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Excursions along the banks of the Rhine

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Part VI.

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PART VI.

THE DEVIL HIMSELF MAY SIN IN BEING A GLUTTON.

ABOUT that time a singular and disagreeable adventure had befallen the devil. The devil is in the habit of carrying off the souls belonging to him in a hod, as you may convince yourself by examining the portal of the cathedral at Fribourg; where he is represented with a swine's head upon his shoulders, a crook in his hand, and a ragman's hod upon his back, as though the devil picked up the souls of the wicked in the heaps of dirt, wherewith the human race defile the corners of divine truth.

Now the devil having a bad habit of neglecting to fasten his hod, thanks to the celestial aid of the angels, many souls escaped. But the devil, having found this out, secured the lid of the hod with numerous padlocks. Still the souls, little heeding such paltry precautions, found means to make their way by the interstices of the wicker-work; seeing which, the devil slew a dromedary, and with the skin of the hump, assisted by the demon *Hermès*, managed to make it soul-tight. When his new hod was full to the brim, he was merrier than a school-boy with a bag of golden sequins. It is generally in Upper Egypt, upon the shores of the Red Sea, that the devil, after beating for game the

country of the pagans and heathens, manages to fill his hod.

The spot is quite deserted, being a sandy shore near a palm-grove, situated between Coma, the birthplace of St. Antony, and Clisma, where St. Sisoës gave up the ghost.

One day the devil, having made a more successful hunt than usual, was joyously filling his hod, when lo! at a few paces distance from him, stood an angel, smiling. The devil shrugged his shoulders, and went on packing his souls, taking them as they came, great and small; all being fish that came to his net. Having finished his task, he was about to throw the hod over his shoulder, when alas! he finds it impossible to raise his souls with a single pull; so many there were, and so overcharged with crimes. Having seized the fatal wallet with both hands, his efforts were still of no avail. He could no more move his burthen than if it had been a rock! "A curse upon ye, oh souls of lead!" exclaimed Beelzebub; and he began to swear like a trooper; when, on turning round, he saw the beautiful angel laughing in his face.

"What are you at, pray?" inquired the evil one, in an indignant tone. "Amusing myself at your expense, as you may perceive," replied the good angel. "I may make you laugh on the other side of your mouth," cried Beelzebub, in a passion. But the angel now assumed a severe countenance. "Listen, oh serpent! and give ear!" said he, "in the name of Him who is above both thee and me. Never shall thou carry off the prey thou holdest in thy hand, until a saint fallen from Paradise, or a

Christian fallen from the sky, aid thee to lift the burthen upon thy shoulders." And as he spoke, the angel spread forth his wings, and was no more seen.

The devil was beside himself. "What the deuce is the meaning of all this?" mumbled he between his teeth. A saint fallen from Paradise, or a Christian from the skies! I may wait long enough for such assistance! What could tempt me so to overfill this wallet?"

During this monologue, the inhabitants of Coma and Clisma began to hear the thunder groan frightfully towards the horizon, which was neither more nor less than the grumbling of the devil.

For a carter, sticking in the mud, to swear, is natural enough, though to struggle his way out be a wiser measure. The devil was at his wits' end. All-cunning, as when he deluded the weak mind of Eve, penetrating everywhere, and gliding into love, or into Paradise, as the case may be, he retains an acquaintance with St. Cyprian the magician, and knows how to ingratiate himself with other saints; sometimes by rendering them little services, at others by saying agreeable things to them, knowing well how to suit his conversation to his company, and attacking every one on his weak side. To St. Robert of York he conveys buttered oat-cakes; with St. Elias he discusses jewelry, and culinary affairs with St. Theodotus. He talks to the holy Bishop Germain of his friend King Childebert; to the holy Abbot Wandrille of his friend King Dagobert, and to St. Ustarade of King Sapor; to St. Paul

the Simple of St. Anthony, and to St. Anthony of his pig.

He talks to St. Loup of his wife Piméniole, and does *not* talk to St. Gomer of *his* wife Gwinmarie. For the devil, if the prince of darkness, is the prince of flatterers; his heart all gall, but his lips, in good sooth, a very honeycomb.

Meanwhile four saints, renowned for their reciprocal friendship, St. Nile the Solitary, St. Antre-
maine, St. John the Dwarf, and St. Medard, hap-
pened to be taking a walk that very day on the
borders of the Red Sea. As they advanced towards
the palm grove, the devil perceived them without
being seen. Having hastily assumed the appear-
ance of a decrepit old man, he began to utter moans
of despair. "What is the matter?" inquired St.
Nile, approaching him. "Alas! alas! my good
gentleman!" exclaimed the devil, "Come, I pray
ye, to my aid. I am a poor slave, and my wicked
master is a merchant of the country of Fez; nor
need I tell you that the men of Fez, the Moors,
Numidians, Garamantuans, and all the tribes of
Barbary, Nubia, and Egypt, are worthless, perverse,
corrupt, bold, and pitiless, from the influence of the
planet Mars. Moreover my master is a victim to
black bile, and the loose cough of Cicero; hence, a
deep melancholy, which renders him timid and
reserved. Still his inventions are cruel towards his
slaves, and"—"Will you be so obliging as to come to
the point, my good friend," interrupted St. Antre-
maine.

"Let me tell you, my good sir," replied the devil,

“that my master is a great traveller, and has strong manias. He has a fancy for raising in his garden a hill composed of the sand of the sea-shore of all the countries he visits. In Zealand, he heaped up a mound of filthy mud and sand; Friesland afforded him sand mixed with red shells, among which you find the striped cone; and in the Cimbrian Chersonesus, now called Jutland, a heap of fine white sand, in which you find occasionally the beautiful shell of—”

“The deuce take all this rigmarole,” cried St. Nile, “To the point! to the point! For the last quarter of an hour, at least, you have been making fools of us. I counted the minutes.”

“The minutes, sir?” replied the devil; “You must be from the south, then. The southerners are apt to deal in horology, being nearer than others to the equator:” and he now began sobbing and beating his breast, crying aloud, “Alack, alack! good princes. To complete his mountain of sand, my tyrannical master compels me, aged man as I am, to fill this sack on the sea-shore, and I must bear it on my shoulders from morning till night, and ever commencing and re-commencing. Though tired and exhausted, I dare not rest myself, or I should be severely flagellated. I am sinking under infirmities and ill usage! Yesterday I made six trips, and in the evening was so exhausted that I could not raise the sack to my shoulder. I have tarried here all night in fear of the resentment of my master. Therefore my good, good lords, in pity and for mercy’s sake, help me to raise my burthen, that I may return home to my cruel master.”

After listening to this pathetic appeal, St. Nile, St. Antremaine, and St. John the Dwarf looked full of sympathy, and St. Medard wept, which caused it of course to rain for forty days.

St. Nile, however, said to the demon, "I cannot help you, my friend; it is against my articles of faith to touch a dead substance such as yonder skin. 'Touch not the unclean thing,' said Moses, and St. Paul confirmed the interdiction." St. Antremaine, on the other hand, observed, "To assist you, friend, might be a good action. But good actions lead to vain-glory, and I therefore abstain, for the better security of my humility."

St. John the dwarf added, "It is out of my power to come to your aid. I reach only to your waist, and could not possibly lift the sack upon your shoulders."

St. Medard, still in tears, exclaimed, "My feelings are too much unhinged, old gentleman, to be of the least assistance." And away went the four saints to pursue their walk. Beelzebub might as well have wished them at the devil, for he was now beside himself. But this charitable wish, so frequent among Christians, was in his case out of the question; and he had consequently only to chew the cud of his own ill-humour. As his fiendish eyes were glaring out malignantly towards the sky, he descried a small black speck in the heavens, increasing as it approached, till at length he saw that it was a man—a knight armed and helmed—a Christian with the red cross on his breast, and literally falling from the clouds.

"I am safe!" cries the demon exultingly, "Here

is my Christian, in the nick of time. I failed with the four saints, but the devil is in it if I cannot prevail over a man." Pecopin now set foot on earth and perceiving the old man reposing beside his burthen, went up to him, saying, "Who art thou, friend, and, prythee, where am I?"

The devil, recommencing his piteous moan, replied, "You are by the Red Sea, sir knight, and you behold the most wretched of beings!" He then implored him, as he had done the saints, to lift the burthen upon his back.

Pecopin shook his head, saying, "Old man, this story of yours is I fear stranger than true."

"My good sir," replied the devil, "who would believe yours, were you to tell them you had fallen from the sky?"

"This time you certainly say true," quoth Pecopin.

"It is not my fault," quoth the devil, "if truth be strange, stranger than fiction. I am forced to tell my story in its own way."

"You may let it have its own way if you will, but permit me to go mine," replied Pecopin sharply.

"And yet," remonstrated the demon, "it would do you no great harm to give a lift to a poor devil!"

This was unanswerable, and Pecopin, quietly stooping, raised up the sack without difficulty, and placed it upon the back of the old man, who was waiting for his burthen.

Beelzebub is apt to indulge in his evil propensities, and play the devil; one of his favourite vices being that of gluttony. At that moment, he hungered ravenously after the soul of Pecopin. The

first step towards obtaining it was to part it from his body, to achieve which, he summoned to his aid, by certain mutterings, an invisible spirit, to whom he issued his commands.

Everybody knows that the language spoken by the devil in his private life is half Spanish, half Italian, intermixed with a little dog Latin; a fact clearly established on the trial of Dr. Eugenio Torralva, begun at Valladolid Jan. 10th, 1528, and terminated the 6th of May by the *auto da fe* of the doctor.

Now Pecopin was far from an ignoramus, on the contrary, he was a knight fully entitled to benefit of clergy. Among other branches of polite letters, he was a proficient in diabolical dialect.

As he was placing the camel-skin on the old man's shoulder, he distinctly heard him utter the following words:—" *Bamos, non chierra occhi verbera, frappa, y echa la piedra.*" A flash of lightning seemed to strike Pecopin; and a luminous idea instantly suggested itself. On raising his eyes, he beheld an immense rock, suspended by some giant over his head.

To throw himself back, touch his talisman with his left hand, and seize hold of his poinard with his right, so as to stab the camel-skin sack with impetuous violence, was the work of a second!

The devil uttered a cry of despair. The imprisoned souls were escaping in all directions, leaving behind them in the sack their crimes and wickedness, a hideous heap, which, by natural sympathy and attraction, attached itself like a wart to the devil, struck root in his back, and remained

there, fixed to all eternity, between his shoulders. It is to this singular incident we are to attribute the humpback of the evil one.

At the moment Pecopin threw himself back, the invisible giant let fall his rock upon the devil's cloven feet, and ever since he has gone lame.

There is a thunder which emanates from the regions below, as well as a thunder from above; but the former roots up trees, and reverses the order of nature. Pecopin trembled when a black smoke seemed to envelope him, and an astounding noise overpowered his senses; a moment afterwards he seemed to be skimming the surface of the earth like a dead leaf driven by the winds. He had fallen into a deep swoon!