

# **The True Legend of St. Dunstan and the Devil eBook**

## **The True Legend of St. Dunstan and the Devil**

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# Page 1

## THE TRUE LEGEND OF ST. DUNSTAN AND THE DEVIL

Showing How the Horse-Shoe Came to Be a Charm against Witchcraft

by

*Edward G. Flight.*

With Illustrations by George Cruikshank

Engraved by John Thompson

Third Edition

1871

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

The success of the first edition of this little work, compels its author to say a few words on the issue of a second. "Expressive silence" would now be in him the excessive impudence of not acknowledging, as he respectfully does acknowledge, that success to be greatly ascribable to the eminent artists who have drawn and engraved the illustrations.

"A man's worst wish for his enemy is that he might write a book," is a generally-received notion, of whose accuracy it is hoped there is no impertinence in suggesting a doubt. To reflect on having contributed, however slightly, to the innocent amusement of others, without giving pain to any, is alone an enjoyment well worth writing for. But when even so unpretending a trifle as this is, can, besides, bring around its obscure author fresh and valuable friendships, the hackneyed exclamation would appear more intelligible if rendered thus: "Oh, that my *friend* would write a book!"

In former days, possibly, things may have been very different from what they now are. Haply, the literary highway may, heretofore, have been not particularly clean, choked with rubbish, badly drained, ill lighted, not always well paved even with good intentions, and beset with dangerous characters, bilious-looking Thugs, prowling about, ready to pounce upon, hocus, strangle, and pillage any new arrival. But all that is now changed.

Now, the path of literature is all velvet and roses. The race of quacks and impostors has become as extinct, as are the saurian and the dodo; and every honest flourisher of the pen, instead of being tarred and feathered, is hailed as a welcome addition to “the united happy family”—of letters.

Much of this agreeable change is owing to the improvement of the literary police, which is become a respectable, sober, well-conducted body of men, who seldom go on duty as critics, without a horse-shoe. Much is owing to the propagation of the doctrines of the Peace Society, even among that species of the *genus irritabile*, authors themselves, who have at last learned

“That brother should not war with brother,  
And worry and devour each other;  
But sing and shine by sweet consent,  
Till life’s poor transient night is spent.”

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Chiefly, however, is the happy change attributable to the discriminating and impartial judgment of the reading public of this golden Victorian era. In the present day, it may be considered a general rule, that no picture is admired, no book pronounced readable, no magazine or newspaper circulated, unless in each case it develope intrinsic merit. The mere name of the artist, or author, or editor, has not the slightest weight with our present intelligent, discriminating community, who are never enslaved, or misled, by whim, caprice, or fashion. It has been said, but it seems too monstrous for belief, that, formerly, persons were actually to be found so extremely indolent, or stupid, or timid, as never to think for themselves; but who followed with the crowd, like a swarm of bees, to the brazen tinkle of a mere name! Happily, the minds of the present age are far too active, enlightened, independent, and fearless, for degradation so unworthy. In our day, the professed wit hopes not for the homage of a laugh, on his "only asking for the mustard;" the artist no longer trusts to his signature on the canvas for its being admired; no amount of previous authorship-celebrity preserves a book from the trunkmaker; and the newspaper-writer cannot expect an extensive sale, unless his leaders equal, at least, the frothy head of "Barclay's porter," or possess the Attic salt of "Fortnum and Mason's hams." At the same time, the proudest notable in literature can now no longer swamp, or thrust aside, his obscurer peers; nor is the humblest votive offering at the shrine of intellect, in danger, as formerly, from the hoofs of spurious priests, alike insensible to receive, and impotent to reflect or minister, light or warmth, from the sacred fire they pretend to cherish. In short, such is the pleasant change which has come over literary affairs, that, however apposite in past times, there is not, in the present, any fitness in the exclamation, "Oh, that mine enemy would write a book!"

With reference to the observation, made by more than one correspondent, that the horse-shoe has not always proved an infallible charm against the devil, the author, deferentially, begs to hazard an opinion that, in every one of such cases, the supposed failure may have resulted from an adoption of something else than the real shoe, as a protection. Once upon a time, a witness very sensibly accounted for the plaintiff's horse having broken down. "'Twasn't the hoss's fault," said he; "his plates was wore so thin and so smooth, that, if he'd been Hal Brook[1] his self, he couldn't help slipping."

[Footnote 1: Doubtless he meant Al Borak, the name of Mahomet's night mare.]

"You mean," said the judge, "that the horse, instead of shoes, had merely slippers?"

Peradventure, the alleged failures may be similarly accounted for; the party, in each case, having perhaps nailed up, not a shoe, but a slipper, the learned distinction respecting which was thus judicially recognised. The deed which the devil signed, must, like a penal statute, be construed strictly. It says nothing of a slipper; and it has been held by all our greatest lawyers, from Popham and Siderfin, down to Ambler and Walker, that a slipper is not a shoe.

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Another solution suggests itself. Possibly the horse-shoe, even if genuine, was not affixed until after the Wicked One had already got possession. In that case, not only would the charm be inefficacious to eject him, but would actually operate as a bar to his quitting the premises; for that eminent jurisconsult, Mephistopheles himself, has distinctly laid it down as “a law binding on devils, that they must go out the same way they stole in.” Nailing up a shoe to keep the devil out, after he has once got in, is indeed too late; and is something like the literary pastime of the “Englishman,” who kept on showing cause against the Frenchman’s rule, long after the latter had, on the motion of his soldiers, already made it absolute with costs.

There is one other circumstance the author begs to refer to, from a desire to dispel any uneasiness about our relations with the Yezidi government. The late distinguished under-secretary for foreign affairs, as every one knows, not regarding as *infra dig.* certain great, winged, human-headed bulls,[2] that would have astonished Mr. Edgeworth, not less than they puzzle all Smithfield, and the rest of the learned “whose speech is of oxen,” has imported those extraordinary grand-junction specimens, which, with their countryfolk, the Yezidis, Dr. Layard has particularly described in his book on Nineveh. When speaking of the Yezidis, he has observed, “The name of the evil spirit is, however, never mentioned; and any allusion to it by others so vexes and irritates them, that it is said they have put to death persons who have wantonly outraged their feelings by its use. So far is their dread of offending the evil principle carried, that they carefully avoid every expression which may resemble in sound the name of Satan, or the Arabic word for ‘accursed.’ Thus, in speaking of a river, they will not say *Shat*, because it is too nearly connected with the first syllable in *Sheitan*, the devil; but substitute *Nahr*. Nor, for the same reason, will they utter the word *Keitan*, thread or fringe. *Naal*, a horse-shoe, and *naal-band*, a farrier, are forbidden words; because they approach to *laan*, a curse, and *m[=a]loun*, accursed.”—*Layard*, vol. i. p. 297.

[Footnote 2: A sister countryman,—a bull is excusable when discoursing of bulls,—on seeing the monster at the Museum, exclaimed, “Faith! the great Dan himself couldn’t repale *that* union, at all, at all, *after* ’twas once put together.” Some suppose this bull to be typical of a foreign John Bull, the head representing the Crown, the fine feathers the Lords, and the rest the Commons.]

Notwithstanding all this, the author has the pleasant satisfaction of most respectfully assuring his readers, on the authority of the last Yezidi *Moniteur*, that the amicable relations of this country with the Yezidi government are not in the slightest danger of being disturbed by this little book; and that John Bull is, at present, in no jeopardy of being swallowed up by those monstrous distant cousins of his, of whom Mr. Layard has brought home the above-mentioned speaking likenesses.



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1, Adam Street, Adelphi.

[Illustration]

### ST. DUNSTAN AND THE DEVIL.

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

“And it is for trouth reported, that where this signe dothe appere, there the Evill Spirite entreth not.”—SERMON ON WITCHES.

“Your wife’s a witch, man; you should nail a horse-shoe on your chamber-door.”—REDGAUNTLET.

[Illustration]

### ST. DUNSTAN AND THE DEVIL.

In days of yore, when saints were plenty,  
(For each one now, you’d then find twenty,)  
In Glaston’s fruitful vale,  
Saint Dunstan had his dwelling snug,  
Warm as that inmate of a rug,  
Named in no polished tale.

The holy man, when not employed  
At prayers or meals, to work enjoyed  
With anvil, forge, and sledge.  
These he provided in his cell,  
With saintly furniture as well;  
So chroniclers allege.

The peaceful mattock, ploughshare, spade,  
Sickle, and pruning-hook he made,  
Eschewing martial labours.  
Thus bees will rather honey bring,  
Than hurtfully employ their sting  
In warfare for their neighbours.

A cheerful saint too, oft would he  
Mellow old Time with minstrelsy,—





But such as gave no scandal;  
Than his was never harp more famed;  
For Dunstan was the blacksmith named  
Harmonious by Handel.

And when with tuneful voice he sang,  
His well-strung harp's melodious twang  
Accompaniment lending;  
So sweetly wedded were the twain,  
The chords flowed mingled with the strain,  
Melliflently blending.

Now 'tis well known mankind's great foe  
Oft lurks and wanders to and fro,  
In bailiwicks and shires;  
Scattering broad-cast his mischief-seeds,  
Planting the germs of wicked deeds,  
Choking fair shoots with poisonous weeds,  
Till goodness nigh expires.

Well, so it chanced, this tramping vagrant,  
Intent on villanies most flagrant,  
Ranged by Saint Dunstan's gate;  
And hearing music so delicious,  
Like hooded snake, his spleen malicious  
Swelled up with envious hate.

[Illustration]

Thought Nick, I'll make his harp a fool;  
I'll push him from his music-stool;  
Then, skulking near the saint,  
The vilest jars Nick loudly sounded,  
Of brayings, neighings, screams compounded;  
How the musician's ears were wounded,  
Not Hogarth e'en could paint.

The devil fancied it rare fun.  
"Well! don't you like my second, Dun?  
Two parts sound better sure than one,"  
Said he, with queer grimace:  
"Come sing away, indeed you shall;  
Strike up a spicy madrigal,  
And hear me do the bass."

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This chaffing Dunstan could not brook,  
His clenched fist, his crabbed look  
    Betrayed his irritation.  
'Twas nuts for Nick's derisive jaw,  
Who fairly chuckled when he saw  
    The placid saint's vexation.

"*Au revoir*, friend, adieu till noon;  
Just now you are rather out of tune,  
    Your visage is too sharp;  
Your ear perhaps a trifle flat:  
When I return, 'All round my hat'  
    We'll have upon the harp."

A tale, I know, has gone about,  
That Dunstan twinged him by the snout  
    With pincers hotly glowing;  
Levying, by *fieri facias* tweak,  
A diabolic screech and squeak,  
    No tender mercy showing.

But antiquarians the most curious  
Reject that vulgar tale as spurious;  
    His reverence, say they,  
Instead of giving nose a pull,  
Resolved on vengeance just and full  
    Upon some future day.

Dunstan the saying called to mind,  
"The devil through his paw behind  
Alone shall penal torture find  
    From iron, lead, or steel."  
Achilles thus had been eternal,  
Thanks to his baptism infernal,  
    But for his mortal heel.

And so the saint, by wisdom guided,  
To fix old Cloutie's hoof decided  
    With horse-shoe of real metal,  
And iron nails quite unmistakable;  
For Dunstan, now become implacable,  
    Resolved Nick's hash to settle.



Satan, of this without forewarning,  
Worse luck for him! the following morning,  
    With simper sauntered in;  
Squinted at what the saint was doing,  
But never smoked the mischief brewing,  
Putting his foot in't; soon the shoeing  
    Did holy smith begin.

Oh! 'twas worth coin to see him seize  
That ugly leg, and 'twixt his knees  
    Firmly the pastern grasp.  
The shoe he tried on, burning hot,  
His tools all handy he had got,  
    Hammer, and nails, and rasp.

A startled stare the devil lent,  
Much wondering what St. Dunstan meant  
    This preluding to follow.  
But the first nail from hammer's stroke  
Full soon Nick's silent wonder broke,  
For his shrill scream might then have woke  
    The sleepest of Sleepy Hollow.

And distant Echo heard the sound  
Vexing the hills for leagues around,  
    But answer would not render.  
She may not thus her lips profane:  
So Shadow, fearful of a stain,  
    Avoids the black offender.

The saint no pity had on Nick,  
But drove long nails right through the quick;  
    Louder shrieked he, and faster.  
Dunstan cared not; his bitter grin,  
Without mistake, showed Father Sin  
    He had found a ruthless master.

And having driven, clenched, and filed,  
The saint reviewed his work, and smiled  
    With cruel satisfaction;  
And jeering said, "Pray, ere you go,  
Dance me the *pas seul* named 'Jim Crow,'  
    With your most graceful action."

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To tell how Horny yelled and cried,  
And all the artful tricks he tried,  
    To ease his tribulations,  
Would more than fill a bigger book  
Than ever author undertook,  
    Since the Book of Lamentations.

His tail's short, quick, convulsive coils  
Told of more pain than all Job's boils,  
When Satan brought, with subtle toils,  
    Job's patience to the scratch.  
For sympathetic tortures spread  
From hoof to tail, from tail to head:  
    All did the anguish catch.

[Illustration]

And yet, though seemed this sharp correction  
Stereotyped in Satan's recollection,  
    As in his smarting hocks;  
Not until he the following deed  
Had signed and sealed, St. Dunstan freed  
    The vagabond from stocks.

TO ALL good folk in Christendom to whom this instrument shall come the Devil sendeth greeting: KNOW YE that for himself and heirs said Devil covenants and declares, that never at morn or evening prayers at chapel church or meeting, never where concords of sweet sound sacred or social flow around or harmony is woo'd, nor where the Horse-Shoe meets his sight on land or sea by day or night on lowly sill or lofty pinnacle on bowsprit helm mast boom or binnacle, said Devil will intrude.

The horse-shoe now saves keel, and roof,  
From visits of this rover's hoof,  
    The emblem seen preventing.  
He recks the bond, but more the pain,  
The nails went so against the grain,  
    The rasp was so tormenting.

He will not through Gran[=a]da march,  
For there he knows the horse-shoe arch  
    At every gate attends him.  
Nor partridges can he digest,  
Since the dire horse-shoe on the breast  
    Most grievously offends him.



The name of Smith he cannot bear;  
Smith Payne he'll curse, and foully swear  
At Smith of Pennsylvania,  
With looks so wild about the face;  
Monro called in, pronounced the case  
Clear antismithymania;

And duly certified that Nick  
Should be confined as lunatic,  
Fit subject for commission.  
But who the deuce would like to be  
The devil's person's committee?  
So kindred won't petition.

Now, since the wicked fiend's at large,  
Skippers, and housekeepers, I charge  
You all to heed my warning.  
Over your threshold, on your mast,  
Be sure the horse-shoe's well nailed fast,  
Protecting and adorning.

[Illustration: "O, et praesidium, et dulce decus."—HOR Lib. i. Ode i.]

Here note, if humourists by trade  
On waistcoat had the shoe displayed,  
Lampoon's sour spirit might be laid,  
And cease its spiteful railing.  
Whether the humour chanced to be  
Joke, pun, quaint ballad, repartee,  
Slang, or bad spelling, we should see  
Good humour still prevailing.

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And oh! if Equity, as well  
As Nisi Prius, would not sell  
    *Reason's perfection* ever  
To wrangling suitors *sans* horse-shoe,  
Lawyers would soon have nought to do,  
Their subtle efforts ceasing too,  
    Reason from right to sever.

While Meux the symbol wears, *tant mieux*,  
Repelling sinful aid to brew  
    His liquid strains XX;  
Still, I advise, strong drinks beware,  
No horse-shoe thwarts the devil there,  
    Or demon-mischief checks.

And let me rede you, Mr. Barry,  
Not all your arms of John, Dick, Harry,  
    Plantagenet, or Tudor;  
Nor your projections, or your niches,  
Affluent of crowns and sculptile riches,  
    Will scare the foul intruder.

He'll care not for your harp a whistle,  
Nor lion, horse, rose, shamrock, thistle,  
    Horn'd head, or *Honi soit*;  
Nor puppy-griffs, though doubtless meant  
Young senators to represent,  
    Like Samson, armed with jaw.

Only consult your sober senses,  
And ponder well the consequences,  
    If in some moment evil,  
The old sinner should take Speaker's chair,  
Make Black Rod fetch the nobles there,  
    And with them play the devil!

Then do not fail, great architect,  
Assembled wisdom to protect  
    From Satan's visitation.  
With horse-shoe fortify each gate,  
Each lion's paw; and then the State  
    Is safe from ruination.

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

## POSTSCRIPT.

The courteous reader's indulgence will, it is hoped, extend to a waiver of all proofs and vouchers in demonstration of the authenticity of this tale, which is "simply told as it was told to me." Any one who can show that it is not the true tale, will greatly oblige, if he can and will a tale unfold, that *is* the true one. If this is not the true story and history of the horse-shoe's charm against the wicked one, what *is*? That's the question.

There's nothing like candour; and so it is here candidly and ingenuously confessed that the original deed mentioned in the poem, has hitherto eluded the most diligent searches and researches. As yet, it cannot be found, notwithstanding all the patient, zealous, and persevering efforts of learned men, erudite antiquarians, law and equity chiffonniers, who have poked and pored, in, through, over, and among, heaps, bundles, and collections, of old papers, vellums, parchments, deeds, muniments, documents, testaments, instruments, ingrossments, records, writings, indentures, deed polls, escrows, books, bills, rolls, charters, chirographs, and exemplifications, in old English, German text, black letter, red letter, round-hand, court-hand, Norman French, dog Latin, and law gibberish, occupying all sorts of old boxes, old bookcases, old

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chests, old cupboards, old desks, old drawers, old presses, and old shelves, belonging to the Dunstan branch of the old Smith family. At one moment, during the searches, it is true, hopes were excited on the perception of a faint brimstone odour issuing from an antiquated iron box found among some rubbish; but instead of any vellum or parchment, there were only the unused remains of some bundles of veteran matches, with their tinder-box accomplice, which had been thrown aside and forgotten, ever since the time when the functions of those old hardened incendiaries, flint and steel, were extinguished by the lucifers. All further search, it is feared, will be in vain; and the deed is now believed to be as irrecoverably lost, as the musty muster-roll of Battle Abbey.

A legal friend has volunteered an opinion, that certain supposed defects in the alleged deed evince its spuriousness, and even if genuine, its inefficiency. His words are, "The absence of all legal consideration, that is to say, valuable consideration, such as money, or money's worth; or good consideration, such as natural love and affection, would render the deed void, or voidable, as a mere *nudum pactum*. [See *Plowden*.] Moreover, an objection arises from there being no *Anno Domini*, [*Year Book, Temp. Ric. III.*] and no *Anno Regni*, [*Croke Eliz.*] and no condition *in poenam*. [*Lib. Ass.*] Now, if the original deed had been thus defective, the covenanting party thereto is too good a lawyer, not to have set it aside."

To these learned subtleties it may be answered, that the deed was evidently intended, not so much as an instrument effectively binding "the covenanting party," as a record whereby to justify a renewal of punishment, in case of contravention of any of the articles of treaty. It would have been informal to make mention of money as the consideration, it being patent that this "covenanting party" considers it of no value at all. For however dearly all "good folk in Christendom" may estimate and hug the precious bane, as the most valuable consideration on earth, he, old sinner that he is, wickedly disparages it, as being mere filthy lucre, only useful horticulturally, to manure his hot-beds of iniquity. With regard to the consideration of natural love and affection, it is humbly submitted that the facts are at variance with such a suggestion.

Another friend, not of the legal, but the equestrian order, has tendered, according to his ideas, an explanation of the especial protecting virtue of the horseshoe. His notions are given as follows, *ipsissimis verbis*. "There is not in the whole world, a nobler animal than that splendid fellow, the horse. He is the embodiment of all that is magnificent, possessing strength, swiftness, courage, sagacity, and gracefulness. He never drinks more than he needs, or says more than he ought. If he were an opposition M.P.—and a horse was once a consul—his speech against Government bills, would be only a dignified neigh. Base and unworthy measures he disdains.



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"Who ever knew this honest brute  
At law his neighbour prosecute;  
Bring action for assault and battery,  
Or friend beguile with lies and flattery?"

"His proud step is on all fours with his love of a fair field and no favour. The grandeur of his nature is such, that the idea of a beggar on horseback is proverbially the most revolting of all inequitable absurdities and incongruities in human economy; while, on the other hand, as was once well remarked by a distinguished lecturer, this superb animal stamped his very name itself on that for which our loftiest princes and nobles, before the present degenerate age of iron, were emulous of distinguishing themselves. In proportion as they developed unblemished honour, with undaunted bravery, graceful bearing, and magnanimous generosity, were they deemed worthy to rank among Christendom's bright chivalry.

"The horse-shoe was, no doubt, regarded as typical of the noble qualities of its wearer. These being so hateful to the ugly, sly, intriguing, slandering, malevolent, ill-conditioned, pettifogging, pitiful arch-enemy, it might well be supposed that the mere apparition of that type would scare him away. To this supposition is ascribable the adoption of the horse-shoe, as an infallible charm against the visits of old Iniquity."

But mere "supposition" is no answer to the question above propounded.

\* \* \* \* \*

An acknowledgment is due, and is hereby offered, to the unknown correspondent, who has obligingly communicated the following copy of the coat of arms of the Dunstan family.

"Azure, on a chevron gules between three harps, a horse-shoe supported by two pairs of pincers, proper. *Crest*—An arm embowed, couped at the shoulder, the hand grasping a hammer, all proper. *Motto*—'SARUED HYM RIGHTE.'"

[Illustration: SAREUD HYM RIGHTE]