CHAPTER IX.

The three religious classes of the second half of the reign of Elizabeth.—Progress of Non-Conformity.—Statute against the Puritans.—The Puritan enmity to the habits of society.—Philip Stubbes' Anatomy of Abuses.—Pride of Apparel.—Gluttony and Drunkenness.—Dancing considered a vice.—Music held to be corrupting.—The Sabbath profaned by Sports.—The Lord of Misrule.—May-games; Wakes; Church-ales.—Country festivals.—Athletic exercises and sports.—Gaming.—Stage Plays.

THE three chief religious classes of the second half of the reign of Elizabeth have been defined by one who lived near that period:—"They may for distinction be called the active Romanists, the restless Nonconformists (of which there were many sorts), and the passive peaceable Protestants." * In the history of this time, as of every other time, the doings of the "active" and of the "restless" must be far more prominent than any movement of the "passive peaceable." Up to the period of the death of Mary Stuart, the "active Romanists" were the only objects of grave solicitude to the government. All the just and rational energies of the queen and the statesmen who surrounded her; all the severities against Popish recusants, which were defended as being levelled only against traitors, were calculated to uphold the great edifice of Protestantism which was the shelter and bulwark of the civil polity. In this contest against the Romanists, none were more zealous than those who, known as Puritans, first objected to some ceremonies of the Anglican Church, and then denounced the hierarchical constitution upon which she rested. They became "restless Nonconformists." They were compared to a man "who would never cease to whet and whet his knife, till there was no steel left to make it useful." † Both these classes, however, constituted a decided minority, as compared with the "passive peaceable Protestants"—those who were content to remain in the quiet enjoyment of the security which had been won by the sagacity of their rulers. Amongst their ranks the enthusiasts were not to be found. The Established Church had opened its arms widely, to embrace many who conscientiously differed as to doctrine and discipline.

* Walton, "Life of Hooker." † *Ibid.*

The majority accepted the invitation to abide by the religion of the State,—to form contented if not zealous members of a Church which was expressly calculated to reconcile differences. Her decent ceremonies, her abundant provision for the maintenance of her ministers, her beautiful form of Common Prayer, her solemn Offices, were well suited to the quiet and orderly English character. The Romanists, who, at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, were a powerful body decidedly hostile to the government, had, after the contests of a quarter of a century, been absorbed into the ranks of the conformists, or held their own opinions in secret, or had been crushed. The power which had largely contributed to crush the more dangerous of the enemies of the reformed doctrines had, in its turn, become troublesome if not dangerous. Let us endeavour to sketch an outline of the position of the Puritans, in their relations to the church and state and in their social relations, as they present themselves to our observation during the years immediately succeeding the great triumph over the attempt to make England an appanage of Spain, a country for the bishop of Rome "to tithe and toll in."

In 1588, the bishop of Winchester, Thomas Cooper, published "An Admonition to the People of England," which aimed at counteracting the effect of certain bold and scurrilous pamphlets which had been issued with the intent to bring the Church and its ministers into contempt. He especially complains that such books should be in men's hands and bosoms, "when the view of the mighty navy of the Spaniards is scant passed out of our sight; when the terrible sound of their shot ringeth, as it were, yet in our ears." But though the Puritans were at issue with the government upon the great question of religious freedom, and held opinions very adverse to the constitution and discipline of the Church, as enforced by the Act of Uniformity, they had not been the less ready to defend their country against invasion. They were naturally most strenuous in their hatred of the invader that drew the sword in the name of Rome. When the immediate danger had passed away, the Puritans went with redoubled zeal about the work which they called a Re-reformation. The age of pamphlets had now fully come. As the power of reading was more widely extended, tracts were multiplied, whose tone was adapted for men of strong convictions and obstinate prejudices, to whom abuse would be more acceptable than placid reasoning. Many, also, who cared little for the subjects of controversy, read with avidity the

little books that bore the name of Martin Marprelate, and the answers they called forth; for they were bitter and sarcastic, with touches of coarse humour. The queen's proclamation against certain seditious and schismatical books and libels was issued with little effect. The Marprelate tracts were secretly printed and circulated in despite of authority. "The public printing-presses being shut against the Puritans, some of them purchased a private one, and carried it from one county to another, to prevent discovery. It was first set up at Moulsey, in Surrey, near Kingston-on-Thames; from thence it was conveyed to Fawsley, in Northamptonshire; from thence to Norton; from thence to Coventry; from Coventry to Woolston, in Warwickshire; and from thence to Manchester, in Lancashire, where it was discovered. Sundry satirical pamphlets were printed by this press, and dispersed all over the kingdom." * The crisis of a great struggle had arrived; and these libels were the straws which, thrown up, showed which way the wind blew.

The Protestant ministers who fled from the persecutions of queen Mary, had remained long enough in communion with foreign reformed Churches to bring home, upon the accession of Elizabeth, opinions much opposed to the system of church government as established by the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity. There were some portions of the ceremonies prescribed in the rubric which they held to be superstitious. They regarded the vestments of the clergy as popish. They objected to the sign of the cross in the office of baptism, and to the ring in that of matrimony. They objected to kneeling at the communion service. Throughout the reign of Elizabeth her Council held divided opinions upon these matters of controversy; but the queen herself was opposed to an abolition of forms to which the only serious objection was that they belonged to the rites of the earlier Church. But in that age opinions assumed a more violent character of opposition when their differences centred round some visible object; and we still contend in a like fashion, as soldiers in a battle strive to gain or to hold the rag of silk under which one side fights, whilst the principle of the warfare has passed out of mind. The clergy who returned from their seven years' exile during the time of persecution, were put in possession of many of the livings from which the Romish priests had been in their turn ejected. They very soon ceased to regard the Act of Uniformity as imperatively binding;

* Neal's "History of the Puritans," vol. i. chap. viii.

and great irregularities in the performance of ceremonies crept in, and were for some time tolerated. But at length a rigid observance of the rubric was enforced; and the ministers who would not conform were thrust out from their benefices. There was now a body of men, powerful from their abilities and their earnestness, deprived of their means of subsistence, and excluded from the vocations to which they were dedicated. They had their admirers and their followers; and their course was to form separate assemblies. In 1567 a congregation of dissenters were seized at Plumbers' Hall, and some were committed to prison. As yet, the contest had been about what the Puritans held as superstitious ceremonies. The resistance with which they were encountered upon minor points ultimately led them to condemn the episcopal constitution of the Anglican Church, and to proclaim the superiority of the Genevan model. Although the queen was decidedly opposed to their pretensions, which, as set forth by some of their leaders, affected her own claim to supremacy, they had a covert support amongst the most influential of her ministers. Burleigh and Walsingham, and even the favourite, Leicester, knew that if the civil government became persecutors of these zealous men it would alienate its warmest supporters in the contest between Protestantism and Romanism. These were the men who were the most powerful in keeping the people from lukewarmness in the great cause for which they were fighting. But the queen and the ecclesiastical authorities were too strong for the moderate party of the Council. Archbishop Parker discountenanced the meetings of the clergy called Prophesyings. The licences for preaching were greatly restricted under his authority. Archbishop Grindal, who succeeded Parker, took a different view of what he considered the interests of the Church. He inclined to a toleration of preachings and prophesyings, and accordingly fell under the queen's displeasure. Archbishop Whitgift, who succeeded to the primacy in 1583, was determined to put down rather than conciliate the party of the Puritans. As might be expected he drove them into Non-conformity. He prohibited all preaching, reading, or catechising in private houses, if any resorted thereto not of the same family. He imperatively required from every minister of the Church a new subscription, which under previous requirements had been probably evaded. The clergy were now absolutely driven to subscribe to the point of the queen's supremacy, to that of the lawfulness of the Common Prayer and the Ordination Service, and to the Thirty-nine Articles.

He appointed a new Ecclesiastical Commission, who were to examine the clergy upon twenty-four articles, of so stringent and subtle a nature that Burleigh wrote to the archbishop: "I find them so curiously penned that I think the Inquisition of Spain used not so many questions to comprehend and to trap their priests." Burleigh remonstrated in vain; the archbishop, supported by some of the bishops, pursued his course. The result was first a furious attack upon episcopacy in the pamphlets of Martin Marprelate; and then severe laws against the Puritans, which had no ultimate effect but that of fortifying their opinions, and ultimately of making their cause the rallying point of civil and religious liberty. In 1593, an Act was passed "to restrain the queen's subjects in obedience." Those who disputed the queen's ecclesiastical authority, abstained from church, or attended "any assemblies, conventicles, or meetings, under colour or pretence of any exercise of religion," were to be imprisoned unless they made a formal submission in the open church; if at the expiration of three months they did not conform they were to abjure the realm; if they refused so to do, or returned after abjuration, the penalty of death awaited them. In the same session an Act of increased severity was passed against "popish recusants." The times were changed. There was now little distinction between the non-conforming Protestant and the recusant Romanist, in the eyes of the dominant Church. The obvious and not unreasonable excuse for this course, which we now call bigotry, is that neither of the three great parties, if placed in power, would have admitted the principle of toleration. There was not for Protestant, Puritan, or Papist, any middle course between the assertion of his own principles and the destruction of those of his adversaries. Cartwright, the great leader of the Puritans, claimed absolute power for the Church he would have set up; and he exhorted his brethren to resistance and nothing but resistance: "The Lord," he says, "keep you constant, that ye yield neither to toleration, neither to any other subtle persuasions of dispensations and licences, which were to fortify their Romish practices; but as you fight the Lord's fight, be valiant." * And so, in this spirit of giving no quarter to those who asked none, the Ecclesiastical Commission ejected ministers; the government hanged libellers; and Penry, the supposed author of the Marprelate tracts, was hastily and cruelly executed under the statute of 1581, for seditious words and rumours against the queen. These

* Quoted by Mr. Hallam, from Madox, "Vindication of the Church."

severities were chiefly directed against the separatists from the Church who were then denominated Brownists, and afterwards Independents. No man of those times who really desired the advancement of true religion could look upon the odious scoffings of either party—upon the schismatic spirit which rejected union as an accursed thing, and upon the arrogant temper which thought to compel conformity by banishment and the gibbet—without feeling sorrow and humiliation that so noxious weeds had sprung up amidst the rich harvest of the Reformation. Such lovers of peace would long to address the violent of both classes in the prophetic words which the most illustrious of the defenders of the establishment, the eloquent, profound, and sensible Hooker, addressed "to those who seek the reformation of the laws and orders ecclesiastical in the Church of England:"—"Far more comfort it were for us, so small is the joy we take in these strifes, to labour under the same yoke, as men that look for the same eternal reward of their labours; to be enjoined with you in bands of indissoluble love and amity; to live as if our persons being many, our souls were but one; rather than in such dismembered sort to spend our few and wretched days in a tedious prosecuting of wearisome contentions; the end whereof, if they have not some speedy end, will be heavy, even on both sides." *

Such, then, were the relations of the Puritan party to the Church and State, and so ominous were these "wearisome contentions," when Hooker published the first four books of his great work in 1594. In their social relations these dissenters certainly did not present an amiable aspect to the rest of the community. What Hooker said of the Anabaptists was indirectly pointed at them: "Every word otherwise than severely and sadly uttered, seemed to pierce like a sword through them. If any man were pleasant, their manner was fervently with sighs to repeat those words of our Saviour Christ, 'Woe be to you which now laugh, for ye shall lament.'" It was in this temper that the Puritans made themselves obnoxious as the enemies of all innocent amusements; and, affecting "to cross the ordinary custom in every thing," equally denounced the general habits of society, however harmless or indifferent, as well as its exceptional vices. In looking at this aspect of Puritanism we may collect some distinctive traits of the social life of the latter period of the reign of Elizabeth. We believe that we should greatly err if, accepting the de-

* Preface to "Ecclesiastical Polity," vol i. p. 190. Oxford ed., 1820.

nunciations of the puritanic writers without qualification, we were to regard this as a period of very marked profligacy. We open "The Anatomie of Abuses" of Philip Stubbes—"a most rigid Calvinist, a bitter enemy to Popery, and a great corrector of the vices and abuses of his time." * This lay-preacher has no gradations in his scale of wickedness. "The horrible vice of pestiferous dancing" is as offensive to him as "the beastly vice of drunkenness;" and "new devices and devilish fashions" of apparel are as odious in his sight as "gaming-houses, the shambles of the devil." Nevertheless, he is an honest and trustworthy observer of manners, at a time when the moralist had a wide range for observation; when he looked upon a people rather than a class—the courtier and the citizen, the artisan and the peasant. The pursuits of all members of the social state had become blended in mutual wants and dependencies. Let us follow this quaint old writer in some of his delineations of the English of the latter part of the sixteenth century—"a strong kind of people, audacious, bold, puissant, and heroical, of great magnanimity, valiancy, and prowess;" but, "notwithstanding that the Lord hath blessed that land with the knowledge of his truth above all other lands in the world, yet is there not a people more corrupt, wicked, or perverse, living upon the face of the earth." † Out of the manifest exaggerations of this declaimer we may collect many curious and unquestionable facts.

In the Epistle Dedicatory of his volumes, Stubbes says, "reformation of manners, and amendment of life, was never more needful; for was pride, the chiefest argument of this book, ever so ripe!" By "pride" we understand him to mean what is the accompaniment of every period of general prosperity—a love of luxury and of luxurious display, not confined to the superior classes, but spread by the force of the imitative principle very widely through many inferior degrees of station. "Do not," he says, "both men and women, for the most part, every one, in general, go attired in silks, velvets, damasks, satins, and what not, which are attire only for the nobility and gentry, and not for the others at any hand?" The sumptuary laws of Henry VIII. had ceased to be regarded. Those who were winning wealth by industry would no longer submit, if they ever did submit, to be told by statute what they were not to wear, according to a scale of income

* Antony à Wood.

† Stubbes, p. 4. We quote from the rare reprint, edited by Mr. Turnbull.

varying from 200*l.* a year to 5*l.** They utterly despised the reason set forth for such arbitrary regulation—namely, to prevent "the subversion of good and politic order in knowledge and distinction of people, according to their estates, pre-eminences, dignities, and degrees." † A statute of Philip and Mary was directed against the wearing of silk, except by certain privileged classes. The statesmen of Elizabeth meddled little with these matters, but we find in the statute-book three laws which were intended, as we suppose, for the encouragement of home manufactures. By a statute of 1562-3, a most singular device was adopted, for preventing persons, except those of inordinate wealth, indulging too largely in the extravagance of "foreign stuff or wares" for appareling or adorning the body. If such finery was sold to any person not possessing 3000*l.* a year in lands or fees, not being paid for in ready money, the seller was debarred of any legal remedy for the recovery of the debt. ‡ By a statute of 1566, velvet hats or caps were prohibited to all under the degree of a knight; and by that of 1571, every person, except ladies, lords, knights, and gentlemen having twenty marks by the year in land, was to wear upon his head, on Sundays and holidays, a home-made cap of wool, very decent and comely for all states and degrees. § If Stubbes is to be relied upon, all states and degrees rejected the statutory notion of what was decent and comely. They wore hats "perking up like the spear or shaft of a temple;"—or hats "flat and broad on the crown, like the battlements of a house;" or "round crowns" with bands of every colour. They wore hats of silk, velvet, taffety, sarsenet, wool, and of "fine hair, which they call beaver, fetched from beyond the seas, from whence a great sort of other vanities do come besides." He was of no estimation among men who had not a velvet or taffety hat; "and so common a thing it is, that every serving-man, country-man, or other, even all indifferently, do wear of these hats." With these exceptional laws, which thus appear to have been wholly inoperative, Elizabeth and her Council left the regulation of apparel to a far higher law than any parliament could enact—to the tastes of the people and their ability to gratify them. The foreign fashions were copied, and the foreign silks and velvets imported, with no restraint that had the least effect. The queen herself carried her love of costly dress almost into a mania. It was the only expenditure in which she was pro-

* 24 Hen. VIII. c. 13.

† *Ibid.*

‡ 5 Eliz. c. 6.

§ 13 Eliz. c. 19.

fuse. In her youth, said bishop Aylmer, "her maidenly apparel, which she used in king Edward's time, made the noblemen's daughters and wives to be ashamed to be dressed and painted like peacocks." Sir John Harrington has a story of a bishop, which shows how the same Elizabeth thought of such adornments at a later period of her life. "On Sunday my lord of London preached to the queen's majesty, and seemed to touch on the vanity of decking the body too finely. Her majesty told the ladies that 'if the bishop held more discourse on such matters, she would fit him for heaven, but he should walk thither without a staff, and leave his mantle behind him.'"* The ruff and the vardingale had then superseded all "maidenly apparel;" and we are now accustomed to think of Elizabeth and her ladies as they shone forth in the most gorgeous but least graceful of womanly attire. The liberty of the press, small as it was, must have been more relied upon than the liberty of the pulpit, when Philip Stubbes hurled his thunder against every article of dress with which we are familiar in the portraits of the magnificent queen. The wreaths of gold and jewels in the bolstered hair; the rings of precious stones in the pierced ears; the "great ruffs and neckerchers of holland, lawn, cambric, and such cloth, smeared and starched in the devil's 'liquor,' starch;" the gowns "of divers fashions, changing with the moon;" the fringed petticoats; the coloured kirtles—these vanities of the rich and great, had, according to this minute censor, descended to the very humble: "So far hath this canker of pride eaten into the body of the commonwealth, that every poor yeoman's daughter, and every husbandman's daughter, and every cottager's daughter, will not stick to flaunt it out in such gowns, petticoats, and kirtles, as these." Doubtless this description of the spread of luxury is greatly overdone; or we might receive it as a proof of the general diffusion of wealth. But when this godly satirist tells us of these cottagers' daughters,—"they are so impudent that, albeit their poor parents have but one cow, horse, or sheep, they will never let them rest till they be sold, to maintain them in their braveries,"—we may be certain that he is speaking "in Ercles' vein." The holiday finery of the village maiden was limited to a ribbon and a coloured nether-stock. A "queen of curds and cream," transplanted to a town, might "spend the greatest part of the day in sitting at the door, to show her braveries,"

* "Nugæ Antiquæ," vol. i. p.

but on her native green she was as pure and simple as the rose in her bosom.

The pride of apparel, set forth by this anatomist of abuses, was scarcely more obtrusive in women than in men. All ranks, according to this authority, lavished their means upon the abominations of stately bands and monstrous ruffs, upon embroidered shirts, upon slashed and laced doublets, upon French and Venetian hosen, upon knit nether-stocks (stockings), upon velvet cloaks. There never was a period in which the satirist did not affirm that the preceding generation was healthier and braver, and altogether nobler than that to which he had the misfortune to belong; and so our good old Puritan writes, "how strong men were in times past, how long they lived, and how healthful they were, before such niceness and vain pampering curiosity was invented, we may read, and many that live at this day can testify. But now, through our fond toys and nice inventions, we have brought ourselves into such pusillanimity and effeminacy of condition, as we may seem rather nice dames and wanton girls, than puissant agents or manly men, as our forefathers have been."* The year 1588 gave a practical answer to the charge of pusillanimity. The Saxon heart was as brave as ever, though it beat under an Italian doublet. Nevertheless, if there had not been some salt in society to preserve the body politic from the taint of selfishness, these and other excesses of pride might be received as symptoms of national decay. Gluttony and drunkenness are the vices of the rudest communities; but in the more general diffusion of wealth in the reign of Elizabeth, they assumed those forms of ostentatious display which are amongst the worst evils of social refinement. The puritan writers were not alone in their remonstrances against the luxuries of the table which marked the latter years of the sixteenth century. Stubbes compares the variety of meats and sauces, the sweet condiments, the delicate confections of his time, with the past days, when "one dish or two of good wholesome meat was thought sufficient for a man of great worship to dine withal." Thomas Nash, whom the Puritans counted amongst the wicked, enlarges on the same theme: "We must have our tables furnished like poulterers' stalls, or as though we were to victual Noah's ark again. . . . What a coil have we, this course and that course, removing this dish higher, setting another lower, and taking away the third. A general might in less space remove his camp, than they stand disposing of their

* Stubbes, p. 44.

gluttony." * Excessive drinking, a vice which reached its climax in the degraded court of James I., was not wholly of native growth. The same writer says, "From gluttony in meats let me descend to superfluity in drink,—a sin that, ever since we have mixed ourselves with the Low Countries, is counted honourable; but before we knew their lingering wars was held in the highest degree of hatred that might be."† Stubbes says, every country, city, town, village, and other places, hath abundance of ale-houses, taverns, and inns, which are so fraught with maltworms, night and day, that you would wonder to see them." There were punishments for low debauchery, such as the drunkard's cloak. Against this growing sin, which was creeping up from the peasant and the mechanic to the yeoman and the courtier, the preachers lifted up their voices in the pulpit, and not always in vain. Robert Greene, the unhappy dramatist, who died in the midst of his excesses, tells how he was stopped in his early career of riot by hearing a good man preach of future rewards and punishments; but that he could not stand up against the ridicule of his companions, who called him Puritan and Precisian, and so went again to his drinking-booth, his dice, and his bear-baiting. But we may be sure that these earnest preachers in some degree injured the good effect of their religious exhortations against real vices, by denouncing those harmless recreations which to the greater number supplied the place of grosser excitements. In resisting "the beginnings of evil" too much zeal may be as fatal as too much laxity.

The court of Elizabeth, in which

"My grave Lord-Keeper led the brawls,"

was a dancing court. The queen danced when she was a girl, as her sister Mary also danced. In 1589, at her palace of Richmond, her "ordinary exercise" was "six or seven galliards in a morning, besides music and singing." ‡ In 1600, when she was feeble, and asked for a staff when wearied, she could still delight, at the house of sir Robert Sydney, to look upon the pleasures of the young, "and smiled at the ladies, who in their dances often came up to the step on which the seat was fixed to make their obeisance, and so fell back into their order again." § The Puritans denounced all dancing in mixed companies of the sexes. The dancing-schools, which then abounded, were, they said, for teaching "the noble

* "Pierce Pennilesse," edited by J. P. Collier, from the original of 1592. p. 47.
† *Ibid.* p. 52. ‡ Lodge, vol. ii. p. 411.
§ "Nugæ Antiquæ," vol. i. p. 315.

science of heathen devilry." They held that "men by themselves and women by themselves" might dance without sin, "to recreate the mind oppressed with some great toil and labour." The people, high and low, did not choose to accept this limitation of their favourite amusement; and so upon the rushes of the torch-lighted hall, having before them the noble example of sir Christopher Hatton, * the courtiers danced their grave measures and corantoes, to the airs of queen Elizabeth's "Virginal Book;" and the peasant youths and maidens, on the village green, saw the sun go down, as they tripped "the comely country-round." Puritanism thought it right to make war upon every such amusement, crying out, "Give over your occupations, you pipers, you fiddlers, you minstrels, and you musicians, you drummers, you tabretters, and you fluters, and all other of that wicked brood." † They held that "sweet music at the first delighteth the ears, but afterward corrupteth and depraveth the mind." In this, and in many other battles which they fought, they warred against nature, and were beaten. Music was the especial Art of the Elizabethan days. In every household there was the love of music, and in many families it was cultivated as an essential part of education. The plain tune of the church did not unfit the people for the madrigals of the fire-side—exquisite compositions, which tell us how much of the highest enjoyments of a refined taste belonged to an age which we are too apt to consider very inferior to our own in the amenities of life.

We should do the Puritanic writers and preachers injustice if we did not see and point out that many of their objections to the recreations of the people were originally directed against their use on the Sunday. The Christians' first day of the week being regarded by the Romanists as a holiday, on which, after the hours of devotion, all amusements lawful in themselves were not unlawful, the more rigid Protestants determined, in their implicit reverence for the Old Testament, to adopt the strictest Judaical observance of the Sabbath, as one of the most distinguishing attributes of the Reformation. This view was injurious to the desire for conciliation which influenced the majority of the conforming clergy; who were either opposed upon principle to the application of this supposed test of a holy life, or saw the impolicy of depriving the people of the recreations which their forefathers deemed not only innocent but salutary. After the evening service, to shoot at the butts, to play at football, even to see an interlude, were not

* See Gray's "Long Story." † Stubbes, p. 204.

accounted unchristian occupations. Round the old manor-house, the lads and lasses of the village would have their Sunday evening games of barley-break and handball, while the squire and even the parson would look on approvingly. The Puritans conscientiously believed such license to be incompatible with religious principle, and set about opposing these pursuits with an earnestness commensurate with the difficulty of their task. Cartwright, the most influential of their number, speaking of the way in which a clergyman performed the service, says—"He posteth it over as fast as he can gallop; for either he hath two places to serve, or else there are some games to be played in the afternoon." When there were daily prayers in the parish-churches, and especially at holiday-seasons, the old traditional sports and mummeries of the people were also offensive to some, though tolerated by many. Thus Puritanism came to do battle, not only against those amusements on Sundays, and at other especial times when the Church claimed serious thoughts, but against the amusements themselves, whenever practised. In 1585, a bishop of Lincoln, in his "Visitation articles of Inquiry," asks, "Whether your Minister and Churchwardens have suffered any Lords of Misrule, or Summer Lords and Ladies, or any disguised person in Christmas, or at May-games, or Morris-dancers, or at any other time, to come unreverently into the church-yard, and there to dance or play any unseemly part, with scoffs, jests, wanton gestures, or ribald talk, namely in the time of common prayer."* The popular license on these holiday occasions, amongst a people in whom the love of fun was inbred, no doubt often went beyond the bounds of decorum; and thus the stricter Protestants endeavoured to sweep away the merriments altogether. They were in due time successful—"the hobby-horse was forgot," and the "sealed quarts" at the alehouse-door remained the only attraction.

The Lord of Misrule was a great personage in town and country. He was the "master of merry disports" in royal palaces and civic halls. Learned doctors of the universities, and great benchers of the inns of court, recognised his authority. He held his ground through all the troublesome times of the Reformation up to the Civil Wars, when his mock pageantry was swept away with the realities of power that then perished. The Christmas sports and their lord would have perished, even though Prynne, with other learned Puritans, had not called upon "all pious Christians eternally to abominate them," because they were "derived from the

* Quoted in "The Martin Marprelate Controversy," by the Rev. W. Maskell.

Roman Saturnalia and Bacchanalian festivals." But in Elizabeth's days, though most of the so-called superstitious ceremonies of the ancient Church had been swept away, the people, high or low, would not readily surrender those festive observances which, although common in the times of Popery, were not necessarily connected with its spirit or its practice. Thus, in every borough, and more especially in every village, the Lord of Misrule, chosen by universal suffrage at Christmas or at Whitsuntide, headed his company of lusty mummers, in their gaudy liveries, their scarfs and laces, their legs hung with little bells; and "then march this heathen company towards the church and churchyard, their pipers piping, their drummers thundering, their stumps dancing, their bells jingling, their handkerchiefs swinging about their heads like madmen, their hobby-horses and other monsters skirmishing amongst the throng."* We laugh at these follies which the Puritans execrated; but in this license the national character may be recognised. The riot of the multitude was placed by themselves under control. The Lord of Misrule was as absolute as the Parish Constable. The empire of Law was recognised by "the wild heads of the parish" in choosing their captain; and "the foolish people" submitted themselves for their guidance to his authority, upon the principle of order by which their more serious liberties were upheld. Amongst such a people it was useless declaiming against May-games; against Plough-Monday dances, with their "tipsy jollity; against Church-ales, and Wakes. The old hearty spirit of hospitality might be denounced as gluttony, and the free intercourse of joyous hearts reprobated as licentiousness. If the feasts and the merry-makings had been simply vicious they could not have so long prevailed amongst a nation essentially moral. Even in the popular gatherings, which have been so emphatically described as occasions for sin, there were objects of piety and charity connected with the harmless merriment and wild excitement. Such were the Wakes and the Church-ales. The Wake was the annual feast to commemorate the dedication of the parish church. Stubbes has described the festival with less than his usual acrimony: "Every town, parish, and village, some at one time of the year, some at another,—but so that every one keep his proper day assigned, and appropriate to itself, which they call their wake-day,—useth to make great preparation for good cheer; to the which all their friends and kinsfolks, far and near, are invited." He speaks the language which the Puritans ap-

* Stubbes, p. 169.

plied to every relaxation, when he asks, "wherefore should the whole town, parish, village, and country, keep one and the same day, and make such gluttonous feasts as they do?" Such declaimers have ever confounded abuse with use. The use of Wakes was recognised at a later period, as promoting "neighbourhood and freedom, with manlike and lawful exercises." * "Neighbourhood" was that old "hearty spirit of social intercourse, constituting a practical equality between man and man, which enabled all ranks to mingle without offence and without suspicion in these public ceremonials." † The object of the Church-ale was thoroughly practical; and in complete accordance with one great national characteristic—that of voluntary contributions for public objects. At the season of Whitsuntide, when the spring was calling up "a spirit of life in every thing," there was a parish feast, which the churchwardens had prepared for by an ale-brewing; and the profit that was made by filling the black-jacks of the jovial countrymen was applied to the repairs of the church. Fancy-fairs have superseded Whitsun-ales. We are a more decorous people than these our ancestors, with their exuberant merry-makings for every season —their sheep-shearing feasts, with cheese-cakes and warden-pipes, —their Hock-cart at Harvest-home,—their Christmas, with the Boar's-head and the Yule-log in the great hall, the tenants sitting at their landlord's table, and the labourers and their wives and children crowding in unreproved. All these indications of a kindly spirit, not chilled by distinctions of rank, are gone. Let us strive to revive the spirit in all forms fitting our own age.

Roger Ascham maintained that "to ride comely; to run fair at the tilt or ring; to play at all weapons; to shoot fair in bow or surely in gun; to vault lustily; to run; to leap; to wrestle; to swim; to dance comely; to sing, and play of instruments cunningly; to hawk; to hunt; to play at tennis; and all pastimes generally which be joined with labour, used in open place, and in the daylight, containing either some fit exercise for war or some pleasant pastime for peace, be not only comely and decent, but also very necessary for a courtly gentleman to use." The training of the courtly gentlemen of England has, for three centuries, been according to the maxim of the wise old "Schoolmaster;" and a better training could never have been devised to produce the leaders of a manly people. But the pastimes joined with labour—the vaulting, running, leaping, wrestling, swimming—were as necessary for the

* Proclamation of Charles I., 1633. † "William Shakspere, a Biography."

yeomen, the artisans, and the peasants, as for the gentlemen of England. Such training, "fit exercise for war," has won our country's battles, from Agincourt to Alma. Such training, "pleasant pastime for peace," has still done something for brotherly kindness amongst degrees of men whom fortune had too much isolated. It was this frank and rough fellowship in their field sports—their hunting, hawking, birding, fishing, otter-hunting; it was this bold rivalry in their hurling and their foot-ball, their wrestling and their single-stick, their archery, their land and water quintain, which knitted the squire and the yeoman and the ploughman—the merchant, the artificer, and the sturdy apprentice,—in a companionship which made them strong enough to defy the world in Elizabeth's heroic time. The Puritans, who, when it came to the issue whether they should be slaves or fight, fought as well as the most reckless, made the mistake of trying to put down the rude games of the people because they might lead to brawling and contention, and withdraw them from godliness. They were wiser in their denunciations of gaming and gaming-houses, which were amongst the corruptions of the town at this period. Sir John Harrington wrote "A Treatise on Playe," in which he endeavours to purify its abuses rather than banish it from the houses of princes, and out of their dominions, as "holy and wise preachers" desired. If he were to show no indulgence to such recreations, he says, "I should have all our young lords, our fair ladies, our gallant gentlemen, and the flower of all England against me." But he nevertheless draws a picture of "one that spends his whole life in play, of which there is too great choice," that sufficiently illustrates the prevailing madness: "In the morning, perhaps, at chess, and after his belly is full then at cards; and when his spirits wax dull at that, then for some exercise of his arms at dice; and being weary thereof, for a little motion of his body, to tennis; and having warmed him at that, then, to cool himself a little, play at tables; * and, being disquieted in his patience for overseeing cinque and quatre, or missing two or three foul blots, then to an interlude; and so, as one well compared it, like to a mill-horse treading always in the same steps, be ever as far from a worthy and wise man as the circle is from the centre." †

Drinking, dicing, bear-baiting, cock-fighting,—the coarsest temptations to profligacy,—were not such abominations in the eyes of the Puritans, as "stage-plays, interludes, and comedies." The

* "Tables," backgammon. † "Nugæ Antiquæ," vol. i. p. 198.

aversion which the early Reformers entertained towards the Mysteries and Miracle Plays, were poured forth in fuller measure upon the plays of profane subjects, which had now become the universal amusements. The more it was said that some good example might be learned out of them, the more furious were those who would suppress them altogether. This was the great controversy of a century. It began when the drama was in its puling infancy, it grew more violent during its erratic youth; it ceased not when its glorious manhood had supplied the best answer to its enemies; it triumphed in that drama's licentious decline. The history of the stage is an interesting chapter of our social history, through several generations. In the latter years of the reign of Elizabeth, when the Puritans, zealous, persevering, and united, had possessed themselves of much of the municipal power of the larger cities and towns, there was frequent warfare between the civic authorities and the performers of plays. The severe moralists called them "caterpillars of the commonwealth;" the law defined them as "vagabonds." But the law, which mixed together in one common opprobrium "all fencers, bearwards, common players in interludes, minstrels, jugglers, pedlars, and petty chapmen," who wander abroad and have not license of two justices of the peace, in what shire they shall happen to wander,*—that same law excepted the established companies of players, by making those only vagabonds who were "not belonging to any baron of this realm, or towards any other honourable person of greater degree." The number of honourable persons who gave their sanction to companies of players was sufficient to secure a sanction for dramatic performances, wherever there was a demand for such amusements. But, notwithstanding these privileges, there was frequent opposition to the acting of plays, especially in London; and thus the earl of Leicester's players, of which company James Burbage was the chief shareholder, being refused a license to perform within the walls of the city, erected a theatre in the Blackfriars, in 1576. The original theatrical performances were in the inn-yards of the city, such as the Belle-Savage. The better sort of spectators sat in the gallery which connected the inn-chambers; the larger number of the audience stood in the open yard. Gradually, hostelries were converted into theatres, and new buildings were erected for dramatic representations. They were multiplied in various parts of the town, and especially in Southwark. The company of the Lord Chamberlain,

* 14 Eliz. c. 5.

who were the queen's household servants, had two theatres—the Blackfriars and the Globe—the one for winter, the other for summer performances. Of this company Richard Burbage was the chief actor, and William Shakspere was a shareholder in 1589. This we know from a document, in which the "poor players" address lord Burleigh, affirming that they "have never given any cause of displeasure, in that they have brought into their plays matters of state and religion, unfit to be handled by them, or presented to lewd spectators." A commission had been issued to inquire what companies of players had thus offended. This was the period of the Marprelate controversy; and the stage was made an instrument for attacking the Puritans. Nash boasted that "Vetus Comœdia had brought forth Divinity with a scratched face, holding her heart as if she were sick." Spenser has described this period of license as one of ugly barbarism and brutish ignorance, of scoffing scurrility and scornful folly; and he asks why "the man whom Nature self had made to mock herself"—"our pleasant Willy" chooses "to sit in idle cell" rather "than so himself to mockery to sell." There can be little doubt that "the gentle spirit," thus alluded to by the greatest poet of that time—a poet of enduring greatness—was Shakspere. He had, we are assured, already written two or three of his comedies, of which "unhurtful sport, delight, and laughter" were the characteristics. A grander labour was before him—the labour of preserving for all ages and all nations the influences of what has been truly called "great Eliza's golden time;" a time of free thought and heroic action, when individual prosperity had not deadened the sympathy for national greatness; when men lived for their country as much as for themselves; a time of security and comparative peace, born out of a long period of unrest. Of the great interpreter of the spirit of that age we shall have again to speak, in a brief notice of the Elizabethan Literature.