



### The Songs of Christmas

(London Calling)

Every year, as December comes round, church choirs all over the world begin to practise the Christmas hymns. In villages and towns the old words are sung to the old tunes in church and chapel, as the last preparations for the festival are being made in the homes round about, as the holly is being cut in the woods, the fattened poultry is plucked, the cake is baked, and the gifts are wrapped in their brightly coloured paper.

And every Christmas listener all round the globe tune-in to the inspiring carol service which is broadcast from the Chapel of King's College, Cambridge, and listen with us to the old hymns which belong to all the Christmases of our childhood as they swell out across the world, telling once again of the Babe Who was born in Bethlehem.

Who gave us these hymns and carols? We know and love them as part of our common heritage, but if the people who wrote them could come knocking back to King's College Chapel this Christmas, as the chorists' voices rise pure and sweet, we should think them a very strange company indeed. Men and women of all ages, in queer, ancient costumes, from all over Britain—and some from beyond the sea.

Christmas is the children's festival, and so it is rather fitting that children should have had a hand in the making of some of our Christmas hymns. There were the two small boys who lived in Londonderry, in the middle of the last century, and like so many children found it difficult to understand the Creed when it was said in church. Their godmother, Mrs. C. F. Alexander, hit upon the idea of writing a hymn to give a picture in words of what was meant by each difficult part. Most of the 400 hymns that she wrote during her lifetime have been forgotten, but the one that she wrote to explain 'He suffered under Pontius Pilate'—'There is a Green Hill Far Away'—is sung during almost every Good Friday service for children, while the charming simplicity of 'Once in Royal David's City' we owe to her efforts to explain to these two small boys what is meant by 'Who was born of the Virgin Mary'.

Then there is the young American boy, Edward Hamilton Sears, whose parents were descended from Pilgrim Fathers and who at the age of ten was working in the fields near his home at Sandisfield, Massachusetts, and as he worked composed two verses of poetry. He had no paper or pencil with him, so he searched for a piece of chalk

preserved from death at the hands of murderous mobs, as he criss-crossed England and Wales on horseback during his preaching-wanderings 200 years ago. But it is all the joy that he always felt in living that he has put into this Christmas carol, which he first wrote as 'Hark how the welkin rings!' and afterwards altered to the opening words we know so well.



A carol has really a dancing origin, and right in the beginning it was meant for people who wanted to dance and sing in a ring, like the children sing.

Here we go round the Mulberry Bush. There is 'The Holly and the Ivy', for instance, a song which began, it is thought, far back in the pagan days, as a singing dance for lads and lassies, the masculine holly and the feminine ivy. A song probably already popular during the great pagan midwinter festival, before Christianity came to alter many of the words and give it new life, to be handed on by word of mouth from generation to generation until we can claim that this is a Gloucestershire contribution to our Christmas! A Mrs. Clayton of Chipping Camden gave Cecil Sharp the words and melody that we shall sing this Christmas.

Another carol, of which a rather beautiful story is told, is 'In Dulci Jubilo'—Now let us sing with mirth and joy! This is an old German carol translated into English in the year that Henry VIII married Anne of Cleves. The story goes that in the Christmas of 1366 angels appeared to Henry Duce, a mystic of those times. They were dancing and singing this carol, and the bemused man, drawn into the joyous throng, danced with them, and in the morning, remembering the words they had sung, he wrote them down.

In after years they were set to music by Johann Sebastian Bach,

and it is to his tune that we hear this legendary song of the angels as it swells out from King's College Chapel at Christmas.

'God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen', with its magnificent tune, is another one of those numerous carols which have been passed down from generation to generation by word-of-mouth, and this one is particularly a London song, a carol sung in the old London streets as the holly went up.

But it is from the little town of East Grimstead in Sussex with its tree-bordered main street and ancient, square-towered church that what is probably our oldest carol of all has come.

For 'Good King Wenceslas' was even then 1,000 years old when James Mason Neale translated it from the Greek, when he was Warden of Sackville College and lassies, the masculine holly there a century ago, putting it to the tune of what was really an Easter carol.

So the stories come thick and fast with almost every Christmas hymn you can mention. In the deep midwinter, written by the strange, melancholy Christina Rossetti, who, though she was a London girl, wrote into these verses the love and knowledge of the country she had learned during childhood visits to Little Missenden in Buckinghamshire.

'While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night', one of the six hymns first admitted into the permanent use of the Church of England, and composed partly by Nahum Tate, the Poet Laureate, who died in a debtor's prison, and partly by Nicholas Brady, Royal Chaplain to William and Mary, whose sermons on occasions of national grief or rejoicing were thundered out from the pulpit of his church in the ancient, historic, jumbled town of Richmond. 'Past Three O'clock and a cold frosty morning!'—the old English watchman's carol, beloved of the Lon-

# Ralph Fixes Things Up

By Dorothy Boys Kilian

It was Christmas Eve but the group of people sitting on the floor in the Reeds' living-room certainly weren't in a festive mood.

'Doggonit,' Dad exclaimed as he stared gloomily at the shiny tracks and the motionless cars of a new electric train. 'What's wrong with this thing anyway?'

'We've put it together exactly according to directions, I'm sure we have,' fifteen-year-old Rick insisted.

'Well, something's got to be done,' said Mom, looking in from the kitchen where she was stuffing the turkey. 'Little Jackie's been praying for that train for months, and how'll he feel tomorrow morning if the thing won't run?'

'Maybe Ralph can help. He's coming by for me in a few minutes, you know,' said Wilma, the pretty big sister of the family.

'Oh, him!' Rick was scornful. 'That guy from the big city with his socks and ties and handker-

chiefs that match! What does he know about motors?'

'Rick!' Mom reproved.

'Oh, I know you all think of him as an outsider,' Wilma said. 'If you only really knew him better! Mom, I do wish you'd let me ask him to breakfast tomorrow.'

'I'm sorry dear, but I just don't think he'd fit in.'

The doorbell rang. Wilma answered it and she and Ralph exchanged happy hellos.

Rick immediately threw out the challenge to the tall, blond, well-dressed young man. 'We can't make this train go. Can you tell what's wrong with it?'

'Maybe,' Ralph said quietly. 'I used to have a train something like this.'

'Look out, that cotton batting stuff will stick to your trousers,' Dad warned.

'That's snow, and the snow around here is clean.'

Dad looked slightly startled.

Wilma smiled. She remembered how impressed Ralph had been by the whiteness of the drifts even on Main street last night.

'The flakes are practically sooty before they even reach the ground in Chicago,' he had said.

'Tracks are O. K.?' Ralph straightened up. Then he picked up the shiny black engine carefully and turned it over and over. He put it up to eye level and peered into its workings.

'The professional touch!' Rick muttered.

'There may be oil in the commutator,' Ralph said. 'That sometimes happens with a new engine.'



He picked up the shiny black engine carefully and turned it over and over. He put it up to eye level and peered into its workings.

### 'Christkindli' Is Swiss Counterpart of Santa

Santa Claus plays a very insignificant part in the Swiss celebration of Christmas, observed mostly on December 24. It is Christkindli, the Christ Child, who makes the rounds of Swiss homes on Christmas Eve.

This radiant angel is said to have come from the North, travelling on a fair-like sleigh pulled by reindeer, much in the fashion of our Santa. Christkindli brings good Swiss children a beautiful tree, and many gifts. Like Santa, he stresses obedience and admonishes naughty youngsters.

### A Christmas Prayer This Day of Joy

As with gladness men of old Did the guiding star behold; As with joy they hailed the light, Leading onward, beaming bright; So, most gracious Lord, may we Evermore be led to Thee.



As with joyous steps they sped To that lowly manger bed, There to bend the knee before Him whom heaven and earth adore; So may we with willing feet Ever seek thy mercy seat.



As they offered gifts most rare At that manger rude and bare, So may we with holy joy, Pure, and free from sin's alloy, All our costliest treasures bring, Christ, to Thee, our heavenly King. Amen



## 'twas the night before washday...



'twas the night before Washday When spirits are low Just thinking of Monday And work we hate so—

The clothes were all sorted And put in to soak But the scrubbing tomorrow— The thought was no joke!

Then thinking of Christmas I cheered up a bit. An idea struck me— I cried "This is it!"—

So clipping this ad' From the paper, with zest, I placed it at once Where he'd see it the best.

Now I know by his eyes And a slight hidden grin, He's taken the hint And our order is in!

And so for the New Year I'll do as they say, "Make Washday a pleasure The New Connor way!"

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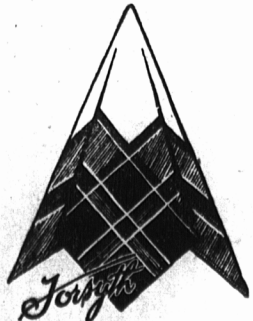
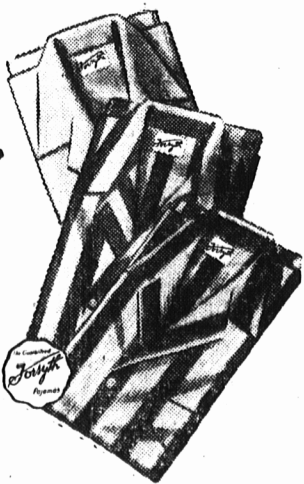
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