



## LIFE IN A GERMAN COUNTRY PARISH.



PROBABLY most of my readers imagine that life in a German country parish is pretty much the same as in our villages in England, but I will give them a short description of it, and then let them judge for themselves. As I have spent three months at a time in one of them, I can speak from actual experience. Let me begin with the parsonage.

As a rule, it is a well-built house of two stories, consisting of about eight good sized rooms, high and well lighted by large windows. The walls are seldom papered (except, indeed, the drawing-room), but done in distemper, and certainly not with the prettiest designs in the world. In each room is an unsightly, though most necessary and comfort-giving, stove made of iron; the visitors' room—*Besuchzimmer*—can generally boast of one in porcelain. The floors, kept scrupulously clean by being constantly scrubbed with sand, are carpetless, with the exception of the drawing-room floor, which is usually waxed and polished, as in France, a pretty rug here and there setting off the dark colouring. In this room is always to be found a piano, and one of no mean order either. Flowers grace every room in the house. Ivy is often trained against the walls of the sitting-room, encircling with its dark leaves the portraits of relatives and friends of the family. Here, too, is always to be found a sofa, which is the best piece of furniture in the house and the place of honour. Every visitor or guest in the house is, on entering the room, immediately requested "to take a place on the sofa." It would be considered a great want of manners to decline, and in fact it would be rather difficult to do so, for the lady of the house is sure to seize you by the hand, and drag you towards it with hospitable speeches by the way. The said sofa, as well as the chairs, sofa cushions, curtains, and even the rugs, are generally the work of the lady to whom the house belongs. German women all work well; it is as much a part of their education as is geography or history or cooking. Their fancy work is unequalled. As the lady in Germany has to furnish the house, all the pretty things are made during the time of her engagement. German women are never idle, no matter to what class they belong.

Wedding presents are always of a useful as well as an ornamental nature. In country villages the ladies make all they wear, with the help of a workwoman to whom they pay eightpence a day, and who generally spends a fortnight in the house, both in the spring and autumn, when dresses are turned, altered, and made up for the coming season.

The Germans are very early risers. Five o'clock is no unusual hour to get up in the summer time. In our parsonage, where I have often stayed, the servant—who, besides all the

work of the house, did the washing for the whole family, milked the cow, cut grass for her in the meadow, and brought it home—used to bring me a cup of new milk every morning regularly at three o'clock! I opened my eyes, drank it, turned round, and went to sleep again as if nothing had happened.

In this, as in most country parsonages, breakfast was served up somewhere about half-past six o'clock, or from that to seven. It consisted of really good coffee, hot rolls, as well as a kind of brown household bread—which is less palatable, being made with leaven and pretty well sprinkled with caraway seeds—milk and sugar in profusion. Butter is not often eaten at breakfast, but in its stead some really good preserve. The jam-making season is a very busy one. There is one strange kind of mixture unknown in England. It has for its foundation the new wine as it flows from the wine-press; into this are thrown well peeled apples, peas, beetroot, plums, carrots, and even apricots, and any other kind of fruit which may be in season. The whole is boiled together for no less than twenty-four hours. It must be stirred all the time, if it is to turn out well. And very delicious it is, though it does not look inviting, being of an ugly brown colour, more like lumpy treacle than anything else I can compare it to. The great secret is that it is economical, the long boiling making the addition of sugar unnecessary.

Every German clergyman's wife has her pantries well stored with preserves, pickles, hams, *Wurst*, clarified butter, dried apples and plums, cheese, lentils, rice, *Nudeln*, and every other imaginable thing, all stowed away with the greatest order and neatness.

I must here remark that the clergyman himself sometimes lends a hand in household matters. For instance: one summer's morning I was awakened at the early hour of four by a stir which seemed to be going on in the courtyard just beneath my bedroom window. Curiosity prompted me to rise and see what it was. I beheld the master of the house, habited in a most ancient dressing-gown—which had once been of some colour or other—his sleeves tucked up, a knife in one hand, and in the other a pigeon, one of half a dozen which he had just slaughtered. He was engaged in plucking it most dexterously. Of course I never let him know that I had seen him.

The clergyman's wife helps her servant in many ways, more especially with the cooking. She generally becomes invisible about nine o'clock, and is seen no more until twelve, when the dinner makes its appearance. A very good dinner it generally is, cooked by her own hands. Soup, *bouilli*—with all sorts of delicious sweet pickles, such as grapes and plums (I brought some recipes for these pickles home with me, but could never get an English servant to understand them), some sort of roast, and lastly open fruit tarts and fruit follow each other in quick succession. They disappear very rapidly! After dinner there is a pleasant hour or so devoted to chatting and work of some kind—generally knitting. At four o'clock comes the coffee, with its nice cakes, usually—except in the winter—taken out of doors, in an arbour, of which every German garden possesses at least one. In some families, all the meals are taken out of doors for many weeks together. If one parson's family have a visitor, he or she is taken to call on all the parsons' families in the neighbouring villages. Very pleasant these country visits are. You take care to call shortly before "coffee time," and you are, as a matter of course, expected to remain, so you make up your mind beforehand. As soon as you arrive, you are greeted with: "Ah! you have come to stay, that's right! Come and take off your boots." There is no saying nay. The steaming beverage soon makes its appear-

ance, with all the necessary adjuncts—very acceptable after a walk of a mile or two. There is no lack of conversation. The Germans are certainly more primitive than we are, but they are more good-natured and more sociable. Scandal is certainly not a part of the afternoon visit's entertainment. It is rare that German women pick each other to pieces. I can scarcely say as much for our own. The gentlemen of the party do their best—pipe in mouth!—to make themselves agreeable. They are well read, acquainted with the topics of the day, often possess much wit and humour, and know plenty of amusing stories with which to entertain their guests. The village clergy do not usually (the reader will remember that I am describing the average country pastor, not the men of exceptional piety or notable character, about whom books of biography are written) visit the people, even the sick, unless specially sent for, so that they have plenty of time at their command, whether for study or household matters. They are on the best of terms with all their parishioners, and are as ready to smoke a pipe with a peasant as with the doctor, of which there is one in every village, or with the *Graf*, if there be one, in a neighbouring *Schloss*.

Eight o'clock is the hour for supper—in winter a heavy one, in summer, often consisting of *dicke Milch*, milk which is placed, fresh from the cow, in stone jars in the cellar, until it becomes quite thick and slightly sour. When it comes to the table the thick cream is removed and put into a tureen, and with a wooden spoon made as smooth as possible; then the milk is gradually added to it, being stirred all the time so as thoroughly to mix with the cream; it is then laddled out into soup-plates and eaten with grated brown bread, powdered cinnamon, and sifted sugar. And very delicious it is! One sits over these suppers as one might do over a dinner in England. Before the evening is over, some one of the party will give some really good music, and it generally winds up with a dance. No matter if there are only three couples, old or young—the Germans never leave off dancing as long as they have a leg to stand upon! The last dance is always (*die Grossmutter*) "the grandmother." Let me describe it. Some one sits down to the piano and begins a galop in the ordinary time. Two or three rounds are danced in the usual manner, when suddenly the music begins to quicken and the pace increases accordingly; this goes on for a few minutes, when the music is still more accelerated, and so on, until keeping time to it is almost an impossibility, and one couple after another is obliged to discontinue for want of breath! How often have I danced that "grandmother"! and on looking back, what a mad thing it seems to have done so! The wonder is that people do not kill themselves by it. When the "grandmother" is "dead," the visitors take their leave, cordially thanking their entertainers for the pleasant time they have spent, and requesting them "very soon" to favour them with their presence at home—which they do not fail to do.

