

Corpus Christi Carol

Corpus Christi Carol

Down in yon forest there stands a hall,
The bells of Paradise I heard them ring;
It's covered all over with purple and pall [so tall]
And I love my Lord Jesus above any thing.

In that hall there stands a bed,
It's covered all over with scarlet so red.

At the bedside there lies a stone
Which the sweet Virgin Mary knelt upon.

Under that bed there runs a flood [river]
The one half runs water, the other runs blood.

At the foot of the bed there grows a thorn
Which ever blooms [blows] blossoms since He was born.

Over that bed the moon shines bright,
Denoting our Saviour was born on this night.

From Lloyd, Folk Song in England

note: The Corpus Christi Carol is so called, not because it was sung at the Festival of Corpus Christi (celebrated the Thursday after Whitsuntide/Pentecost) but because most versions, especially the earliest, contained an explicit reference to the Corpus Christi (Latin, the body of Christ.)

The earliest known form of the text dates back to about 1500, when it was taken down by Richard Hill of London. Many of the details of the song still survive, although the song has changed metrical form somewhat. For Hill's text, see CORPCHR2

By the nineteenth century, the text had evolved into various forms of the "Down in Yon Forest" given here. Many mysterious symbols worked their ways into these later texts: the flood of water and blood given here (an obvious reference to John 19:34) is drunk up by a hound in some versions. Various attempts have been made to interpret these symbols (often in terms of Grail legends); few have