

Devil Stories

[AN ANTHOLOGY]

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By

**MAXIMILIAN
J. RUDWIN**

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SELECTED AND EDITED WITH INT-
RODUCTION AND CRITICAL COM-
MENTS

*“Mortal, mock not at the Devil, Life is
short and soon will fail, And the ‘fire
everlasting’ Is no idle fairy-tale.”—*

Heine.



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BOOKS BY
MAXIMILLAN J. RUDWIN

The Prophet and Disputation Scenes in the Religious Drama of the German Middle Ages.

The Devil Scenes in the Religious Drama of the German Middle Ages.

The Devil in the German Religious Plays of the Middle Ages and the Reformation. [Hesperia: Johns Hopkins Studies in Modern Philology, No. 6.]

The Origin of the German Carnival Comedy.

In Preparation:

The Devil in Modern French Literature.

DEDICATED TO
ALL STUDENTS OF THE SUPERNATURAL
IN LITERATURE

NOTE

The preparation of this book would have been out of the question without the co-operation of authors and publishers. Proper acknowledgment has been given on the first page of each selection to the publishers who have granted us permission to reprint it. We take this opportunity to express once more our deep appreciation of the courtesies extended to us by all the parties concerned in the material between the covers of this book. Special thanks are offered to Mr. John Masefield for his permission to republish his story, and to Messrs. Arthur Symons and Leo Wiener and to Miss Isabel F. Hapgood for their permission to use their translations of the foreign stories which we have selected. To Professor Henry Alfred Todd and Dr. Dorothy Scarborough, of Columbia University, who have kindly read portions of the manuscript, the editor is indebted for a number of helpful suggestions. He adds his thanks to Professor Raymond Weeks, also of Columbia University, who called his attention to the Daudet story, and to his former colleague, Professor Otto A. Greiner, of Purdue University, who was good enough to read part of the proofs.

The Publisher.

The Editor.

INTRODUCTION



Of all the myths which have come down to us from the East, and of all the creations of Western fancy and belief, the Personality of Evil has had the strongest attraction for the mind of man. The Devil is the greatest enigma that has ever confronted the human intelligence. So large a place has Satan taken in our imagination, and we might also say in our heart, that his expulsion therefrom, no matter what philosophy may teach us, must for ever remain an impossibility. As a character in imaginative literature Lucifer has not his equal in heaven above or on the earth beneath. In contrast to the idea of Good, which is the more exalted in proportion to its freedom from anthropomorphism, the idea of Evil owes to the presence of this element its chief value as a poetic theme. The disrowned archangel may

have been inferior to St. Michael in military tactics, but he certainly is his superior in matters literary. The fair angels—all frankness and goodness—are beyond our comprehension, but the fallen angels, with all their faults and sufferings, are kin to us.

There is a legend that the Devil has always had literary aspirations. The German theosophist Jacob Böhme relates that when Satan was asked to explain the cause of God's enmity to him and his consequent downfall, he replied: "I wanted to be an author." Whether or not the Devil has ever written anything over his own signature, he has certainly helped others compose their greatest works. It is a significant fact that the greatest imaginations have discerned an attraction in Diabolus. What would the world's literature be if from it we eliminated Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Calderón's *Marvellous Magician*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Goethe's *Faust*, Byron's *Cain*, Vigny's *Eloa*, and Lermontov's *Demon*? Sorry indeed would have been the plight of literature without a judicious admixture of the Diabolical. Without the Devil there would simply be no literature, because without his intervention there would be no plot, and without a plot the story of the world would lose its interest. Even now, when the belief in the Devil has gone out of fashion, and when the very mention of his name, far from causing men to cross themselves, brings a smile to their faces, Satan has continued to be a puissant personage in the realm of letters. As a matter of fact, Beelzebub has perhaps received his greatest elaboration at the hands of writers who believed in him just as little as Shakespeare did in the ghost of Hamlet's father.

Commenting on Anatole France's *The Revolt of the Angels*, an American critic has recently written: "It is difficult to rehabilitate Beelzebub, not because people are of one mind concerning Beelzebub, but because they are of no mind at all." How this demon must have laughed when he read these lines! Why, he needs no rehabilitation. The Devil has never been absent from the world of letters, just as he has never been missing from the world of men. Since the days of Job, Satan has taken a deep interest in the affairs of the human race; and while most writers content themselves with recording his activities on this planet, there never have been lacking men of sufficient courage to call upon the prince of darkness in his proper dominions in order to bring back to us, for our instruction and edification, a report of his work there. The most distinguished poet his infernal Highness has ever entertained at his court, it will be recalled, was Dante. The mark which the scorching fires of hell left on Dante's face, was to his contemporaries sufficient proof of the truth of his story.

The subject-matter of literature may always have been in a state of flux, but the Devil has been present in all the stages of literary evolution. All schools of literature in all ages and in all languages set themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously, to represent and interpret the Devil, and each school has treated him in its own characteristic manner.

The Devil is an old character in literature. Perhaps he is as old as literature itself. He is encountered in the story of the paradisiacal sojourn of our first ancestors, and from that day on, Satan has appeared unfailingly, in various forms and with

various functions, in all the literatures of the world. His person and his power continued to develop and to multiply with the advance of the centuries, so that in the Middle Ages the world fairly pullulated with demons. From his minor place in the biblical books, the Devil grew to a position of paramount importance in mediaeval literature. The Reformation, which was a movement of progress in so many respects, left his position intact. Indeed, it rather increased his power by withdrawing from the saints the right of intercession in behalf of the sinners. Neither the Renaissance of ancient learning nor the institution of modern science could prevail against Satan. As a matter of fact, the growth of the interest in the Devil has been on a level with the development of the spirit of philosophical inquiry. French classicism, to be sure, occasioned a setback for our hero. As a member of the Christian hierarchy of supernatural personages, the Devil could not help but be affected by the ban under which Boileau placed Christian supernaturalism. But even the eighteenth century, a period so inimical to the Supernatural, produced two master-devils in fiction: Le Sage's Asmodeus and Cazotte's Beelzebub—worthy members of the august company of literary Devils.

But as if to make amends for its long lack of appreciation of the Devil's literary possibilities, France, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, brought about a distinct reaction in his favour. The sympathy extended by that country of revolutionary progress to all victims and to all rebels, whether individuals or classes or nations, could not well be denied to the celestial outlaw. The fighters for political, social, intellectual, and emotional liberty on earth, could not withhold their admiration from the

angel who demanded freedom of thought and independence of action in heaven. The rebel of the Empyrean was hailed as the first martyr in the cause of liberty, and his rehabilitation in heaven was demanded by the rebels on earth. Satan became the symbol of the restless, hapless nineteenth century. Through his mouth that age uttered its protest against the monarchs of heaven and earth. The Romantic generation of 1830 thought the world more than ever out of joint, and who was better fitted than the Devil to express their dissatisfaction with the celestial government of terrestrial affairs? Satan is the eternal Malcontent. To Hamlet, Denmark seemed gloomy; to Satan, the whole world appears dark. The admiration of the Romanticists for Satan was mixed with pity and sympathy—so much his melancholy endeared him to their sympathies, so kindred it seemed to their human weakness. The Romanticists felt a deep admiration for solitary grandeur. This “knight of the doleful countenance,” laden with a curse and drawing misfortune in his train, was the ideal Romantic hero. Was he not indeed the original *beau ténébreux*? Thus Satan became the typical figure of that period and its poetry. It has been well remarked that if Satan had not existed, the Romanticists would have invented him. The Devil’s influence on the Romantic School was so strong and so sustained that soon it was named after him. The terms Romantic and Satanic came to be wellnigh synonymous. The interest which the French Romanticists showed in the Devil, moreover, passed beyond the boundaries of France and the limits of the nineteenth century. The Symbolists, for whom the mysteries of Erebus had a potent attraction, were simply obsessed by Satan. But even the Naturalists, who certainly were not haunted by phantoms, often succumbed to his charms.

Foreign writers turning for inspiration to France, where the literature of the last century reached its highest perfection, were also caught in the French enthusiasm for the Devil.

Needless to say that this Devil is not the evil spirit of mediæval dogma. The Romantic Devil is an altogether new species of the *genus diaboli*. There are fashions in Devils as in dresses, and what is a Devil in one country or one century may not pass muster in another. It is related that after the glory of Greece had departed, a mariner, voyaging along her coast by night, heard from the woods the cry: "Great Pan is dead!" But Pan was not dead; he had fallen asleep to awake again as Satan. In like manner, when the eighteenth century believed Satan to be dead, he was, as a matter of fact, only recuperating his energies for a fresh start in a new form. His new avatar was Prometheus. Satan continued to be the enemy of God, but he was no longer the enemy of man. Instead of a demon of darkness he became a god of grace. This champion of celestial combat was not actuated by hatred and envy of man, as Christianity was thought to teach us, but by love and pity for humankind. The strongest expression of this idea of the Devil in modern literature has been given by August Strindberg, whose Lucifer is a compound of Prometheus, Apollo and Christ. However, this interpretation of the Devil, whatever value it may have from the point of view of originality, is aesthetically as well as theologically not acceptable. Such a revaluation of an old value offends our intellect while it touches our heart. All successful treatment of the Devil in literature and art must be made to correspond with the norm of popular belief. In art we are all orthodox, whatever our views may be in religion. This new conception of Satan will be

found chiefly in poetry, while the popular concept has been continued in prose. But even here a gradual evolution of the idea of the Devil will be observed. The nineteenth century Demon is an improvement on his *confrère* of the thirteenth. He differs from his older brother as a cultivated flower from a wild blossom. The Devil as a human projection is bound to partake in the progress of human thought. Says Mephistopheles:

“Culture, which the whole world licks,
Also unto the Devil sticks.”

The Devil advances with the progress of civilization, because he is what men make him. He has benefited by the modern levelling tendency in characterization. Nowadays supernatural personages, like their human creators, are no longer painted either as wholly white or as wholly black, but in various shades of grey. The Devil, as Renan has aptly remarked, has chiefly benefited by this relativist point of view. The Spirit of Evil is better than he was, because evil is no longer so bad as it was. Satan, even in the popular mind, is no longer a villain of the deepest dye. At his worst he is the general mischief-maker of the universe, who loves to stir up the earth with his pitch-fork. In modern literature the Devil's chief function is that of a satirist. This fine critic directs the shafts of his sarcasm against all the faults and foibles of men. He spares no human institution. In religion, art, society, marriage—everywhere his searching eye can detect the weak spots. The latest demonstration of the Devil's ability as a satirist of men and morals is furnished by Mark Twain in his posthumous romance *The Mysterious Stranger*.

The Devil Lore Series, which opens with this book of Devil Stories, is to serve as documentary evidence of man's abiding interest in the Devil. It will be a sort of portrait-gallery of the literary delineations of Satan. The Anthologies of Diabolical Literature may be considered, I trust, without any risk of offence to any theological or philosophical prepossession. To those alike who accept and who reject the belief in the Devil's spiritual entity apart from man's, there must be profit and pleasure in the contemplation of his literary incarnations. As regards the Devil's fitness as a literary character, all intelligent men and women, believers and unbelievers, may be assumed to have but one opinion.

This Series is wholly devoted to the Christian Devil with the total disregard of his cousins in the other faiths. There will, however, be found a strong Jewish element in Christian demonology. It must be borne in mind that our literature has become saturated through Christian channels with the traditions of the parent creed.

This collection has been limited to twenty tales. Within the bounds thus set, an effort has been made to have this book as representative of national and individual conceptions of the Devil as possible. The tales have been taken from many times and tongues. Selection has been made not only among writers, but also among the stories of each writer. In two instances, however, where the choice was not so easy, an author is represented by two specimens from his pen.

The stories have been arranged in chronological order to show the constant and continuous appeal on the part of the Devil to our story-writers. The mediaeval tale, although published last, was placed first. For obvious reasons, this story has not been given in its original form, but in its modernized version. While this is not meant to be a nursery-book, it has been made *virginibus puerisque*, and for this reason, selections from Boccaccio, Rabelais and Balzac could not find their way into these pages. Moreover, as this volume was limited to narratives in prose, devil's tales in verse by Chaucer, Hans Sachs and La Fontaine could not be considered, either. Nevertheless this collection is sufficiently comprehensive to please all tastes in Devils. The reader will find between the covers of this book Devils fascinating and fearful, Devils powerful and picturesque, Devils serious and humorous, Devils pathetic and comic, Devils phantastic and satiric, Devils gruesome and grotesque. I have tried, though, to keep them all in good humour throughout the book, and can accordingly assure the reader that he need fear no harm from an intimate acquaintance with the diabolical company to which he is herewith introduced.

Maximilian J. Rudwin.

THE DEVIL IN A NUNNERY^[1]

BY FRANCIS OSCAR MANN^{Notes}



Buckingham is as pleasant a shire as a man shall see on a seven days' journey. Neither was it any less pleasant in the days of our Lord King Edward, the third of that name, he who fought and put the French to shameful discomfiture at Crecy and Poitiers and at many another hard-fought field. May God rest his soul, for he now sleeps in the great Church at Westminster.

Buckinghamshire is full of smooth round hills and woodlands of hawthorn and beech, and it is a famous country for its brooks and shaded waterways running through the low hay meadows. Upon its hills feed a thousand sheep, scattered like the remnants of the spring snow, and it was from these that the

merchants made themselves fat purses, sending the wool into Flanders in exchange for silver crowns. There were many strong castles there too, and rich abbeys, and the King's Highway ran through it from North to South, upon which the pilgrims went in crowds to worship at the Shrine of the Blessed Saint Alban. Thereon also rode noble knights and stout men-at-arms, and these you could follow with the eye by their glistening armour, as they wound over hill and dale, mile after mile, with shining spears and shields and fluttering pennons, and anon a trumpet or two sounding the same keen note as that which rang out dreadfully on those bloody fields of France. The girls used to come to the cottage doors or run to hide themselves in the wayside woods to see them go trampling by; for Buckinghamshire girls love a soldier above all men. Nor, I warrant you, were jolly friars lacking in the highways and the by-ways and under the hedges, good men of religion, comfortable of penance and easy of life, who could tip a wink to a housewife, and drink and crack a joke with the good man, going on their several ways with tight paunches, skins full of ale and a merry salutation for every one. A fat pleasant land was this Buckinghamshire; always plenty to eat and drink therein, and pretty girls and lusty fellows; and God knows what more a man can expect in a world where all is vanity, as the Preacher truly says.

There was a nunnery at Maids Moreton, two miles out from Buckingham Borough, on the road to Stony Stratford, and the place was called Maids Moreton because of the nunnery. Very devout creatures were the nuns, being holy ladies out of families of gentle blood. They punctually fulfilled to the letter all the

commands of the pious founder, just as they were blazoned on the great parchment Regula, which the Lady Mother kept on her reading-desk in her little cell. If ever any of the nuns, by any chance or subtle machination of the Evil One, was guilty of the smallest backsliding from the conduct that beseemed them, they made full and devout confession thereof to the Holy Father who visited them for this purpose. This good man loved swan's meat and galingale, and the charitable nuns never failed to provide of their best for him on his visiting days; and whatsoever penance he laid upon them they performed to the utmost, and with due contrition of heart.

From Matins to Compline they regularly and decently carried out the services of Holy Mother Church. After dinner, one read aloud to them from the Rule, and again after supper there was reading from the life of some notable Saint or Virgin, that thereby they might find ensample for themselves on their own earthly pilgrimage. For the rest, they tended their herb garden, reared their chickens, which were famous for miles around, and kept strict watch over their haywards and swineherds. If time was when they had nothing more important on hand, they set to and made the prettiest blood bandages imaginable for the Bishop, the Bishop's Chaplain, the Archdeacon, the neighbouring Abbot and other godly men of religion round about, who were forced often to bleed themselves for their health's sake and their eternal salvation, so that these venerable men in process of time came to have by them great chests full of these useful articles. If little tongues wagged now and then as the sisters sat at their sewing in the great hall, who shall blame them, *Eva peccatrice?* Not I; besides, some of them were some-

thing stricken in years, and old women are garrulous and hard to be constrained from chattering and gossiping. But being devout women they could have spoken no evil.

One evening after Vespers all these good nuns sat at supper, the Abbess on her high dais and the nuns ranged up and down the hall at the long trestled tables. The Abbess had just said “*Gratias*” and the sisters had sung “*Qui vivit et regnat per omnia saecula saeculorum, Amen,*” when in came the Manciple mysteriously, and, with many deprecating bows and outstretchings of the hands, sidled himself up upon the dais, and, permission having been given him, spoke to the Lady Mother thus:

“Madam, there is a certain pilgrim at the gate who asks refreshment and a night’s lodging.” It is true he spoke softly, but little pink ears are sharp of hearing, and nuns, from their secluded way of life, love to hear news of the great world.

“Send him away,” said the Abbess. “It is not fit that a man should lie within this house.”

“Madam, he asks food and a bed of straw lest he should starve of hunger and exhaustion on his way to do penance and worship at the Holy Shrine of the Blessed Saint Alban.”

“What kind of pilgrim is he?”

“Madam, to speak truly, I know not; but he appears of a reverend and gracious aspect, a young man well spoken and well disposed. Madam knows it waxeth late, and the ways are dark and foul.”

“I would not have a young man, who is given to pilgrimages and good works, to faint and starve by the wayside. Let him sleep with the haywards.”

“But, Madam, he is a young man of goodly appearance and conversation; saving your reverence, I would not wish to ask him to eat and sleep with churls.”

“He must sleep without. Let him, however, enter and eat of our poor table.”

“Madam, I will strictly enjoin him what you command. He hath with him, however, an instrument of music and would fain cheer you with spiritual songs.”

A little shiver of anticipation ran down the benches of the great hall, and the nuns fell to whispering.

“Take care, Sir Manciple, that he be not some light juggler, a singer of vain songs, a mocker. I would not have these quiet halls disturbed by wanton music and unholy words. God forbid.” And she crossed herself.

“Madam, I will answer for it.”

The Manciple bowed himself from the dais and went down the middle of the hall, his keys rattling at his belt. A little buzz of conversation rose from the sisters and went up to the oak roof-trees, like the singing of bees. The Abbess told her beads.

The hall door opened and in came the pilgrim. God knows what manner of man he was; I cannot tell you. He certainly was

lean and lithe like a cat, his eyes danced in his head like the very devil, but his cheeks and jaws were as bare of flesh as any hermit's that lives on roots and ditchwater. His yellow-hosed legs went like the tune of a May game, and he screwed and twisted his scarlet-jerked body in time with them. In his left hand he held a cithern, on which he twanged with his right, making a cunning noise that titillated the back-bones of those who heard it, and teased every delicate nerve in the body. Such a tune would have tickled the ribs of Death himself. A queer fellow to go pilgrimaging certainly, but why, when they saw him, all the young nuns tittered and the old nuns grinned, until they showed their red gums, it is hard to tell. Even the Lady Mother on the dais smiled, though she tried to frown a moment later.

The pilgrim stepped lightly up to the dais, the infernal devil in his legs making the nuns think of the games the village folk play all night in the churchyard on Saint John's Eve.

"Gracious Mother," he cried, bowing deeply and in comely wise, "allow a poor pilgrim on his way to confess and do penance at the shrine of Saint Alban to take food in your hall, and to rest with the haywards this night, and let me thereof make some small recompense with a few sacred numbers, such as your pious founder would not have disdained to hear."

"Young man," returned the Abbess, "right glad am I to hear that God has moved thy heart to godly works and to go on pilgrimages, and verily I wish it may be to thy soul's health and to the respite of thy pains hereafter. I am right willing that thou shouldst refresh thyself with meat and rest at this holy place."

“Madam, I thank thee from my heart, but as some slight token of gratitude for so large a favour, let me, I pray thee, sing one or two of my divine songs, to the uplifting of these holy Sisters’ hearts.”

Another burst of chatter, louder than before, from the benches in the hall. One or two of the younger Sisters clapped their plump white hands and cried, “Oh!” The Lady Abbess held up her hand for silence.

“Verily, I should be glad to hear some sweet songs of religion, and I think it would be to the uplifting of these Sisters’ hearts. But, young man, take warning against singing any wanton lines of vain imagination, such as the ribalds use on the highways, and the idlers and haunters of taverns. I have heard them in my youth, although my ears tingle to think of them now, and I should think it shame that any such light words should echo among these sacred rafters or disturb the slumber of our pious founder, who now sleeps in Christ. Let me remind you of what saith Saint Jeremie, *Onager solitarius, in desiderio animae suae, attraxit ventum amoris*; the wild ass of the wilderness, in the desire of his heart, snuffeth up the wind of love; whereby that holy man signifies that vain earthly love, which is but wind and air, and shall avail nothing at all, when this weak, impure flesh is sloughed away.”

“Madam, such songs as I shall sing, I learnt at the mouth of our holy parish priest, Sir Thomas, a man of all good learning and purity of heart.”

“In that case,” said the Abbess, “sing in God’s name, but stand at the end of the hall, for it suits not the dignity of my office a man should stand so near this dais.”

Whereon the pilgrim, making obeisance, went to the end of the hall, and the eyes of all the nuns danced after his dancing legs, and their ears hung on the clear, sweet notes he struck out of his cithern as he walked. He took his place with his back against the great hall door, in such attitude as men use when they play the cithern. A little trembling ran through the nuns, and some rose from their seats and knelt on the benches, leaning over the table, the better to see and hear him. Their eyes sparkled like dew on meadowsweet on a fair morning.

Certainly his fingers were bewitched or else the devil was in his cithern, for such sweet sounds had never been heard in the hall since the day when it was built and consecrated to the service of the servants of God. The shrill notes fell like a tinkling rain from the high roof in mad, fantastic trills and dying falls that brought all one’s soul to one’s lips to suck them in. What he sang about, God only knows; not one of the nuns or even the holy Abbess herself could have told you, although you had offered her a piece of the True Cross or a hair of the Blessed Virgin for a single word. But a divine yearning filled all their hearts; they seemed to hear ten thousand thousand angels singing in choruses, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia; they floated up on impalpable clouds of azure and silver, up through the blissful paradises of the uppermost heaven; their nostrils were filled with the odours of exquisite spices and herbs and smoke of incense; their eyes dazzled at splendours and lights and glories;

their ears were full of gorgeous harmonies and all created concords of sweet sounds; the very fibres of being were loosened within them, as though their souls would leap forth from their bodies in exquisite dissolution. The eyes of the younger nuns grew round and large and tender, and their breath almost died upon their velvet lips. As for the old nuns, the great, salt tears coursed down their withered cheeks and fell like rain on their gnarled hands. The Abbess sat on her dais with her lips apart, looking into space, ten thousand thousand miles away. But no one saw her and she saw no one; every one had forgotten every one else in that delicious intoxication.

Then with a shrill cry, full of human yearnings and desire, the minstrel came to a sudden stop—

“Western wind, when wilt thou blow,
And the small rain will down rain?
Christ, if my love were in my arms,
And I in my bed again.”

Silence!—not one of the holy Sisters spoke, but some sighed; some put their hands over their hearts, and one put her hand in her hood, but when she felt her hair shorn close to her scalp, drew it out again sharply, as though she had touched red-hot iron, and cried, “O Jesu.”

Sister Peronelle, a toothless old woman, began to speak in a cracked, high voice, quickly and monotonously, as though she spoke in a dream. Her eyes were wet and red, and her thin lips trembled. “God knows,” she said, “I loved him; God knows it.

But I bid all those who be maids here, to be mindful of the woods. For they are green, but they are deep and dark, and it is merry in the springtime with the thick turf below and the good boughs above, all alone with your heart's darling—all alone in the green wood. But God help me, he would not stay any more than snow at Easter. I thought just now that I was back with him in the woods. God keep all those that be maids from the green woods.”

The pretty Sister Ursula, who had only just finished her novitiate, was as white as a sheet. Her breath came thickly and quick as though she bore a great burden up hill. A great sigh made her comely shoulders rise and fall. “Blessed Virgin,” she cried. “Ah, ye ask too much; I did not know; God help me, I did not know,” and her grey eyes filled with sudden tears, and she dropped her head on her arms on the table, and sobbed aloud.

Then cried out Sister Katherine, who looked as old and dead as a twig dropped from a tree of last autumn, and at whom the younger Sisters privily mocked, “It is the wars, the wars, the cursed wars. I have held his head in this lap, I tell you; I have kissed his soul into mine. But now he lies dead, and his pretty limbs all dropped away into earth. Holy Mother, have pity on me. I shall never kiss his sweet lips again or look into his jolly eyes. My heart is broken long since. Holy Mother! Holy Mother!”

“He must come oftener,” said a plump Sister of thirty, with a little nose turned up at the end, eyes black as sloes and lips

round as a plum. “I go to the orchard day after day, and gather my lap full of apples. He is my darling. Why does he not come? I look for him every time that I gather the ripe apples. He used to come; but that was in the spring, and Our Lady knows that is long ago. Will it not be spring again soon? I have gathered many ripe apples.”

Sister Margarita rocked herself to and fro in her seat and crossed her arms on her breast. She was singing quietly to herself.

“Lulla, lullay, thou tiny little child,
Lulla, lullay, lullay;
Suck at my breast that am thereat beguiled,
Lulla, lullay, lullay.”

She moaned to herself, “I have seen the village women go to the well, carrying their babies with them, and they laugh as they go by on the way. Their babies hold them tight round the neck, and their mothers comfort them, saying, ‘Hey, hey, my little son; hey, hey, my sweeting.’ Christ and the blessed Saints know that I have never felt a baby’s little hand in my bosom—and now I shall die without it, for I am old and past the age of bearing children.”

“Lulla, lullay, thou tiny little boy,
Lulla, lullay, lullay;
To feel thee suck doth soothe my great annoy,
Lulla, lullay, lullay.”

“I have heard them on a May morning, with their pipes and tabors and jolly, jolly music,” cried Sister Helen; “I have seen them too, and my heart has gone with them to bring back the white hawthorn from the woods. ‘A man and a maid to a hawthorn bough,’ as it says in the song. They sing outside my window all Saint John’s Eve so that I cannot say my prayers for the wild thoughts they put into my brain, as they go dancing up and down in the churchyard; I cannot forget the pretty words they say to each other, ‘Sweet love, a kiss’; ‘kiss me, my love, nor let me go’; ‘As I went through the garden gate’; ‘A bonny black knight, a bonny black knight, and what will you give to me? A kiss, and a kiss, and no more than a kiss, under the wild rose tree.’ Oh, Mary Mother, have pity on a poor girl’s heart, I shall die, if no one love me, I shall die.”

“In faith, I am truly sorry, William,” said Sister Agnes, who was gaunt and hollow-eyed with long vigils and overfasting, for which the good father had rebuked her time after time, saying that she overtasked the poor weak flesh. “I am truly sorry that I could not wait. But the neighbours made such a clamour, and my father and mother buffeted me too sorely. It is under the oak tree, no more than a foot deep, and covered with the red and brown leaves. It was a pretty sight to see the red blood on its neck, as white as whalebone, and it neither cried nor wept, so I put it down among the leaves, the pretty poppet; and it was like thee, William, it was like thee. I am sorry I did not wait, and now I’m worn and wan for thy sake, this many a long year, and all in vain, for thou never comst. I am an old woman now, and I shall soon be quiet and not complain any more.”

Some of the Sisters were sobbing as if their hearts would break; some sat quiet and still, and let the tears fall from their eyes unchecked; some smiled and cried together; some sighed a little and trembled like aspen leaves in a southern wind. The great candles in the hall were burning down to their sockets. One by one they spluttered out. A ghostly, flickering light fell upon the legend over the broad dais, "*Connubium mundum sed virginitas paradisum complet*"—"Marriage replenisheth the World, but virginity Paradise."

"Dong, dong, dong." Suddenly the great bell of the Nunnery began to toll. With a cry the Abbess sprang to her feet; there were tear stains on her white cheeks, and her hand shook as she pointed fiercely to the door.

"Away, false pilgrim," she cried. "Silence, foul blasphemer! *Retro me, Satanus.*" She crossed herself again and again, saying *Pater Noster*.

The nuns screamed and trembled with terror. A little cloud of blue smoke arose from where the minstrel had stood. There was a little tongue of flame, and he had disappeared. It was almost dark in the hall. A few sobs broke the silence. The dying light of a single candle fell on the form of the Lady Mother.

"Tomorrow," she said, "we shall fast and sing *Placebo* and *Dirige* and the *Seven Penitential Psalms*. May the Holy God have mercy upon us for all we have done and said and thought amiss this night. Amen."

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Taken by permission from *The Devil in a Nunnery and other Mediaeval Tales*, by Francis Oscar Mann, published by P. Dutton & Company, New York, 1914.

BELPHAGOR

BY NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI Notes



We read in the ancient archives of Florence the following account, as it was received from the lips of a very holy man, greatly respected by every one for the sanctity of his manners at the period in which he lived. Happening once to be deeply absorbed in his prayers, such was their efficacy, that he saw an infinite number of condemned souls, belonging to those miser-

able mortals who had died in their sins, undergoing the punishment due to their offences in the regions below. He remarked that the greater part of them lamented nothing so bitterly as their folly in having taken wives, attributing to them the whole of their misfortunes. Much surprised at this, Minos and Rhadamanthus, with the rest of the infernal judges, unwilling to credit all the abuse heaped upon the female sex, and wearied from day to day with its repetition, agreed to bring the matter before Pluto. It was then resolved that the conclave of infernal princes should form a committee of inquiry, and should adopt such measures as might be deemed most advisable by the court in order to discover the truth or falsehood of the calumnies which they heard. All being assembled in council, Pluto addressed them as follows: “Dearly beloved demons! though by celestial dispensation and the irreversible decree of fate this kingdom fell to my share, and I might strictly dispense with any kind of celestial or earthly responsibility, yet, as it is more prudent and respectful to consult the laws and to hear the opinion of others, I have resolved to be guided by your advice, particularly in a case that may chance to cast some imputation upon our government. For the souls of all men daily arriving in our kingdom still continue to lay the whole blame upon their wives, and as this appears to us impossible, we must be careful how we decide in such a business, lest we also should come in for a share of their abuse, on account of our too great severity; and yet judgment must be pronounced, lest we be taxed with negligence and with indifference to the interests of justice. Now, as the latter is the fault of a careless, and the former of an unjust judge, we, wishing to avoid the trouble and the blame that might attach to both, yet hardly seeing how to get clear of it,

naturally enough apply to you for assistance, in order that you may look to it, and contrive in some way that, as we have hitherto reigned without the slightest imputation upon our character, we may continue to do so for the future.”

The affair appearing to be of the utmost importance to all the princes present, they first resolved that it was necessary to ascertain the truth, though they differed as to the best means of accomplishing this object. Some were of opinion that they ought to choose one or more from among themselves, who should be commissioned to pay a visit to the world, and in a human shape endeavour personally to ascertain how far such reports were grounded in truth. To many others it appeared that this might be done without so much trouble merely by compelling some of the wretched souls to confess the truth by the application of a variety of tortures. But the majority being in favour of a journey to the world, they abided by the former proposal. No one, however, being ambitious of undertaking such a task, it was resolved to leave the affair to chance. The lot fell upon the arch-devil Belphegor, who, previous to the Fall, had enjoyed the rank of archangel in a higher world. Though he received his commission with a very ill grace, he nevertheless felt himself constrained by Pluto's imperial mandate, and prepared to execute whatever had been determined upon in council. At the same time he took an oath to observe the tenor of his instructions, as they had been drawn up with all due solemnity and ceremony for the purpose of his mission. These were to the following effect:—*Imprimis*, that the better to promote the object in view, he should be furnished with a hundred thousand gold ducats; secondly, that he should make use of the

utmost expedition in getting into the world; thirdly, that after assuming the human form he should enter into the marriage state; and lastly, that he should live with his wife for the space of ten years. At the expiration of this period, he was to feign death and return home, in order to acquaint his employers, by the fruits of experience, what really were the respective conveniences and inconveniences of matrimony. The conditions further ran, that during the said ten years he should be subject to all kinds of miseries and disasters, like the rest of mankind, such as poverty, prisons, and diseases into which men are apt to fall, unless, indeed, he could contrive by his own skill and ingenuity to avoid them. Poor Belphagor having signed these conditions and received the money, forthwith came into the world, and having set up his equipage, with a numerous train of servants, he made a very splendid entrance into Florence. He selected this city in preference to all others, as being most favourable for obtaining an usurious interest of his money; and having assumed the name of Roderigo, a native of Castile, he took a house in the suburbs of Ognissanti. And because he was unable to explain the instructions under which he acted, he gave out that he was a merchant, who having had poor prospects in Spain, had gone to Syria, and succeeded in acquiring his fortune at Aleppo, whence he had lastly set out for Italy, with the intention of marrying and settling there, as one of the most polished and agreeable countries he knew.

Roderigo was certainly a very handsome man, apparently about thirty years of age, and he lived in a style of life that showed he was in pretty easy circumstances, if not possessed of immense wealth. Being, moreover, extremely affable and liberal,

he soon attracted the notice of many noble citizens blessed with large families of daughters and small incomes. The former of these were soon offered to him, from among whom Roderigo chose a very beautiful girl of the name of Onesta, a daughter of Amerigo Donati, who had also three sons, all grown up, and three more daughters, also nearly marriageable. Though of a noble family and enjoying a good reputation in Florence, his father-in-law was extremely poor, and maintained as poor an establishment. Roderigo, therefore, made very splendid nuptials, and omitted nothing that might tend to confer honour upon such a festival, being liable, under the law which he received on leaving his infernal abode, to feel all kinds of vain and earthly passions. He therefore soon began to enter into all the pomps and vanities of the world, and to aim at reputation and consideration among mankind, which put him to no little expense. But more than this, he had not long enjoyed the society of his beloved Onesta, before he became tenderly attached to her, and was unable to behold her suffer the slightest inquietude or vexation. Now, along with her other gifts of beauty and nobility, the lady had brought into the house of Roderigo such an insufferable portion of pride, that in this respect Lucifer himself could not equal her; for her husband, who had experienced the effects of both, was at no loss to decide which was the most intolerable of the two. Yet it became infinitely worse when she discovered the extent of Roderigo's attachment to her, of which she availed herself to obtain an ascendancy over him and rule him with a rod of iron. Not content with this, when she found he would bear it, she continued to annoy him with all kinds of insults and taunts, in such a way as to give him the most indescribable pain and uneasiness. For what with the

influence of her father, her brothers, her friends, and relatives, the duty of the matrimonial yoke, and the love he bore her, he suffered all for some time with the patience of a saint. It would be useless to recount the follies and extravagancies into which he ran in order to gratify her taste for dress, and every article of the newest fashion, in which our city, ever so variable in its nature, according to its usual habits, so much abounds. Yet, to live upon easy terms with her, he was obliged to do more than this; he had to assist his father-in-law in portioning off his other daughters; and she next asked him to furnish one of her brothers with goods to sail for the Levant, another with silks for the West, while a third was to be set up in a goldbeater's establishment at Florence. In such objects the greatest part of his fortune was soon consumed. At length the Carnival season was at hand; the festival of St. John was to be celebrated, and the whole city, as usual, was in a ferment. Numbers of the noblest families were about to vie with each other in the splendour of their parties, and the Lady Onesta, being resolved not to be outshone by her acquaintance, insisted that Roderigo should exceed them all in the richness of their feasts. For the reasons above stated, he submitted to her will; nor, indeed, would he have scrupled at doing much more, however difficult it might have been, could he have flattered himself with a hope of preserving the peace and comfort of his household, and of awaiting quietly the consummation of his ruin. But this was not the case, inasmuch as the arrogant temper of his wife had grown to such a height of asperity by long indulgence, that he was at a loss in what way to act. His domestics, male and female, would no longer remain in the house, being unable to support for any length of time the intolerable life they led. The inconvenience