

In my old arm-chair—
 Rising—sinking
 Round me thinking,
 Till, in the maze of many a dream,
 I'm not myself; and I almost seem
 Like one of the shadows there.
 Well, let the shadows stay!
 I wonder who are they?
 I cannot say; but I almost believe
 They know to-night is Christmas Eve!
 And to-morrow is Christmas Day.

Ah! there's nothing like a Christmas Eve
 To change Life's bitter gall to sweet,
 And change the sweet to gall again;
 To take the thorns from out our feet—
 The thorns and all their dreary pain,
 Only to put them back again.

To take old stings from out our heart,
 Old stings that made them bleed and smart,
 Only to sharpen them the more,
 And press them back to the heart's own core.

Ah! no eve is like the Christmas Eve?
 Fears and hopes, and hopes and fears,
 Tears and smiles, and smiles and tears,
 Cheers and sighs, and sighs and cheers,
 Sweet and bitter, bitter and sweet,
 Bright and dark, and dark and bright—
 All these mingle, all these meet,
 In this great and solemn night.

Ah! there's nothing like a Christmas Eve!
 To melt, with a kindly glowing heat,
 From off our souls the snow and sleet,
 The dreary drift of wintry years,
 Only to make the cold winds blow,
 Only to make a colder snow;
 And make it drift, and drift and drift,
 In flakes so icy cold and swift,
 Until the heart that lies below
 Is cold, and colder than the snow.

And thus with the shadows only
 And the dreamings they unweave,
 Alone, and yet not lonely,
 I keep my Christmas Eve.

'Tis passing fast!
 My fireless, lampless room
 Is a mass of moveless gloom:
 And without a darkness vast,
 Solemn—starless—still,
 Heaven and earth doth fill.
 But list! there soundeth a bell,
 With a mysterious ding, dong dell
 Is it, say is it a funeral knell?
 Solemn and slow,
 Now loud—now low;
 Pealing the notes of human woe
 Over the graves lying under the snow!
 Ah! that pitiless ding, dong dell!
 Trampling along the gale,
 Under the stars and over the snow,
 Why is it? whence is it sounding so?

Is it the toll of a bridal bell?
 Or is it a spirit's wail?
 Solemnly—mournfully,
 Sad—and how lornfully!
 Ding, dong, dell!
 Whence is it? who can tell?
 And the marvellous notes, they sink and swell
 Sadder, and sadder, and sadder still!
 How the sounds tremble! how they thrill
 Every tone
 So like a moan;
 As if the strange bell's stranger clang
 Throbb'd with a terrible human pang.
 Ding, dong, dell!
 Dismally—drearily—
 Ever so wearily,
 Far off and faint as a Requiem plaint,
 Floats the deep-toned voice of the mystic bell
 Piercingly—thrillingly,
 Icily—chillingly
 Near—and more near,
 Drear, and more drear,
 Sounded the wild, weird ding, dong dell.
 Now, sinking lower,
 It tolleth slower!
 I list, and I hear it sound no more.
 And now, me thinks, I know that bell;
 Know it well—know its knell—
 For I often heard it sound before.
 It is a bell—yet not a bell
 Whose sound may reach the ear!
 It tolls a knell—yet not a knell
 Which earthly sense may hear.
 In every soul a bell of dole
 Hangs ready to be tolled;
 And from that bell a funeral knell
 Is often, often rolled;
 And Memory is the Sexton grey
 Who tolls the dreary knell;
 And nights like this he loves to sway
 And swing his mystic bell.

'Twas that I heard and nothing more,
 This lonely Christmas Eve;
 Then, for the dead I'll meet no more
 At Christmas, let me grieve no more
 Night, be a Priest!—put your dark stole on
 And murmur a holy prayer
 Over each grave, and for every one
 Lying down lifeless there!
 And over the dead stands the high-priest
 Night.
 Robed in his shadowy stole;
 And beside him I kneel, as his Acolyte
 To respond to his prayer of dole.
 And list! he begins
 That psalm for sins,
 The first of the mournful seven,
 Plaintive and soft
 It rides aloft,
 Begging the mercy of Heaven
 To pity and forgive,
 For the sake of those who live,
 The dead who have died unshriven.
 Miserere! Miserere!