



# The Shadow on the Dial

By Marjorie L.C. Pickthall

As one grows older, Christmas becomes more and more the time for remembrance. The garlands should be woven of rosemary rather than merry holly, because rosemary, "that's for remembrance." But Canadian gardens do not grow rosemary; the *Encyclopaedia Americana* lists it as "not hardy north of Virginia." And so you will never see the rosemary at Christmas night in full bloom, what time also the cattle turn eastward in their stalls to hail the newly-risen Star. This is what they sing about the rosemary—ros maris, sea-dew—in Suffolk of the long and crumbling coasts:

Rosemary green,  
Rosemary gray,  
Name of old, incensewort,  
Flower like sea spray.  
Dew of the ocean, fair Rosemarine,  
By hall and by cottage  
There you are seen.

Old Christmas Day,  
Hear them declare,  
Rosemary's silver gray  
Blossoms are there.

Incense from garden  
Lowly and fair,  
Their homage and worship  
This winter night share.

With men and with angels,  
With beasts in the stall,  
Who eastward have turned them  
To the Maker of all.

Rosemary green,  
Rosemary gray,  
Why do you blossom  
On old Christmas Day?"

Nor will you now hear the old, old carols, except at a concert, where they are as strange as shepherds strayed into a city with a gospel of faith and loveliness to which no one has time to listen. Some six years ago an effort was made, by some Englishmen exiled in New York, to revive the beautiful old custom of carol-singing in its own proper sphere, which is the sphere of night and snow and stars and of friendly windows hailing with their lights the season of peace. It was a brave and touching effort, but I believe it was never repeated. We are too self-conscious in these days to sing in the streets for the pleasure of our friends. At Oxford they still bring in the boar's head, and sing the carol sung five hundred years ago—

"Caput apri defero,  
Reddens laudes Domino—  
The bore's heed in hand brynge I  
With garlans gay and rosemary,  
And I pray you all sing merely  
Qui estis in convivio"

Even older versions of this carol are said to exist; the ceremony that it celebrates dates back—so the learned tell us—to the sun-festival of Babylon and the wild boars slain yearly in honour of Tammuz.

Froude found some beautiful carols in the commonplace Book of Richard Hilles; foremost among them that which he justly termed "exquisitely graceful:

"There is a flower sprung of a tree,  
The root of it is called Jesse.  
A flower of price—  
There is none such in Paradise.  
Of lily white and rose of Ryse,  
Of primrose and of flower-de-lyse,  
Of all flowers in my devyse,  
The flower of Jesse beareth the prize,  
For most of all  
To help our souls both great and small."

Most beautiful, too, is the carol of Joseph and Mary, taken from an old miracle play, familiar to most of us in its first lines:

"As Joseph was a-walking  
He heard an angel sing,"  
not so familiar the lovely ending—

"Then Mary took her young Son  
And set him on her knee—  
I pray thee now, dear Child,  
Tell how this world shall be?"

"This world shall be like  
The stones in the street,  
For the sun and the moon  
Shall bow down at thy feet.

And upon a Wednesday  
My vow I will make,  
And upon a Friday  
My death I will take.

And upon the third day  
My uprising shall be  
And the sun and the moon  
Shall rise up with me."

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THERE is another strange old story about a warrior who bore the golden wings upon his shield and his helm. He was no true knight of the age of romance, but a rough Northman, who was too proud to bow the knee to the new God whom Olaf the King gave to Norway. He said Odin and Thor were his gods and he would be their man as long as he lived unless they themselves bade him go. So he painted gold wings on his shield to show he was a free man and golden wings he wrought on his helm to show he could go where he would, and he took ship and sailed away from the displeasure of Olaf. The world was wide in those days, and the warrior of the wings found much in it to please him. He harried the pleasant coasts of Kent, and laid a toll on all the Calais Keels. He went south to Egypt and was burnt by the Syrian sun. He traded with nameless folk about the Baltic and had a journey into Muscovy that all but cost him his skin. By and by his rough fair hair was streaked with gray, and wrinkles gathered deep at the corners of his level blue eyes, but he was still a man of a merry heart—"For my gods are the best," he said, "and I will worship none but Odin and his children."

But at length he grew old and his strength failed and his wild men fell away from him to follow more profitable chiefs. At last he was so old and poor that he had nothing left but his brave heart, his sword, the wolfskin cloak upon which he slept, and the battered golden wings upon his helmet. The wings upon his shield had been worn away long ago. And his heart turned to his own country. He

followed it, and saw again the blue fjords and the bleak hills that stood high as the foundations of Valhalla. But all the men and women he had known in his youth were dead; Olaf the king, too, was dead; and on the high sea-cliffs where his father's stead had stood there was now a wood-built monastery, and a church where they worshipped the new God.

In this monastery the old warrior found one far he knew, one tongue that greeted him by the name of his youth. So here he hung up his sword and in a little stone cell unrolled his wolfskin and lay down to rest awhile ere he went forth to seek his part through some last fight, to the halls of Valhalla and the eternal battles of the gods. The valiant proselytes and fiery monks honoured the old man even though he would not listen to their words; he listened to his tales and prayed for him to the Virgin and White Christ and all the warrior said that his heart might be softened before his head was bowed. For they saw death coming for him.

So there, in the little cliff-cell overlooking the northern seas where the gyrfalcon passed like a snow and the kelpies screamed of a winter's night and the roar of the monks' psalms warned the long ships from the shoal, the old man of war rested and dreamed of his last fight, and he knew not that every day death was a little nearer. He walked no longer on the ledges among the gannets, but he rolled in the wolfskins, seeking a little warmth from the December sun that scarcely showed his face above the waves. And one day when the monks were all in the church celebrating the Nativity, he awoke from the thin sleep of age and saw that his cell was all alight with a red glow. He stood and felt for his sword. "Is it war?" he cried to the dark. And a voice said, "Nay, it is Peace."

Then he saw that his cell was changed. It was the seeming of a stable at the back, and a girl sat among the hay with a cow at her feet, and in her arms she had a Child. And one by one, green and shining folk came and greeted her and the Child.

The first was a young man, more beautiful than Einar the friend of Olaf, who had bright hair woven with the gold of his hair. And he stooped above the Child and sang to Him, and the old warrior trembled, for he knew he saw Balder the loved. And the Child laughed. Then there came a woman, Freya, Fairest in Valhalla, and she took the Child in her arms and rocked him. And the Child touched her face with his hand. Then there came, one by one, all the gods of Asgard the Golden City, and they put their hands between the hands of the Child and were His men. And the old warrior leapt again to his feet.

"I follow my gods," he cried, and stumbled forward to the feet of Mary. The Child stooped and leaned above him, and grew greater until he was lifted up, higher than the world, while all about Him was a glow of golden wings, and the singing of Balder and Freya was so sweet that the old man's heart broke.

The monks found him in the morning, and wept, and because he died a heathen and would go to Hela, they gave him a heathen burial in a flaming ship. The ship was so old it would have sunk at the moorings, but a soul in Hela could not know that, and they meant well and friendly by the old man.



Miss Crosby, the new Lady Mayoress of London, Eng., and her maids of honour.