SABINE BARING-GOULD

THE BOOK OF WERE-WOLVES

STUDY ON LYCANTHROPY

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The Book of Were-Wolves (Study on Lycanthropy)

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INTRODUCTORY.

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I shall never forget the walk I took one night in Vienne, after having accomplished the examination of an unknown Druidical relic, the Pierre labie, at La Rondelle, near Champigni. I had learned of the existence of this cromlech only on my arrival at Champigni in the afternoon, and I had started to visit the curiosity without calculating the time it would take me to reach it and to return. Suffice it to say that I discovered the venerable pile of grey stones as the sun set, and that I expended the last lights of evening in planning and sketching. I then turned my face homeward. My walk of about ten miles had wearied me, coming at the end of a long day's posting, and I had lamed myself in scrambling over some stones to the Gaulish relic.

A small hamlet was at no great distance, and I betook myself thither, in the hopes of hiring a trap to convey me to the posthouse, but I was disappointed. Few in the place could speak French, and the priest, when I applied to him, assured me that he believed there was no better conveyance in the place than a common charrue with its solid wooden wheels; nor was a riding horse to be procured. The good man offered to house me for the night; but I was obliged to decline, as my family intended starting early on the following morning.

Out spake then the mayor—"Monsieur can never go back to-night across the flats, because of the—the—" and his voice dropped; "the loups-garoux."

"He says that he must return!" replied the priest in patois. "But who will go with him?"

"Ah, ha,! M. le Curé. It is all very well for one of us to accompany him, but think of the coming back alone!"

"Then two must go with him," said the priest, and you can take care of each other as you return."

"Picou tells me that he saw the were-wolf only this day se'nnight," said a peasant; "he was down by the hedge of his buckwheat field, and the sun had set, and he was thinking of coming home, when he heard a rustle on the far side of the hedge. He looked over, and there stood the wolf as big as a calf against the horizon, its tongue out, and its eyes glaring like marsh-fires. Mon Dieu! catch me going over the marais to-night. Why, what could two men do if they were attacked by that wolf-fiend?"

"It is tempting Providence," said one of the elders of the village;" no man must expect the help of God if he throws himself wilfully in the way of danger. Is it not so, M. le Curé? I heard you say as much from the pulpit on the first Sunday in Lent, preaching from the Gospel."

"That is true," observed several, shaking their heads.

"His tongue hanging out, and his eyes glaring like marsh-fires!" said the confidant of Picou.

"Mon Dieu! if I met the monster, I should run," quoth another.

"I quite believe you, Cortrez; I can answer for it that you would," said the mayor.

"As big as a calf," threw in Picou's friend.

"If the loup-garou were *only* a natural wolf, why then, you see"—the mayor cleared his throat—"you see we should think nothing of it; but, M. le Curé, it is a fiend, a worse than fiend, a man-fiend,—a worse than man-fiend, a man-wolf-fiend."

"But what is the young monsieur to do?" asked the priest, looking from one to another.

"Never mind," said I, who had been quietly listening to their patois, which I understood. "Never mind; I will walk back by myself, and if I meet the loup-garou I will crop his ears and tail, and send them to M. le Maire with my compliments."

A sigh of relief from the assembly, as they found themselves clear of the difficulty.

"Il est Anglais," said the mayor, shaking his head, as though he meant that an Englishman might face the devil with impunity.

A melancholy flat was the marais, looking desolate enough by day, but now, in the gloaming, tenfold as desolate. The sky was perfectly clear, and of a soft, blue-grey tinge; illumined by the new moon, a curve of light approaching its western bed. To the horizon reached a fen, blacked with pools of stagnant water, from which the frogs kept up an incessant trill through the summer night. Heath and fern covered the ground, but near the water grew dense masses of flag and bulrush, amongst which the light wind sighed wearily. Here and there stood a sandy knoll, capped with firs, looking like black splashes against the grey sky; not a sign of habitation anywhere; the only trace of men being the white, straight road extending for miles across the fen.

That this district harboured wolves is not improbable, and I confess that I armed myself with a strong stick at the first clump of trees through which the road dived.

This was my first introduction to were-wolves, and the circumstance of finding the superstition still so prevalent, first gave me the idea of investigating the history and the habits of these mythical creatures.

I must acknowledge that I have been quite unsuccessful in obtaining a specimen of the animal, but I have found its traces in all directions. And just as the palæontologist has constructed the labyrinthodon out of its foot-prints in marl, and one splinter of bone, so may this monograph be complete and accurate, although I have no chained were-wolf before me which I may sketch and describe from the life.

The traces left are indeed numerous enough, and though perhaps like the dodo or the dinormis, the werewolf may

have become extinct in our age, yet he has left his stamp on classic antiquity, he has trodden deep in Northern snows. has ridden rough-shod over the mediævals, and has howled amongst Oriental sepulchres. He belonged to a bad breed, and we are quite content to be freed from him and his kindred, the vampire and the ghoul. Yet who knows! We may be a little too hasty in concluding that he is extinct. He may still prowl in Abyssinian forests, range still over Asiatic steppes, and be found howling dismally in some padded room of a Hanwell or a Bedlam.

In the following pages I design to investigate the notices of were-wolves to be found in the ancient writers of classic antiquity, those contained in the Northern Sagas, and, lastly, the numerous details afforded by the mediæval authors. In connection with this I shall give a sketch of modern folklore relating to Lycanthropy.

It will then be seen that under the veil of mythology lies a solid reality, that a floating superstition holds in solution a positive truth.

This I shall show to be an innate craving for blood implanted in certain natures, restrained under ordinary circumstances, but breaking forth occasionally, accompanied with hallucination, leading in most cases to cannibalism. I shall then give instances of persons thus afflicted, who were believed by others, and who believed themselves, to be transformed into beasts, and who, in the paroxysms of their madness, committed numerous murders, and devoured their victims.

I shall next give instances of persons suffering from the same passion for blood, who murdered for the mere gratification of their natural cruelty, but who were not subject to hallucinations, nor were addicted to cannibalism.

I shall also give instances of persons filled with the same propensities who murdered and ate their victims, but who were perfectly free from hallucination.

LYCANTHROPY AMONG THE ANCIENTS.

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Definition of Lycanthropy—Marcellus Sidetes—Virgil—Herodotus—Ovid—Pliny—Agriopas—Story from Petronius—Arcadian Legends—Explanation offered.

What is Lycanthropy? The change of manor woman into the form of a wolf, either through magical means, so as to enable him or her to gratify the taste for human flesh, or through judgment of the gods in punishment for some great offence.

This is the popular definition. Truly it consists in a form of madness, such as may be found in most asylums.

Among the ancients this kind of insanity went by the names of Lycanthropy, Kuanthropy, or Boanthropy, because those afflicted with it believed themselves to be turned into wolves, dogs, or cows. But in the North of Europe, as we shall see, the shape of a bear, and in

Africa that of a hyæna, were often selected in preference. A mere matter of taste! According to Marcellus Sidetes, of whose poem περὶ λυκανθρώπου *a fragment exists, men are attacked with* this madness chiefly in the beginning of the year, and become most furious in February; retiring for the night to lone cemeteries, and living precisely in the manner of dogs and wolves.

Virgil writes in his eighth Eclogue:—

Has herbas, atque hæc Ponto mihi lecta venena
Ipse dedit Mœris; nascuntur plurima Ponto.
His ego sæpe lupum fieri et se conducere sylvis

Mœrim, sæpe animas imis excire sepulchris,
Atque satas alio, vidi traducere messes.

And Herodotus:—"It seems that the Neuri are sorcerers, if one is to believe the Scythians and the Greeks established in Scythia; for each Neurian changes himself, once in the year, into the form of a wolf, and he continues in that form for several days, after which he resumes his former shape."—(Lib. iv. c. 105.)

See also Pomponius Mela (lib. ii. c. 1) "There is a fixed time for each Neurian, at which they change, if they like, into wolves, and back again into their former condition."

But the most remarkable story among the ancients is that related by Ovid in his "Metamorphoses," of Lycaon, king of Arcadia, who, entertaining Jupiter one day, set before him a hash of human flesh, to prove his omniscience, whereupon the god transferred him into a wolf:[1]

In vain he attempted to speak; from that very instant
His jaws were bespluttered with foam, and only he thirsted
For blood, as he raged amongst flocks and panted for slaughter.
His vesture was changed into hair, his limbs became crooked;
A wolf, he retains yet large trace of his ancient expression,
Hoary he is as afore, his countenance rabid,
His eyes glitter savagely still, the picture of fury.

Pliny relates from Evanthes, that on the festival of Jupiter Lycæus, one of the family of Antæus was selected by lot, and conducted to the brink of the Arcadian lake. He then hung his clothes on a tree and plunged into the water, whereupon he was transformed into a wolf. Nine years after,

if he had not tasted human flesh, he was at liberty to swim back and resume his former shape, which had in the meantime become aged, as though he had worn it for nine years.

Agriopas relates, that Demænetus, having assisted at an Arcadian human sacrifice to Jupiter Lycæus, ate of the flesh, and was at once transformed into a wolf, in which shape he prowled about for ten years, after which he recovered his human form, and took part in the Olympic games.

The following story is from Petronius:—

"My master had gone to Capua to sell some old clothes. I seized the opportunity, and persuaded our guest to bear me company about five miles out of town; for he was a soldier, and as bold as death. We set out about cockcrow, and the moon shone bright as day, when, coming among some monuments. my man began to converse with the stars, whilst I jogged along singing and counting them. Presently I looked back after him, and saw him strip and lay his clothes by the side of the road. My heart was in my mouth in an instant, I stood like a corpse; when, in a crack, he was turned into a wolf. Don't think I'm joking: I would not tell you a lie for the finest fortune in the world.

"But to continue: after he was turned into a wolf, he set up a howl and made straight for the woods. At first I did not know whether I was on my head or my heels; but at last going to take up his clothes, I found them turned into stone. The sweat streamed from me, and I never expected to get over it. Melissa began to wonder why I walked so late. 'Had you come a little sooner,' she said, 'you might at least have lent us a hand; for a wolf broke into the farm and has butchered all our cattle; but though he got off, it was no laughing matter for him, for a servant of ours ran him through with a pike. Hearing this I could not close an eye; but as soon as it was daylight, I ran home like a pedlar that has been eased of his pack. Coming to the place where the

clothes had been turned into stone, I saw nothing but a pool of blood; and when I got home, I found my soldier lying in bed, like an ox in a stall, and a surgeon dressing his neck. I saw at once that he was a fellow who could change his skin (*versipellis*), and never after could I eat bread with him, no, not if you would have killed me. Those who would have taken a different view of the case are welcome to their opinion; if I tell you a lie, may your genii confound me!"

As every one knows, Jupiter changed himself into a bull; Hecuba became a bitch; Actæon a stag; the comrades of Ulysses were transformed into swine; and the daughters of Prœtus fled through the fields believing themselves to be cows, and would not allow any one to come near them, lest they should be caught and yoked.

S. Augustine declared, in his *De Civitate Dei*, that he knew an old woman who was said to turn men into asses by her enchantments.

Apuleius has left us his charming romance of the *Golden* Ass*, in which the hero, through injudicious use of a magical* salve, is transformed into that long-eared animal.

It is to be observed that the chief seat of Lycanthropy was Arcadia, and it has been very plausibly suggested that the cause might he traced to the following circumstance:—The natives were a pastoral people, and would consequently suffer very severely from the attacks and depredations of wolves. They would naturally institute a sacrifice to obtain deliverance from this pest, and security for their flocks. This sacrifice consisted in the offering of a child, and it was instituted by Lycaon. From the circumstance of the sacrifice being human, and from the peculiarity of the name of its originator, rose the myth.

But, on the other hand, the story is far too widely spread for us to attribute it to an accidental origin, or to trace it to a local source.

Half the world believes, or believed in, were-wolves, and they were supposed to haunt the Norwegian forests by those who had never remotely been connected with Arcadia: and the superstition had probably struck deep its roots into the Scandinavian and Teutonic minds, ages before Lycaon existed; and we have only to glance at Oriental literature, to see it as firmly engrafted in the imagination of the Easterns.

Footnotes

1. OVID. Met. i. 237; PAUSANIAS, viii. 2, § 1; TZETZE *ad Lycoph.* 481; ERATOSTH. *Catas.* i. 8.

THE WERE-WOLF IN THE NORTH.

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In Norway and Iceland certain men were said to be *eigi* einhamir*, not of one skin, an idea which had its roots in* paganism. The full form of this strange superstition was, that men could take upon them other bodies, and the natures of those beings whose bodies they assumed. The second adopted shape was called by the same name as the original shape, *hamr*, and the expression made use of to designate the transition from one body to another, was at *skipta hömum*, or *at* hamaz*; whilst the expedition made in the second form, was* the hamför. By this transfiguration extraordinary powers were acquired; the natural strength of the individual was doubled, or quadrupled; he acquired the strength of the beast in whose body he travelled, in addition to his own, and a man thus invigorated was called *hamrammr*.

The manner in which the change was effected, varied. At times, a dress of skin was cast over the body, and at once the transformation was complete; at others, the human body was deserted, and the soul entered the second form, leaving the first body in a cataleptic state, to all appearance dead. The second hamr was either borrowed or created for the purpose. There was yet a third manner of producing this effect-it was by incantation; but then the form of the individual remained unaltered, though the eyes of all

beholders were charmed so that they could only perceive him under the selected form.

Having assumed some bestial shape, the man who is *eigi* einhammr *is only to be recognized by his eyes, which by no* power can be changed. He then pursues his course, follows the instincts of the beast whose body he has taken, yet without quenching his own intelligence. He is able to do what the body of the animal can do, and do what he, as man, can do as well. He may fly or swim, if be is in the shape of bird or fish; if he has taken the form of a wolf, or if he goes on a *gandreið*, or wolf's-ride, he is fall of the rage and malignity of the creatures whose powers and passions he has assumed.

I will give a few instances of each of the three methods of changing bodies mentioned above. Freyja and Frigg had their falcon dresses in which they visited different regions of the earth, and Loki is said to have borrowed these, and to have then appeared so precisely like a falcon, that he would have escaped detection, but for the malicious twinkle of his eyes. In the Vælundar kviða is the following passage:—

I.	I.
Meyjar flugu sunnan	From the south flew the maidens
Myrkvið igögnum	Athwart the gloom,
Alvitr unga	Alvit the young,
Orlög drýgja;	To fix destinies;
þær á savarströnd	They on the sea-strand
Settusk at hvilask,	Sat them to rest,
Dró sir suðrœnar	These damsels of the south
Dýrt lín spunnu.	Fair linen spun.
II.	II.
Ein nam þeirra	One of them took
Egil at verja	Egil to press,
Fögr mær fíra	Fair maid, in her
Faðmi ljósum;	Dazzling arms.

Önnur var Svanhvít,	Another was Svanhwit,
Svanfjaðrar dró;	Who wore swan feathers;
En in þriðja	And the third,
þeirra systir	Their sister,
Var i hvítan	Pressed the white
Háls Völundar.	Neck of Vœlund.

The introduction of Sœmund tells us that these charming young ladies were caught when they had laid their swan-skins beside them on the shore, and were consequently not in a condition to fly.

In like manner were wolves' dresses used. The following curious passage is from the wild Saga of the Völsungs:—

"It is now to be told that Sigmund thought Sinfjötli too young to help him in his revenge, and he wished first to test his powers; so during the summer they plunged deep into the wood and slew men for their goods, and Sigmund saw that he was quite of the Völsung stock. . . . Now it fell out that as they went through the forest, collecting monies, that they lighted on a house in which were two men sleeping, with great gold rings an them; they had dealings with witchcraft, for wolf-skins hung up in the house above them; it was the tenth day on which they might come out of their second state. They were kings' sons. Sigmund and Sinfjötli got into the habits, and could not get out of them again, and the nature of the original beasts came over them, and they howled as wolves—they learned "both of them to howl. Now they went into the forest, and each took his own course; they made the agreement together that they should try their strength against as many as seven men, but not more, and. that he who was ware of strife should utter his wolf's howl.

"'Do not fail in this,' said Sigmund, 'for you are young and daring, and men would be glad to chase you.' Now each went his own course; and after that they had parted Sigmund found men, so he howled; and when Sinfjötli heard

that, he ran up and slew them all-then they separated. And Sinfjötli had not been long in the wood before he met with. eleven men; he fell upon them and slew them every one. Then he was tired, so he flung himself under an oak to rest. Up came Sigmund and said, 'Why did you not call out?' Sinfjötli replied, 'What was the need of asking your help to kill eleven men?'

"Sigmund flew at him and rent him so that he fell, for he had bitten through his throat. That day they could not leave their wolf-forms. Sigmund laid him on his back and bare him home to the hall, and sat beside him, and said, 'Deuce take the wolf-forms!"'—Völsung Saga, c. 8.

There is another curious story of a were-wolf in the same Saga, which I must relate.

"Now he did as she requested, and hewed down a great piece of timber, and cast it across the feet of those ten brothers seated in a row, in the forest; and there they sat all that day and on till night. And at midnight there came an old she-wolf out of the forest to them, as they sat in the stocks, and she was both huge and grimly. Now she fell upon one of them, and bit him to death, and after she had eaten him all up, she went away. And next morning Signy sent a trusty man to her brothers, to know how it had fared with them. When he returned he told her of the death of one, and that grieved her much, for she feared it might fare thus with them all, and she would be unable to assist them.

"In short, nine nights following came the same she-wolf at midnight, and devoured them one after another till all were dead, except Sigmund, and he was left alone. So when the tenth night came, Signy sent her trusty man to Sigmund, her brother, with honey in his hand, and said that he was to smear it over the face of Sigmund, and to fill his mouth with it. Now he went to Sigmund, and did as he was bid, after which he returned home. And during the night came the same she-wolf, as was her wont, and reckoned to devour him, like his brothers.

"Now she snuffed at him, where the honey was smeared, and began to lick his face with her tongue, and presently thrust her tongue into his mouth. He bore it ill, and bit into the tongue of the she-wolf; she sprang up and tried to break loose, setting her feet against the stock, so as to snap it asunder: but he held firm, and ripped the tongue out by the roots, so that it was the death of the wolf. It is the opinion of some men that this beast was the mother of King Siggeir, and that she had taken this form upon her through devilry and witchcraft."—(c. 5.)

There is another story bearing on the subject in the Hrolfs Saga Kraka, which is pretty; it is as follows:—

"In the north of Norway, in upland-dales, reigned a king called Hring; and he had a son named Björn. Now it fell out that the queen died, much lamented by the king, and by all. The people advised him to marry again, and so be sent men south to get him a wife. A gale and fierce storm fell upon them, so that they had to turn the helm, and run before the wind, and so they came north to Finnmark, where they spent the winter. One day they went inland, and came to a house in which sat two beautiful women, who greeted them well, and inquired whence they had come. They replied by giving an account of their journey and their errand, and then asked the women who they were, and why they were alone, and far from the haunts of men, although they were so comely and engaging. The elder replied—that her name was Ingibjorg, and that her daughter was called Hvit, and that she was the Finn king's sweetheart. The messengers decided that they would return home, if Hvit would come with them and marry King Hring. She agreed, and they took her with them and met the king who was pleased with her, and had his wedding feast made, and said that he cared not though she was not rich. But the king was very old, and that the queen soon found out.

"There was a Carle who had a farm not far from the king's dwelling; he had a wife, and a daughter, who was but