

CHILDREN OF ALL NATIONS: THEIR HOMES, THEIR SCHOOLROOMS,
THEIR PLAYGROUNDS.

II.—GERMANY.



TO put anything like system into my account of child-life in Germany, it is evident that I must begin at the beginning, and the beginning is, as evidently, the baby.

Fortunately, the German baby is a quaint and interesting little morsel of humanity, and is

very well worthy of a few words of description.

This is a recognised fact in its own country, where it figures largely in all picture-books, is exhibited in the bakers' shop-windows at Easter-time in the form of cakes, with two great currants for its eyes, and dangles in sugar from at least one branch of every Christmas-tree, besides being modelled and remodelled for a variety of other purposes too numerous to mention.

It is wrapped up in a long, narrow pillow, which is turned up at the little feet, and tucked under the dimpled chin. Three bands of bright blue ribbon are, as shown in our picture above, passed round this pillow in different places, and tied in large bows in front. In this chrysalis state nothing of the baby is visible but the small round face, and that is encircled and partly hidden by a cap.

This mode of swaddling has its advantages.

Baby's limbs are in no danger of being broken by an accidental fall; it cannot scratch its little face to pieces with its sharp, rosy nails, after the manner of English babies; and it can be placed on a table, a shelf, or the counter of a shop like a plate of soup, or a loaf of bread, or a parcel of goods, or anything else inanimate.

The other side of the question is this. Would not the baby prefer to kick its legs about in freedom, and stretch its arms and limbs, and would not they become all the stronger for the exercise?

Besides this, there is such a thing as placing too great confidence in baby's complete safety when strapped up in its cushion.

A party of peasants had once to carry their child some distance before they came to the church in

which it was to be christened. It was winter, and the snow lay thick on the ground. After the christening ceremony, the parents, the sponsors, and the friends took some refreshments at a neighbouring inn, to fortify themselves for the return journey.

They then set out in great good humour, and reached home safely with the pillow, but there was no baby in it. Perhaps they had by mistake held the pillow upside down; perhaps the blue bows had become loose; let this be as it may, the baby had slipped out, and was found lying on the snow, half-way between the church and the village. Fortunately, he was a sturdy young peasant-child, and escaped with a cold in his head, which the fond parents endeavoured to cure on reaching home by popping him, pillow and all, into the oven, that was still warm from the baking of the christening-cake!

After the baby is released from his pillow-bondage he passes a year or two in much the same way as children of his tender age do in other countries, entering gradually into the wonderland of fable and poetry which has nowhere so warm a home as in Germany. Giants, dwarfs, gnomes, fairies, wizards and witches, good spirits and bad spirits, surround him on every side. He does not trouble himself to doubt their existence; he simply believes in them all—Rubezahl, Pelzmärtel, Santa Claus, Frau Hölle; he loves some, fears others, but has more real dread of the chimney-sweep, who, his nurse tells him, will run away with him if he is not a good boy, than of any of the unseen inhabitants of fairyland.

Above all, he is taught to love the Christ-child.

In many parts of Germany it is customary, on the morning of the day preceding Christmas, to let a figure, representing the Christ-child, wave past the window of the room where the little ones sleep. Half awake only, in the grey of the morning, they see this little child-figure flit dimly past, and go to sleep again in the blissful consciousness that the Christ-child has not forgotten them, and that they will have abundance of presents round his tree in the evening.

In this manner the next few years pass between the fairyland of fable-lore and wholesome home discipline. The rod has still an honourable place in all German households. It peers from behind the looking-glass all the year round, and is always adorned at Christmas with a *bright new ribbon*, which is bound round it with much ceremony.

When the little ones are four years old, or even earlier, many of them go for some hours in the day to the *kindergarten*. A good man, named Fröbel, who had the welfare of children at heart, instituted these *kindergarten* (childrens' gardens) years ago.

The rooms in which they are held are provided with low benches, and the walls are decorated with bright pictures. By means of these pictures, small blocks of wood, small sticks, coloured straws, balls, rings, threads, stones, shells, and clay, the children receive their first impressions of beauty, of fitness, and of use. In what they call their play-school, they build, they plait, they draw, they paint, cut out, lay on, mould, and model, and all that they do, simple as it is, must be done with precision, method, and order.

But they are not suffered to sit too long. Constant change is the order of the day. From time to time the mistress makes a sign, and all leave their playwork and assemble round her. "This is the way we clap our hands when we march round the school," says she, suiting the action to the word, and the little ones form themselves into a kind of procession, and follow her movements, clapping and shouting to their hearts' content.

Sometimes the procession is united by a long ribbon or string passed from the leader all along the line. Each child is instructed to hold this string with one hand, and this precaution being taken to prevent the little ones from straggling, they are taken out for a walk.

In the summer afternoons their walk usually extends to a small garden or orchard, hired during the summer months for the use of the school. A few rough benches and tables, perhaps a swing and a diminutive gymnastic arrangement, indicate the purpose to which the garden is applied, and here a couple of hours are spent in the open air below the apple-trees in alternate work and play.

Singing, of course, is not forgotten. The simplest words are put to the simplest melodies, and are sung with a will. If now and then a childish voice begins before the others, or performs a little solo on its own account when all is finished, what does it matter?

Short tales are told, and the shortest words used in the telling, for if a big word creep into the relation, the children cannot remember it. Once the tale of Goliath and David was related. The teacher described the giant with his *panzerhemd* (shirt of mail), and David in his shepherd's dress. Then he asked questions. They were all answered till he said, "What had Goliath on?" Then no one spoke. *Panzerhemd* was too long a word. At last one urchin stretched out a chubby little fist to intimate that he knew. "Well, Mase," said

the teacher, "what had Goliath on?" "Please, sir, a *hemdlein*," answered the voice. A *hemdlein* is a little baby shirt!

In their sixth, or sometimes seventh, year German children commence school-life.

The latest festal occasion they have enjoyed has foretold the coming event. Among their presents then have figured a bran-new satchel, slate and pencil, copy-book, and sponge-box. The satchel is rather large, for it is bought with an eye to future requirements; if for a boy, it has a hairy cover or lid; if for a girl, one of oilcloth; on both the initials of the name appear in large bright brass letters.

The young day begins its course early in Germany. The sun is up betimes; and, as he has very little morning mist to disperse, and is not at all bashful, he soon throws his rays about in all directions, and forces his way through the thinly-curtained window of the children's nursery.

The children begin their day early, too; for the elder ones have all to be at their places in school by seven from Easter to October, and by eight in the winter. The little ones and the girls are expected by eight all the year round.

What a hurry and commotion! Rubbing the sleep out of their eyes takes the children the longest time—washing and dressing the shortest.

Then a cup of milk or coffee and a "wecken" (waking-roll) are hastily despatched, and mother helps to hook the satchels, and pops another "wecken" or "bretzel" into each pocket, and father gives them a parting admonition to be good and attentive to their masters; and away they go.

If there be a garden to the house, the little girls pluck a rose, or a couple of pinks, pansies, or violets, or a nosegay of wild flowers, to take to their mistress, who places them in water on the desk before her, so that all the class may inhale their fragrance.

The school duties commence with a hymn, said or sung. Then a portion of Scripture is read, and a short prayer offered. After this, Latin and Greek in the boys' schools, French in the girls' schools, geography, history, &c., in both, succeed each other in lessons of an hour's length. The domestic rod is exchanged for a cane, with which unruly or lazy boys get *tatzen* (a stroke on the palm of the hand), or, in very bad cases, *hosenspanner*, a severer form of punishment, but the latter is falling into disuse.

The girls are punished by bad notes. If a girl has three bad notes, she must report herself to the Director, or Rector, as he is entitled; and this is considered a great disgrace. The rector is the nominal head of the staff of professors, masters, and governesses who give instruction in the great

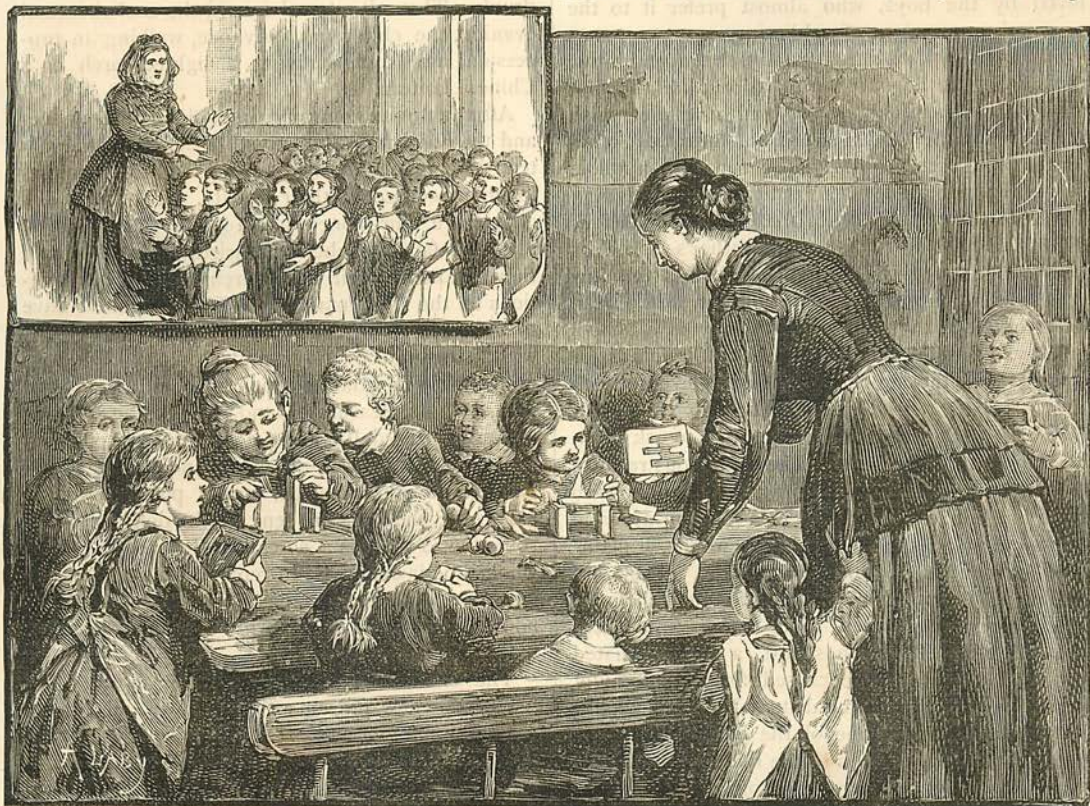
schools for girls; but in most towns there is a prelate above him, and above the prelate a queen, a princess, or a duchess; and the dread of being specially reported to one or other of these grand personages keeps the little girls in excellent order.

Singing and gymnastics belong to the school duties. Gymnastics, especially, is a national

"Puss in the Corner," &c.), are skating and sleighing in winter and soldiering in summer.

Sleighing is a great amusement, and one of long duration in Germany, when old Winter keeps to his long-established custom and makes his arrangements with a view to furthering this favourite pastime.

What is required of him is a pretty heavy fall of snow and then frost. The frost may last as long



IN A KINDERGARTEN SCHOOL. (See p. 78.)

institution, and takes the place in Germany that the national games do in England. Of course, cricket, football, &c., are introduced into many parts of the country, but with no great success. Such games can only become national in a country of boarding-schools, where the boys remain together after lesson-time, and can commence their practice of a game without loss of time. Where the children disperse after lessons, and have to return to their respective homes, some at a considerable distance, time is too short for anything but a turn on the horizontal or parallel bars, or, with the girls, a swing, or a run with the skipping-rope. The principal outdoor amusements, if we except the numberless games common to all countries (as "I spy,"

as it likes, and very frequently does last with more or less intensity for a couple of months. Fine opportunities then for skating; fine for sleighing! For this latter amusement Nature has to lend a willing hand too. More or less gentle slopes and hills not too far out of town, and yet far enough to prevent the police from interfering with the amusements, are the favours required of her.

Old Winter and Nature being propitious, the children make the best use of all their holiday hours, and pulling their fur or worsted caps over their ears, and thrusting their hands into their moleskin gloves, hurry away to the top of the hills with their mountain sleighs, and then seating themselves on them, with or without a stick to

guide them, descend the frozen slope with great rapidity, only stopping at the bottom, where some little ditch or dried-up runnel stays their farther progress.

Another way of coming down called the "whale" descent is lying on the sleigh, head downwards, with outstretched arms and legs. The steeper the hill and the more numerous the sleighers, the wilder and more dangerous the sport, and the more loved by the boys, who almost prefer it to the summer's amusement of soldiering.

In a military land like Germany, the gay uniforms, the music, the flags, the processions, are the first thing that attract a child's eye, and his earliest wish is for a helmet, a wooden sword, and a drum. Sometimes papa presents his young son with a whole suit of regimentals for his birthday; and it is very droll to see a hero of six march with conscious dignity up and down before his father's house, or touch his cap with martial salute. As the boy grows older, the military spirit continues. In most parts of Germany, every saint's day is a school holiday. Besides this, there are half-holidays for heat. If the thermometer stands, at eleven o'clock a.m., at 20 degrees Réaumur (equal to 77 degrees Fahrenheit), the school-boy is entitled to ask for a holiday in the afternoon. These precious respites from learning are occupied in making excursions to some fine old ruin, a cloister, or a fort; or away go the boys in troops to the heights, or woods, or plains that surround their town or village. They are decked with many a stray scrap of armour, helmets of all descriptions, a mail shirt or two, spurs, &c., and all have a wooden sword, a superannuated gun that has long since ceased firing, or a blunt sabre, brought from some distant land and kept at home as a relic. On one of the heights that surround the town, perhaps in the middle of a wood, stands a fort of rude construction, that has been made by boys in remote years, and has been used by generations of boys since. Here the flag is hoisted; the boys divide into two parties—one party mans the fort and defends the flag, the other endeavours to cross the moat and storm the position.

Of course there is plenty of noise; and the blast of the never-failing horn, and the shouts of the boys, often guide father and mother, who are taking their afternoon walk, to the spot. The mothers look on with something like terror, fearful of sprained ankles, wounds, and bruises; but the father enjoys the sight. He remembers how he played at the same fort when he was a boy, and enters thoroughly into the spirit of the game.

After the summer is over, comes autumn with, in Southern Germany, its vintage. Most schools get

a special holiday, of about a fortnight in length, for the vintage season. The little girls and boys are presented with miniature "bottens," and fill them with ripe grapes. Then they carry them down the narrow vineyard steps to the wine-press below. In the evening bonfires are made, fireworks let off, pistols fired, songs are sung; bread, butter, cheese, sausage disappear in large quantities, and bowls of the sweet wine freshly pressed from the grapes are drunk. Then all return home in the cool autumnal evening, the children in advance, walking in procession, and each carrying a lighted torch or a Chinese lantern.

After autumn comes with rapid strides winter and the Christmas holidays. Brief they are, only ten days in length, but perhaps all the more enjoyable because of their brevity. The boys and girls have fair-money given them (for there is always a fair held before Christmas), with which they can make their little purchases and contributions to the Christmas-tree. Then the attics have to give up their treasures; and the miniature castle, with its moat, drawbridge, and regiments of soldiers drawn up in martial array in the castle yard—the villa, with its pleasure-grounds, its lakes, its playing fountains—the doll-houses, dolls, kitchens, pantries, shops, theatres, &c.—all come under review, are painted afresh, repaired, newly papered, newly arranged; the dolls are sent to the doll doctor (in some towns there is a so-called doll doctor, whose whole time is employed in repairing the tender constitutions of these fragile creatures), and some addition is made as a surprise to each different toy.

The children write their "Wünsch-zettel"—a list of the new presents that they would like to get—and mamma and papa choose from the rather long list what they think suitable. The tree is bought, and hidden, and decorated in secrecy, and on Christmas Eve papa lights it with great ceremony, after mamma has arranged the presents and a great plateful of cakes for each member of the household. Then the doors are opened, and the impatient children are admitted.

The next week is a week of business. Selling, buying, cooking (all on a small scale), dolls' christenings, dolls' parties, theatrical performances, &c. &c., follow each other in rapid succession, till New Years' Day is passed and the holidays are over. Then it is that all the larger toys vanish to their attic, and are not to be brought down again till another twelvemonth has flitted past with its school-life and its home pleasures, and the Christ-child moves once more past the window, and the frosted fir-tree stands in festal array and awaits its guests.

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SCENES FROM GERMAN CHILD-LIFE. (See pages 78-80.)

1. The Nosegay for the Teacher. 2. The Parting Admonition. 3. Playing at Soldiers. 4. Skipping. 5. Skating. 6. Sleighing.