

people. When the hour for going to rest arrives they are conducted to a large room in which feather-beds are spread upon the floor, and in these "the playfellows" repose during the night, it being the rule that they are not to be separated so long as the festival lasts.

Next morning the whole town or village is early in movement, and the gossips are abroad to give and receive information as to the events of the preceding evening. In the festive houses, on the other hand, there is much bustle and turmoil. The nurses rise with the dawn of day to prepare the morning draught for the "fair maidens," consisting of a mixture of wine, beer, honey, and spices; whilst the rest of the domestics apply so freely to the new wine, which on these occasions is dealt out to them in a liberal manner, that they are quiet unequal to perform the numerous tasks the busy housewife intrusts to them. The "fair maidens" alone rest undisturbed until the bell tolls for church. At this signal the mistress of the house, who must not venture to awaken them earlier, presents herself on the threshold of their door, and cries out: "Holloa, holloa! fair maidens! it is time to rise. Your elected are up long ago. They have already beaten the dust out of their coats, have looked about them in two markets, have sold three swine, have chased about in the steppes, and have everywhere inquired for their elected. Up, up! and now say what have been your dreams, and who appeared to you in your sleep?"

The answers to these questions are listened to with profound attention, for the dreams of the "fair maidens" during the Christmas festival are considered of grave import, and are repeated in every house in the village, and the babuschka, or interpreter of dreams, is called in by the hostess to give a clear interpretation of that which has passed through the young ladies' minds during sleep. Breakfast is now served, after which there is an attempt to amuse by games and sports, but these generally languish for the time is drawing near when the "elected" are to appear, and the choice which has been made for them is of course not matter of indifference. At the appointed hour the doors are thrown open, and a numerous procession enters, and the several persons are presented to the maidens by the host and the hostess as the companions they have selected for them, and to be the leader of their games.

At nightfall of the second day the rest of the invited guests begin to arrive. The host takes up his stand in the gateway to receive them, the hostess awaits them on the doorstep, and the maidens meet them in the hall. After many greetings and salutations the guests are at length seated in the great room, not, however, without much attention being bestowed as to the place assigned to each. Those whom the host and hostess are desirous of honoring are placed at the top of the room. Rich old bachelors are generally seated on the right, and next to them the elder ladies of the secondary importance. If there be any fat, fair, and rosy lady in the company, she is pretty sure to be selected the queen of the evening, and is led with much ceremony to the seat of honour. The young married women are placed on the left and observe a rigid silence. The more staid their deportment the more they are admired; and mother and mother-in-law, husband and brother, glory in the propriety of their conduct. The *suzennyja*, on the contrary, are grouped in the corners of the rooms and are engaged in merry converse, which, however, is carried on in an undertone, as all boisterous mirth would be a breach of decorum, and contrary to the respect due to the elder persons present. The latter, on their part, are bound not to interfere with the amusements of the young ones, or to interrupt their conversations.

All the guests at the Christmas festival are dressed in their holiday clothes, but the caprices of fashion are banished from their garments as much as from their social pleasures. The costume of the old-fashioned Russians is not more distinguished for its richness than for its antiquity. In the provincial districts the son dresses as his father and as his father's father did before him; and even female taste and vanity venture not to introduce an innovation in the costume which ages have consecrated. A large beaver cap, a pelisse of sable or fox skin, a richly embroidered kaftan buttoned up the front with silver buttons, and a girle of rich Persian silk, or of a red kind of woollen stuff called *kunmatsch*, is the uniform of each wealthy male guest. The married women wear the *kokoschnik*, a kind of head-dress made of scarlet silk, embroidered with colored silks or pearls and trimmed with lace, from which is suspended a white fatu or short veil. Their dress called *seraphan* resembles in shape a clergyman's gown, and is made of rich gold or silver brocade, buttoned up the front with a single row of buttons; the sleeves, which are very long and wide, are of white muslin, and a stiff muslin ruff encircles the throat. A woollen cloak trimmed with sables, richly embroidered mittens, and delicate slippers with high heels, complete the costume. Their trinkets consist of gold chains, necklaces, and bracelets of pearls and precious stones, and earrings of the same. These last-mentioned objects form the most important items in the dower of the rich maidens, and the greater their antiquity—the oftener they have descended from mother to daughter in the same family—the higher they are valued. The "fair maidens" wear the *seraphan* and the ruff like the married women, but the rich tresses of their own hair, wound round with a rose-colored ribbon, constitute the only head-dress allowed to them.

The quantity and variety of refreshments

provided on these occasions is almost incredible. Before the arrival of the guests a large table is placed in the middle of the room and covered with a profusion of delicacies of home growth and manufacture, as well as foreign, all served up in tin dishes and plates, and flanked with flasks without number of the various home-made liquors which are so much in favor with the Russians. As soon as the guests enter, they are pressed to partake of the good things prepared for them. The host presents a silver cup containing apple, raspberry, currant, or some other liquor on a wooden salver to each of the guests, mentioning them by name and requesting them to drink; and when, to prove their refined manners, they make a very long resistance, he implores them at least to taste the beverage. The mistress of the house in the meanwhile stands behind her "better half," accompanying each of his words with a deep courtesy to the guest. If the latter aim at being admired for courtesy and elegance of manner, he refuses to accept the proffered draught from the hand of her husband, but entreats the lady to hand it to him; then, seizing the cup, he expresses a thousand good wishes for every member of the family, and slowly quaffs the beverage, after which he is entitled to imprint a kiss on the forehead of the hostess. When this ceremony is gone through, the guests are requested to partake of something more substantial, "something for the tooth," and the hospitality of the entertainers is evinced by repeated complaints that their guests do not sufficiently honor their cheer. To the young married women no wine or liquor is offered, but they are sure to find their kind hostess prepared to regale them privately in a side room with strong mead or cherry-brandy. The "fair maidens" are not allowed to partake of the refreshments prepared for the other guests, but each of them is provided with a packet of cakes, fruits, and sweetmeats, to which she applies according to her desire. The poor "elected" alone are entirely excluded from participation in the feasting that is going on around them; they are expected to be *nipuschtschi*—i. e., neither eaters nor drinkers, as it is supposed that the pleasure they enjoy in the presence of the "fair maidens" will nullify every other feeling.

When the refreshments are partaken of the guests begin to give signs of their intention to take leave, and it again becomes the duty of the host and hostess to press them to stay. The eloquence of the latter proving vain, masks and morris-dancers are called in to aid. These masks, which are of the most primitive description, and generally represent bears and goats, blind beggars and clowns, perform natural dances and recite fables and fairy tales, in which they cleverly introduce all kinds of striking and opposite proverbs and playful allusions to the faults and foibles of many of the guests, and more particularly to the anxiety of the mothers to see their daughters suited with a desirable "elected." No one is allowed to take amiss what is said on these occasions, provided their names are not mentioned; but should the maskers in any way overstep their privileges they are immediately turned out. The host is bound to offer them the same refreshments as other guests; if they refuse to partake of any, they are supposed to be persons of rank, and are, on departing, conducted to the gate with many marks of consideration. Those maskers who may have only tasted a few drops of any beverage are seized by the servants on their returning, and swun backwards and forwards for about half a dozen times.

When the company begin to weary of this kind of amusement, then commence the so-called "dish games," the most interesting entertainment of the evening. A table in the middle of the floor is covered by the *babka pozivatka* with a white cloth, whilst the eldest nurse in the family places upon it a dish filled with water. While this is going on the company stand in a ring round the table, and when the arrangements are completed, the "fair maidens," their "elected," and all the married women of the party, step forward and deposit their rings, bracelets, and earrings upon the table. The hostess then brings a napkin, with which the person officiating at the dish, after depositing therein all the rings, bracelets, and earrings, covers it, while the whole company seat themselves in a circle round the table, the old nurse being placed so as to be immediately in front of the dish. The other nurses having then placed a few small bits of bread, some salt, and three bits of charcoal, on a chair close to the table, all persons present join in the "song of the salt and the bread" (*chjehu i soli*). This song, which has many variations, but is essentially the same throughout Russia, from the confines of Siberia to the frontier of Poland, is as follows:

"May the bread and the salt live a hundred years—slava (glory)!
May our Emperor live still longer—slava!
May our Emperor never grow old—slava!
May his good courser never be tired—slava!
May his shining garments ever be new—slava!
May his good servants always remain faithful—slava!"

While this is being sung the *babka pozivatka* stirs the dish in which the trinkets have been placed, and at the conclusion of the song she gives them all a good shake. Other songs follow, prognosticating speedy marriage, the unexpected meeting of friends, marriage with a person of unequal rank, a happy life, good fortune, riches, the fulfillment of a particular wish, poverty, death, sickness, disappointment, etc.; and the trinkets are taken out of the dish one by one—the song that precedes the extrication

of each determining the fate of the person to whom it belongs.

These songs, though of a primitive character, are not devoid of grace in conception, as the following specimen will prove:

"A sparrow-hawk flew out from one tree—slava!
And a little bird flew out from another—slava!
They flew to each other and kissed each other—slava!
Embraced each other with their downy wings—slava!
And the good folks wonder'd and marvel'd—slava!
That sparrow-hawk and dove should build their nests so peaceably together—slava!"

At the end of each line the following chorus is given:

"To him for whom we have sung it, may it turn to good!
He who has miss'd it must do without it!
Must do without it—this cannot fall!"

At the conclusion of this some games follow, which very much resemble "turn the trencher," "blind-man's buff," etc., played by children in this and other countries. Then the guests begin for the first time in earnest to think of retiring; and though host and hostess are again bound to press them to stay a little longer, they are at length allowed to depart. Each party, however, must be conducted to the gate with the same ceremonies as on their arrival, and a full hour or more often elapses before the ceremony of leave-taking is gone through. After the withdrawal of the elder guests, the "fair maidens" and their "elected" recommence their sports, which are continued until the hour of midnight.

The amusements on the following days (for the festivities last until Twelfth Night) differ somewhat from those of the first. In these the men take the lead. Accompanied by the ladies of their family, they go out towards nightfall, disguised in masks and fancy dresses, to pay visits to their friends. The persons receiving the maskers treat them with distinguished politeness and liberal hospitality even before they know who they are; but when they have endeavored in vain for some time to discover them, then, they are on a given signal seized by some of the household, and swung to and fro until they do "penance"—i. e., declare their names. When many guests are thus assembled in one house and have feasted to their hearts' content they all depart in company to some other house, where the rest of the night is spent in merry-making and carousing. The noise and bustle of the sledges driving up and down the streets of the towns and villages during the nights that these masked visits are going on can scarcely be described; for such occasions are seized, and particularly by the humbler classes, to renew old friendships and family alliances, and to give young people opportunities of making acquaintances, which, on account of the retiring manners of the girls, are difficult to form during the more staid periods of the year.

The poorer people who have no rich relations, and are consequently never invited to take part in the entertainments we have described, amuse themselves in the streets. Masked after a grotesque fashion of their own, they perform all kinds of antics, and make up in merriment for whatever may be wanting in substantial cheer; and the bolder characters amongst them venture sometimes under the leadership of a young noble, or man of family, to introduce themselves into the houses of the rich, where with their masks on they are permitted to entertain the company, and to enjoy the hospitality of the host.

A GOSSIP ABOUT NAMES.

Readers of "The Book of Days" will remember, in the first volume, a collection of little verses brought together as illustrations of "Rhythmic Puns on Names." Such a subject, to a diligent searcher, would prove almost as endless as the kindred one of epitaphs. A few more specimens gathered since the publication of the above, has been selected for insertion in these pages, together with other fantastic exemplifications of the fertile theme of nomenclature. It is, indeed, quite hopeless to be able to set down anything on such a matter which shall be quite new to all readers; still, one frequently falls into companies in which the very best, and even the very oldest of such things are unknown, and we may reasonably suppose that to some of our readers many of these will yet be new.

On Lord Rockingham's becoming minister during our disputes with America, a declaratory bill being brought into the House of Commons which was judged to be too tame a measure by the adverse party, the following distich appeared in the papers:

You had better declare, which you may without shocking'em,
That the nation's asleep, and the minister Rock-ing'em.

An old gentleman by the name of Gould having married a very young wife, wrote a poetical epistle to a friend to inform him of it, and concluded it thus:

So you see, my dear sir, though I'm eighty years old,
A girl of eighteen is in love with old Gould.

To which his friend replied:
A girl of eighteen may love Gould, it is true;

But believe me, dear sir, it is Gould without U!

Punning upon names in epitaphs has been common enough. Here are three specimens: one on the Earl of Kildare:

Who killed Kildare? Who dared Kildare to kill?
Death killed Kildare, who dares kill whom he will.

On John Penny:
Reader! of cash, if thou'rt in want of any,
Dig four feet deep, and thou shalt find a penny.

The celebrated Dr. Parr attended for a short time upon Queen Caroline, to read prayers, etc. His place was afterwards supplied by a gentleman of the names of Fellowes. Upon which the following epigram was written:

There's a difference between
Dr. Parr and the Queen;
For the reason you need not go far;
The doctor is jealous
Of certain little Fellowes,
Whom the Queen thinks much above Par.

On being told that Bishop Goodenough was appointed to preach before the House of Lords, a wag wrote:

'Tis well enough that Goodenough
Before the Lords should preach;
For sure enough they're bad enough
He undertakes to teach.

When the above most respectable prelate was made a bishop, a certain dignitary, whom the public had expected would get appointment, being asked by a friend how he came not to be the new bishop, replied: "Because I was not Goodenough." This pun is perfect in its way.

We have somewhere met with the following, which is more in the style of word-twisting of our modern burlesque writers. It is on the bankruptcy of a person of the name of Homer:

That Homer should a bankrupt be,
Is not so very Old D'-ye See,
If it be true, as I'm instructed,
So Ill-he-had his books conducted.

The pulpit has been not seldom occupied by confirmed punsters. The following cases may be cited without offence as instances of name-punning. At Belford election once, Mr. Whitebread and Mr. Howard were opposed by a Mr. Sparrow. The clergyman, a warm supporter of the former party, during the heat of the election, on Sunday morning took first his text: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?" in order to draw from it this encouragement to his friends: "Fear ye not, therefore; ye are of more value than any many sparrows."

A clergyman of the name of Friend, who had got possession of a living in a way that rendered it doubtful whether it might not be regarded as a simoniacal contract, was imprudent enough to ask a neighboring clergyman to preach for him on the day he was to read himself in, as it is called. This clergyman, who remonstrated with him in the course of the negotiation, being humorously inclined, to the great consternation of the new incumbent, sitting in the desk below him, chose for his text: "Friend, how earnest thou in hither?"

The story of Dr. Mountain and the witty Charles II. is strongly characteristic of the times, and very applicable to our subject. A shop being vacant, Charles happened to ask his chaplain, Dr. Mountain, whom he should appoint. "Why, sire," says the latter, "if your Majesty had but faith, I could tell you whom." "How so," said the king, "if I had but faith?" "Why, in that case," said the doctor, "your Majesty might say to this mountain, be thou removed into the sea."

James the First of England and Sixth of Scotland was, as every one knows, not remarkable for vigor and steadiness. Having heard of a famous preacher who was very witty in his sermons, and peculiarly so in his choice of texts, he ordered this clergyman to preach before him. With all suitable gravity, the learned divine gave out his text in the following words: "James, first and sixth in the latter part of the verse, 'He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven by the wind and tossed.'"

The Cavaliers, during the Protectorate, were accustomed in their libations to put a crumb of bread into a glass of wine, and before they drank it, say: "God send this Crumb-well down."

Southey, in his Life of Wesley, cites a passage from Fuller's "Grave Thoughts," which shows that even the most solemn occasions and subjects cannot always exclude this punning propensity. "When worthy Master Hern, famous for his living, preaching, and writing, lay on his death-bed (rich only in goodness and children), his wife made such womanish lamentations, what should become of her little ones? Peace! sweet-heart, said he; that God who feedeth the ravens will not starve the hens; a speech censured as light by some, observed by others as prophetic; as indeed it came to pass that they were all well disposed."

"The trivial prophecy which I heard," writes Lord Bacon "when I was a child, and Queen Elizabeth was in the flower of her years, was

When Hempe is spun,
England's done;

whereby it was generally conceived that after the princes had reigned which had the principal letters of that word Hempe (which were Henry, Edward, Mary, Philip and Elizabeth) England should come to utter confusion; which, thanks be to God, is verified in the change of the name; for that the king's style is now no more of England, but of Britain."

Though not perhaps to be reckoned amongst