

WOLVES AND THEIR COUSINS

From the London Times

It is recorded that once upon a time a pack of wolves raided a monastery and punctiliously ate each monk whose opinions smacked of heresy, the brothers who were theologically sound being left unscathed. Let this act of pious discrimination then be set to the credit of the wolves at once, for most of their record is what is to follow will be found black enough. The lion, with all its shortcomings, stands not unworthily for the majesty of beasthood. We use the tiger as an image of reckless courage, even the bear, however surly, has a certain blunt, bucolic honesty which makes it almost a gentleman. But the wolf, the "blood-happy" wolf, for all that it suckled Romulus and was the companion of Odin, represents nothing but cowardice and skulking cruelty. In holy writ, whether in the Old or the New Testament, it appears always in one of two lights, either as the "evening wolf" and "wolf of the evenings" or as "ravening." And these two phrases sum up fairly the wolf's character. In daylight it keeps as a general rule in hiding, and almost any hole or crack in earth or rock or ruined monastery will serve it for a lair. As twilight darkens to night—entre chien et loup—when its gray form slips by on silent padding feet invisible, it comes out to hunt, whether singly, in pairs, or with the pack, and then to all things weaker than itself it becomes ruthless personified, killing where it can, as among a flock of sheep, far in excess of the amount that it can eat. And, like many bullies, it is, when left to its own resources, a coward. Almost every animal when at bay will fight to the last with desperation; but there is abundant testimony to the fact that a wolf, when finally cornered so that it knows escape to be hopeless, so loses heart that often it will cower and suffer itself to be killed without resistance. On the other hand, when hunting in company, so strong is the pack-instinct, the individual wolf seldom seems to lose all sense of its particular danger, throwing away its own life with apparent indifference, as if conscious that only so can victory be won for the pack as a whole; and in the days when almost every beast was held up as an exemplar of some human virtue it is perhaps curious that no apologist was found to glorify the wolf as the type of the self-sacrificing citizen—the Curtius-patriot ready to fling himself to death for the common good. But it is a poor kind of courage which has to be forced into being by the backing of overwhelming numbers. The pack, however, takes its heroes to itself, seldom failing even at the risk of delaying the general assault, to eat the comrade who has devoted himself to the people's cause.

How terrible a thing the wolf-pack may be is perhaps best illustrated by the story that in 1812 a party of twenty-four French soldiers was rushed by a veritable wolf-army. The men are said to have sold their lives dearly, killing between two hundred and three hundred of their assailants, but in the end they were overcome and nothing was left of them but some bones, their arms, and scraps of uniforms. Mr. Roosevelt records that the great grey timber wolf of North America, when in sufficient strength, will pull down even the grisly, So Thomson:

"Assembling wolves in raging troops descend And, pouring o'er the country, bear along, Keen as the North Wind sweeps the glossy snow.

All is their prize. They fasten on the steed Press him to earth and pierce his mighty heart.

Nor can the bull his awful front defend Or shake the murdering savages away."

Not without reason was January once the "wolf month"—the time when, pressed by hunger, the wolves gathered into the largest packs and swept out to scour the frozen country on their tireless feet. We then to horses, sheep, or cattle left exposed and to the traveler whom the pack might find too far from shelter:

"Woe to the broken door!
Woe to the loosened gate,
And the groping wretch whom sleety fogs
On the trackless moor belate!"

Nor without reason was it that in Scotland they prayed, "From wolves and all other kinds of wild beasts, deliver us, O Lord!" From Scotland wolves seem to have been exterminated by the end of the seventeenth century. In Ireland they lingered into the early decades of the eighteenth, about two centuries after they had disappeared from England. The history of the wolf in the British Isles has been traced in detail by various writers, notably Mr. Harting, and has been recently summarized by Mr. Millais in his "Mammals of Great Britain and Ireland"; so that the chief features of the story are well known—what efforts Edgar made to put an end to the scourge, and how he exacted an annual tribute of 300 wolf-skins from the Welsh king; how refugees or "spittals" were erected in various parts of both England and Scotland, where travellers might take sanctuary from the wandering beasts; how Mary Queen of Scots took part in a great wolf-hunt, letting slip the hounds herself. Many lands were granted at divers times on wolf-head tenure. Laws enacted that barons should assemble all people within their baronies to hunt the wolves three, or sometimes four, times a year, and any man who failed to turn out at the summons was fined. The reward for killing a wolf varied at different times and in different parts of the kingdom from two shillings to a living ox! or again it was a sum equal to one penny for every resident in the parish in which the beast was killed.

That the individual wolf may be a beauti-

ful animal any one can satisfy himself by looking at Blanca and Lobo, the two splendid North American timber wolves, now in Regent's Park, presented to the society by Mr. William Ruston. Even at this season of the year, when they are out of coat, they are extraordinarily handsome beasts, and a son of theirs in the next cage is perhaps as fine as his father. When they are excited as at the prospect of food, their grace and elasticity, the ease with which they spring ten and twelve feet up the sides of the cage, to land again almost noiselessly on their feet, put even the suppleness of the great cats to shame. One understands then something of the terrible speed at which the wolf-pack can cover ground. The present writer, on a fastish pony once tried to cut off a timber wolf which crossed a plain in daylight—a good fair race of about equal distance to the hypothetical meeting point. The wolf was well aware of what was in progress, but beyond swinging off obliquely to make the race a trifle longer, it made no effort to escape by direct flight, nor did it seem to hasten its pace from what looked like the most leisurely of canters. But it had a good three hundred yards in hand at the point where the courses crossed. So leisurely and effortless does the wolf's gait look that it is difficult except by putting it to some such test, to believe that it travels at any great rate of speed; yet, as Colonel Percy says, "a wolf in the evening, when empty, will lope along just ahead of good greyhounds till the latter lie down exhausted." None the less, wolves are run down by dogs. In Russia, especially borzois are trained for the purpose and are said to overhaul the beast without much difficulty. But no dog would live with a wolf in a day-long run.

Seeing the wolves in the gardens being fed, one understands, too, why it is that we speak of a man as "wolfing" his meals. The wolf has a reasonably catholic taste in foods, but it seems absurd that it should exhibit any preferences whatever; for a lump of meat larger than a man's fist makes no more check on its way down a wolf's throat than a letter does when dropped into a pillar box. It is a method of feeding made necessary by the habit of hunting in packs, when every member of the pack is probably hungry, and seldom is a kill large enough to furnish a meal all round. In such circumstances the individual wolf has no time to trifle with its food, and the animal which wasted time in chewing would soon die of starvation. Watching the performance (it has all the appearance of a trick which has been carefully rehearsed) one knows how the wolf in Grimm's story came to swallow the young kids whole, so that the mother-goat, finding the destroyer of her progeny asleep, cut him open and released her children alive, filling their places with stones. We know also why in Scandinavian myth it was in the form of a wolf that the water-demon, brother of Hel, swallowed Odin; nay, how the Fenris wolf and Skoll wolf between them gulped down the gods and the firmament together. Provided the wolf were big enough, there is nothing that it could not swallow whole and instantaneously.

Yet the chief horror of the idea of being torn to pieces by wolves lies perhaps in the thought that death comes, as it were, piecemeal. Certain Red Indians in the southwest portion of the United States are credited with the invention of an ingenious method of disposing of their prisoners, whereby they merely stake them out, pegged down by wrists and ankles, starfish-wise, upon the ground in the immediate vicinity of an ant's nest. The ants can be trusted to do the rest and to do it with expedition. There is something of the same terror, as in the case of a bound man being eaten alive by rats, in the mental image of death at the jaws of a pack of wolves. The lion, the tiger, all the large cats, and the bear kill, as it were, outright, primarily with a crushing blow of the paw, and using the teeth only secondarily and as a reserve. But the wolf can deal no killing blow with its paws and it attacks first with the teeth and kills by biting, or rather by snapping and tearing; and where a pack pulls down some large animal, like a stag or horse or ox, one may well believe that before the thing is dead it is already partly eaten, many pieces having already been torn from it and immediately swallowed. But the universal human hatred of the wolf has rested not so much on the fact that "assiduous in the shepherd's harms," it kills other animals, or on its method of killing them, nor even upon its occasional waylaying, when "fierce-destending" in a pack, of men and women. In the folk-lore and legend of almost all countries it is invested with the two awful attributes of being an eater of babies and a spoiler of graves.

He climbeth the guarding dyke,
He leappeth the hurdle bars,
He steals the sheep from the pen
And the fish from the boat-house spars;
And he digs the dead out from the sod
And gnaws them under the stars.

More than one writer has defended the wolf against the accusation of grave-robbing, and certainly its paws are ill-adapted to digging; but the indictment turns up in too many places, among peoples too wide-sundered to encourage a belief that it is without foundation. That the wolf eats children, not only in myth as the fearsome wer-wolf or loup-garou, but in actual life, is only too well authenticated in other countries besides India. But let the author of "In My Indian Garden," tell the story:

"A nurse lies sleeping on the floor, her charge asleep in her arms. The wolf listens.

A house dog far away is answering defiantly the maniac jackals sweeping past him in full cry. Then the wolf bends his furred head and with its thick, warm tongue licks the baby out of its nurse's arms. The poor woman feels the gentle warmth, unconsciously presses the baby closer for a moment, but her grasp begins to relax. The moist soft touch of the wild beast's tongue, its bated breath, melt her fingers open. One by one they loosen their guardian hold, the wrists sink apart, and gently from her bosom the baby slides back against the soft coat of the crouching wolf. It does not wake. The wolf rises. The house dog wonders if that was really something which passed between him and the garden wall—thinks not—growls angrily and turns to sleep. But ask the owl sitting on the viney what it sees that it turns its head over its back. Ask the wheeling bats!

Next harvest a little skull will perhaps be found in the corner of the field, if the jackals have not already rolled it back to its father's door."

Thus it is, by the destruction of children, that in India every year the wolf is responsible for the deaths of more human beings than the tiger. Not that it does not, especially when in company, sometimes attack adults; and horrid tales are told of how in famine times, when the natives are too weak to defend themselves, the wolves grow bold and come out in daylight to kill and feast on men and women.

Nay, for the sake of its cousinship to the dog, for the beauty of Blanca, and Lobo in their cages there, for its guardianship of the head of St. Edmund, for the part it has played in legend in many characters besides that of "the thunderstricken nurse of Rome," one would speak pleasantly of the wolf if one could. It is true that sometimes wolves are tamed and prove faithful to their masters, and that in folk and fairy tales they often figure as the dull-grained fools who are outwitted by the fox, but never in such a way as to excite sympathy with the wolf, which, in story as in real life, is always cunning, if less cunning than the fox, always treacherous, and always cruel. Always, too, it comes to a bad end. And when that end comes we can but fall in with Grimm's kids who "danced round their mother for joy, crying 'The wolf is dead! The wolf is dead!'"

THE WOLF'S COUSINS.

They are not, perhaps, relations to be proud of, though it might plausibly be argued that they are at least good enough for a wolf, who, after all, has no great reason to give himself airs. Yet on the domestic side—one is almost tempted to say, on the distaff side—the wolf has connexions of the best; for while the evolution of the various breeds of dog is a subject bristling with perplexities, there is no doubt that alike, from griffin to St. Bernard, have come originally from some member of the wild dog-wolf-fox family, having themselves been crossed and crossed again till it may be that the dog which lies by your fire-side has in its blood a strain from the wild canidae of all the continents. The dogs of many primitive peoples are still only domesticated races of the wolves or jackals of the locality, the Eskimo dog being barely one step removed from the Arctic wolf, just as the dogs of some of the American Indians further south are obviously no more than direct descendants of the timber wolves and coyotes of the neighborhood, with which they still freely interbreed.

He would indeed be a rash naturalist who would undertake to draw a definite line of demarcation between the wolves and jackals, the dogs and the foxes. In the former case such a line would probably have to run somewhere through the cranial cavity of the Indian wolf (Canis Pallipes), and in the coyotes or prairie wolves here in the Gardens one may see how visibly the animal has tended to become a jackal. Of the three adult prairie wolves in these cages, one is so unjackal-like that it is doubtful if it can be pure coyote at all. American naturalists, it is true, have split the coyote up into a number of so-called species where we should recognize at most no more than local races, to one or other of which it may be that this curious animal could be definitely referred; but there is that in its length of limb and large-jointed freedom of movement which is strongly suggestive of a strain of timber wolf. How narrow, again, is the gap which separates dogs from foxes can be seen from the two crab-eating dogs from South America, which no non-expert visitor to the Gardens would dream of calling anything but foxes—as indeed until recently they were officially labelled on these very cages.

It is roughly possible, by the cranial structure, to divide the whole dog family into two, what may be called respectively fox-like and wolf-like groups, but there are points where the distinction becomes perilously uncertain; and it would be interesting to know how and in what country the first individual split off from whatever was then the common dog wolf stock to develop ultimately into a true fox with a character which is almost half cat. Some female, perhaps, heavy with young, fell out from the pack early in the long chase of whatever was the member of the deer tribe of those days and countries; or it may be that she was driven out, and saved herself from be-

ing torn to pieces by the pack only by finding shelter in a hole. There in solitude she became a mother, and in solitude, unable of her own strength to pull down such quarry as the pack had commonly hunted, she learned to live on little things, on lizards and insects and mice; and her young as they grew up, hunted as they saw their mother hunt. Instead of standing up and, as in the old pack fashion, running down their game in open chase, they learned to crouch and crawl, cat-like, close to the ground, to spring out suddenly upon the nibbling coney or the sitting bird, returning always to the hole which had saved their mother from the jaws of the pack. As generation succeeded generation, the family became confirmed in its solitary ways as a tribe of earth-dwellers, hunting under cover. Slowly they lost the stiff, rudder-like tail of the old hard-running days and developed ampler brushes, comfortable perhaps to wrap round noses in the cold earth; which brushes also they learned to switch like a stalking cat. Having need now mostly of silence, no longer communication with their fellows, they forgot the old hunting song of the pack, and the former full-throated howl came to be abandoned for a short yapping bark, sufficient for a signal, but which they used so seldom that they came in time not only to hunt and fight but, as the fox does today, to mate. It is only conjecture, and conjecture to which many objections can be raised. But somehow or other they have all—wolves, jackals, hunting dogs, tame dogs, and foxes—come from the one common stock.

There are some who believe, though the evidence seems against them, that certain of the wild dogs, like the Australian dingo—"yellow dog," always hungry, dusty in the sun"—are reversions to the wild state of a race once tame, just as the pariah dogs of various countries have travelled half the road towards becoming wild animals again. As one sees the dingo here in the Gardens, it looks not merely like a domesticated dog, but like a dog of distinctly engaging and amiable kind. Of the fact, well known to all Australians, that the dingo will breed freely with domestic dogs of various sorts, there was until the beginning of the present month evidence enough in the person of an entirely deplorable pup which shared the cage with its parents. A certain eminent living statesman possesses a favorite dog which he commends as being "of several excellent breeds." In the tangled pedigree of this puppy, though its father and mother are both outwardly good dingoes, there must have been interwoven many kinds of dog. Its mother has now been removed to another cage and her place supplied by a new arrival, who in her redder colouring and broader muzzle is perhaps a more typical representative of the true wild breed, while the creditable pup has gone to a private home in Devonshire, where as it grows up it is to be hoped that the traits of its tame ancestors will outweigh those of the wild.

For the dingo's character belies its gentle looks. "Quarrelsome, sly and treacherous," an Australian naturalist has called it. So sly it is that, according to Mr. Beddard (in "The Cambridge Natural History"), it feigns death "with such persistence that an individual has been known to be partly flayed before moving"; and so treacherous that in the days when dingoes were more commonly kept as pets by the colonists than, as a result of bitter experience, is the case today, it was no unusual thing for the dog which had been brought up with every tenderness from puppyhood to turn suddenly on its master or mistress, or, what was more frequent, when left in charge of an empty house, to seize the opportunity to raid the sheep-fold or the poultry-runs. On such occasions it "ravens" even as the wolf, killing not to satisfy its hunger, but in the unrestrained fury of a brute instinct, so that, given time enough, it will not leave one fowl or sheep alive. That it does not need much time, moreover, is shown by the statement of Mr. Thomas Ward, that "one dingo in the course of a few hours has been known to destroy several scores of sheep." For its fighting ability the same authority ("The Rambles of an Australian Naturalist") declares it to be a match for most domestic dogs of double its size. When wild it hunts in packs which are said sometimes to include as many as a hundred individuals, though from six to a dozen is the common number; and the only Australian animal which it is uncertain if the pack can ever pull down is (in spite of Mr. Kipling) the "old man" kangaroo.

Similarly, the hyena-like Cape hunting dog (a specimen of which may be seen here in these cages is said at times to gather in very large packs; but the largest which Gordon Cumming saw ("A Hunter's Life in South Africa") numbered 40, and that pack he watched kill a koodoo. Mr. Vaughan Kirby also saw a koodoo killed, while Mr. Selous records an instance of one dog, single-handed, tackling a sable antelope. On another occasion, Gordon Cumming saw four dogs pull down a brindled gnu; and these he believed to be the largest animals which the African dog ever kills, questioning their ability to handle a buffalo. On the other hand, the Asiatic red dog or dhole (if it be safe to speak of it as a single species), the largest recorded pack of which is said to have numbered 30, appears beyond a doubt at times to attack and kill the tiger; and one is inclined to doubt whether such negative evidence as that the Australian and African dogs have not been actually known to kill respectively the "old man" or the buffalo can be accepted as conclusive. Es-

kimo dogs, nominally tame, have more than once been known to tear human beings to pieces; and if wolves can pull down grizzlies and dholes cope with tigers, it is difficult to believe that any living thing could in the long run hold out against a pack of 40 hungry and desperate Cape hunting dogs. Mr. Lydekker says that the Asiatic dog sometimes kills the domesticated buffalo of India.

A doubt has been suggested above whether there may not be more than one species of dhole or Asiatic wild dog, for it is uncertain that the Malayan race is the same as the Indian. It may be also that there are other quite different species yet to be recorded. Colonel Pollok, in Burma, saw two presumably wild (though at the time captive) dogs which seem to have been of more or less badger-like habits, "as hairy as Skye terriers, as large as a medium-sized spaniel, and black and white." The Cape hunting dog, again, varies much in coloration in different districts, so that there are those who would divide it into several species; but allowing for all known varieties of tint, one's curiosity is still piqued by the mention by Colonel Patterson of the dog which he saw near Tsavo, "bigger than a collie, with jet-black hair and a white-tipped bushy tail." But without any additions from fancy these cousins of the wolf are numerous enough. Besides the various dogs there are in these cages a dozen foxes representing half as many species, silver-grey, and silver-backed foxes, desert and Indian desert foxes, among which is one white variety. In addition there are the jackals, "the thin jackals," Asiatic and North African, with seven specimens of the latter alone, from Egypt, from Morocco, and from Mogador. And probably if the wishes of the wolf were consulted, of all his relatives he would dispense most cheerfully with the jackals.

Few people have been found to say a good word for Tabaki, the "filthy jackal." Byron bluntly calls it. The Wolves and Foxes Dens in the Gardens are built double-sided so that the animals pass freely through the central partition to one cage or the other; and doubtless many visitors daily go up one side and down the other and go away believing that they have seen twice as many beasts as they have. With two or three exceptions, where it has been necessary to divide a den in half by shutting the middle door, one can see all the animals from either side; and the sagacious visitor will generally choose to see them from the windward. None of them is savory, wolf, wild dog, fox, or jackal; and in the combined aroma it is not easy to say which animal is responsible for what proportion of the smell. But of the whole tribe it is probably the jackals which smell most indistinctly. But for that drawback, and it is an ineradicable one, the jackal would make a not unattractive pet, being easier to tame and vastly more reliable than either wolf or wild dog. Wild or tame indeed the jackal is—a jackal.

"Be you the lion to devour your prey
I am your jackal to provide for you." And it is a fact, not literary fancy only, that the jackal lives largely on the leavings of others, whether it be on the rubbish and offal thrown away by man or on the meat of game killed (as in India by the tiger) by other and larger beasts. Of their own initiative it does not appear that jackals normally kill anything more formidable than hares and rabbits and ground-nesting birds, though wounded or ailing animals like deer or antelope and sick sheep and goats often fall a prey to them. Of all the dog family, besides being most odious, the jackal is also the most noisy, and those who have once heard the sudden clamor of a pack of jackals breaking upon the silence of an Indian night will never forget it. Kindly Bishop Heber, it is true, spoke of it as "sylvan revelry"; but most Anglo-Indian writers are less generous—"The crash of a brass band be-devilled each throat a end's, every fiend double-throated." In Holy Writ the word "fox" in the English version should in all probability be more often read as jackal. The "little foxes that spoil the vines" may refer to either fox or jackal, but the animal of which Samson caught three hundred "and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put firebrands in the midst between the tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks and the standing corn, and the vineyards and the olives"—that animal was, as the Rev. J. G. Wood argued, almost surely a jackal, of which it was then, and would be still, in that locality, more easy to catch three hundred than to take thirty foxes.

But of all these miscellaneous dog-foxes in the Wolves and Foxes Dens, it is curious that the one in which the general public shows most interest is the common English fox. It looks here, beside the wolves and hunting dogs, a poor, scurrying little thing; yet there are few questions more often asked of keepers in the Gardens than: "Can you tell me where I can find a fox?" The Zoological Gardens are educative in many unexpected ways; and it is here that tens of thousands of Englishmen, and that not town-dwellers only, get the opportunity of their lives to see a living fox.—London Times.

A good front frequently conceals a bad heart. Sweet are the thoughts that savor of content;

The quiet mind is richer than a crown.
—Robert Green.



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