

The Thirteenth Day

Some things never change. For instance, you will find
Today, on Radio Four, precisely ends at nine.
Never is the show allowed to end a little early –
Listeners would be outraged if it ended prematurely.

But one thing always changes, every single year,
As surely as the chancellor puts up the tax on beer,
It's earlier and earlier – and never seems to stop –
the day you first see Christmas trees and tinsel in a shop.

It used to be that everyone would plan, on Stir-up Sunday,
To pound the streets for presents, on the following Monday.
But then the turning-on of lights became the usual thing
And November was the time to hear the Herald Angels sing.

And then the supermarkets saw that if you bought your wine
In October, you would drink it weeks before the time –
And so you'd buy some more. And, likewise, more mince pies.
Thanks to Santa, supermarkets saw their profits rise.

Now Christmas decorations seem to be on sale all year.
Why not try to mix and match the seasons of good cheer?
Book your summer holiday in the blue Bahamas –
And spend the time out shopping for slippers and pyjamas.

Soon we'll hear that Easter is the time to Christmas-shop –
You could buy a Christmas tree with a bunny on the top –
And then at Valentine's, if no kisses are in store,
Hang a branch of mistletoe up above your door.

Although Twelfth Night is still the time the festive season ends –
Thirteenth day is now the point it all begins again.
And if the thought of everlasting Yuletide leaves you vexed,
Just think: you could be planning for the Christmas after next.

Happy Christmas 2014

Ian Mortimer