

THE BEST POEMS ON CHRISTMAS

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The Best Poems on Christmas by Edward A. Bryant

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EDWARD A. BRYANT

**THE BEST POEMS
ON CHRISTMAS**



BRINGING IN THE YULE LOG

The Best Poems on Christmas

COMPILED BY
EDWARD A. BRYANT



But they my troubled spirit rule,
For they controll'd me when a boy;
They bring me sorrow touch'd with joy,
The merry, merry bells of Yule.
—TANNYSON, *In Memoriam.*

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Preface

THE festivities in celebration of the Yule-tide season began in old England with the lighting of the Yule log or "clog" on Christmas Eve, according to Irving's account in *The Sketch-Book*: "The grate was removed from the wide, overwhelming fireplace, to make way for a fire of wood, in the midst of which was an enormous log glowing and blazing, and sending forth a vast volume of light and heat: this I understood was the Yule clog, which the Squire was particular in having brought in and illumined on Christmas Eve, according to ancient custom." This huge log, frequently the whole stump of a tree, was lighted by means of a small portion of the previous year's log, preserved for the purpose. At the same time with the firing of the log the Yule-tide candles were lighted.

Beginning with verses anticipatory of the delights of the Christmas season, the compiler

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of this book of Yule-tide poems had intended to give emphasis to the sprightlier side in the choice of selections,—to those carols and other Christmas lyrics which, like Mr. Wardle's song, would naturally be sung around the hearth in the glow of the burning log. While this idea has to a certain extent prevailed, it has proved to be the fact that underlying the revelries of Christmas Eve and the merrymaking of Christmas Day, there is constantly in the minds of us all, and especially of our poets, the thought of the sacred origin of the festival. The greater part of the poetry of permanent value, suitable for inclusion here, is that which celebrates in hymns and carols the Nativity and all it signified, from the earliest Anglo-Norman Carol, down through Milton's noble Ode, to the hymns of Watts, Heber, and Phillips Brooks and the carols of William Morris and Christina Rossetti. So while the collection opens with verse hailing the more worldly signs of the season and the delights of the table and the dance,—with here and there a soberer thought,—a larger space later in the book is occupied by the sacred song in honor of the Holy Birth and by the carols. It is believed that the proportion of secular to sacred verse will not be found inappropriate.

The great body of Christmas verse calculated

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to endure is open for free use in a work of this description. Among the poems which it was felt would add to the worth of the book but which are controlled by copyright are the two choice examples of Father Tabb's genius, to be found on pages 126 and 142, for permission to incorporate which acknowledgment is gratefully made to Small, Maynard & Company. The publishers of *Collier's Weekly* have been equally generous in granting the use of poems by Bliss Carman, M. V. Caruthers, and John Kendrick Bangs. Messrs. E. P. Dutton & Co. have courteously extended permission to include the four poems by Phillips Brooks, without which no Christmas anthology would be complete. The fine poem by Eugene Field, entitled "Christmas Treasures," is inserted by arrangement with Charles Scribner's Sons, authorized publishers of Field's works, and the selection from Thomas Bailey Aldrich, entitled "Kriss Kringle," by arrangement with the Houghton Mifflin Company, authorized publishers of Aldrich's works. To the authors who have kindly allowed extracts from their works to be reprinted here and have extended good wishes, sincere gratitude is expressed for their courtesy.

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