

The Bat and the Devil

By Barry Pain

I

The bat he hung on the yew-tree bough,
As the devil came over the high hill brow.
He opened the gate of the grim churchyard,
And cursed at the hinges that went so hard.
He sat him down 'neath the same yew-tree
And long at the poor little bat glared he:
"It is but a leaf that is hanging there,
Dead, but moved by the strong sweet air.
Plants and trees are nothing to me,
And nothing to Him who made them be.
They have one life and no more than that"—
Poor old Bat!

II

The bat dropped down from the yew-tree spray,
And crawled on the devil in a grewsome way.
A woman's skin would have leaped with fear
At the cold claws touching there and here;
But the devil did naught but chuckle and sing:
"It's a creeping thing! It's a creeping thing!
By the Serpent of Eden, first of the line,
All that creeps on the earth is mine.
This is no leaf, but a soul to crawl
In my inner chamber along the wall,
With the poison-snake and the snail of slime
In hell's dark place that knows not time,
For my sisters to mock and be merry at"—
Poor old Bat!

III

But the grim churchyard grew dusk and dark,
And stars 'gan twinkling, spark by spark;
And out and away on the air of night
Sailed the bat with a noiseless flight,
With scarce a whirr of its nervous wing,
As it wheeled around in a widening ring;
But a curse came into the devil's eyes,

And his mouth was red with blasphemies:
“By the angels that float in the heavenly air,
By the holy sheen of the wings they wear—
And damned be they forevermore!
All that flies in the air will soar
Upward to Him, and away from me!”

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And the lightning blasted the grim yew-tree,
And the thunder roared, and the rain made foam
On the path, as the devil got him home—
Home by the broad road and the level—
 Poor old Devil!