

The Bell of Atri



T Atri in Abruzzo, a small town

Of ancient Roman date,
but scant renown,

One of those little places
that have run

Half up the hill, beneath a
blazing sun,

And then sat down to rest, as if to say,
'I climb no farther upward, come what may,'—
The Re Giovanni, now unknown to fame,
So many monarchs since have borne the name,
Had a great bell hung in the market-place
Beneath a roof, projecting some small space,
By way of shelter from the sun and rain.
Then rode he through the streets with all his train,
And, with a blast of trumpets loud and long,
Made proclamation, that whenever wrong
Was done to any man, he should but ring
The great bell in the square, and he, the King,
Would cause the Syndic to decide thereon.
Such was the proclamation of King John.
How swift the happy days in Atri sped,
What wrongs were righted, need not here be said.
Suffice it that, as all things must decay,
The hempen rope at length was worn away,
Unravelling at the end, and, strand by strand,