

THE MYSTIC BELL.

FROM THE DANISH OF ANDERSEN.

Toward evening, in the narrow streets of a large town, just as the sun was sinking, and the clouds used to glitter like gold between the chimnies, a singular sound, like that of a church-bell, was often heard—sometimes by one, sometimes by another; but it only lasted a minute, for there was such a rumbling of carts, and such a din of voices, that slighter noises were drowned. “The evening bell is ringing,” people used to say, “and now the sun is about to sink.”

Those who rambled beyond the town, where the houses were more thinly scattered, and had gardens and little fields between them, saw the evening sky in fuller beauty, and heard the sound of the bell much more distinctly. It seemed to proceed from a church lying in the depths of the fragrant forest; and people looked in that direction, and their devotional feelings were awakened.

After some time had passed by, one would say to another, “I wonder whether there is a church out there in the woods? The bell has such a peculiarly fine tone. Shall we not go and listen to it a little nearer?” And the rich drove thither, and the poor went on foot, but the way seemed endlessly long.

Three persons declared that they had penetrated to the end of the forest, and that they had always heard the same peculiar sound of a bell, only it seemed there as if it proceeded from the town. One wrote a song on the subject, and said that the bell sounded like the voice of a mother speaking to a good and beloved child, and that no melody was superior to the sound of that bell.

The ceremony of confirmation now took place. The preacher had held forth with heartfelt eloquence, and those who had been confirmed were deeply impressed, for it was a solemn day to them. They were lifted from childhood to the state of grown persons, and their childish spirits must now assume the attributes of rational beings. It was a fine sunny day; and as the young folks who had been confirmed went to take a walk out of town, the large, unknown bell sounded from the forest, in a tone of unusual solemnity. They immediately longed to go and seek for it; and all were of the same opinion, except one, who was a poor boy, who had borrowed a coat and a pair of boots of his landlord's

son, to be confirmed in, and who was obliged to return them by a certain time.

But two of the youngest soon grew tired, and returned to town. Two little girls sat down to make garlands, and they went no further. Finally others observed, “Now we are a far way into the forest; but the bell does not really exist, it is only a fancy that people have taken into their heads.”

Just then the bell sounded so beautifully, and so solemnly, from the depths of the forest, that four or five amongst them determined to penetrate further. The trees were thickly set, and very leafy. It was really difficult to advance; for daffodils and anemones grew almost too high, while blooming creepers and blackberry bushes hung in long garlands from tree to tree, on whose boughs the nightingales were singing, and the sunbeams disporting. It was most lovely! But the way was really not fit for girls, who would have torn their dresses at every step. There were huge blocks of stone overgrown with variegated moss, and the fresh spring water babbled forth, and seemed to say the words, “Gurgle, gurgle.”

“I wonder whether this is the bell, after all?” said one of the newly-confirmed youths, as he laid down and listened. “It is worth studying closely.” So he remained behind, and let the others go on.

They came to a cottage built of bark and branches. A wild apple-tree of goodly growth stretched its boughs over it, as if it would shower down blessings over its roof, which was overgrown with blooming roses. The long boughs drooped over the gable-end, to which was fastened a little bell. Might not this be the bell they heard? They all agreed it must be, except one youth, who objected that the bell was too small and too delicate to be heard at such a distance, and that it was a very different sound indeed that touched the human heart so deeply. He who spoke was a king's son; and then the others said that those sort of people always wanted to be wiser than anybody else.

Therefore they left him to go his ways; and the further he went the more deeply was he impressed by the solitude of the forest. But he still heard the little bell that the others had been

so delighted with. But the tones of the bell became louder and louder, and it soon seemed as if an organ had joined them; the sound proceeded from the left—namely, from the side of the heart.

There was now a rustling amongst the bushes, and a little boy stood before the king's son, wearing wooden shoes, and so short a jacket that one could mark the exact length of his wrists. They knew one another; the boy being one of those who had been confirmed, and who could not join the excursion, because he had to go home and deliver up the coat and boots to his landlord's son. This he had done, and had then sallied forth in his wooden shoes and his shabby clothes, for the bell sounded so loud and so solemnly, that go he must.

"We can walk together," said the king's son. But the poor, newly-confirmed youth in the wooden shoes was ashamed. He pulled down the short sleeves of his jacket, and said he feared he could not walk fast enough; besides, he thought the bell must be sought on the right side, because it was in that direction that lay the finest part of the forest.

"Then we shall not be likely to meet each other," said the king's son, nodding to the poor boy, who went into the deepest depths of the forest, where the brambles tore his shabby clothes asunder, and scratched his face, hands, and feet, till they bled. The king's son likewise met with some right good scratches, but the sun shone on his path, and it's he whom we shall follow, for he was a nimble lad.

"I must find the bell," said he, "though I were to go to the world's end to seek it!"

Some ugly apes sat on the tree tops, and grinned till they showed all their teeth. "Shall we cudgel him?" said they. "Shall we thrash him? He is a king's son."

But he went undaunted, deeper and still deeper into the forest, where grew the strangest flowers. There stood star-like lilies, with deep red stamina; azure tulips, that sparkled in the breeze; and apple trees, whose fruit looked like large brilliant soap-bubbles. Only think how the trees glittered in the sunshine! Around the loveliest meadows, where the hart and the hind were playing on the grass, grew stately oaks and beech-trees; and wherever the bark had cracked in any of these trees, grass and long tendrils

peeped out of the crevices. And there were large tracts of land intersected by quiet lakes, on whose surface white swans were swimming and flapping their wings.

The king's son frequently stood still and listened. He often fancied the bell sounded in his ears from out of one of these lakes; but he knew that it could not proceed thence, and that the bell was sounding yet deeper in the forest.

The sun had now set. The air was as glowing red as fire, and the forest was as silent as silent could be, when he sank on his knees, and sang an evening-hymn, and then said,

"Never shall I find what I seek! The sun is now sinking, and night, dark night is coming on. Yet I may perhaps see the round, red sun once more before it disappears from the horizon: I will climb to the summit of yonder rocks, for their height is equal to that of the tallest tree."

And by the help of roots and creepers he managed to scale the wet rocks, where water-snakes were wriggling about, and toads seemed to be baying at him; yet he reached the summit before the sun had quite sunk to rest.

Oh, how grand a sight was there! The sea, the boundless, magnificent sea, rolling its broad waves to the shore, lay spread out before him, while the sun stood like a fiery altar just at the point where the sea and sky met, and all around had melted into one glorious tint. The forest was singing, and the sea was singing, and his heart joined their hymns of praise.

All nature was one vast, holy church, whose pillars were formed by trees and floating clouds, whose velvet coverings were represented by grass and flowers, and whose dome was imaged forth by the sky itself; but the glowing tints now faded away, and millions of stars, like so many diamond lamps, lighted up that glorious cupola. And the king's son stretched forth his arms toward heaven, toward the sea, and toward the forest.

Just at that moment, the poor boy, with short sleeves and the wooden shoes, emerged from the right-hand road; he, too, had come just in time, having reached the same point by another way.

And they ran to meet each other, and stood hand-in-hand in the vast church of nature and poetry. And above them sounded the invisible, solemn bell, while holy spirits floated around them, singing a joyous hallelujah!

LINES.

The lovely eyes of the young Spring night,
So softly down are gazing—
Oh, the Love which bore thee down with might,
Ere long will thy soul be raising.

All on yon linden sits and sings,
The nightingale soft trilling;
And as her music in me rings,
My soul with love is thrilling.