

THE PILOT

Southern Pines North Carolina

"In taking over The Pilot no changes are contemplated. We will try to keep this a good paper. We will try to make a little money for all concerned. Wherever there seems to be an occasion to use our influence for the public good we will try to do it. And we will treat everybody alike."—James Boyd, May 23, 1941.

"I pray you, sirs, both more and less, Sing these carols in Christemas."

So wrote John Awdlay, the blind and deaf chaplain of Haughmond Abbey in Shropshire, about the year 1426, showing that by this time, the custom of carol singing was well established in England.

But praise of "Dan Noel" can be traced back at least two centuries earlier. There is an Anglo-Norman carol, which was perhaps sung in the days of King John, in which Noel, after enjoining upon every man to keep open house and to furnish his neighbor drink "until he nods his head and sleeps by day," concludes with the old Saxon exchange of healths: "Wessey!" and "Drinc-hey!"

So The Pilot is heeding the good John Awdlay's admonition, as in former years, bringing readers a Christmas editorial page on which carols claim a large share of the space.

And, because the older carols are among the loveliest that exist, there are verses here 300 to 500 years old—songs and hymns from centuries utterly different from our own in almost every aspect of our daily lives, but sharing with us, unchanged, the joy and wonder of the Saviour's birth and the warmth and jollity of the Christmas season.

The Birth Of Christ

I come from heaven to tell
The best nowells that ever befell;
To you their tidings true I bring,
And I will of them say and sing

This day to you is born a child,
Of Mary meek and virgin mild;
That blessed bairn, benign and kind,
Sall you rejoice, baith heart and mind.

It is the Lord Christ, God and man,
He will do for you what He can;
Himself your Saviour He will be,
Fra sin and hell to make you free.

Ye sall Him find but mark or wring,
Full simple in a crib lying;
So lies He whilk you has wrocht,
And all this warld made of nocht.

Let us rejoice and be blithe,
And with the herds go full swithe,
And see what God of His grace has done,
Through Christ to bring us to His throne.

O my dear heart, young Jesus sweet,
Prepare Thy cradle in my sprite,
And I sall rock Thee in my heart,
And never mair from Thee depart.

Glory be to God eternally,
Whilk gave His only Son for me,
The angels' joys for to hear,
The gracious gift of this New Year.
(About 1567)

What Child Is This?

What Child is this, Who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary!

Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading:
Nails, spear, shall pierce Him through,
The Cross be borne, for me, for you:
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary!

So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh,
Come peasant, king, to own Him;
The King of kings salvation brings;
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
Raise, raise the song on high,
The Virgin sings her lullaby:
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The Babe, the Son of Mary!
(English air)

Wassail, Good Cheer with the Lord of Misrule

It is now Christmas and not a cup of drink must pass without a carol!
The beasts, fowl, fish come to a general execution, and the corn is ground to dust for the bakehouse and the pastry. Cards and dice purge many a purse, and the youth show their agility in shoeing of the wild mare.

Now good cheer and welcome and God be with you (and against the New Year provide for the presents). The Lord of Misrule is no mean man for his time and the guests of the high table must lack no wine. The lusty bloods must look about them like men, for piping and dancing puts away much melancholy.

Stolen venison is sweet and a fat coney is worth money; pitfalls are set for small birds and a woodcock hangs himself in the gin, a good fire heats all the house and a full alm's-basket stills the beggar's prayers. The maskers and the mummings make the merry sport, and musicians now make their instruments speak out; a good song is worth the hearing. In sum, it is a holy time, a duty in Christians in remembrance of Christ, and customs among friends for the remembrance of good fellowship.

In brief, I thus conclude it: I hold Christmas a memory of Heaven's love and the world's peace; the mirth of the honest and the meeting of the friendly.

—Nickolas Brenton. "Fantasticks," 1626

In Excelsis Gloria

When Christ was born of Mary free,
In Bethlehem, in that fair city,
Angels sungen with mirth and glee,
"In excelsis gloria!"

Herdsmen beheld these angels bright,
To them appeared with great light,
And said "God's Son is born this night,
"In excelsis gloria!"

This King is come to save His kind,
As in Scripturs we may find;
Therefore this song have we in mind,
"In excelsis gloria!"

Then, Lord, for Thy great grace,
Grant us the bliss to see Thy face,
Where we may sing to Thee solace,
"In excelsis gloria!"
(About 1500)

The Boar's Head

Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Tidings good I think to tell.

The boar's head that we bring here
Betokeneth a Prince withouten peer
Is born this day to buy us dear,
Nowell.

A boar is a sovereign beast,
And acceptable in every feast;
So might Thy Lord be to most and least,
Nowell.

The boar's head we bring with song,
In worship of Him that thus sprung
Of a virgin to redress all wrong,
Nowell.
(Temp. Henry VII or VIII)

I Sing A Song

Of a rose, a lovely rose,
And of a rose I sing a song.

Hearken to me, both old and ying
How a rose began to spring;
A fairer rose to my liking
Sprang there never in king's land.

Six branches are on that rose beam,
They be both bright and sheen;
The rose is called Mary, heaven's queen,
Of her bosom a Blossom sprung.
(15th Cent.)



Merry Christmastide

God give ye merry Christmastide,
Ye gentle people all!
And in your merry-making may
No evil chance befall:
Rejoice! For once at Bethlehem
While shepherds knelt to pray,
Our blessed Master Jesus Christ
Was born on Christmas Day!

Ye hang the twining winter green,
The glad home fires ye light,
And cheery Merry Christmas keep
With hearts and voices bright;

But in a stall at Bethlehem,
Where simple shepherds pray,
Our blessed Master Jesus Christ
Was born on Christmas Day!

God give ye merry Christmastide,
And give ye all to see
How blessed 'tis to give and know
The grace of charity;
Rejoice! For once at Bethlehem,
To give his life away,
Our blessed Master Jesus Christ
Was born on Christmas Day!
(Old English)

Old, Yet Always New

One of the most fascinating aspects of Christmas carols is the extraordinary mingling of paganism and Christianity they contain.

There is reverence and revel, worship and frolicking, austerity, suffering and gay feasting and fun. Often the two viewpoints are combined in the same song and we find such seeming absurdities, even irreverence, as the boar's head, supreme delicacy of the Christmas feast, used as a symbol of Christ in the carol of that name, and the words, "Bring us good ale," set to the tune of an Annunciation hymn.

It is possible to find in this jumble an almost perfect image of the times, those days, of Medieval England especially, when the carols first blossomed and then grew as grew the history of those times.

Not only does the story of the carols epitomize the struggle of the church to overcome the pagan inheritance and instincts of men, but the historical changes, the customs and ideas of Old England, can be traced through these songs.

The date of Christmas itself was chosen because it corresponded with the time of the pagan festival of the winter solstice, celebrating the end of Winter and the first stirrings of Spring.

Then, as Christianity took root, in the early days of the Church in England, rules were made against dancing and processions at Christmas-time, in an attempt to quell the old pagan rites.

A hundred years later, decrees against "disguising" and the presentation of "filthy plays" at this time were issued. But whether because the people rebelled or the clergy took a different view, perhaps attacking the problem more subtly, when St. Augustine came along, the Church started to take over the Christmas drama and celebrations.

Mystery plays were given; singing and the composition of religious songs were encouraged. Important personages, many of the greatest poets,

wrote carols, as well as wandering ballad-singers. Several British kings, notably Henry VIII, wrote both verses and music for Christmas parties. Significantly, these carols were written in English, instead of the Latin of the clerics or the French of earlier court life, showing greater participation of the simple people, as the first stirrings of democracy began to be felt in Old England.

The new freedom to sing and play at Christmas was taken up with a will by the people. Soon it swept far beyond any religious leadership or control and the hymns began to be infiltrated by the dearly-loved old songs of hospitality and good cheer.

The effect was to bring a deeply human note into the carols, a note not only of gayety and friendliness, but also of human sympathy and participation in the emotional implications of the Christmas story. Human drama crept in, human pity, human joy and human suffering, and the carols grew in depth, in poignancy and delicacy. They expressed, as never before nor perhaps since those early days, the heart-song and heart-break of humanity.

And so they have lasted to this day: precious, old, yet though sung year after year, always new. The Puritans did their best to stop them. The Church, which had benefitted from their introduction, tried to freeze them into a rigid mould or to drown them in a welter of ponderous anthems. In more recent years, commercialism has laid its heavy hand on Christmas. The effect has been slight.

As ever, when the magic time draws near, people gather to sing carols. The merry gentlemen come, the children bring their torches, the master and the mistress of the house and all the goodly company follow the light of the Star of Bethlehem, to hear once more with shepherds the message of peace and hope the angels bring.

Who Can Forget?

Who can forget — never to be forgot —
The time, that all the world in slumber lies,
When like the stars the singing angels shot
To earth, and heaven awaked all his eyes,
To see another sun at midnight rise
On earth? Was ever sight of pareil fame
For God before, man like Himself did frame,
But God Himself now like a mortal was became.

A Child He was, and had not learnt to speak,
That with His word the world before did make,
His mother's arms Him bore, He was so weak,
That with one hand the vaults of heaven could shake.
(Giles Fletcher 1588-1623)

Dame, Get Up

Dame, get up and bake your pies,
Bake your pies, bake your pies,
Dame, get up and bake your pies
On Christmas Day in the morning.

Dame, what makes your maidens lie,
Maidens lie, maidens lie,
Dame, what makes your maidens lie
On Christmas Day in the morning?

Lo, How A Rose

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
From tender stem has sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming
As men of old have sung.
It came, a flow'ret bright,
Amid the cold of winter
When half-spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
The Rose I had in mind;
With Mary we behold it,
The Virgin Mother kind.
To show God's love aright
She bore to men a Saviour,
When half-spent was the night.
—Michael Praetorius
(German, 15th Cent.)

Dame, what makes your ducks to cry,
Ducks to cry, ducks to cry,
Dame, what makes your ducks to cry
On Christmas Day in the morning?

Up, Maids, no longer lie,
Ducklings all have ceased to cry
Good Dame has baked them in her pie
On Christmas Day in the morning.

Grains of Sand

One Word Rhymes With Christmas

Always one to stress the practical, we would point out that Christmas presents may provide much pleasure if carefully selected.

Books, for instance. You can read them all first, if you buy them early enough. The only drawback — minor — is you end up by keeping some of them and by feeling like apologizing as you Christmas wrap some of the others and send them.

The latter was the case with a small innocent-looking volume, tastefully decorated. It lured the reader inside and then—Whoppo!

It was about gardens, purporting to tell you what to do month by month. Not so bad, you'd think. But oh the orders it gave, the rules it laid down! "Do this, don't do that! Look out for this, spray that, cut this, BURN that!" Oh my, oh my. A devil and a bully, this little book.

Turning quickly to December—as the last straw, so to speak, we found, for a start, a quotation, (misquoted, by the way) from Master Shakespeare who surely knew a lot about gardens, he and Mistress Hathaway.

"Then heigh-ho the holly," sang Master S., "This life is most jolly," in the snide refrain to that grim piece: "Blow, blow, thou winter wind." A mean song for gardeners, sung or quoted.

Anyway, there sits this bait, this come-on to a most disagreeable book. If Rules For December had continued in rhyme—which it didn't—it might have gone something like this:

"Look lively! Deck the hall!" (Wait till the berries begin to fall And, before they squash all over the floors,
Stop and go outdoors.)

"Remember;
Lots to be done in the garden in December."

"Don't be benighted,
This is the time when you should be foresighted."

(At least enough so you won't be caught short)

Later on with your garden in a mess when your ort
To have it ready for spring planting,

If you can bear the thort.)
Now: "Sharpen lawnmower before spring rush;
Store vegetables carefully avoiding crush."

"Use chimney soot
To make things root,"

(Note: get the sweep to sweep the chimney,
Unless you yourself are that nimble.)

(Of course, this week a garden is handy as a way of stopping Commands that you go Christmas shopping—

As a change from pleading that street music

Is inevitably going to make you sick,

You decide you've absolutely got to see the county agent,

Only he'll be out watching the Christmas pageant,
Or doing HIS Christmas shopping,
Or wropping.)

"Plant bulbs, get your roses pruned."
(Last time you did it they were runed.)

"House plants mean plenty fuss,"
(You're telling us.)

"Stick to mistletoe and holly;
Hang them the last thing," (by golly)

"If you want them bright and jolly."

In fact, it's folly
And, we feel, definitely benighted

At Christmas-time to be foresighted.

Frinstance, how can you bear to think of a garden

In December? Friend, we ask your pardon

For giving you this book. My land!

As irrelevant as a desert island, A peninsula or even an isthmus Is a garden at Christmas!

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