

The Bell in the Wilderness

By James Morton, Two Creek, Man.

OVER the far northern forest a puff of wind breathed, and the yellow leaves drifted down. They clung to the ragged, recumbent figure of a man stretched by a rotten log. Some struck his face, and his nostrils slightly quivered. The face was cadaverous under the black beard, the eyes were sunken, the cheeks hollow. He moaned and raised himself slightly, as the sharp edges of the leaves pricked him into consciousness. The sough of the breeze in the tree top struck upon his ears. He raised himself on his elbow. There was something metallic in the sound of the wind, faintly suggestive of civilized man with his instruments of iron and brass somewhere in that wilderness of wood. Again it came in mournful cadence, more distinct than before.

"A bell!" he muttered. "A bell in the wilderness."

It brought back memories of his native land; it rang a peal of hope. He tried to raise himself, but the weakened knees bent, and on his hands he crawled forward. Windfalls and branches of dead trees barred the way, but he clambered over them heading toward the sound as a wounded hound might follow a scent. He gasped painfully, and his eyes began to close again, when he came upon an Indian trail. Just a narrow track that wound past the windfalls and by the

prepared, and he ate eagerly. With the renewal of physical strength curiosity revived. He looked at the face of the Sister as one recalls something seen in a dream.

"Who are you? What place is this? Won't you tell me please?"

In the Sister's blue eyes shone the sympathy begotten of far-off glimmerings of love, and there was tenderness in her voice.

"This is the Roman Catholic mission to the Indians on Lac La Martre that flows into the Great Bear Lake. There are four of us here, the Father in charge, and two other Sisters and myself, whose duty it is to teach the Indian children. The Father will be in presently, and he will tell you all you want to know."

Her voice struck slumbering chords in memory, and as their music vibrated in his brain, he lay still and closed his eyes. Then opening them again, he said:

"You are very kind Sister. You make me think of someone I knew very long ago."

She turned her face slightly from him and looked toward the half-covered window, and spoke very gently:

"I am glad you are French. When I hear the old tongue spoken by a stranger, it brings me memories of home."

"Yes, I was born in France," he said trying again to arrest her eyes. "My

Requests for Soldiers' Comforts

Miss Helen J. Henry, assistant secretary 106th and 226th Auxiliary, 130 Sherbrook St., Winnipeg, writes: The 106th and 226th Willing Workers have received many replies to the 1200 or more parcels sent to our 226th Battalion men at Christmas and distributed to them while in quarantine at Bramshott. We wish to express to our friends in the outlying districts our gratitude for the substantial assistance rendered to us in this connection through subscriptions to Misses McPhee and Murray from the kind people of Minitonas. We also were recipients of contributions from Neepawa, Newdale and Glen Ewen. The Red Cross Society of Ogilvie also assisted by sending in very ample boxes.

"We hope, hampered though we may be by the difficulty of keeping in touch with our boys, to continue the work we have started. In our endeavors for the present year Thornhill has augmented our funds by a substantial donation. Any assistance in locating the men of our battalion will be welcomed by the ladies of our auxiliary, as we wish to reach as many as possible.

"Apples and smokes were supplied to the boys when passing through Winnipeg, and although our Christmas parcels consisted of merely remembrances, we felt that in just leaving Canada they were not in need of more substantial assistance. We have been steadily working on trench comforts in readiness for such time as they may be required.

"Any assistance along these lines will be gladly welcomed. And our secretary will at all times be found willing to answer all communications in this connection."

edges of the muskegs, but it stretched in the direction from which the bell had sounded, and he guessed that some settlement lay at its end.

Again was hope renewed and strength revived. He managed to raise himself, and stumbled clumsily forward. His ragged moccasins caught in snags sometimes and he would fall, only to struggle to his feet again. Then came the barking of many dogs and the sound of human voices. He tried to run, but fell and crawled again. Then the forest opened and the light of the setting sun blazed on him. He saw a lake that blinded him with its gleam, as if some great jewel had flashed on his weakened eyes. In the haze swam a few log houses, and a band of dogs, like a pack of wolves, came howling toward him. He saw strange figures and heard guttural voices calling, and then he knew no more.

The room in the priest's house at the Indian mission had been partially darkened, but in its subdued light the Sister of Charity, who watched by the bed of the stranger studied his wasted features with reminiscent intensity. Something in it called to the past in her—that past in which earth's loves and joys had not yet been merged in the serene light of her spiritual life. The stranger's eyes opened as from sleep, and he looked at her as one who is groping out of a cavern into the light of strange worlds.

"Where am I?" he asked in French.

"With friends," she answered softly in the same tongue. "But you must not talk now. You must eat."

She placed before him food delicately

name is Francois Le Jeune and I come from La Chappoiaise in Normandy. Did you ever hear of it?"

Over the regular features of the middle-aged woman passed a slight flush that seemed to lose itself beneath the white band that wrapped her brow. There was a moment of indrawn prayer. Then covering a quivering heart with a calmness that looked almost cold, she rose, walked to the bed, and held out her hand.

"It is many years since we met, Francois, and time has changed us both. I did not know you. Do you know me?"

Recognition brightened in his eyes and he clasped with impulsive warmth the hand she held out to him.

"Lucille, Lucille Benoit. My own Lucille!"

She placed a hard, straight finger on his lips. "No, Lucille no longer. I am Sister Anita here, and must be called by no other name. Of some things in the past we may not speak. I want to be your friend, and I ask you as you respect me to remember the vows I have taken."

He released her hand and sighed. "Pardon me. I have lived in the wilderness for many years. You know why I came away. My packhorse with all my food and supplies got away from me when I left it in the trail to shoot a grouse. I sought for it till I got lost myself. The mission bell guided me here when life seemed almost gone, and to have you by me again after it all seems like a bit of heaven, no matter what may come between."

"God guides us in mysterious ways sometimes Francois," she said more softly, "and perhaps, there is a purpose in this meeting that we cannot fathom.

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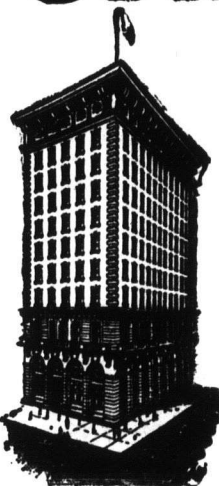
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