

wood "to gather in the mistletoe"; for, when that evening comes, the mystic bough will have passed through many hands, and have travelled many miles. Its gathering gives profitable employment to many of our rural population, both young and old; and when I see two cottage lads pass up the lane with a stick over their shoulders, from which hang boughs of mistletoe and branches of berried holly, although they somewhat remind me of the pictures of Israelitish spies with the grapes of the Promised Land, yet I know them to be the heralds of Christmas, and therefore the harbingers of the season of glad tidings.

We have another Christmas herald in the shape of the country carol-seller, whose vocation begins with December. To our rural population he is just as much a harbinger of Christmas-tide as the may-bloom is of spring or the swallow of summer. The poet Gay said that the townspeople could "judge the festival of Christmas near" by rosemary and bays being "bawled in frequent cries through all the town"; and the country folks are reminded of the oncoming of the festal time by carols being bawled through the village streets. For the modern Autolycus who, in December, takes up the trade of a carol-seller, not only offers his wares for sale unto those who, like Mopsa, the shepherdess, dearly "love a ballad in print," but can also "bear his part" in singing it; " 'tis his occupation" so to do; and, like Autolycus, he often sets his carol "to a very doleful tune." Nevertheless it is music to the rustic ear; and the carol-seller is doubly welcome because he is also a carol-singer.

The country carol-seller disdains to offer novelties of song. He knows his customers, and is aware that they will give the preference to verses, the rudeness of whose jingles and the roughness of whose metre are all smoothed and mellowed to them by time and long familiar usage. And so he gives them their choice between such carols as "God rest you, merry gentlemen," "Behold the grace appears," "I saw three ships come sailing by," "Now thrice welcome Christmas, that brings us good cheer," "When Christ was born of Mary free," "Lullaby, my baby, what meanest thou to cry," "A glorious star from heaven appeared," "On Christmas night all Christians sing," or, of more recent origin, "While shepherds watched their flocks by night," "High let us swell our tuneful notes," and "Hark, the herald angels sing." All these are sealed either with the stamp of antiquity or of public approval, at any rate in rural districts; and the country carol-seller selects his wares judiciously, and confidently offers to the rustic ploughman the Christmas carol that he would not place before a town mechanic. The cuts also must be old-fashioned. Hone once advised a printer to get some new designs, and the answer was, that the people wouldn't think the carols genuine if the pictures were modern. So we leave him singing to his small audience of village children—

"The shepherds at those tidings
Rejoiced much in mind;
They left their flocks a-feeding,
In tempest, storm, and wind,
And went to Bethlehem straightway,
The heavenly Babe to find."
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The end of the year has now brought my monthly essays to a close, and I have thought that I could not more appropriately conclude them than by taking my last "Peep through Loopholes" at those Christmas heralds who proclaim the approach of the glad season that brought Peace on Earth, Good-will to Man.

TRIPLE RAINBOWS.

To the Editor of the LEISURE HOUR.

SIR,—I enclose a copy of a very short paper by Bishop Mant, descriptive of the phenomenon of triple rainbows, described and illustrated in No. 826 of the LEISURE HOUR, my reason being that it supplies the explanation "left open for the consideration of meteorologists."

The bishop's paper is accompanied by a coloured engraving of the three bows, their position being very similar to that you have reproduced from the "Encyclopædia Metropolitana," as seen by Dr. Halley at Chester. It is worthy of notice that the point on which the bishop evidently felt doubt, namely, that the relative position of the three bows remained unchanged, had on the previous occasion been noted by Halley, thus supplying the missing link in the verification of the bishop's explanation. Your readers will notice that there is the requisite water surface in each case. "In the North Seas" there would probably be more or less, "at Belfast" there is the Lough, "at Chester" the estuary of the Dee, and lastly, "amid the isles of Greece" there could be no scarcity of water, and the mirror was evidently good, as "the yacht was becalmed and perfectly steady." From all the evidence there cannot be a doubt that the extraordinary bow described by your correspondent, was occasioned by an image of the sun reflected from the surface of water. I may add that Dr. Scoresby (in "Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal," vol. II. p. 235) described some appearances of this kind, observed in the North Seas, but these were much more imperfect than that described by Bishop Mant. G. J. SYMONS.

From the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy, Vol. XV., 1828. A PHENOMENON OF THE RAINBOW, OBSERVED BY R. MANT, D.D., M.R.I.A., LORD BISHOP OF DOWN AND CONNOR, NOV. 14TH, 1826.

"This phenomenon was observed at the See House, near Belfast, between 3 and 4 p.m. on Tuesday, November 14, 1826. It remained till the setting of the sun. The colours of each bow were brilliant, but the centre one was the least so. It is not known how long it was visible, but it must have been at least ten minutes. This phenomenon appears to afford an interesting illustration of the theory of the rainbow.

"It cannot be doubted that the extraordinary, or centre bow, was occasioned by an image of the sun reflected from the surface of water (probably the Lough of Belfast). The description and figure answer exactly to this explanation. The inner and centre bow have their colours in the same order. They both appear to spring from the same points of the horizon, as they ought; because the sum of the heights of the two bows must be equal to twice the angle of the primary bow. The centre bow appears to mix itself with the exterior, or secondary bow. This circumstance enables us to point out with tolerable exactness when the observation, as represented in the drawing, was made. The interval between the primary and secondary bow being somewhat above 8°, the sun's altitude must have been about 4°. Now, on November 14, in lat. 54° 36', this took place about thirty-five minutes past three o'clock. It is said it lasted at least ten minutes and till sunset. Probably what was supposed to be the setting of the sun was occasioned by its disappearing behind a low cloud. As the phenomenon does not appear to have been observed more than ten minutes, no material alteration would have taken place in the relative positions of the two primary bows."