

round on raised galleries, while the lower orders thronged outside the barriers to witness the sport. At each end of the lists tents were pitched for the rival knights who in a little while were to engage in combat. This coarse enjoyment lasted several days and "to the victors belonged the spoils of the vanquished," in the shape of armor and horses. The favourite sports of the lower classes were archery, bull-baiting and quarter-staff. We have mentioned too, the custom of burning the yule log which was done amid similarly engaging sports. This custom comes through our Scandinavian ancestors, who at the winter-solstice were in the habit of kindling huge bonfires in honor of their god *Thor*. In many parts of England it is still kept up, although it has entirely lost its original signification. In Devonshire, in later years, the *Ashton-fagot* superseded the *yule-log*. Games, such as jumping in sacks, diving in water for apples, jumping at bread and treacle, followed the burning of the ash sticks. No country has entered more heartily into the Christmas sports than England; and perhaps at no period of her history were the people more enthusiastic over the return of the season than during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the darkness of ignorance and superstition was on the eve of being dispelled by the dawn of a brighter day. It was then in truth that Christmas was the day of days; and amidst the general license all kinds of tricks of the wildest nature were practiced. We are told that "all England, from the Sovereign to the beggar, went mumming in strange dresses and masks." In every parish a Lord of Misrule was chosen to superintend the revels, who, with a troop of idle fellows, in dresses of a glaring color, covered with ribbons, went about shouting and drumming, sometimes entering churches during Divine Service. And in Scotland a similar functionary used to be appointed under the title of the Abbot of Unreason, till the year 1555, when the office was abolished by an Act of Parliament. As time went on, however, and the people became enlightened, those performances disappeared, and Christmas decorations with holly, bay, rosemary and laurel, took the place of those masquerading customs. The Reformation taught even Englishmen and Scotchmen that simple and more rational games were certainly more appropriate than the noisy revellings and carousals that used to characterize their celebration of the Nativity. Various Christian preachers used to remonstrate with their flocks for paying too much attention to the secular aspect of the season, to the neglect of the religious. A sort of refinement in the pleasures of the period gradually worked its way in, which caused the religious side of the day to receive more prominence and the festive side less, and in a little while succeeded in excluding every feature which had not, or could not be given, a religious character. It was because of the coarse and unchristian character which the festival still retained from those dark ages of which we spoke that the Presbyterian churches in Scotland, and the whole of the English dissenters rejected it, in its religious aspect,