

"Look here, boys," said Barrington, "let's do as the Christmas Annual fellows always do, when down in a diving-bell, or up in a balloon, or snow-bound at a village inn, each man tell a tale or sing a song."

It was agreed upon. Then came the momentous question—who should begin—and seeing a good deal of hesitation amongst us, Walter Holbrooke, who was never backward in coming forward, started with a relation of how he spent

#### CHRISTMAS DAY WITH A VENGEANCE.



SHUT the ledger with a bang, locked up the cash-box, and gave the keys of the board-room to our antediluvian housekeeper with "a happy new year," and a more than usually liberal largess to help her to spend one, and I, Walter Holbrooke, secretary to the Philanthropic Association for the promotion of the emigration of paupers to Figi-land, hurried off to catch the mid day train from St. Pancras to the north, for I was bound a Christmassing to an old farmhouse among the hills and wolds of Derbyshire.

There are few localities left in "merrie" England where the observance of our ancestral customs is so properly acknowledged, and few people retain so many of the rites and ceremonies of bygonedom as the mid country folk that dwell in secluded nooks and corners of the Peak mountains; and I was anticipating a rare treat.

There I knew that the yule-log would burn brightly, and that the bonnie lassie that first saw it drawn up to the broad hearth, would faithfully look for a husband within seven weeks and a day. There I was sure of the big, flaring dish of Snap-Dragon, and the mighty bowl of posse! made of brown, home-brewed ale and creamy white milk—none of your tins of compressed quackerries to be found in this land of pastoral richness—and the fishing with wooden spoons for the lady's wedding ring out of a glorious jorum of frumenty.

Hither I knew would come the mummers with fantastic dress and time-honoured drollery, and the morrice dancers with white duck trousers, variegated ribbons, and coats of a dozen hues; and I saw in my mind's eye the lovingness with which we welcomed the waits and plied them with hot elderberry wine to keep the cold out and give them lusty voices to sing their song of grateful remembrance.

Here, too, I knew that a plum-pudding meant a plum-pudding, and not a petty apology of a cannon-ball-sized thing, like an overgrown dumpling, such as Londoners believe in; but a substantial twenty-pounder, with a sprig of holly as big as a geranium stuck in its sugary top.

Here, too, I knew that the noble Baron of Beef lorded it in all his majesty, and that turkeys, geese, fat capons, rabbits, hares, and such small deer, were simply thrown into the feast as make-weights, hardly to be accounted for.

Of all these good things I had anticipatory visions, and my heart leapt