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THE CHIMES AT KIPIGAMI

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THE momentary lull at which we had taken heart was broken by a burst of thunder that rolled overhead like a rattle of musketry. Another pounding roar up above, and the rain came clattering down like bayonets, and it set in again for another interminable drizzle.

"We may as well make an evening of it," said Sanders to me, resignedly.

I had run up to Kipigami to spend the day with Sanders, partly on business connected with the Little Calumet, and partly on pleasure. On the way home from the mine we had run into a slushing Temiskaming downpour, and here we were still at Malachi's tavern, lounging about and waiting as patiently as we might for a let-up.

A rather animated discussion was beginning to crop up among some of the Little Calumet crew marooned along with us. I turned an indolent ear to it presently. The proprietor, an excessively fat man; Gentilly, the mine foreman, and one or two others were arguing with much earnestness on bells. How conversation took the turn to this subject, I am still unable to conjecture. It was dangerously near supper-time, however, and it may have been that the idea of dinner bell was uppermost in the general mind.

Certain it was that the common fund of information regarding bells was decidedly meagre, so, having myself a profound inexperience with bells, I took an active part in the debate. In respect to the largest specimens of these interesting objects, their whereabouts, probable cost, and what not, the most fanciful statements were put forth and sustained with a great deal of unnecessary warmth. When Sanders came by—he was leisurely pacing the length of the porch, smoking, and with his thumbs hooked in his belt—I halted him.

"You ought to know, Sanders—look here, what's the biggest bell?"

He raised his eyebrows. "The biggest?—h'm. It's in Moscow, I think. I read something about it somewhere. Weighs a hundred and eighty tons, but there's a piece out of it, and I believe they now use it as a sort of chapel."

Malachi was loudly sceptical, and shook his head firmly. "Nobody would make them that size. And besides, if it ain't ringing it don't count in the discussion. Now, some years ago, when I was down in Ottawa—"

"The second largest," Sanders interposed, "is in Moscow also. Weighs about thirty tons less, and goes all night—for all I know to the contrary."

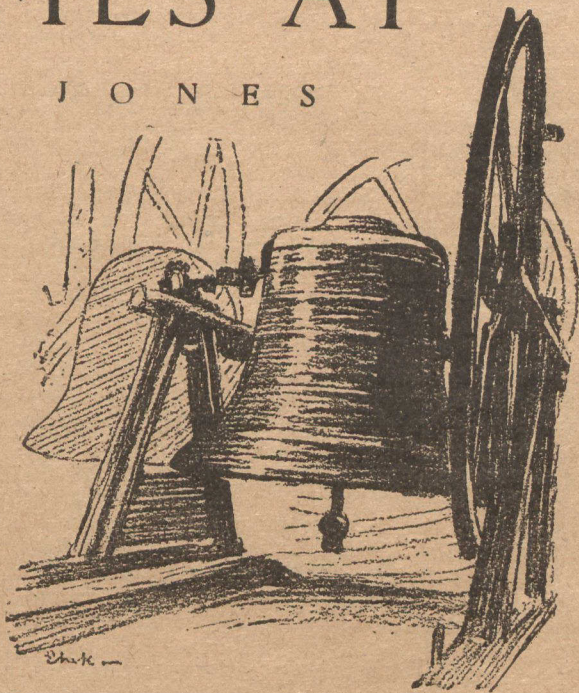
"I don't say, mind you, that I approve of such sizes myself. They must have cost a tremendous pile of kopecks, and the money would have been more wisely spent in some other direction, or in churches without any bell at all."

THE sentiment met with much murmuring commendation. Some even declared profanely that there was no more useless appendage to an edifice of the sort than a bell.

"After all," said Gentilly, settling back in his chair and nursing a clasped knee, "there's bells and bells."

"When I was a petit garçon, back home in Quebec, some rich old chap—a notary, I think—gave a chime of bells to our church. Did a thorough job of it: had a belfry built to house them in, and then had gardeners train ivy over it, so as to make it look like they had always been there. My grandfather used to ring them. Never got a penny for the ringing; wouldn't have taken anything if it had been offered him, except a glass or two of ale after an occasion, perhaps. Did it seulement pour l'amour de l'art, he used to say. The ringing, not the drinking."

"It was a treat I never tired of, to watch the old boy touch off the chimes. He worked the ropes in his old silk hat and swallow-tail coat, and far more solemn over it than the cure over his sermon. Six bells there were, and what with 'single bob' and



'triple bob' and all that, he could ring over seven hundred changes on them.

"The bonhomme has been gone these many years, but I'd give a good deal to hear those chimes once again in old Ste. Clothilde de Malbaie, ringing out clear and sweet of a Sunday morning, with the swallows flying out frightened from the ivy in the belfry, like they did when I was small."

"A peal like that must cost a mint to rig up, I suppose?"

"Five or six hundred dollars, perhaps. I remember once hearing my grandfather say they were a famous make, and made by an American, Ringwood, Ringgold—some name like that—who lived in Baltimore."

"Mercy; they couldn't have cost that much," said Malachi. "Surely nowhere near so much as that. It don't stand to reason somehow—for bells."

"Cloches d'église, they were, comrade—not the kind they hang on cows."

"I know that, Gentilly. Still, a man ought to get a good one for thirty or forty dollars, and that's plenty. The women were talking about one for the new church a month or so ago, and that's what they figured on."

He paused, and in deep cogitation stroked his chin. "I think I will write to this—what's the name, again, Ringman?—and find out. It wouldn't be much trouble, and I'd enquire in a polite way, sort of mentioning these chimes." He peered over his glasses to seek approbation. But interest had long tapered to a thin edge, and he must have beheld yawns instead, and a vast amount of wearied indifference. The skies, too, were clearing up.

"Rain's stopped," announced the foreman, getting up and reaching for his dinner pail. "What's the use to argue with a man that has no ear for music? Come along, fellows."

The assemblage broke up at once, and everybody hurried home for a belated supper. Sanders walked down with me to the post-office, as was his custom, and in the nick of time I scrambled into the stage on the point of pulling off for the station four miles distant.

Late one afternoon, perhaps two weeks after this, I set foot again at Kipigami, descending from the coach before Malachi's. I helped another passenger to alight—a tall woman dressed in black, who might have been a school-teacher, or a dressmaker, or a lady drummer—and assisted her with her satchel. The curious spectator who came lounging up, hands in pockets and with a pipe stuck in the corner of a suppressed grin, was Sanders. He looked native to the place, and the lady accosted him.

"May I enquire, sir, if this is the residence of Mr. Melville?"

"Yes, marm; it is," he answered, respectfully, bestowing the pipe in his pocket. "Shall I bring him out?"

"I should be much obliged if you would."

We all mounted the steps, and Sanders went straight in to inform Malachi of the arrival of a visitor. The proprietor shuffled out forthwith in his carpet slippers, and puffing at a cigar. Sanders followed.

"Good evening, mum," said Malachi, managing a ponderous bow. Then, describing a parabola with his cigar: "Please sit down in the chair."

"Thank you," said the lady, seating herself. "But I won't take up much of your time just now, Mr. Melville."

She drew up her travelling veil over the brim of her hat. The gloves on her thin hands were worn and showed signs of much neat and frequent repair. It was a pleasant face; not young, old-fashioned and grave, with lines in it, but not many, and wrought there more by sorrow and care than by the years. Her rather wearied hazel eyes looked out bravely from a dark sort of halo. Then, in a high, well-bred voice:

"It gave me much pleasure, Mr. Melville, to receive your letter requesting information on our chimes. It was directed to my late father, Duncan Ringgold. . . ."

SANDERS and I moved away unobtrusively; we did not care to hear the rest. He pushed open the door and we went in. We sat down to a table in a quiet corner.

"It looks like a fix for the lady," I remarked, after some time.

"Yes, or for somebody else. How do you suppose the man worded the letter?" he queried, puzzled. He snapped his fingers in a sudden access of irascibility; then gave a short laugh, as though in despite of himself. "Let's have something to drink."

The door opened and Malachi appeared. Perturbation was writ large on his face, and he stood still a moment rubbing the top of his head with a fat palm worriedly. He caught the eye of Gentilly seated among convivial friends at the far end, beckoned him forward privately, and after having whispered into

his ear, seized him by the elbow and led him out. Gentilly's visage was dismay itself, and at the threshold he displayed such reluctance to proceed further that it was several seconds before the door swung behind the two. We did not feel exactly gay ourselves.

Sanders put down his glass smartly. "It's rather horrid. I really don't know how we—they are going to straighten things out. Did you hear her voice? Pretty nice sort, too. It didn't appear to you, did it, that she might not be very well fixed?" He pushed back his chair, then rose.

"I'll come out with you," I said, and we went out upon the porch.

Malachi upheaved

