

invites him to accompany him to his home, and spend Christmas there. This at once symbolizes the hospitality peculiar to the season. An Englishman would not wish his worst enemy to dine alone on this all-important feast-day, and would rather risk the company of the most uncongenial guest than endure the thought of another spending in loneliness the day set apart for mutual good-will. Such is the natural introduction of a Christmas guest to the table presided over by the Squire of Bracebridge Hall. He is the central character of Irving's charming sketch, and it would be impossible to imagine a more poetical, and at the same time more truthful portrait of a 'good old English gentleman, one of the olden time.' I have always thought that in delineating this delightful personage Irving had before him, perhaps unconsciously to himself, that *preux chevalier* Sir Roger de Coverley. Not only in general characteristics are the two identical, but in many minor points. They both were firmly convinced that there is 'no condition more truly honourable and enviable than that of a country gentleman on his paternal lands,' and in spite of the worthy Knight's occasional visits to London, they both thoroughly lived up to this belief. They were both beloved by, and sole arbiters in all the concerns of, their tenants and dependants, and each esteemed every man as a friend, no matter what his station, who showed himself worthy of friendship. We are told by Mr. Spectator that, as Sir Roger was beloved by all about him, 'his servants never care for leaving him; by this means his domestics are all in years, and grown old with their master. You would take his valet de chambre for his brother, his butler is grey-headed, his groom is one of the gravest men I have ever seen, and his coachman has the looks of a privy counsellor.' The composition of the Bracebridge household was exactly similar; we are told that the servants

'had an old-fashioned look, having for the most part been brought up in the household, and grown into keeping with the antiquated mansion, and the humours of its lord.'\*

Indeed, we are continually reminded, in reading Irving's Old Christmas, of the visit of Mr. Spectator to Sir Roger's country-house, and more particularly of those portions of it which are described in papers contributed by Steele, whose essays have a striking affinity, both in style and matter, with the writings of Washington Irving. It would be too much to say that if there had been no Sir Roger de Coverley, there would have been no Squire Bracebridge, but it is hardly too much to say that if 'The Spectator' had not existed, Squire Bracebridge would have been a somewhat different, and perhaps a somewhat less endearing creation. It would be almost impossible, however, to present a perfect type of the old English gentleman without investing him with some of the characteristics of the famous Knight, and perhaps a more remarkable coincidence is the resemblance between Irving's description of Master Simon and Addison's sketch of Mr. Will Wimble. In each of these cases an eccentric personage is portrayed, with curious habits formed by the force of circumstances, and in each case the habits are at least similar, and the circumstances absolutely identical. Irving, it is true, elaborates the picture in his most charming manner, so that the execution is entirely his own, but for the conception it almost seems as if he were indebted to Addison. Old bachelors and poor relations are themes upon which Irving loved to dilate with kindly good nature, and certainly if all old bachelors were like Master Simon marriage would not so generally be deemed the more honourable state. 'He had a chirping buoyant disposition, always enjoying the present moment; and

\* This idea is still further worked out in 'Bracebridge Hall' in the paper on Family Servants.