Complete Tales & Poems

THE Bells

I

Hear the sledge with the bells—
   Silver bells!
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
   How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night!
While the stars that oversprinkle
   All the heavens seem to twinkle
With a crystalline delight;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinabulation that so musically wells
   From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
   Bells, bells, bells—
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

II

Hear the mellow wedding bells,
   Golden bells!
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
   Through the balmy air of night
   How they ring out their delight!
   From the molten-golden notes,
And all in tune,
   What a liquid ditty floats
To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats
   On the moon!
   Oh, from out the sounding cells
What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!
   How it swells!
   How it dwells
   On the Future! how it tells
   Of the rapture that impels
To the swinging and the ringing
   Of the bells, bells, bells,
   Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
   Bells, bells, bells—
To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!

III

Hear the loud alarum bells—
   Brazen bells!
What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!
In the startled ear of night
How they scream out their affright!
Too much horrified to speak,
They can only shriek, shriek,
   Out of tune,
In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,
In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire,
   Leaping higher, higher, higher,
   With a desperate desire,
   And a resolute endeavor
Now—now to sit, or never,
By the side of the pale-faced moon
Oh, the bells, bells, bells!
What a tale their terror tells
   Of despair!
How they clang, and clash, and roar!
What a horror they outpour
On the bosom of the palpitating air!
   Yet the ear it fully knows.
   By the twanging,
   And the clanging,
   How the danger ebbs and flows;
Yet the ear distinctly tells,
   In the jangling,
   And the wrangling,
   How the danger sinks and swells,
By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells—
   Of the bells—
   Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
    Bells, bells, bells—
   In the clamor and the clangor of the bells!

IV

Hear the tolling of the bells—
   Iron bells!
What a world of solemn thought their melody compels!
In the silence of the night,
How we shiver with affright
At the melancholy menace of their tone!
For every sound that floats
From the rust within their throats
   Is a groan.
And the people—ah, the people—
They that dwell up in the steeple,
   All alone,
And who tolling, tolling, tolling.
In that muffled monotone,  
Feel a glory in so rolling  
On the human heart a stone—  
They are neither man nor woman—  
They are neither brute nor human—  
    They are Ghouls:  
And their king it is who tolls;  
And he rolls, rolls, rolls,  
Rolls  
    A paean from the bells!  
And his merry bosom swells  
    With the paean of the bells!  
And he dances, and he yells;  
Keeping time, time, time,  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
    To the paean of the bells—  
    Of the bells:  
Keeping time, time, time,  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
    To the throbbing of the bells—  
    Of the bells, bells, bells—  
    To the sobbing of the bells;  
Keeping time, time, time,  
    As he knells, knells, knells,  
In a happy Runic rhyme,  
    To the rolling of the bells—  
    Of the bells, bells, bells—  
    To the tolling of the bells,  
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells—  
    Bells, bells, bells—  
    To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

TO MY MOTHER

Because I feel that, in the heavens above,  
The angels, whispering to one another,  
Can find, among their burning terms of love,  
    None so devotional as that of “Mother,”  
Therefore by that dear name I long have called you,  
    You who are more than mother unto me,  
And fill my heart of hearts, where Death installed you,  
    In setting my Virginia’s spirit free.  
My mother—my own mother, who died early,  
    Was but the mother of myself; but you  
Are mother to the one I loved so dearly,  
    And thus are dearer than the mother I knew  
By that infinity with which my wife  
Was dearer to my soul than its soul-life.