

THE SONG OF THE BELL

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649295852

The song of the bell by Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.

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JOHANN CHRISTOPH FRIEDRICH VON SCHILLER

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Translated from Schiller.



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DUBLIN:

M^cGLASHAN AND GILL, 60, UPPER SACKVILLE-ST.

1857.

285.0.94.

*The profits, if any, to be given to the Ragged Schools,
Thomson-street, Dublin.*

THE SONG OF THE BELL.

HID within this mound of earth,
The mould of clay doth waiting stand ;
To-day, the Bell must have its birth,—
Quick, companions, hold a hand.

From the hot brow first, 5
Labour's sweat shall burst,
Ere its blessing heaven engages,
Ere the work the master praises.

The work that is earnest still should we
With an earnest word prepare ; 10
When words are flowing cheerfully,
Then the mind with the hand may share.

So let us now with care consider
What through our weak power may be wrought.
That man inspires contempt, who never 15
To what he works out gave a thought.
'Tis this which forms man's highest art,
For this was understanding given,
To trace within his inmost heart
The work for which his hands have striven. 20

Take thou wood of the pine-tree stem,
Solid and dry that wood must be ;
Then the fierce, compressed flame
Strikes through the metal thoroughly.
Seethe the copper brew, 25
Stir the tin in through,
That the tough bell-metal flow
In the right way down below.

What in the dark mould's earthen shroud
Our right hand forms, 'mid fiery flame, 30
From the high tower shall echo loud
Our sentence, be it praise or blame.

Endure it shall till latest morrow,
 Ringing its tale on each man's ear ;
 Wailing with the heart's deep sorrow, 35
 Hymning with the soul's strong prayer.
 Of all the changes here below
 That pass o'er man, by fate or choice,
 That grants him weal, or works him woe,
 This warns him with its brazen voice. 40

I see the white flames glow,
 Stir with an ashen stick ;
 The molten mass will flow,
 When moved within it quick.
 Free from every scum, 45
 Must the mixture come ;
 Then, from metal clean and clear,
 Clear and full the sound we hear.

Right joyful is the festive peal
 With which they greet the new-born child, 50
 Who sets forth with this life to deal,
 Hushed in the arms of slumber mild.

For him, within the lap of Time,
Lies hid the lot of good or crime ;
The mother's love, so good, so fair, 55
Guards his young life with tender care.
The years flow on as arrows swift
From female rule now starts the boy ;
In life's wild tumult must he roam,
Strange lands to see, his only joy :— 60
A stranger doth he turn towards home.
There, lovely in the light of youth,
Bright as if from heaven she came
With gentle, glowing, modest truth,
See the fair maiden's blushing shame ! 65
A nameless longing seizes then
His unfilled heart,—he walks alone ;
His eyes shed tears, the haunts of men
He shuns, and every social tone.
Trembling he treads where she has been, 70
Blest by her lightest look or smile ;
On her fair brow his gifts are seen ;
He decks her with his love the while.

Oh! tenderest longing,—sweetest hope
 Of fair first love, the golden time ; 75
 Eyes then may see, the heavens ope,
 Hearts then may swim in joy sublime :
 Oh! might it ever green remain,
 The golden time of young Love's reign.

See, the metal now is burning, 80
 Dip the trial rod therein ;
 If the glaze is on it turning,
 Time it were the mould within.

Now, companions, quick,
 Prove with the glazed stick ; 85
 It is ever a hopeful sign,
 When the strong with the weak combine.

When fierceness shall with mildness pair,
 And strength its power with mercy share,
 Then is the sound both sweet and strong : 90
 When heart meets heart, prove what you find,
 'Tis for eternity you bind ;
 The frenzy's short, the ruing long.