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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Christmas Comes But Once A Year

Thomas Miller

Those Christmas bells as sweetly chime,
As on the day when first they rung
So merrily in the olden time,
And far and wide their music flung:
Shaking the tall grey ivied tower,
With all their deep melodious power:
They still proclaim to every ear,
Old Christmas comes but once a year.

Then he came singing through the woods,
And plucked the holly bright and green;
Pulled here and there the ivy buds;
Was sometimes hidden, sometimes seen—
Half-buried 'neath the mistletoe,
His long beard hung with flakes of snow;
And still he ever carolled clear,
Old Christmas came but once a year.

He merrily came in days of old,
When roads were few, and ways were foul,
Now staggered,—now some ditty trolled,
Now drank deep from his wassail-bowl;
His holly silvered o'er with frost.
Nor never once his way he lost,
For reeling here, and reeling there,
Old Christmas came but once a year.

The hall was then with holly crowned,
'Twas on the wild deer's antlers placed;
It hemmed the battered armour round,
And every ancient trophy graced.
It decked the boar's head, tusked and grim,
The wassail-bowl wreathed to the brim.
A summer-green hung everywhere,
For Christmas came but once a year.

His jaded steed the armèd Knight

Reined up before the Abbey gate,
By all assisted to alight,
From humble monk to abbot great.
They placed his lance behind the door,
His armour on the rush-strewn floor;
And then brought out the best of cheer,
For Christmas came but once a year.

The maiden, then, in quaint attire,
Loosed from her head the silken hood,
And danced before the yule-log fire—
The crackling monarch of the wood.
In lines of light, like summer rays,
While music sounded loud and clear;
For Christmas came but once a year.



What, though upon his hoary head,
Have fallen many a winter's snow,
His wreath is still as green and red
As 'twas a thousand years ago.
For what has he to do with care?
His wassail-bowl and old arm-chair
Are ever standing ready there,
For Christmas comes but once a year.

No marvel Christmas lives so long,
He never knew but merry hours,
His nights were spent with mirth and song,
In happy homes, and princely bowers;
Was greeted both by serf and lord,
And seated at the festal board;

While every voice cried "Welcome here,"
Old Christmas comes but once a year.

But what care we for days of old,
The knights whose arms have turned to rust,
Their grim boar's heads and pasties cold,
Their castles crumbled into dust?
Never did sweeter faces go,
Blushing beneath the mistletoe,
Than are to-night assembled here,
For Christmas still comes once a year.

For those old times are dead and gone,
And those who hailed them passed away,
Yet still there lingers many a one,
To welcome in old Christmas Day.
The poor will many a care forget,
The debtor think not of his debt;
But, as they each enjoy their cheer,
Wish it was Christmas all the year.

And still around these good old times
We hang like friends full loth to part,
We listen to the simple rhymes
Which somehow sink into the heart,
"Half musical, half melancholy,"
Like childish smiles that still are holy,
A masquer's face dimmed with a tear,
For Christmas comes but once a year.

The bells which usher in that morn,
Have ever drawn my mind away
To Bethlehem, where Christ was born,
And the low stable where He lay,
In which the large-eyed oxen fed;
To Mary bowing low her head,
And looking down with love sincere,
Such thoughts bring Christmas once a year.

At early day the youthful voice
Heard singing on from door to door,
Makes the responding heart rejoice,
To know the children of the poor
For once are happy all day long;
We smile and listen to the song,

The burthen still remote or near,
"Old Christmas comes but once a year."

Upon a gayer, happier scene,
Never did holly-berries peer,
Or ivy throw its trailing green,
Or brighter forms than there are here,
Nor Christmas in his old arm-chair
Smile upon lips and brows more fair;
Then let us sing amid our cheer,
Old Christmas still comes once a year.

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