

Odds and Ends.

ALTHOUGH Russia is rapidly advancing in civilisation many barbaric customs still exist, and that of choosing a wife is amongst the most curious. It is chiefly prevalent in country districts, and is really a game played at Christmas-time. A prominent person in a village announces that this annual feast will take place in his house, and all the young men and women of the place flock there at the appointed time. First there are dances and songs and games just as at any other ordinary party, but when these are over the hostess takes all the girls into one room where they sit upon benches round the walls, and are completely muffled up in large white sheets. In the meantime the young men have been drawing lots, and when the girls are all rolled up in their sheets, and looking more like mummies than human beings, they enter the room one by one, their order being decided by the number each draws. It is impossible to distinguish any one girl, and the young man, having finally made his choice, unveils her, it being the unwritten law that he should marry whomsoever he may pick out. If either the girl or the man refuse to marry, they must pay a heavy forfeit. Strange as it may seem, this extraordinary game of marriage is said to lead to many happy unions.



ENGLISH needles are now sold all over the world, but their manufacture, after being kept secret for many years, was taught to us in 1650 by Christopher Greening. At Redditch alone twenty thousand people make more than one hundred million needles in a year, and as they are made and exported so cheaply, England has no rival in the industry, and to all intents and purposes monopolises the trade. In the old days needle-making killed tens of thousands of operatives owing to their inhalation of fine particles of steel, but an invention, by which an air-blast drives away the filings from the grindstone, has removed this danger, and the occupation has in consequence become absolutely safe. One of the most interesting of the processes in needle-making is the drilling of the eye, and it is the boast in one factory that one of the drillers is so expert that he can perforate a hair and thread it with itself. Another very interesting fact in connection with the industry is that whilst at the ordinary needles used in America are supplied by Great Britain, nearly all the sewing-machine needles used in this country come from America.



BABIES and little children were at no time so much considered as at the present day. The newest addition to the comfort and joys of babies is the shell cradle, which is made of real silver, metal silver plated, or aluminium. This cradle, made in the shape of a shell, all in one piece, is hung upon two rods in such a manner that it swings at a touch or at the least move of the infant inside, or when it is awake it can amuse itself by swinging the cradle from side to side. A lace canopy is supported over the shell by a light wire framework surmounted by two metallic Cupids who hold the lace in their hands. This lace canopy can be drawn all over the cradle when the baby is asleep. Wicker baskets can be swung upon upright poles in the same way, but it is always advisable to employ a carpenter to fix the basket-work firmly, as rapid movement might bring about an accident.

THE reason why rain falls is that whenever warm, vapour-laden air arrives in positions where it gets rapidly chilled, the vapour falls through the cold air to the earth, cold air being unable to support as much floating vapour as warm air. A hundredth part of a grain of aqueous vapour over the amount that the air will support is sufficient to cause rainfall. Any chill will produce rain. It occurs when a moist warm wind blows in from the ocean upon cold stretches of land, where dense vapour-laden winds are pressed up the slopes of abruptly-rising hills, and whenever warm ocean winds are mingled with cold blasts in the various movements of the atmosphere. Even a cold dry wind may bring on rain, if it blows suddenly upon a mass of warm and vapour-saturated air.



ONE would scarcely think that it would be worth anybody's while to tamper with flowers and sell tunc as other than they really are. But it is an elaborate art. For instance, a matured tulip can be turned into "a young thing just on the point of blowing" by carefully plucking off the bloom, and leaving the bulb with its few leaves beneath. "Only two shillings, sir; it'll bloom in a week, sir," and the uninitiated buy and wait vainly for the promised blossom. Owing to the popularity of the parsley fern, the "flower dodger" has found a most efficacious and cheap method of supplying customers. He plants a carrot in a dark place, with the consequence that its leaves at the top become fine and of a very delicate green; then cutting off the crown of the carrot and putting it in a pot he sells it as a "parsley fern." As for scented flowers all the neglect of nature is supplied by these people with a scent-bottle, and they do not hesitate to produce "new and strange varieties," by subjecting well-known flowers to the action of aniline dyes. With flowers that absorb a large amount of moisture, their work is very easy, as they change their colour with extraordinary rapidity.



SPEAKING of flowers, there are certain species which bloom at every hour, and even at every half-hour of the day, and a botanical instructor of the University of California has carried out a very fanciful idea of making a flower-clock. In order to do this he has planted the necessary flowers in a circle like a dial-plate. The first flower would open at daybreak and the last at nightfall, when all the flowers would be in bloom. This is not the first garden of the kind, Linnaeus having originally invented the idea, but California is so favourable to the growth of flowers, that the instructor hopes to make a more perfect clock-garden than any of his predecessors.



"A LITTLE space of pleasure,
A little space of pain;
And then the solemn darkness,
And then—the light again.
A little song and story,
In sunlight and in rain;
A little gleam of glory,
And then—the dark again.
And so it goes—the darkness,
And then the gleam of light;
And so life is good—morning,
With sad thoughts of good-night."

THE washing of clothes varies in every country in the world, but the hardest-worked washerwomen are the Koreans, for the Korean men wear voluminous pantaloon and dresses. The women wash the clothes in cold water, generally in running streams, and pound them with paddles until they shine as if they had been starched. In Egypt the men usually do the washing standing at the edge of a pool or running water and slapping the wet clothes upon round smooth stones. French women wash their clothes in the same way, although, as a rule, they kneel to their work. This beating upon stones makes many holes in the garments, especially as the dirt is frequently literally pounded out with other stones or wooden paddles. The Japanese method of washing clothes appears as singular to us as do the majority of their customs, for they rip their dirty garments apart for every washing, while their ironing consists of spreading the clothes out on a flat board which is leant against the side of the house in order that they may be dried by the sun, which takes all wrinkles out of the thin material. Washing in the land of the chrysanthemum is done out of doors, the Japanese washerwomen using a tub that is about six inches high and is about the size of an English dish-pan. As a rule the clothes are simply rubbed by the hand until they are clean, but when they are particularly dirty soap is used—and Japanese soap is full of grease—and the clothes are stamped upon with the bare feet. Chinese girls wash in the same way, as also do the Scotch washerwomen, although in larger receptacles.



SOLDIERS' beds differ in every European army, and in each kind national characteristics are very clearly shown. In England the soldier's bed is hard, the man lying on thin mattresses that rest on canvas stretched over a wooden frame. In the German and Austrian armies the bed is of straw with only one or two covers and no sheet or mattress. Until quite recently the soldiers of the Czar slept in their clothes upon camp beds, but now ordinary beds are being introduced and the men undress. The Spanish soldier has only a straw bed, but he is allowed a pillow, two sheets, two blankets and a covered quilt, with sometimes a cover for his feet. The French soldier has the best and most comfortable bed, being allowed a wooden or iron bedstead, a straw bed, a good mattress, sheets and a brown woollen coverlet, to which is added an extra quilt in cold weather.



"OVER-WORK and under-exercise result in nervous diseases," said a physician recently. "Preventive measures may be summed up in two words," he continued—"physical development. Worry annually kills more people than work. One should strive, however, to avoid all things that tend to disturb the nerves. Throw away the pen that scratches and a pencil that has a hard spot in it. Discard a needle that squeaks and a basin that leaks. Use sharp tools, wear soft garments that do not rustle. Oil the hinges of the rheumatic door and fasten the creaking blind. These may seem trifles, but such trifles irritate the nerves as much as a piece of woollen does a sore. Charles Lamb once said that a carpenter's hammer on a warm summer morn would fret him more than midsummer madness."