

<p>NOELS This is the Salutation of the Angel GABRIEL</p>	
	<p>Now-ell Now-ell Now-ell Now-ell This is the Sal-u-ta-tion of the angel Bring us in good ale good ale For our Bless-ed Ladeys sake bring us</p>
	
	<p>Ga-bri-el tidings true there become new sent from the Trinity by Gabri-el in good ale Bring us in no brown bread for that is made from bran, nor bring</p>
	
	<p>to Naz-a-reth Ci-ty of Gal-i-lee A clean Maid-en & Pure Vir-gin thru us in no white bread for therein is no gain, but bring us in good ale good ale</p>
	
	<p>her hum-il-it-ty Hath con-cep-ed the Person Second in Di-et-ty & bring us in good ale For our blessed La-dyes sake, bring us in good ale</p>

OUR PAGAN CHRISTMAS INHERITANCE

By Helen J. Stiegler

Christmas Carols . . . Christmas Music . . . Though the words may bring to mind a fleeting picture of a little group of English waits standing in thin snow out side of a cheerily lighted window, singing old English Christmas carols with lusty optimism, or of a happy German family encircled about a tinsel candle-lit tree, singing an old Weinachts Lied, or of a dimly-lit Cathedral in Italy or Spain resounding with solemn chants, it is not very probable that they will bring a mental image of a wild Pagan celebration. Yet, strange as it sounds, our use of sacred music is a relic of our Pagan ancestry.

The very date which the Church set, on which to celebrate the Feast of the Nativity, was a direct concession to Pagan custom, and is our inheritance from our Pagan forefathers. It coincided with feasts of great antiquity that from time immemorial had been observed throughout the world.

It was exactly at this time of the year, during the winter solstice, that the Ancient Athenians held their Three Sacred Plowings; The Persians celebrated a great Agricultural Feast, which had its counterpart in distant China; The Scandinavians celebrated with their Feast of the Yule; the Romans held the Saturnalia; and the ancient Druids went forth with many ceremonials to gather their Sacred Mistletoe.

In all Pagan rites of divine worship, music and dancing played important parts.

The early Church, in its efforts to stamp out Pagan influence and tradition, forbade both music and the dance. The use of ritual music was too indelibly ingrained in the people however, for the edict to endure, so the Church compromised; but the dance remained stigmatized and to this day certain branches of the Church keep this prejudice alive.

The ancient Pagan ritual of decorating house-doors and hearths with greens also fell under the Church ban as another evil inheritance from the days of Pagan worship, but this was another tradition too firmly rooted in the minds of the superstitious folk for church influence to combat it successfully.

Both St. James and St. Paul refer to Christmas songs, and Pliny the Younger, in his letter to Trajan, referring to the Christians in 107 A. D. says, "They were wont to meet together on a stated day before it was light, and sing among

themselves alternately a hymn to Christ as to God"; Telesphorus, Bishop of Rome, is accredited with having instituted the singing of "Noels" at the celebration of the Nativity, (that word being derived from a root signifying "news").

In the earliest days of the Church, "The Bishops were accustomed on Christmas Day to go amongst their clergy and sing Hymns to them." "Gloria in Excelsis" is the earliest recorded hymn, and no doubt originated at this time. Many writers claim the actual use of ceremonial music dates back to the ecclesiastical ceremony-of-the-creche inaugurated by St. Francis in 1223.

Our present use of Christian music and our Christmas Carols had their inception in the old English Mysterie Plays.

A cradle containing a living child or a bambino was placed in the chancel of the church; "In an effort" (according to a very old manuscript) "to further enlighten the Rustics by means of Pictorial Representations . . . At a certain point in the Service, a Procession of Men dressed as Shepherds approach the artificial Manger. The Priests then address them 'Quem Quaritus in Praeseps,' they answer 'Salvatore Dominum Christum,' then other priests dressed as midwives draw aside curtains and shew the Shepherds the baby."

At these services hymns of a popular though religious nature were sung to familiar tunes. In time the Mysteries left the churches, and migrated to the public squares, and the hymns, disassociated from the Church, formed the basis of the extensive carol literature found in England and France. Strangely enough, the origin of Spanish carols is untraceable as they were only preserved orally, and Spanish Christmas music is entirely of a sacred nature. In England, especially, Christmas carols rapidly lost nearly all trace of their sacred origin, and became a strange mixture of religion and conviviality, with references to ale and wine and pork-pie far outweighing those of a religious nature.

The "caroula," whence we derived our "carol" originally signified "a ritual dance with music." "In the 7th century," to quote from an old manuscript, "Carol had an evil sound, for Wicked folk wanted to dance on Saints Dayes," so the caroula was condemned. But by the 14th century it has altered its

meaning, being shorn of its dance association, and, for the time being at least, had "become respectable."

In fact, carols were a sign of the emancipation of the people from the Puritanism of the Dark Ages, when the drama, the dance, and communal singing had been suppressed. They flourished until the recrudescence of Puritanical oppression in the 17th century, when all observation of Christmas was forbidden by law.

Carols were in their heyday in the 15th century. The populace desired something less severe than the old Latin Hymns, and freely substituted new words to their old familiar tunes. The two sets of words as exemplified in the illustration are typical of the change that had taken place; Sacred songs became little else than incitements to the secular mirth and enjoyment which now characterized the Christmas season; its primitive holy character had been completely superseded by a festival of conviviality.

Instead of being sung only in Church, by the middle of the 16th century, the old songs, with new words (though words, sacred or secular made little difference "provided there was a righte goode tune"), were being freely sung by bands of convivial singers, itinerant nocturnal musicians and waifs. They roamed the streets, wandering from house to house on Christmas Eve and other nights preceding the Festival of the Lord's Nativity, and their singing was often merely a pretext for collecting money. To wit:

"Three weeks before the daye whereon was born the Lord of Grace,

And on the Thursdaye boyes and gyrls do roame in every place.

And bounce and beate at everye doore with blows and lustie slaps

And crie the Advent of the Lord not born as yet perhaps.

And wishing to the neighbors all that in the house do dwell

A Happy Yeare and Everything to spring and prosper well."

The celebration of Christmas had indeed deviated far from the precepts of the early Christians, and, as reflected in the carols of the day, had become a day of excessive feasting and carousing.

After the Reformation, when the Puritans came into power, they prohibited the celebration of Christmas, by an act of Parliament, "Being persuaded that no one thing hindereth the Gospel work all the year long more than doth the observation of that Idol Day, that Old Feasting Day in honour of Satan, their Idol God, the Papists' Massing Day, the Profane

Man's Ranting Day, the Superstitious Man's Idol Day, Satan's Day . . . having so many days of accursed observations with it." Because Christmas in 1644 fell on their fast day they ordered it kept as such, and certain church dignitaries were arrested for "committing a breach of a Parliamentary ordinance by receiving Holy Communion on Christmas Morn." No church services were permitted, and strongest efforts were made to stamp out both secular and sacred observations of the day. But such unpopular restraint could not, and did not last very long; the carols that ensued the eventual revival of Christmas reflected very strongly that the people had missed more the restraint placed on their food and drink than on their church attendance!

The temporary suspension of Christmas resulted in at least one deplorable loss—that of the ancient tunes to which many of the carols had been sung. Having been traditional, many of these were now forgotten. The Reformation had also forbidden the singing of hymns in Church, but some of the rural churches had kept the singing of carols alive, dividing them into two classes, the scriptural and the convivial.

A preface to a collection of "Ancient Christmas Carols" (about 1830) informs us that "This pious and Laudable practice, as is well known, has in some rural parts of the Kingdom never been relinquished . . . A few years ago London retained scarcely more than a Shadow of the Ancient Use; then occasionally might be heard itinerant singers who (from motives not altogether disinterested and in strains as uncooth as they were ill-suited to the theme and object) annually wished their neighbors a Merrie Christmas and announced 'Tidings of Comfort and Joy.' Now it is a Comfort to know a Great Portion of our Parochial Choirs have discerned one of their principal offices as true heralds of the church and hasten 'very early, very early to spread the Tidings . . . how Christ our Savior He was Born on Christmas Daye in the Morning.'"

When Christmas, as we have come to know it was revived, thanks to Dickens' "Christmas Carol" (which wasn't a carol at all) interest in the old carols reawakened with it. Many of the old songs were completely lost, but after much research work in the country districts, some were retrieved, through the preservation of old broadsheets. Others were recovered by appealing to old villagers with good memories. Some of the old tunes were stripped of their traditional words of levity by the well meaning Religious Tract Society of London, which, in 1825 was instrumental in bringing to light many of the songs that had fallen into disuse, and recast them to give them a religious aspect. Of these many are the familiar hymn-like carols we sing today.