

THE DERBYSHIRE MINER'S CHRIST- MAS FIFTY YEARS AGO

(The following relates to the time when the small shopkeepers formerly gave small presents to encourage trade. A period of "doles" to the poor. Long hours for coal miners; naked lights, many very disastrous explosions of fire-damp, or gas, and often many lives were lost from this cause.)

Oh, it was a "Merrie England" then—
No thought of world-alarm;
The petty wars of distant men,
At home we felt no harm.
The Christmas Days were all so glad:
Oranges, holly, mistletoe;
And mothers' hearts were far less sad,
Just Fifty Years Ago.

'Twas glee to go a-Christmas-boxing:
The children toiled all day
Collecting pennies from their friends
Who turned but few away.
On Christmas Eve the joy began:
(That pleasant memory lingers;—)
Angels, Shepherds, Bethlehem's Star:
That sweetest theme of singers!

Anticipation weeks ran high:
Our mother dwelt upon it,
When she would go to grocer Straw
In shawl and curtained bonnet.
Right glad was he to get her trade:
Her ready cash to handle,
So Christmas-time he rendered thanks:
Sought next year's trade with waxy candle.

All other trades,—their gratitude we knew it:
Encouraged those just budding:
The butcher gave an ounce o' suet
To raise our Yorkshire pudding.
The tailor made our clothes,
Thus earned his daily bread;
His gratitude we all admired:
He'd give a yank o' thread!

There was poor old cobbler Clarke,
Who filled our soles with hob-nailed tacks,
And softly touched our tender heart,
An orange or a ball o' wax!
The Parson! we must not him forget:
Just think how warm a family of TEN
Can keep whole year on yard of flannellette.
How grand it was to have such men!

That fat old sport: the Squire,
(Whose game fed on his tenants' corn;)
Oh, how he roused affection's fire—
A POUND o' rice on Christmas morn!
O, those were grand old times,
For Polly and for Joe:
For Mother when she lit her foot of wax
Just Fifty Years Ago!