

A GERMAN NUPTIAL EVE.

By ONE WHO WAS PRESENT.

It is an old custom in Germany, and one which we may hope will never die out, to have a gathering of friends on the nuptial eve, either at the house of the bride elect, or, when this is too small, in a hotel. Most of the guests are expected to appear in some character, and give a recitation or song, if possible, composed for the occasion, and referring in some way to the bride and bridegroom. It is a cheerful, pleasant custom, and helps to make the last evening in the old home a happy and joyous one, by surrounding the bride with the friends of her youth who come to wish her God speed in the new life about to open up. It seems in many ways much better than having a party after the wedding, when the bride and bridegroom are no longer among the guests, and it is pleasanter to remember that the last festivities in the old home were brightened by their company.

Let me give a sketch of a nuptial eve, or, as our German cousins call it, a "Polter Abend" gathering, at which I was present, held at the house of the bride, and for that reason more homelike than if it had been held in a hotel. In former times it was common among all classes, but now chiefly among the poorer, for the guests to bring old crockery and smash it before the door of the house, so that next morning, if it had been a large party, the unfortunate father had to employ a man and cart to carry away the fragments. I was unable to discover the origin of this, but it seems like our throwing an old shoe after the bride as she leaves home. Has it anything to do with the German custom of giving the baby a shilling when he breaks his first plate? Most people appear to be not altogether sorry that this marriage custom is dying out.

Without any crockery, but with a little inward fear and trembling, owing to my slender knowledge of the language, I stood, one evening last September, at the house of my friend, waiting for the door to open to introduce me into the midst of the excitement. Glad I was to find several who could speak English, and I was tempted to talk more English than German.

The programme of the evening commenced by Fräulein and a young medical student singing a very humorous duet together, containing some warnings to the bride and bridegroom, who, however, seemed to enjoy it as

much as anyone. In accordance with a time-honoured custom, which is also observed when moving into a new house, a little girl went up to the bride, and, after reciting a poem, gave her a stand containing salt and a bread-basket, in order that the newly married couple, on commencing housekeeping, might have something with which to begin and keep them from starvation. Perhaps the salt may also be meant for a warning against ever letting any bitter words pass between the two who are now so loving to each other, and the bread may also signify contentment with the simpler things of life, coupled with the rich delicacy of love.

After the bride had received this present, a dwarf with a long white beard, described by Scheffer, the German poet, as Perkeo, dwarf of Heidelberg Castle, came forth, and sang a song of his own composition. It narrated several events in the lives of the bride and bridegroom in a very amusing manner. The dwarf was personated by the medical student, a younger brother of the bridegroom, and he told how, in the earlier days of courtship, they used to send him away to play with other boys, in order to be alone together, and how, having wisely learnt English, they would tease him by speaking in that language, which he, poor fellow! did not understand. But now that is all forgotten, and he is quite ready to forgive them for all their misdeeds in the past, ending by wishing them a very happy and joyous future.

While we were having some refreshments, a peasant girl from Southern Germany appeared, dressed in the pretty costume peculiar to the district, and with a basket upon her back such as is seen in all pictures of German market-women. It contained crockery. Addressing the bride, and after praising up her wares, and saying how impossible they were to break, she carelessly let fall an already broken cup, but in such a manner as to make it appear as if it broke in falling. She quickly atoned for her stupidity by presenting the bride with a beautiful china tea and coffee set painted by her mother, and which she was very careful not to break. Very heartily she was received, and continued to receive the congratulations of her friends until no less a person than the self-appointed ambassador of her most gracious Majesty Queen Victoria and of the President of the United States is announced. He came as a joint ambassador of the two nations, partly

because he had himself lived some years in England, and partly because the bride had lived in America, so that it was fitting that someone should represent these nations. The manner in which he was received showed the cordial relationship existing between Germany and these countries. He finished, after mentioning the recent marriage of the President, by conveying united congratulations to the bride, who was delighted with the voice from the old country, and who, by the way, had placed a small American flag above a large German one.

The young Englishman having finished, a lady decorated the bride with the bridal wreath, reciting a poem composed by herself. A pretty custom usually takes place at this moment. All the young people present form a circle round the bride, who stands blind-folded in the centre and places the wreath upon someone's head, showing who will be the next to be married. Unfortunately, it was omitted on this evening, so we did not know on whom the lot would fall, much as we should have liked to, and the question remains unanswered.

When the bride had received the wreath, the bridegroom's father recited a poem, and gave the bride a box containing the rare meerschaum powder, brought from Ruhla, a great seat of the meerschaum pipe trade in the Thuringer Wald. The German wives are noted for being good *hausfraus* (housekeepers), and frequently a girl will go into a *pension* to learn housekeeping before she is married. This powder is for cleaning purposes, and serves as a reminder of what is expected from the bride.

The evening finished by one more very clever speech from the student, who made some capital jokes about the partnership of the two names, which were, both in German and in English, names of very common businesses, without which we could not live, and certainly, if they did not go hand in hand with each other, a general failure would be the result. And with everyone in good humour, we bid adieu at half-past eleven, we English almost thinking that we might take a lesson from the Germans, and very much increase the pleasures of a wedding by instituting a "Polter Abend" in England.

W. A. H. LEGG.
Arnstadt, Nov., 1886.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

EDUCATIONAL.

BEATTIE.—You do not say where you reside. You should write for all such information to the special college under whose training you will find it the most convenient to place yourself. Address the secretary.

G. M. H. should read all our answers to correspondents under the above heading, as her questions have been answered over and over again in our volumes. In one of the early volumes there was an article entitled "How to Earn One's Living."

A. Mc.—You should write to the secretary of the Holyway College for Women direct, and obtain their prospectus, stating your wishes and all the particulars of the case.

E. T. G.—The Latin motto, *Virtus semper viridis*, is that of three families—i.e., Corry, Green, and Lowry, and means, "Virtue is always flourishing."

C. M. should write direct to the secretary of the College of Preceptors, 42, Queen-square, Bloomsbury, W.C. 2. We give you the same advice; you had better read and judge for yourself.

POLLIE.—Write to the secretary of the Civil Service

Commissioners, Cannon-row, S.W., and obtain the printed prospectus of rules respecting the clerkships of the telegraph department. If you look through our answers under the above heading, you will see scores of replies to this question.

C. KERSHAW.—There is a training home for domestic servants, The Guild of Aid, at Zeals, near Bath, Somerset, and one at 19, Romney-place, Maidstone; matron, Miss Kemp. Also St. John's Training School for Girls, Westbourne-park, W.; matron, Miss McEwen.

ART.

ZILLAH.—If the medium known as Florentine is used when painting upon silk, it is not necessary to prepare the foundation.

MARS.—In mirror painting it is necessary to use one of the many mediums advertised, or the oil paints are easily removable with turpentine or a penknife.

THE LADY OF AROOSTOCK.—It is extremely difficult to sell original drawings, and much more so to sell mere copies. So we fear that we could not help you. Shew's mounting medium for photographs is the best to employ.

Ivy.—The safest manner of cleaning photographs is to immerse them in pure clean tepid water, and then wipe them dry with a soft silk rag.

WORK.

A MOTHER is thanked for the recipe she kindly gives for a description of embroidery, especially her own:—For the foundation, prepare as proposed for crazy work in our part for November, 1886. Get artificial flowers of velvet, old or new, the brighter the better, and of all varieties. Tack them on the sprays, large or small, or grouped; then use button-hole-stitch to fasten down every flower in coarse crewel silk, of the respective colours required by the flowers, finishing round the larger flowers and leaves with gold tinsel cord, and using small yellow beads for flower seeds. The stems should be made in shaded greens with crewel-stitch, and the whole effect is very brilliant.

TEETER.—With reference to your helping to support your mother and yourselves by dressmaking, no friends worth keeping would cast you off on that account. No disgrace is attached to honest work,