

Suffering Souls on Pilgrimage

By A. Le Braz

There are two pilgrimages which every one ought to have made, once, at least, in his life. The first is to Loc-Ronan, round St Ronan's holy mountain. This pilgrimage is not properly fulfilled if the head is turned even once during the pious pilgrimage. It is essential to follow exactly the circuit St Ronan made, without omission, and without being daunted by ditch, by under-wood, or by bog.

This pilgrimage is called, "La Troménie." Persons accomplishing it alone, even when they have seen no one, have often heard a rustling in the hedges and the sound of footsteps. Souls, who during their lives had failed to make this pilgrimage, were making it after their death.

Sometimes, when the weather is bad, the great Troménie procession cannot take place. When that is so, mysterious bells are heard in the air, and a long line of shadows passes. These are the souls of the dead, who are resolved to accomplish the holy observance. Saint Ronan leads them, ringing his iron bell.¹

The second essential pilgrimage is that of Saint Servais.

If this pilgrimage is not made in life, it has to be accomplished after death. When that is the case, the coffin has to be carried on the shoulders, and the daily progress cannot exceed the length of the coffin. In the church of St Servais there is a wall which has a deep cavity. Through that, the dead return to their graves when their devotions are done. If you put your head through the hole, you can hear the grating of the coffins on the pavement, and the noise they make in rolling back into the vault.

When during life one has made a vow to visit any sanctuary, one is bound to do so after one's death, if it has not been performed during one's life. But a dead person cannot go on a pilgrimage alone. He must be accompanied by one of the living.

He goes therefore at the midnight hour, the hour of the dead, to one or other of his family, and speaks to him in dreams.

(Told to M. Le Braz by a fruit-seller at Quimper, known as Naïc.)

¹ A vision of this kind is recorded in the register of the Parish of Locronan, in which the undersigned declare that they saw the procession pass, with lights, banners and crosses, and heard bells ringing of themselves.