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A CRETAN
VAMPIRE-STORY.

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When at Askyfo I had asked about the Vampires, or Karakhanaádhēs as the Cretans call them, of whom I had heard from Maniás and others of his fellow-countrymen, and whose existence and ill-deeds form a general article of popular belief throughout the island. Of course, this belief is very strong in the mountains. If anyone ventures to doubt it, undeniable facts are brought forward to silence the incredulous. At Anópolis I am on ground which has long been haunted by them, and is celebrated in numerous stories, some of which are amusing enough, in which their exploits are recorded.

I subjoin one of these stories in the very words in which it was communicated to me. The account is peculiarly worthy of credit, since I heard it in many places, and all the relations given to me agreed in every material point. The

following is a translation, and, even without comparing it with the original, the reader will see, from its very style, that it is a close, though somewhat condensed, version of the words of the Sfakian peasants:

Once on a time the village of Kalikrati, in the district of Sfakia, was haunted by a Katakhanás, and people did not know what man he was or from what part. This Katakhanás destroyed both children and many full-grown men; and desolated both that village and many others. They had buried him at the church of Saint George at Kalikrati, and in those times he was a man of note, and they had built an arch over his grave. Now a certain shepherd, his mutual Synteknos, was tending his sheep and goats near the church, and, on being caught by a shower, he went to the sepulcher, that he might be shaded from the rain. Afterwards he determined to sleep, and to pass the night there, and, after taking off his arms, he placed them by the stone which served him as his pillow, crosswise. And people might say that it is on this

account that the Katakhanás was not permitted to leave his tomb. During the night, then, as he wished to go out again, that he might destroy men, he said to the shepherd: ‘Gossip, get up hence, for I have some business that requires me to come out.’ The shepherd answered him not, either the first time, or the second, or the third; for thus he knew that the man had become a Katakhanás, and that it was he who had done all those evil deeds. On this account he said to him, on the fourth time of his speaking, “I shall not get up hence, gossip, for I fear that you are no better than you should be, and may do me some mischief: but, if I must get up, swear to me by your winding-sheet, that you will not hurt me, and on this I will get up.” And he did not pronounce the proposed words but said other things: nevertheless, when the shepherd did not suffer him to get up, he swore to him as he wished. On this he got up, and, taking his arms, removed them away from the monument, and the Katakhanás came forth, and, after greeting the shepherd, said to him, ‘Gossip, you must

not go away, but sit down here; for I have some business which I must go after; but I shall return within the hour, for I have something to say to you.’ So the shepherd waited for him.

And the Katakhanás went a distance of about ten miles, where there was a couple recently married, and he destroyed them. On his return, his gossip saw that he was carrying some liver, his hands being moistened with blood: and, as he carried it, he blew into it, just as the butcher does, to increase the size of the liver. And he shewed his gossip that it was cooked, as if it had been done on the fire. After this he said, " Let us sit down, gossip, that we may eat." And the shepherd pretended to eat it, but only swallowed dry bread, and kept dropping the liver into his bosom. Therefore, when the hour for their separation arrived, the Katakhanás said to the shepherd, ‘Gossip, this which you have seen, you must not mention, for, if you do, my twenty nails will be fixed in your children and yourself.’

Yet the shepherd lost no time, but gave information to priests, and others, and they went to the tomb, and there they found the Katakhanás, just as he had been buried. And all people became satisfied that it was he who had done all the evil deeds. On this account they collected a great deal of wood, and they cast him on it, and burnt him. His gossip was not present, but, when the Katakhanás was already half consumed, he too came forward in order that he might enjoy the ceremony. And the Katakhanás cast, as it were, a single spit of blood, and it fell on his foot, which wasted away, as if it had been roasted on a fire. On this account they sifted even the ashes and found the little fingernail of the Katakhanás unburnt and burnt it too.

This supposed Vampire's habit of feeding on the human liver, may perhaps account for an exclamation of a Cretan mother, recorded in the travels of Tavernier: "I will sooner eat the liver of my child."

The Vampire, or Katakhanás, as he is called in Crete, is

denominated Vurvúlakas, or Vrukdlakas, in the islands of the Archipelago, where the belief is generally prevalent, that if a man has committed a great crime, or dies excommunicated by a priest or bishop, the earth will not receive him when he dies, and he therefore rambles about all night, spending only the daytime in his tomb. Many believe that, even in the daytime, it is only once a week, on the Saturday, that he is allowed to occupy his burial-place. When it is discovered that such a Vurvúlakas is about, the people go, on a Saturday, and open his tomb, where they always find his body just as it was buried, and entirely undecomposed. The priest by whom they are accompanied reads certain parts of the ritual, supposed to be of peculiar efficacy for putting a stop to every restless Vampire's wanderings and sometimes this course suffices to restore the neighbourhood to peace and quiet.

But cases happen in which the priest is not a sufficiently powerful exorcist, thus easily to stop the nocturnal rambles

and misdeeds of the undying one, who, like Shakspeare's ghost, is doomed to walk the night, as a punishment for the foul crimes done in his days of nature.

Whenever, then, this ordinary religious ceremony, to which recourse is first had, is found inefficacious, the people of the neighbourhood go to the tomb on a Saturday, take out the body, and consume it with fire; an operation which nothing but extreme necessity would ever make Greeks consent to perform, on account of their religious horror of burning a body on which the holy oil has been poured by the priest when performing the last rite of his religion over the dying man.

Even the rough Hydhraeans, whose seafaring life and intercourse with other countries, might have been supposed likely to have diminished the prevalence of such notions among them, are generally believers in these Vurvúlaki. As in Sfakia, so also at Hydhra,

Both well attested, and as well believ'd,
Heard solemn, goes the Vampire-story round;
Till superstitious horror creeps o'er all.

Many Hydhraeans have assured me there used to be a great number of Vampires in Hydhra, and that their present freedom from them is to be attributed solely to the exertions of their bishop, who has laid them all in Santoréne, where, on the desert isle, they now exist in great numbers, and wander about, rolling stones down the slopes towards the sea, as may be heard by anyone who passes near, in a *kaík*, during the night.

The Sfakians also generally believe that the ravages committed by these night-wanderers, used, in former times, to be far more frequent than they are at the present day; and that they are become comparatively rare, solely in consequence of the increased zeal and skill possessed by the members of the sacerdotal order! Similar exertions of holy

priests are said, by our poet Chaucer, to have put a stop to the pastimes of the English fairies. Thus also Dryden:

Lo in the walks where wicked elves have been,
The learning of the parish now is seen—
From fiends and imps he sets the village free,
There haunts not any incubus but he:
The maids and women need no danger fear
To walk by night, and sanctity so near.

This popular belief in Vampires is not confined to Crete and Greece; but, as most of my readers will be aware, is very widely spread: they are found in Dalmatia, Hungary, Moravia, and other countries. During the Middle Ages, a belief in ravages committed by similar monsters, was not confined to poets, in our own island, but formed an article of generally prevalent superstition among the people, and, like the equally absurd belief in witchcraft of more recent times, was shared with them by the clergy.