

KEEPING CHRISTMAS.

“CHRISTMAS comes but once a year” were words familiar and dear to English childhood. They were uttered by the band of mummers who came into the halls of the gentry on Christmas Eve to exhibit their rude traditional disguises and play their uncouth antics, earning thereby the half-crowns wherewith to make themselves a merry Christmas. If you had traced the pedigree of the mummers, probably you would have found that they, like Punch, represented the actors of some mediæval mystery or morality play, now fallen in its estate, since the Church of the Middle Ages, with all its sacred pageantry and dramaturgy, had passed away. Punch will die only with Shakespeare, but the mummers probably by this time the policeman of a refined civilization has ordered to “move on.” Besides the roughness and absurdity of the exhibition, these fooleries enacted by the lower class to amuse the upper class and draw money from them did smack somewhat of the old *régime* and even reminded one a little of the Saturnalia of the Roman slave. More than two centuries before, Puritanism had banished forever the Lord of Misrule, under whose reign of tipsy jollity and folly the lawyers of the Temple were once fined for having failed to perform their customary dance before the judges. The Lord of Misrule, while he lasted, was kept up in a style incredibly elaborate and expensive. He had a mimic court, with officers answering to those of the real court, and for