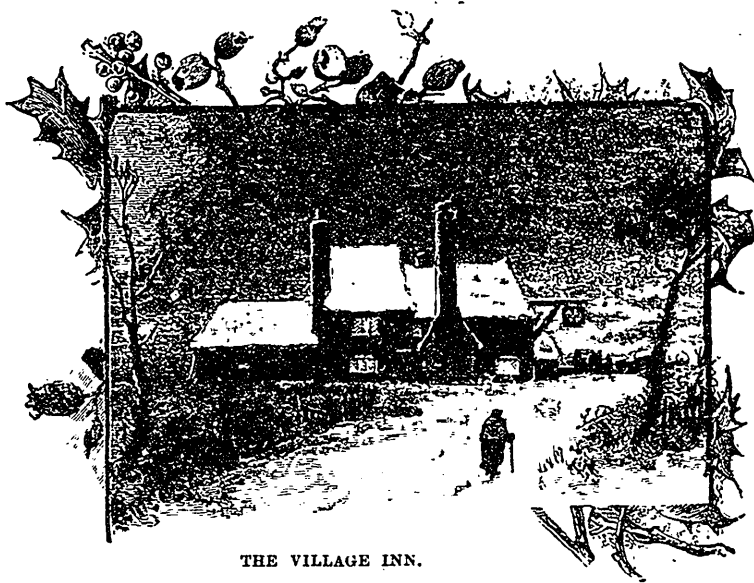


But to see Christmas as it is really kept by the people we must leave the cities and dive deep into the heart of the country; we must mingle with the crowd that at the festive season enters the gates of the squire's hospitable mansion, or in the long low rooms of the old farm-houses. The real beginning of the festivities is on Christmas-eve, when the large parties meet their friends from far and near round the festive board. Then the time passes right merrily.

The village inn represented in the sketch below, sending its ruddy glow through its lattice windows, across the snow, and with its well-known sign—say the "Red Lion"—hanging above



THE VILLAGE INN.

the door, will reap a considerable harvest; and a jovial gathering of big-boned labourers and hardy rustics, with the host himself, portly and rubicund, in their midst, will make the blackened rafters ring again with song and joke as the night wears on. There we shall hear many an odd conceit or quaint superstition which the season of the yule-log and the holly-berry again brings round to their memories. As they sit and talk over their tankards they care very little for anything else but the fact that "Ye goode old Chrismasse-tide" has come again. It matters little to them that the actual Christmas-day was not even fixed on the 25th December until the fourth century. They are prepared to celebrate the day as it is, and be merry, come what may.

As hinted before, superstition of the most absurd kind is every-