

CHAPTER XI.

THE FAIRY SAILOR AND HIS COUSINS.

WHO has not heard of the argonaut, or paper nautilus? One of the most vivid recollections of our early reading presents us with a little boatman, in his "shelly bark,"

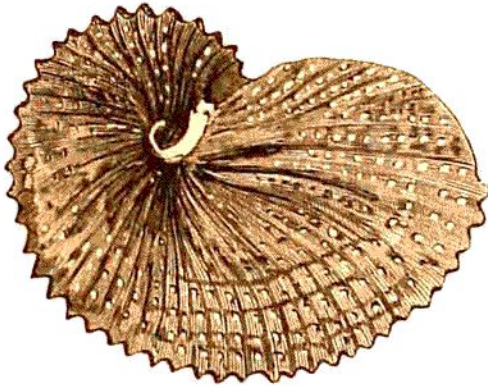


Fig. 42. The Paper Nautilus (*Argonauta argo*).

wafted over the placid surface of a summer sea. With tiny sail upraised, the favoring breeze bears him securely onward; but let the winds escape from their Æolian caves, and the billows wake from their liquid slumbers, and down glides our tiny boatman with his shelly bark, and finds a safe retreat among the marble corridors of the millepores and the madrepores. Montgomery, in his "Pelican Island," has thus embalmed the fable:

"Light as a flake of foam upon the wind,
Keel upward, from the deep emerged a shell,
Shaped like the moon ere half her orb is filled.
Fraught with young life, it righted as it rose,
And moved at will along the yielding wave.
The native pilot of this little bark
Put out a tier of oars on either side,
Spread to the wafting breeze a twofold sail,
And mounted up and glided down the billow
In happy freedom, pleased to feel the air,
And wonder in the luxury of light."

It seems a pity to spoil so pretty a fable, and one, too, that has lived since the days of Aristotle. But the fable of the argonaut has been spoiled by the industry of a lady.