

CHRISTMAS MUMMERS.



AS old customs are fast dying out before the march of fashion, the cheap excursions, the fineries of the ready-made clothes shops, and the country linen-draper's establishments, it is well perhaps to record the manner in which the fathers of the present generation diverted themselves, ere the tradition of them quite dies out. But few men could read or write in old days, a sad privation which the present more enlightened generation can hardly realise; but their tastes were simpler, and less money went in the outward adornment of their persons. A clean smock-frock on Sunday was the height of their ambition. Some such rustic figures even now cling to the traditions of their youth, in our out-of-the-way village, and come to church in snow-white embroidered smocks, and their wives in poke-bonnets and neat shawls; but they can be counted by ones and twos, while the younger men, in their black suits and irreproachable neck-ties, swagger into church as if the world belonged to them, or lounge about the village. Their sweethearts affect the latest fashions of the day, and with a toss of the head, and a wriggle and a swing, they seat themselves on the benches.

Eight years ago, the Tiptirs or mummers used to come round during the week following Christmas Day, the custom having lingered longer with us than in most villages; but their performances have quite ceased now, and are not likely to be repeated.

The play they performed had been handed down orally for generations, and no written copy was known to exist. Like all stories mentally preserved, it must have undergone considerable changes since the first local poet invented its doggerel. The Tiptirs would come and ask to perform in the farm kitchens on Boxing Day, and during the holidays. They were dressed up, as far as their means afforded, in the character of the parts they played, and threw a good deal of energy and even drollery into their movements. The spirit of the piece was of course entirely dependent on the actors chosen. Being interested in such relics of old days, I persuaded one of the men to repeat the words they used slowly to me, that I might write them down, and the following is a faithful reproduction of the performance. St. George and King George have got sadly mixed up in the minds of the Sussex Tiptirs. The meaning of several expressions is hard to divine, especially where in parts all rules of versification are set at defiance. A fiddler was wont to accompany the mummers. Let us imagine that he has struck up a

lively tune, that the audience have gathered in a farm kitchen, and a space has been cleared in the centre directly beneath the kissing-bunch.

ACT I.—SCENE I.

Enter FATHER CHRISTMAS.

Father Ch. In comes I, oh, Father Christmas!
Welcome, or welcome not;
Sometimes cold, and sometimes hot;
But I hope, oh, Father Christmas will never be forgot.
Although I'm here but a short time to stay,
I am willing to show you some sport
To pass the time, before I go away.

SCENE II.

Enter actors—BILLY WHITTLE, KING GEORGE, and others.

Billy Wh. In comes I, little Billy Whittle!
Ladies and gentlemen, I think this room too little;
Pass by these tables, chairs, and stools,
For after me come men so cruel!—
Room, gentlemen, room, room, I pray,
For I'm the noble captain, who leads
King George, and all his men, this way.

K. George. In comes I, King George, that man of courage bold
With my broad sword and spear, I won ten tons of gold;
I fought the fiery dragoon, and brought him to great slaughter,
By which means I wish to win the King of Egypt's daughter.

Turk. In comes I, the Turkish knight!
Come from Turkish land to fight
King George, that man of courage bold;
If his blood be hot, I'll soon turn it cold.

K. George. Out, out! you Turkish dog, and don't you vapour;

If you do, I'll cut you down with my rusty rapier;
I will rag you—I will jag you—
I will let you for to know

That I'm King George of old England, ch!

Valiant Soldier. In comes I, the valiant soldier!
Bold and Slasher is my name;
With sword and buckle by my side,
I fought to win the game.

Only I, and seven more,
Fought and killed eleven score—
Marching men, men of war.

How broad you stand—your house of old;

Appear like a man, stand and behold;

Neither will I bow nor bend,

Nor take thee to be my friend;

Many such a battle have I been in

For to save great George, our king.

Thrice through my head I have been shot—

My brains have boiled like a pot.

For that King George shall have his will,

You Turkish dog, I'll sooner kill.

Turk. For what, for what, sir? have I done you any harm?

Valiant Soldier. Yes, you saucy cock! and get you gone.

Turk (angry). Saucy cock! Draw! Your name?

You ought to be stabbed.

Valiant Soldier. Stab for stab, I have no fear,

Appoint your place, I'll meet you there;

Across the water, betwixt four and five,

I'll meet you there, if I'm alive.

ACT II.—SCENE I.

The TURK and VALIANT SOLDIER fight—the former is wounded and falls.

Turk (kneeling). Down on my bended knees I creep—
I for to be a Turkish slave.

Valiant Soldier. Arise, arise, you Turkish knight;

Go to your Turkish land and tell

What noble champions there in old England dwell.

Enter the PRINCE.

I bid my foe fear not to stand,
King George commands the British land—
The ruler of the main.

Let fly in turn, and cheer the men ;
My British boys, strike on again.

(*They fight again—the Turk falls dead.*)

Valiant Soldier. There, King George, see what I have done !

I've cut him down like the evening sun ;
And for a doctor you may seek,
While he lies bleeding on the deck.

SCENE II.

K. George. Oh, fie ! oh, fie ! this man is slain ;
And on the floor his body's lain.

Is there a doctor to be found
That can raise the dead, and heal the wound ?

Enter the DOCTOR.

Doctor. Oh, yes ! oh, yes ! there is a noble doctor
To be found ! and that you shall quickly see.

Many years I've been a doctor,
Both upon the land and sea,
And now I'm come to behold your majesty.

K. George. Doctor, doctor, what can you cure ?

Doctor. I can cure the itchy, pithy, or the gout ;
A strain within, or a strain without ;
A broken leg, or a broken arm,
Or a broken bone of any sort ;
All this I will maintain.
If that man's neck be broke,
I'll set it straight again,
Or else I'll not receive
One single farthing for my pain.

K. George. Doctor, doctor, what are your fees ?

Doctor. Fifty guineas is my fee ;
But half that money I'll demand of thee.

K. George. Doctor, doctor, try your skill for five.

Doctor. Oh, no ! that won't do for me !
Get my horse, Jack, and I'll be gone.

K. George. Step back, doctor, step back.

Ten pounds in gold I'll give to thee,

If thou can raise this slain Turk under me.

Doctor. King George, you talk more like a man. Now, ladies and gentlemen, you shall see that I'm not one of those quack doctors which go about from house to house, with a box of pills and an ounce of salts, telling you as many lies in one half-hour as you can find true in seven years. My father was the father of seven sons, and the seventh son am I ; and I will guarantee there is no man can work such wonderful cures as I. Now I have a little bottle in my pocket, which is called the Golden Foster-drops ; I'll drop one on his tongue, and it will strike warm life all over his whole body. Also a box of pills in my pocket, which are called the Golden Snip-snaps. I'll put one on his tongue, and it will strike warm breath all over his body. [*He puts the pills in the Turk's mouth.*] See, he moves one leg already.

(*The Turk moves, looks about him, and is helped up by KING GEORGE.*)

Turk. Ladies and gentlemen, you see what it is to be slain,
And have a noble doctor to fetch you to life again.

Doctor. Ladies and gentlemen, you see I was not one of those quack doctors which go about from house to house, with a box of pills and an ounce of salts, telling you as many lies in one half-hour as you can find true in seven years. What I have done, I have done plainly before your face. If you can't believe your own eyes, I think it a very hard case. [*Bows, and retires.*]

Old traditions, as long as they retain any amusement to suit the taste of the present day, are retained. This we gather from the fact that in our village St. Swithin's Day is kept according to the old style, eleven days after the 15th of July, and honoured by a village feast and cricket match. The state of the weather is very anxiously watched on the 26th of July, not on the 15th.

LITTLE ACCIDENTS, AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM.

IN TWO PARTS.—PART THE FIRST.



EVERYBODY knows that "accidents will happen." All are liable to them, but all do not know how to deal with them, consequently the majority of folks become unnerved and excited when they occur, and instead of taking prompt and proper measures to remedy the mischief, aggravate it to such an extent that what might have been only a slight inconvenience becomes a great misfortune.

Accidents are very useful for one thing, they bring out character, and often where it is least expected. It will generally be found that when there is any sudden call for self-control and presence of mind, one person steps to the front and immediately assumes the position which is his or hers by right of the possession of those qualities. Those around simply obey their leader. Accidents are indeed a misfortune when they occur in the presence only of those who can do nothing but rush wildly about and add to the confusion which is to a certain extent unavoidable.

I believe however that this excitability, which cannot be sufficiently deprecated, arises in a great measure from the consciousness of ignorance ; and the knowledge that the best remedy was at hand, and could be used, would give calmness and resolution to those who would otherwise be agitated and unfit for anything. Acting on this belief, I propose to give a list of common, and what are considered trifling, accidents,

and to state what I believe to be the best way of dealing with them.

The next best thing to preventing an accident is to be prepared for it. In every home there ought to be a place known to all the members of the household, but out of reach of the children, set apart for things which are likely to be wanted in case of accident. These should include a good pair of scissors, three or four large needles, ready threaded, some broad tape, a little lint, a roll of clean old linen, flannel, and calico, part of each of which should be torn into strips, some sticking-plaister, gold-beater's skin, turpentine, lunar caustic (nitrate of silver), tincture of arnica, and tincture of calendula. The possession of these articles will enable any one who can act with self-possession and nerve to deal promptly and wisely with most of the every-day accidents to which flesh is liable. These are, I think, included in the following list :—

Cuts.—Cuts require to be treated suitably according to their position and their character. A cut finger is best tied up in rag with the blood ; for blood is very healing. If a cut has any foreign substance such as glass, gravel, or dirt in it, this should be removed by being bathed in lukewarm water before the rag is put on. If a cut is severe, the blood should be examined. If it is dark, and oozes slowly from the wound, it comes from a vein, and is not serious ; if it is bright scarlet, and spurts out of the cut like water from a fountain,