

MISCELLANEOUS.

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTES.

DEVIL STORIES: AN ANTHOLOGY. Selected and Edited With Introduction and Critical Comments. By *Maximilian J. Rudwin*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921. Pp. xx-332. Price: \$2.50 net.

Starting from the supposition that in all the regions of mythical imagination "the Personality of Evil has had the strongest attraction for the mind of man", the author of this book, well known to our readers through a number of diabolistic studies which he has been contributing to *The Open Court*, has started the publication of a remarkable series of volumes on the various aspects of diabolical literature to be issued under the general heading of *Devil Lore*. Of this series the present collection of devil stories is the first.

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, Fernán, Caballero, Gógol, Górký, 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. Gógol's fiend is as typically Russian as Hauff's is German, and he is as much of a Ukrainian peasant as Górký'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 "Belphagor, or The Marriage of the Devil" by Niccoló 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.

Of the other less familiar stories "The Devil's Round", translated from the French of Charles Deulin, and prefaced by a note of Andrew Lang, is a jolly tale about golf as played in Flanders in olden days. Dr. Richard Garnett's "The Demon Pope" is an excellent humoresque on popery, and his "Madam Lucifer" represents the devil in the unenviable role of a henpecked husband. In Fernán Caballero's "The Devil's Mother-in-Law" the poor devil is as helpless against this marital appendage as most mortal men. The American story "Devil-Puzzlers" by F. B. Perkins is a satire on woman's wear. The devil loses a wager, after guessing the most difficult metaphysical puzzles, because he cannot tell which is the front of a woman's hat.

The stories have been arranged in strictly chronological order to show how permanent and persistent has been the appeal of this puissant personage to the story writers of all times and of all tongues.

The texts have been most adequately and accurately edited, and the book is almost wholly free from typographical errors.

The Introduction presents in succinct form the evolution of the idea of the Devil through the history of literature. It is most interesting to follow the author in his differentiation between the medieval and the modern devil. The latter "differs from his older brother as a cultivated

flower from a wild blossom". The Satan of the romantics, the author holds, is "the symbol of the restless, hapless nineteenth century". To quote further from the author's definition of the New Devil:

"The Spirit of Evil is better than he was, because evil is no longer what 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. The 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."

Last but not least in the volume are the critical comments on each story. These Notes deal with the Devil in myth, tradition, institution, belief and custom, art, music and literature. In them may be seen the amazing breadth of the author's researches in seeking material. These Notes will be of great value especially to the students of the supernatural in literature, to whom the volume is dedicated. But even the average intelligent reader will derive much pleasure and profit from them.

The author has highly specialized in his field of study, and is internationally known, through his many books and magazine articles, as an authority on the supernatural and diabolical in literature.

The book is wholly free from controversial or compromising matter. It contains nothing to offend moral or theological sensibilities. It is strictly *virginibus puerisque*. The author may be commended for the delicacy with which he has handled this difficult matter. There is great danger in the attempt to bring under critical analysis any phase of religious belief, and especially a phase of this sort, that the method of treatment may appear unsympathetic, if not irreverent. To the credit of Dr. Rudwin be it said that his treatment of the subject leaves nothing to be desired. The objectivity and impersonality, to which the readers of this journal are accustomed in the author, stood him in good stead in his preparation of this book.

A word may be said in conclusion in regard to the appearance of *Devil Stories*. The book has properly been wrapped in red jackets and bound in cloth about which also hovers a glow of deeply smouldering infernal fires. This is wholly in keeping with the motto from Heine placed on the title-page,

"Mortal, mock not at the Devil,
Life is short and soon will fail,
And the 'fire everlasting'
Is no idle fairy-tale."