

cake being thrown against the outside door of each house by the head of the family, to keep out hunger during the ensuing year. The New Year is rung, in, and bands of music parade the towns as on Christmas morn, and in some places (though getting nearly obsolete) the bellman goes round with a copy of verses wishing a merry Christmas and happy New Year.

New Year's Day, or the first of January, was kept by the Romans as a feast in honour of Janus; and according to Brady,* the first mention of it as a Christian festival was in 487, under Pope Felix the Third, who called it the *octave of Christmas*; it having been originally kept by the more zealous primitive Christians as a fast, to distinguish it from the customs of the heathens. Under the title of the Circumcision, it is only to be traced from the end of the 11th century; and it was not generally so observed, until it was included in our Liturgy in the year 1550. It was, however, a day of feasting for some centuries before this, and, with Christmas-day and Twelfth-day, one of the most marked days throughout the holidays. After Edward the Third had fought incognito in a severe battle at Calais, under the banners of Sir Walter de Manny, and overcome the French on the 31st day of Dec. 1348, he entertained the captive knights on the following day, to celebrate the New Year. Henry the Eighth, in the early part of his reign, (before the uncontrolled indulgence of his passions had demoralized a disposition naturally impetuous,) was fond of Christmas revellings, as before mentioned; and New Year's day, or night, was frequently fixed on for some imposing pageant, according to the style of that age; of which one instance may be

* Clavis Calendaria, vol. i. p. 135.

selected from Hall's Chronicle in the Christmas of 1513-14. "And against Newieres night, was made in the halle a castle, gates, towers, and dungion, garnished wyth artilerie, and weapon after the most warlike fashion: and on the frount of the castle was written, *Le Fortresse dangerus*, and within the castle were vi ladies clothed in russet satin laide all ouer with leues of golde, and every owde knit with laces of blewe silke and golde. On their heddes, coyfes and cappes all of golde. After this castle had been caried about the hal, and the Quene had behelde it, in came the Kyng, with fiue other appareled in coates, the one halfe of russet satyn, spangled with spāgles of fine gold, the other halfe riche clothe of gold, on ther heddes cappes of russet satin, embroudered with workes of fine gold bulliō. These vi assaulted the castle; the ladies seying them so lustie & coragious, were content to solace with them, and upon fārther comunicacion, to yeld the castle, and so thei came doune and daunced a long space. And after the ladies led the knightes into the castle, and then the castle sodoinly vanished out of their sightes."

At present the commencement of the year is treated as a feast, and frequently as a sort of meeting or *re-union* among families, where they can conveniently join at the same table; and in many cases the servants and labourers are entertained by their employers, and many of the Christmas sports repeated. Stewart mentions a singular custom in vogue in Strathdown, and its neighbourhood, formerly common to all the Highlands on this day. "Piles of juniper wood are collected and set on fire, each door, window, and crevice being first closely stopped up; the fumes and smoke of the burning wood cause to the inmates violent sneezing, coughing, &c. till they are nearly exhausted,

producing expectoration, and thereby, as they fancy, driving off disease; a cordial is afterwards administered around. The horses, cattle, and other bestial stock are treated in the same way."*

New year's gifts are not yet obsolete, although the practice is losing ground, which is a pity, as it served to strengthen and cement that kind feeling in society, which so many circumstances concur to jar and interrupt. It is now very much confined to interchange of gifts in families, at least in this country. For on the Continent the mutual exchange of presents, in the shape of jewellery, fancy articles, bon-bons, sweetmeats, &c. is very considerable: the expenditure in Paris alone for them (*étrennes*, as they are called, and hence *le jour d'étrennes*) has been reckoned at upwards of £20,000. Visits are made throughout the circle of a person's acquaintance, and the customary gifts left, which, if not intrinsically valuable, are at least fanciful and pretty. In Spain a similar custom formerly existed, tables being prepared in the house-squares, or entrance halls, for the reception of the visiting cards and presents.

According to Chardin, the Persians on this day exchange gilded eggs, painted and ornamented, a custom of great antiquity, the egg typifying the commencement of things, whence the mundane egg, so essential in much of the Oriental Mythology. In the Celtic countries the Druids presented misletoe to the people about the time of the new year, for which they no doubt obtained some good equivalent. Boulanger† says, "that the second day of the sigillaria (the four latter days of the Saturnalia) which fell on the 21st of December, was the fête of the goddess *Angeronia*, or *Ageronia*, the goddess of

* Popular Superstitions of the Highlanders, pp. 252-3.

† L'Antiquité dévoilée, vol. iv. pp. 16-17.

silence or mysteries, sometimes called *Strenua*, then signifying courage. At this time of the feast the fear of the close of the world was supposed to cease, and people mutually gave presents, saying *strenue*, or courage; hence the word *étrennes*. The practice, like all others which could be traced at all to the Pagans, was forbidden by many councils, but, as in other cases, with no lasting effect. Amongst others, the Concilium Autisiodorense, A.D. 614, in France, decreed, that "It is not lawfull in the Kalends of January to make any bonfires or filthy playes; or to observe any diabolical New-Yeares gifts."*

The difference between New-year's gifts and Christmas boxes appears to be, that the former were mutually exchanged, or, indeed, were sometimes in the nature of an offering from an inferior to a superior, who made some acknowledgment in return, while the latter were in the nature of gratuities from superiors to their dependants. The practice is of considerable antiquity in this country, and formerly it was customary for the nobility and persons connected with the court to make presents to the King, who gave gifts generally of money or plate in return. The servants or officers who carried the gifts also had handsome fees or presents made them; and it became at last almost a matter of regulation what the amount of them was to be, depending on the rank of the person by whom they were sent, on which the rank of the messenger would also depend: as for instance, in the Northumberland household-book it appears, that his lordship used to give to the King's servant bringing a new-year's gift, if a special friend of his own, £6. 13s. 4d.; if only a servant of the King, £5.

* Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, p. 580.