

crease, and so sacred are the associations of Christmas, that long years, stirring events and change of clime are powerless even to cast a haze over the brightness of our earliest recollections. We still see the tender, much-loved mother, at whose knee we first learned the sweet story of Christmas, bending over the little cot at the foot of which hangs the tiny stocking ready for Santa Claus—we still remember that, ever kind, ever thoughtful as she was, at Christmas time her care seemed warmer and her love more sacred; we see her once again as she appeared to our childish eyes, a glorified and perfect being, and alas, for some of us, the vision is blotted out by a blinding rush of tears. But why recapitulate those sweet and bitter memories which are so familiar to us all? To him who is separated from the home of his youth by a thousand leagues of sea, Christmas is especially dear by reason of these mingled recollections; he can be sure that then at least, he is fondly remembered, and that, amidst all their rejoicings, those he has left behind will feel a pang of tender regret when they think of the absent one. And just in the same way as every individual Englishman feels his heart stirred at Christmas time by yearning thoughts of his childhood's home, so the vast family of Englishmen, whether born in Canada, Australia, or Old England itself, turn at this season instinctively towards the land that they are all proud to call home—the land where Old Christmas finds his warmest welcome, and is most gaily decked out in holly and mistletoe. We none of us need to be prompted either by literature or art in our remembrance of friends, or in our love for Christmas, but it is very pleasant to open one of some few books, which are themselves old friends, and to be gently reminded of the old familiar faces and the old familiar scenes—and among such rare books Washington Irving's 'Sketch Book' deserves a prominent place.

Much as we love every article and story in the Sketch Book, we recur at this time of the year with the greatest affection, to the series of papers on Old Christmas. It appears singular that an American should have written the most delightful account of Christmas that our literature possesses. Irving was, however, imbued with such warm love for his parent country, and for all her old institutions and customs, that he wrote concerning them with equal warmth, and with more truth, than would be possible to a native-born Englishman. Not only in his account of Christmas, but in his papers on 'The Boar's Head Tavern,' on 'London Antiques,' on 'Little Britain,' and in many other instances, he evinces an affection for old customs, which, from his greater familiarity with them, would not be likely to impress an Englishman so deeply. 'Nothing in England'—he says—'exercises a more delightful spell over my imagination, than the lingerings of the holiday customs and rural games of former times.' In discoursing of these old customs and games, Irving throws a halo of sentiment around them, which renders his account charming, without in the least depriving it of the accuracy gained by study and observation. The story of his Christmas passed in the country opens with a delightful description of a day's journey by stage-coach. The revolution in our manner of travelling has been so complete, that, although stage-coaches have not been defunct half a century, we accord them all the reverence due to antiquity, and invest their memory with a tinge of sentimental regret. We know that, as a matter of fact, they were often dirty, ill-horsed, and unsafe; that a traveller was compelled either to freeze with cold outside, or to be stifled with bad air inside—and this, in a journey of any length, for four or five days at a stretch;—and yet, although these and other cruel facts are patent, we obstinately shut our eyes to them and