

which we first hear them, the sacred or local memories intertwined with their vibration, appeal to the memory with a distinctness seldom otherwise realized. Hence the most aspiring of German poets availed himself of this fact to compose an immortal "Song of the Bell." The most reckless and weird of our native birds found in the graduated intonation and emphatic occasion of bells scope for the remarkable verbal and rhythmic ingenuity which conserves his effusions.

"Hear the sledges with the bells—  
Silver bells!  
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!

Hear the mellow wedding-bells—  
Golden bells!  
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!

Hear the loud alarm-bells—  
Brazen bells!  
What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!

Hear the tolling of the bells—  
Iron bells!  
What a world of solemn thought their monody compels!"

On the same principle Gray touched at once the pensive strain of his elegy by allusion to the curfew.

The language of bells is cosmopolitan. It requires no polyglot to understand the meaning of those sounds which, for fourteen hundred years, have announced from church towers worship, festivity, and death. We may be wandering thousands of miles from home, amidst a crowd whose garb and tongue are alien, or in a lonely and distant region, where the very herbage beneath and branches above proclaim a foreign soil, and yet the instant a bell's chime falls on the ear we take up the broken link of our electric human chain and feel at home once more. Bells, said the pious Latimer, inform Heaven of the necessities of earth; and so also do they announce the identity of human wants, instincts, and destiny, and thereby indissolubly blend their cadence with the sentiment of life. The modern novelists have well availed themselves of this fact, as in Victor Hugo's "Notre-Dame," Jerrold's "St. Giles and St. James," and in Dickens's "Little Dorrit." And this universality is recognized by the poets. In that tender episode of Dante where he speaks of the voyager recalling at sunset the friends left behind, it is the "*squilla di lontano*" which seems to "*piange il giorno che si muore*." "The bell invites me," soliloquizes Macbeth on the eve of crime; and Hamlet can find no more significant image to betoken Ophelia's madness than, "sweet bells jangled out of tune." How Moore sang of those "Evening Bells," and Lamb felt the dying year's chime!

"Of all sounds of all bells—(bells, the music highest bordering upon heaven)—most solemn and touching is the peal which rings out the old year. I never hear it without a gathering up of my mind to a concentration of all the images that have been diffused over the past twelve-month; all I have done or suffered, performed or neglected, in that regretted time. I begin to know its worth, as when a person dies. It takes a personal color; nor was it a poetical flight in a contemporary when he exclaimed,

"I saw the skirts of the departing year!"

It is no more than what, in sober sadness, every one of us seems to be conscious of in that awful leave-taking. I am none of those who

"Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest."

A fire and a festa, a gratulation and a requiem, welcome to peace and call to arms, find voices in bells. It was a beautiful reverence for their office that led the architects of old to lavish their highest skill on the towers wherein those vocal ministers of humanity were to vibrate. The Florence Campanile is a memorable instance; its variegated marbles, its harmonized proportions, its lofty grace—so effective beside the vast dome and massive spread of the Cathedral—associate the bells which call out the "Misericordia," and sound matins and vespers over the beautiful valley of the Arno, with one of the fairest trophies of the builder's skill. No wonder that primitive faith consecrated bells with prayer and song; and that science combines, moulds, and tempers the metal with vigilant care, in order to develop the rarest charms of sound.

"Fastened deep in firmest earth,  
Stands the mould of well-burned clay.

Now we'll give the bell its birth;  
Quick, my friends—no more delay!

With splinters of the driest pine  
Now feel the fire below;  
Then the rising flame shall shine,  
And the melting ore shall flow,  
Boils the brass within,  
Quickly add the tin,  
That the thick metallic mass  
Rightly to the mould may pass.  
See, the boiling surface whitening  
Shows the whole is mixing well;  
Add the salts, the metal brightening.  
Ere flows out the liquid bell  
Clear from foam and scum  
Must the mixture come,  
That with a rich metallic note  
The sound aloft in air may float.  
See how brown the liquid turns!  
Now this rod I thrust within;  
If it's glazed before it burns,  
Then the casting may begin.

And it shall last to days remote,  
Shall thrill the year of many a race;  
Shall sound with sorrow's mournful note,  
And call to pure devotion's grace.  
Whatever to the sons of earth  
Their changing destiny brings down,  
To the deep, solemn clang gives birth,  
And rings from out this metal crown." (1)

There is something remarkably endearing in the sounds of bells. Whoever has caught their distant peal while coasting along the Mediterranean shores, or felt the summer stillness of an Alpine valley broken by the chimes from a venerable belfry, can imagine, as the mellowed intonations blend with the scenery and make the soft air melodious, how precious to native associations must be the familiar echoes. At the Zürich Insane Asylum, some years ago, there was an inmate whose occupation had been that of a bell-ringer. So keenly did he feel the deprivation of his accustomed office that, making his escape, he hastened to the nearest magistrate and implored to have his occupation restored or be immediately beheaded. What a chapter in history are the Vespers of Palermo! One of the most affecting legends of which so many charming ballads have been constructed by the Germans, is the "Blind Steed" of Langbein: (2)

"What bell-house, yonder, towers in sight  
Above the market square?  
The wind sweeps through it day and night,  
Nor gate or door is there.  
Speaks joy or terror in the tone  
When neighbors hear the bell?  
And that tall steed of sculptured stone,  
What doth the statue tell?"

The answer to this inquiry is, that the fathers of the town created what they called the "Doom-bell of Ingratitude," that whoever felt that serpent's sting might therewith summon the ministers of the law and have instant punishment awarded the offender. A prosperous citizen of the place owned a horse not less remarkable for beauty and fleetness than for sagacity; his services were long and memorable, but in his old age his master turned him adrift to starve; he roamed about, gnawing at every chance twig, and at last—

"Once, thus urged on by hunger's power,  
All skin and bone—oh, shame!  
The skeleton, at midnight hour,  
Up to the bell-house came.  
He stumbled in and chanced to grope  
Near where the hemp-rope hangs;  
His gnawing hunger jerks the rope,  
And bark! the bell-doom clangs."

The judges meet, and are astonished to "see such a plaintiff there;" but consider "'twas God that spoke," and oblige the ungrateful master to take home and provide for his steed.

There is the bell which summons the diurnal repast, and one

(1) Schiller's "Song of the Bell."

(2) Germans, Lyri translated by C. T. Brooks.