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Carol Singing Is Dying Out

THE custom of carol singing out of doors at Christmas time seems to be dying out.

This is a great pity, for carols are a branch of folk music, the unconscious art of the peasant mind, a heritage of inestimable worth.

In many English villages there are carols peculiar to themselves, to be jealously guarded and retained for their use.

The Christmas carol dates from the birth of Christianity itself, the angels having sung their carols at the birth of Jesus Christ.

Among the early Christians carols were sacred hymns representing Christ's nativity.

Now the name is given to a variety of popular metrical compositions from the simple record of the birth of our Lord to rude wasail songs and rhymes of holiday revelry.

Probably no Christmas would seem complete without the well-known and popular hymn, "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing."

The word carol, which originally meant a dance, is thought to have come into our language either from the Norman French carole or from the Celtic carol.

In 1822 Davies Gilbert published "some ancient Christmas carols, with the tunes to which they were formerly sung in the west of England." In his preface he declared himself to be desirous "of preserving them in their actual forms, as specimens of times

now passing away, and of religious feelings now superseded by others of a different caste."

Of late years some of the churches—chiefly in the larger cities—have held "Christmas carol services" during the Christmas season. This is an excellent movement, and might profitably be taken up by churches all over the country. Certainly if the churches can restore this old custom it will add to the enjoyment of the season.

France is exceptionally rich in carols, which are often drinking songs as in many European countries. We find many French carols translated into English, no doubt as a result of the intercourse which existed between dwellers on either side of the channel, in the days when English youths often pursued their studies in France.

There is a great deal of discussion as to which is the most popular carol. While it is impossible to name the favorite, there can be little doubt of the universal appeal of "God rest ye, merry gentlemen, whose plaintive melody has touched a chord in the popular mind. Among modern compositions may be mentioned, "The Shepherds Left Their Sheep," by Alfred Hollins. Mr. Hollins is blind, but this affliction has not prevented him from becoming one of the finest organists and composers in Britain.

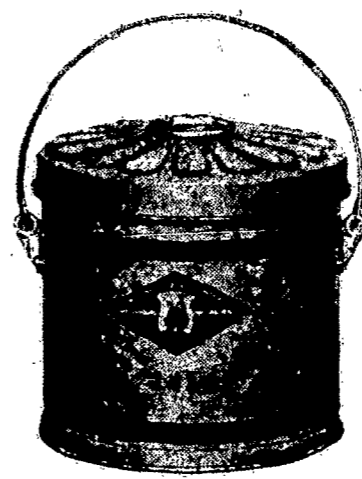
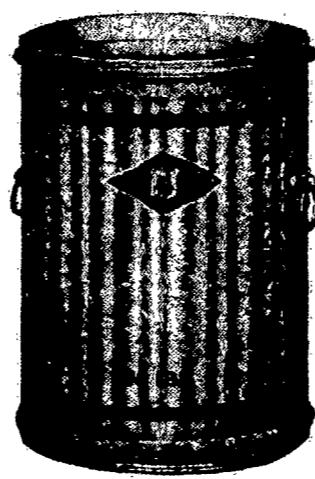
Washington Irving in his famous "Sketch Book" introduces us to most of the old English customs which have from time immemorial, attended the Christmas festival. Of his first night at Bracebridge Hall he says:

"I had scarcely got into bed when a strain of music seemed to break forth in the air just below the window. I listened, and found it proceeded from a band, which I concluded to be the waits from some neighboring village. They went around the house playing under the windows. I drew aside the curtains, to hear them more distinctly. The moonbeams fell through the upper part of the casement, partially lighting up the antiquated apartment. The sounds, as they receded, became more soft and serial, and seemed to accord with the quiet and the moonlight. I listened and listened—they became more and more tender and remote, and, as they gradually died away, my head sank upon the pillow and I fell asleep."

In Pasquill's "Jests," a book published in 1604, an amusing story is told of a knight who gave a Christmas feast at which he entertained his friends and the tenantry.

The host ordered no man at the table to drink a drop "till he that was master over his wife should sing a carol." A pause ensued and then one poor man, more daring than the others, timidly lifted his lonely voice.

The knight then turned to the ladies, who sat at a table apart, and "bade her who was master over her husband," sing a carol. The legend says that forthwith "the women fell all to singing, that there was never heard such a catter-walling piece of musick."



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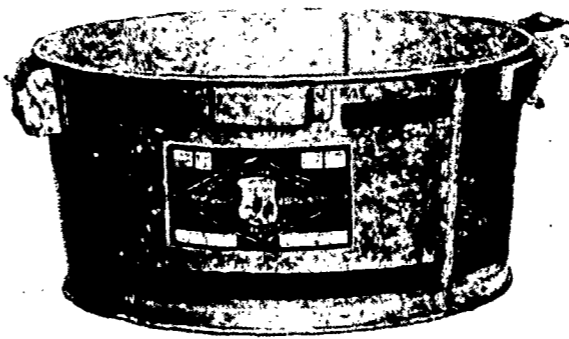
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