

TRAVELLING CRAFTSMEN IN GERMANY.

The following communication from the benevolent Thomas Twining, contains some curious details on mediæval practices. It will be found in full in the *Journal of the Society of Arts* on the 6th inst:—

THE WORKING CLASSES OF NASSAU.

If all is tolerably right, the lad receives in due form his educational certificate, and he and his friends set about looking for the right sort of shop, and a comfortable master; but before a definite agreement is come to, German prudence steps in very appropriately and prescribes two weeks' preliminary trial. If this turns out to mutual satisfaction, a contract is drawn up, of which the legalisation is obtained with very little expense, or none at all if the parties are poor. For ordinary trades, such as those of the shoemaker, tailor, joiner, baker, &c., the usual term is three years, and the total sum to be paid to the master varies from thirty to sixty florins (£2 10s. to £5), or a term of four years is agreed upon, without payment, the work of the apprentice in the last year being expected to form an equivalent. With respect to more difficult trades, such as those of the watchmaker, mechanic, lithographer, &c., the term is usually three or four years, with a payment of eighty to two hundred florins (£6 13s. 4d. to £16 13s. 4d.). In no case does an apprenticeship last longer than four years. As far as I have been able to ascertain, serious disagreements between masters and apprentices are less frequent in Germany than with us. One legitimate cause of dissatisfaction on the part of the apprentice, which frequently occurs in England, is the incompetency of the master to teach all he engaged to teach. This is in some measure obviated in Germany by the examination which must be undergone before an artisan can settle anywhere as master; but in all cases redress is facilitated by the practice of paying the stipulated sum by instalments, so that one-third or one-half of the amount stands over to the conclusion of the term. If an apprentice has just cause of complaint, he is released by the local authorities from further obligations towards his master, and his friends from further payment. At the expiration of his term the apprentice must furnish proof of the extent of his acquirements, by executing some appropriate piece of handiwork, in the presence of the official judges of the trade, forming a kind of jury, which, from its usefulness, deserves some attention. Every three years the masters in each trade, residing in a district, or in a group of districts, if the trade is a scarce one, assemble to elect, or re-elect three representatives for the purpose of examining the certificates, and of testing and recording the abilities of industrial candidates. Such is the Board of Examiners, which we now find sitting in judgment on the merits of the young artisan anxious to emerge from his apprenticeship, and which we shall meet with again in a further stage of his career. If the examiners are not satisfied with the young man's performance, he must find means of improving himself within half-a-year, against another trial; if, on the contrary, they are well pleased, he obtains his certificate as *gesell*, or journeyman and sets out for his travels. Those to whom German literature is familiar, will remember that the *wanderschaft*, or travelling apprenticeship

of young artisans, is included in the world of poetical ideas and associations peculiar to the Germany of the olden time. It is true that about the year 1819, the guild system was handled in a manner which nearly amounted to its abolition in the Duchy of Nassau, and that the *wanderschaft* ceased to be obligatory; moreover, railroads and police have done much in these prosaic days to deprive this custom of its coloring of romance; but, nevertheless, it still retains enough of the character of the industrial period in which it had its origin, midst potent guilds and jolly companionships, to render a special inquiry both entertaining and instructive. For our present purpose a brief summary of its leading features will suffice. When the *gesell* arrives at a town, he goes forthwith to the specially appointed inn of his trade, where the inn-father, from whom he is entitled to receive paternal attentions and advice, shows him a register in the form of a slate or black board, on which is inscribed the name of any master wanting a hand. If the register is a blank, and the *gesell* has no cash in purse from previous savings, he may claim his *viaticum*, or travelling money, which is either paid from the treasury of the town, or from a subscription purse of the trade, or made up by small donations which he gets at the several workshops of his calling, where he applies in succession for that purpose; in so doing, he generally makes good his claim to brotherly assistance by some token which he bears, or by mysteriously symbolical signs and passwords, analogous to those used in Freemasonry. At Frankfurt, where trade affairs are reckoned to be on a more liberal, or more antiquated footing than elsewhere, an itinerant servant of the proud company of hair-cutters receives, from a special purse, as much as thirty-six kreutzers (one shilling); but this may be counted exceptional, and in the generality of cases the total amount which a common journeyman obtains by legitimate means is no more than a few pence: at all events the sum is definite; except in case of illness, no further sum can be claimed, and it will be well if the next morning's dawn sees our wanderer trudging contentedly onward, his knapsack on his back, with a boot sticking out at each end of it, and his faithful pipe dangling at the side of his mouth, whilst he sings some classical ditty of the brotherhood. Often, however, his prospects are far from encouraging, and his heart grows heavy as he slowly puffs his last pipelul. The very apprenticeship through which he has acquired the knowledge of his trade, binds him to its narrow and exclusive regulations. He can only exercise it by placing himself at the disposal of a licensed master; the law forbids him, under penalty, to undertake anything on his own account; and I am assured that this enactment is rigorously enforced. In relation to its moral tendency, this thick-and-thin life of labor and adventure has little to recommend it. In a technical point of view it is undoubtedly productive of good results. If endowed with an observing turn of mind, the *gesell* may acquire in his travels not only practical experience in all the branches of his calling but a valuable knowledge of the various methods and contrivances used in various countries; and it is indeed his chief consolation in the hardships he has to undergo, that those acquirements may one day enable him to ascend into a higher industrial region, where he will be no longer a dependent, and need no longer remain a bachelor.