

The Bell of Saint Euschemon

By Richard Garnett

The town of Epinal, in Lorraine, possessed in the Middle Ages a peal of three bells, respectively dedicated to St. Eulogius, St. Eucherius and to St. Euschemon, whose tintinnabulation was found to be an effectual safeguard against all thunderstorms. Let the heavens be ever so murky, it was merely requisite to set the bells ringing, and no lightning flashed and no thunder peal broke over the town, nor was the neighbouring country within hearing of them ravaged by hail or flood.

One day the three saints, Eulogius, Eucherius and Euschemon, were sitting together, exceedingly well content with themselves and everything around them, as indeed they had every right to be, supposing that they were in Paradise. We say supposing, not being for our own part entirely able to reconcile this locality with the presence of certain cans and flagons, which had been fuller than they were.

“What a happy reflection for a Saint,” said Eulogius, who was rapidly passing from the mellow stage of good fellowship to the maudlin, “that even after his celestial assumption he is permitted to continue a source of blessing and benefit to his fellow-creatures as yet dwelling in the shade of mortality! The thought of the services of my bell, in averting lightning and inundation from the good people of Epinal, fills me with indescribable beatitude.”

“*Your* bell!” interposed Eucherius, whose path had lain through the mellow to the quarrelsome. “*Your* bell, quotha! You had as good clink this cannakin” (suiting the action to the word) “as your bell. It’s my bell that does the business.”

“I think you might put in a word for *my* bell,” interposed Euschemon, a little squinting saint, very merry and friendly when not put out, as on the present occasion.

“Your bell!” retorted the big saints, with incredible disdain; and, forgetting their own altercation, they fell so fiercely on their little brother that he ran away, stopping his ears with his hands, and vowing vengeance.

A short time after this fracas, a personage of venerable appearance presented himself at Epinal, and applied for the post of sacristan and bellringer, at that time vacant. Though he squinted, his appearance was far from disagreeable, and he obtained the appointment without difficulty. His deportment in it was in all respects edifying; or if he evinced some little remissness in the service of Saints Eulogius and Eucherius, this was more than compensated by his devotion to the hitherto somewhat slighted Saint Euschemon. It was indeed observed that candles, garlands, and other offerings made at the shrines of the two senior saints were found to be transferred in an unaccountable and mystical manner to the junior, which induced experienced persons to remark that a miracle was certainly brewing. Nothing, however, occurred until, one hot summer afternoon, the indications of a storm became so threatening that the sacristan was directed to ring the bells. Scarcely had he begun than the sky became clear, but instead of the usual rich volume of sound the townsmen heard with astonishment a solitary tinkle, sounding quite ridiculous and unsatisfactory in comparison. St. Euschemon’s bell was ringing by itself.

In a trice priests and laymen swarmed to the belfry, and indignantly demanded of the sacristan what he meant.

“To enlighten you,” he responded. “To teach you to give honour where honour is due. To unmask those canonised impostors.”

And he called their attention to the fact that the clappers of the bells of Eulogius and Eucherius were so fastened up that they could not emit a sound, while that of Euschemon vibrated freely.

“Ye see,” he continued, “that these sound not at all, yet is the tempest stayed. Is it not thence manifest that the virtue resides solely in the bell of the blessed Euschemon?”

The argument seemed conclusive to the majority, but those of the clergy who ministered at the altars of Eulogius and Eucherius stoutly resisted, maintaining that no just decision could be arrived at until Euschemon’s bell was subjected to the same treatment as the others. Their view eventually prevailed, to the great dismay of Euschemon, who, although firmly convinced of the virtue of his own bell, did not in his heart disbelieve in the bells of his brethren. Imagine his relief and amazed joy when, upon his bell being silenced, the storm, for the first time in the memory of the oldest inhabitant, broke with full fury over Epinal, and, for all the frantic pealing of the other two bells, raged with unspeakable fierceness until his own was brought into requisition, when, as if by enchantment, the rain ceased, the thunder-clouds dispersed, and the sun broke out gloriously from the blue sky.

“Carry him in procession!” shouted the crowd.

“Amen, brethren; here I am,” rejoined Euschemon, stepping briskly into the midst of the troop.

“And why in the name of Zerneck should we carry *you*?” demanded some, while others ran off to lug forth the image, the object of their devotion.

“Why, verily,” Euschemon began, and stopped short. How indeed was he to prove to them that he *was* Euschemon? His personal resemblance to his effigy, the work of a sculptor of the idealistic school, was in no respect remarkable; and he felt, alas! that he could no more work a miracle than you or I. In the sight of the multitude he was only an elderly sexton with a cast in his eye, with nothing but his office to keep him out of the workhouse. A further and more awkward question arose, how on earth was he to get back to Paradise? The ordinary method was not available, for he had already been dead for several centuries; and no other presented itself to his imagination.

Muttering apologies, and glad to be overlooked, Euschemon shrank into a corner, but slightly comforted by the honours his image was receiving at the hands of the good people of Epinal. As time wore on he became pensive and restless, and nothing pleased him so well as to ascend to the belfry on moonlight nights, scribbling disparagement on the bells of Eulogius and Eucherius, which had ceased to be rung, and patting and caressing his own, which now did duty for all three. With alarm he noticed one night an incipient crack, which threatened to become a serious flaw.

“If this goes on,” said a voice behind him, “I shall get a holiday.”

Euschemon turned round, and with indescribable dismay perceived a gigantic demon, negligently resting his hand on the top of the bell, and looking as if it would cost him nothing to pitch it and Euschemon together to the other side of the town.

“Avaunt, fiend,” he stammered, with as much dignity as he could muster, “or at least remove thy unhallowed paw from my bell.”

“Come, Eusky,” replied the fiend, with profane familiarity, “don’t be a fool. You are not *really* such an ass as to imagine that your virtue has anything to do with the virtue of this bell?”

“Whose virtue then?” demanded Euschemon.

“Why truly,” said the demon, “mine! When this bell was cast I was imprisoned in it by a potent enchanter, and so long as I am in it no storm can come within sound of its ringing. I am not allowed to quit it except by night, and then no further than an arm’s length: this, however, I take the liberty of measuring by my own arm, which happens to be a long one. This must continue, as

I learn, until I receive a kiss from some bishop of distinguished sanctity. Thou hast done some bishoping in thy time, peradventure?"

Euschemon energetically protested that he had been on earth but a simple laic, which was indeed the fact, and was also the reason why Eulogius and Eucharius despised him, but which, though he did not think it needful to tell the demon, he found a singular relief under present circumstances.

"Well," continued the fiend, "I wish he may turn up shortly, for I am half dead already with the banging and booming of this infernal clapper, which seems to have grown much worse of late; and the blessings and the crossings and the aspersions which I have to go through are most repugnant to my tastes, and unsuitable to my position in society. Bye-bye, Eusky; come up to-morrow night?" And the fiend slipped back into the bell, and instantly became invisible.

The humiliation of poor Euschemon on learning that he was indebted for his credit to the devil is easier to imagine than to describe. He did not, however, fail at the rendezvous next night, and found the demon sitting outside the bell in a most affable frame of mind. It did not take long for the devil and the saint to become very good friends, both wanting company, and the former being apparently as much amused by the latter's simplicity as the latter was charmed by the former's knowingness. Euschemon learned numbers of things of which he had not had the faintest notion. The demon taught him how to play cards (just invented by the Saracens), and initiated him into divers "arts, though unimagined, yet to be," such as smoking tobacco, making a book on the Derby, and inditing queer stories for Society journals. He drew the most profane but irresistibly funny caricatures of Eulogius and Eucharius, and the rest of the host of heaven. He had been one of the demons who tempted St. Anthony, and retailed anecdotes of that eremite which Euschemon had never heard mentioned in Paradise. He was versed in all scandal respecting saints in general, and Euschemon found with astonishment how much about his own order was known downstairs. On the whole he had never enjoyed himself so much in his life; he became proficient in all manner of minor devilries, and was ceasing to trouble himself about his bell or his ecclesiastical duties, when an untoward incident interrupted his felicity.

It chanced that the Bishop of Metz, in whose diocese Epinal was situated, finding himself during a visitation journey within a short distance of the town, determined to put up there for the night. He did not arrive until nightfall, but word of his intention having been sent forward by a messenger, the authorities, civil and ecclesiastical, were ready to receive him. When, escorted in state, he had arrived at the house prepared for his reception, the Mayor ventured to express a hope that everything had been satisfactory to his Lordship.

"Everything," said the bishop emphatically. "I did indeed seem to remark one little omission, which no doubt may be easily accounted for."

"What was that, my Lord?"

"It hath," said the bishop, "usually been the practice to receive a bishop with the ringing of bells. It is a laudable custom, conducive to the purification of the air and the discomfiture of the prince of the powers thereof. I caught no sound of chimes on the present occasion, yet I am sensible that my hearing is not what it was."

The civil and ecclesiastical authorities looked at each other. "That graceless knave of a sacristan!" said the Mayor.

"He hath indeed of late strangely neglected his charge," said a priest.

"Poor man, I doubt his wits are touched," charitably added another.

"What!" exclaimed the bishop, who was very active, very fussy, and a great stickler for discipline. "This important church, so renowned for its three miraculous bells, confided to the

tender mercies of an imbecile rogue who may burn it down any night! I will look to it myself without losing a minute.”

And in spite of all remonstrances, off he started. The keys were brought, the doors flung open, the body of the church thoroughly examined, but neither in nave, choir, or chancel could the slightest trace of the sacristan be found.

“Perhaps he is in the belfry,” suggested a chorister.

“We’ll see,” responded the bishop, and bustling nimbly up the ladder, he emerged into the open belfry in full moonlight.

Heavens! what a sight met his eye! The sacristan and the devil sitting *vis-à-vis* close by the miraculous bell, with a smoking can of hot spiced wine between them, finishing a close game of cribbage.

“Seven,” declared Euschemon.

“And eight are fifteen,” retorted the demon, marking two.

“Twenty-three and pair,” cried Euschemon, marking in his turn.

“And seven is thirty.”

“Ace, thirty-one, and I’m up.”

“It *is* up with you, my friend,” shouted the bishop, bringing his crook down smartly on Euschemon’s shoulders.

“Deuce!” said the devil, and vanished into his bell.

When poor Euschemon had been bound and gagged, which did not take very long, the bishop briefly addressed the assembly. He said that the accounts of the bell which had reached his ears had already excited his apprehensions. He had greatly feared that all could not be right, and now his anxieties were but too well justified. He trusted there was not a man before him who would not suffer his flocks and his crops to be destroyed by tempest fifty times over rather than purchase their safety by unhallowed means. What had been done had doubtless been done in ignorance, and could be made good by a mulct to the episcopal treasury. The amount of this he would carefully consider, and the people of Epinal might rest assured that it should not be too light to entitle them to the benefit of a full absolution. The bell must go to his cathedral city, there to be examined and reported on by the exorcists and inquisitors. Meanwhile he would himself institute a slight preliminary scrutiny.

The bell was accordingly unhung, tilted up, and inspected by the combined beams of the moonlight and torchlight. Very slight examination served to place the soundness of the bishop’s opinion beyond dispute. On the lip of the bell were engraven characters unknown to every one else, but which seemed to affect the prelate with singular consternation.

“I hope,” he exclaimed, “that none of you know anything about these characters! I earnestly trust that none can read a single one of them. If I thought anybody could I would burn him as soon as look at him!”

The bystanders hastened to assure him that not one of them had the slightest conception of the meaning of the letters, which had never been observed before.

“I rejoice to hear it,” said the bishop. “It will be an evil day for the church when these letters are understood.”

And next morning he departed, carrying off the bell, with the invisible fiend inside it; the cards, which were regarded as a book of magic; and the luckless Euschemon, who shortly found himself in total darkness, the inmate of a dismal dungeon.

It was some time before Euschemon became sensible of the presence of any partner in his captivity, by reason of the trotting of the rats. At length, however, a deep sigh struck upon his ear.

“Who art thou?” he exclaimed.

“An unfortunate prisoner,” was the answer.

“What is the occasion of thy imprisonment?”

“Oh, a mere trifle. A ridiculous suspicion of sacrificing a child to Beelzebub. One of the little disagreeables that must occasionally occur in our profession.”

“*Our* profession!” exclaimed Euschemon.

“Art thou not a sorcerer?” demanded the voice.

“No,” replied Euschemon, “I am a saint.”

The warlock received Euschemon’s statement with much incredulity, but becoming eventually convinced of its truth—

I congratulate thee,” he said. “The devil has manifestly taken a fancy to thee, and he never forgets his own. It is true that the bishop is a great favourite with him also. But we will hope for the best. Thou hast never practised riding a broomstick? No? ’Tis pity; thou mayest have to mount one at a moment’s notice.”

This consolation had scarcely been administered ere the bolts flew back, the hinges grated, the door opened, and gaolers bearing torches informed the sorcerer that the bishop desired his presence.

He found the bishop in his study, which was nearly choked up by Euschemon’s bell. The prelate received him with the greatest affability, and expressed a sincere hope that the very particular arrangements he had enjoined for the comfort of his distinguished prisoner had been faithfully carried out by his subordinates. The sorcerer, as much a man of the world as the bishop, thanked his Lordship, and protested that he had been perfectly comfortable.

“I have need of thy art,” said the bishop, coming to business. “I am exceedingly bothered—flabbergasted were not too strong an expression—by this confounded bell. All my best exorcists have been trying all they know with it, to no purpose. They might as well have tried to exorcise my mitre from my head by any other charm than the offer of a better one. Magic is plainly the only remedy, and if thou canst disenchant it, I will give thee thy freedom.” “It will be a touch business,” observed the sorcerer, surveying the bell with the eye of a connoisseur. “It will require fumigations.”

“Yes,” said the bishop, “and suffumigations.”

“Aloes and mastic,” advised the sorcerer.

“Aye,” assented the bishop, “and red sanders.”

“We must call in Primeumaton,” said the warlock.

“Clearly,” said the bishop, “and Amioram.”

“Triangles,” said the sorcerer.

“Pentacles,” said the bishop.

“In the hour of Methon,” said the sorcerer.

“I should have thought Tafrac,” suggested the bishop, “but I defer to your better judgment.”

“I can have the blood of a goat?” queried the wizard.

“Yes,” said the bishop, “and of a monkey also.”

“Does your Lordship think that one might venture to go so far as a little unweaned child?”

“If absolutely necessary,” said the bishop.

“I am delighted to find such liberality of sentiment on your Lordship’s part,” said the sorcerer. “Your Lordship is evidently of the profession.”

“These are things which stuck by me when I was an inquisitor,” explained the bishop, with some little embarrassment.

Ere long all arrangements were made. It would be impossible to enumerate half the crosses, circles, pentagrams, naked swords, cross-bones, chafing-dishes, and vials of incense which the sorcerer found to be necessary. The child was fortunately deemed superfluous. Euschemon was brought up from his dungeon, and, his teeth chattering with the fright and cold, set beside his bell to hold a candle to the devil. The incantations commenced, and speedily gave evidence of their efficacy. The bell trembled, swayed, split open, and a female figure of transcendent loveliness attired in the costume of Eve stepped forth and extended her lips towards the bishop. What could the bishop do but salute them? With a roar of triumph the demon resumed his proper shape. The bishop swooned. The apartment was filled with the fumes of sulphur. The devil soared majestically out of the window, carrying the sorcerer under one arm and Euschemon under the other.

It is commonly believed that the devil good-naturedly dropped Euschemon back again into Paradise, or wheresoever he might have come from. It is even added that he fell between Eulogius and Eucherius, who had been arguing all the time respecting the merits of their bells, and resumed his share in the discussion as if nothing had happened. Some maintain, indeed, that the devil, chancing to be in want of a chaplain, offered the situation to Euschemon, by whom it was accepted. But how to reconcile this assertion with the undoubted fact that the duties of the post in question are at present ably discharged by the Bishop of Metz, in truth we see not. One thing is certain: thou wilt not find Euschemon’s name in the calendar, courteous reader.

The mulct to be imposed upon the parish of Epinal was never exacted. The bell, ruptured beyond repair by the demon’s violent exit, was taken back and deposited in the museum of the town. The bells of Eulogius and Eucherius were rung freely on occasion; but Epinal has not since enjoyed any greater immunity from storms than the contiguous districts. One day an aged traveller, who had spent many years in Heathenesse and in whom some discerned a remarkable resemblance to the sorcerer, noticed the bell, and asked permission to examine it. He soon discovered the inscription, recognised the mysterious characters as Greek, read them without the least difficulty—

Μη κίνει Καμαρίαν· ἀκίνητος γάρ ἀμείνων—

and favoured the townsmen with this free but substantially accurate translation:—

CAN’T YOU LET WELL ALONE?