

was indulged. He who first announced the crowing of the cock was rewarded with a cup of tea in which a glass of spirits was mixed. At Culdaff, in Ireland, it was usual for the working classes to raffle for mutton, when sufficient people could be got to subscribe and pay for a sheep. A favourite game in the Christmas holidays was the game of Kamuran. This was played with a ball, which was required to be sent in a certain course, while the opponent exerted himself to send it in another direction. A crooked stick was used to drive the ball.

The Welsh custom of assembling "in church at about three o'clock in the morning" taking part in a service, and then continuing "singing psalms and hymns with great devotion till daylight," is certainly fully in harmony with the true spirit of keeping Christmas Eve as a vigil. Even those who were unable, through age or other disability, to attend divine service at church, conducted the prayers and sang the carols at home.

In connection with the ancient custom of bringing in the boar's head at St. John's Gate, Clerkenwell, a good deal of ceremony was observed, and with telling effect no doubt. A blowing of bugles announced the approach of the dish. The cook, dressed in white, came in singing an old song printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1521 :

"The bred heed in hande bringe I,
With garlens gay and rosemarie;
I pray you all synge merrilie."

The guests, each of whom had a copy of the words, joined in the chorus.

A similar custom prevailed at Queen's College, Oxford; but here the ceremony is supposed to have had some reference to a curious experience of a scholar, who once being attacked by a boar, rammed his copy of Aristotle down the beast's throat, so choking him.

Many of the customs described are certainly curious, and no doubt wholly baffling in their origin. Some of them are entirely alien in their spirit from the spirit of the Christian religion; and yet they have lived, with all the hardihood of superstition rooted in ignorance. Even Christianity does not always prevail over the human hunger for the fanciful; and one authority tells us that "A superstitious notion prevails in the western parts of Devonshire, that at twelve o'clock at night on Christmas Eve the oxen in their stalls are always found on their knees, in the attitude of devotion." The dwellers in western Devonshire must be singularly innocent of any sense of the excruciatingly ridiculous!

How many of the more commendable and hospitable customs mentioned are still in one form or another in vogue, we do not know. That which, because of its connection with the "old order" seemed likeliest to last, is with the "old order" passing away. After all, only one thing signifies to us, keeping Christmastide in this our great open temple of Nature, where "everything saith glory," and that is, that the true Christmas Spirit shall prevail. That spirit will dictate its own expression; and its language, the language of kindness, needs no interpreter.

