

THE WOOBURN VERSION OF THE MUMMERS' PLAY.

Down to perhaps 1870, or possibly a year or two earlier, a visit from "the Mummings" was an annual Christmas event at my old home at Great Marlow. The play was the same year after year, and was handed on orally. Into its origin it is not my present intention to enquire,* but merely to put on record the version used in one Buckinghamshire parish—Wooburn. The play was in use in many parishes, in probably many counties, but became in course of time gradually altered or specialized in each parish.

All whom I saw taking part in these performances at Great Marlow have been dead, I believe without exception, for some years; and for a good many years before my departure thence in 1900 I had vainly tried to "bring to book" the last survivor who, though I believe he had never taken part in the performance, knew the words, or most of them.

In 1895, among friends made among my fellow members of the Diocesan Guild of Church Bell-ringers, I found that Mr. James Garrell, pork butcher, of Wooburn, remembered most of the version formerly current there, and he wrote it out for me, aided by

*The late Dr. Jos. Stevens, for many years Hon. Curator of the Reading Museum, in his "History of St. Mary Bourne, Hants." 1888, p. 340, says of the version there current: "The plot was evidently Eastern, and founded probably on the Legend of St. George. And there can be no doubt that the usage, continued onward from sire to son, is as old as the myth itself. There were various versions of the play, all of which were alike in the principal characters." Dr. Stevens gives that version in full; in it the characters, six in number, were: Old Father Christmas; Mince Pie; A Turkish Knight; St. George; An Italian Doctor; Little John. In Hone's "Every Day Book," 1827, vol. II., col. 1646, is reprinted (omitting some ribald lines), "Alexander and the King of Egypt; a mock Play, as it is acted by the Mummings every Christmas. Whitehaven. Printed by T. Wilson, King St." (No date.) The characters, numbering four, are: Alexander; The King of Egypt; Prince George (his son); Doctor. Mr. George Clinch informs me that he has seen a version printed in an old child's book. There are a few remarks on Mumping, elsewhere in Hone; and on Early Mumping in Brand's "Popular Antiquities," 1813, I. 354.

the only other survivor possessing any recollection of it. On August 16, 1895, Mr. Garrell wrote:—"I have enclosed what you asked me for. I am sorry I could not send it before, but I had forgotten one small portion of it, and I did not see the person that knew it until our Flower Show day." Not long afterwards Mr. Garrell died, and with him the Wooburn version would have died out if he had not just previously written it down, as the other man's recollection was very imperfect. The play is given exactly as written for me, except for my selection of where to use capitals, the addition of punctuation, and the correction of one or two slips in orthography. I am responsible also for practically all the stage directions; and for the names of the speakers prefixed to their lines. The publication has been purposely deferred in hopes of securing the Great Marlow version before doing so, so as to avoid all suspicion of "cribbing" or collusion. One character in the latter version was St. George, who does not appear in the Wooburn version, and the only lines I can remember were spoken in a repentant vein by the character who fought and slew the Duke (whether of Cumberland, as in the Wooburn version, or what other title I forget):—

"Oh, doctor! doctor! do thy part,
The dook is piercéd to the 'eart."

In the four versions that I have met with, the action or principal incident (it can hardly be dignified by the name of "plot") is the same—a duel, and cure of the fallen hero by the Doctor, which character alone is constant. The other characters vary, as do the words, though very similar in style; perhaps a couple of lines in one version will be found in another, helping to show a common origin.

The properties considered requisite were of the simplest; a change of head-gear to a top-hat, or a paper cocked hat; perhaps a bit or two of frilled coloured paper pinned on the coat of one character; and a couple of wooden swords, completed the outfit. Each character, as he entered, either announced his own name or the friendly office was performed by someone already on the stage.

THE PLAY.

Enter HEY DOWN DERRY.

HEY DOWN DERRY.

Hey Down Derry,
 I am come round this Christmas time to make you all merry;
 I must have room
 For me and my broom
 All round this house to-night.
 Come in Fly!

Enter FLY.

FLY.

In comes I,
 As light as a Fly;
 I've got no money,
 And what cares I.

Come in the Duke of Cumberland!

Enter The DUKE.

DUKE OF CUMBERLAND.

In comes the Duke of Cumberland
 With his broad sword in hand.
 Where is the man that bids me stand?
 I'll cut him down with my courageus hand,
 As small as a horse, as numerous as flies,
 And send him to the cook-shop to make mince pies
 Between now and next Christmas.

Come in Captain Kearley!

Enter CAPTAIN KEARLEY.

CAPTAIN KEARLEY.

In comes Captain Kearley all from the Isle of Wight,*
 And with the Duke of Cumberland I'm come here to fight;
 Where is the man that bids me stand?
 I'll cut him down with my courageous hand,
 As small as a horse, as numerous as flies,
 And send him to the cook-shop to make mince pies
 Between now and next Christmas.
 A battle! a battle! between you and I,
 To see which on the ground shall first lie.
 If I should happen to gain the day,
 On the ground you first shall lay;
 So mind your head, and guard your blows,
 Or else you'll get a pop on the nose.

*They fight. The DUKE falls.*HEY DOWN DERRY (*calls off*).

Five pounds would I give for a doctor, if a doctor was but here!

* I shall be obliged for any information as to this character.

DOCTOR (*without*).

The doctor won't come for five pounds.

HEY DOWN DERRY.

Ten pounds would I give for a doctor, if a doctor was but here!

DOCTOR (*without*).

The doctor won't come for ten pounds.

HEY DOWN DERRY.

Twenty pounds I give!

DOCTOR (*without*).

The doctor will come for twenty pounds. (*Enters.*)

In comes the noble and jolly doctor!

I'm doctor here,

I'm doctor there,

I'm doctor everywhere!

I don't go about like you sham Quack Doctors,

I go about to cure, not to kill.

HEY DOWN DERRY.

What can you cure?

DOCTOR.

The hipsy, pipsy, palsy, and the gout,

Pains within, and pains without.

Bring me an old woman that has been dead ten years,

In her coffin twenty, and buried thirty.

If she has a sound hollow tooth in her head

I'm bound for her life to be saved.

George,* George, you have been to France, I've been to Spain,

Take one of these pills, and rise and fight again.

CAPTAIN KEARLEY.

We have had a ring, we have had a right,

And now we'll have a jolly good fight. †

They fight. The Duke falls.

CAPTAIN KEARLEY.

Come in Jack Finny!

Enter JACK FINNY.

JACK FINNY.

How dare you call me Jack Finny?

My name is Mr. Finny, otherwise John Finny.

I can do more than you, or any other man.

* George not being the Christian name of the third Duke of Cumberland, who is probably here intended to be represented, it seems likely that the character was St. (or Prince) George until some time subsequent to the death of the duke, which took place in 1765.

† Probably "the text is here corrupt;" this second fight seems out of place.

? CAPTAIN KEARLEY.

What can you do?

JACK FINNY.

Cure a magpie of the tooth-ache.

? CAPTAIN KEARLEY.

How do you do that?

JACK FINNY.

Wring off his head, and throw his body in the ditch.

I can cure this man if he is not quite dead.

He is dead and stiff, by the spring of his leg,

But this is a case I've seen before,

Take one of these pills, and rise, and fight no more.

Come in Big Head!

Enter BIG HEAD.

BIG HEAD.

In comes I, as ain't been yet

With my big head and little wit.

My head's so big, my wit so small,

But I'll sing you a song that will please you all.

(Sings.)

[THE END.]

"Referring to Big Head's song, he is supposed to sing the latest song of the day, or any song he knows.

"I wrote it all from memory, excepting about three or four words I had from my friend. I have never seen it in print or writing, but learned it off the bigger boys; I do not know anywhere else where they play it.

"I remain, Dr. Sir, yours respectfully, J. GARRELL."

Ten syllables seem missing from the beginning of the first line of the play, and two from the beginning of Fly's lines; while in several places the oral transmission of the (? 18th century) libretto has evidently failed, and the consequent *lacunæ* have been crudely patched up by the subsequent players; to particularize one example only: Captain Kearley's last line before the first fight—"Or else you'll get a pop on the nose"—is surely a "corrupt reading." Further than this I will not attempt to criticize.

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