



The Shepherd's Pipe

Songs from the Holy Night

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Georg Johannes Gick

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The Speech of Things



The Stable

Oh, the whole long, weary night
I lay awake and wept
because I am so rudely made,
and so poorly kept.

Old age has bent my legs
to leave me all forlorn,
And the rain pours through my roof
in little streams of scorn.

Then the gypsy wind one day
may the mountains spank him
Came and stole my door away.
For that I'll never thank him!

I'm just a wretched stable, old,
neglected, and forsaken!
Tell me how my walls can hold
all heaven without breaking!

My room's so narrow, I must slave
and sweat to make it do,
for, through every crack I have,
heaven is shining through!



The Roof above the Manger

Have the stars come floating down
to me and entered all?
Dropped in through my holes and flown
to rest beside the stall?

My peak has always longed to fly
into heaven and be free,
And now - but can it be I?
Heaven has come down to me!

All my ribs are trembling now
with the beating of my heart,
for in me, the poor and low,
heaven has found its part!



The Manger

Now, my wooden garment here
was not always old and broken.
And I have to shed a tear
now that I have spoken.

But you see, the stupid cows,
with the way they chomp and chew,
they sometimes miss the hay they browse
and bite off pieces of me too!

That's why I'm a battered crate
and why my legs all creak and wobble;
Forgive me, but I had to say it,
so my heart and I won't squabble.



The Rose Bush

Open up the manger shutters,
throw them open wide;
Let me catch a breath of joy
from the Christmas child inside!

How my branches dip and bow
underneath their load to rest.
Quiet, I am blooming now
for the holy guest...

Let me spend my days in flowering
for the baby's birth;
roses rise in every spring,
even from the poorest earth.



The Linden Tree

Pardon, I'm the linden tree;
above the roof I'm talking through.
I stayed awake the livelong night
just to pray for you.

'Twas all because I had a dream
from the stars up there.
See how my arms and how my hands
still are lifted up in prayer.

Listen, my branches cannot rest,
their little blossom bells are waving.
This holiday will be my best,
because the earth is made the nest
for the whole of heaven!



The Stars

How the stars do stare tonight,
like to lose their eyes,
for the joy that shines so bright
where the baby lies!

And they shed their silver gleam
in calm and quietness,
For eternity has come
to don its earth dress!

They spin for the poorest street
gleaming golden thread;
Love wanders soon on homeless feet,
nowhere to lay his head...



The Moon

But wait a bit, the poor old moon
has had no chance to speak!
He's gone and hid himself in fright
behind a mountain peak...

Behind the hill he takes his ease
in scorn of anxious star.
The good shepherd guards the world
and all things near and far.



Simplicity upon its Knees



The Ox and the Ass

I am the ass, and blind for life.
And I am the ox that am stone deaf.
“The stable’s lords are we!”

If I could see the baby bright!
And I hear the angels sing tonight!
“Have pity on our need!”

Is that the child I see?
That laughter, is it he?
“With God all things can be!”



The Child

See how each little hand
turns to your bed and prays!
I wish my little heart
could lie with you always.

With my love I've kindled it,
made it hot as I could do.
If it only helps a bit
to keep the cold from you!

Hear the thumping of my heart just like a holy bell.
To help you, take my coat,
and may it warm you well!



The Beloved

That my wishing might be smaller
here I kneel, dear child, at thy feet;
Take the love my lips would speak of,
with devotion Thee to greet.

Then when comes my own beloved,
bowing to me though I am poor,
with my kiss impressed upon him
his heart knows thy heavenly fire.



The Man

To see how crude the baby's bed
would grieve most anyone,
and shame the eye that feels no tear
to see the little Son.

When looking on this lowly bed
it even hurts me too;
so make a nest here in my heart;
I've opened it, dear child, for you.



The Poet

All the singing, ringing sounds
have made my heart aglow;
and it wants to sing aloud tonight
what every heart would show.

The smile, the tear that speaks to all
that eyes can understand –
This my poor lips now long to frame
in rhyme that love will grant.

Let my life before the child
in quiet first bow down;
and then my heart, no longer mine,
pours out for you in song!



Christmas Every Day

Oh, let me come and follow too –
laugh at me though you may –
for to our nearest neighbor's house
a baby's come today.

I saw the star that fell that night
down from the heaven clear;
I know I heard the angels tread
who brought the baby here.

The mother I would like to ask
if with her husband dear
she'll let me in to see the child,
to heaven's babe draw near.

I want to open wide my heart
and sweep it clean and clear;
he'd see and smile upon me then,
the little Jesus dear.



The Old Shepherd

The red sun will be setting soon,
my days are white as snow.
The angels call me from the sheep
and I must rise and go.

Then I myself will be a lamb
and seek the lowly stall
to where the Holy Shepherd comes
who to pasture leads us all.

I look once more at every lamb
my staff has guided tenderly.
Oh, what will become of them
when His horn sounds forth and beckons me?

Oh, let my tears come flowing down!
Come my lambs, come with me all!
Let us go to golden meadows with
the Shepherd in the stall!



The Wisemen

After the children and the shepherds
after the poor we beg of you,
Oh, may your heavenly loving-kindness bring
our souls to pasture too.

Myrrh, incense and gold,
kingdoms and crowns of kings;
how pale and cheap and old
there in the stable are these things!

Good shines in one alone,
true as a guiding star!
Guide between star and stone
through love and tears afar
into the kingdom of your own,
you King of kings that are!



The Heart Lifts its Hands



The Bed of Hay

See, I am the bed of hay
from the blessed night
where Love came to the world – a tiny child –
so helpless in our sight.

For the little God so great
I'm too poor, I'm told.
Had I but known this miracle could be!
Thou Love a thousandfold!

Will you ask the child for me,
I beg you, holy mother,
a crib more worthy I may be
to hold this little brother.



The Wisp of Straw

I'm a wisp of manger straw
from holy night and I was glad;
I was full of love and awe
and made myself his bed.

Trample all my ripe grain out,
thou child of love of heaven;
In the soil of shepherd's hut
shall all my roots be driven.

When you bless the great broad world
to its very end,
I shall be a ripened field
waiting for your hand.

Before you die for all men's sake
on the lifted cross,
I shall be the bread you break
to redeem our loss.



The Spider in the Corner

I'm spider in his cubbyhole
under the roof away;
for the child I slave and toil
all through the night and day.

All the many weary folk
who come to see God's Son –
their hearts are filled with Christmas love
when my spinning's done.

When I have spun my life away
and woven many hearts a shrine,
let the child come if he may,
and spin me up in mine.



The Little Path

That's what I should like the best:
to be a humble bridge or way
leading to the Christmas joy
where longing finds the road to rest.

If only someone came to greet
the holy mother and her child,
the very stones that make my path
would thrill with joy beneath those feet.



The Shepherd's Song

I am the shepherd's song, I sing
here in the stable's shadow,
and all men come; like lambs I bring
them to the Christmas meadow.

I call them through the winter night,
lost out there in the bitter cold;
Oh come and see how love is bright
in the Good Shepherd's fold!

If there should come some weary one
still late at night that I could bless,
I'll be content my singing's done
and glad for weariness.



The Candle

A candle let me be to shine
before the manger;
Let me stay
as a burning sign
to all who pass along this way...

So that some poor wandering stranger
may see my light and come,
leave earth's streets and find a manger
that is all men's home.

Then let my wax drip to the floor
with the love I bring;
Only when I am no more
will I be everything!



The Bell

I ring it far and near
and sound it forth to all,
for God is made our brother here
in an oxen stall!

Then all men's hearts will ring out clear
to make his praises known
and burn like crimson candles here
in silence 'round God's throne.

This is the wonder in the last
great Christmastime
when time is done
and the Spirit's children keep the feast
with God, the Father and the Son!



The Miracle

When all the winds were mild,
Mary came to me apart
and laid the Holy Child
here inside my heart.

My heart was made the manger,
and my body was the stall.
And now no man is stranger:
my life goes out to all,

To bring to each of them
this Child of heaven's light,
to let them enter in, like flames
of candles to the holy night.

My heart was made the manger,
and my body was the stall.
And now no man is stranger:
my life goes out to all,



Notes

This collection of songs revolves around the stable on Christmas Night. The ordinary, commonplace things participated, each in its own way, in the miraculous birth, as did the everyday people who also came to worship – and which of us might not see himself among them?

The poems were found in a book shop in Germany in 1935. Their unpretentious, genuine approach to that Night of nights brought an immediate response. In the English translation composer Marlys Swinger found the inspiration to a Christmas cantata for children.

We know that Christ came, not in a gorgeous, gilded, royal setting, but in surroundings so humble and poor that even the lowest and meanest of God's creatures could see His power for what it was – not of this world but of God. The little path, the bed of hay, the linden tree – do they not point to Christmas every day? While the Shepherd's Pipe has at its center the very fact of Christmas, all of the voices that speak through it are for every day and every time.

The poet, Georg Johannes Gick, we have been unable to trace; he seems to have vanished in the dark, destructive years of the Second World War. One can only conjecture. But we feel close to him, nonetheless, and as if we know him, for he, the Poet, has spoken to us of himself, and in a way which we wish to echo:

Let my life before the Child
In quiet first bow down;
and then my heart, no longer mine,
pours out for you in song.

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