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NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL CAROLS: '82!

PROFESSOR JEREMY SUMMERLY

In Northern climes, the year 1582 was an important one. In 1582 the Scottish Parliament issued an act against the singing of 'caralles', whether in church or outside it, and 'sik uthers superstitious and papisticall rites' were also banned. So carols and 'such other…rites' were regarded as 'superstitious and papist' in Scotland. The same held true in Scandinavia, although 1582 marked the publication of what was to become one of the most bizarrely influential carol publications of all time.

Didrik Persson of Nyland – in Latinized form Theodoricus Petri Nylandensis – was born in the city of Porvoo, which is about thirty miles east of Helsinki. In today's terms, Didrik Persson Ruuth was born in Finland into a family that hailed from Denmark, grew up in the Russian Federation, studied in Germany, worked in Sweden, and died in Poland. In 1582, when Persson was a student at the University of Rostock and in his very early twenties, he published an anthology of seventy-four pre-existent songs in Greifswald (then under Swedish rule, now in North-Eastern Germany). All but a dozen of them were single-line melodies, and two dozen of them were songs for Christmastide. The long Latin title of the volume, which began *Piae Cantiones Ecclesiasticae et Scholasticae Veterum Episcoporum*, means:

> Pious Church and Scholastic Songs of the Venerable Churchmen of territories in the control of the Swedish Crown, under the scrutiny of a priest who edited it in accordance with the exacting requirements of the Church of God and the School of Turku in Finland and with appropriate humility, this is the work of Theodoricus Petri of Nyland.

Finland was under Swedish rule, and the turn into the seventeenth century was a difficult one for a well-born Roman Catholic like Ruuth since the prevailing wind carried Lutheranism with it. When the *Piae Cantiones* collection was published, the headmaster of the Cathedral School in Turku (on the south west cast of Finland) was Jacobus Finno – in Finnish, Jaakko Suomalainen (1540 - 88). Suomalainen was granted an extended period of study leave by the Bishop of Turku for the two years each side of 1580, and Suomalainen produced a number of religious works in the Finnish language during that time – a prayer book and a hymnal among them. Suomalainen also made changes to some of the texts that were included in *Piae Cantiones* so that they fitted the Protestant views of the Swedish church of the day. Considering how well educated a man Suomalainen was, it seems odd that his changes were so makeshift. Clearly, simple substitution of the name of Jesus for the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a less than elegant solution to the problem of how to 'reform' your texts. Yet that's what Suomalainen did.

A copy of the 1582 edition of *Piae Cantiones* now resides in the British Library in London (shelfmark K.2.a.13). Before leaving Scandinavia, this tiny 5¾- x 3¾-inch book was owned by Eric Linning, Eric Linderstedt, and latterly by the Swedish composer Pehr Frigel (1750 - 1842). The volume was brought to England in 1851 by George Gordon (1812 - 1902), Queen Victoria's Envoy and Minister in Stockholm. Gordon had been appointed *chargé d'affaires* following the death of Sir Thomas Cartwright a week after Easter in 1850. It was during his year of ambassadorial deputizing in Sweden that Gordon obtained the *Piae Cantiones*. Gordon gave the volume to Rev. John Mason Neale (1818 - 1866), who passed it to Rev. Thomas Helmore (1811 - 1890), whose son Arthur inherited it and in 1908 sold it to the Plain Song and Medieval Music Society, from where it was bought by the British Museum in 1926. As a result of acquiring the *Piae Cantiones*, in 1853 the Reverends Helmore and Neale

published *Carols for Christmas-tide. Set to Ancient Melodies, and harmonized for Voices and Pianoforte, by the Rev. T. Helmore, the Words principally in imitation of the Original, by the Rev. J. M. Neale*. Helmore was Master of the Children at the Chapel Royal, hence why he was the musical brains of the outfit. But Helmore's knowledge of late-sixteenth century musical notation left something to be desired, particularly in the area of rhythmic transcription. Neale, on the other hand, was a very fine scholar, a polyglot, and a prolific author, though a controversial clergyman. His view on a successful collection of carols was a polystylistic one:

> It is impossible at one stretch to produce a quantity of New Carols, of which words and music alike shall be original. They must be the gradual accumulation of centuries; the offerings of different epochs, of different countries, of different minds, to the same treasury of the Church. None but an empiric would venture to make a set to order.

Neale was certainly not a carol quack, and therefore resolved not to foist on the market entirely new creations, but instead to modernize a dozen carols from *Piae Cantiones* to make them fit for Christmas use in his own day. In ten cases this involved translating the words from Latin to English, but in two cases (the tenth and eleventh carols in his sequence) Neale transformed spring songs into Christmas carols.

The spring song '*Tempus adest floridum*' ('The time of flowers is come') could date from as far back as the late-thirteenth century. The Victorian words that John Mason Neale attached to the tune have achieved unprecedented popularity in some circles:

> Good King Wenceslas look'd out,
> On the Feast of Stephen;
> When the snow lay round about,
> Deep and crisp and even:
> Brightly shone the moon that night,
> Though the frost was cruel,
> When a poor man came in sight,
> Gath'ring winter fuel.

Three years previously, John Mason Neale had published a children's book entitled *Deeds of Faith: Stories for Children from Church History*. Its ninth story is 'The Legend of S. Wenceslaus':

> The ground sloped down from the castle towards the forest. Here and there on the side of the hill, a few bushes, gray with moss, broke the unvaried sheet of white. And, as the King turned his eyes in that direction, a poor man—and the moonshine was bright enough to show his misery and his rags—came up to these bushes, and seemed to pull somewhat from them.

Wenceslas is the German form of the Bavarian name Vaclav. Vaclav the Good was an early tenth-century duke, not a king. The epithet 'Good' is certainly admissible when compared to the behaviour of Vaclav's own brother Boleslav, who murdered Vaclav for his title. Vaclav's canonization was a political act, but his saintly image is staunchly portrayed by Neale's memorable words. A particularly pleasing reference occurs at the beginning of the final verse of 'Good King Wenceslas', where Neale alludes to the medieval legend that Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary warmed the ground wherever they walked and that flowers sprang up where they trod. This was Neale's cue for the flowers of '*Tempus adest floridum*' to make their oblique presence felt in the last verse of 'Good King Wenceslas':

> In his master's steps he trod, Where the snow lay dinted;
> Heat was in the very sod Which the Saint had printed.

In 1911, Edmondstoune Duncan (1866 - 1920) praised the original spring song, '*Tempus adest floridum*', yet observed of its delightful tune that 'this we foolishly sing to Dr. Neale's doggerel'. And in 1885, Arthur Bullen snarled:

> One of the most popular carols is the piece beginning "Good King Wenceslas looked out," written by the Rev. Dr. Neale. The language is poor and commonplace to the last degree.

The reception from Erik Routley in 1959 was rather more favourable. Indeed Routley heaped a plethora of posthumous praise upon George John Robert Gordon, Queen Victoria's *chargé d'affaires*, for his part in bringing the *Piae Cantiones* volume to England:

> Few of Her Majesty's envoys have done the country such signal service as did this Mr. Gordon. After all, the man who was primarily responsible for our singing "Good King Wenceslas" deserves mention as one of our more conspicuous national benefactors.

Certainly the *Piae Cantiones* collection has influenced the carol canon significantly, helped in part by John Mason Neale's rhapsodic Victorian translations and Thomas Helmore's passable harmonizations. Two of the most enduring melodies from *Piae Cantiones* are two of the oldest: they both originate from fourteenth-century Germany; possibly even from the thirteenth century. 'Good Christian men, rejoice' began life as '*In dulci jubilo*', whereas 'Christ was born on Christmas Day' derived from '*Resonet in laudibus*', and before that '*Joseph, lieber Joseph mein*'. What Neale's free translation didn't do was to imitate the macaronic form of '*In dulci jubilo*'. The irrepressible momentum of '*In dulci*' arises because the overall sense continues as the language flits from Latin to the vernacular and back. Here's an old Latin/German version:

In dulci jubilo	In dulcet jubilation
nu singet und seyt froh	now sing and be joyful;
aller unsers wonne	all our delight
leyt *in praesepio*	lies in the manger,
sie leuchtet vor die sonne	it shines like the sun
matris in gremio	in a mother's lap:
qui es a et o	you who are Alpha and Omega!

By the fifteenth century, '*In dulci*' had grown into a four-verse hymn. It retained its macaronic form, substituting the local language at the relevant points (Swedish in the case of *Piae Cantiones*), and it began to be harmonized from the sixteenth century onwards. '*In dulci*' had become associated with the German mystic Heinrich Seuse (*c*1295 - 1366) at an early stage of its existence. After several hours of meditation, Seuse envisioned himself gambolling with angels. Seuse imagined a seraphic leader of the dance who led the song from within the gyrating company using a call-and-response format.

'*Resonet in laudibus*' also had physical associations of two different types – one multiphonic and the other oscillatory. As a *Wechselgesang* ('exchange-song'), the hymn was divided into sections and each section was sung (and played) by different ensembles, which were strategically placed at various points around the church. It's even possible that the 'exchange' principle was applied to the language of the text: Latin lines of '*Resonet in laudibus*' might alternate with German lines of '*Joseph, lieber Joseph mein*'. An equally colourful tradition was that of the *Wiegenlied* ('cradle-song'), where a garish effigy of the Christ-child was embedded in a cot, and the priest rocked the cradle vigorously in time to the music.

In the late-twentieth century, another piece from *Piae Cantiones* with medieval roots found particular fame. *Gaudete Christus est natus* ('Rejoice, Christ is born') began life as a fourteenth-century melody. By the sixteenth century its burden had received the four-part harmony treatment, and it's in this guise that it appears in *Piae Cantiones*. This makes it especially notable within the 1582 *Piae Cantiones* since it is only one of twelve pieces that use any form of harmony, indeed there's only one other that uses four-part harmony. In the early 1970s, the guitarist Bob Johnson heard a performance of *Gaudete* at a folk-carol service in Cambridge. When Johnson joined the electric folk band Steelyeye Span in 1972, he introduced the carol into the group's repertoire. *Gaudete* appeared on Steeleye Span's album 'Below the Salt' in that year, and in a different mix as a Christmas single. The single was re-released a year later and rose to No. 14 in the UK singles charts. This commercial success came four centuries too late to be of any monetary value to Didrik Persson Ruuth. As did the success of '*In dulci jubilo*' for Mike Oldfield, whose folk-rock version of the medieval dance-song peaked at No. 4 in the UK singles charts

during Christmas of 1975. Indeed, so seriously was Oldfield's instrumental version of '*In dulci*' taken by the recording industry in the mid-1970s that Italian pressings of the vinyl attributed the original song to J.S. Bach. While this is almost half a millennium out in terms of the dating of '*In dulci*', it's an error that can be rationalized. One of Bach's most performed organ pieces at Christmas is the majestic chorale prelude '*In dulci jubilo*' BWV 729, which is stridently based on the melody of the medieval classic.