

THE LEGEND OF THE STRASBOURG CLOCK.

IT was a bitterly cold day, which we halted at Strasbourg. The snow lay in large patches on the slanting roofs of the houses, and in the paved streets and in the market-place,—where the Christmas fair was going forward—the peasants hurried to and fro, looking frost-bitten and perished with the cold, despite their valiant attempts at holiday-making.

"We shall have to go on without exploring the town," said the friend in charge of our party; "it is quite useless to think of standing about in this weather: why, the wind would cut us through, to say nothing of having to wade through the snow."

But there was an outcry in the camp, for we were determined to see Strasbourg Cathedral with its wonderful clock, of which we had heard so much, and so at length we came to terms with our *chef d'affaires*, who agreed to spend a few hours' solitude in our rooms at the "Maison Rouge," whilst we were entrusted to the care of a dear little energetic Strasbourgienne, who was only too anxious to do the honours of her native town, and who, in due course of time, introduced us to the famous Strasbourg clock, of which I am about to tell the legend.

Everybody, I suppose, who has not seen the famous clock in Strasbourg Cathedral, must at least have heard of it; yet, nevertheless, it may not be altogether out of place, if, before proceeding further, I give a short description of the great masterpiece itself.

Strange as it may seem, the name of its maker cannot be given with any certainty, although some people are inclined to believe that one Isaac Hakrecht was the inventor of this fine piece of mechanism; and the exact date of its presentation to the cathedral is likewise open to doubt, although it is thought to have been about the sixteenth century. The clock,—which is immensely high,—is fenced in against the wall, protected on all sides by an iron

railing. In a kind of recess at the top of the clock, is a figure of our Lord, which is always to be seen *standing*; below Him, likewise never changing, is Death, *seated*. At an equal distance again below Death, is a sun-chariot, which is to be seen all day, and which marks the days of the week according to the style of the ancients; as, for instance, Jupiter stands for Thursday, and so forth. This chariot always changes at midnight. Seated on either side of the said sun-chariot are two cherubs: one holds a small gong in his hand, which he strikes at all the quarters; the other has an hour-glass, which he turns when the first cherub strikes his gong.

At the base of the clock, below the cherubs, and standing out rather more prominently than the rest of the figures, are two globes, one to shew the eclipses of sun and moon and the movements of the planets, the other to mark the four seasons.

At the very top of the clock, on the left-hand side, is a cock, supposed to have about nine or ten times the dimensions of an ordinary fowl, since, viewed at so great a distance, it appears to be life-size.

A gong is placed before Death. At the first quarter, a child appears from the right and passes to the left side of the clock, whereupon Death strikes one. At the half-hour, a youth appears and the child disappearing, Death strikes two; at the third quarter, a man moves in, while the youth moves out, Death strikes three; and at the hour, the man is replaced by an aged father, grey-headed and bent, then Death strikes four.

At mid-day the cock crows twice, flapping his wings each time, while from the right of the recess where stands the figure of our Saviour the twelve Apostles appear, following each other. They pass in succession to the left-hand side of the clock, all bending in turn before their Master, only Judas Iscariot turns his back.

After they have passed, Christ raises His arms to bless the spectators, where-