

THE

HUNCH-BACK

of Aix-la-Chapelle.

It was late at night on the eve of St. Matthew in the year 1549, that a poor hunch-backed musician chanced to be on his road back to Aix-la-Chapelle from a distant village, where he had been performing at a wedding.

Emboldened by his frequent libations at the feast, he approached the cathedral precisely as the turret-clock struck midnight.

Startled, however, at the lateness of the hour and more so still by a fluttering noise, as though a legion of cats and owls kept holy-day around him, he hurried on as fast as possible, hoping to reach his humble dwel-

ling in Jacobs-street, ere the hour for the appearance of spirits and goblins had completely done sounding.

However, on reaching the Fish-Market he stood perfectly paralyzed at the spectacle that presented itself to his sight, so that he was unable to advance or retreat. The Fish-Market lay before him glittering from afar in the dark night, with innumerable lights. Rich and costly viands in gold and silver dishes were spread upon tables, ruby wine sparkled in a multitude of crystal vessels and around the tables sat a number of richly clad dames, apparently eating with considerable appetite.

The astounded musician retreated and crouched in a corner, for he now remembered with horror, that it was the festival of St. Matthew. But it was too late, for one of the unearthly guests had already perceived him and rising from his seat invited him to the table. The terrified musician obeyed, though his teeth rattled in his jaws like dice in a box and his knees bent under him, as if they were made of whalebone. The ghost who remarked this, addressed him thus: "Fear not, my good friend, but play us a cheerful tune, and thou shalt be well rewarded." And thus speaking she handed him a goblet filled with spicy wine. The musician drained the cup and thus encouraged, commenced a merry tune. Immediately the benches and all they contained were thrown aside and the ladies, among whom the hunch-back thought he recognized many of the noble women of the town, commenced dancing. Rapid and more rapid went the measure,

as though driven by an invisible hand and helter-skelter danced the Dames. While the fiddler with vigorous arm plyed the bow, passing from one tune to another with such energy and velocity, that it appeared to himself as though a whole concert of screeching fiddles and yelling flutes were behind him. He began to doubt whether it were not all a dream, when in the midst of the dance the clock struck three quarters after twelve. The Ladies stopped suddenly, as if overcome with exhaustion and all became quiet as before.

Irresolute stood the musician, not knowing whether to remain or depart; when the Dame, who appeared to preside over this nocturnal revel, again approached and said to him: "Good musician, thou hast bravely done thy part towards our amusement, thus shalt thou be rewarded." And stepping quickly behind him, she stripped him of his coat, and ere he had recovered from his astonishment, with a sudden and violent grasp removed his hunch. Overwhelmed with gratitude he was about to fall upon his knees before his benefactress, when the clock struck one. Ladies, lights, and dishes disappeared and he alone remained standing in the darkness.

"It is all a dream," he exclaimed mournfully rubbing his shoulders, but he started with surprise and again passed his hand across his shoulders to be assured of the fact. It was no dream his hunch had disappeared, and joyfully he grasped his coat which lay on the ground, when another surprise awaited

him, for the pockets were heavy with gold. Doubly rejoiced at this windfall, he now hastened home. But his good wife recognized him not and could scarcely credit his account of the night's adventure and stared at him from head to foot and from foot to head.

And well might she be astonished, for he was now tall, slender and as straight as a turnpike bar. Upon this the pious woman gave praise to the Lord, who knows all things and can perform all things. The violin, that had been the means of such good fortune to the house, was now suspended under the portrait of their Patron-Saint, as a perpetual memorial, a holy relic for their children and grand children!

The poor musician's good fortune was scarcely known however in the neighbourhood, ere it stirred up a host of enemies.

Amongst the most violent was a brother hunchback, who distinguished himself by his loud abuse of his former companion. Day and night was he tormented by his jealousy and vainly did he practise the most beautiful tunes with the hope of rivalling his friend and of having the same opportunity of exhibiting his talents. This was soon given him at St. Gerards festival. At the hour of midnight he proceeded to the Fish-Market, where he found a sumptuous banquet prepared and the company assembled. The ladies immediately invited him to play and in proud self-confidence he commenced a merry, but pompously executed tune. The ladies arose to dance, when suddenly the sprightly measure fell into

a funereal dirge and he fiddled a tune so sad, so heartbreaking, that hellish howls and hisses arose around him and the dancers moved slowly along with mournful faces. Perfectly satisfied with his own performance, he continued to play, until the dance had ended; when throwing aside his coat and waist coat he boldly approached the table, saying: "Ah, ah! good Madam, I had not thought to recognize in the queen of this night's revels, the honoured wife of our worthy Burgomaster, what would his worship say, to find thee at this broom-stick feast? But, fair lady, detain me not, for the night is cold and I shiver in the autumnal air, hasten to bestow my reward. I doubt not that my talent is worth a better price than his, whose music so lately tinkled in thy ears." The lady replied not, but ere the astonished fiddler had ceased to speak, hastily snatched off the cover from a silver dish, and taking thence the hunch of his companion, which had been here concealed, affixed it firmly upon his breast.

At the same moment the whole party vanished amidst roars of laughter.

Surrounded by this double bulwark of flesh, the hunch-back now hastened home, and carried with him through life the effects of his envy and covetousness. May his fate serve as a beacon to warn others from those rocks of envy and jealousy upon which he was shipwrecked.