

LEGENDS AND STORIES OF THE HOLY CHILD JESUS.

II.

HOW PETRONEL STARTED FOR THE ISLAND OF FAME.

Petronel started with a light heart; it was so merry out on the deep blue sea to be tossed up and down in his pretty little boat, the gold shone in the bright sunlight, and the breeze carried him along swiftly. At times he wondered where his other companions were, and felt a little regretful at having started so hastily without reflecting on all the messenger of the King had told them.

He felt just a little lonely, too as the days passed by, and he was so far away from the shore that he could no longer distinguish the trees in the garden.

To his surprise, no enemies appeared for some days; no storm arose, the voyage was calm and easy. He was so far away that he could no longer see the shore he had left, and he rather longed for adventures, but still none came.

He looked out for General, but could not see him. Then he wondered how far it was to the island, and if from there he would be able to see the beautiful country of the King. Then he looked at his chart, and saw that every mile toward the Island of Fame drew him away from the country of the King. For a moment or two he thought of changing his course and making straight for the country.

"But no," he said to himself, "all the more glory to me to have accomplished the double voyage; surely the King will admire my bravery and give me a greater reward than those who merely make a simple voyage to His country."

"Bravo, Petronel!" cried some one from a boat close behind him.

Petronel turned round in astonishment. There a few yards away from his own little boat, was a large vessel, with only a man at the helm. The boat was tawdry; gilded; had Petronel looked attentively he would have seen that it was just gilded over and not pure gold, like those the King had given the little boys. Here and there flowers and birds were painted on it in gaudy colors; the sails were not pure white, but bright scarlet.

There was no crew at the mast-head. The man himself wore a painted mask; but his eyes were cruel and cunning, and his voice, though he tried to soften it, was harsh and rasping.

"How do you know my name," asked Petronel, "and where are you going?"

"I have often seen you before," returned the man, "playing in the garden, on the seashore, launching your boat, or sailing toward the island. I have watched you many a time."

"I never saw you," said Petronel, mistrustfully. "Are you one of the King's messengers?"

"No, not I," roared the man, with a half sneer, "I am a king in my own right. See, he added, drawing from his vest a glittering crown of false gold and sam jewels, "this is my crown."

Petronel was dazzled by the artificial glitter, but at the same time he felt a voice within him warning him not to listen to another king than him who had heard him the boat and bade him come to him.

"Have you ever been to the Island of Fame?" he asked the man, his curiosity getting the better of him. "And can you tell me what it is like? Is it worth my going out of the way and running me risk to see?"

"Have I been there?" laughed the man. "Why, if I who am one of the chief rulers; very few on the island ever desert my service. And as to its being worth while your going out of the way, you're the best judge of that. I should say yes; but perhaps your courage is not equal to allow of your facing the dangers."

"Indeed," answered Petronel, haughtily, his face flushing with offended pride, "no one can call me a coward. If it be only a matter of danger, why I will reach the island, never fear."

"Well," returned the pretended king, "I must go and my business. I plainly foresee I shall have you for one of my most devoted subjects ere long on the island. Wish you every success, and will a you in your efforts to land on the land. Till we meet again, farewell."

"Farewell," said Petronel, stooping to see what had happened to his boat. For the stranger's keel had scratched it, and made a long, ugly crack in the bright gold.

"That does not look very nice," said the boy to himself, "but I dare say I can get it patched up on the island."

Suddenly a hurricane arose, which lashed the waves into ring madness, heaving them mountain high, whirling them round and round in giddy circles. Petronel's little boat was tossed up and down and carried round the wind-driven whirlpools, and even he was afraid the fragile little boat must be overwhelmed. Very moment he expected to be driven down beneath the hungry billows and cruel foam. Then he remembered what the King's messenger had said about impeding the aid of the King in danger, and he clasped his hands in agony and cried aloud to the King.

Immediately appeared a beautiful child in a pure white robe, with a crown of thorns on his brow, and wounded hands and feet. Rays of light streamed from his heart: His face was most mild and yet loving. He stood at the helm and quailed the boat with his left hand. His right hand he stretched forth over the waves, and at his bidding they sank into peace.

Other—watching each other with envious eyes, forgetful of aught save the race for renown.

All the lessons of his childhood, all the words of the King's messenger, all the whispering voices of unseen angels from heaven, were unheeded by Petronel in his one overmastering desire for glory.

They were very near the island, and could see the inhabitants in robes of purple and crowned with laurel, every leaf of which was an emerald glittering in the sun. But the little boats struck against treacherous rocks underneath the sea, and much of the pure gold was scratched and the delicate engraving effaced. An old man with a long beard passed by them in a boat. He had cast his crown into the sea, and changed his purple vestment for one of coarse brown cloth. His eyes were full of tears, and his voice was sad and gentle.

"My children," he called to them in passing, "be not deceived; there is no happiness to be found there. Turn ere it is too late, and come with me to that country where alone all is never-ending bliss."

But Petronel and the other boy called the old man coward and fool, and he passed away.

Petronel was quite close now, but the inhabitants came and threw stones at him that he might not land; he was bruised and faint, but he would not give in.

At last he landed, and some of the inhabitants helped him to drag his little boat ashore. But oh! what mud was there: what splashes spoiled the brightness of the gold—splashes which would not rub off the boat, but ate into the purest metals, even gold and silver.

Petronel obtained a purple robe, and an emerald and gold crown from the academy on the island. He was so proud that he left his boat drifting about in the mud on the shore and strutted about all day with his crown on his head. But soon he found that the island was not so blissful as he had imagined. Envy and jealousy were rife; stripes and contentions arose continually. One would revile another, and cast mud and stones to tarnish the purple robe and bruise the very hair.

When there was a feast, each strove to be first; and each wanting to be king, spoke evil of him who was chosen. One king after another was deposed, and sometimes the king was treated with the greatest cruelty. Petronel himself was badly treated, and instead of returning good for evil he fought and struggled as hard as any.

One day, when envy was gnawing at his heart, he resolved to be king himself. Now no longer he prayed, nor listened to the voice of his guardian angel. The thought of being first overmastered him; he must be king at any cost, and then he must start with his kingly robes and royal crown for the country of the Great King, where he would be welcomed as a sovereign.

Poor, silly boy, how little he realized that the King of humility loved only the simple and lowly of heart, and recognizes no conqueror save him that overcometh the world and his own sinful passions!

So Petronel went about the island telling wicked stories of the king then reigning, and saying in what a wonderful way he had discovered the king's wickedness.

The inhabitants, who were only too ready to believe evil of others, gave credit to all his stories, and a plot was made to take the king's life. But they would not give him one death blow; he should be tortured. A band of the most wicked entered his dwelling by night and made him prisoner. They led him to the seashore, and after inflicting wounds all over his body with daggers, they choked him with mud, and left him to gasp his last breath on the seashore all alone.

But when the king was dead a fearful confusion arose. Each wished to be king in his stead. But Petronel, by reason of some followers who admired him, and by dint of great exertion in the way of reasoning and holding his own merits to the light, was at last proclaimed king. "Now, at last," he said to himself, "I shall be happy."

He had never been so wretched in his life. He was haunted by the fear of sudden and treacherous death; he doubted the sincerity of every one who flattered or spoke kindly to him; his heart was sore and torn with the biting words of his enemies. At times he thought he would go and set sail for the King's country, but the sea looked so deep and so boundless, his faith in all things was shaken. He hardly remembered any of his old hopes and beliefs; the simple love and trustfulness of his character were uprooted from his heart; the innocence that had made his life so happy in the garden was sullied.

So he lingered on day after day, and by force of will made all men fear and obey him. And the man with the gaudily painted boat came and helped him govern, and flattered and deceived him into imagining that he was happy, or at least at peace. But all the time this false friend was poisoning the boy's mind and delighting in his miserable handiwork. Every day the pain at Petronel's heart grew more and more unbearable; he now thought with despair of the happy time he had spent in the garden with his little play-fellows, and wished that good little Irenaeus—the Gentle, as they used to call him—were near.

One day when he went out into the streets a man called a disgraceful name after him. Some others took it up, and mocking him, and calling after him and singing jeering songs, they pursued him to his dwelling.

"It is all over now," thought Petronel, "I have missed true happiness; I have lost my faith; I must die. The King will surely not receive me, as I slighted all His messages and warnings. My boat is disfigured and shattered, the pieces filthy and discolored; the sail is stained with the blood of the king I helped—nay, caused—to kill; the cross is gone, I know not whither; I have lost my life."

He went to a cupboard, drew thence a little dark-colored vial, and raising it to his lips drained it to the last drop. The man of the painted boat came in soon after and found Petronel lying on his back on the ground dead, with the little vial tightly clasped in his fingers. And with a mocking laugh he bore Petronel away to his own unhappy country, where all is darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Stop That Vulgarity.

An evil that was once more prevalent than it is now, but which, we are sorry to say, has not yet entirely disappeared, is referred to in the following protest from a highly esteemed "Irish-American Catholic" correspondent, which we received last Saturday:

"It is a matter of infinite pride and a pleasure to note the high order of talent which is constantly developed in our Catholic literary societies; and the good taste usually displayed in the selection of songs and recitations is made more conspicuous when some low degree comedian intrudes a vulgar song or recitation on a refined Catholic audience. I was a witness to an instance of this kind recently in an entertainment given by one of our most prominent Catholic organizations, at which a number of our young people of both sexes were assembled, and the impression created was neither elevating nor edifying to the Irish race or the Catholic Church. All the other talent was of the highest order, and their productions of the most chaste and refined type; yet all were compelled to listen to what surely must have wounded the finer feelings of those who were present.

"I am sure that a word from your representative Catholic journal would cause such exhibitions to be eliminated from programmes of Catholic entertainments and consigned to the regions where they properly belong."

Not only do we think that our correspondent is right in making this protest, which is only one of several that we have received recently, but we wish that some one would take similar action in every case of such an exhibition. It is high time that every trace of vulgarity should be removed from entertainments given under the auspices of a Catholic society, especially as there is an ample supply of devout and refined humor to draw upon. — Standard and Times.

A Wonderful Story.

One day a wonderful bird trapped at the window of Mrs. Nansen's home at Christiania. Instantly the window was opened, and the wife of the famous arctic explorer in another moment covered the little messenger with kisses and caresses.

The carrier pigeon had been away from the cottage thirty long months, but had not forgotten the way home. It brought a note from Nansen stating that all was going well with him and his expedition in the polar regions.

Nansen had fastened a message to the bird and turned it loose. The frail courier darted out into the blizzard air. It flew like an arrow over a thousand miles of frozen waste, and then sped forward over another thousand miles of ocean and plains and forests, and one morning entered the window of the waiting mistress, and delivered the message which she had been awaiting so anxiously.

We boast of human pluck, sagacity, and endurance; but this loving carrier pigeon, in its homeward flight, after an absence of thirty months, accomplished a feat so wonderful that we can only give ourselves up to the amazement and admiration which must overwhelm every one when the marvelous story is told. Mrs. Nansen's pigeon is one of the wonders of the world.

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