

his frequent change of scene and company prevented his acquiring those rusty, unaccommodating habits with which old bachelors are so uncharitably charged.' He made love to all the old spinsters, in whose eyes he was still a gay young dog, and he was adored by all the youngsters, 'for he must have been a miracle of accomplishments in their eyes. He could imitate Punch and Judy; make an old woman of his hand, with the assistance of a burnt cork and pocket handkerchief, and cut an orange into such a ludicrous caricature that the young folks were ready to die with laughing.' The failure of the village choir in the anthem which Master Simon had so industriously endeavoured to drum into their heads, is conceived in the true spirit of comedy, and the old gentleman's joviality after dinner, when he chirped 'like a grasshopper filled with dew,' and finally grew maudlin about the widow, is excellently humorous. In his choice of a parson the Squire of Bracebridge Hall differed from Sir Roger de Coverley. The little, dried-up black-letter hunter, who even on Christmas Day preached a long erudite sermon on the rites and ceremonies proper to the season, citing as his authorities half a score of the ancient fathers, is in marked contrast with the worthy gentleman to whom Sir Roger presented all the good sermons printed in the English language, making it a condition that he should read one of them in the pulpit every Sunday, and leave to others all attempts at originality. The remaining characters are, in this series of papers, but slightly sketched in, but how charming and how comprehensive Irving makes even his slightest sketches! The young officer who had been wounded at Waterloo, with his dash of natural coxcombery; the blushing beauty of seventeen, the coy victim of his love-making; the Oxonian, who delighted in quizzing his maiden aunts and cousins with exaggerated airs of gallantry; the captivating little hoy-

dens still in the school-room, who taxed Master Simon's powers of dancing so sorely; the fat-headed old gentleman, who stuck in the middle of a story, and was the only person in the room who could not remember the end of it; to each of these a vivid personality is given, which could scarcely be increased by any additional elaboration.

With regard to the antiquated manner in which he describes Christmas as having been spent at Bracebridge Hall, Irving was freely criticised on the first appearance of the 'Sketch Book.' If such a criticism were true in 1820, it would be doubly true in 1878, but I venture to think that its truth cannot be sustained. In remarking upon these strictures at a later period, Irving said, that since writing the Old Christmas papers he had had opportunities of seeing almost all the rural customs which he describes, in full force in many districts in England. With the exception of the dance, accompanied by cudgel play, which so delighted Squire Bracebridge as being the lineal descendant of the sword dance of the ancients, there is nothing described, the counterpart of which could not be found to-day in some parts of England. Surely no one will allege that blindman's buff, hot cockles, bob-apple, or snap-dragon, are obsolete games; or that the Yule Log, the Wassail Bowl, and the time honoured mistletoe are things of the past? With regard to the Antique Masque which concluded the merry Christmas evening, this only purported to be a 'burlesque imitation,' and Irving half confesses that he borrowed the idea from Ben Johnson's Masque of Christmas. But to refute seriously an allegation against Irving's Old Christmas of want of accuracy, is to fight with shadows. Probably no such exquisite combination of all the sports and merriment belonging to the season, was ever found in any one village of England; but how many villages of England have lived under the jovial