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Feb 17, 1923, 11 a.m.

**The Devil in Place-Names**

CLEMENT ANTRORUS HARRIS, Author of The Story of British Music. In Chamber's Weekly.

## III.

How elastic the term we are discussing may be seen from the fact that it is frequently applied in a manner precisely the opposite of that just illustrated—that is to say, for creations of man's own hand and brain which are so vast as to suggest a supernatural agency. Chief among these are dykes, and especially the Devil's Dyke, or Dyke, extending seven miles from Reach to Wood Ditton, in Cambridgeshire. It is eighteen feet high on the east side, and evidently of Roman origin, for it is cut through the Roman roads. Even the certain knowledge among educated persons that a remarkable feature is of human design and construction will not prevent the necessity from attributing it, at least nominally, to Satanic builders. Thus Antonine's Wall, in Scotland, is regularly known as Grim's Dyke, from its demon. Similarly, the earth-ramart in Germany built by the Emperor Charlemagne and extending from Ratisbon to the Danube, to the Rhine, three hundred and sixty-eight miles, is called "Teufelsburg" (The Devil's Wall). Again, Ponty Monach, in Cardiganshire, received its name, which means

"The Monks' Bridge," from its wonderful arch of some twenty-five feet single span, over a tremendous chasm, being due to the engineering and architectural genius of the monks of Strata Florida Abbey. Yet, though the monastery was founded as late as 1164, the edifice, in popular local parlance, is known as "The Devil's Bridge," the country-people refusing to believe that any merely human power could have built it. It must not be assumed, however, that the term "Devil's" necessarily means that the personage named built a bridge, or whatever else may be in question. It may mean just the opposite—namely, that he was defeated in his attempt to destroy a human erection! This is the case with what is perhaps the most famous of all examples, the remarkable bridge over the Reuss, in Switzerland. It was built by Abbot Gtraldus of Einsiedel, Mephistopheles promising not to destroy it (as he had done its predecessors) if the abbot would consent to him the first living thing that crossed it. This was agreed to; but no sooner was the last stone laid than the abbot threw a loaf of bread, across, which a starving dog at once sprang after, and the rocks re-echoed with

peals of laughter to see the Devil thus defeated (Longfellow, Golden Legend, V.). A dyke on the South Downs, near Brighton, is another well-known example. St. Cuthman plumed himself on having redeemed the land from the sea and saved from perdition by building a dyke and a nunnery behind it (the site of the latter was where the dyke-house now stands). The opportunity afforded by such a dyke was not to be lost by Apollon, who accordingly shortly presented himself and told the saint that virtue was in vain—he would break down his sea-wall and flood the whole district before next morning! Cuthman thereupon hastened to the nunnery, and told the abbess to keep the sisters in prayer till after midnight, and then to illuminate the windows. At midnight the Devil returned with maddock and spade, and began cutting a dyke into the sea. Hardly had he started, however, when (I presume in answer to the prayers of the saint and the sisters) he was seized with rheumatic pains all over the body. He "downed tools." At the same moment the cocks in the neighbourhood, mistaking the light in the nunnery windows for sunrise, began to crow, and the Prince of Darkness, fearing that light was coming, made off with celerity, and—well, there the dyke is to this day, to prove it all!

Again, in Yorkshire the term "Devil's Leap" is applied to the span between a southern spur of the Hambleton Hills and the summit of a cone-shaped promontory near by, called Hood Hill, because an infernal athlete is said to have jumped from the one to the other—and, of course, the usual stories as to his footprints having been seen are not lacking in Northumberland, on the other hand, the name Devil's Rock has been given to a huge stone because a demon, less agile than his master, failed to leap from it to the opposite side of the river—a mile distant—and, falling headlong into the Leap Crag Pool, was drowned!

Moreover, the character of the features to which a Satanic title is given are as opposite as are the legends connected with them. For, while most are gloomy or dangerous, others are bright and attractive. Of this latter kind, perhaps the most striking is the Devil's Glen, in what has been justly termed "The Garden of Wicklow." Of this "lovely glen" Mr. Hall writes: "We enter through a tunnel; and as the overhanging foliage has hitherto concealed its character, the scene that at once bursts upon the sight is inconceivably grand and beautiful." Between two mountains "rushing the rapid river, now a mass of foam, now subsiding; a calm miniature lake, the most graceful if not the most stupendous, of the Wicklow cataraacts, I might have cited this glen in connection with legends, for there is a local one of a fair novice in a nunnery who baffled all the allurements of the Devil—it is given at length, and very skillfully, by the author just quoted—but I am not at all sure that the name is due to the legend: it may be the other way round.

In a few instances sheer immensity would seem to account for the appellation, as in the case of the Devil's Peak. (Local legends attribute the name—and the "table-cloth" of cloud that envelops the top of the mountain—to a yet unexplained smoking contest between a Dutchman and his Satanic Majesty) part of Table Mountain in South Africa, and the Devil's Stone, near Durkheim, in Germany, on which is the apparent imprint of a huge paw.

## IV.

If we could believe the prefix "Devil's" to be three or four thousand years old, it would be comparatively easy to account for its application to natural features or buildings of utility and even beauty. For in the original Jewish conception Satan was one of the Beni Elohim, or "Sons of God," who, though sometimes an instrument of physical evil, as in the case of Job, was not an incarnation of moral evil at all. And possibly the application of the term is in some cases due to a survival of, or an unconscious harking back to, this view. But I imagine that it is more generally an instance of whimsicality, as when we use the term "Devil's luck" for a stroke, not of ill fortune, but good; or when a figure of the Devil was so placed as to appear to be looking over a college or a city as its guardian angel! It was this practice which originated the terms "the Devil looking over Lincoln" (that is, Lincoln College, Oxford), quoted by Sir Walter Scott in Kenilworth; and "the Devil looking over Durham." The Oxford statue lost its head in a storm, and was taken down in 1781. I hope it was to the older and better sense of the word "Devil" that Dublin, according to one dubious derivation, owes its name. According to this, it is derived from the Scandinavian Divilinn, and Burns, in "Death and Dr. Hornbook," says his story

Is just as true's the Devil's in hell Or Dublin city.

There are one or two instances of the term being applied not whimsically so much as in satirical reference to the nefarious practices of the human inhabitants of a town. Thus the scandalous impositions said to have been practised on sailors and visitors in certain seaports led to their being nick-named—one might say Old-Nick-named—the "Devil's Daughter's Portion"; hence the saying:

Deal, Dover, and Harwich, The Devil gave with his daughter in marriage.

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Despite many inquiries, both locally and to high authorities, two names baffle me—the "Devil's Tower" at Pickering Castle and the "Devil's Tower" at Windsor Castle. One way of accounting for the latter may, however, be mentioned as being different from any other derivation we have given—namely, that the term is a corruption of the name of the building.

There are probably scores of instances in addition to those here given; many readers will in all likelihood be able to increase the list from their own knowledge. In doing so they will naturally observe whether they are adding to the kind of feature to which the term has been applied or merely increasing the list of these: out of some thirty-seven instances, twenty-nine have been distinctive in name, though occasionally very similar in character. We may sum them up as follows:

Devil's Bridge, Dykes, Walls, Varners, Frying-pan, Mountains, Elbows, Cheese-knife, Currents, Punch-bowl, Garden, Kettle, Cauldron, Mill, Stone, Slide, Towers, Arrows, Daughter's Portion, Den, Nostrils, Throat, Leap, Beef-tub, Basin, Staircase, Rock, Pulpit, Outlook over a city—a goodly heritage!

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**A Hero of Rorke's Drift.**

A face familiar to visitors to the British Museum a few years ago was that of Sergeant Henry Hook, formerly of the 24th Foot (South Wales Borderers), a "Commissionaire," whose twenty years' service at Great Bloomsbury St. was terminated by death on March 12, 1905. Hook had seen other and less peaceful service in his time, his most exciting experience being at Rorke's Drift in 1879, a stirring episode of the Zulu War when 800 British soldiers (the gallant 24th and other detachments) were surprised and slain almost to a man near Isandlwana Mountain. Some thousands of fearless and well-disciplined savages, flushed with victory had advanced to the Drift to "wipe out" the little outpost of a hundred men left in charge of the thirty sick in the hospital huts. Survivors from the massacre, had, however, warned Lieutenants Chard and Bromhead, and a slight breastwork of corn sacks and biscuit boxes had been improvised. A withering volley welcomed the Zulu onrush, and the savages wheeled to the further side of the camp only to be beaten off with cold steel. The hospital hut was set on fire and Private Hook, and three comrades, held back the Zulus at the point of the bayonet from the door of the hut until his helpless inmates were all removed. All night long fresh attacks were made and repulsed. At dawn the enemy retired leaving the ground around the camp strewn with dead (350) and wounded. Two hours afterwards Lord Chelmsford, British Commander in Chief, rode up with the relief column, and apprehension was changed to joyful surprise at finding the Union Jack still flying over the post, and the tiny garrison almost intact. Seventeen English soldiers had been killed and twelve wounded.

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