

had made necessary. He says: "To give a person a light between Christmas and Twelfth Night is to bring upon yourself ill-fortune all that year. I recollect well losing the good-will of my old grandmother by allowing a benighted waggoner to light his lanthorn while her back was turned, and it was many a week before the old lady forgave me."

In the olden days our ancestors used to keep the merry season in much the same way, but during the Middle Ages a custom prevailed which has since lost its character, if it has not altogether died out. Thus, in the larger towns were performed certain mysteries—dramatic representations—in which the players wore grotesque dresses and masks. These were celebrated with great pomp and ceremony, and the country people flocked from far and near to witness them. The only custom which bears any resemblance to these, and which is only found now in certain parts of the midland counties, is called the "December Liberties," or the feast of fools and asses, which is described as "grotesque saturnalia, in which everthing serious was ridiculed." Whole villages would turn out to dance, carrying torches and evergreens, casting weird shadows on the glistening snow.

Within doors the houses at Christmas-time are very cheerful and bright. On the wide stone hearth a yule-log burns, briskly casting a ruddy glow on everything around, while the walls and pictures are decorated with holly, ivy, and several bunches of mistletoe hung up in obvious places for equally obvious reasons. These decorations are usually kept up until Twelfth Night or old Christmas-day. At this season, too, there is a plant called rosemary, which flowers about Christmas-time. It was held in high repute by our ancestors, though the purposes for which they used it have now ceased to be noticed. They held high holiday from Christmas-day until Candlemas (February 2nd), and their first feast was the occasion of bringing in the head of the wild boar,

"Upon a silver platter with minstrelsy."

Then, once the great tankards had been filled, it was the custom to stir the foaming potations with twigs of rosemary. It was also considered auspicious to use it on two other occasions of a very opposite nature, namely, a wedding and a burial. Boughs of the plant were carried before the bride or laid on the grave, as the occasion called for, and referring to this old custom in his "Hesperides," Herrick says that the rosemary plant

"Grows for two ends ; it matters not at all
Be it for my bridal or my burial."