

being gradually reduced to a refrain and at last disappearing. The Latin phrases, which recur frequently, are all common in medieval hymnology. The verse is very often at times modelled upon the form of the hymns, in lines of four or three beats alternately. The sentiments of the early carols differ scarcely at all from those of the hymns. In all probability both were written by clerics, the carols representing an attempt, whether formulated or not, to bring the meaning of Christmas nearer home to the people.

It is to be noted that most of the great carol manuscripts belong to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; indeed, they may almost be said to be included between the reigns of Henry VI. and Henry VIII. There are, however, grounds for believing that some of the poems themselves go back to the days of Henry IV. and Richard II., possibly even to Edward III. This date would seem to show that carol writing was a part of the great fourteenth-century movement of the middle classes in England, of the stir towards democracy, of the conquest of the people's English over the Latin of the clergy, over the French of the court.

In this connection it is interesting to point out certain coincidences in theme and treatment which suggest that the carols and the mystery plays are but two phases of the same tendency towards the popularisation of religion. Not only were carols sung on the stage, as in the *Second Shepherd's Play* (Towneley Plays) and the *Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors* (Coventry Plays), but the carols as a class are strongly dramatic, especially the Annunciation and Shepherd Carols.