

WAKEMAN'S WANDERINGS.

LONDON, July 3, 1867.—It is a common and pathetic lament of most writers, and particularly of those who shut themselves up in the shadowy recesses of some moldy club, with the opposite street facade for the limit of their horizon of actual observation, that the good old days and their good old ways are dead and beautiful things of the past. The change in conditions of life and living in England, Scotland and Ireland have certainly been greater during this century than in all the five centuries immediately preceding; and this has of necessity made obsolete many ancient customs and observances that are perhaps just as well to have survived in literary reminiscence only; but in most of those things holding fast the gentler and dearer traditions of a people in home, sporting, social and even religious life, there is a surprising record of sturdy retention.

Should only those which have come under my personal notice since 1867 be given the briefest reference, so great a number could be grouped as to completely refute those dolorous complaints that the pleasant olden customs are no more; and I am quite sure that should some friendly and enthusiastic pen be devoted to making an entire volume on the subject of "Famous British Customs Still in Vogue," treating the matter something after the garrulous, genial manner of that wonderful old olla podrida, "Hone's Every Day Book," the English speaking and reading world of today would find in the result a genuine revelation of pleasure and surprise.

In Ireland the tender custom of "convoying" the departing emigrant is the same today as during all the sad cycles since its peasantry were forced to seek homes in foreign lands; its wakes and weddings, its fairs and frolics, its children's hunting of the robin and the wren, and countless other customs hundreds of years old are precisely as they were in the heart of the better olden days.

Over in the sturdy little Isle of Man every essential feature of its patriarchal and representative government, established early in the tenth century, exists in its original simplicity at the present time. Its Tynwald Court is still, as a thousand years ago, held under the open sky on its grassy Tynwald Hill. Its sheading coroners, high bailiffs, House of Keys and sword-bearer, promulgate the laws just as they did in glorious King Orry's time. Some of its parish clerks are still elected by the votes of only those who "put out smoke," that is, whose habitations possess a chimney. Its fisher folk put to sea with goodly prayers and psalms. Its peasant folk, in dress, customs, superstitions and pious faith live lives of calm indifference to the outer world of change; and the bardic strain of old, held true and firm down the shining line of a thousand years, flashes forth now as then in its weird, exalted Oriel Verre in each succeeding Christmas tide that comes.

And who shall truly say that the land o' cakes has lost its fine old customs and tender superstitions altogether? What a host of genial customs still cling to these stern and fine fold through the influence of their "guid neebors" the beneficent little Brownies alone! Make merry of it as you may, the household Scottish "brownie" still holds its help-

ful place in the hearts of the people beyond the Esk and the Tweed.

He is never idle in all good office to the lowly home of the countryside, where you never fail of finding him, if you do not enter his realm in the spirit of cavil and scoffing. There, in each simple home and heart he sits enthroned with every attribute of benevolence and affect on. He not only works with giant might to assist in ploughing the land, harvesting the crops, guarding the grain and minding the herds, but in every little household drudgery of guid-wife and bairn he lends a helping hand. No ill can come but that he has fended its cruellest touch. No sorrow can fall upon the household whose hurt would not be deadlier were it not for his kindly and palliative powers. And in all the glorious old land o' cakes, his gentle influence adds zest to every peasant joy. As the burns, springing from the misty, crag-rimmed corries of the north, descend and water the welcoming plains of the lowlands, the endless streams of Gaelic superstition descend from the weird and misty *ceitidhs* of the crofters' ancient homes and the centuries-old *clachans* and render perennial the lowlands growth of Scottish folk-lore and well beloved olden ways.

Let all doubters of the existence in Scotland of most ancient customs and pastimes step into the great farm kitchens of the Lothians at Hallowmas Eve. Let them, at Auld Reekie's ancient Cross, at midnight of any New Year's eve learn what a Scottish Hogmanay truly is. Let them in spring and summer and autumn follow the keeneyed, sure armed golfer, or know the thrill of winter curling joys. Let them visit that most ancient and glorious of Scottish fairs, the St. George cattle fair of Kelso, where the Tweed and Teviot mingle their historic waters. Let them wander to that decaying realm of Gipsydom, quaint old Yetholm, hidden from both English and Scottish eyes in the mazes of the greswome Teivot Hills, and see the "Fasten Een" games of Bowmont side, in February, almost as ancient as the Teviots themselves, and so brave, rough and brawny that the spirit of battle and the strength of giants are required to withstand them. Or still, let them wander to old Hawick town and view something that church and state could never put down—the annual Common Ridings; and as the Cornet is mounted, feel the thrill of the hero-days within them as Hogg's soul-stirring lines.

Sons of heroes slain at Flodden!—

Met to ride and trace our Common—

burst from thousands of borderers' throats; and they will know that the Scotia of old, in tradition, feeling, pastime and venerated custom, is the same today as long, long before the solemn league and covenant.

Down in scarred and earth-rent old Cornwall little indeed has been any manner of change for hundreds of years. It is within the memory of those now living when old folk were constantly lamenting in their ancient language, "Cornoack ewe all ne cea ver yen poble younk!"—"Cornish is all forgot with the young people!"—but there has been no one to lament in truth the departure of old customs in the rugged land of "Tres, Pol and Pen." See what a host of these dear old drolls, and these but a few out of hundreds, even a Yankee can find and remember: The "Takin' Sunday," when all the lads and lasses

meet to select "pairdners" for Mazard (cherry) Fair, that most beloved and ancient fair at Praze; the "growder" selling and growder, or scrubbing day, the "watching" over night for the May-day's coming; the blessing of apple trees on St. James's Day and at Christmas time; "rook" day on the great estates, when all the peasant folk can shoot rooks to their heart's content and luxuriate in pot-pie made of the young rooks for a fortnight thereafter; "cob-nutting," that ferocious contest between Cornish lads, and quite as wonderful kite-flying by grave old miners; that immortal custom of mothers of bestowing gifts to the first person met, when returning from a christening; the "taking the New Year" into houses invariably by men first, on account of the ill luck always following a woman's accidental first entrance, a custom almost as universal in Scotland, Ireland and some portion of the north of England; the saturnalia of flowers at Helston called Furry (Flora) Day, as ancient as the duchy itself; and the "huers" of Carrington and Porthminster Hills, St. Ives, and their horn-blowing and bush-waving as the shoals of pilchers are sighted.

Then there are the *Beltain* fires, as in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands, older than Christianity itself; the "touch-pipe" or siesta of the Cornish miner, "above grass" and below; the "vagroneers" or wild, barbaric conveying by children of all vagabond traveling shows; the "wiping of the shoe" by the pilcher-packing fishwives of St. Ives, or daubing the stranger's shoes with oil, for which a half crown "for luck of the fair maids that feed and clothe the poor" (the pilchers) must be paid, or a hustling or a ducking will follow; the very ancient harvest-home custom of "crying the neck" which consists of elevating a small sheaf of the best heads of grain three times and crying "The Neck!" as a token that the field is done, and a signal for farm-side generosity and jollity; and those quaint old customs at Cornish funerals of "carrying" the box" (the coffin), "laying" out the corpse, "watchin'" which is nearly equivalent in all essentials to the Irish wake, the display of the "biers" (bearers) and their unique coffin-tackle, the slow, weird, psalm-chanting processions to the churchyard, the wailing of all females at the church, the compensation of the "passon" in coin in the presence of the multitude; the final "Cheerin'" of the mourners at the homes of the latter, and the gallons of "shnaegrum" at the public house, over which the lamented "Codan Jack" is paid the highest eulogy known to Cornish genius, "E knowed tin!"

In England generally the great number of old customs surviving, and almost prevailing, is far more remarkable to those who will see, than can the absence of their like be either striking or lamentable save to those of completely opaque vision. In modern London, modern as Paris or New York in most of its cosmopolitan characteristics, there are no end of ancient customs still in vogue, especially among the ancient guilds and among the extremes of society, from the costermongers' annual outlandish parade to the Lord Mayor's banquet. There is a no greater nest of these odd old ceremonies and things than may at any time be observed in and about parliament and the