

BELL-RINGING FOR GIRLS.



SOME five years ago it was the lot of a girl, the daughter of a clergyman in the country, to consult an eminent London oculist on account of her failing eyesight. Without going into details as to the nature of the mischief, it is sufficient to say

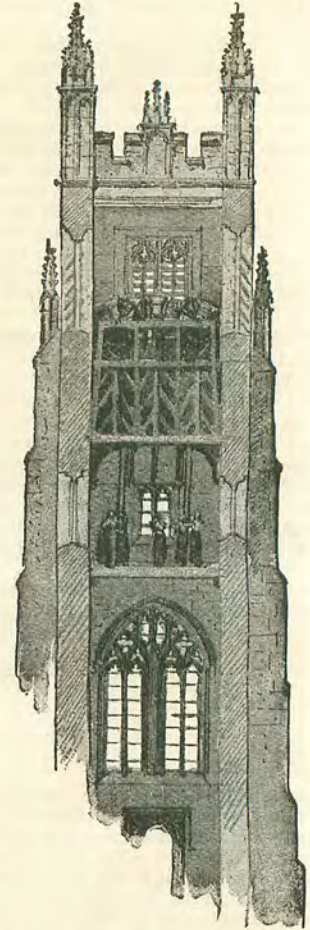
that the result of the visit was, that for the space of two years at least, all the ordinary occupations of a girl were absolutely forbidden. Not a single line of any kind was to be read, not even the letters which she received; no writing was to be indulged in, except through the medium of a machine, which enabled her to write without seeing a word of what she was writing; no needlework was allowed, not even the sewing on of a single button, and, last but not least, no music which necessitated the looking at or reading from the printed score before her, and the sentence of total and permanent blindness was passed upon her if she disobeyed orders.

Various occupations were immediately taken in hand, with a view to drawing the patient as much as possible out of herself, to making her live an outdoor existence, and also to preventing her from brooding over her misfortune. Gardening, poultry-keeping, regular country walks, tricycling, all formed part of the new

regime. But still the question remained what was to be done with the long winter evenings, and for some time this was an unsolved difficulty. Here, however, as is so often the case, the ordinary routine of life, if we may so call it, came to the rescue. The Daily Service in the Church suggested the exercise that was wanted. It is ordered, as doubtless our readers are aware, in the Prayer Book, that "the curate" of every parish-church "shall cause a bell to be tolled a convenient time before he begin" the Service; and as, in the country, there is not always a sexton or a caretaker at hand to do this, the clergyman has to do it himself, or get one of his family to do it for him; and so our patient, wishing to help her father in some small way, undertook the duty of tolling the church-bell each day for a few minutes before the Morning Service. But bell-ringing has a peculiar fascination of its own, which is well-nigh irresistible, and when a person has once got thoroughly used to the feel of a bell-rope between his fingers, the desire to do more than simply toll or chime very soon follows, and it was so in this case. The presence one day in the belfry of her brother, who had for many years been a "bell-ringer," naturally brought out the request, "Could you not teach me to ring a bell? chiming is rather dull, monotonous work;" the result is that now the girl is a constant ringer in the belfry—not indeed what is technically known as a "change ringer," but she can and does manage her bell and bell-rope as well to all intents and purposes as those who have been ringers in the parish for years. Not only this, such is the force of example, that not long ago the writer was present in the said belfry on a practice-night, and two out of the five bells being rung were managed by girls.

Now here is an opportunity for exercise, which in these days, it is agreed on all hands, is so necessary for our girls. Of course there is a very general opinion among the uninitiated that bell-ringing requires great strength, but this is not necessarily the case at all. Given a peal of average weight (such as is usually found in our country churches), and in fairly good order, and it will be found that a girl, when she has mastered the elementary principles of the art, may easily hold her own with boys and men. It is not strength that is required so much as a combination of knack and nerve for the simple ringing of a bell, and both of these may be acquired by use and practice. We do not mean to say that the ringing of a heavy bell, or of one that runs badly, does not require a good deal of strength and endurance, and a trial on such would perhaps be fatal to the patience as well as the nerve of a beginner; but then a girl need not be put to ring a heavy bell, and even in the worst belfries there is always one of the lighter bells that does not run so badly as the others. Nor do we mean to say that the dodging about of a rope, as thick and heavy as a bell-rope necessarily is, within a few inches of one's nose, does not require a strength of nerve and a decision of purpose which some girls we have met seem utterly to lack; but we believe that with this, as indeed with everything else, the nerve required comes with efficiency and knowledge of power, and once a girl has been taught thoroughly the usual vagaries that a bell-rope is wont to perform when the bell is being rung, and also what to do in an emergency, the question of the requisite nerve is a comparatively small one, and the difficulty will be soon overcome.

But apart from the thought of mere exercise and amusement, which after all are a selfish reason for undertaking a new pursuit, we cannot help thinking, and this is a result of

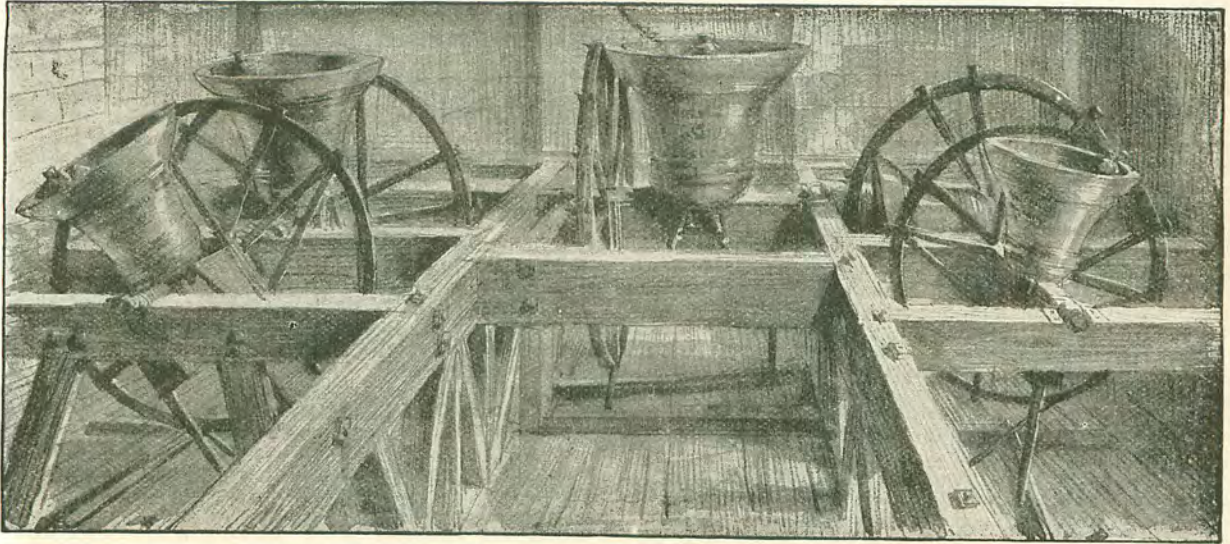


experience, that there is genuine work for the Master to be done by our sisters if they will try bell-ringing. The ringers in a country parish are often drawn from quite the rough, happy-go-lucky lads of the village, and not infrequently are a source of great trouble, or at least anxiety, to those responsible for the religious tone of the parish; in many cases they do not think of going to a place of worship, except when they ring the church-bells for Service, and, even then, we have too often seen those who have been engaged in calling the people to worship, themselves troop out of the church just before the service begins.

But further than this, they are very difficult to get hold of; they avoid the clergyman of the parish because they are afraid of him, or uncomfortably shy with him; they have as little to do with religion of any kind as possible, because somehow they think it unmanly. In a word, there is often no influence in a country village which can reach them, since they have given up going to Sunday school; and consequently they loaf about at the street corners on Sundays idle, if not worse. Now there is, we are confident, no influence with such lads equal to a lady's. If once a lady can get hold of them and make them trust her, there is little she cannot do with them. She need never be afraid of them, they will most certainly never insult her, and she may do them lasting good by her gentle firmness with them. At all events, she will make them, quite unconsciously, less rough and more gentleman-like, and that is something, and so prepare their minds to receive again the teachings of Christianity, which they have almost forgotten. She will awaken in their hearts that feeling of chivalry



CHIMING.



IN THE BELFRY.

towards women which is so necessary to a really good man's character, and which is not dead in the breast of the ordinary English lad, but only sleeping for want of exercise. And this she may do in a great measure, we believe, in the belfry, if she will condescend to learn and to take part in the pursuit of which they are in many cases so fond. Her presence in the belfry will tend to humanise and civilise the lads in a way which nothing else can do; it will suppress all coarse words and idle jesting, which are not convenient, and by teaching the lads to reverence the lesser, herself to wit, she will gradually lead them to a reverence of the immeasurably greater One, her Maker and theirs.

And now we must turn to the practical side of bell-ringing, and give a few hints as to the art itself. It will be necessary first, however, to clear the ground by giving a few definitions and explanations of technical terms used, and a short description of the machinery, because it will afterwards be more easy to give instructions as to the management of the bell. First and foremost, as this is more or less a novel pursuit for girls, it is important to give a hint or two as to the dress of the girl who is going to be a bell-ringer. This is more important than at first sight it would seem, but a little thought will show why we give the directions we do. The skirt of the dress should be plain, and of some fairly heavy stuff (*e.g.*, serge), so as not to be in the way of the rope, or to catch it as it moves quickly past; the bodice should be quite loose-fitting, made of flannel or something of the sort, so as to allow a perfectly free movement to the arms. The wrist-bands should be quite easy; a close-fitting outdoor cap will be found most convenient, and this should be secured by an elastic round the back of the head, and not by the long pins that are in general use. The discomfort of a straw hat will be very obvious if only tried once, and besides the discomfort, there is some little risk attached to the wearing of any head-gear with a brim. Rings are also to be avoided, as they have the effect of allowing the rope to slip through the hand, and are efficacious in the manufacture of blisters. Bangles are merely a nuisance.

Next, as to the bell herself (for a bell is always a lady to the bell-ringer). A church bell is rather a large thing—the heaviest of quite an average weighted peal scaling fifteen to twenty cwt., and measuring five feet to five feet six inches in height. She is hung so that she can swing backwards and forwards quite freely upon a block of wood called the “headstock,” at the ends of which upon the lower side are two pivots (“gudgeons”) which project on to the beams of the framework or “cage” of the bell. These pivots work in metal sockets or “cradles” let into the beams. Fixed on to the headstock in a position parallel to the beams upon which the gudgeons work is a large grooved wheel, about six feet or more in diameter, for the bell-rope to run in, and upon the other end of the headstock is an upright piece of wood, very strong, called the “stay,” varying in length according to the size of the bell; and underneath the bell, working on a pivot fixed to the framework on the wheel side, is another stout piece of wood called the “slide”; the loose end of this is allowed to slide backwards and forwards as necessary, about eighteen inches in all, and prevented from exceeding this limit by “stops.” Inside the bell is the “clapper,” a long arm of metal with a knob quite close to the end, which is hung from the top of the bell so that it can hit the inner surface of the bell on either side just at the point where the mouth opens out, but so hung that it can move only in the same plane as the bell herself.

There are three ways of making a bell “speak.” 1. By striking her with a hammer; this is used for the clock striking, and with it we have nothing to do. 2. By chiming, by

which we mean swinging the bell just sufficiently for the clapper to hit one side only. 3. By ringing, by which we mean swinging the bell right round the circle and back again, during which time the clapper hits the bell once, while going each way. It is with the last named that we are concerned. For this purpose, the bell has to be first “raised,” that is placed in the position of having her mouth uppermost; this is effected by means of continuous swinging backwards and forwards, until at last she gets on to the balance, and she is kept in this position, when it has once been attained, by the stay resting against the slide. Of course the movement of the slide allows the weight of the bell to act first one way and then the other, and so whichever side she goes up, the weight keeps the stay pressed firmly against the slide. At the same time, the ringer has to be very careful to give the necessary check with the rope, and not let the stay bump heavily against the slide, or one of two things will happen; either the bell will spring back, owing to the combined spring of stay and slide, or, if these be not strong enough to stand the strain, she will go right over, and down the other side.

So much for the bell herself; our next concern is the rope. Immediately under the groove of the wheel on one side, and in a line with the lower edge of the same, is a hole in the framework, or in the floor of the bell-chamber, with a small grooved wheel, called sometimes the shiver wheel, for the purpose of keeping the rope in its place, and guiding it down to the ringing chamber. There are also other guides through the floors, just large enough to allow the rope to pass easily. Down in the ringing chamber, the bell-rope has for some five feet of its length wool interwoven in it, for the purpose of facilitating the holding of the rope, this is called the “sallie.” Below the sallie there is about fourteen feet of rope, which is ordinarily tied up, so as to form a loop, and keeps this part of the rope just off the ground. When the bell is being chimed, the rope remains in such a position that the foot may be placed in the loop, and the sallie held in the hands; but when the bell is being rung, this loop is untied, and the whole length of rope is used. Now when the bell is raised, as we said before, she is alternately “set,” first one side and then the other; this is called being at “handstroke” and “backstroke;” when the bell is at “handstroke” the sallie is in the hands of the ringer, and the rope, after passing up through the floors and round the “shiver wheel,” proceeds at right angles to its previous direction to the wheel of the bell; when at “backstroke,” it passes straight on through this guide and upward round the large wheel; the ringer then having in his or her hand only the rope's end, the sallie being far above the ringer's head.

The first thing to be done by all ringers is to learn how to manage the bell perfectly, and have her under complete control; and as nerve plays such a large part in the art, it is most important that confidence should be established, since if the ringer once gets frightened of her bell, it will be difficult to regain the nerve lost, and a not inconsiderable danger attends the timid ringer; it is therefore necessary for a beginner, even though she may have fully mastered the details of the theory, to have an instructor with her, who is thoroughly capable of managing the bell. The instructor should raise the bell himself; having done this, or even before, for the sake of those who live in the neighbourhood, it is advisable and kind to lash the clapper, that is to tie it up, so that it cannot move and strike the bell. To preserve the true balance, the clapper should be lashed in the centre of the bell by means of ropes passed to each side, and so up to headstock. When the bell has been raised, the instructor should take a few pulls to show the learner exactly how the bell runs, and then

set her at “backstroke.” The object of this is to see the length of rope required by the learner. The latter should then take her stand immediately underneath the rope, firmly on both feet, in an easy position; then raising herself on her toes grasp the rope as high up as she can reach with the left hand, placing the right hand underneath the left; if there is too much rope below the hands (only about four inches is necessary) the instructor should himself pull the bell “off,” and setting her at handstroke, rectify this by taking more up, or letting some down so as to have it exactly the right length. When the rope is arranged properly, and the bell set at backstroke, let the learner again take her position as before, and grasping the rope firmly, herself pull the bell off—the instructor standing close beside her to catch the sallie. It will be best for the learner to move her hands a little out of the perpendicular line away from her face, as then the rope will follow that direction, and so clear her head and face as it comes down. The bell should be worked in this manner for some time, until the beginner learns to “feel” the bell as she goes up to backstroke, so as to prevent her bumping against the stay. When this has been learnt, and confidence to some degree been established, the next thing to be tried is the catching of the sallie by the beginner. Anyone with a sense of rhythm, we had almost said of music, because music and rhythm are very closely allied, will soon get into this; but there are one or two rules to be carefully observed in this. First of all, the instructor should set the bell at “handstroke,” and show the learner whereabouts the sallie has to be grasped, that is as high as she can conveniently reach; then the learner with the rope's end in her right hand must clasp it firmly with the little and third fingers, so as to leave the thumb and first two fingers free; then taking the sallie with both hands (the left hand above as before), she should pull the bell off, immediately closing the rest of her right hand round the rope's end, and placing her left hand just above it; if she has pulled the bell off too strongly, she must gently check it, as she begins to feel the rope, and as her hands go above her head; but the instructor must be careful to stand by her so as to be able to step in if anything unexpected happens. If on the other hand, she has not pulled the bell off strongly enough, she will not go high enough to secure the balance and make the rope quite taut, but will “drop” on the ringer; the instructor must then take the next sallie, and by an extra pull rectify this mistake, and the learner must try again, wishing for better results next time. It is quite possible that a good deal of practice will be necessary, with the instructor by the learner's side, before she fully masters the point; but when it is once thoroughly mastered, confidence is gained, and we believe is never again lost; but one thing is quite certain, that until the learner has perfect confidence, and has thoroughly mastered the management of the rope, she must never try without some efficient person at hand; because a heavy thing like a bell is not a plaything for a child, and a mistake might very easily result even in the death of the ringer, the bell-rope in coming down, if it got in any way twisted, might drop round the neck of the ringer, and on its return journey perform the office of hangman. Still, with care and guarding against the feeling of presumption, there is no real danger.

When the ringer has learnt thoroughly to manage her bell, there is only one more thing to be done as far as regards this article, and that is to learn to ring in a round, *i.e.* in company with the other bells. No further instructions are necessary here, except that the learner should be put to ring an inside bell with a steady ringer before and after her. She must pull her bell quite steadily, and not

let her go right back to the stay, but be able to hold her on the balance a longer or shorter time as may be necessary; this of course can only come with practice and a good deal of patience; and at first until she has got quite used to the rattle and sight of the other ropes as they fly up and come down there should always be an old and competent ringer by her side ready to act in case of emergencies.

We have said nothing about learning to "raise" and "lower" the bell; and this omission is intentional, as we believe it is beginning at the wrong end to teach a learner first to do this. Teach her first to manage the bell when she is raised, and she will then soon be able to raise her herself and lower her when necessary, and for two reasons. Practice at ringing will develop certain muscles necessary for the work, and these when in working order will materially help her to do that which is harder work than merely ringing, viz., raising and lowering, and secondly practice at ringing will teach her to know the bell as a friend, and not to fear her as a possible and dangerous foe. It will give her quickness to catch the rope at the right time; it will give her nerve to overcome the natural discomfort of a rope dancing wildly about; so that when she has learnt to manage the rope as it moves slowly and in a more measured manner, she will gradually be able to manage it when it is moving in the quicker and more unsteady way it does when the bell is being raised or lowered.

In conclusion there are one or two directions which ought to be given, as the ringer may as well learn to ring well at first.

I. Stand well under your bell and don't look up at the rope as it goes up, and don't move your body round to look at the other ropes.

II. Keep your toes always on the ground so as to prevent the spare rope getting underneath them, and only raise your heels when it is absolutely necessary for you to reach a little higher.

III. Keep your body upright and do the work with your arms as much as possible.

IV. Keep your knees firm, and only bend them just a little when it is necessary to get some of the weight of your body on to the rope.

V. Always be quite silent when you are ringing; and attend entirely to the business in hand.

In addition to the above technical directions, there are two important suggestions to be made:

I. Remember that you are in the House of God, so discourage in every way possible talking about outside things, and especially any joking.

II. Remember that in this pursuit, or pleasure, or amusement, or exercise, or whatever you choose to call it, you will have many opportunities of getting to know the characters and tempers of those with whom you may be ringing, and also many opportunities of influencing them for good. Try therefore to use the opportunities gently, firmly, humbly, and prayerfully for the Master's glory and the salvation of souls.

THE MAIDEN'S BELL.

AN Englishman has just published a book describing his experiences in Spain, which he tramped from end to end with only a bag upon his back. The book is called *A Vagabond in Spain*, and contains the following account of an ancient custom in the village of Sabinan:—

Sabinan was our place of refuge. Here my companion had a friend—the tailor of the village—and we were well received and pressed to stay the night. (I must own that I needed no pressing.)

The tailor was an old sportsman, and showed me his guns, dogs, ferrets, and pigeons with pride. He had also some fine old red clay plates, cups and basins enamelled with white and elegantly flowered in Arabic and Spanish designs, and curious lamps in iron, brass, and clay. I feel sure that his wine-skins and curious old bottles of glass, wood, clay, and stone would be looked on at Christie's sale-room by a crowd of envious eyes. Here they are old and useless, nothing more.

It is the custom in this part of Spain when you share a man's roof to pay for your fare and sometimes your host's as well! My friend of the day sent out for a sou's worth of potatoes, of tomatoes, and little strips of salt cod-fish. These, cooked in a large three-legged frying pan with some olive oil, an onion, and a handful of herbs, made a big supper for five of us. We ate from a big dish placed on a stool. Wooden spoons and one knife served for all, and a piece of bread was broken from in turn. While we were supping my friend put up his hand and signed me to listen. I did so, hearing for the first and probably for the last time the sound of the "Nina's Campanilla." It is one of the most ancient customs in all Spain, and in the midst of all this cobwebby *bric-à-brac* and primitiveness I found it hard to persuade myself that I was an alien and living in the nineteenth century.

"LA NINA'S CAMPANILLA" ("THE MAIDEN'S BELL").

Many centuries ago, when the world had little history but many witching legends and

gruesome tales, a tiny "nino," tired of play and tale, sat nodding before the winter fire. His father and mother pressed him to seek his bed, but in vain. He feared the darkness of his solitary chamber, which his fancy peopled with goblins and legendary sprites. Deaf to his parents' voice, he sat dozing and nodding on the hearth till, overcome by sleep, he fell forward into the blazing fire. His wounds were terrible, and when he rose from his sick bed—his sight was gone. Never more would he see the sunshine or the flowers by sweet Jalon's brink. A sad and sightless boy, he fretted his early years away, and when his parents died he became a beggar-man, wandering through the vale and begging a pittance from door to door. The children learned to fear him as the dead, for, in his blindness, he fumbled round the doors and terrified the little heads he touched with his outstretched hands. Hence the blind beggar-man became a terror in Sabinan's Vale, and children grew to fear their quiet beds.

Then the mothers of the valley met together and sought a way to end this growing terror.

The form was this: the prettiest girls were called into the plaza, and the mothers bade them choose a "Campanilla" maiden for a year. She had to vow that she would never fail, when evening came, to leave play or feast, vesper or toil, to ring her "Campanilla" through the vale, and tell in sound of every hour the tale of him who bred such fears in Sabinan.

The song was brief, for the maiden had to hasten and repeat it often ere the sun went down:—

"Children now to bed must go,
Or their lives be filled with woe."

And still to-day the maiden may be seen running through the streets of Sabinan and ringing her little silver bell. The scene is strange. Before her groups and games and noisy shouts—behind her silence! The little



AN ACCIDENT.

ones give but one shout, "The Nina comes," and dart into their homes. No mortal, no despot commands such calm as the mild maiden of the bell.

What a long life is hers! Seasons come and go, but Campanilla is unchanged. Fierce wars and feuds have raged within the vale; the storms of centuries and manifold disasters have all been centred there; illness and death have overtaken forty* generations of the world; but Campanilla is a child through all. Her voice will never cease till Sabinan itself is still.

This was a most delightful evening, and I took leave of my simple friends the following morning with real regret, for I knew I should behold their cheery faces and curious little nest no more.

* It is recorded in Parracuellos that in the twelfth century a silver bell was purchased for the Nina (*por una aracion de la noche*), but the custom is believed to be much older.