

# THE LOCAL NEWS.

Manuscripts of an Old Bachelor.—No 11.

REMINISCENCES OF ALEXANDRIA.

Seignors to you di por veir  
Ke daz noel ne uelt avoir  
Si jole non;  
E repleni sa maison,  
De pain, de char, & de poisson, &c.  
ANGLO-NORMAN CAROL.  
Lordlings in these realms of pleasure,  
Father CHRISTMAS yearly dwells;  
Deals out joy with liberal measure,  
Gloomy sorrow soon dispels;  
Numerous guests, and viands dainty,  
Fill the hall and grace the board;  
Mirth and beauty, peace and plenty,  
Solid pleasures here afford.—TRANS.

No where else in America were the traditions, the sports, the festivals, the manners and customs of England, so well remembered, and so faithfully kept and followed, as in Virginia, up to some forty years ago.—Since then, there has been a decline: but, still, there are more English customs even now retained among us, than the traveller can find outside of our limits, on this side of the Atlantic ocean. And among these customs is the celebration of Christmas Day, as it is celebrated in the country parts and the country towns of England. As an old Virginia town—notwithstanding its temporary, unwise, and improper political condition for a series of years—separated from its true mother—now happily returned and fondly welcomed to her bosom—Alexandria was the scene of great "rejoicing, glee, and merriment," in the olden time, on every recurrence of Christmas and the Christmas Holidays. I well remember, in my boyhood, "what a time we had!"—and how the months and weeks were counted in fond anticipation of the arrival of that day, which "comes but once a year," and which we then thought, came so slowly, and fled away so rapidly!

Christmas was a general holiday. There was no class nor condition of men—no race nor color—who did not participate in the cessation from labor, and the enjoyment of the festival. The poorest would work beforehand more diligently than ever, to prepare for the "rest" of that day:—and from prattling childhood to hoary age all united in getting ready for it, hailing its advent, enjoying its hours, and—I may add—lamenting their departure.

The boys at school, looked for the holiday during Christmas week, as a matter of right—not as a favor; and resented any attempt to curtail their privileges or abridge their time. I remember that one unlucky wight—not popular at best with his pupils and "not to the manor born"—undertook, on one occasion, in consequence of some real or fancied offence, to give notice, in advance, that the school would be closed only on Christmas Day. The announcement was received in silent astonishment—and the business of the school went on, for the remainder of the day, in sullen quietude.—But, from the commencement of the next morning, such a series of persecutions and annoyances as ensued, were rarely equalled at Eton, where the boys are famous for their unruly deportment towards obnoxious ushers. The key hole of the school house was stopped up with mud and old nails—red pepper was thrown into the stove—the stove pipe was filled with newspapers—leather was burned to emit a disagreeable odor—derisive cheers assailed the ears of the teacher as he turned the corner—and every species of dissatisfaction shown—ending in a plain indication that a regular "barring out" was determined on, if the obnoxious order was not recalled. Triptolemus, after advice and consultation, succumbed. It was announced that the "common law" would be observed—immemorial franchises preserved—and Christmas week be recognized as a holiday to which all were entitled. The proclamation was hailed with general applause—and affairs restored to the most amicable relations—"in statu quo ante bellum."

On Christmas eve, in old Alexandria, the children of the family and the neighbors, were called together at the house of some friend, where there was the most room, and the most comfortable accommodations. The "Christmas tree," loaded with bon-bons was placed in the middle of the room, and cake and sweet meats furnished in abundance. The boys and girls, with their fathers and mothers, and elder brothers and sisters looking on, and joining in their sports, played at blind man's buff with forfeits, and other similar games—and the hours passed merrily until 10 o'clock, when the watchmen's horns told the time of night, and were the signal for breaking up the happy party. I saw but yesterday, an estimable matron surrounded by her sons and daughters, in the meridian of life, but still young and gay in her disposition, whose very presence is a pleasure, for the sweet and virtuous influen-

ces which surround her—who, I remember, was the belle of one of these Christmas eve gatherings—not then in her teens—and to obtain a kiss from whom the boys would have jumped out of a two story window.—I recalled to her recollection the happy occasion—when, with a smile of ineffable sweetness, she turned to her husband, and said, "I know all about what he is talking—and how I kissed him, because he teased me so, and I wanted you to see it, and kiss me too." "Oh! happy, glad some hours of my younger days! Ye have all gone, and left me standing almost alone on the banks of the stream of time, as it rolls before me, bearing far off, the friends, and the companions of my boyhood, and, I sometimes fear, the feelings of my youth!

On Christmas Day the Catholic and Episcopal Churches were always adorned with evergreens, and appropriate scriptural mottoes, and several days before-hand the young people were engaged in the work of arranging these churches in their holiday garb.—There are some who can remember the appearance of old Christ Church, when its galleries, and pillars, and walls, its chancel and pulpit, were hung with thick garlands from the hardy trees and shrubs which retain their verdure in spite of the rude blasts and icy grasp of winter. Nothing could be more beautiful—nothing more appropriate. Devotional feelings were aroused in the most torpid hearts, when the solemn words of praise and thanksgiving for the Birth of our Saviour, ascended from the sanctuary embosomed in the green foliage, which cast a dim religious light through the church, and seemed to accord with the services and worship of the hallowed occasion.

Early on Christmas morning, the festivities of the day commenced. Guns were discharged, pistols fired, and as much noise and smoke made as would have sufficed for a moderate battle. But there was not then so much street firing as I am told has been the case within the last ten or twelve years.—The gunpowder explosions were mostly on the premises of the parties engaged in that very questionable kind of hilarity. Large bowls of egg-nog were ready by daylight in the bars of all the hotels and restaurants—by the way, there was not in the time of which I write a single "restaurant" in the Corporation—they were oyster houses then—and thither flocked all the "men about town"—all the "Bohemians"—and many others besides, to partake of the beverage, freely and "without price," and to see the beginning of the sport among those who were determined to have "a frolic" then, if they could not have another for the next twelve months.

These, however, were the public, and often rude and "parish" proofs, of the general feeling which prevailed: the real Virginia Christmas festival could only be seen and enjoyed at the quiet and happy homes of the people, who kept the day as their ancestors had celebrated it ever since the settlement of the "colony." and down to the year —. Every family went to church in the morning, and, that duty performed, devout thanks to God rendered for all his mercies and especially for his greatest of all mercies, the sending of his own Son to redeem the world—the remainder of the day was spent in enjoying the good gifts which Providence had bestowed, the converse of kindred and friends, the meeting of children and grand children—the indulgence in the dearest, the kindest, the sweetest emotions of the human heart. The feast itself, as it smoked upon the hospitable board, was like the feasts in old England more than a hundred years ago—the large juicy ham—the fat turkey—the oysters of the finest flavor—the saddle of mutton—the chine of pork—the sirloin of beef—these, and twenty other substantial dishes, in many houses, tempted the appetite of the happy guests; and then the dessert of mince pies, and apple pies, and plum puddings—they will all be remembered by many an old Alexandrian who recalls the Christmas dinners of the olden time—it may be, the Christmas dinners at which his own father and mother presided! Nor were the foaming bowls of luscious egg-nog—the pitchers of rich apple toddy—always made of Jamaica rum—the liberal supply of Port and Madeira wines, absent upon the side-board and the table.

I have said that no work was ever done on Christmas by free or bond. Am I wrong, when I add that even the cooks are included in the remark. To prepare such a feast as I have spoken of, they were, of course, employed and busy. But if it was labor, it was "a labor of love." I really believe the cooks enjoyed the day more than other people.—The feast was the work of their hands—they had ready the dinner—they had arranged all

for "master and mistress," and for the honor and credit of the house—in which they took as much interest as if it belonged to them. Happy days for the servants in Virginia! They had not then been debased, corrupted and ruined, as I fear many of them have been since;—nor had they, then, been deceived and deluded by siren strains, which only lure them to a deeper degradation than any servitude can entail.

And so, on through the whole day, at the old homestead, around the domestic hearth, "the hours sped with noiseless tread," and as light and joyous as if they had been garlanded with roses, and fanned by the breezes of spring. What though the keen wind might roar, or the snow fall in feathery flakes without—the chimney blazed within, and "December was as pleasant as May." When night came, "the parting glass was taken—honest hands were shaken," farewells were given—wishes for health and prosperity were reciprocated—and then the guests departed, "pleased with their hosts and happy in themselves."

Such were the feasts, the sociability, the merry making, the gathering in of the links of family by blood and marriage, which marked the celebration of Christmas day in old Alexandria more than thirty years ago. It was a time when the home feelings were, perhaps, more strongly developed, and more fully exhibited, than at any other period—and this gave it the great charm it possessed, and made it to be highly enjoyed, and makes it now so fondly remembered. To think of such a festival as I have attempted to describe does, indeed, bring "the light of other days around me." It is on that account that I linger as my pen traces these lines, not willing to stop, but knowing that I may become wearisome in such reminiscences of an Old Bachelor, who lives more upon the past than most men, and who thinks that the "old times were the best times," despite of modern "improvements" and modern "progress."

## GENERAL NEWS.

A letter from New Orleans, published in the Boston Traveller, denies the often repeated statements of great distress in the Crescent City. It says produce is on the decline, the poor are well supplied, and bank stocks are advancing. Real estate is improving. There are 30,000 troops in and about the city, and more expected, and the fortifications are well provided with cannon.

At the Christmas dinner given by Lord Lyons, only the members of the British legation, and a few distinguished English guests, were present. It was a home and family dinner.

The trial of Jeffers, recently convicted of murder in New York, developed some of the worst features of city life in the career of both son and mother—utter depravity in both—and many of their associates.

There is said to be a scarcity of good seamen in New York. The supplies for the merchant vessels are below the demand.

S. G. Haven, formerly a representative in the U. S. Congress from Buffalo, N. Y., died in that city on the 24th. He was once a law partner of Mr. Fillmore.

Most of the people of Galveston, in Texas, have left that city, and gone into the interior of the country.

Large quantities of cotton are being sent from Texas to Mexico. New Braunfels, in Texas, is now a great cotton depot.

The London Observer informs us that steps have been taken to put a stop to what it calls "American espionage in England,"—that is to say, the system of sending out detective policemen to watch Southern men in English cities and towns. The editor says: "Mr. Adams, the United States Minister in London, is understood all along to have protested against these doings, and they appear to have been carried on through the instrumentality of another ambassador of the United States at a foreign court.

The U. S. War Department has issued an order that no additional cavalry regiments be organized. Those that have not been mustered into service will necessarily be transferred to some other arm of the military service.

Late advices from Nassau, New Providence, state that several vessels have arrived there from Southern ports, having run the blockade, and all flying the Confederate flag.

The Montreal Commercial states that a few days ago two men enlisted in a regiment at Toronto, and having made drawings of the fortifications there, concluded to desert, and left for Rochester in a boat which they stole from the island. They were followed by a negro who had been watching them, with another man, in a row boat, and after

an exciting chase of seven miles, owing to a change in the wind, they were overhauled. Refusing to surrender, the colored man fired on them with a gun loaded with duck shot, wounding them both, after which they were captured.

The Richmond correspondent of the Nashville Union tells the following: "A young lady of Maryland, has, after braving many hardships, recently arrived here. Reaching the Potomac, she found a boat and a negro to row it, but the negro refused to attempt to cross, for fear, as he said, the Yankees would shoot him. Drawing a pistol from her pocket, she told him she would shoot him herself if he didn't cross. The negro rowed her over to the Virginia shore, and thus, utterly alone, she came to her friends in Richmond, with her petticoats quilted with quinine, her satchel full of letters, many of them containing money, and with no end of spool-thread, needles, pins and other little conveniences. The name of this heroine is Miss Nannie Webster."

In consequence of the hesitation exhibited by the Federal Administration to sanction a formal exchange of prisoners, lest, by so doing, they should in some way embarrass their position, a committee was recently appointed by the Massachusetts Historical Society to inquire into and report to what extent an exchange of prisoners was effected during the American Revolution. From the report of the committee it appears that, from the battle of Lexington to the close of the revolutionary war, exchanges of prisoners constantly took place, and often in considerable numbers, although the British Government steadily and cautiously avoided making any political admission whatsoever. They permitted exchanges under rules of war, for purposes of military convenience, and in relief of the sufferings of their own officers and privates in captivity.

A Methodist clergyman in Ware, Mass., was recently unable to collect the amount of his salary, and sued for the balance due him. The defence claimed that under the Methodist system nothing was due him, as he was sent by the Conference, not called by the society, and therefore all payments were voluntary and not the result of a legal agreement, and if the trustees did not recollect the full amount of the salary, there was no legal manner of collecting the balance.—The court decided in favor of the trustees and against the clergyman.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

### SERVANTS FOR HIRE.

I HAVE for hire several SERVANTS, of different ages and sexes, among them some good cooks, washers and ironers. Apply at my residence, near Alexandria, on the Washington road. Dec 23—1w\* THOMAS W. SWANN.

JOHN H. DEVAUGHAN'S  
AMBROTYPE GALLERY,  
No. 111, King Street,  
OPPOSITE THE MARSHALL HOUSE.  
nov 29—1m\*

### DRUGS, CHEMICALS, &c.

JUST RECEIVED, a full supply of Brown's Bronchial Troches, Spaulding's Throat Confections, for coughs and sore throat, Ayer's Sarsaparilla, Cherry Pectoral, and a good assortment of other Drugs, &c., for sale at MILBURN'S Drug and Chemical Store, dec 17—2w N. W. corner King and Wash'n-st.

### GROCERIES

NEW BUCKWHEAT, HAMS AND CITRON. THE SUBSCRIBER has just received the following articles, and invites the attention of customers and citizens. 2,000 lbs. new Buckwheat, in large and small packages; 1,000 lbs. small Family Hams and Breast Pieces Raisins, Currants and Citron; also, an assortment of small family cakes and crackers, to wit: Jumbles, J. nny Lind Cakes, Ginger Cakes, Ginger Snaps, and Tea Cakes, Soda, Water and Sugar Crackers, all of which will be sold at low prices for cash. JOHN T. COOKE, dec 13 Corner below Post Office.

MINCE MEAT.—Just received, a nice article of Mince Meat. J. T. COOK, dec 19 Old Post Office Corner.

NEW JOWL.—Just received, a lot of new Jowls, very nice. J. T. COOK, dec 19 Old Post Office Corner

### BOOTS AND SHOES.

HENRY C. FIELD,  
BOOT AND SHOE MANUFACTURER,  
No. 74 King street, Alexandria,  
KEEPS on hand, and is prepared to manufacture BOOTS and SHOES of all kinds. MILITARY BOOTS or SHOES made at the shortest notice, and of the best material. Persons in want of a good article in his line, will do well to give him a call. oct 7

### DRY GOODS.

DRY GOODS.  
BRYAN & ADAMS, AGENTS,  
No. 75, King street. oct 7

### JEWELRY, &c.

W. W. ADAM,  
DEALER IN WATCHES, JEWELRY AND SILVER WARE  
All kinds of WATCHES and CLOCKS repaired.