

David Wilbourne's Christmas sermon

It's been the coldest, iciest, December for ages.

'It'll change with the moon'

a farmer's widow assured me.

And it did.

As soon as the full moon came,

the snow went.

I love stuff like that,

old country folk-lore

championed by people who are rooted in the seasons,

which kicks expert predictions and pronouncements

into touch.

'It'll change with the moon'

Last year the full moon fell on Christmas Eve,

a wondrous sight,

and certainly things changed with that moon,

as a birth in a stable broke history in two,

BC became AD,

marvellous light dawned

in the utter darkness

of a brutal pagan world.

God has a habit of changing things with the moon.

His chosen people , the Jews,

were slaves in Egypt over three thousand years ago,

then the full moon came

and they escaped to freedom,

passing over the Red Sea

by its light

as if on dry land.

Ever Spring full moon since they solemnly and joyfully

keep that miraculous change,
their Passover.

The fact that the full moon fell on Christmas Eve
meant we had the earliest Easter
in our life time,
another full moon,
a March full moon,
the Passover full moon,
when Jesus, kept the festival
but gave it a new significance.
He passed over from death and utter failure and rejection
to life in all its fullness and all its glory,
resurrected life.
'It'll change with the moon'
It did.

Another piece of country folk-lore
is keeping Old Christmas.

In September 1752 the Government
docked ten days off our year,
because the seasons had got out of phase.

Country folk don't like having their calendars mucked about
and many kept to the old scheme of things.

I met a farmer from Bransdale
who told me that it would invariably snow
on old Christmas Day,
the true Christmas,
now 5 January.

Francis Kilvert,
a Victorian Clergyman and Diarist,
goes to a barn on Old Christmas Eve
to celebrate another country custom,

to see whether the farm animals would kneel
on the night of the birth
of the child born in their manger.
The farm animals, like country stalwarts,
clearly resist well-intended government interference
and keep to the old calendar.

Thomas Hardy described the custom in his poem

the Oxen,

written in the darkest days of the Great War.

The poem is a seeking for light,
catching an intuitive hope
that the old ways are true,
that faith is true,
that God can break in and make animals kneel
and change things for good.

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.

"Now they are all on their knees,"

An elder said as we sat in a flock

By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where

They dwelt in their strawy pen,

Nor did it occur to one of us there

To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave

In these years! Yet, I feel,

If someone said on Christmas Eve,

"Come; see the oxen kneel,

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb

Our childhood used to know,"

I should go with him in the gloom,

Hoping it might be so'

We come tonight simply hoping it might be so.

'It'll change with the moon'

It certainly changed with the first Passover,

the first Christmas,

the first Easter,

it changed big-time as light dawned in darkness.

Lord, turn the darkness of our war-torn world

to the light of peace,

turn the darkness of our divided Church

to the light of unity,

turn our darkness to your marvellous light.

'It'll change with the moon'

No.

It will change with God.