

Gloria In



Excelsis

SAY, heavenly muse, shall not thy sacred vein Afford a present to the infant God. Hast thou no verse, or hymn, or solemn strain To welcome him to this, His new abode?

So sang John Milton. And the question recurs to one at this season of the year, when Christmas cheer is visibly displayed to our allured eyes, while our purse-strings are loosened and our hearts are enlarged by a feeling of philanthropy and benevolence (let us not say charity—that is a cold word for Christmas). As an answer to the poet's question we involuntarily think of the "carol" as the one distinctive "verse or hymn or solemn strain" connected with the Merrie Christmastide.

That many of the popular Christmas carols were really inspired by the heavenly muse is a certainty, but others suggest more definitely the inspiration of Bacchus or Sir John Barleycorn.

The subject of "Carols" is such an extensive one if both or all kinds are reviewed that it will be wise to limit the carols of revelry to an example or two and proceed to a sketch of what is generally understood by a Christmas carol—that is, verse relating to the nativity. As a good instance of the carol of "ye merrie folke" take the following:

A bone, God wot!
Sticks in my throat—
Without I have a draught
Of corne ale,
Nappy and stale,
My life lies in great waste.
Some ale or beer,
Gentle butler,
Some liquor thou shew,
Such as you mash,
Our throats to wash,
The best ware that you brew.
And this is very popular:
All you that are good fellows
Come hearken to my song;
I know you do not hate good cheer,
Nor liquor that is strong.
Plum porridge, roast beef and mince pies
Stand smoking on the board,
With other brave varieties
Our master doth afford.

This is no miser's feast,
Although that things be dear,
God grant the founder of this feast
Each Christmas keep good cheer.
The close alliance of the spiritual and the material in this carol is interesting:
Now that the time is come wherein
Our Savior Christ was born,
The larders full of beef and pork,
The garners filled with corn,
As God hath plenty to thee sent,
Take comfort of thy labors,
And let it never thee repent,
To feast thy needy neighbors.

Earliest Christmas Carols.

Ever since that eventful time when the star shone over the manger and the kings came to worship at the lowly crib, mankind has sung carols of gladness and of joy. There is a species of theologian which argues on the folly of celebrating the festive Christmas, because through the higher criticism it has discovered that the accompanying desiderata of frost, snow and cold are absurd, for Christ was really born at such and such a time. Let them be excommunicated and with them the all-wise ones who say: "Little children, there is no Santa Claus."

When those simple shepherds sat together that night, and no doubt passed the time discussing the fleece of this sheep and the weight of that, when they one by one told their tale of how they had visited such a place or met such an one, when they gossiped about the most recent event in their simple society or joked one another about their love affairs, then—for the first time—was a carol heard.

Picture them—not as we are wont to do, as though they were prophets or seers—but picture them as ordinary human beings working for a living, herding sheep, talking commonplace and agreeing or disagreeing over trifling affairs. Then imagine the puzzling of their untutored minds as to the remarkable appearance of the heavens. What could this star mean?

And then surprises more surprising! What is that? Listen! Nearer and nearer it comes and fuller and fuller grows the volume of rapturous song until the whole world is filled with that first great carol—"Gloria in excelsis Deo. Et in terra pax hominibus bone voluntatis." "Glory to God in the highest! And on earth peace, good will to men!"

Carols of Praise.

The carol is said to have been imported into England from Italy and it has undergone many changes since its first appearance, after the Norman conquest. Some carol writers have chosen legendary ideas for their work and they are immensely interesting. In this sketch there will be space only for a few specimens, and, inasmuch as many of them were very long, it will be necessary to abbreviate. One of the most interesting on account of its simplicity and sincerity is the following:

God bless the master of this house,
The mistress also,
And all the little children
That round the table go.
Another very famous carol is the one beginning:

The Lord at first did Adam make
Out of the dust and clay,
And in his nostrils breathed life,
Even as the scriptures say.
There are seven stanzas, eight lines each, in this carol, and it carefully recites the story of the apple episode which caused so much trouble in the Garden of Eden. Each verse ends with a chorus like this:

Now, let good Christians all begin
An holy life to live,
And to rejoice and merry be
For this is Christmas eve.

One of the most popular of the early English carols is entitled "All You that Are to Mirth Inclined." It contains sixteen stanzas of four lines each, exclusive of the refrain, which is sung to each verse:

And to redeem our souls from thrall,
He is the Saviour of us all.
It is amusing to read the following old carol, which was written in deep sincerity and with much style. Here are a few lines selected from various stanzas:

The spotless virgin and her guide
Went long time seeking up and down
To find them lodging in the town.
Of course, the word "silly" is here used in its older meaning, "simple."

Another very popular one, which is heard in the country places of Great Britain, is the one about the "Angel Gabriel," a favorite theme:

The Angel Gabriel from God
Was sent to Galilee,
Unto a virgin fair and free,
Whose name was called Mary.
Each verse ends with the chorus:
Then, sing we all, both great and small,
Noel, Noel, Noel,
We may rejoice to hear the voice
Of the Angel Gabriel.
The story of the nativity is told in five eight-line stanzas, and the last one is often seen on Christmas cards:

Good people all, both great and small,
The which do hear my voice,
With one accord let's praise the Lord,
And in our hearts rejoice.

It is safe to assert that the favorite English carol of Christmastide, and the one most often sung nowadays, is:

God rest you, merrie gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ, our Saviour,
Was born upon this day,
To save us all from Satan's power,
When we were gone astray.
Chorus:
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy.

1st CANTO.

See the conquering ho- - ro comes, Sound the trumpets, beat the drums;
See the conquering ho- - ro comes, Sound the trumpets, beat the drums;
See the conquering ho- - ro comes, Sound the trumpets, beat the drums;
See the conquering ho- - ro comes, Sound the trumpets, beat the drums;

FULL CHORUS.
Sports pre-pare, the lau - rel bring, Songs of tri- umph to him sing.
Sports pre-pare, the lau - rel bring, Songs of tri- umph to him sing.
Sports pre-pare, the lau - rel bring, Songs of tri- umph to him sing.
Sports pre-pare, the lau - rel bring, Songs of tri- umph to him sing.

For Jesus Christ, our Saviour, was born on Christmas day.

It was the singing of this particular carol that so annoyed Mr. Scrooge in Dickens' immortal story, "A Christmas Carol," that he seized a ruler and threw it at the offending chorister, who was fortunately discreet enough to have sung through a keyhole.

Legendary Carols.

The following very rare carol was formerly sung, hundreds of years ago, indeed, at the hall of Tara, and doubtless was accompanied by the ever-famous "narp, that once—the soul of music shed." It is the best and most simply devout of the few known carols of Ireland:
Christ on my right hand,
Christ on my left hand,
Christ in the heart of all who heed me,
Christ in the mouth of all who speak to me,
Christ in the eye of all who see me,
Christ in the ear of all who hear me.

When Count Zinzendorf came to this country first, to visit the Moravians, he arrived at a little settlement in Pennsylvania and conducted a service there in a stable on Christmas eve and he began by the singing of this fine old hymn—a veritable Christmas carol:
Nicht Jerusalem, sondern Bethlehem,
Aus dem Komet, was uns frommet
Nicht Jerusalem.

The name of the place since that time has been Bethlehem (Pennsylvania). The music appears herewith:

GREGORY'S 4TH METRE. (3, 5, 8, 5, Trochaic.) Adam Dresse, 1582
Jesu, tuus rex.

46, A.

Here is a good type of a really old carol: When Christ was born o' Mary free In Bethlem in that fayre cyte, Angells sangen wt mirth and gle In excelsis gloria.

There is a fine swing to the lines of the next carol and a treatment of the nativity theme which was very popular. It might be described as the "carol-ballad style:"

As I rode out this endenes (last) night,
Of three joll sheppardes I saw a sight,
And all aboute their told a star
Shone bright.
They sange forth, ferlow,
So merrell the sheppardes their pipes
can blow.

But one of the most poetical carols along this line is this one and it may be interesting to note that it has been set to music by no less a master than Johannes Brahms:

There has been a very popular carol, known as the "Cherry Tree" carol, which is found in all the works on carols in libraries:

Joseph was an old man,
And an old man was he
When he wedded Mary
In the land of Galilee.

This carol continues through many verses and is worth looking up. It is too long to print here.

Another of the old favorites is:
I saw three ships come sailing in
On Christmas day, on Christmas day
I saw three ships come sailing in
On Christmas day in the morning.

Carols in Other Countries.

In Sweden, where the people are full of musical temperament, and where religion has surely secured music as hot handmaid, the early hours of Christmas morn are greeted with these words, which will come with irresistible force to those living in this country and will send their thoughts flying homeward:

Vår Herrel, siona morgonstund,
Som af profeters heiliga mun
Åross bebödad vorden
Du stora dag, du stilla dag,
På hvilken himlen välobad
Annå besöker jorden.
Enga
Sjunga
Med dragarna.
Sig försånna
Jordens söner.
Kring den störste af dess söner.

Another of the famous carols, and one which is sung in many Sunday schools of the United States, is the beautiful story of King Wenceslaus. The text in its usual form is as follows:

Good King Wenceslaus looked out
On the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about,
Cold and crisp and even.
An old Dutch carol starts off in this remarkably imaginative way:

There comes a vessel laden
And on its highest gunwale
Mary holds the rudder,
The angel steers it on,
which finds a counterpart in this, a type of the sixteenth century ballad music:
There comes a ship far sailing then,
Saint Michael was the steersman,
Saint John sat in the stern,
Our Lord harped, our lady sang
And all the bells of Heaven they rang
On Christ's Sunday at morn.
A favorite old round in early days was the "Bridgroom" carol:

Frankincense and Myrrh
When the bridegroom came,
Frankincense and Myrrh
When the bridegroom came,
Frankincense and Myrrh
When the bridegroom came,
And the Lord is born in Bethlehem.

And yet another, which is credited to the people of Yorkshire and was supposed to be a charm against evil results from burns when said fervently and devoutly three times:

There were three angels came from the west,
The one brought fire,
The other brought frost,
And the other brought the book of Jesus Christ.

The following carol is said to be of Scandinavian origin and is often met with:
Christ was born on Christmas day,
Wrench the holy, twine the hay,
Christus natus heilic.
The Babe, the Son, the Holy One of Mary,
The God, the Lord, by all adored forever.

And so on through several verses. This article would not be complete in any sense without an excerpt from the "Lullaby" carol, which was written some time in the sixteenth century:

Lulla, la lulla, lulla lullaby,
My sweet little babe, what meaneest thou to cry?
He still, my blessed babe, though cause thou hast to mourn,
Whose blood, most innocent, the cruel king
And he, alas, behold what slaughter he doth make,
Shedding the blood of infants all, sweet Saviour, for Thy sake,
A King is born, they say, which King this king would kill.
Oh, wo, and woful heavy day, when wretches have their will.

It will be found on studying up the ancient carols that King Herod came in for his share of attention, as in the above lines.

Personal Reminiscence.

A personal reminiscence may be permitted here. The writer's most potent recollection of an old country Christmas

was this: A special permission to occupy with a younger brother the spare room, with its mahogany furniture and its "iron" windows. This was quite a promotion. A back room of the house was our regular sleeping apartment. But on the occasion of the annual visit of that famous personage whom we knew as "Father Christmas," instead of Santa Claus, we were allowed the special privilege, sacred indeed to us, of the spare room.

Across the street was the magnificent old church of St. Ann's, a stately edifice built on classic lines and venerable with age. Here we were wont to see the military companies leave the church on Sundays and watch the "red coats" march up Church Street and home to their barracks. Another feature of interest was the exit of the Rancourly family, the earl and countess, and the dowager countess, nobility deservedly beloved because of their charitable deeds and their democratic simplicity.

How thrilling was the music of old St. Ann's when those bells pealed out on Christmas morning. Sleep soon forsook the youthful eyes and eagerly we waited for the sounds of music. Not long did we have to wait, for the bells had begun to ring at 4 o'clock, and at about 4 we heard those glorious strains come from the band, the band of brass instruments, those strains which today ring true as of old:

"Hark! the Herald Angels sing!
Glory to the new born King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.

Not to the tune by Mendelssohn. No, no, older by far than that. The tune of "See the Conquering Hero Come!" by Handel, written in the fine old oratorio, "Judas Maccabaeus!" The tune is reproduced on this page with its own words, but the reader can easily study the beautiful setting by arranging the well known words in this way:

1. See the conquering hero comes
(Hark the Herald Angels sing.)
2. Sound the trumpets, beat the drums,
3. Glory to the new born King.
4. Sports prepare, the laurel bring,
5. Peace on earth and mercy mild,
6. Songs of triumph rehearsing,
7. God and sinners reconciled.

And after each half-verse following, return to the line,

"Hark! the herald angels sing,
Then came the music of the glorious old Christmas hymn, to its famous tune, "Adexte Fideles," which has been erroneously named in many modern hymnals, "Portuguese Hymn." This is such a popular carol that we append two verses, the Latin text and its translation. It is the only Christmas carol on which Catholic and Protestant unite.

Adexte, fideles,
Gaud. triumphantes,
Venite, venite in Bethlehém,
Natum videte,
Regem angelorum,
venite adorare,
Venite adorare,
Venite adorare, Dominum

Deum de Deo,
Lumen de lumine,
Genitum patre visceribus,
Deum verum
Genitum non factoremque factum
Venite adoremus, etc., etc.

O, come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O, come, ye O, come, ye, to Bethlehém!
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of Angels;
O, come, let us adore Him,
O, come, let us adore Him,
O, come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord,
God of God,
Light of Light,
Lo, He abhors not the virgin's womb;
Very God,
Begotten, not created,
O, come, let us adore Him, etc., etc.

Then came the beautiful advent hymn, "Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending," to the old tune, "Helmley," which can be found in most hymnals, and after that the great English Christmas hymn:

Christians, awake; salute the happy morn,
When on the Saviour of mankind was born,
Haste to adore the mystery of love,
Which hosts of angels chanted from above;
With them the joyful tidings first begun,
Of God incarnate and the Virgin's son.

This music was always acapella, the band playing a verse and then the chorus era singing one.

With the warm glare of the torches in the hands of the carolists and the singing and the playing, the frost and the snow, there awoke a memory of Christmas which shall never be forgotten as long as the old world bears the first great Christmas carol: "Gloria in excelsis!"

THOMAS J. KELLY.