

Reflections

On Christmas

Then said a rich man, Speak to us of Giving.
And he answered:
You give but little when you give of your possessions.
It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.
For what are your possessions but things you keep and
guard for fear you may need them tomorrow?

Kahlil Gibran

There is nothing I can give you which you have not; but there is much that, while I cannot give, you can take. No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today. Take heaven. No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present instant. Take peace. The gloom of the world is but a shadow; behind it, yet within reach, is joy. Take joy. And so, at this Christmastime, I greet you with the prayer that for you, now and forever, the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

Fra Giovanni

Margaret Dougt

Carols Most Universal Way of Celebration

Of all of the customs surrounding the Yuletide season, perhaps the most popular is the singing of Christmas carols. Anyone, young or old, prima donna or monotone, can sing the many songs that celebrate the world's most joyous holiday. Where, however, did the singing of carols begin, and where did some of the best known carols originate?

The word "carol" comes from the French word carole, and was originally a dance done in rings, and accompanied by singing and, sometimes, flutes. In the thirteenth century these carols were secular in nature; but, according to legend, St. Francis of Assisi changed the songs into religious hymns. From then on, the singing of carols spread throughout Europe; later, colonists carried them to distant lands, including America.

Although there are carols for Advent, Epiphany, and Easter, the most popular ones are those about Christmas, and can be placed in several divisions. The largest group of carols are of the nativity, such as "What Child Is This?" Others can be classified as shepherd carols ("While Shep-

herds Watch Their Flocks By Night"), wise men carols ("We Three Kings"), and ballads (the sixteenth century carol, "I Saw Three Ships"). Some carols, such as "Angels We Have Heard on High" are macaronic, a medieval practice of mixing an English and Latin text.

Some carols have melodies that date far back in history with lyrics of fairly recent origin. The tune of "Deck the Halls" dates back to the Druids. It was published in 1784 under the Welsh lyrics entitled "Nos Galan" or "New Year's Night." Over a hundred years later--in 1881--this same melody appeared in New York with the now-familiar lyrics "Deck the halls with boughs of holly."

The music of "Good King Wenceslas" originated in 13th century Sweden with words that began "Spring has unwrapped her flowers." Around 1850 an English minister, John Mason Neale, wrote several verses about the Bohemian king, Wenceslas, noted for the good deeds he performed. Neale set his verses to the old Swedish melody, and created a new Christmas song.

Other popular carols were

There is a better thing than the observance of Christmas day---and that is keeping Christmas.

Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people and remember what other people have done for you? to ignore what the world owes you, and to think what you owe the world? to see that your fellow men are just as real as you are and to try to look behind their faces to their hearts, hungry for joy? to close your book of complaints against the management of the universe, and to look around for a place where you can sow a few seeds of happiness? If you are willing to do these things, even for a day, then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to stoop down and consider the needs and the desires of little children? to remember the weakness and loneliness of people who are growing old? to stop asking how much your friends love you, and ask yourself whether or not you love them enough? to trim your lamp so that it will give more light and less smoke, and to carry it in front of you so that your shadow will fall behind you?

Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world---stronger than hate, stronger than evil, stronger than death, and that the blessed life that began in Bethlehem nineteen hundred years ago is the image and brightness of eternal love? Then you can keep Christmas.

And if you can keep it for a day, why not always?

Henry Van Dyke

written within the past two centuries. Issac Watts, the "Father of Hymnody," wrote the words of "Joy to the World" as his translation of the last five verses of Psalm 98. Years later, an American, Lowell Mason, composed a melody to Watt's words, borrowing two musical phrases from Handel's "Messiah" as inspiration. He entitled the carol "Antioch" and published it in 1839.

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" took over a century to evolve into its present form. Charles Wesley wrote a poem in the early 1700's that began "Hark how all the Welkin rings/Glory to the King of Kings." A George Whitefield, apparently having little fondness for the word "welkin"--it means sky--changed the lyrics to "Hark! the herald angels sing/Glory to the newborn king." After that, several editors saw fit to make changes in the text.

In 1840, German composer Felix Mendelssohn was asked to compose a work in honor of the invention of the printing press. He responded with a composition for male chorus and piano. An English organist, Dr. W.H. Cummings, dis-

covered that one portion of the work, "Vaterland," fitted Charles Wesley's words. With Mendelssohn's music, then, and Wesley's poem, he published "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" in 1855.

Perhaps the world's most popular Christmas carol is "Silent Night," and its origin was almost as simple as its words. At Christmastime, 1818, an Austrian priest, Joseph Mohr, discovered he needed a new carol for services. He wrote down a poem, and gave it to his friend, organist Franz Gruber. Gruber composed the melody on Christmas Eve, and "Silent Night" was first sung that very night at Mohr's church.

The twentieth century has also produced many Christmas songs that are fast becoming traditional Christmas carols. Melodies such as "Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer," "White Christmas," and "Do You Hear What I Hear" are among the most popular of today's carols. But no matter what the song is--an ancient Swedish melody or an Irving Berlin original--Christmas carols have been and shall remain one of the most universal ways to celebrate Christmas.