

Weird Tales

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Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 30, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States; \$3.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 450 East Ohio Street, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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Folks Used to Believe

by ALVIN F. HARLOW

The Werewolf



THE belief that certain human beings were changed or changed themselves at times into lower animals has prevailed since ancient days not only in Europe but in many other parts of the world. The animal into which persons were most often transformed was a wolf. In ancient Greece a man named Lycan was said to have been turned into a wolf as a result of eating human flesh. The Greeks also said that a man of the Anteus family was chosen by lot at certain intervals, taken to a lake in Arcadia, where he hung his clothes on an ash-tree and swam across. There he became a wolf and wandered with the pack nine years. Herodotus said that the Neurii, a tribe of eastern Europe, were turned into wolves for a few days every year.

Hideous stories were told of witches and wizards who were able to turn themselves into wolves, and thus went forth to work the will of their master, the Devil, on innocent persons. The change was brought about in various ways. In Europe the commonest method was to remove the clothing and put on an enchanted girdle, usually of the skin of the animal whose form was to be assumed. Sometimes the body was rubbed with a magic salve. Our old Southern friend, Uncle Remus, declares that such people have a slit in the skin at the back of the neck, where they can take hold of the skin and pull it off like a shirt—undoubtedly an African form of the myth. Less skilful persons brought about the change by

drinking water out of the animal's footprint, by eating of its brains or drinking of certain enchanted streams.

In Prussia, Livonia and Lithuania in the Sixteenth Century, the Christian bishops said that the werewolves were more destructive than the natural wolves. They were a sort of army allied against Christian people and divine law. During that century many peasants, influenced by the mania, imagined themselves wolves. There was clear proof of many cases in which human beings, especially children, had been killed and eaten by men who fancied themselves wolves.

It seems that werewolves were not always opposed to mankind and the Church, for in the year 617 A. D. a pack of them went to a monastery and killed some heretic monks. Saints sometimes had the power of turning people into wolves. St. Patrick changed Vereticus, King of Wales, into a wolf, and St. Natalis cursed a prominent Irish family by dooming each member of it to be a wolf for seven years. An involuntary werewolf could be cured by kneeling in one place for a hundred years; or you could bring either a voluntary or involuntary werewolf back to human form by accusing it with being a werewolf, or saluting it with the sign of the cross, addressing it by its human baptismal name three times, striking it on the forehead three times with a knife or drawing three drops of its blood.