

“Nor war nor battle sound
 Was heard the world around ;
 The idle spear and shield were high uphung ;
 The hooked chariot stood
 Unstained with hostile blood ;
 The trumpet spake not to the armed throng ;
 And kings sat still with awful eye,
 As if they surely knew their sovereign Lord was nigh.

The helmed cherubim,
 And sworded seraphim,
 Are seen in glittering ranks with wings displayed ;
 Harping in loud and solemn choir,
 With unexpressive notes to Heaven’s new-born Heir.
 And all around the courtly stable
 Bright harnessed angels sit in order serviceable.”

Many of the simple carols which from time immemorial have been sung on Christmas eve are of remarkable beauty, and often have a quaint and infantile expression that renders them singularly attractive. Some that for centuries have floated out upon the midnight air, mingling with the sweet jangling of the Christmas bells, still linger in quiet villages in England, France, and Germany. The following will serve as familiar examples in our own language :

“God rest you, merry 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.
 For Jesus Christ, our Saviour,
 Was born on Christmas Day.”

Still more ancient is this, whose tender pathos made it a universal favourite :

“As Joseph was a-walking, he heard an angel sing,
 ‘This night shall be born our Heavenly King;
 He neither shall be born in housen nor in hall,
 Nor in the place of Paradise, but in an ox’s stall.

He neither shall be clothed in purple nor in pall,
 But all in fair linen as were babies all ;
 He neither shall be rocked in silver nor in gold,
 But in a wooden cradle that rocks upon the mould.”