

Student Life in Germany.

To the Editor of the UNIVERSITY GAZETTE.

DEAR SIR,—In compliance with a rash promise made last spring, I propose to describe a scene of student life in Germany that is but rarely witnessed, viz., a student's funeral. You must forgive me if the description be not as entertaining as a student's correspondence should be, for the deceased was one of my more intimate acquaintances—a young Bostonian.

Last Monday afternoon (27th ult.) I dropped into this gentleman's room to ask him to spend the evening with me. I found him stretched on the sofa with his landlady bending over him. On my expressing anxiety, he told me that his eye felt queer, and that he thought he had caught cold in it. He said that it seemed to have become fixed obliquely in its socket, and that consequently he could not walk straight, for everything was presented to him in two different aspects, whose comparative truth he could not judge. We laughed and joked about "seeing double," &c. I left him after receiving his promise to drop into my rooms some other evening soon. He proposed to go to Dresden next morning to consult one of their best oculists.

In the morning, as I passed his rooms on my way to an eight o'clock lecture, I recollected his intention of going to Dresden, so I ran up to his room to ask after his eye. His sitting-room door stood ajar. On crossing towards his bedroom I was startled by noticing, through the half-open door, that there were several people there before me. I hastily advanced, but paused on the threshold, arrested by the sight of my friend stretched upon his bed evidently unconscious, and struggling hard for every breath. His landlady and the doctor stood by, but had already done their worst for him. I entered. A student present drew me aside and told me that the invalid had gone to bed early the night before, but had shortly after alarmed the house by calling for assistance. When the others hastily entered they found him unable to speak, although conscious of what they said to him, but he soon finally lost all consciousness. As I heard this I recollected what the poor fellow had told me of his repugnance to Freiberg doctors. I hastily left the chamber to enquire the quickest and surest way of bringing one out from Dresden. But before the next train started, my friend's struggles were ended. In less than twelve hours after his serious seizure he quietly sank to rest.

That night a meeting of the students was held, whereat it was promptly resolved that, according to German student-custom, the funeral should be conducted at the students' general expense, and a committee was appointed to carry out this determination. Several Americans wanted the burial to be left to the numerous American students here, but the other students resented the proposal as an insult. An Englishman and I were placed on the committee as friends of the deceased; a third one, our chairman, was an American, to represent his nationality; and the others were a Russian gentleman and a German baron. Our first duty was to appoint regular watches, of four students each, to guard the body constantly until its burial.

The rooms of the corpse were hung with black cloth, draped with white and black crape. On the day of the funeral the body was elaborately dressed, and laid on a bed of state, which was covered with purple velvet bedecked with silver fringe. The room was filled with hot-house plants, and the body was covered with rare flowers. All that day the room was illuminated with massive candelabra full of lights. But the most striking feature of this parade was the "Ehrenwache," or guard of honor, consisting of eight students supposed to have been friends of the deceased. Our duty was to stand motionless on either side of the bed during the day's proceedings. We were dressed in the holiday costume of Saxon miners. Let me try to describe it! On our heads were high cylindrical caps of green or black stuff, decorated with silver or gold braid in a kind of Grecian pattern. The front of the cap bore the well-known mining device of crossed hammers of gold or silver, and on one side was fastened a gay green and white rosette, which was overshadowed by a lofty plume of white feathers. We wore parade kittels, a kind of black cloth Garibaldi taken in at the waist, but showing no belt. Such a coat is provided with an erect black velvet collar and a mock cape of black velvet, ornamented with gold or silver braid. (The Saxon students here are privileged to wear all such mining ornaments of gold, whilst the outer barbarians must content themselves with the cheaper metal.) The breast of the kittel bears a treble row of silver buttons, the sleeves are slashed and provided with a very liberal allowance of the same, and on the shoulders are the cross hammers again, with a heavy silver fringe depending below them.

Our hands were encased in white kids; and we wielded ornamental wands terminated in gold or silver heads of a somewhat hatchet shape. About our waist were buckled patent leather "arshledern" (a species of leather apron that the miners always bear behind to spare their trousers when they squat down to work in a mud-puddle) and over them we buckled bright belts, with gay silver buckles. Our trousers were white. Thus apparelled I felt more suitably equipped for a ghastly masquerade than for a sober funeral. But our work was trying enough to sober any one. We had to stand, four by four, erect and motionless, for an hour at a time beside the corpse, while all the old women and children in Freiberg who happened to be at leisure came in and criticised the whole performance.

As though we students were not sufficiently uncomfortable already, they asked each other whether we were friends of the deceased, or how much the undertaker gave us for the job. And I took it as a decided compliment when they expressed their approbation of the whole performance, which they invariably did with repeated use of that expressive word "schon" (beautiful). Some of them specially tickled my vanity by confessing that it was almost as good as the circus that performed here the week before.

At six p. m., the burial service was read by the American Chaplain, from Dresden, who delivered a brief address, directing the students' attention to this warning of the shortness of life. An oratorical address was then delivered by the German Pastor, who pronounced the benediction. During the service, the hall was filled with a number of Obersteigers (mine captains). Their costume was somewhat like that of the Ehrenwache. But they wore top-boots, and had swords at their sides. They wore bands very like a clergyman's, but heavily braided with gold lace. In place of our black velvet on the shoulders, their kittels had white capes, richly braided and decorated with gold. In their caps they wore stiff black plumes, instead of our waving white ones.

As soon as the service was finished, the coffin was brought in. It was a most elaborate German affair, standing about three times as deep as a Canadian one, and gradually narrowed towards the top. Such coffins look as if they were built in several stories, and they display a great deal of white metal work.

When we left the house, we found the procession drawn up outside, patiently awaiting us. The strange costumes and the immense crowds, were rendered doubly imposing by the fitful glare of the torches. The band struck up a most dismal dirge, and we moved off very slowly. See the order of procession! It was headed by the town brass band in most fanciful costumes. Behind it was borne the flag of the academy, surrounded by a guard of honour, dressed precisely like the Ehrenwache. Then came the American flag, reverently draped in mourning and surrounded by a guard of Americans in full evening dress, with large tricolour sashes. Next advanced the flag of the presiding corps, accompanied by a guard of the corps, students wearing sashes of the corps' colours and long gauntlets and bearing drawn swords. It was followed by the flag of the other corps, surrounded by a similar guard, menacing the spectators with sharp sabres. Behind the last flag walked the Ehrenwache. It was followed by the marshal of the procession in gold-embroidered cocked hat and loud voice, accompanied by two sombre assistants. Close at their heels paced six coal-black horses drawing the hearse and led by mutes. The hearse was escorted by the Obersteigers. It was followed by the private mourners, and the professors brought up the rear. The whole train was escorted and lighted by a double row of the students dressed appropriately in miners' every-day costume and bearing huge resinous torches. Our route to the railway station was lined by thick crowds in spite of the gloomy, cold, threatening weather. When we reached the station we found a car specially fitted up for the reception of the body, tastefully draped with black cloth and decorated with garlands of flowers.

The ceremonies were sadly curtailed by reason of the mourning for the late king of Saxony. By law, all music and festivity throughout Saxony was, during a certain time, prohibited. Therefore when the funeral proper was over, we were compelled to extinguish the torches and dismiss the band before we reentered the town. The police were so strict that we were not even allowed to sing "*Gedächtnis-gebet*" around the burning torches according to the ceremonial prescribed for such seasons. Even the sorry satisfaction of flanking our flag as the way back was denied us, although the night was so dark that nobody could have seen them in any case.

Thus the obsequies were shorn of much of their pomp. But even sadly curtailed as they were, I hope that the description of