STORYS OF

THE

BEWITCHED FIDDLER,

PERILOUS SITUATION,



THE BEWITCHED FIDDLER.

MATTHEW WILMART was the best fiddler in the city of Hesdin. There was no village for ten miles round, where they would have enjoyed their dancing, if any one but Matthew Wilmart fingered the violin for them. He was a personage, consequently, of no little importance. He sat down with the relations at marriage feasts; and the bride, who waited upon the guests during the repast, according to a custom of the country, was always sure to give the titbits to Matthew. When he opened his lips, all listened to him, for there was nobody better at telling a story or singing a song.

One winter night, there was a marriage at Auffin. The dancing had been continued to a late hour, and it was already past midnight, when Matthew threw his violin over his shoulder, and announced his attention of taking leave.—They used every effort to prevail upon him to remain.

'Stay, father Matthew,' they say, 'the wind is north-east, and it is cold enough to split the very stones.' The forest of Hes

din, which you must pass through, has a bad name. It is haunted by wolves and robbers, not to mention the sorcerers who meet there.

'I have a good goblet of wine in me,' said the old man, 'a fine fur cloak on my shoulders, and a good iron club in my hand. With all these, I defy the cold, wolves, and robbers. As to wizards and devils, if I meet any, they shall dance to the sound of my violin. They will tell me if the musicians in hell play a better fiddle than old Matthew Wilmart.'

In finishing these words, which made the young people laugh, and the old men shake their heads in displeasure, he enveloped himself in his cloak, and set out at a firm pace on the path which led through the forest to Hesdin.

He had not been more than a quarter of an hour on his way, when the sky, just before blue and starry, was suddenly covered with an immense cloud. The darkness became frightful. Our fiddler began to regret that he refused a good bed at Auffin. But it was too late to retrace his steps. Besides, after his bravadoes, they would not fail to laugh at him for his want of courage. He continued his course. To add to his chagrin, he discovered that he had lost the path.

What was to be done. To advance was only to loose his way still more effectually.

To wrap himself in his cloak and lie down at the foot of a tree was altogether unsafe; the wolves would inevitably make a meal of him; though, if he escaped them he would perish of cold. His two hands resting on his staff, he remained some minutes in a painful anxiety, when a light suddenly appeared in the distance. 'It comes from some wood-cutters' cottage,' said he, "God be praised!' He was on the point of directing his steps towards it, but it had vanished. The anger of the fiddler knew no bounds. He struck the earth with his staff, and uttered the most shocking blasphemies. His lips were still pronouncing them, when the light re-appeared.

It was with the greatest difficulty, and after much time, that Matthew arrived at the spot from which the light had first proceeded. His surprise was extreme on finding there a magnificent chateau of which he had never before heard. Brilliant music was resounding from all parts of it, and the dancers who were passing every moment before the windows, cast their dark and rapid shadows upon the curtains, which a reddish light rendered transparent.

He went round and round this immense building several times to find an entrance, but in vain. He had given it up in despair, when an old man suddenly appeared and

sounded a horn. A drawbridge which Matthew had not before observed, was immediately let down, and our fiddler, following the old man, entered the mansion.

He was astonished to find it filled with an inconceivable multitude of persons who were taking part in a splendid repast; others were playing at games of chance; but the greatest number were dancing.

Matthew advanced with boldness to a man of elevated stature, whom he recognised as master of the mansion, by the manner which he gave out his orders, and the respect which was generally paid to him. 'My lord governor,' said he to him, 'I am a poor fiddler who has been lost in the woods. Condescend to allow me to pass the night in a corner of your mansion, and I will depart to-morrow at break of day.' The personage whom Matthew addressed answered only with a smile, and a sign of assent. At the order of his master, a page took the violin from the fiddler, and attached it to one of the golden nails which glittered among the rich draperies in the hall. Whilst occupied with this service, the page grinned with an infernal grin, and the part of the instrument which his fingers touched grew black, as if it had been burned.

Matthew now began to walk about on all sides and examine the strange place, when an old man suddenly appeared and

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he found himself, but he in vain endeavoured to recognise any of the strange people by whom he was surrounded. Every time that he fixed his eyes upon any one of them, a sort of thin mist shrouded his face, and baffled the old man's curiosity. While he was seeking to account for this strange circumstance, he perceived a bass-viol hanging up of such exquisite beauty that he thought he should like to try his hand upon it, and display his skill to the other fiddlers. Raising his eyes to find the staircase leading to their gallery, what was his affright to recognise among them old Barnabas Matassart, who had been dead 30 years, and had given him his first lessons on the violin. 'Holy Virgin,' he cried, 'have pity on me!' At the same moment, musicians, dancers, and chateau, all disappeared before his eyes.

On the next day, the inhabitants of Auffin, who more prudent than the fiddler, had delayed their departure till morning, found the old man extended at length at the foot of a gibbet, with a white fiddlestick in his hand.

'Father Matthews,' says one of them, 'has chosen rather a queer place to sleep in.'

'And a still queerer nail to hang his fiddle on,' answered another, 'his violin and bow are both strung on the toe of a hanged man.

'He is not afraid that the carcase would be cold?' added a third. 'The old man has covered his dry shoulders with his own cloak.'

'He is a prudent fellow, old father Matthew,' said a fourth, who was trying to bring the old musician to life; 'why he carried two fiddles with him, so that if he broke one he should have another.'

When Matthew returned to himself by dint of the labours of the good folks about him, he attributed every thing to the cold, and took care not to say a single word of the infernal visions which had appeared to him.

But on entering his cottage, he carefully examined the instrument of which he had become possessed in so strange a manner. A thrill of horror was the result of this examination. The fiddle was nothing more than the bone of a dead man, wrought with exquisite skill; and he read upon its rich silver ornaments the name of an inhabitant of Hesdin, who passed there as a sorcerer and a wizard.

When the evening shades gathered, he repaired to the house of this ill-famed man:—

'Friend,' said he, with a low salutation, 'there is a fiddle which belongs to you, I believe. I have accidently found it, and thought I would bring it back to you.

His neighbour grew pale at these words,

and stood for a moments in astonishment without uttering a word.

'Oh! oh! master Matthew,' he at length muttered, 'you have discovered strange things during the past night, and a word from you might do me much mischief.'

'God forbid, then, friend, that I should utter it.'

'You are a brave man, Matthew, but you must keep your tongue well. If they burn me alive as they certainly will if they find out half of what you know, it will go hard with you friend Matthew.'

Matthew rose to go, but the owner of the strange fiddle stopped him, and, putting his mouth to his ear, muttered in a low voice---'Neighbour, tell me your enemies; I will send a plague among their cattle this very night; or I will devise some means to get you entirely rid of them.'

'I have no enemies, neighbour, and God forbid that I should wish ill to any one.'

'In what manner, then, can I be useful to you?'

'In nothing,' replied our fiddler, who was in a hurry to be gone; 'in nothing, neighbour. I consider myself lucky in being able to restore to you so fine a fiddle.'

'A beautiful fiddle to be sure. But, neighbour Matthew, I must make you some present.'

'Give him this purse: take out of it as much as you will, and as often as you will, and there will yet be six livres left in it.'

These words are spoken by a man of sinister aspect, who certainly was not in the sorcerer's cabinet when Matthew arrived. How had he entered? It was impossible to comprehend, for the doors had all been carefully closed by the master of the house, that none might hear his conversation with Matthew.

'It is some of the devil's handywork, cried the fiddler, 'and I will not risk my salvation by accepting it.'

'It is a talisman,' replied the other, 'a talisman which a christian can use without fear.' In pronouncing the word Christian, a shudder ran over all his limbs.

'If this purse is the work of the devil, then I am damned,' added he with a bitter smile.

Matthew, half convinced, yielded to the temptation of becoming possessor of such a treasure.

He had recourse so frequently to the wonderful purse, that he became in a short time, master of a pretty house, and lived in as splendid a style as the richest citizen in Hesdin.

Every day were feasts and fetes without end.---He continued however to play at wed-

dings, but he had a good mule of a gentle step to ride on, and a varlet to carry his fiddle.

This new manner of life of the fiddler occasioned a great deal of astonishment in the town of Hesdin, and gave rise to various surmises. The most general belief was that Matthew had discovered a hidden treasure.

Now Matthew had four nephews, rakish young men, whom he had never assisted on account of their ill conduct. They said one day among themselves, 'Our uncle Matthew has become rich, and we shall inherit all his wealth.' They understood each other, and they all went out with weapons, to watch for Matthew at a crossway in the woods, where they knew he would pass that night.

The fiddler could not avoid his fate. Four arrows pierced the old man, while his more fortunate varlet escaped.

The four brothers, without thinking on this witness of their crime, ran towards the carcass for the purpose of despoiling it. They were prevented by a man of sinister aspect, who rushed upon the body, took from it a little purse, and ran away crying, 'Thus much good do my gifts!' A bitter smile followed these words.

While the assassins were standing dumb with horror, they were suddenly surrounded by the sheriff and other officers of justice. Matthew's varlet had met them in his flight,

and returned with them to arrest the assassins of his master.

Justice was not slow in following the proper proof of the crime. The sheriff had them all hung on the tree behind which they concealed themselves to commit the murder. This circumstance has given the spot the name which it still bears.---THE CROSSWAY OF THE FOUR BROTHERS.



A PERILOUS SITUATION.

I sat in the cuddy, watching the storm, till past eight o'clock, when a flash which illuminated the whole hemisphere, and was accompanied with loud cracking, and a tremendous noise, struck the ship, and killed, upon the spot, two of the seamen on the forecastle. I ran to the door to ascertain the effects of the stroke, and heard the second mate, who was between decks, cry out, 'Fire in the hold! fire below!' The cargo had taken fire from the electric fluid. The scene which followed exceeds all description; it was one that can never be forgotten by any who witnessed it.

In a moment all hands were on deck; buckets were supplied in abundance; the pumps were manned and leaked, that the water might be discharged on the burning cargo; passengers and crew were all on the alert: I threw off my boatcloak, which I had procured by rushing below through the smoke into my cabin, and assisted at the pumps. When the hatches were taken off, to allow of water being poured into the hold, flames and clouds of smoke issued forth as

from a furnace, increasing every instant in heat and density. It was soon found that all exertion was in vain---the vessel must perish!

From the pumps we ran to the boats; the gig hung over the larboard quarter, so as to be lowered in a moment; but we should have lost its valuable services, had not a gentleman threatened to send a bullet through the head of the carpenter, who, insane with terror had brought a hatchet to cut the ropes and drop it at once into the sea. The yawl, a larger boat, was our great difficulty; it was turned, keel upwards, over the long boat, to serve as a roof to the live stock kept in the latter. Many attempts were made, in vain, to raise it from its situation; the long boat was already on fire, by the flames bursting from the main hold. I climbed into it (without feeling that, in doing so, I broke my shins severely) to give my assistance, and when we were just ready to despair, the yawl eased and rose, no one knew how, and was over the side and in the water, more quickly, the sailors said, than they had ever before seen it done.

Captain Dacre had already affirmed, in answer to my inquires, that the two boats could not carry all the ship's company, passengers and crew: and under other circumstances, we should not have dared to try

them; but the trial must now be made. The two ladies, one of whom had to be hurried from her bed, where she had retired for the night, were first put safely into the yawl; some other passengers and myself, with part of the crew, followed, and our weight sank it nearly to the water's edge; the captain and others entered the smaller boat and sufficiently filled it, leaving the vessel with honourable reluctance; while the first mate, Mr Ibbetson, gallantly remained on board to the last, suggesting the best arrangements, and assisting to hand to us any article that could be got at the moment, that might be useful to us in the extreme perils we were about to encounter.

Many of the party having retired to their hammocks before the electric fluid struck the vessel, were half naked; but were supplied with trowsers and jackets, by those seamen who had been on the watch; who, in consequence of the heavy rain, had eased themselves in double or treble their usual quantity of clothing. My own dress was merely a nankeen jacket and trowsers, a shirt and neckcloth. I had lost my hat in assisting to get out the boat.

We happily succeeded in bringing away two compasses from the binnacle, and a few candels from the cuddy table, one of them lighted; one bottle of wine and ano-

ther of porter were handed to us, with the table-cloth and a knife, which proved very useful; but the fire raged so fiercely in the body of the vessel, that neither bread nor water could be come at.

It was now about nine o'clock: the rain poured in torrents: the lightning continued to stream from one side of the heavens to the other, one moment dazzling us by its glare, and the next leaving us in darkness, relieved only by the red flames of the conflagration, from which we were trying to escape.

Our first object was to get clear of the vessel, lest she should explode and overwhelm us. But to our great distress we discovered that the yawl had no rudder, and that in the two boats we had only three oars, all exertions to obtain more from the ship having proved unsuccessful. From the gig, which had a rudder, they gave us a rope's end to keep us in tow; and by means of a few spars, found at the bottom of the boat, we assisted in moving ourselves slowly through the water. Providentially the sea was very still, or our boats would have swamped and we must have perished. There was also very little wind, but it sometimes changed, and assisted by the prevailing current, urged forward the burning ship; for the sails, being drenched with rain, did not easily take fire. Our situation, therefore, was for

some time exceedingly perilous. The vessel neared us more than once, and seemed to threaten to involve us in its own destruction. The cargo, consisting chiefly of hams, cheeses, ale, porter, spirits, and other things equally combustible, burned with violence and rapidity, and the flames rose to an amazing height.

We succeeded in encreasing the distance between us and the vessel; directing our course towards land, by help of the compasses, which we could see by the light of the candles we had with us. About ten o'clock, we saw the masts go overboard, and the sides of the vessel seemed to be burnt down to the water's edge. The spectacle was awfully grand, even contemplated abstractedly from a recollection of our own circumstances. The destruction, by fire, of the animals on board, dogs, sheep, &c., at another time would have excited our deepest commisseration, but, at present, the total loss of property, the awfully sudden death of the seamen, our own narrow escape, and the great probabilities, even yet, that we should never again see the light of day, or set our feet on solid ground, seemed to absord our faculties and feelings: for some time the silence was scarcely broken, and I doubt not, that many, like myself, were engaged in thoughts most suitable to immortal beings

on the brink of eternity---in thankfulness and in prayer.

The number of persons in the two boats was forty-eight; and all, with the exception of the two ladies, who, I must observe, bore these awful circumstances with extraordinary fortitude, took it in turns to work at the oars and paddles. After some time, to our great relief, the rain ceased; the labour of bailing water from the boats was considerably diminished; we hailed each other frequently, during the night, and the honest tars, true 'hearts of oak,' occasionally gave a simultaneous 'hurra,' to cheer each other, and to keep up our spirits.

The Tanjore must have risen in the water, as it gradually consumed; we saw it burning the whole night, and at daybreak could distinguish a column of smoke arising from it, which, however, soon ceased, and we saw and heard no more of our favourite ship. When the sun rose, we could clearly discern land a-head; the sight of it filled us with grateful joy and nerved us with fresh vigour.

JOHN HETHERINGTON'S

DREAM.

In a certain small town in the south of Scotland there lived, about three years ago, a very respectable tailor, of the name of John Hetherington---that is to say, John wore well with the world; but, like too many of his craft, he was sorely addicted to cabbaging. Not a coat could he make; not a pair of trowsers could he cut out; not a waistcoat could he stitch up, but he must have a patch of this, that, and t'other, were it for no other purpose but just to serve as a bit of a memorial. One very warm evening, towards the end of August, 1826, John had gone to bed rather earlier than usual, but not without having laid in a very good share of a very tasty Welsh rabbit, which said rabbit being composed of about a pound of tough cheese, of course furnished the poor tailor, after he had fairly tumbled over into the land of Nod, with something of a very curious Welsh rabbit vision. It suddenly struck him that this life, with all its cares and anxieties, was over with him; that the

finishing stitch had been put to the great work of life, and the thread of his existence cut through. In the other world, to his misfortune, he found things not moving so comfortably as he would have wished, and the Old Gentleman with the short horns and the long tail, rigged out in his best suit of black, was the first friend he forgathered with after passing the border. 'There's a fine morning,' said the wily old dog, 'how do you find yourself after long travel?' 'No that weel,' stammered out the half dead son of a goose, 'no that weel, and I'dinna think, all things considered, it would benefit me much to be found in such company---no offence to your Reverence,' as he saw his new friend's collar rise, 'no offence to your Reverence, I trust, but if I may be so bold, I would thank you to tell me the reason of my being here; and, above all, who's to be thankit for the honour of an introduction to your Reverence?' 'That you will know shortly, friend---nay, John Hetherington, for you see I know you;' and taking a large parcel from below his left arm, he commenced to unroll it, and to the astonishment of poor John, unfolded a long sheet of patchwork, in which were found scraps of every hue---a web of many colours---all neatly stitched together; and in the middle, by way of a set off, a large bit of most ex-

cellent blue cloth, which had been cabbaged that very morning from a prime piece which he had got into his hands for the purpose of making a marriage coat for his neighbour, the blacksmith. 'Was all this stuff got fairly and honestly, good man,' said the Old Gentleman, with a sneer quite worthy of Beelzebub. 'I suppose you will be able to recognise some of these old bits; what think you now of that piece in the middle which your eyes are fixed on---cabbaged no farther back than this morning? Come along, my old boy, come along; you are a true son of your old father, I see, and I will furnish you with as warm winter quarters as you ever enjoyed when you was half stewed with your old maiden-aunt, at the top of fifteen pair of stairs in the High Street of Edinburgh, when serving your apprenticeship with Dick Mouleypouches.' A cold sweet broke over the poor tailor, and he felt as if he could have sunk snugly into the earth, if it had only had the goodness to open at that moment for his especial accommodation, when he saw the long bony arm stretched out, with its sharp eagle claws, to clutch him: he made a sharp bolt back, and giving vent to his feelings in a loud and long howl, which rang horribly in his ears long after opening his eyes, he found himself sprawling in the middle of his wooden floor,

with all the bedclothes tumbled above him. It was the first breaking out of a fine morning; the sun was rising, and all nature looked fresh and fair; but poor John was at the point of death, with sheer bodily fear and trembling, so that to get to bed again, and to sleep, would have been martyrdom; therefore he huddled on his clothes, and walked out 'to snuff the caller air,' and muse over his wonderful dream. The more he thought of it, the more he saw the necessity of reforming his mode of life; and, before finishing his stroll, he was an altered man, and had made up his mind never more to cabbage an inch of cloth; and, by walking circumspect and just, he trusted that his past offences might be wiped out, and that the wonderful web of many colours should no more be brought up as evidence against him. To make him the more secure in the event of forgetfulness in the hour of temptation, his foreman was let into the great secret, and had orders at all times to rub up his remembrance when there was any thing going, which he used to do by the laconic phrase of---'Master, mind the sheet!'

'A year passed over, and the terror of the dream being yet fresh in his memory, John's transactions were strictly honest. He could cut out with somewhat more considerable ease, and had lost a good deal [illegible] knack [illegible]

cutting out the sly piece at the corner But, alas! for the stability of all human resolutions, our friend was sorely tempted, and how he stood we shall soon see. He had got to hand a beautiful piece of red cloth, for what purpose I know not, whether for the coat of a field officer, or the back of a fox hunter, but a prime piece of cloth that was; he turned it over to this side, and back to that, viewed it in all lights and shades, rubbed it against the grain, and found it faultless; he had never seen such a fine piece of cloth before; scissors had never before cut such immaculate stuff. He fixed his eye wistfully on a tempting corner, looked up, and his foreman John was staring firmly in his face: he had read his thoughts. 'Master, mind the sheet!' solemnly ejaculated John. 'I'm just swithering, John; I'm just swithering: now, when I mind, their wasna a piece of red cloth in all the sheet; and mair by token, there was a bit gap at one of the corners; now, I'm just thinking, since it maun be that all these bit odds and ends are to be evidence against me when I come to the lang count, it would be better to snick a bit aff the corner here; and that you see, John, will fill all deficiencies, and mak the sheet, since it maun appear against me, evidence, John, without a flaw!'

ANECDOTE.

Dougal Graham, author of a well known metrical history of the rebellion in 1745, being candidate for the place of town-bellman in the city of Glasgow, was desired to call "Gude fresh herrings new come in at the Broomielaw," (it not being the season of herrings), Dougal added,

"But, indeed, my friends, it's a' a blaeflum,
"For the herrings no catch'd, an' the boat's no come,"

which procured for Dougal the situation.

Dougal was a kind of Scotch Æsop, he had a large humph on one of his shoulders, and like his prototype, had wit. Calling in the street of the Gallogate, opposite the Saracen's Head Inn, where several officers of the gallant 42d regiment were dining at the close of the American war, some of whom knew Dougal before they went abroad, opening the window, called out, "What is that you've got on your back, Dougal?" Knowing what the regiment suffered at Bunker's Hill, Dougal replied, "It's Bunker's Hill, do you choose to mount?"

FINIS.