

THE LYCANTHROPIST.

BY

MRS. CATHERINE CROWE,

WHOEVER has read the "Arabian Nights' Entertainments," will be acquainted with the words ghou! and vampyre. A ghou! was believed to be a being in the human form, who frequented graveyards and cemeteries, where it disinterred, tore to pieces, and devoured the bodies buried there. A vampyre was a dead person, who came out of his grave at night to suck the blood of the living, and whoever was so sucked became a vampyre in his turn

when he died. Both these persuasions have been rejected by the modern scientific world as altogether unworthy of credence or inquiry, although, about a century ago, the exploits of vampyres created such a sensation in Hungary, that they reached the ears of Louis XV., who directed his minister at Vienna to report upon them.

In a newspaper of that period, there appeared a paragraph to the effect that Arnold Paul, a native of Madveiga, being crushed to death by a waggon, and buried, had since become a vampyre, and that he had himself been previously bitten by one. The authorities being informed of the terror his visits were occasioning, and several persons having died with all the symptoms of vampyrism, his grave was solemnly opened, and, although he had been in it forty days, the body was like that of a living man. To cure his roving propensities, a stake was driven into it, whereupon he uttered a cry ; after which his head

was cut off, and the body burnt. Four other bodies, which had died from the consequences of his bites, and which were found in the same perfectly healthy condition, were served in a similar manner; and it was hoped that these vigorous measures would extinguish the mischief. But no such thing. The evil continued more or less, and, five years afterwards, was so rife, that the authorities determined to make a thorough clearance of these troublesome individuals. On this occasion a vast number of graves were opened, of persons of all ages and both sexes; and, strange to say, the bodies of all those accused of plaguing the living by their nocturnal visits, were found in the vampyre state—full of blood, and free from every symptom of death.

The documents which record these transactions bear the date of June 7, 1732, and are signed and witnessed by three surgeons and other creditable persons. The facts, in

short, are indubitable, though what interpretation to put upon them remains extremely difficult. One that has been suggested is, that all these supposed vampyres were persons who had fallen into a state of catalepsy or trance, and been buried alive. However this may be, the mystery is sufficiently perplexing; and the more so, that through the whole of Eastern Europe innumerable instances of the same kind of thing have occurred, whilst each language has an especial word to designate it.

That which in the East is called 'ghoulism' has in the West been denominated 'lycanthropy,' or 'wolfomania;' and this phenomenon, as well as vampyrism, has been treated of by numerous ancient authors; and though latterly utterly denied and scouted, was once very generally believed.

There are various shades and degrees of lycanthropy. In some cases the lycanthrope declares that he has the power of transform-

ing himself into a wolf, in which disguise—his tastes corresponding to his form—he delights in feeding on human flesh; and in the public examinations of these unhappy individuals there was no scarcity of witnesses to corroborate their confessions. In other instances there was no transformation, and the lycanthrope appears more closely to resemble a ghoul.

In the year 1603, a case of lycanthropy was brought before the Parliament of Bordeaux. The person accused was a boy of fourteen, called Jean Grenier, who herded cattle. Several witnesses, chiefly young girls, came forward as his accusers, declaring that he had attacked and wounded them in the disguise of a wolf, and would have killed them but for the vigorous defence they made with sticks. Jean Grenier himself avowed the crime, confessing to having killed and eaten several children; and the father of the children confirmed all he said. Jean Grenier,

however, appears to have been little removed from an idiot.

In the fifteenth century, lycanthropy prevailed extensively amongst the Vaudois, and many persons suffered death for it; but as no similar case seems to have been heard of for a long while, lycanthropy and ghoulistism were set down amongst the superstitions of the East, and the follies and fables of the dark ages. A circumstance, however, has just now come to light in France that throws a strange and unexpected light upon this curious subject. The account we are going to give is drawn from a report of the investigation before a council of war, held on the 10th of the present month (July 1849), Colonel Manselon, president. It is remarked that the court was extremely crowded, and that many ladies were present.

The facts of this mysterious affair, as they came to light in the examinations, are as follow: For some months past the cemeteries

in and around Paris have been the scenes of a frightful profanation, the authors of which had succeeded in eluding all the vigilance that was exerted to detect them. At one time the guardians or keepers of these places of burial were themselves suspected; at others, the odium was thrown on the surviving relations of the dead.

The cemetery of Père la Chaise was the first field of these horrible operations. It appears that for a considerable time the guardians had observed a mysterious figure flitting about by night amongst the tombs, on whom they never could lay their hands. As they approached, he disappeared like a phantom; and even the dogs that were let loose, and urged to seize him, stopped short, and ceased to bark, as if they were transfixed by a charm. When morning broke, the ravages of this strange visitant were but too visible—graves had been opened, coffins forced, and the remains of the dead, fright-

fully torn and mutilated, lay scattered upon the earth. Could the surgeons be the guilty parties? No. A member of the profession being brought to the spot, declared that no scientific knife had been there; but certain parts of the human body might be required for anatomical studies, and the gravediggers might have violated the tombs to obtain money by the sale of them. . . . The watch was doubled; but to no purpose. A young soldier was one night seized in a tomb, but he declared he had gone there to meet his sweetheart, and had fallen asleep; and as he evinced no trepidation, they let him go.

At length these profanations ceased in Père la Chaise, but it was not long before they were renewed in another quarter. A suburban cemetery was the new theatre of operations. A little girl aged seven years, and much loved by her parents, died. With their own hands they laid her in her coffin, attired in the frock she delighted to wear on fête days,

and with her favourite playthings beside her ; and accompanied by numerous relatives and friends, they saw her laid in the earth. On the following morning it was discovered that the grave had been violated, the body torn from the coffin, frightfully mutilated, and the heart extracted. There was no robbery : the sensation in the neighbourhood was tremendous ; and in the general terror and perplexity, suspicion fell on the broken-hearted father, whose innocence, however, was easily proved. Every means were taken to discover the criminal ; but the only result of the increased surveillance was, that the scene of profanation was removed to the cemetery of Mont Parnasse, where the exhumations were carried to such an extent, that the authorities were at their wits' end.

Considering, by the way, that all these cemeteries are surrounded by walls, and have iron gates, which are kept closed, it certainly seems very strange that any ghoul or vampyre

of solid flesh and blood should have been able to pursue his vocation so long undiscovered. However, so it was ; and it was not till they bethought themselves of laying a snare for this mysterious visitor that he was detected. Having remarked a spot where the wall, though nine feet high, appeared to have been frequently scaled, an old officer contrived a sort of *infernal machine*, with a wire attached to it, which he so arranged that it should explode if any one attempted to enter the cemetery at that point. This done, and a watch being set, they thought themselves now secure of their purpose. Accordingly, at midnight an explosion roused the guardians, who perceived a man already in the cemetery ; but before they could seize him, he had leapt the wall with an agility that confounded them ; and although they fired their pieces after him, he succeeded in making his escape. But his footsteps were marked with blood that had flowed from his wounds,

and several scraps of military attire were picked up on the spot. Nevertheless, they seem to have been still uncertain where to seek the offender, till one of the grave-diggers of Mont Parnasse, whilst preparing the last resting-place of two criminals about to be executed, chanced to overhear some sappers of the 74th regiment remarking that one of their sergeants had returned on the preceding night cruelly wounded, nobody knew how, and had been conveyed to Val de Grace, which is a military hospital. A little inquiry now soon cleared up the mystery; and it was ascertained that Sergeant Bertrand was the author of all these profanations, and of many others of the same description previous to his arrival in Paris.

Supported on crutches, wrapped in a grey cloak, pale and feeble, Bertrand was now brought forward for examination; nor was

there anything in the countenance or appearance of this young man indicative of the fearful monomania of which he is the victim ; for the whole tenor of his confession proves that in no other light is his horrible propensity to be considered.

In the first place, he freely acknowledged himself the author of these violations of the dead both in Paris and elsewhere.

“ What object did you propose to yourself in committing these acts ? ” inquired the president.

“ I cannot tell,” replied Bertrand : “ it was a horrible impulse. I was driven to it against my own will : nothing could stop or deter me. I cannot describe or understand myself what my sensations were in tearing and rending these bodies.”

President. And what did you do after one of these visits to a cemetery ?

Bertrand. I withdrew, trembling con-

vulsively, feeling a great desire for repose. I fell asleep, no matter where, and slept for several hours ; but during this sleep I *heard everything that passed around me!* I have sometimes exhumed from ten to fifteen bodies in a night. I dug them up with my hands, which were often torn and bleeding with the labour I underwent ; but I minded nothing, so that I could get at them. The guardians fired at me one night and wounded me, but that did not prevent my returning the next. This desire seized me generally about once a fortnight."

He added, that he had had no access of this propensity since he was in the hospital, but that he would not be sure it might not return when his wounds were healed. Still he hoped not. "I think I am cured," said he. "I had never seen any one die ; in the hospital I have seen several of my comrades

expire by my side. I believe I am cured, for now I fear the dead.”

The surgeons who attended him were then examined, and one of them read a sort of memoir he had received from Bertrand, which contained the history of his malady as far as his memory served him.

From these notes, it appears that there had been something singular and abnormal about him from the time he was seven or eight years old. It was not so much in acts, as in his love of solitude and his profound melancholy that the aberration was exhibited ; and it was not till two years ago that his frightful peculiarity fully developed itself. Passing a cemetery one day, where the grave-diggers were covering a body that had just been interred, he entered to observe them. A violent shower of rain interrupted their labours, which they left unfinished. “At this sight,” says Bertrand, “horrible

desires seized me : my head throbbed, my heart palpitated violently ; I excused myself to my companions, and returned hastily into town. No sooner did I find myself alone, than I procured a spade, and returned to the cemetery. I had just succeeded in exhuming the body, when I saw a peasant watching me at the gate. Whilst he went to inform the authorities of what he had seen, I withdrew, and retiring into a neighbouring wood, I laid myself down, and in spite of the torrents of rain that were falling, I remained there in a state of profound insensibility for several hours."

From this period he appears to have given free course to his inclinations ; but as he generally covered the mutilated remains with earth again, it was some time before his proceedings excited observation. He had many narrow escapes of being taken or killed by the pistols of the guardians ; but his

agility seems to have been almost superhuman.

To the living he was gentle and kind, and was especially beloved in his regiment for his frankness and gaiety !

The medical men interrogated unanimously gave it as their opinion, that although in all other respects perfectly sane, Bertrand was not responsible for these acts. He was sentenced to a year's imprisonment, during which time measures will doubtless be taken to complete his cure.

In relating this curious case of the *Vampire*, as he is called in Paris, where the affair has excited considerable attention, especially in the medical world, I have omitted several painful and disgusting particulars ; but I have said enough to prove that, beyond a doubt, there has been some good foundation for the ancient belief in ghoulishness and lycanthropy ; and that the books

of Dr. Weir and others, in which the existence of this malady is contemptuously denied, have been put forth without due investigation of the subject.