

THE GREEN MONSTER

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I THE DEVIL'S MANOR

I am going to speak of one of Paris' oldest inhabitants. He was once called the Vauvert devil.

Which is the source of the saying, "It's with the Vauvert devil! Go to the Vauvert devil!" Meaning, "Go away, take a hike."

The porters generally say "It's at the devil over there!" to express that a place is very far away.

That means you'll have to pay exorbitantly for the errand you ask of them. – But it's also a vicious and corrupt saying, like many others familiar to the Parisian people.

The Vauvert devil is principally an inhabitant of Paris. He has lived there for centuries, if you believe the historians. Sauval, Félebien, Sainte-Foix and Dulaure recounted his escapades in depth.

He seems to have first inhabited the Vauvert manor, which was situated where the Carthusian ball is held today, at the boundary of Luxembourg and across from the Observatory's paths, on Hell Street.

This castle had a bad reputation. It was partly demolished, and the ruins became a guest-house for the Carthusian monastery. Jean de la Lune, the nephew of the antipope, Benedict XIII, died there in 1414. He had been suspected of having a relationship with a certain demon, who may have been the familiar spirit of the old Vauvert manor. Each of the monastery's feudal edifices had, of course, belonged to that devil.

Historians have left us nothing precise on this interesting phase.

The Vauvert devil made the news again in the days of Louis XIII.

For a long time, every night, a great noise was heard, coming from a house made of the former convent's remnants. The house's owners had been absent for many years.

The noise frightened the neighbors very much.

They went and told the chief of police, who sent some archers.

The astonishment of these soldiers, hearing the clinking of glasses mingled with piercing laughter!

At first they thought it was counterfeiters having an orgy, and judging the number of forgers by the noise's intensity, the soldiers went to find reinforcements.

But they still felt the squadron was insufficient. None of the sergeants cared to lead his men into the lair. The din seemed like that of an entire army.

Finally, near morning, a sufficient group was amassed, and the troops penetrated the house. They found nothing there.

The sun dissipated the shadows.

They searched all day. Then someone conjectured that the sound may have come from the catacombs, which were situated beneath this part of town.

While the police made arrangements to enter the cellar, evening came again, and the sound returned, louder than ever.

No one dared to go back in this time. It was obvious that the cellar contained nothing but bottles. It must have been the devil, therefore, who set them dancing.

They were content to occupy the sides of the street and to ask the clergy for prayers.

The clergy offered a mass of prayers. They even sent holy water in syringes through the cellar window.

The sound persisted all the same.

II THE SERGEANT

A crowd of Parisians filled the neighborhood's surroundings, fearful and asking for news.

Finally, a sergeant of the provost-marshal who was bolder than the others offered to enter the cellar. In return, he asked for a pension that, in case of death, would go to a seamstress named Maggie.

He was a brave man, more in love than gullible. He adored this seamstress, who was a well-dressed and very thrifty person—one could even say a bit miserly. She had not wanted to marry a simple sergeant, deprived of fortune.

But in earning the pension the sergeant would become another man.

Encouraged by this prospect, he exclaimed that he believed in neither God nor Devil, and that he would find a reason for the noise.

“Then what do you believe in?” one of his comrades asked him.

“I believe,” he replied, “in the chief of police and the provost-marshal of Paris.”

It was too much to say in so few words.

He took his sword in his teeth, a pistol in each hand, and ventured down the stairs.

The most extraordinary spectacle awaited him when he reached the cellar floor.

The bottles were all engaged in a frenetic dance, forming the most graceful figures.

Bottles with green seals depicted men, and bottles with red seals depicted women.

There was even an orchestra set up there, on the bottle rack.

The empty bottles resonated like wind instruments, the broken bottles like cymbals and triangles, and the cracked bottles sounded something like the penetrating harmony of violins.

The sergeant had knocked back a few bottles himself before undertaking the expedition. Seeing nothing there but bottles, he felt very reassured and began to dance in imitation.

Then, more and more encouraged by the merriment and the charm of the spectacle, he picked up a likeable bottle with a long neck. It appeared to be a pale burgundy, carefully sealed in red. He pressed it lovingly to his heart.

Frenzied laughter burst from all sides. The surprised sergeant dropped the bottle, which shattered into a thousand pieces.

The dance stopped. Cries of dread issued from every corner of the cellar, and the sergeant felt his hair stand on end as the spilled wine appeared to form a pool of blood.

The nude body of a woman lay beneath his feet, with blonde hair stretching across the earth and soaking in the liquid.

The sergeant would not have feared the devil in person, but this sight filled him with horror. Thinking that, after all, he had to complete his mission, he seized a green-sealed bottle that seemed to be snickering before him, and he cried, “At least I'll have one!”

There was an immense cackling in reply.

But he had climbed the staircase, and showing his comrades the bottle he shouted, “Some

sprites! You're a bunch of cowards"—he used a stronger word—"to fear going in there!"

His words were bitter. The archers dropped into the cellar, where they found only a single broken bottle of burgundy. The rest was in its place.

The archers lamented the broken bottle's fate. But, now brave, they emerged each with a bottle in hand.

They were allowed to drink them.

The sergeant of the provost said, "As for me, I'm going to keep mine for my wedding day."

They could not refuse him the pension he was promised, so he married the seamstress, and—

You think they had a lot of children?

They only had one.

III

WHAT FOLLOWED

The day of his wedding reception, which took place at the Rapée, the sergeant put the famous green-sealed bottle between himself and his wife, and he poured the wine for her and him alone.

The bottle was green like mint, the wine red like blood.

Nine months later the seamstress gave birth to a little, entirely green monster with red horns on his forehead.

Now, go, you young girls! Go dance at the monastery—on the site of the Vauvert castle!

The child grew, if not in virtue at least in height. Two things bothered his parents: his green color, and a caudal appendage that at first seemed to be simply the extension of his coccyx. But little by little, it began to resemble an actual tail.

They consulted with scholars, who declared that it was impossible to operate on the extrusion without compromising the child's life. They added that it was a fairly rare case, but there were still examples found in Herodotus and Pliny the Younger. They therefore did not intend to use Fourier's system.

As for his color, they attributed it to a predominance of the biliary system. However, they tried several caustics to lessen the overly pronounced shade of the epidermis, and they managed after a rash of lotions and rub-downs to turn him first bottle-green, then sea-green, and finally apple-green. Once the skin seemed to whiten completely, but that evening it returned to its shade.

The sergeant and the seamstress could not overcome the grief this little monster caused them as he became increasingly stubborn, wrathful and devilish.

The melancholy they suffered drove them to a common vice for people of their sort. They became drunks.

Only, the sergeant never wanted any wine except that from a red seal, and his wife only wanted wine from a green seal.

Every time the sergeant was dead drunk, in his sleep he saw the bloody woman that had terrified him in the cellar after he had broken the bottle.

The woman said to him, "Why did you press me to your heart, and then sacrifice me—when I loved you so?"

Every time that the sergeant's wife spent too much time with the green-sealed bottle, in her sleep she saw a large devil, terrifying in appearance. It said to her, "Why are you surprised to

see me—didn't you drink from the bottle?

“Aren't I your child's father?”

Oh, mystery!

Having reached the age of thirteen, the child disappeared.

His inconsolable parents continued to drink, but they never again saw the terrible apparitions that had tormented their sleep.

IV MORAL

It's thus that the sergeant was punished for his impiety, and the seamstress for her avarice.

V WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GREEN MONSTER

No one ever knew!