

St. Bronach's Bell

"Rosalie, open the window, quickly, my darling. It won't hurt me. Nothing can hurt me now."

Rosalie knew that well. But the tears sprang to her eyes as she obeyed, and let the fresh evening breeze into the room, where her mother lay dying of slow decline. Familiar as she was with the scene before her, its soft tranquil beauty had never seemed more truly the fair work of the Creator's hands than while she stood there looking out on the lovely valley beneath the Mourne mountains, which had been Rosalie Royamont's home from her childhood.

It was one of those calm evenings that come so often in Ireland when May is passing into June. The exquisite changeful light that glorifies the Irish skies was sending its rich tints of many hues over the mountains and through the glen, not glancing here and there as it would in the early morning, but spreading peacefully across the whole expanse, as though it wished to leave not a single spot of sweet Killbroney untouched before it would fade away for the long hours of the coming night.

All was very still that evening. Not a leaf stirred among the trees. The birds had nestled down in silence. The day's toil was over, and as far as Rosalie could see there was no sign of life visible. She was turning back from the window when her mother spoke again:—

"Hush, darling," she said, "hush for a moment."

And in the pause that followed the clear silvery notes of a bell floated into the room.

"It never sounded like this, mother," whispered Rosalie.

"Never," answered Mrs. Royamont. "It is as joyful as if it were welcoming someone home. St. Bronach's heart is specially glad this evening, I think. Perhaps some sinner is coming back to God. Are there lights in the chapel, Rosie?"

"Yes," said Rosalie, "but the confessions have not begun, if that is what you mean, mother. The May devotions come first. I am watching the hour for them."

"What hymn to-night?" asked Mrs. Royamont.

"I'll sing it for you."

And at the last word the strange, mystic-sounding bell pealed out again, as if echoing the prayer.

"Something tells me my fancy is true," said Mrs. Royamont. "May the star guide the wandering soul home."

A long, soft tone of melody from the bell seemed to answer "Amen!"

By this time many of our readers are asking impatiently, "Who was St. Bronach, and what was the mystery of her bell?"

Upwards of 1400 years have gone by since the people, living near the now far-famed Rostrevor, began to give the name of "saint" to a beautiful Irish girl whose days were spent in prayer and in kindly deeds to all who needed pity or help.

It was a time when many noble maidens—noble by birth and noble by nature—filled the plains and hillsides of Ireland with the odor of sanctity. Great praise is often given to the Irish nuns, heartfelt praise, indeed, but they, looking through the mists of ages into the grand years when the torch of faith first burned and shone magnificently in fire, say from their very heart:—

"What are we compared to those who first knelt before St. Patrick to receive the virgin's snowy veil?"

The white ranks were soon thronged with Ireland's sweetest daughters—beginning, as some say, with the twin sister princesses, Ethna and Fedleina. Stories manifold, partly historical, partly legendary, are twined around the names of the first Irish nuns. Such holy memories. Such lovely legends. However, in this sketch we can only record too briefly on earth the presence on earth of one who blest the vale of Killbroney—the beloved patroness, St. Bronach.

There must have been something specially winning in the saint, for a crowd of companions bent, like herself, on dedicating themselves to the service of the King of virgins, gathered around her. The months glided away so happily that they brought round the sharp winter frosts, and storms almost unperceived, and though the air is comparatively mild in the shelter of the Mourne mountains, the inhabitants of Rostrevor determined to build a suitable home for those who had forsaken their own well-cared dwellings for the love of Christ.

Precipitous among them for her tender readiness to enter with a mother's love into the joys and sorrows of those who turned to the convent gates when they wanted to find their truest friends, was the gentle star of the future of Killbroney—St. Bronach. For many years her words were in-

the poetic language of the peasantry, "God's holy music in the valley." They often told her so, and St. Bronach, smiling in her humility, answered, "I cannot bear that music, but I am glad you do."

Old age dealt lightly with her. She was bright and beautiful and comforting to the last. Just as she was sinking into her last sleep she was called back by hearing some sobbing voices outside her little cell:—

"Will she never speak to us again? Shall we never hear her voice again? Is its music silenced forever?" cried the mourners.

The pitying heart was moved. The saint lifted up her eyes to heaven for a moment, and then in a voice that God strengthened wondrously, she said aloud:—

"Tell them, whenever the bell rings from our convent church, to remember it would be my joy to see them hurrying to find comfort from Him who bade the weary and the heavily-burdened come to Him for rest. Tell them to prize the music of the bell that calls them to Him."

They were her last words. They were so dearly treasured that, going down from father to son, they were still repeated when, in the evil days of persecution and spoliation, St. Bronach's Convent was wrecked and left in ruins. One evening, soon after the destruction was complete, an old woman who was sitting at her cottage door, praying aloud to the patroness of the valley to look down on her "nameplace," Killbroney, thought she heard a whisper beside her, "Listen, listen."

She stopped her prayers. And that instant, the faint, soft tones of the bell sounded from the very spot where St. Bronach's Church had been standing. Before the old woman could recover from her surprise, her two grandchildren, who were helping their mother to weed the cottage garden, called out:—

"The bell, Granny, the bell!"

"The blessed St. Bronach herself is ringing it," cried the mother.

And from that hour the news spread everywhere that St. Bronach would never let the persecutors silence her bell. They searched for it in vain—not a trace of it could be found; though certain it was that, over and over, when some great sorrow or some unexpected happiness had fallen to the lot of those who lived near, the unseen bell suddenly pealed—sometimes plaintively, sometimes as though able to enter into the brief gleams of sunshine which were vouchsafed to suffering friends in her struggles for the faith, which was trodden down by the powers of the world, and rose up living still. And now we come back to our story.

Travelling rapidly, as we must do in story telling, on a limited scale, we open the door of Glenview, while the August sun of the year 1821 is glistening on the thousand charms of Killbroney, and we are met by a tiny child of 5, who asks did we hear the bell. Yes, the bell has rung sadly and solemnly, and Rosalie Royamont is its fatherless.

A strange, wise, loving little creature was Rosalie.

"She will comfort you as no one else can, Marcia," had been Francis Royamont's farewell, as he watched Rosalie clasping her mother's hand tightly in her own.

Marcia's cheeks glowed with pain, for not even the mother's love could be first in her heart when death was breaking the close tie of the "two in one."

"God has been good to us. Tell Him we thank Him," continued Francis. "My life might so easily have been cut short without these hours together. And even if I could take you with me, we could not leave the little ones alone. I pray that you may be spared to them till Rosalie can be a mother to Fergus."

Rosalie, with a dim idea that she was meant to attend Fergus, stole away. As she passed up the stairs she heard the doctor's voice:—

"I came with all speed, nurse, but I know I can do nothing. Mr. Royamont's heart has been treacherous since he was a boy. He has looked death calmly in the face for years. Nor can it be a shock to Mrs. Royamont. She was in his confidence."

In the warmth of the setting sun, air was admitted freely into Glenview, and so there was not one in the house, except baby Fergus, who did not shudder at the breeze that had sprung up bore what they called the death knell to Francis Royamont's bedside. For him, indeed, fears and hopes had ended. He welcomed St. Bronach's bell for the last time with a happy smile.

"Marcia," he whispered, "was there ever a kinder pledge of heavenly love?"

"It must be real," she said, "it can-

not be a delusion." "How could it be?" he answered. "At last it has led our thoughts to heaven, and I feel that it is leading me there now."

The priest and doctor entered the room together, but the latter drey back and said hastily:—

"There is no time to be lost."

Father Archer raised his hand quickly. A ray of bright sunlight streamed in, but Francis Royamont's eyes opened to the light above.

"Believe me," said the priest, "he was judged with a smile."

The life that had just closed had been an eventful one—and equally eventful were the first years of Marcia Royamont's widowhood. She was not rich; far from it. However, there was no strain on the household nestling so quietly in its seclusion. Rosalie was nearly 18 when the shadow—a scarcely noticeable shadow—hovered above Glenview. She had been true to trust—her mother's comforter—her younger brother's anxious friend. Anxious often, and often sore at heart, though Fergus was not yet quite fifteen.

The boy was wilful and weak from his boyhood, though no one seemed to notice the weakness except Rosalie. He was capable of daring acts, but he would never willingly face the consequences. Like many another sister, Rosalie shielded him continually, partly for his own sake, partly for their mother's. What else could Rosalie do, she asked herself, seeing how fragile her mother grew: watching the quick, sensitive flush on the thin cheeks that showed such a sorrowful want of strength, to meet any grief or care? So Fergus chose his companions and was led off into ways that Rosalie guessed with dread.

"Fergus, dear boy," she said at last, "you must remember that I am shrinking from saying this to you. Until now I could give you a little help for your amusement, but my last penny is gone. I can do no more."

The boy's cheeks burned hotly. "You don't wish to do it, Rosalie," he answered.

"I hardly know," said Rosalie. "Time was when I delighted to feel that I had my little store for you to spend in making yourself happy. But you are not happy. Fergus, I wish you would tell me why. You can't tell mother."

"No—not for the world," he cried. "By the by, there was a boy who was in great need of a couple of shillings the other day. I lent him what I had. He promised to pay me back to-night. I must go and look after him."

"Not to-night," pleaded Rosalie. "There will be a storm. Look at the flaming sky."

Fergus raised the window. A gust of wind swept through the trees and with it came a long, mournful peal of St. Bronach's bell.

"I hate this life," said Fergus. "I must get away into the world, Rosalie. It is the weariness and dullness of this place that is driving me to what I want to hide from you and mother."

"It is not hidden from me," said Rosalie, "nervous herself to speak quietly. 'You have gambled, Fergus.'"

"On a few miserable pence," he muttered. "I hadn't much at my disposal."

"No, indeed," she answered, gently, "for it was her own scanty pocket money that had been his supply, but it was all you had, Fergus. And you fretted over your losses. And then—"

"I joined the others in a drink. Yes, I did," he said, defiantly. "I must, and I will—while I am cooped up here."

His sister's fair face paled to deadly whiteness, while Fergus, quivering with the struggle, hurried away from her into his mother's room.

Marcia Royamont idolized her son, and when he threw himself on his knees beside her, he asked:—

"Will you be proud of me, mother, when I grow to be a man?"

"Always, Fergus, my own beautiful boy. I am proud of you now," she whispered, pressing him passionately to her arms.

He sprang up smiling, looked at her with eyes that were shining with tears, and playfully calling: "To our next meeting, mother," Fergus Royamont left his home without venturing to say "good-bye."

Next morning a letter from him hastened his mother's steps to "the gates of the grave."

"Rosalie can tell you all, dearest, dearest mother," wrote Fergus. "You may believe everything. Life seemed hard to me. It may be harder still. At all events, my choice is made, and the wide world may be my home for some years. Peniless and friendless as I am, I only see one course open to me. There are plenty of vessels outward bound that will not refuse the services of a tall, strong Irish boy. Mother, what shall I be like when we meet again? Think of me whenever you hear St. Bronach's bell. I can't write more."

Think of him! Marcia's thoughts by night and day seemed fixed on the intense supplication to the only friend who could follow her friendless child

and for weeks and months she was the Irish "Monks" of the valley, or, as truly as it is written of the mother of St. Augustine, we might write of Marcia Royamont, that tears daily marked the place in the church where she knelt to pray for her erring boy.

He had no difficulty in carrying out his plan. A ship sailing to the West Indies had been disappointed of two of its cabin boys at the last moment. Fergus offered to do double work in his eagerness to be accepted, so his message to Glenview was half buoyant, half regretful, and brimful of love for his mother and Rosalie, whom he owned he had learned "to prize too late." How much heart sickness, how much intense yearning for the tenderness he had forsaken were breathed into the last words, no one but the wilful boy could know. He was suffering already, and keener suffering awaited him.

After some days a hasty line was written:—

"On the high seas. No more till we reach our destination. Mother, Rosalie, pity me."

This letter dealt the stroke of death to the delicate frame of Marcia Royamont. She never rallied. Spring glided into summer, summer was crowned by autumn, winter wended its slow path into the young returning light, and Marcia lingered on.

"Perhaps," she said to Rosalie, "God wishes to prove once more that the child of a mother's tears cannot be lost. He may intend to bring Fergus home before I die."

Yet when St. Bronach's bell rang on the evening when our story opens, neither mother nor daughter thought that their own wanderer might be the straying sheep who was returning to the fold. Fergus was too far away, too bound to his new masters, to shake off the chains he had put on.

We left Rosalie ready to answer the other bell that announced the May devotions. They were no longer than usual, for some impulse had evidently been given to the preacher to dwell on the mercy of the Heart of Mary, its motherly longings to bless and to crown the penitent. It was growing dark when she left the chapel, and the light was so dim by the time she reached Glenview that she started as she heard a footstep close behind her at the gate.

"Rosalie, don't be terrified," said a low voice. "You are a brave girl. I am greatly changed, but I think you will know Fergus."

He crept forward, and in spite of the warning, Rosalie shuddered. The boy was worn and wasted almost beyond recognition. His large blue eyes shone, as their mother's did, in the last stages of consumption, and the hectic flush on her cheeks was not as bright as the fevered spot on her son's altered face.

"I was useless to them," he said, "and they sent me home to die."

Before the sentence was finished Rosalie's arms were round him. And, too sure of the mother's joy to delay the meeting, Marcia Royamont's son was given back to her for a few short hours. Then, as the morning dawned, Fergus woke from his heavy slumber.

"Mother," he asked, "am I dying?"

"You are going to heaven, my darling," answered Marcia. "I give you back, with my whole heart, to the God who gave you. He is coming, before you leave us, to be your guide to His presence above."

For, while the dying mother soothed and tended her dying child, the old priest who had baptized Fergus was coming to him with his last communion.

"You need not try to speak, dear boy," he said, "let it comfort you. I blot the Star of the Sea a thousand times for the confession you made last evening. My gratitude was overflowing in my sermon, and listen to me, Fergus—the boy was sinking fast—"

"I want you to bear this, to give you confidence, the words that you put on my lips did their work and brought older sinners than you to the feet of the Good Shepherd."

Half an hour later Fergus Royamont's struggle was ended in eternal peace.

No one who saw Marcia Royamont by that deathbed could foretell a week of life for her, but she, on the contrary, said:—

"I begged God and the Mother, who knows a mother's heart, to enable me to spend a while on earth, in prayer for my child. I can fancy, him appealing to me from purgatory to lift him up a little from his bed of expiation."

Whatever was the cause, St. Bronach's bell was never long silent during the following autumn. Every rising of the autumn winds wakened that hidden voice which lay in some mysterious depths of the hidden sanctuary.

A change had come gradually over Catholic Ireland. The prayers of its saints, the blood of its martyrs, had wrestled with the powers of darkness. The great triumph of faith was heralded on the day that saw the first gleam of spiritual brightness, when the "Te Deum" was chanted from end

to end of the country, as it hailed its holiest victory—Catholic emancipation.

"I wonder," said Rosalie to her mother, "why St. Bronach does not ring her bell for the general rejoicing."

She was soon answered. The night set in, joyous and tempestuous. The winds raged and rose. Suddenly, clear and loud, above the storm, St. Bronach's bell tolled, as none had ever heard it toll.

"It sounds," said Rosalie, "as if it had been imprisoned until now, and that it had been set free at last."

When daylight shone again over a peaceful smiling scene, a grand old tree, the pride of Killbroney, was lying prostrate with a deep cavity in its trunk, and beside it lay St. Bronach's bell. How it had been sheltered in its hiding place for centuries, no one knew, but many a lover of the saints of old looked up to their thrones, saying:—

"May the spirit of the past breathe God's music of faith, hope and love through the present days of promise."

"Rosalie," said Marcia Royamont, some weeks after, "when I leave you am I to leave you alone?"

She had drawn her daughter close to her, so close that Rosalie's answer was in a soft murmur which had often soothed her mother's sorrow.

"My stay will be short, mother," she answered. And her secret was told, a secret that had kept for years. The grave will soon close over the last of the Royamonts.

"Are we not blest, mother?" whispered Rosalie. "Not one left to travel along the path in loneliness?"

And Marcia's thanksgiving was finished in the sight of Him who said:— "Leave thy fatherless children to Me, and I will protect them."

The memory of the Glenview of those far-off days has faded away. The name of Royamont is never heard in the valley. But the sweet, forgotten story of St. Bronach halows Killbroney still, and we, to whom our Irish saints are as dear as our dearest friends, cherish the remembrance of St. Bronach's bell.—Ulster Examiner.

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LEGISLATURE OPENED.

The Speech from the Throne Promises Much Work.

On Wednesday afternoon last the Ontario Legislature opened amid mourning drapery and an absence of the usual brilliant ceremonies.

The speech from the throne was as follows:—

Speech From the Throne. Mr. Speaker and Gentlemen of the Legislative Assembly:—

I take great pleasure in again meeting you as representatives of the Province in Parliament assembled.

Since we last met, the British Empire has been called to mourn the death of our late Sovereign, her gracious Majesty Queen Victoria. Never in the history of the empire has there been a monarch more beloved by her people or more fully endowed with sagacity and wisdom, combined with devotion to duty and sincere regard for the welfare of the nation. Under her beneficent sway we have long enjoyed the priceless privileges of self-government and the fullest measure of civil and religious liberty. And deeply as we feel in common with the whole empire the loss of one so great and good, we rejoice to believe that under her illustrious successor, King Edward VII., these privileges will not be impaired nor our constitutional rights in the slightest degree curtailed. You will be asked to express in fitting terms your feelings with respect to the Queen, whose career has closed so gloriously, as well as the King, whose reign has just begun and whose authority as loving subjects we heartily acknowledge.

Provision for War Veterans. The valor displayed by the Canadian military contingents engaged in the South African war has reflected the highest honor upon Canada, and entitles them to some token of your appreciation. To this end, a bill will be submitted for your consideration authorizing the Crown Lands Department to set aside certain townships in the unorganized districts permitting every volunteer enrolled in the Province, who served in South Africa, to choose 100 acres, to be held upon the most favorable conditions compatible with the settlement of the public domain and the development of the district. Provision will also be made for the recognition of the survivors of the volunteer militia who were actually engaged in defensive service on the frontier during 1866.

It is gratifying to be able to state that the agricultural classes during the past year have enjoyed unusual prosperity. Improved methods of farming and a more thoughtful application of the principles of sound

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husbandry, with a general adoption of cold storage by dairymen and fruit growers, have greatly contributed to this happy condition of affairs. Beet Root Sugar Industry.

It has been found by various tests conducted by the Department of Agriculture that the soil and climate of Ontario are admirably adapted for the growth of sugar beets. You will be asked to consider whether farmers should be encouraged to give such special attention to beet raising as will justify the establishment of factories for the production of beet root sugar, by granting such aid for this purpose as may be deemed expedient.

The lumber trade is in a prosperous condition, and the revenue from woods and forests continues buoyant, employment being abundant and wages high. The continued investment of capital in the erection of saw-mills affords satisfactory evidence of the wisdom of requiring that logs cut on the Crown domain shall be sawn in our own country.

Preservation of the Forests. The preservation of our forest wealth continues to engage the attention of my Government, and the recent setting apart of a large forest reserve in the pine region surrounding Lake Temagami, marks another step in this direction. The increasing flow of population to New Ontario is a matter of congratulation.

I congratulate you on the great expansion of the mineral industry. The manufacture of pig iron in the Province is now firmly established, and is materially aided by the discovery of large bodies of conveniently situated hematite ore in the Michipicoten region. The making of the first open-hearth steel in the Province and the establishment of the upper lakes of the first line of steamers to carry the ore from our own mines to the smelters of our own Province are events significant of substantial progress.

The nickel and copper mining is more active than at any previous time, and it is gratifying to know that additional works for treatment of these ores are being erected in different parts of the Province.

Work of Exploration. Acting on the authority given to the Government by the appropriation made for exploring that part of the Province lying toward Hudson Bay, exploration parties spent the greater part of the summer in investigating the agricultural, forest and mineral resources of the several districts assigned to them. The results of their enquiries will be laid before you.

During the past year extensive alterations have been undertaken in connection with the buildings at Cobourg to meet the urgent demand for additional accommodation for the insane. I am pleased to inform you that these alterations are well advanced, and will, I trust, be completed before the close of the current year, thus providing ample facilities so far as the demands for the accommodation and treatment of this unfortunate class of our population at present require.

Your attention is again invited to the present relative jurisdiction of the courts of the Province and of their respective Judges and to the suggestions of experience for further promoting the efficient, prompt and inexpensive administration of justice throughout the Province.

The evidence taken before the Royal commission appointed to examine and report upon the assessment, laws of the Province will be laid before you, and legislation, dealing with some phases of municipal taxation will be submitted for your approval.

Important Measures Promised. Measures will be multiplied for aiding in the improvement of public highways; for the encouragement of the trade in dressed meat for the European market; for abolishing tolls on public highways and bridges; for further encouraging technical education, and for consolidating the laws with respect to public and high schools, and to liquor licenses.

The public accounts and reports of the several departments will be submitted to you in due course.

The estimates for the current year are prepared with as great economy as is consistent with efficient service, and will at an early date be placed before you.

CHURCH BELLS Chimes and Pells. MCHANE BELL-FOUNDRY Baltimore, Md.