

HOLIDAY THOUGHTS.

CHRISTMAS and New Year have from time immemorial been set apart as days for festivity and rejoicing. Then it is that families are re-united, and old and young partake of the pleasures of the season, while prosperity, friendship and good cheer rob life of its enmity, its care and its sorrow; and whilst we, among the rest of our readers, look back upon the days that are no more and sigh over the recollections of the past, let us not forget the experience and the wisdom which the years bring to us, but learn to prize highly that reward which is a token of duties faithfully performed. This is a cold winter's night, but inside all is warmth, contentment and joy, and despite the approaching joys and pleasures of to-morrow, our thoughts have naturally taken a pensive train. Is it not a strange anomaly in human nature, that one can be sad and melancholy in a season of gladness and mirth. But to some natures a sense of freedom from toil allied with a hope of joy and pleasure to come, seems to cause a feeling of despondency to rise in the heart. A strange presentment of evil sometimes mingles with our deepest joy. In this mood we sit down to pen this essay, and whilst we reflect upon the many seasons like this which have come and gone, one cannot but remark, how custom, opinion, and our modern habits of utilitarianism, coupled with the marching civilization of the age, seem to have lessened the respect and veneration which was wont to be paid to the annual return of Christmas and New Year. Alas, as Tennyson sings:

"The old order changeth yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

Probably in no country is Christmas and New Year so well observed as in England. The conservative habits of the people, their laws and institutions, together with their insular position, has certainly made them a characteristic people, and has tended in no small measure to foster and cherish a love for whatever is old and venerable. In stories connected with the "bringing home of the 'Yule Log' and the 'Mistletoe Bough,'" Romance has weaved some of its most ingenious fictions. Whilst "Christmas Waits" continue still, as they did in the olden time, to sing their hymns of praise and thanksgiving in almost every village throughout the land. But even in England this custom seems to be dying away, and is only practised in those outlying villages and towns, like the sleepy Drenthorp which Alexander Smith so quaintly describes. Alas for the onward march of time that sweeps laws, customs and institutions to the dust: making the young to regret on all those joys which

were endearing to childhood and the old to sigh over pleasures that will return no more. While we sit pondering over the revolving seasons of the year, the hopes that have been indulged and the loves long buried and forgotten; the happy hours of early youth seem to return to us again, and there seems to be no period of that gladsome time which stands out so vividly in the bleak ground of our after experience, as these holidays of the New Year, when we are free to choose our own occupations, and when freedom from school brings with it a feeling of restless and impatient joy.

This is indeed a season sacred to the hallowed memories of childhood, when through the long trackless vista of the past one can recall the vanished joys of life's earliest years, and gather hope and consolation for the future. Since childhood's happy hours what dreams have been cherished, what chimeras chased, and to how many idols we all have bowed? And thus it is from year to year, as youth wanes the passions which impel it—in time loose their force, until reason exerts her sole preeminence. Sitting by the fire-side, to-night, what strange fancies have crossed our mind, concerning these holiday hours; what vague undefined ideas, struggling for expression, have we in this essay endeavoured to convey? If old Montaigne was alive now and looking over our shoulder he would, no doubt, be perfectly willing to guide the pen. Cannot we obtain something of the inspiration of that immortal spirit? Montaigne wrote on almost every topic, and his mind was a perfect transcript of society, as it existed in France in his day. The old customs of the times in which he lived were dear to him, and no man, we venture to say, enjoyed life so well as he did.

We remember well, one custom peculiar to the New Year which is still in vogue, namely, that of shooting for fowl, and memory recalls with pleasure, a long walk we took some years ago, to the scene of this sport. The day was cold, and the snow lay deep and unpacked, as we trudged our way through the streets of the city, until we came to the suburbs, where the firing was to take place. The spot selected was at the head of a long level marsh, and here were to be seen numbers of persons of the laboring class, mingled with a few sporting characters, who prided themselves on their ability to make a good shot. Among these stood the owner of the fowl, ready to receive the pay of those who intended to shoot, and of course, he who succeeded in killing a fowl, claimed it as his own. The practice is a most barbarous and cruel one, and we hope the day is not far distant, when this disgraceful pastime, which is