

CAROLLERS

In a corner of the market place of a small town huddled a small group. It was a place invaded least by the wind and one where they could stand close together sheltered by an ornate doorway. It was nearly Christmas. Only a few days to go, a time when people came into the town for their seasonal shopping, beef, turkeys, mince pies and trinkets for babies. Each year this choir assembled in the square to serenade the folk with their carols. It was expected of them. And that ornate doorway should help with the acoustics, suggested one member, especially in this wind. The wind hurled itself down the single street from the west, funnelling into the market place, searching furiously around every cranny for things to seize upon and drive relentlessly before it, squeezed against the wall of building on the eastern side. Nothing, it seemed, could escape. But sing the choir must. Everybody expected it, though in truth there were few about. They couldn't be disappointed. Hoping to obliterate their songs the wind hissed and whistled through wires, eaves and gutters. It tugged and dragged at the warm winter coats of those standing at the edge of the group, flapping the cloth so violently it hoped they might fall over. But they didn't and the songs went on. For these were stout hearted Devon folk.

But this was the very devil of a wind. It even knew how to deal with polar bears. Shrieking and howling with rage it tore about over the rooftops until suddenly it had an idea. It was Mephistophelian in its deviousness. Diving down over the choir it suddenly snatched the beginning of a verse they were singing. I think it might have been 'God rest ye merry...' Pulling with all the skill it could muster it dragged it away, unravelling it and stretching it like elastic cords or even elastic chords. Up it went over the rooftops of the little town in its valley, stretching so far it was pulled out over the hills, down the Dart valley then over the tall cliffs and way out over the English Channel. People in Brittany returning from mass were startled by the strange sound. They peered into the darkness for an accompanying vision that they might usefully canonise for, stretched like this, the sound of the verse had a truly unearthly timbre. It had to be angels. Was this the second coming?

Eventually the verse could stretch no more. Music is a very elastic thing. But even that elasticity was eventually at an end and the little choir, attached to the end of the verse, itself disappeared over the rooftops into the darkness of the Devon night and beyond. Over the hills, along the Dart valley and over the cliffs and dark sea. The Bretons had their vision and duly canonised it under the auspices of 'Saint Cecilie et Toute les Anges en Passant la Vierge'. In due course a shrine was built which became magnificent and where each year a pilgrimage was organised in which singers competed to best recreate the strange mysterious sound that had flown past that night on angels' wings.