BELLS OF HISTORY AND ROMANCE: WITH PICTURES FROM FRANK A. MILLER’S VAST COLLECTION OF BELLS AT RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA: BY ELOISE ROORBACH

When the dawn creeps up from the darkly slumbering ocean this Christmas morn and speeds brightly around the world, circling it with a golden girdle of light, myriads of bells in many lands will awake and from steeple to steeple ring out the glad tidings that “The Messiah is King.” Each bell, catching the exultant peal of its neighbor, will vibrationally carry along the good news until the world-wide girdle of light will be hung with melody. This joyous pealing of bells on Christmas morn has come to be one of the most beloved features of this sacred festival, one in importance with the decking of our homes and churches with garlands of green, bright berries or flowers. Not a heart in New York but will throb with emotion when the sweet, familiar Christmas hymn is pealed forth by the chimes of Old Trinity, when the ten bells of St. Thomas float their anthems over the city housetops, when the carillon of Grace Church brings to remembrance the holy day. Little children all over America will be listening, bright-eyed and eager, for the glad ringing of Christmas bells—bells which follow the soft, melodious jingling of Kriss Kringle’s sleighbells! Little children of England will be listening for the voice of their old friend “Great Tom” of Lincoln, “Peter of York,” “Big Ben” of Westminster to announce the arrival of their day of days.

Bells, so dear to the hearts of Christian mankind because of their association with religious festivals, also from time immemorial have played a conspicuous part in pagan ceremonies. They have rung in historical events, enriched literature, colored romances, inspired architects, struck terror to the superstitious or given consolation. They have rejoiced with the rejoicing, mourned with the grieving, chanted with the praying of all nations. They have opened markets, announced guests, roused for danger, summoned to war, welcomed the victor. They have pealed merrily for rustic weddings, joyfully announced the birth of royal heirs, and tolled with muffled tone the
passing soul along his way. They have tinkled from the ankles of pagan dancing girls and from the sacrificial robes of Levitical high priests. They have sorrowfully mourned “The King is dead,” then loyally shouted “Long live the King.” In seventeen hundred and seventy-six they recorded our nation’s independence.

According to repute bells have often spoken to listening, expectant mankind. *Tobias*, said Dickens in his “Christmas Chimes,” heard them speak. When he was in trouble they said to him “Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart Toby;” and “Toby Veck, Toby Veck, job coming soon, Toby.” Charles Warren Stoddard in his “Bells of San Gabriel” bears testimony:

“And every note of every bell
Sang Gabriel, rang Gabriel!”

Longfellow declares, “I heard a heart of iron beating in the belfry tower.” Victor Hugo says that their pealing is an “opera of steeples.” They have also been called “the artillery of priests.”

How melodiously they sing in our poems, “Keeping time, time, time in a sort of Runic rhyme,” “What a world of happiness their harmony foretells.” How they ring through Schiller’s “Song of the Bells,” Longfellow’s “Bells of San Blas,” Bret Hart’s “Angelus.” Elaborate ceremonies have attended their christening; names of royal families, church dignitaries, saints, the Virgin Mary, even those of the Trinity have been bestowed upon them. Christian and pagan emblems have been engraved, embossed and inlaid with skilled, devoted fingers.

**THERE** seems little doubt that the first bells (which were also the first musical instruments) were but clapping rattles, disks of wood, bone or stone, requiring little craft to make and less to sound. The idea of bells may easily have come from the rattling of dried seeds in dried pods, or primitive man may have accidentally struck a piece of resilient stone with his club and noted its pleasing sound. The first hollowed bells fitted with tongues that struck the inner rim were square or rectangular in shape, thin plates of metal riveted together.

Bell casting came much later, and then developed the science of campanology. Bell founding flourished in many monasteries of the twelfth century, and several families of that time attained fame equal to the great violin makers. The Purdies of Salisbury cast the famous bell called “Peter of Exeter.” About the time of Henry the Eighth the Rudhalls of Gloucester won high honors for their bell casting. The art of bell founding is not understood very well even at this late day, and much uncertainty still attends the casting of every large bell.
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The tone of a bell depends very much upon the composition of metals of which it is made, and also upon the shape and the relation of the proportions of height, diameter and thickness. After casting, the tone can be improved somewhat—made flatter by turning a little off the inside by the sound bow, or sharper by cutting a little from the edge to reduce the diameter of the mouth—but this is uncertain work and sometimes ruins a bell. The toning requires as delicate treatment and wise handling as is necessary for violins. When in perfect tune a bell sounds a chord of five notes. The clapper striking against the bell gives the fundamental note, and notes one-third and one-fifth above this can be heard, also the octave above and the one below the fundamental note (which is called the hum note).

To Riverside, California, belongs the honor of housing the largest and finest historic collection of bells, as far as we know, in the world—a collection which can tell an almost uninterrupted story of the bell from the first crude flake of stone to the perfectly shaped, tuned, decorated, inscribed and signed example of the present day bell founder. The archeological value of such an assemblage of bells is only equaled by its value to the world of arts and crafts. There both historian and artist can lose themselves in the joys of research or in the mere delight of gazing upon the graceful forms, curious inscriptions, delicately wrought carvings, rich and varied colorings. This collection is the property of Mr. Frank A. Miller, and has been patiently gathered by him, with the discriminating help of his daughter and her husband, De Witt Hutchings, from the treasure houses of the world, from its highways and byways, from its celebrated and its obscure corners.

To reach the garden where the bells are hanging, a narrow, steep, window-tower stairway must be climbed. Where should old bells be resting, brooding of the past, but in a tower garden under the bright blue sky of day and the star-lighted sky of night, near that Camino Real, monumented by Fray Junipero Serra with the twenty-one Missions from out whose towers pealed the clarion message of bells dedicated to holiness, bells which ushered in a new civilization!

Mr. Miller’s collection of almost three hundred bells hangs in one of the courts of the Inn of the Bells. Two of the high walls of this hanging court are set with richly colored panels, ancient tiles, intricately carved marbles, escutcheons and coats of arms embedded after the manner of those in the staircase of the Bargelio Palace, Florence. Around the other two sides is an arched parapet, in each arch of which is hanging some wonderful old bell. One corner of this wall has been extended to form a campanile, a reproduction of the one at the Mission of San Antonio de Palatingwa surmounted by an image of St. Anthony.
of Padua. Clear from the ground a vigorous vine has sprung, twining its tendrils around these old bells, and each morning it lifts afresh, ethereally delicate chalices of blue, fragrant symbols of the Holy Grail. From pagan to Christian bell, this green vine has traveled, entwining itself in and out among the arches, running along the tiled walls, creeping even to the feet of Saint Anthony, until the bells of all nations and all faiths have been united—Nature’s ever living prophecy of the days when enmity will cease, when the many shall be one!

In this peaceful Garden of Bells are altar chimes from Rome hanging next to those from the temples of India, China and Japan; bells of Buddhist begging pilgrims, and those which rang the Angelus in sunny Spain; bells used by pilgrims when climbing the slopes of Fujiyama; bells from Scotland; bells that take one back to the days of warring Christian and Moslem, to the days when the name of Richard the Lion Hearted was still a fresh memory with the Saracens. There are bells taken from the necks of goats browsing on the Acropolis at Athens; Swiss cowbells, old sheep bells from Zermatt, and one that once hung from the neck of a sacred bullock in Ahmedabad; a camel bell from Peshawar, and a donkey bell from Cairo, a bell that tinkled to the stately tread of My Lord the Sacred Elephant of India; a castle Tocsin from Wurtemberg dated seventeen hundred and forty-six; a house bell from Russia cast before the reign of Peter the Great, and a “Potlatch” rattle used in the dances of Alaska Indians; also castanets of the eighteenth century used by dancing fakirs of India. There are gongs whose hoarse, discordant notes once echoed through fantastic temples of the Far East; house gongs from Tokio which announced the coming of guests; a very old prayer gong with tip of yak horn for a wand, from Thibet the “backbone of the world,” and a war gong from Borneo; one five hundred years old from China with inscriptions in old characters of the Ming Dynasty. A wonderful gong from Japan, once used in a sacred cha-no-yu, is beautifully ornamented with decorative characters and imperial chrysanthemums; the wooden sounding mallet has an inscription meaning “Single Heart.” Such gongs were used in the Daimyo or feudal days from sixteen hundred and three to eighteen hundred and sixty-seven. There is another tea ceremony gong made in the shape of the sacred foot of Buddha, ornamented with sacred lotus, a fine specimen of seventeenth century craft.

A conspicuous gong is from Pekin, China; it is a flat, circular sheet of bronze covered on both sides with extracts from the sacred writings of Confucius, from his work entitled “Change.” The worshipers read the words on this disk as from a book, occasionally striking it with
From a Photograph by Avery Edwin Field.

The Campanile Gateway of the "Inn of the Bells" at Riverside, California.
A CORNER OF THE BELL PERGOLA, FROM WHICH ARE SWINGING BELLS OF ALL ERAS AND COUNTRIES.

BELL PERGOLA IN OUTER COURT OF THE INN, AND RESTING PLACE TO VIEW THE BELLS.
A LINE OF THE MOST FAMOUS BELLS IN THE WORLD FROM EUROPE AND THE FAR EAST.

ARCHED PARAPET CARRYING OLD DATED BELLS FROM SPAIN, GERMANY AND SCOTLAND.
From a Photograph by Avery Edwin Field.

General View of the Court of the Bells at Mission Inn, Showing the Bell Tower, Arched Parapet, and in the Foreground a Copy of "Big Ben."
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a wand to attract the attention of the great teacher. This is about one hundred and fifty years old. Another large gong of especially rich and beautiful tone was once suspended from a tall pole overlooking the crowded districts of Tokio and used to sound fire warnings. Still another sweet-toned bronze gong is from a Chinese temple; its handle is formed of double dragons, and on its face is the phoenix, symbol of power and vigorous life, and the mystical ginseng plant, typifying virility and potency. A gong of hammered brass made by the Morros of the Island of Mindanao (one of the Philippines), in its early life rested upon the ground, hidden in the depths of a tropical jungle, and was beaten upon with heavy sticks in the celebration of strange savage festivities. Not far from this is a Mukden gong in the form of the eight-petaled lotus flower, and two hundred and fifty years ago summoned the faithful to worship in the temple. Its inscription in ancient Chinese characters translated reads, “Given to the holy God.” It was made in sixteen hundred and sixty, the thirty-ninth era of Chinese history, the golden age from a standpoint of arts and crafts. There is a large Dora gong from a Buddhist temple at Hakodate with the signature of its maker, Myochin, upon it; and a strange three-footed one of the eighteenth century from Kamakura beautifully ornamented with lotus buds. And one that was once thrust through the belt of a begging pilgrim as he walked the streets of Yokohama praying to God and man.

THE curator of the Inn, Francis S. Borton, with a patience possessed only by the antiquarian, pointed out beauties which otherwise might have been overlooked. He began with a bell which was simply a piece of phonolite (“clink stone”) suspended by a cord, which when beaten upon the raised boss with a small wooden mallet gives a clear metallic ring. Such a bell was in use as early as six hundred B.C. Mr. Borton drew attention to a beautifully molded bronze bell ornamented with a raised design of lotuses and music-loving dragons, and around the upper part were the snails of Buddha. A curved dragon formed the ears of this valuable bell. The cha-no-yu, or tea ceremony, in which this bell was used developed into a cult during the Shogunate of Ashikaga Yoshimasa in the fifteenth century.

The most valuable bell in Mr. Miller’s collection is bronze, large and sweet-toned; it has the distinction of being the oldest dated Christian bell in the world today, bearing a Latin inscription around the edge which translated reads, “Quintana and Salvador made me in the year of our Lord twelve hundred and forty-seven.” Near the top of the bell is its name, Maria Jacobi, signifying “Mary” (mother)
"of James" (the lesser). It bears the Greek monogram "I. H. S. X. P. S.," and is forty-six inches in circumference and twenty inches in height.

Noteworthy among others is a large green-bronze bell dated seventeen hundred and four, bearing the inscription, "To the honor and glory of God and the Virgin Mary of All Saints: Salvator and Francis Anthony of Montserrat, donors." Around the shoulders and barrel is a very elaborate, lacerlace tracery of vines and medallions with inscriptions and figures of saints. Below are the names of donors and dedicatory inscriptions to saints. It is an unusually fine example of bell craft.

A large iron bell, resting under the shadow of the campanile of St. Anthony, is from the church of St. Francis at Molokai. For many years this broken bell summoned those unfortunate creatures imprisoned on that fatal island, "alive in death," to listen to the beloved voice of Father Damien as he comforted and blessed the souls he gave his life to help. It is surely fitting that this bell should find a permanent resting place in this collection at Mission Inn under the shadow of the cross on Mt. Rubidoux, reared in memory of another immortal son of St. Francis—Fray Junípero Serra.

Of interest to metal workers is a very rare iron Angelus bell from Zaragoza, with Gothic lettering of the fourteenth century. The letters of the inscription were evidently all made separately and then stuck on the core of the bell mold, as evidenced by their great unevenness. There is a curious mass bell from Stuttgart whose four bells in one denote the four gospels. In the fourth arch of the parapet is a beautiful bronze bell from the old German military citadel of Spandau, ornamented in bold relief with an eagle grasping fasces in its talons. The ears of the bell are formed by a group of lions couchant. The words Ton Gis guarantee the purity of metal and tone.

There is a Lama’s bell from Jantzi, Thibet, called "Dilbuh." The tip of the handle is in the shape of a dorgee (from which Darjeeling gets its name); the eagle claw is to destroy evil; the head is of Dolma, goddess of mercy; about the shoulders of the bell runs a Sanskrit prayer, meaning, "In thee, O Buddha, do we put our trust."

And so each of the three hundred bells that are swinging from pergola and arch in the Garden of the Bells, at the Inn of the Bells, might be enumerated, each history recorded, each bit of ancient, patiently wrought decoration described. Sweet-toned, discordant, strident, cracked and muffled voices please or startle the listener as he touches these bells with wand of wood, bone or metal. Chapters of earth’s history, of its arts and sciences are here recorded as in the pages of a mighty book, in hieroglyphics strange and beautiful.