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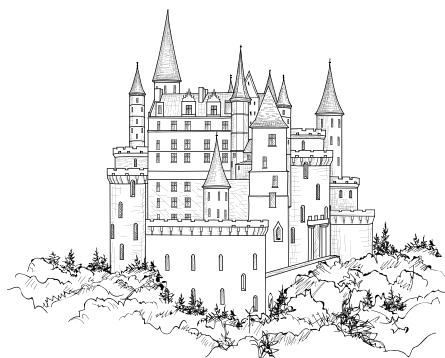
Sunshine Country

The Princess Bellaheld

The Giant Killer

Mary Jones and Her Bible

THE PRINCESS BELLAHIEL



Julie Sutter
Edited by Perry and Kimberly Coghlan

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19039 Plaza Dr. Ste. 210

Parker, Colorado 80134

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PREFACE

We live in a day that has stolen our sense of history. We live in a time that has forgotten God's providential plan and how He works all things together for good. I am a father on a mission to recapture the memory of the wonderful works the Lord has done so that my children understand how God cares for us, His people. My wife Kim and I are always on the lookout for books that will help us in this task.

You can imagine her delight when, at a recent book sale, among the old magazines and other ancient ephemera she spotted a dusty little hardback subtitled "A Tale of the Irish Missionaries in Germany 703." For the last year we had been studying church history as a family and had begun to have a sense of the string of small stories scattered through history like pearls. Small and precious, their value lies not in their uniqueness but in their similarity. They are the tales of providence and care, left as clues by our spiritual forefathers to

give us hope. This little book is one of those pearls.

Yet we were doubly surprised and thrilled to find that our little book held not just a tale of missionaries, but that of a young heroine. We had discovered the account of a brave young girl—originally named Bilihild—who endured harsh persecution but rested in God’s promises; who faced a strong temptation to fall, yet stood fast by strength greater than her own. My wife, herself the oldest of ten girls, has remarked on the apparent dearth of strong, godly young heroines in either fact or fiction. This is one of the many reasons our family came to love this story. Here we found an example of feminine boldness, courage and faith. The life of Bilihild exemplified a type of strength that has nothing to do with feminism and everything to do with true Biblical femininity.

So I hope you find, as we did, encouragement from the example of a girl from the past as you seek to inspire the mothers of the future.

While reading, keep an eye out for numbers marked on special terms. Those numbers are keyed to the glossary in the back of the book. The glossary provides brief definitions for unfamiliar terms.

Perry and Kimberly Coghlan

ORIGINAL PREFACE AND HISTORICAL NOTE

This little tale, retold rather than translated, is taken from the German of Professor Ebrard of Erlangen, to whom we are indebted for much information concerning the early Church of Ireland and Scotland, known in ecclesiastical history as the Culdean Church.

This story (of a young girl originally known as Bili-hild) carries us back more than a thousand years, to the first growth of Christianity, which now spreads as a mighty tree. In that time the Church of Ireland shone as a very star in the West. Her learned men were the pride of courts, and her missionaries carried the pure Gospel far and wide. Germany and Switzerland to a great extent were Christianized from Ireland.

The early Church of Ireland was eminently a mission Church; and the manner in which she set to work was not without a tinge of colonization. Her messengers went forth

by bands of twelves: twelve brethren under an abbot (a church leader or elder), with their wives and families—forming the nucleus, as it were, of a community—would found their cenoby in the wilds of some heathen land, bringing their influence to bear upon the people round about them—their charity, that is, winning them to the Lord; the cenoby growing and sending forth new bands of workers to found new settlements elsewhere.

It was the Culdean Church, and not Rome, which in this manner was chiefly instrumental in Christianizing the heart of Western Europe.

For derivation of the “Culdee,” setting aside others, we give Professor Ebrard’s definition, from the Gaelic *cele* (fellow, or man) and *De* (God): at any rate, “men of God” the Irish missionaries were called by the heathen wherever they went.

Bilihild (known as the Princess Bellaheld in this publication) and Hedan are no fiction; the “men of God” occurring in these pages one and all are historic; and the little story, in the best and deepest sense, is true.

Julie Sutter

GERMANY

A.D. 700



CAST OF CHARACTERS

Bellaheld

The young daughter of missionaries from Ireland who also has the title of Herzogin

Totman

A close friend of Bellaheld's late father

Abbot Colman

Abbot of the cenoby at Hocheim

Abbot David

Abbot of the cenoby at Wirtsburg

Gozbert

The Christian Herzog (or Duke) of Thuringia

Hedan

The son of the Gozbert, next in line to rule Thuringia; also goes by the title of Herzog

Geila

The heathen wife of Herzog (or Duchess) Gozbert, and Hedan's mother

Pillung

A heathen manservant in the house of the Herzog

Hezzilo

A pagan high priest

Regiswind

Geila's waiting woman

Haimerich

A Christian retainer in the service of the Herzog

Gisilbar

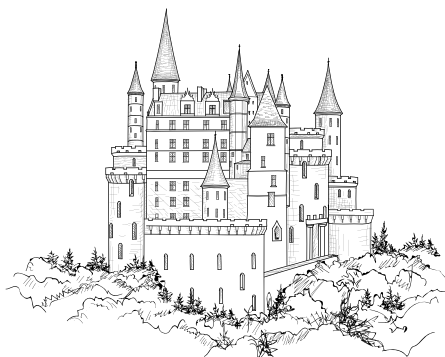
A free lord in the service of Herzog Theudo

Mechild

The mother of Bellaheld and the wife of Iberius, who was a missionary from Ireland

CHAPTER 1

A DYING MOTHER



*I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.
—Psalm 39:12*

In a small low-thatched cabin, roughly built of wood, lay a woman past middle life, with sunken eyes and the flush of fever on her cheeks. Her couch was a broad wooden bench, her covering a couple of bearskins. Her clothing consisted of an ample garment of undyed sheep's wool. Beside the bed, if such it could be called, an earthenware jug, filled with spring water, was placed on a log within the reach of her feeble hands. A younger woman, similarly dressed, sat at

a little distance. The cabin stood within a hundred yards of the German river Main, but the two women spoke not the German tongue.

"I have longed for this day," said the sick woman, "with the longing of the swallow for the southern land, when the leaves are gathering their autumn tints. On some sea-girt rock the weary bird might be resting, lonely and sad; the waving palm-trees would beckon her onward to that other shore, but the wing is powerless to reach it. See, the day has come, the blessed Easter day! Protected by the God-fearing Herzog¹, the Christian flock will unite at the oratory² beneath the Wirtsburg³ to witness with praise and thanksgiving the baptism of my beloved daughter, my only child. The river flowing past our cenoby⁴ has touched there, each wave seems burdened with a message to me: 'The festal time is at hand,' I hear them saying. The bells proclaim it from the tower, 'Come! Come!' they say, 'and tarry not.' But Bellaheld's mother is lying low in sickness. I feel the shadows of death closing about me."

"Let not thy heart be troubled, sister Mechild," replied her companion, "but yield it to the will of God. His thoughts are thoughts of peace, and not of evil. In the body thou art absent from thy daughter's baptism, but thy prayers for her may rise to God, bringing thee very near to her, even in Him."

"Thou art right," said the sick woman, "and death with Him is powerless. 'Christ is the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Him, though he were dead, yet shall live.' Iberius, my husband, also lives, though with mortal eyes I saw his face grow white in death. He too, in the spirit, will be with his child; her father's blessing will descend on her."

She ceased speaking, folding her hands in silence, then she continued, "My child will be baptized this day, but I enter

the gates of death. The sun has risen brightly. Before it setteth I shall be gone. See, the morn is breaking which knoweth no going down. The weary feet are coming home—ah, weary indeed! How long it is since they began their earthly course in the green isle—how far away! At Armagh, in distant Erin⁵, Aghandekka was born—yes, Mechild would have liked to see the place again where she was called Aghandekka—her childhood's home.”

“These all died in faith,” responded the younger woman, in the words of the Apostle, “not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: where God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city.”

“Hark!” said Mechild, “I hear the bell calling to prayer. Leave me, dearest Gertrude. Go, join our brothers and sisters in the oratory.”

“Leave thee? No,” replied the latter, “comforting the sick is no less a service to Him than joining with the congregation; and where two or three are gathered in His name, He is in the midst of them. Thou and I may worship Him here. What wouldst thou have me read?”

“Thou art kind, Gertrude. The Lord will be thy reward. I would hear the Savior's parting words to His disciples, as given in the Gospel of St. John.”

Gertrude, rising from her seat, took a parchment roll from a shelf beneath the thatch. It contained the four Gos-

pels in the Irish language, carefully written and partly illuminated. She was just about to begin her reading, when the door opened and a venerable figure entered, saying, "Peace be with you." The old man's hair was silvery white, but it was allowed to grow at the back only, the front to the crown of his head being closely shaven. His dress consisted of a simple tunic of undyed wool, and leathern shoes with leggings reaching to the knees. In his right hand he held a chalice, his left bearing the bread. A pouch was suspended from his belt.

"Is it thou, Totman!" exclaimed the sick woman, her face flushing eagerly. "Comest thou to me, thou friend of my departed husband, rather than join in the service?"

"Yes, sister Aghandekka," answered the aged man with a smile. "Abbot Colman has sent me; the stricken widow of a faithful messenger of Christ shall not be left to hunger while the congregation has meat and drink in the house of God. I have come to read the Scriptures with thee, and we three will remember the Lord's death as He would have us. It is the worthy Abbot who thus thought of thy spiritual need, and his wife has not left thy body to want. A bottle of milk I have for thee, and a barley cake, which she gave me, that thou mayest eat and drink when we have worshipped the Lord."

And he took from the pouch by his side a silver flask containing wine, then a stone bottle filled with milk, and the cake in question. The earthly food was placed on the floor, while the wooden log beside the bed served as a table during the Communion about to be celebrated.

The aged priest, or presbyter, knelt by the sick woman, and having chanted, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," he repeated the Lord's Prayer, to which he added a few words of loving intercession for the

maiden who, at that self-same hour, was to be received into the Church. Having recommended the dying mother to the Lord of mercy, he then took up the Gospel and read the very words she had longed for; those words of tender comfort which Christ gave to His disciples.

He added no sermon to the lesson, but addressed the weary pilgrim with kindly words of sympathy; their experience had been a common one for many a year.

“Let me look back with thee to the time,” he began, “when, following Killeen, the blessed man of God who has since gone to glory, our little band left the green shores of Ireland to bring the Gospel to the poor heathen on this great continent. ‘In the world ye shall have tribulation,’ said the venerable Abbot-Bishop Columba, as we set sail on our mission, but he could add the Lord’s words, ‘Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.’ How truly have we found it so! Our very voyage was troubled and stormy, deep calling unto deep. Our women and little ones, nay ourselves, looked despondingly into the watery gulf. Killeen alone kept his faith, believing even as St. Paul believed on the terrible sea. And we were brought safe to land, casting anchor on the shores of Friesland.

“We sailed up the Rhine as far as the Roman colony, *Moguntia*⁶, where the great German river receives the darker waters of the Main. There we found a Christian settlement ruled over by Bishop Buaidhe, or Sigfrid, as they call him here, thine own brother. Of him we inquired whither we should direct our steps, anxious as we were to work for the Lord. He advised us to turn our ship’s head up the Main to the land of the Thuringians, a fine people, lost in the night of paganism. They were ruled over by their Herzog, Gozbert,

who, although a heathen, was a brave and noble hero. It is just eighteen years ago; it was in the year of our Lord 685 that we arrived at the foot of the Wurtsburg. The Herzog received us hospitably and inquired about our plans. We acknowledged ourselves messengers of the Lord God, the Maker of heaven and earth. We told him we were sent to tell him of a new kingdom of peace and righteousness established by One in whose Name the Gentiles also shall trust, and behold, he was anxious to be taught. He gave us leave to settle at the foot of his Wurtsburg, between the hillside and the river. There we erected an oratory, our place of worship, built of stone, and around it thirteen wooden cabins, one for the Abbot and his wife, and one for each of the brethren with their families, also a common refectory⁷ and barns. The settlement was enclosed with a ring-fence. The river yielded plenty of fish for food, and we planted a few vines on the hill side, having brought them from Moguntia, that we might celebrate the Holy Communion. And thus we began to preach Christ crucified, finding open ears and willing hearts among the Thuringians.

“The Herzog himself heard us often and gladly, but he would not decide for baptism because his wife, the Herzogin Geila, strove hard for the heathen practices. For the priests of their false gods, Woden and Friga, Thor and Eor, perceiving the people were inclined to Christianity, had threatened the Herzogin with dire consequences, and she worked upon the Herzog her husband. It so happened that a horde of Chawari, a wild Asiatic people which had followed the course of the Danube, just about this time broke into the land and burnt the villages of the unwary Thuringians. Geila said it was Woden’s revenge, because his worship had been neglected, and that the enemy could not be driven back unless Her-

zog Gozbert would appease the injured gods by sacrificing the blaspheming foreigners on the forsaken altars.

“Gozbert listened to her evil counsel. Father Killean and our brethren Galun and Arnuval were seized and killed by the bloodthirsty priests. We others fled like frightened sheep, and for a time lived in the forest, building huts here at Hochheim, and not venturing back to the Wirtzburg. But the Herzog gathered the strength of his land about him, and the Chawari, finding themselves outnumbered, withdrew beyond the frontier. Then he imagined it was the gods who had helped him because of his yielding up the Christian messengers.

“Yet see, before the year had waned, the Chawari had returned in tenfold number, burning and murdering with ruthless fury. The word, ‘In the world ye shall have tribulation,’ was now doubly true with us, for we were in twofold anguish, terror of the Chawari on the one hand and fear of the Herzog on the other, being all the time as men on a burning vessel, fire behind us and water beyond. The people from everywhere fled to the Wirtzburg, to the strong enclosure. But how could we go there for shelter, being in bodily fear of the Herzog himself?

“In that time of distress, when the hosts of the Chawari were within half a day’s march of us on the other side of the river, it was Iberius, thy husband, who raised his voice in counsel, saying, ‘If death be our meet, brethren, let us rather die as confessors witnessing for the Lord, than be killed by the Chawari away from our post. Up! Then, to the Wirtzburg! Let us ask the weak-hearted ruler, Is this the help thou hast experienced at the hands of thy gods? Trust thou in the living God, and He alone will save thee.’

“Thus spoke Iberius the faithful, and we obeyed his voice.

Together with many other fugitives, we arrived at the Wirtzburg. Bellaheld, thy child, was then a babe only ten weeks old. But one of Geila's men-at-arms, seeing us return, threw a stone towards us as we entered the enclosure; it hit Iberius, crushing his shoulder. He lingered a few weeks and died, leaving thee a widow and thy babe fatherless. Thus the word came home to thee also, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation.'

"But thy husband did not die without tasting fullness of the promise, 'Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.' It was our Abbot who went up to the Herzog, bravely asking the question, 'What is it thy gods have done for thee, or the blood of the saints thou hast spilt?'

"And Gozbert trembled. 'Show me that He whom thou worshippingest is mightier than the gods of my fathers and I will believe,' said he.

"But Colman made answer, 'That thy fathers' gods have availed thee nothing, thou hast seen with thine eyes. The living God who made heaven and earth alone can help thee. He can confound thine enemies, and let them be as chaff before the wind. He can do it, if it pleaseth Him; but only if thou wilt repent thee of thy great sin and come to Him for mercy.'

" 'I will, but pray thou for me,' said Gozbert, humbled. 'I am altogether undone, my men are destroyed, I have but women and children left within the ring-fence. Pray for me!'

" 'I will,' replied Colman; 'but thou must join us thyself, lifting up thy voice to the Lord of mercy.'

"Night was falling when Father Colman spoke thus. The Herzog placed watchmen upon the turrets and returned with us to the foot of the mount where our settlement had been. The cabins were burnt to the ground, but the oratory, the strong stone tower, remained standing. We entered, the

Herzog along with us. And now Colman began chanting the penitential psalms in the German language that Gozbert might understand. Lowly upon his knees he chanted verse after verse. And kneeling around him in deep contrition we repeated after him, Gozbert with us, verse upon verse. Thus we continued far into the night, the lamp shedding a subdued radiance about us.

“At midnight the watchmen on the tower heard a clattering noise in the valley, as of a host of warriors nearing from the direction of the burnt-down cabins. They listened, fearful of what might befall their Herzog. When the approaching host had seemingly reached the stone tower, the clanking suddenly ceased, as though they were pausing. Presently the watchmen on the Wirtsburg heard a strange rustling from the valley, as of a swarm of cranes rising on their wings, or a herd of deer breaking through the brushwood. It died away in the distance, and all was still. When the morning rose, they descended from the Burg to look for the Herzog, and behold! The place all round was strewn with spears and battleaxes, left behind by the Chawari in their headlong flight. They had chosen that very night for an attack, and coming forth from the forest, they had suddenly seen the soft gleaming light of the lamp burning within the oratory. They had heard the low chanting, and a terror from the Lord had fallen upon them. They had fled, truly, as chaff before the wind, and no mortal eye in the this neighborhood has seen them since.

“Then Herzog Gozbert believed, and was baptized, having been instructed in the truth, as is meet. The cenoby at the foot of the Wirtsburg was built up again, and more brethren arrived with Abbot David, to the sore grief of the Herzogin Geila. We others, with our own Abbot Colman,

returned hither to continue at the new settlement. Thou also didst come back with us to Hochheim, leaving behind thee Bellaheld, thy little daughter, that she might be taught at Wurtsburg in the school which thy brother Edda with his wife had founded there.

“Thou knowest all this history which I have thus called up to thy memory, for it is thine own history, and yet I told it as though it were unknown to thee, wishing to bring back thy past life to thy inward eye, that, having reached unto the end, thou mayest look upon the road by which the Lord hath brought thee. The ways have been rough, and yet they have been ways of peace, for their end is salvation. Thou knewest it would be so, when thou followedst the presbyter and messenger, Iberius, as his wedded wife. Thou knewest that all earthly pleasure, even this life’s happiness, must be laid upon the altar that souls might be won for Him from the heathen people who knew Him not, and yet are precious in His sight. For they also are bought with a price. But thou wast willing to bear thy part in the blessed work. And the first-fruits have been given us. Hundreds of those among whom we spend our life, who were born in darkness, put now their trust in the grace of God which is in Christ Jesus, and have given up all evil practices and deeds of wickedness.

“Ought we not to return thanks to Him, saying, ‘We are not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou has showed unto Thy servants’? Alas! How often have we been wanting in love, in patience, in faith. How often have we even murmured at the tribulation which we must have in the world, forgetting in our faithless grief that we have every right to be of good cheer through Him who has overcome the world? Is the place which He has prepared for us not enough? And as regards this world, Aghandekka,

is it not more than enough that the Lord has put thy beloved child from her earliest youth into the way of salvation? It is true that today it is not given thee to clasp her to thy heart, but art thou not satisfied that thy Savior will take her to His heart as a lamb to His bosom, while thou art near her in prayer? She will now be made a partaker of the covenant, and for the first time this day she will join the congregation in the Communion of His body and blood. And thou, too, art about to join in this. Repent thee humbly of thy sins and thy many shortcomings, remembering that the Bread of Life is given to the hungry.”

Totman knelt down, engaging in a short but earnest prayer, which the sick woman repeated after him and, having broken the bread and poured the wine into the chalice, he began slowly and solemnly to sing the communion hymn of the Irish Church. Gertrude reverently joined in the singing, while the dying Mechild worshipped her Redeemer in fainting notes. The hymn they sung has been rendered into many of the modern languages of Europe. It presents in clear and lively form the faith of the early Irish Church. It is more evangelical in its teaching than might have been expected in that age, and there is ample evidence of the fact that in the eighth century the Irish branch of the Church was one of the purest in this respect. The following is a recent translation of some of the stanzas:

*Salvation's given, Christ the only Son,
By His dear Cross and Blood the victory won.*

*Offered was He for greatest and for least,
Himself the Victim and Himself the Priest.*

*He, Ransomer from death, and Light from shade,
Now gives His holy grace His saints to aid.*

*He, that in this world rules His saints and shields,
To all believers life eternal yields.*

*With heavenly bread makes them that hunger whole,
Gives living waters to the thirsting soul.*

*Alpha and Omega, to Whom shall bow
All nations at the Doom, is with us now.*

When they had sung this hymn, the aged minister gave the bread and the wine to the two women before him, after which he repeated the Nunc Dimittis⁸, also the Lord's Prayer, and kneeling again, he concluded the service as he had began it, repeating, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost."

"How shall I thank you for this comfort in my dying hour?" said Mechild, adding after awhile, "Tell good mother Hilda how grateful I am for her kindness in sending me this bread and milk to refresh me. But I think the bread which the Lord has just blessed to me will be the last I shall have need of in my pilgrimage. Earthly food can no longer avail me. The end is near. The eye is growing dim. Ah, my child, had I once more seen thee!"

The words had scarcely escaped her lips when the door was thrown open eagerly, and a maiden, fair as the morning, hastened to the bedside. "Mother! Mother!" she exclaimed, sinking to her knees by her dying parent.

"Bellaheld!" faltered Mechild, "is it thou? Can I indeed bless thee ere I go?" She placed her trembling hands on the

girl's head, her lips moving in prayer which none but God could hear. The light fled from her face; she lay still in death.

It was a happy death, and her desire had been given her; she had seen her child before she went. When Bellaheld had spent her first grief, clasping the lifeless hand, Totman asked her gently, "How was it possible to come so quickly? It is barely time for the service to have been finished."

"Alas, reverend Father," sobbed the orphaned maiden, "the service was never begun. I am as yet unbaptized, and have fled hither for fear of the Herzogin Geila, for Gozbert, the Herzog, has died this night."

"Then may the Lord have mercy on us!" said the old man, adding softly, "In the world ye shall have tribulation."

