

WHAT IS IN WHICH CHAPTER

Six of the sixteen chapters describe murders, from the trial records. This sheet says which, so the book can be lent to somebody else with the warning attached.

Seven of these sixteen chapters describe murders, and they describe them from the trial records. This note says what is in them, because a reader is entitled to know before rather than after.

Chapter VI, A Chamber of Horrors. The French werewolf prosecutions of the sixteenth century: Pierre Burgot and Michel Verdun at Poligny in 1521, Gilles Garnier at Dole in 1573, the Gandillon family in 1598, Jacques Roulet at Angers in the same year. The charges are the killing and eating of children, and the confessions — most of them obtained under torture or its threat — are quoted.

Chapter VII, Jean Grenier. The trial at Bordeaux in 1603 of a boy of thirteen who said he had killed and eaten children. Baring-Gould follows the case in detail and prints the confession, and the boy's own account of the killings is quoted at length.

Chapter IX, Natural Causes of Lycanthropy. The most graphic chapter in the book, and the one a reader is least likely to expect, because its title sounds clinical. Baring-Gould is arguing that some men are born cruel, and he proves it with modern criminal cases described in detail — Dumollard, Andreas Bichel, who dismembered living women, and the Hungarian countess who is said to have tortured and killed a great number of girls. The quotations are from the trial records and they are explicit.

Chapters XI to XIII, the Maréchal de Retz. Gilles de Rais, a Marshal of France who had fought beside Joan of Arc, tried at Nantes in 1440 for the murder of a large number of children at his castles over some eight years. This is the longest continuous section of the book and the most detailed. It includes what the servants Henriot and Poitou said, and what the Marshal himself finally said.

Chapters XII and XIII continue the same case to the trial, the confessions of the servants Henriot and Poitou, and the execution.

Chapter XIV, A Galician Were-Wolf. Swiatek, a beggar in Austrian Galicia who in 1849 was found to have killed and eaten several children. Baring-Gould gives the discovery and the aftermath.

Chapter XV, The Human Hyæna. The violation of graves in the Paris cemeteries in 1848 and 1849, and the confession of the sergeant who was caught doing it.

Why they are all printed. This press does not abridge a book to make it comfortable, and it does not print an expurgated text while implying the reader has the whole. There is a second reason particular to this book. Baring-Gould's argument depends on these chapters: his case is that the werewolf of folklore and the murderer of the assize records are two descriptions of the same events, one supplied by the countryside and one by the court, and removing the court records would leave a book about superstition with nothing underneath it. What is removed is not the horror but the surprise: every one of these chapters is announced in its own head-note.

What the edition does not do. It does not treat a confession as reliable simply because it was sworn, and it does not overstate the case either. At Nantes in 1440 excommunication was pronounced and torture threatened before the Marshal confessed, and the editorial note says so. In the sixteenth-century French cases of chapter VI Baring-Gould alleges no torture and neither does this edition; what can be said there is that a confession to an impossible act, made to a court that believes the act possible, is evidence about the court first. Jean Grenier's confession began as boasting to two girls on a sand dune, before anyone had arrested him.

From The Book of Were-Wolves by Sabine Baring-Gould, Valice Classics 15. Free at valicepress.com/companion-book-of-were-wolves