



For Every Boy and Girl



THE WICKED BELLS

By E. NESBIT

HERE is a certain country where a King is never allowed to reign while a Queen can be found. They like Queens much better than Kings in that country. I can't think why. If some one has tried to teach you a little history you will perhaps think that this is the Salfic law. But it isn't. In the biggest city of that odd country there is a great bell-tower. This bell-tower had several bells in it, very sweet-toned, splendid bells, made expressly to ring on the joyful occasions when a Princess was born who would be Queen some day. And the great tower was built expressly for the bells to ring in. So you see what a lot they thought of Queens in that country.

Now in all bells there are Bell-people—it is their voices that you hear when the bell rings. All that about its being the clapper of the bell is mere nonsense, and would hardly deceive a child. I don't know why people say such things. Most Bell-people are very energetic, busy folk who love the sound of their own voices, and hate being idle—and when nearly two hundred years had gone by, and no Princess had been born, they got tired of living in bells that were never rung. So they slipped out of the Belfry one fine frosty night, and left the big, beautiful bells empty, and went off to find other homes. One of them went to live in a dinner bell, and one in a school bell, and the rest all found homes—they did not mind where—just anywhere, in fact, where they could find any Bell-people kind enough to give them board and lodging. And everyone was surprised at the increased loudness and sweetness in the voices of these hospitable bells. For of course the Bell-people from the Belfry did their best to help in the housework, as polite guests should, and always added their voices to those of their hosts on all occasions when bell-talk was called for. And the seven big beautiful bells in the Belfry were left hollow and dark and quite empty, except for the clappers who did not care in the least about the comforts of a home.

Now of course a good house does not remain empty long, especially when there is no rent to pay, and in a very short time the seven bells all had tenants—and they were all the kind of folk that no respectable Bell-people would care to be acquainted with.

They had been turned out of other bells—cracked bells and broken bells, the bells of horses that had been lost in snow storms or of ships that had gone down at sea. They hated work, and they were a glum, silent, disagreeable people—but as far as they could be pleased about anything they were pleased to live in bells that were never rung—in houses where there was nothing to do. They sat hunched up under the black domes of their houses, dressed in darkness and cobwebs—and their only pleasure was idleness—their only feast the thick dusty silence that lies heavy in all bellries where the bells never ring. They hardly ever spoke, even to each other, and even in the whispers that good Bell-people talk among themselves, and that no one can hear but the bat, whose ear for music is very fine and who has himself a particularly high voice. And when they did speak they quarreled.

And when at last the bells were rung for the birth of a Princess the wicked Bell-people were furious. Of course they had to ring—a bell can't help that, when the rope is pulled—but their voices were so ugly that people were quite shocked.

"What poor taste our ancestors must have had!" they said. "To think these were good bells!" "Dear me!" said the King to the Queen, "what odd ideas people had in the old days—I always understood that these bells had beautiful voices, but I cannot imagine anyone having such a poor ear for music that he would call the noise they make anything but ugly."

"They're quite hideous," said the Queen. And so they were.

Now that night the lazy Bell-folk came down out of the Belfry full of anger against the Princess whose birth had disturbed their idleness. There is no anger like that of a lazy person who is made to go to work against his will.

And they crept out of the dark domes of their houses and came down in their dust dresses and cobweb cloaks, and crept up to the Palace where everyone had gone to bed long before, and stood round the mother-of-pearl cradle where the baby Princess lay asleep. And they reached their seven dark right hands out across the white satin coverlet and the oldest and hoarsest and laziest said:

"She shall grow uglier every day—except Sundays, and every Sunday she shall be seven times prettier than the Sunday before."

"Why not uglier every day, and a double dose on

it all the more if she's pretty once a week. And," he added, "this shall go on till she can find a bell that doesn't ring, and can't ring, and wasn't made to ring, and never will ring so long as life lasts."

When the Princess was two weeks old the King said to the Queen:

"My love—the Princess is not so handsome as I thought she was."

"Nonsense, Henry!" said the Queen. "The light's not good, that's all."

Next day—it was Sunday—the King pulled back the lace curtains of the cradle and said:

"The light's good enough now—and you see she's—"

He stopped. "It must have been the light," he said. "She looks all right to-day."

"Of course she does, my precious," said the Queen.

But on Monday morning His Majesty was quite sure that the Princess really was rather plain for a Princess. And when Sunday came, and the Princess had on her best robe and the cap with the little white ribbons in

the fringe he rubbed his nose and said there was no doubt a great deal of difference.

The Princess was several years old before her mother could be got to see that it really was better for the child to wear plain clothes and a veil on week days. On Sundays, of course, she could wear her best frock and a clean crown just like anybody else.

Of course nobody ever told the Princess how ugly she was. She wore a veil on week days and so did everyone else in the Palace, and she was never allowed to look in the glass except on Sundays, so that she had no idea what she was not as pretty all the week as she was on the first day of it. She grew up, therefore, quite contented. But the parents were in despair.

"Because," said King Henry, "it's high time she was married. We ought to choose a King to rule the realm—I always looked forward to her marrying at twenty-one—and to our retiring on a modest competence to some nice little place in the country where we could have a few pigs."

"And a cow," said the Queen, wiping her eyes. "And a pony and trap," said the King.

"Yes, and hens," said the Queen. "And now it can never, never be. Look at the child! I just ask you! Look at her!"

"No," said the King, firmly. "I haven't done that since she was ten, except on Sundays."

"Couldn't we get a Prince to agree to a 'Sundays only' marriage—not let him see her during the week?"

"Such an unusual arrangement," said the King, "would involve very awkward explanations, and I can't think of any except the true ones, which would be quite impossible to give. You see, we should want a first-class Prince. And no really high-toned highness would take a wife on those terms."

"It's a thoroughly comfortable kingdom," said the Queen doubtfully; "the young man would be handsomely provided for for life."

"I couldn't marry Belinda to a time-server or a place worshiper," said the King definitely.

Meanwhile the Princess had taken the matter into her own hands. She had fallen in love.

You know, of course, that a handsome book is sent out every year to all the kings who have daughters to marry. It is rather like the illustrated catalogues of the big department stores, only instead of illustrations showing furniture or ladies' cloaks and dresses, the pictures are all of Princes who are of an age to be married, and are looking out for suitable wives. The book is called the "Royal Match Catalogue, Illustrated," and besides the pictures of the Prince it has little printed bits about their incomes, accomplishments, prospects, tempers and relations.

Now the Princess saw this book—which is never shown to Princesses, but only to their parents—it was eagerly left lying on the round table in the parlor. She looked all through it, and she hated each Prince more than the one before till she came to the very end, and on the last page of all, screwed away in a corner, where many might overlook it, was the picture of a Prince who was quite as good-looking as a Prince need be.

"I like you," said Belinda softly. Then she read the little bit of print underneath.

"Prince Bellamant, aged 24. Wants Princess who

doesn't object to a christening curse. Nature of curse only revealed in the strictest confidence. Good tempered. Comfortably off. Quiet habits. No relations."

"Poor dear," said the Princess. "I wonder what the curse is! I'm sure I shouldn't mind."

So Belinda thought and thought. And at last she got the book that had the portraits of eligible Princes in it, and she wrote to the Prince who had the christening curse—and this is what she said—

"Princess Belinda of Carrillon-land is not afraid of christening curses. If Prince Bellamant would like to marry her he had better apply to her royal father in the usual way."

"P. S.—I have seen your portrait."

When the Prince got the letter he was very pleased, and wrote at once to Princess Belinda's likeness. Of course they sent him a picture of her Sunday face, which was the most beautiful face in the world. As soon as he saw it he knew that this was not only the most beautiful face in the world, but the dearest, so he wrote to her father by the next post—applying for her hand in the usual way and enclosing the most respectable references. The King told the Princess:

"Come," said he; "what do you say to this young man?"

And the Princess, of course, said, "Yes, please."

So the wedding day was fixed for the first Sunday in June.

But when the Prince arrived with all his glorious following of courtiers and men-at-arms, with two pink peacocks and a crown-cased full of diamonds for his bride, he absolutely refused to be married on a Sunday. Nor would he give any reason for his refusal. And then the King lost his temper and broke off the match, and the Prince went away.

But he did not go very far. That night he bribed a page-boy to show him which was the Princess's room—and he climbed up by the jasmine through the dark rose-scented night, and tapped at the window.

"Who's there?" said the Princess, inside in the dark.

"Me," said the Prince in the dark outside. "The thief I'd ridden away."

"What a cold you've got, my Princess!" said the Prince, hanging on by the jasmine boughs.

"It's not a cold," sniffed the Princess, and her voice was very sad.

"Then—oh, you dear!—were you crying because you thought I'd gone?" he said.

"I suppose so," said she.

He said "You dear!" again and kissed her hands. "Why wouldn't you be married on a Sunday?" she asked.

"It's the curse, dearest," he explained. "I couldn't tell any one but you. The fact is, Malevola wasn't asked to my christening, so she doomed me to be—well, she said 'moderately good-looking all the week, and too ugly for words on Sundays.' So you see! You will be married on a week day, won't you?"

"But I can't," said the Princess, "because I've got a curse, too—only I'm ugly all the week and pretty on Sundays."

"How extremely tiresome!" said the Prince. "But can't you be cured?"

"Oh, yes," said the Princess and told him how. "And you," she asked, "is yours quite incurable?"

"Not at all," he answered. "I've only got to stay under water for five minutes and the spell will be broken. But you see, beloved, the difficulty is that I can't do it. I've practised regularly, from a boy, in the sea and in the swimming bath and even in my wash-hand basin—hours at a time I've practised—but in spite of every thing I never can keep under more than two minutes."

"Oh, dear!" said the Princess. "This is dreadful!"

"It is rather trying," the Prince admitted.

"You're sure you like me?" she asked suddenly. "Now you know that I'm only pretty once a week?"

"I'd die for you," said he.

"Then I'll tell you what. Send all your courtiers away, and take a situation as under-gardener here—I know we want one. And then every night I'll climb down the jasmine and we'll go out together and seek our fortunes. I'm sure we shall find it worth while."

And they did go out. The very next night, and the next and the next and the next and the next and the next. And they did not find their fortunes, but they grew fonder and fonder of each other. They could not see each other's faces, but they held hands as they went along through the dark.

And on the seventh night as they passed by a house that showed chinks of light through its shutters they heard a bell being rung outside for supper, a bell with a very loud and beautiful voice. But, instead of saying "Supper's ready," as any one would have expected, the bell was saying:

"Ding, dong, dell! I could tell Where you ought to go To break the spell."

Then some one left off ringing the bell, so of course it couldn't say any more. So the two went on. A little way down the road a cow-bell tinkled behind the wet hedge of the lane. And it said—no! "Here I am, quite safe!" as a cow-bell should, but

"Ding, dong, dell. All will be well If you—"

Then the cow stopped walking and began to eat, so the bell couldn't say any more. The Prince and the Princess went on, and you will not be surprised to hear that they heard the voices of five more bells that night. The next was a school bell. The schoolmaster's little boy thought it would be fun to ring it very late at night—but his father came and caught him before the bell could say more than:

"Ding, dong, dell. You can break up the spell By taking—"

So that was no good.

Then there were the three bells that were the sign over the door of an inn where people were happily dancing to a fiddle, because there was a wedding. These bells said:

"We are the Merry three Bells, Bells, Bells. You are two To undo Spells, spells, spells—"

Then the Wind, who was swinging the bells, suddenly thought of an appointment he had made with a pine forest, to get up an entertaining imitation of sea waves, for the benefit of the forest nymphs who had never been to the sea-side, and he went off—so of course the bells couldn't ring any more, and the Prince and Princess went on down the dark road.

There was a cottage, and the Princess pulled her veil over her face, for yellow light streamed from its open door—and it was Wednesday.

Inside, a little boy was sitting on the floor—quite a little boy—he ought to have been in bed long before, and I don't know why he wasn't. And he was ringing a little tinkling bell that had dropped off a sleigh. And this little bell said:

"Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle. I'm a little sleigh-bell. But I know what I know, and I'll tell, tell, tell. Find the Enchanter of the Ringing Well. He will show you how to break the spell, spell, spell. Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle. I'm a little sleigh-bell. But I know what I know—"

And so on—over and over—again and again, because the little boy was quite contented to go on shaking his sleigh-bell forever and ever.

"So now we know," said the Prince; "isn't that glorious?"

"Yes—very, but where's the Enchanter of the Ringing Well?" said the Princess doubtfully.

"Oh—I've got his address in my pocketbook," said the Prince; "he's my godfather. He was one of the references I gave your father."

So the next night the Prince brought a horse to the garden, and he and the Princess mounted and rode and rode and rode, and in the gray dawn they came to Wanderingwood and in the very middle of that the Magician's Palace stands.

The Princess did not like to call on a perfect stranger so very early in the morning, so they decided to wait a little and look about them.

The castle was very beautiful, decorated with a conventional design of bells and bell-ropes, carved in white stone.

Luxuriant plants of American bell-vine covered the drawbridge and portcullis. On a green lawn in front of the castle was a well—with a curious bell-shaped covering suspended over it. The lovers leaned over the mossy, fern-grown wall of the well, and looking down they could see that the narrowness of the well only lasted for a few feet, and below that it spread into a cavern where water lay in a big pool.

"What cheer?" said a pleasant voice behind them. It was the Enchanter, an early riser, as Darwin was and all other great scientific men are.

They told him what cheer.

"But," Prince Bellamant ended, "it's really no use. I can't keep under water more than two minutes, however much I try. And my precious Belinda's not likely to find any silly old bell that doesn't ring and can't ring and never will ring and was never made to ring."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the Enchanter with the soft, full laughter of old age. "You've come to the right shop. Who told you?"

"The bells," said Belinda.

"Ah, yes." The old man frowned kindly upon them. "You must be very fond of each other?"

"We are," said the two together.

"Yes," the Enchanter answered, "because, only true lovers can hear the true speech of the bells—and then only when they're together. Well—there's the bell!" He pointed to the covering of the well—went forward and touched some lever or spring. The covering swung out from above the well, and hung over the grass, gray with the dew of dawn.

"That!" said Bellamant.

"That," said his godfather. "It doesn't ring and it can't ring and it never will ring and it was never made to ring. Get into it." The old man took a hand of each and led them under the bell. They looked up. It had windows of thick glass, and high seats about four feet from its edge running all round inside.

"Take your seats," said the Enchanter. Bellamant lifted his Princess to the bench and leaped up beside her.

"Now," said the old man, "sit still—hold each other's hands, and for your lives don't move!"

He went away, and the next moment they felt the bell swing in the air. It swung round till once more it was over the well and then it went down—down.

"I'm not afraid—with you," said Belinda, because she was, dreadfully.

"It must have been the light," he said; "she looks all right to-day."

Down went the bell. The glass windows leaped into light—looking through them the two could see blurred glories of lamps in the side of the cave—magic lamps—or perhaps merely electric, which, curiously enough, have ceased to seem magic to us nowadays. Then with a plop, the lower edge of the bell met the water—and the bell went down, down and above their heads the green water lapped against the windows of the bell.

"You're under water—if we stay five minutes—"

Belinda whispered.

"Yes, dear," said Bellamant, and pulled out his jeweled chronometer.

"It's five minutes for you—but oh!" cried Belinda. "It's now for me. For I've found the bell that doesn't ring and can't ring and never will ring and wasn't made to ring. Oh, dearest—it's Thursday. How I love my Sunday face!" She tore away her veil, and her eyes, fixed upon her face, could not leave it.

"Oh, dream of all the world's delight," he murmured, "how beautiful you are!"

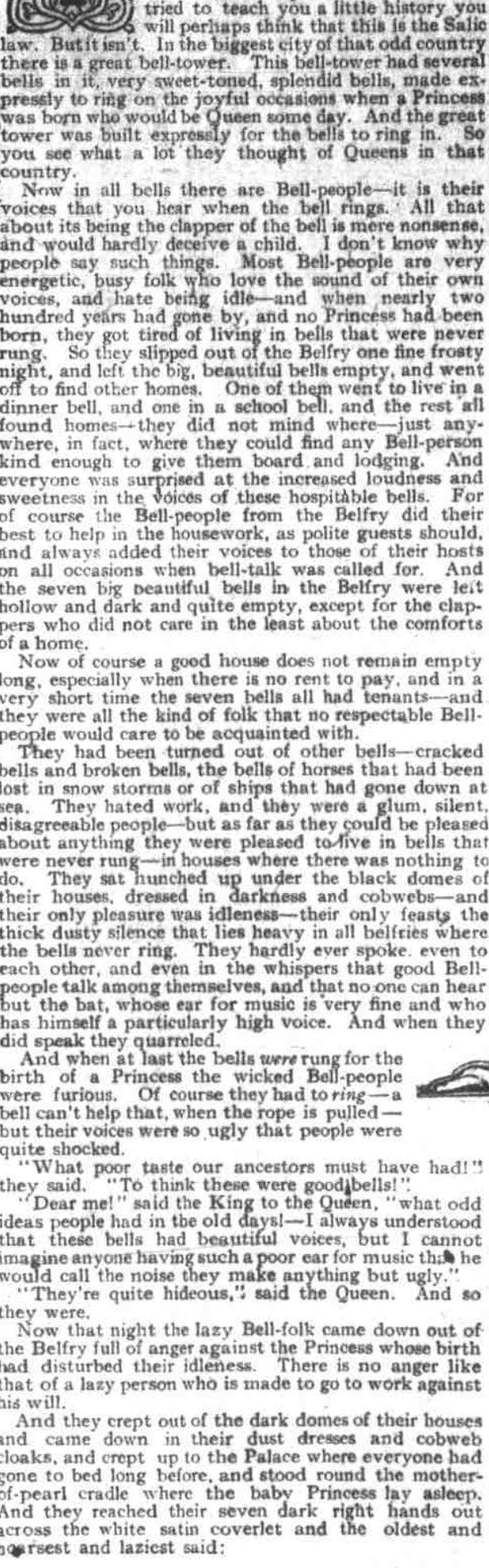
Neither spoke again till a little shock told them that the bell was moving up.

"Nonsense!" said Bellamant, "it's not five minutes."

But when they looked at the ruby-studded chronometer it was nearly three-quarters of an hour.

"Magie! Nonsense!" said the old man, when they hung about him with thanks and pretty words, "it's only a diving-bell. My own invention!"

So they went home and were married, and the Princess did not wear a veil at the wedding. She said she had had enough veils to last her a lifetime.



"I'M NOT AFRAID—WITH YOU!" SAID BELINDA. Sunday?" asked the youngest and spitefullest of the wicked Bell-people. "Because there's no rule without an exception," said the oldest and hoarsest and laziest, "and she'll feel

she was. She wore a veil on week days and so did everyone else in the Palace, and she was never allowed to look in the glass except on Sundays, so that she had no idea what she was not as pretty all the week as she was on the first day of it. She grew up, therefore, quite contented. But the parents were in despair.

"Because," said King Henry, "it's high time she was married. We ought to choose a King to rule the realm—I always looked forward to her marrying at twenty-one—and to our retiring on a modest competence to some nice little place in the country where we could have a few pigs."

"And a cow," said the Queen, wiping her eyes. "And a pony and trap," said the King.

"Yes, and hens," said the Queen. "And now it can never, never be. Look at the child! I just ask you! Look at her!"

"No," said the King, firmly. "I haven't done that since she was ten, except on Sundays."

"Couldn't we get a Prince to agree to a 'Sundays only' marriage—not let him see her during the week?"

"Such an unusual arrangement," said the King, "would involve very awkward explanations, and I can't think of any except the true ones, which would be quite impossible to give. You see, we should want a first-class Prince. And no really high-toned highness would take a wife on those terms."

"It's a thoroughly comfortable kingdom," said the Queen doubtfully; "the young man would be handsomely provided for for life."

"I couldn't marry Belinda to a time-server or a place worshiper," said the King definitely.

Meanwhile the Princess had taken the matter into her own hands. She had fallen in love.

You know, of course, that a handsome book is sent out every year to all the kings who have daughters to marry. It is rather like the illustrated catalogues of the big department stores, only instead of illustrations showing furniture or ladies' cloaks and dresses, the pictures are all of Princes who are of an age to be married, and are looking out for suitable wives. The book is called the "Royal Match Catalogue, Illustrated," and besides the pictures of the Prince it has little printed bits about their incomes, accomplishments, prospects, tempers and relations.

Now the Princess saw this book—which is never shown to Princesses, but only to their parents—it was eagerly left lying on the round table in the parlor. She looked all through it, and she hated each Prince more than the one before till she came to the very end, and on the last page of all, screwed away in a corner, where many might overlook it, was the picture of a Prince who was quite as good-looking as a Prince need be.

"I like you," said Belinda softly. Then she read the little bit of print underneath.

"Prince Bellamant, aged 24. Wants Princess who



A Happy Dream!

By KATHARINE PYLE

The Sandman lost a dream one night—A dream meant for a boy; It floated round awhile, and then It settled on a Toy.

The Toy dreamed that it stood in class With quite a row of boys; The teacher rapped upon his desk And cried, "Less noise! less noise!"

"What's that? What's that?" the teacher cried— In awful tones he spoke; He came with strides across the floor And then the Toy awoke.

There lay the nursery very still, The shelf above its head; The fire burned dimly on the hearth, The children were in bed.

Then, looking at the Toy, he scowled And said, "Next boy—foretell." "Oh, please, sir," cried the little Toy, "I don't know how to spell."

"Indeed, I don't know how it is, I'm sure I am a toy. Although I seem to be in class, And dressed up like a boy."

"What's that? What's that?" the teacher cried— In awful tones he spoke; He came with strides across the floor And then the Toy awoke.

There lay the dolls and Noah's Ark. "Oh, dear me," said the Toy, "I just had such a dreadful dream I dreamed I was a boy."