

the country lanes near midnight on Christmas-eve, he will be startled to hear, on the last stroke of twelve, the iron clang of the church bells far and near ring out the best chimes of which they are capable, and from Land's End to John o' Groats not a church tower that possesses bells will be silent. When these cease the waits begin their rounds, and going from house to house, and village to village, they sing carols and Christmas hymns until the light begins to glimmer in the eastern sky and another Christmas-day has dawned.

The custom of singing carols at Christmas-time may be traced back through many a long century. In the classic city of Oxford, the stronghold of ancient customs and ancient opinions, Christmas has been celebrated for centuries with much of the pomp and pageantry of the Middle Ages. The procession song of the Boar's Head, the "*Gaudeamus Omnes*," the singing of the surpliced choir in the college chapel (as shown in our frontispiece), are still observed as in scarce any place else. And in the Bodleian Library may still be seen one of the oldest collections of carols known to exist. The volume, of which only a few pages remain, was printed in the year 1521, by Wynkin de Worde, and is entitled "*Chrismasse Carolles*." For some reason Oxford is particularly favourable to the laurel, and as a decorative evergreen in the chapels of the different colleges, it is used to the entire displacement of holly or ivy.

There are many other customs in the large cities, and old-fashioned traditions in the country, still preserved in many parts of England, which limit of space forbids us to mention; and though some of these may have already died out and others are now gradually becoming extinct as the years roll on, we are sure of one thing, namely, that England will ever be the home of Christmas gatherings and rejoicings of some sort; and if the old-time pastimes and quaint old ceremonies are giving way to others of a different sort, let us hope that the English people will ever thankfully remember, in their mirth and Christmas celebrations, the occasion when He who made such happiness possible, and who has made us, as a nation, what we are, was born in a stable and cradled in a manger.

SOUND over all waters, reach out from all lands,
The chorus of voices, the clasping of hands,
Sing hymns that were sung by the stars of the morn,
Sing songs of the angels when Jesus was born !

—*Whittier.*