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THE HAIR-EEL (*GORDIUS AQUATICUS*, L.).

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Most people are familiar with the story according to which horse-hairs soaked sufficiently long in a pond or stream will be transformed into eels. I have seen a small book, published in Scotland 50 or 60 years ago, by an intelligent Forfarshire gardener, which, to the apparent satisfaction of its author, proved the vulgar belief to be true. Like most vulgar fallacies, this belief has some apparent foundation to rest upon. The elastic, hard, thread-like body of the Hair-eel (*Gordius aquaticus*) so resembles a brown or black hair from the tail of a horse that the origin of the popular error is easily explained. The further circumstance that ponds and other waters, in which hair-eels were never seen before, suddenly become peopled with these creatures, and that eels also appear unexpectedly in the most out-of-the-way localities, added strength to the theory, especially as the origin of the fish was a matter of dispute amongst naturalists. The sudden appearance of hair-eels was readily explained by the alleged transformation of horse-hairs; and the presence of eels was no mystery if they were simply developed from horse-hairs.

When a boy, I remember well discovering, to my surprise, specimens of *Gordius aquaticus* in the basin of a moss-grown spring by a Yorkshire (England) roadside. This clear, sparkling spring, as a rule, contained no visible signs of aquatic animals, and the appearance of the writhing, active hair-eel seemed difficult to understand.