



# Devil Stories: An Anthology

*Maximilian J. Rudwin*

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The twenty tales brought together between the covers of this book have been taken from many lands and languages and represent a wide range of satanic tradition and lore. They extend from the Middle Ages to the present day and are from the literature of Italy, Spain, France, Russia, Germany and other countries as well as from that of England and America. A number of the stories are familiar to the ordinary reader, although the greater part is out of his reach in any other edition. It is, however, the conception of such a compilation that makes it unique. For the first time has the vague and varied diabolical literature been presented in a convenient and comprehensive collection. The author has approached a new and hitherto unanthologized field. A book of this sort has never appeared in English or in any other language, for that matter. This effort is particularly interesting now in the contemporary vogue of supernatural and psychical subjects. But while the interest in ghost-stuff, which is now being thrust upon the reading public, is an indication of the revival of superstition, the interest in Devil Lore is to be accounted for on other and far more romantic grounds. The selection is judicious. In this wonderfully interesting collection of short stories you will find many masterpieces of mirth and marvel, of mystery and magic. As to the quality of the stories—the names of their writers fully guarantee their literary value. The list of the authors is the roll-call of the masters of fiction. Among the names are Machiavelli, Maupassant, Daudet, Baudelaire, Anatole France, Fernan, Caballero, Gogol, Gorky, Thackeray, Richard Garnett, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, and John Masefield.

In addition to the interest in good stories well told, an opportunity is offered, as they rub shoulders in this book, for observation of the different aspects in which the devil has been viewed by the various authors. For each story reflects the personal, national and temporal traits of its author. This collection of devils are the self-portraying creations of their authors, their countries and their times. It is interesting to learn how the personification and presentation of evil will draw out the most hidden thoughts of man. Washington Irving's Old Scratch is a typical New Englander, while the devil of Poe is redolent of the Southern soil. Gogol's fiend is as typically Russian as Hauff's is German, and he is as much of a Ukrainian peasant as Gorky's is a melancholy, morbid Russian intellectual.

The collection opens with Oscar Francis Mann's highly poetical tale "The Devil in a Nunnery", a modern version of a medieval legend. The Devil enters a convent, disguised as a pilgrim, and plays on his "cithern" for the entertainment of the nuns. Slyly he drifts into the most voluptuous music and the nuns are overcome with memories, memories that should be dead. The effect is so disastrous that a fast is ordered as expiation for the next day. The next story is "Belphegor, or The Marriage of the Devil" by Niccolo Machiavelli, who was himself regarded in England as an incarnation of the Devil. The story opens in the infernal regions. The judges in hell are perplexed. Almost every man that arrives complains that his wife was responsible for his downfall. They wish to be fair in pronouncing their sentences upon the sinful men, and appoint a committee of one to investigate the matter. Belphegor is delegated to go up on earth, stay there ten years, get married and come back and report. What happened to this poor devil in his matrimonial adventures will have to be read in full to be appreciated.

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