

Music—And Bells—And Christmas

BOTH ARE TRADITIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH JOYOUS SEASON, BRINGING MESSAGE OF NATIVITY TO WEARY WORLD

By Hattie C. Fleck

(Written for N. Y. W. C. Christmas Supplement)

Music and bells are closely associated with the festivities of the Christmas season. Not only is each associated with Christmas, but they are associated with each other in the observance of the Feast.

When we think of Christmas as a time of song and happily lend our voices to the singing of "Adeste Fidelis," "Holy Night" and other hymns of the season, we are quick to recall that when an angel appeared to the watching shepherds on that first Christmas, to bring them "good news of great joy," there appeared, also, "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth among men of good will."

And church bells and sleigh bells come into our minds when our thoughts turn to Christmas. They are frequently depicted on greeting cards, and on numerous other marks of the season. But how many of us stop to think that this is not meaningless symbolism, that the bell is not just a ringing thing? Through the centuries, bells have helped to advance civilization, culture and prayer.

BELLS STILLED BY WAR

There was a practice in England of tolling bells for an hour before Midnight on Christmas Eve, and of ringing them out joyously immediately on the stroke of twelve. Now, church bells in England are stilled. Until peace comes to Europe they are only to be rung as a signal that an invasion of England is being attempted.

It is a strangely interesting fact that bells, which we associate so intimately with the proclamation of the Christmas message of Peace on Earth, suffer in an almost personal way from the ravages of war. A quarter of a century ago many countries were locked in the cruel grip of the World War, and church bells those joyous heralds of Christmas, were in some places melted down to make cannon. Two decades ago the world was again at peace, and peoples once more looked forward eagerly to the coming of the Christmas message. The restoration of famed bell-towers and their ringing throughout the world produced news stories that captured the interest of people everywhere. Today much of the world is again at war. It may be that already bells have begun to play the part that was exacted of them before.

One who has spent a peace time Christmas on the Continent of Europe may well remember the high sound of a bell tinkling outside the door of a home. It was rung to announce the Christ Child as impersonated by a little child of the neighborhood. A monitor in

charge of the small visitor was dressed in tarlatan and tinsel. She rang the bell as she steered the heavenly impersonator to the door of the house. The first small sound of the bell transformed the household within. It stirred both young and old folk, moving them to jubilation and reverence. Among the young people of the household the heavenly impersonator distributed cookies and sweets. It was a short visit, for there were other houses many others to be visited. The visitor's departure was a signal for the tiny bell to be rung again.

Seafaring men have always placed great reliance on bells. In Scandinavian countries it was the practice to ring out a bell in a seacoast locality throughout all of Christmas night. The purpose was to encourage mariners to come into port for Christmas. Since it is said that the bell was rung to urge mariners even to buffet a storm to make port for Christmas, there are those who associate this tradition with the frosted bells that have long adorned Christmas trees and the windows of houses.

INTERESTING TRADITION

It seems that in almost every European country one can find a deeply interesting tradition associated with bells and the observance of Christmas. Needless to say, adherence to these practices has been sadly dislocated in almost all of Europe by the current war.

Of course it is not only at Christmas that bells play such an important and consoling part in the affairs of men. Perhaps it is only when bells cannot be heard as in the case in much of Europe today, that we really understand the part they have played in the lives of the faithful to worship in the parishes, the great cathedrals and in the sweltering, the freezing, the parched, the drenched, the bare and arid, the green and tangled areas of Mesopotamia throughout the world. In our own country many, many years ago Catholic missionaries walked in the wilderness, bells swinging in their hands, attracting Indians to hear the first words they ever heard of their Creator.

It is altogether likely that most of us have not noticed too fully the real part bells play in the observance of the Feast of Our Saviour's Birth. What do you think it would be like if for us here in the United States suddenly there were no bells at Christmastime?

Christmas

In a little stable a child was born
In December on Christmas Morn.
A song was heard from the heavens above

And above His head there rested
A dove

The mother held Him in her arms
Saint Joseph kept Him from all harms

The angels sang, the shepherds
prayed
In that stable the Christ child
laid.

And from the east some wise men
came.

And followed the star that was
always the same.

The wise men traveled a night and
a day

And passed a palace on the way

The shepherds and the wise men
came.

The heavens opened and the an-
gels sang.

"Glory to God in the highest
Peace on earth to men of good
will."

—*Barry Davis, Marilyn Hanley,
Fifth Grade, St. Patrick's
School, Corning.*

70TH ANNIVERSARY

Chicago — The Catholic Casino Chorus has observed its seventieth anniversary. The organization was formed by a group of Catholic men with a love for liturgical music and the classical and semi-classical works of great composers. It has made many public appearances in its seven decades of existence.

Non-Catholic Gives Steer To Nuns

CLEVELAND — A custom of 17 years' standing was renewed when the Little Sisters of the Poor were presented with a prize steer to provide Christmas dinner for more than 200 men and women who reside with them at the Home for the Aged here.

The gift has been made annually by William L. Bryans, a non-Catholic, President of the Benstead-Bryans Company livestock dealers. The animal was one of a large number designated as "prize steers" which were auctioned at the annual display of live stock which has just closed here. Raised on a nearby farm by Philip Gibbs, a 16-year-old, high school student, the steer weighed 1,065 pounds and brought 35 cents a pound or \$372.

To Enroll All

WASHINGTON — An increase in membership of 2,000 is the aim of an enrollment program launched by new officers of the Alumni Association of the Catholic University of America. The present membership is more than 9,000.

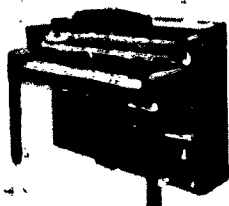
Andrew P. Maloney, 26, of New York City, continues as President of the Association, heading the group of officers elected at the annual reunion just concluded in New York. Enrollment of every graduate of the University and establishment of local chapters in every State are sought in the current campaign.

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