

methods and implements. He prefers his old ways of tilling and plowing, just as he is always shy of risking anything he has in pursuit of uncertain gain.

The peasant's wife attends to all the household duties of the farm ; but her task does not confine itself to indoor life. In the sowing season, it is she who follows the plow and sows the seeds by handfuls on the newly traced furrows.

The village women have their day of meeting and gossip. This generally takes place on wash-days, when they assemble in the village wash-house. Wash-houses are usually built on a running stream, and hold a considerable number of women. There it is that, while the clothes-beater is swinging high on the well-soaped linen, village topics are fully discussed. There it is also that, on the Brittany coast, the wives and mothers talk together of their absent sons and husbands, off at sea, of the perils these loved ones incur, and of the hardships they undergo, for the villages on the coast furnish sailors for the state navy as well as for the merchant ships. In many of these, in fact, fishing is the only means of earning a living, and the coast is rocky and dangerous. With the sturdy lads of Brittany there is no plowing, no weeding, no harvesting ; a life on the high seas seems the height of ambition.

Modern times have in large degree driven away from the villages of France the antique dress and quaint old costumes of the past. The Norman woman no longer wears her picturesque high cap, nor do the women of other provinces keep up their distinctive manner of dress. A similar transformation has taken place in the men's attire, which has also become altered and modernized.

Railroads and rapid transit of all

sorts have had their effect even on the ways of the most conservative who would keep to ancient habits. Then, too, the military service which gathers together yearly all the young men of age in order to place them under the flag, often in a section of the country far off from their own homes, is constantly putting the younger generations in closer contact with different ways and modes of living.

In every farm where there are boys of twenty, the day comes when the summons is received calling to the ranks all the able-bodied men of France. Oftentimes it is the *gendarme* in person, who, with his high three-cornered hat and his well-furbished sword at his side, brings the paper. The farmyard is then all in a turmoil ; the women flock with inquiring glances, while the older men relate for the occasion their own experiences in the army, or anecdotes of the sad invasion of 1870. The young man then receives the summons, and shortly after prepares to start, prepares to leave his work in the fields, his loved surroundings, for the country's service.

While the lad is absent, the mother toils harder than before ; his fiancée grows pensive as she spins on winter nights, or when in the springtime she walks home alone from church on Sunday mornings, along the winding pathways or by the road hedges in bloom.

But when the soldier returns great are the rejoicings ! I have often questioned young men of this class upon their return to their village homes, and I have always found them happy to take up their work again in the fields. The French peasant, who is at times so brilliant a soldier, and who has often proved himself to be as clearheaded a commander as an unflinching