

## A SKETCH OF ENGLISH ARISTOCRACY.\*

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## PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS.

"See—we're all preparing for to-morrow," said Dr. Tatham, leading the way into the little church, where the grizzly headed clerk was busy decorating the pulpit, reading desk, and altar-piece with the cheerful emblems of the season.

"Peggy! Peggy!—you're sadly overdoing it," said the doctor, calling out to the sexton's wife, who was busy at work in the squire's pew—a large square pew in the nave, near the pulpit. "Why, do you want to hide the squire's family from the congregation? You're quite putting a holly hedge all round."

"Please you, sir, I've got so much I don't know where to put it—so, in course, I put it here."

"Then," said the Doctor, with a smile, looking round the church, "let John get up and put some of it in those old ha-chments; and" looking up at the clerk, busy at work in the pulpit, "don't put quite so much up there in my candlesticks."

With this the parson and the squire took their departure. As they passed up the village, which already wore a holiday aspect, they met on all hands with a cordial and respectful greeting. The quiet little public house turned out some four or five stout fellows, all tenants of his—with their pipes in their hands, and who took off their hats and bowed very low. Mr. Aubrey went up and entered into conversation with them for some minutes—their families and farms, he found, were well and thriving. There was quite a little crowd of women about the shop of Nick Steele, the butcher, who, with an extra hand to help him, was giving out the second ox which had been sent from the hall, to the persons whose names had been given in to him from Mrs. Aubrey. Further on, some were cleaning their little windows, others sweeping their floors, and sprinkling sand over them; most were sticking holly and mistletoe in their windows and over their mantel-pieces. Every where, in short, was to be seen that air of quiet preparation for the cheerful morrow, which fills a thoughtful observer with feelings of pensive but exquisite satisfaction.

Mr. Aubrey returned home towards dusk, cheered and enlivened by his walk. His sudden plunge into the simplicity and comparative solitude of country life—and that country Yatton—had quite refreshed his feelings and given a tone to his spirits. Of course Dr. Tatham was to dine at the hall on the morrow; if he did not, indeed, it would have been the first time during the last five-and twenty years.

## CHRISTMAS EVE.

Christmas eve passed pleasantly and quietly enough at the hall. After dinner the merry little ones were introduced, and their prattle and romps occupied an hour right joyously. As soon as, smothered with kisses, they had been dismissed to bed, old Mrs. Aubrey composed herself in her great chair to her usual after-dinner's nap; while her son, his wife, and sister, sitting round the fire—a decanter or two, and a few wine-glasses, and dessert remaining behind them—sat conversing in a subdued tone, now listening to the wind roaring in the chimney—a sound which not a little enhanced their sense of comfort—then criticising the disposition of the evergreens with which the room was plentifully decorated, and laying out their movements during the ensuing fortnight. Mrs. Aubrey and Kate were, with affectionate earnestness, contrasting to Aubrey the peaceful pleasures of a country life with the restless excitement and endless anxieties of a London political life, to which they saw him more and more addicting himself; he all the while playfully parrying their attacks, but secretly acknowledging the truth and force of what they said, when—hark!—a novel sound from without which roused the old lady from her nap. What do you think, dear reader, it was? The voices of little girls singing what seemed to be a Christmas hymn: yes, they caught the words:

"Hark! the herald-angels sing,  
Glory to the new-born king;  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild".

It must be your little school-girls, said old Mrs. Aubrey, looking at her daughter, and listening.

"I do believe it is, quoth Kate, her eyes suddenly filling with tears, as she sat eagerly inclining towards the window.

"They must be standing on the grass-plot just before the window," said Mr. Aubrey: the tiny voices were thrilling his very heart within him. His sensitive heart might be compared to a delicate Arabian harp, which gave forth, with the slightest breath of accident or circumstances,—

"The still, sad music of humanity."

In a few moments he was almost in tears—the sounds were so unlike the fierce and turbulent cries of political warfare to which his ears had been latterly accustomed. The more the poor children sang, the more was he affected. Kate's tears fell fast, for she had been in an excited mood before this little incident occurred. "Do you hear, mamma," said he, "the voice of the poor little thing that was last taken into the school? The little darling!" Kate tried to smile away her emotion, but 'twas in vain. Mr. Aubrey gently drew aside the curtain, and pulled up the central blind, and there, headed by their matron, stood the little singers exposed to view, some eighteen in number, ranged in a row on the grass, their white

dress-glistening in the moonlight. The oldest seemed not more than twelve years old, while the younger ones could not be more than five or six. They seemed all singing from their very hearts. Aubrey stood looking at them with very deep interest.

As soon as they had finished their hymn, they were conducted into the housekeeper's room, according to orders sent for that purpose from Mrs. Aubrey, and each of them received a little present of money, besides a full glass of Mrs. Jackson's choicest raisin wine and a currant bun; Kate slipping half-a-guinea into the hand of their mistress, to whose wish to afford gratification to the inmates of the hall, was entirely owing the little incident which had so pleased and surprised them.

## CHRISTMAS.

"A happy Christmas to you, dear papa and mamma!" said little Aubrey, about eight o'clock the next morning, pushing aside the curtains, and clambering up on the high bed where Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey were still asleep—soon, however, they were awake by the welcome sound. The morning promised a beautiful day. The air, though cold, was clear; and the branches of the trees visible from their windows, were all covered with hoar frost, which seemed to line them all with silver fringe. The little bells of Yatton church were ringing a merry peal; but, how different in tone and strength from the clangor of the London church bells! Christmas was indeed at length arrived, and cheerful were the greetings of those who soon after met at the breakfast table. Old Mrs. Aubrey was going to church with them; in fact, not even a domestic was to be left at home that could possibly be spared. By the time that the carriage, with the fat and lazy-looking grey horses, were at the hall door, the sun had burst out in beauty from an almost cloudless sky. The three ladies rode alone; Aubrey preferring to walk, accompanied by his little son, as the ground was dry and hard, and the distance very short. A troop of some twelve or fourteen servants, male and female, followed presently; and then came Mr. Aubrey, leading along the heir of Yatton, a boy of whom he might well be proud, as the future possessor of his home, his fortunes, and his honours. When he had reached the church, the carriage was returning home. Almost the whole congregation stood collected before the church door, to see the squire's family enter; and reverent were the curtsies and bows with which old Mrs. Aubrey and her lovely companions were received. Very soon after they had taken their places, Mr. Aubrey and his son made their appearance; objects they were of the deepest interest, as they passed along to the pew. A few minutes after, Dr. Tatham entered the church in his surplice (which he almost always put on at home), with a face, serious to be sure, but yet overspread with an expression even more kind and benignant than usual. He knew there was not a soul among the little crowd around him that did not really love him, and that did not know how heartily he returned their love. All eyes were, of course, on the squire's pew. Mrs. Aubrey was looking well—her daughter and daughter-in-law were thought by all to be by far the most beautiful women in the world—what must people think of them in London! Mr. Aubrey looked, as they thought, pleased and happy, but rather paler, and even a little thinner; and as for the little squire, with his bright eyes, his rosy cheeks, his arch smile, his curling auburn hair—he was the pride of Yatton!

Dr. Tatham read prayers, as he always did, with great distinctness and deliberation, so that every body in the church, young and old, could catch every syllable; and he preached, considerably enough, a very short sermon—pithy, homely, and affectionate. He reminded them that he was then preaching his thirty-first Christmas-day sermon from the pulpit. The service over, none of the congregation moved from their places till the occupants of the Squire's pew had quitted it; but as soon as they had got outside of the door, the good people turned out after them, and almost lined the way from the church door to the gate at which the carriage stood, receiving and answering a hundred kind enquiries concerning themselves, their families, and their circumstances.

Mr. Aubrey stayed behind, desirous of taking another little ramble with Dr. Tatham through the village, for the day was indeed bright and beautiful, and the occasion inspiring. There was not a villager within four or five miles of the hall who did not sit down that day to a comfortable little relishing dinner, at least one-third of them being indebted for it directly to the bounty of the Aubreys. As soon as Dr. Tatham had taken off his gown, he accompanied Mr. Aubrey in cheerful mood, in the briskest spirits. 'Twas delightful to see the smoke come curling out of every chimney, scarcely any one visible, suggesting to you that they were all housed, and preparing for, or partaking of their roast beef and plum pudding. Now and then the bustling wife would show her heated red face at the door, and hastily curtsy as they passed, then returning to dish up her little dinner.

By five o'clock the little party were seated at the cheerful dinner table, covered with the glittering old family plate, and that kind of fare, at once substantial and luxurious, which befitted the occasion. Old Mrs. Aubrey, in her simple white turban, and black velvet dress, presided with a kind of dignified cheerfulness, which was delightful to see. Kate had contrived to make herself look more lovely even than usual, wearing a dress of dark blue satin, tastefully trimmed with blonde, and which exquisitely comported with her lovely complexion. Oh that Delamere had been sitting opposite to, or beside her! The more matured proportions of her blooming sister-in-law appeared to infinite advantage in a rich green velvet

dress, while a superb diamond glistened with subdued lustre in her beautiful bosom. She wore no ornaments in her dark hair, which was, as indeed might be said of Kate, "when unadorned, adorned the most." The grey-headed old butler, as brisk as his choicest champagne, with which he perpetually busied round the table, and the three steady looking old family servants, going about their business with quiet celerity—the delicious air of antique elegance around them,—this was a Christmas dinner after one's own heart! Oh the merry and dear old Yatton! And as if there were not loveliness enough already in the room, behold the door suddenly pushed open as soon as the dinner is over, and ran up to his gay and laughing mother, her little son, his ample snowy collar resting gracefully on his crimson velvet dress. 'Tis her hope and pride—her first-born—the little squire; but where is his sister? where is Agnes? 'Tis even as Charles says—she fell fast asleep in the very act of being dressed, and they were obliged to put her to bed; so Charles is alone in his glory. You may well fold your delicate white arm around him, mamma.

His little gold cup is nearly filled to join in the first toast: are you all ready? The worthy Doctor has poured Mr. Aubrey's glass, and Kate's glass, full up to the brim:—"Our next Christmas!"

## SHERIFF PARKINS, A CHARACTER.

(This individual, who was well known in England, about twelve years ago, and since then has made some noise, occasionally, in the United States, recently departed this life. The following biographical sketch of so eccentric a character will not be without interest.)

A troubled spirit is at rest. Joseph W. Parkins, Ex-Sheriff of London, departed this life, suddenly, at Newark, on Tuesday morning. He had been ill for some weeks, but was considered as in the way of convalescence, when his sudden decease put an end to the delusive hopes which none more strongly entertained than himself of his entire recovery.

There was much to admire in the conduct and character of this singular and original genius, and as much to disgust; but his very foibles, where a person did not happen to be the victim of them, were an interesting study. He was one of the most contumacious and pugnacious mortals that ever breathed the breath of life. Quick in his affections, he was the very creature of impulse, and as quick in his jealousy and resentments. Miserly in some points, he was lavish in expenditures in the pursuit of his hobbies, one of which, it is due to the character of the deceased to say, was charity. Any man could win the way to his heart and to his purse, by making out a case of persecution, and then the old gentleman would launch out whatever he had at command, to put his new friend above the reach of the "infernal and most horrible atrocious villain," who had injured his protégé. The chance was, however, that in less than a month, he would include that friend in the same category.

Ex-Sheriff Parkins came to this country about ten years since, an English radical, almost, or at any rate strongly prepossessed in favour of the very largest liberty. He travelled over the country, delighted with its enterprise, and caught with the rapidly increasing value of property. He made some large investments, and was on the point of making more, when he suddenly discovered what he thought was an attempt to over-reach him. At the same time, he experienced some difficulty in procuring the passage of a law to enable him to hold real estate. As his early life was spent among the Sepoys and Coolies in the East Indies, and as he had become somewhat soured, and unreserved in the use of his peculiar phraseology, it may readily be fancied that he did not get on very well in lobbying a bill through the Legislature. Irritated and provoked, he threw himself in the way of legal prosecutions, and a series of insults, begun and prosecuted against him in no very good spirit, made the most of his faults and foibles, and finally threw him into the debtor's prison in this city, on various verdicts for damages for slander, assault and battery, &c., amounting in all, with costs, to five or six thousand dollars.

These creditors, or a portion of them, filed a creditor's bill in Chancery, and an order from the Chancellor was issued, directing Mr. Parkins to surrender certain bonds, known to be in his possession, for the liquidation of the verdicts. Parkins summarily issued a verbal order to the Chancellor to betake himself to a place where Sophr's coal stoves are not needed. For contempt of the Chancellor and of the Chancellor's decrees, he went into Bridewell, as above related, with the bonds in his pocket; and at the end of five years, came out of durance with the same identical papers in his possession. Once, during the term of his imprisonment, he was indicted and fined for an assault and battery on the keepers, or some of the inmates. An attempt was made to prove him insane, a defence which he most indignantly disclaimed, and disproved too, before a commission of lunacy. Representations made to the Chancellor, without the old man's privity, as to their nature, set forth his peculiar character, and he was unconditionally discharged.

The old man was very much elated at what he regarded as a signal victory. He never knew the motive that led to his release, viz., a deference to the infirmity of his character, his monomania. The victory, like many other victories obtained at more cost, was most worthless. He retained his bonds, it is true, but a Receiver had been appointed,—the bonds paid to that Receiver, and declared void; so that the empty papers in his possession amounted to nothing. That Receiver paid the verdicts, and retains still, we be-