

It is therefore possible to affirm with something like accuracy, that George Frederick Hanning Werneck, the ancestor of the family, was born in the district of Holstein, Denmark, in or about the year 1764. He was the third son in a family that was possessed of considerable wealth. When he became eighteen years of age, he left his native country of Denmark and travelled for four years in company with a gentleman of means, neither of them being limited in their expenses for the comforts or even the luxuries of life. In their travels these two visited Spain, Portugal and several tropical countries, and were in fact visitors to many lands. Then they returned to Denmark where young Werneck spent a few more years.

When he arrived at old age, like many people advanced in years, he often took pleasure in relating the exploits of his early life, so that many still living have heard from his lips the incidents of his eventful career. One of these events, which is particularly amusing and which happened during his second sojourn in Denmark, exhibits in a remarkable manner the impetuosity of his nature. The story asserts that once while describing a sight which he had seen on one of his foreign voyages, a listener questioned the truth of his statements. Stung bitterly by this imputation, his nature being unusually fiery, he instantly gave a heavy blow to the fellow who had dared to doubt his word. As a result of this conduct legal proceedings were taken against him, and he was summoned to appear at a court of law to answer for his misconduct. The presiding judge of course decided the case against him, and inflicted a fine of forty shillings for his misbehavior. The infliction of this penalty fired his passionate nature still more, but he remained unhurt in appearance and paid over the forty shillings to the judge, inquiring at the same time if the same sum would be the penalty if he should shortly strike another man in a similar way. The judge answered yes! whereupon young Werneck, to the bewilderment of the spectators, and with less regard for money than for his own injured feelings, counted out a second forty shillings. The purpose of this second payment was not evident at first, but soon became so; for while the judge was counting the money, he received a severe blow upon the head, dealt by Werneck's fist, in consequence of which His Honor rolled over upon the floor. Considerable excitement in and about court followed and policemen were called in; but in spite of the noise and confusion, it was evident that the young man with injured feelings, who had inflicted the blow, had already paid the penalty. This strange event, which happened a century ago, demonstrates the excessive sensitiveness of his temperament.

During this, his second stay in Denmark, his mother died. Some time afterwards he embarked again upon another voyage, not to return to his native country until half a century had passed, as will be seen further on. His travelling was continued until he was over forty years of age, having lasted from his eighteenth year, making a total of about twenty-two years. During this period he visited at least three fourths of the globe.

A remarkable event occurred during one of his voyages. It is superstition, though it was believed by him. Once while passing some rocks that rose out of the sea near islands inhabited only by sea-fowl, the attention of the ship's crew was called to a group of mermaids. Whatever the creatures were that he saw on this occasion*, they made a lasting impression upon

*Seals and walruses are the supposed origin of mermaid stories.