

THE

ERECTION OF THE CATHEDRAL

at Aix-la-Chapelle.

In former times the zealous and devout inhabitants of Aix-la-Chapelle determined to build a cathedral. For six months the klang of the hammer and axe resounded with wonderful activity, but alas! the money which had been supplied by pious Christians for this holy work, became exhausted, the wages of the masons were suspended, and with them their desire to hew and hammer: for after all men were not so very religious in those days, as to build a temple on credit.

Thus, it stood, half finished, resembling a falling ruin. Moss, grass and wild parsley flourished in the

cracks of the walls; screech-owls already discovered convenient places for their nests and amorous sparrows hopped lovingly about, where holy priests should have been teaching lessons of chastity.

The builders were confounded, they endeavoured to borrow here and there, but no rich man could be induced to advance so large a sum. The collections from house to house fell short, so that instead of the much wished for golden foxes nothing was found but copper in the bushes. When the magistracy received this report they were out of humour and looked with desponding countenances towards the cathedral walls, as fathers look upon the remains of favourite children.

At this moment, a stranger of commanding figure and something of pride in his voice and bearing, entered, and exclaimed: "*Bon dies!* They say that you are out of spirits. Hem! if nothing but money is wanting, you may console yourselves gentlemen. I possess mines of gold and silver, and both can and will most willingly supply you with a ton of it."

The astounded senators sate like a row of pillars, measuring the stranger from head to foot. The Burgomaster first found his tongue. "Who are you, noble Lord," said he, "that thus, entirely unknown, speak of tons of gold as though they were sacks of beans? Tell us your name, your rank in this world, and whether you are sent from the regions above to assist us." — "I have not the honour to reside there," replied the stranger "and between ourselves, I beg most particularly to be no longer troubled with questions con-

cerning who and what I am. Suffice it to say : I have gold plentiful as summer hay !” Then drawing forth a leathern pouch he proceeded : “ This little purse contains the tenth of what I’ll give. The rest shall soon be forth coming. Now listen , mymasters ,” continued he clinking the coin , “ all this trumpery is and shall remain yours , if you promise to give me the first little soul , that enters the door of the new temple , when it is consecrated. ”

The astonished senators now sprung from their seats as if they had been shot up by an earthquake , and then rushed péle-mêle and fell all of a lump , into the farthest corner of the room , where they rolled and clung to each other like lambs frightened at flashes of lightning. Only one of the party , who had not entirely lost his wits , collected his remaining senses and drawing his head out of the heap , uttered boldly : “ Avaunt , thou wicked spirit ! ”

But the stranger who was no less a person than Master Urian , laughed at them. “ What’s all this outcry about ? ” said he at length. “ Is my offence so heinous , that you are all become like children ? It is I that may suffer from this business , not you. With my hundreds and thousands I have not far to run to buy a score of souls. From you I ask but one in exchange for all my money. What are you picking at straws for ? One may plainly see you are a mere set of humbugs ! For the good of the common wealth , (which high sounding name is often borrowed for all sorts of purposes) many a Prince would instantly conduct a

whole army to be butchered, and you refuse one single man for that purpose! Fie! I am ashamed, O, overwise consellers, to hear you reason thus absurdly and citizen-like. What do you think to deprive yourselves of the kernel of your people, by granting my wish? O! no: There your wisdom is quite at fault, for, depend on it, hypocrites are always the earliest churchbirds."

By degrees, as the cunning fiend thus spoke, the senators took courage and whispered in each other's ear, "What is the use of our resisting? The grim lion will only show his teeth once—if we don't assent we shall infallibly be packed off ourselves. It is better therefore to quiet him directly." Scarcely was this sanguinary contract concluded, when a swarm of purses flew into the room through the walls and windows and Urian more civil than before, took leave, without leaving any smell behind. He stopped however at the door and called out, with a grim leer: "Count it over again, for fear that I may have cheated you."

The hellish gold was piously expended in finishing the cathedral, but nevertheless when the building shone forth in all its splendour, the whole town was filled with fear and alarm, at the sight of it. The fact was that, although the senators had promised by bond and oath, not to trust the secret to any body, one of them had prated to his wife, and she had made it a market-place tale, so that all declared, they would never set foot within the temple. The terrified council now consulted the clergy but the good priests all

hūng down their heads. At last a monk cried out: “A thought strikes me! The wolf which has so long ravaged the neighbourhood of our town, was this morning caught alive. This will be a well merited punishment for the destroyer of our flocks, let him be cast to the devil in the fiery gulf! T’is possible the arch-hellhound may not relish this breakfast, yet *nolens volens* he must swallow it. You promised him certainly a soul, but whose was not decidedly specified.”

The monk’s plan was plausible and the senate determined to put the cunning trick into execution. At length the day of consecration arrived and orders were given to bring the wolf to the principal entrance of the cathedral; so just as the bells began to ring, the trap-door of the cage was pulled open and the savage beast darted out into the nave of the empty church. Master Urian, from his lurking place, beheld this consecration-offering with the utmost fury. Burning with choler at being thus deceived, he raged like a tempest and then rushed forth slamming the brass gate so violently after him that the wings split in two.

This crack which serves to commemorate the priests’ victory over the tricks of the devil, is still exhibited to the gaping travellers, who visit the cathedral. Proof of the fact is also not wanting, for the brazen figure of the wolf may still be seen over the principal door with the devil carrying off its poor, eternally lost soul.