



FIFTY CHRISTMAS POEMS  
FOR CHILDREN

AN ANTHOLOGY SELECTED BY  
FLORENCE B. HYETT

BASIL BLACKWELL OXFORD

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Fifty Christmas Poems For Children By Florence B. Hyett.

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## 23. A CHRISTMAS CAROL

THE Christ-child lay on Mary's lap,  
His hair was like a light.  
(O weary, weary were the world,  
But here is all aright.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's breast,  
His hair was like a star.  
(O stern and cunning are the Kings,  
But here the true hearts are.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's heart,  
His hair was like a fire.  
(O weary, weary is the world,  
But here the world's desire.)

The Christ-child stood at Mary's knee,  
His hair was like a crown,  
And all the flowers looked up at Him  
And all the stars looked down.

--G. K. CHESTERTON

---

## 24. EX ORE INFANTIUM

LITTLE Jesus, wast Thou shy  
 Once, and just so small as I?  
 And what did it feel like to be  
 Out of Heaven, and just like me?  
 Didst Thou sometimes think of there.  
 And ask where all the angels were?  
 I should think that I would cry  
 For my house all made of sky;  
 I would look about the air,  
 And wonder where my angels were;  
 And at waking 'twould distress me--  
 Not an angel there to dress me!

Hadst Thou ever any toys,  
 Like us little girls and boys?  
 And didst Thou play in Heaven with all  
 The angels, that were not too tall,  
 With stars for marbles? Did the things  
 Play Can you see me? through their wings?  
 And did Thy Mother let Thee spoil  
 Thy robes, with playing on our soil?  
 How nice to have them always new  
 In Heaven, because 'twas quite clean blue.

Didst Thou kneel at night to pray,  
 And didst Thou join Thy hands, this way?  
 And did they tire sometimes, being young,  
 And make the prayer seem very long?  
 And dost Thou like it best, that we  
 Should join our hands to pray to Thee?  
 I used to think, before I knew,  
 The prayer not said unless we do.  
 And did Thy Mother at the night  
 Kiss Thee, and fold the clothes in right?

And didst Thou feel quite good in bed,  
Kiss'd, and sweet, and Thy prayers said?

Thou canst not have forgotten all  
That it feels like to be small:  
And Thou know'st I cannot pray  
To Thee in my father's way--  
When Thou wast so little, say,  
Couldst Thou talk Thy Father's way?  
So, a little Child, come down  
And hear a child's tongue like Thy own;  
Take me by the hand and walk,  
And listen to my baby-talk.  
To Thy Father show my prayer  
(He will look, Thou art so fair),  
And say: "O Father, I, thy Son,  
Bring the prayer of a little one."

And He will smile, that children's tongue  
Has not changed since Thou wast young!

--FRANCIS THOMPSON

---

## 25. A SONG OF CHRISTMAS

THE Christmas moon shines clear and right;  
There were poor travellers such a night  
Had neither fire nor candle-light.

One plucked them stars out of the sky  
To show the road to travel by;  
So that the Ass go warily.

She had all Heaven safe in her hold,  
Hidden within her mantle's fold--  
All Heaven, and It was one hour old.

Her hair under, over Him spread  
His spun-gold coverlet and His bed,  
Twined with His little golden head.

She sang and rocked Him to-and-fro  
Such songs as little babies know,  
With Lullaby Sweet, and Lullalo.

He had no need of moons and suns,  
Nor the gold-crested bird-legions,  
Singing their lauds and orisons.

The Christmas moon shows a cold beam;  
He hath His Mother, she hath Him:  
Together they sleep, together dream.

--KATHARINE TYNAN

---

## 26. THE HOLLY AND THE IVY

THE holly and the ivy,  
Now are both well grown.  
Of all the trees that are in the wood  
The holly bears the crown.

The holly bears a blossom  
As white as the lily flower,  
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ  
To be our sweet Saviour.

The holly bears a berry  
As red as any blood,  
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ  
To do poor sinners good.

The holly bears a prickle  
As sharp as any thorn,  
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ  
On Christmas Day in the morn.

The holly bears a bark  
As bitter as any gall,  
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ  
For to redeem us all.

The holly and the ivy  
Now are both well grown,  
Of all the trees that are in the wood  
The holly bears the crown.

--TRADITIONAL

---

## 27. A CRADLE HYMN

HUSH! my dear, lie still and slumber,  
Holy angels guard thy bed!  
Heavenly blessings without number  
Gently falling on thy head.

How much better thou'rt attended  
Than the Son of God could be,  
When from heaven He descended  
And became a child like thee!

Soft and easy is thy cradle:  
Coarse and hard thy Saviour lay,  
When His birthplace was a stable  
And His softest bed was hay.

See the kinder shepherds round Him,  
Telling wonders from the sky!  
Where they sought Him, there they found Him,  
With His Virgin Mother by.

See the lovely babe adressing;  
Lovely infant, how He smiled!  
When He wept, the Mother's blessing  
Soothed and hush'd the holy child.

Lo, He slumbers in His manger,  
Where the horned oxen fed:  
Peace, my darling; here's no danger,  
Here's no ox anear thy bed.

--ISAAC WATTS

---



## 28. BEFORE DAWN

DIM-BERRIED is the mistletoe  
 With globes of sheenless grey,  
 The holly mid ten thousand thorns  
 Smolders its fires away;  
 And in the manger Jesu sleeps  
 This Christmas Day.  
 Bull unto bull with hollow throat  
 Makes echo every hill,  
 Cold sheep in pastures thick with snow  
 The air with bleatings fill;  
 While of His Mother's heart this Babe  
 Takes His sweet will.  
 All flowers and butterflies lie hid,  
 The blackbird and the thrush  
 Pipe but a little as they flit  
 Restless from bush to bush;  
 Even to the robin Gabriel hath  
 Cried softly, "Hush!"  
 Now night is astir with burning stars  
 In darkness of the snow;  
 Burdened with frankincense and myrrh  
 And gold the Strangers go  
 Into a dusk where one dim lamp  
 Burns faintly, Lo!  
 No snowdrop yet its small head nods,  
 In winds of winter drear;  
 No lark at casement in the sky  
 Sings matins shrill and clear;  
 Yet in this frozen mirk the Dawn  
 Breathes, Spring is here!

--WALTER DE LA MARE

---

## 29. THE WAITS

THERE were sparkles on the window-pane and sparkles in the sky,  
 The moon it sparkled like a star above the world so high,  
 There was star-shine on the ceiling, there was star-shine on the bed,  
 There was star-shine in my eyes, I think, and star-shine in my head.  
 I clambered from my sleep, I did; I flung the window wide,  
 I wanted all that waited in the Christmas Eve outside,  
 I wanted for myself to hear the Christmas people sing,  
 I wanted for myself to hear the Christmas joy-bells ring.

And there outside were waiting three grey Shepherds in the snow,  
 (I knew that they were Shepherds, for they all had crooks, you know,)  
 And when they saw me waiting too they sang to me a song--  
 The stars, they caught and whispered it the whole wide sky along.  
 And then the Shepherds went their way and three black camels came,  
 They stayed beneath the window there and waited just the same,  
 And each black camel on his back had brought an Eastern King,  
 And though each King was very great each had a song to sing.

They sang it as the Shepherds sang, a little low sweet song,--  
 The white stars caught and whispered it the whole wide sky along;  
 And then the camels went their way, I watched them down the street,  
 The snow lay white and soft and still beneath their silent feet.  
 There was singing in the tree-tops, there was singing in the sky,  
 The moon was singing to the clouds above the world so high,  
 And all the stars were singing too and when I looked below,  
 I saw a little, tiny Child was waiting in the snow.

And first I watched him wait there--watched and only waved my hand,  
 For though the song was in my heart I did not understand,  
 Until at last it burst in words, because at last I knew,  
 And then he looked at me and laughed and sang the star-song too.  
 And right across the misty fields I heard the church bells ring,  
 The star-song echoed far and wide for all the world to sing,

But still the tiny Child stood there--the Child that once was born--  
We sang His birthday song--we did--upon His Christmas morn.

--M. NIGHTINGALE

---

## 30. IN PRAESEPIO

IN stable straw the Infant lay,  
Turned from the hostelry away,  
There was no room its doors within,  
For Him Who is the whole world's Inn.

Creation sang, no longer dumb,  
Because her great Desire was come;  
The sad earth in His joy had part,  
Who bore her sorrow in His Heart.

The Angels danced, the Shepherds piped,  
Because earth's tears away were wiped;  
The Ox and Ass adoring saw  
The Infant lying in the straw.

--R. L. GALES

---

## 31. WHEN CHRIST WAS BORN

WHEN Christ was born of Mary free,  
In Bethlehem in that fair citie,  
Angels sang there with mirth and glee,  
In Excelsis Gloria!

Herdsmen beheld these angels bright,  
To them appearing with great light,  
Who said, "God's Son is born this night,"  
In Excelsis Gloria!

This King is come to save mankind,  
As in Scripture truths we find,  
Therefore this song have we in mind,  
In Excelsis Gloria!

Then, dear Lord, for Thy great grace,  
Grant us the bliss to see Thy face,  
That we may sing to Thy solace,  
In Excelsis Gloria!

--TRADITIONAL

---

## 32. THE CAROL OF THE POOR CHILDREN

WE are the poor children, come out to see the sights  
On this day of all days, on this night of nights,  
The stars in merry parties are dancing in the sky,  
A fine star, a new star, is shining on high!

We are the poor children, our lips are frosty blue,  
We cannot sing our carol as well as rich folk do,  
Our bellies are so empty we have no singing voice,  
But this night of all nights good children must rejoice.

We do rejoice, we do rejoice, as hard as we can try,  
A fine star, a new star is shining in the sky!  
And while we sing our carol, we think of the delight  
The happy kings and shepherds make in Bethlehem to-night.

Are we naked, mother, and are we starving poor--  
Oh, see what gifts the kings have brought outside the stable door,  
Are we cold, mother, the ass will give his hay  
To make the manger warm and keep the cruel winds away.

We are the poor children, but not so poor who sing  
Our carol with our voiceless hearts to greet the newborn king,  
On this night of all nights, when in the frosty sky  
A new star, a kind star, is shining on high!

--RICHARD MIDDLETON

---

### 33. STAR OF THE EAST

STAR of the East, that long ago  
Brought wise men on their way  
Where, angels singing to and fro,  
The Child of Bethlehem lay--  
Above that Syrian hill afar  
Thou shinest out to-night, O Star!

Star of the East, the night were drear  
But for the tender grace  
That with thy glory comes to cheer  
Earth's loneliest, darkest place;  
For by that charity we see  
Where there is hope for all and me.

Star of the East! show us the way  
In wisdom undefiled  
To seek that manger out and lay  
Our gifts before the Child--  
To bring our hearts and offer them  
Unto our King in Bethlehem!

--EUGENE FIELD

---

## 34. A CHRISTMAS CAROL

BEFORE the paling of the stars,  
Before the winter morn,  
Before the earliest cock-crow,  
Jesus Christ was born:  
Born in a stable,  
Cradled in a manger,  
In the world His Hands had made  
Born a stranger.

Priest and King lay fast asleep  
In Jerusalem,  
Young and old lay fast asleep  
In crowded Bethlehem:  
Saint and angel, ox and ass,  
Kept a watch together  
Before the Christmas daybreak  
In the winter weather.

Jesus on His mother's breast  
In the stable cold,  
Spotless Lamb of God was He,  
Shepherd of the Fold:  
Let us kneel with Mary Maid,  
With Joseph bent and hoary,  
With saint and angel, ox and ass,  
To hail the King of Glory.

--CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

---



## 35. YULE-TIDE FIRES

CLEANSE with the burning log of oak  
The canker of thy care,  
Deck with the scarlet-berried bough  
The temple of the fair;  
Spread pure-white linen for a feast,  
Perchance some guest may share.

Give forth thy gold and silver coins,  
For they were lent to thee;  
Put out to usury thy dross,  
One talent gaineth three.  
Perchance the hungered and the poor  
May pray to God for thee.

Once a pale star rose in the East  
For watching herds to see,  
And weakness came to Bethlehem,  
And strength to Galilee.  
Perchance! if thou dost keep thy tryst  
A star may rise for thee.

--ANONYMOUS

---

## 36. SIX GREEN SINGERS

THE frost of the moon fell over my floor  
And six green singers stood at my door.

"What do ye here that music make?"

"Let us come in for Christ's sweet Sake."

"Long have ye journeyed in coming here?"

"Our Pilgrimage was the length of the year."

"Where do ye make for?" I asked of them.

"Our Shrine is a Stable in Bethlehem."

"What will ye do as ye go along?"

"Sing to the world an ever-green song."

"What will ye sing for the listening earth?"

"One will sing of a brave-souled Mirth,

"One of the Holiest Mystery,

The Glory of glories shall one song be,

"One of the Memory of things,

One of the Child's imaginings,

"One of our songs is the fadeless Faith,

And all are the Life more mighty than death."

"Ere ye be gone that music make,

Give me an alms for Christ's sweet Sake."

"Six green branches we leave with you;

See they be scattered your house-place through.

"The staunch blithe Holly your board shall grace,

Mistletoe bless your chimney place,

"Laurel to crown your lighted hail,

Over your bed let the Yew-bough fall,

"Close by the cradle the Christmas Fir,  
For elfin dreams in its branches stir,

"Last and loveliest, high and low,  
From ceil to floor let the Ivy go."

From each glad guest I received my gift  
And then the latch of my door did lift--

"Green singers, God prosper the song ye make  
As ye sing to the world for Christ's sweet Sake."

--ELEANOR FARJEON

---

## 37. THAT HOLY THING

THEY all were looking for a king  
To slay their foes and lift them high:  
Thou cam'st, a little baby thing  
That made a woman cry.

O Son of Man, to right my lot  
Naught but Thy presence can avail;  
Yet on the road Thy wheels are not,  
Nor on the sea Thy sail!

My how or when Thou wilt not heed,  
But come down thine own secret stair,  
That Thou mayst answer all my need--  
Yea, every bygone prayer.

--GEORGE MACDONALD

---

## 38. CHRISTMAS

A BOY was Born at Bethlehem  
that knew the haunts of Galilee.  
He wandered on Mount Lebanon,  
and learned to love each forest tree.

But I was born at Marlborough,  
and love the homely faces there;  
and for all other men besides  
'tis little love I have to spare.

I should not mind to die for them,  
my own dear downs, my comrades true.  
But that great heart of Bethlehem,  
he died for men he never knew.

And yet, I think, at Golgotha,  
as Jesus' eyes were closed in death,  
they saw with love most passionate  
the village street at Nazareth.

--E. HILTON YOUNG

---

## 39. TO HIS SAVIOUR, A CHILD; A PRESENT BY A CHILD

GO pretty child, and bear this flower  
Unto thy little Saviour;  
And tell Him, by that bud now blown,  
He is the Rose of Sharon known:  
When thou hast said so, stick it there  
Upon his bib, or stomacher:  
And tell Him, (for good handsell too)  
That thou hast bought a whistle new,  
Made of a clean straight oaten reed,  
To charm His cries, (at time of need:)  
Tell Him, for coral, thou hast none;  
But if thou hadst, He should have one;  
But poor thou art, and known to be  
Even as moneyless as He.  
Lastly, if thou canst win a kiss  
From those mellifluous lips of His;  
Then never take a second on  
To spoil the first impression.

--ROBERT HERRICK

---

## 40. AN ODE TO THE BIRTH OF OUR SAVIOUR

IN numbers, and but these few,  
 I sing Thy birth, O Jesu!  
 Thou pretty baby, born here,  
 With sup'rabundant scorn here;  
 Who for Thy princely port here,  
 Hadst for Thy place  
 Of birth a base  
 Out-stable for Thy court here.

Instead of neat enclosures  
 Of interwoven osiers,  
 Instead of fragrant posies  
 Of daffodils and roses,  
 Thy cradle, Kingly Stranger,  
 As Gospel tells,  
 Was nothing else  
 But here a homely manger.

The Jews they did disdain Thee,  
 But we will entertain Thee,  
 With glories to await here,  
 Upon Thy princely state here;  
 And more for love than pity,  
 From year to year,  
 We'll make Thee, here,  
 A free-born of our city.

--ROBERT HERRICK

---

## 41. A CHRISTMAS CAROL

THAT sweeter music can we bring  
Than a carol, for to sing  
The birth of this our heavenly King?  
Awake the voice; awake the string!  
Heart, ear, and eye, and everything!

Why does the chilling winter's morn  
Smile, like a field beset with corn?  
Or smell, like to a mead new-shorn,  
Thus, on the sudden?

Come and see  
The cause, why things thus fragrant be.  
'Tis He is born, whose quickening birth  
Gives light and lustre, public mirth,  
To heaven, and the under-earth.

The darling of the world is come,  
And fit it is we find a room  
To welcome Him. The nobler part  
Of all the house here, is the heart,  
Which we will give Him; and bequeath  
This holly, and this ivy wreath,  
To do Him honour; who's our King,  
And Lord of all this revelling.

--ROBERT HERRICK

---



## 42. THE OXEN

CHRISTMAS Eve, and twelve of the clock.

"Now they are all on their knees,"

An elder said as we sat in a flock  
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where  
They dwelt in their strawy pen,  
Nor did it occur to one of us there  
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave  
In these years! Yet, I feel,  
If some one said on Christmas Eve,  
"Come; see the oxen kneel

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb  
Our childhood used to know,"  
I should go with him in the gloom  
Hoping it might be so.

--THOMAS HARDY

---

## 43. I SAW THREE SHIPS

I SAW three ships come sailing in,  
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;  
I saw three ships come sailing in  
On Christmas Day in the morning.

And who was in those ships all three,  
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day?  
And who was in those ships all three,  
On Christmas Day in the morning?

Our Saviour Christ and his ladye,  
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;  
Our Saviour Christ and his ladye,  
On Christmas Day in the morning.

Pray whither sailed those ships all three,  
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day?  
Pray whither sailed those ships all three,  
On Christmas Day in the morning?

O they sailed into Bethlehem,  
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;  
O they sailed into Bethlehem,  
On Christmas Day in the morning.

And all the bells on Earth shall ring,  
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;  
And all the bells on Earth shall ring,  
On Christmas Day in the morning.

And all the angels in Heaven shall sing,  
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;  
And all the angels in Heaven shall sing,  
On Christmas Day in the morning.

And all the souls on Earth shall sing,  
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;

And all the souls on Earth shall sing,  
On Christmas Day in the morning.

--OLD CAROL

---

## 44. NOEL

### I

ON a winter's night long time ago  
 (The bells ring loud and the bells ring low),  
 When high howled wind, and down fell snow  
 (Carillon, Carilla).  
 Saint Joseph he and Nostre Dame,  
 Riding on an ass, full weary came  
 From Nazareth into Bethlehem.  
 And the small child Jesus smile on you.

### II

And Bethlehem inn they stood before  
 (The bells ring less and the bells ring more),  
 The landlord bade them begone from his door  
 (Carillon, Carilla).  
 "Poor folk" (says he), "must lie where they may,  
 For the Duke of Jewry comes this way,  
 With all his train on Christmas Day."  
 And the small child Jesus smile on you.

### III

Poor folk that may my carol hear  
 (The bells ring single and the bells ring clear),  
 See! God's one child had hardest cheer!  
 (Carillon, Carilla).  
 Men grown hard on a Christmas morn;  
 The dumb beast by and a babe forlorn.  
 It was very, very cold when our Lord was born.  
 And the small child Jesus smile on you.

### IV

Now these were Jews as Jews must be  
 (The bells ring merry and the bells ring free).

But Christian men in a band are we  
Carillon, Carilla).  
Empty we go, and ill be-dight,  
Singing Noel on a winter's night.  
Give up to sup by the warm firelight,  
And the small child Jesus smile on you.

--HILAIRE BELLOC

---

## 45. UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN

GIVEN, not lent,  
And not withdrawn--once sent--  
This Infant of mankind, this One,  
Is still the little welcome Son.

New every year,  
New-born and newly dear,  
He comes with tidings and a song,  
The ages long, the ages long.

Even as the cold  
Keen winter grows not old,  
As childhood is so fresh, foreseen,  
And spring in the familiar green.

Sudden as sweet  
Come the expected feet;  
All joy is young, and new all art,  
And He, too, whom we have by heart.

--ALICE MEYNELL

---

## 46. VERSES FROM THE SHEPHERD'S HYMN

WE saw Thee in Thy balmy nest,  
 Young dawn of our eternal day;  
 We saw Thine eyes break from the East  
 And chase the trembling shades away:  
 We saw Thee, and we blest the sight,  
 We saw Thee by Thine own sweet light.

Poor world, said I, what wilt thou do  
 To entertain this starry stranger?  
 Is this the best thou canst bestow--  
 A cold and not too cleanly manger?  
 Contend, the powers of heaven and earth,  
 To fit a bed for this huge birth.

I saw the curl'd drops, soft and slow,  
 Come hovering o'er the place's head,  
 Off'ring their whitest sheets of snow.  
 To furnish the fair infant's bed.  
 Forbear, said I, be not too bold;  
 Your fleece is white, but 'tis too cold.

To Thee, meek Majesty, soft King  
 Of simple graces and sweet loves!  
 Each of us his lamb will bring,  
 Each his pair of silver doves!  
 At last, in fire of Thy fair eyes,  
 Ourselves become our own best sacrifice.

--RICHARD CRAWSHAW

---

## 47. VERSES FROM THE HYMN ON THE MORNING OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY

BUT peaceful was the night  
Wherein the Prince of light  
His reign of peace upon the earth began:  
The winds, with wonder whist,  
Smoothly the waters kist  
Whispering new joys to the mild ocean,  
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,  
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave.

The shepherds on the lawn,  
Or ere the point of dawn,  
Sat simply chatting in a rustic row;  
Full little thought they than,  
That the mighty Pan  
Was kindly come to live with them below:  
Perhaps their loves, or else their sheep,  
Was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep.

When such music sweet  
Their hearts and ears did greet,  
As never was by mortal finger strook,  
Divinely-warbled voice  
Answering the stringed noise,  
As all their souls in blissful rapture took;  
The air such pleasure loth to lose,  
With thousand echoes still prolongs each heavenly close.

Ring out, ye crystal spheres,  
Once bless our human ears,  
(If ye have power to touch our senses so)  
And let your silver chime  
Move in melodious time;  
And let the bass of Heaven's deep organ blow,



And with your ninefold harmony  
Make up full consort to the angelic symphony.

For if such holy song  
Enwrap our fancy long,  
Time will run back and fetch the age of gold,  
And speckled Vanity  
Will sicken soon and die,  
And leprous Sin will melt from earthly mould,  
And Hell itself will pass away,  
And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day.

But see! the Virgin blest,  
Hath laid her Babe to rest,  
Time is our tedious song should here have ending,  
Heaven's youngest teemed star,  
Hath fix'd her polish'd car,  
Her sleeping Lord with hand-maid lamp attending:  
And all about the courtly stable,  
Bright-harness'd Angels sit in order serviceable.

--JOHN MILTON

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## 48. FROM "IN MEMORIAM"

RING out, wild bells, to the wild sky,  
The flying cloud, the frosty light:  
The year is dying in the night;  
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:  
The year is going, let him go;  
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,  
For those that here we see no more;  
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,  
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out the want, the care, the sin,  
The faithless coldness of the times;  
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes,  
But ring in the fuller minstrel in.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease;  
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;  
Ring out the thousand wars of old,  
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,  
The larger heart, the kindlier hand  
Ring out the darkness of the land,  
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

--ALFRED TENNYSON

END

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