

THE FIRST BORN.*

In our review of "The Pastor's Wife" last week we were unable, for lack of space, to allude to much that we should have liked to quote. Readers of *THE MIDWIFE* will be interested to learn how approaching maternity is regarded in Germany.

Ingeborg, the young and inexperienced English wife of the Pastor of Kokensee in East Prussia was expecting her first baby. When she fainted in church on Christmas Eve, it flashed on her husband that it was the second time in ten days, and that he was indeed and without any doubt at last the happiest of men. He carried his unconscious wife through the congregation waiting in the churchyard, his face illuminated with joy and pride, and for the rest of the day she outstripped the fertilizers (his supreme hobby) in interest, and the laboratory was a place forgotten. It was not until after a visit from the Baroness that Ingeborg realised the necessity for preparations.

"In April Baroness Glambeck drove over one fine afternoon and questioned her as to her preparations and was astonished to find there were none.

"But my dear Frau Pastorin," she cried, holding up both her yellow kid hands.

"What ought there to be?" asked Ingeborg, who had been too busy wrestling with her daily tasks, in her heavily handicapped state, to think of further labours.

"But naturally a layette, swaddling clothes, pilches, shirts, flannels. Your mother—what is your mother about not to tell you?"

"Mother is very delicate," said Ingeborg, flushing a little.

"And a swaddle table you must have—"

"A swaddle table?"

"Naturally. To swaddle the child on. And a cradle. And a perambulator. And many things for yourself—necessary, indispensable things."

"What things?" asked Ingeborg faintly.

"She had little spirit. She was more tired every day. Just the difficulty of keeping even with her housekeeping, of keeping herself tidy in dresses that seemed to shrink smaller each time she put them on, took up what strength she had. There was none left over. 'What things?' she asked; and her hand, lying listlessly on her lap, were flaccid and damp.

"Then the Baroness poured forth an endless and bewildering list with all the gusto and interest of health and leisure. When her English gave out she went on in German. Her list began with a swaddle table, which seemed a very important item, and ended with a midwife.

"Have you spoken with her?" she asked.

"No," said Ingeborg. "I didn't know—where is she?"

"In our village. Frau Dosch. It is lucky for you she is not further away. Sometimes

there is none for miles. She is a very good sort of person. A little old now, but at least she has been very good. You ought to see her at once and arrange."

"Oh?" said Ingeborg, who felt as if the one blessedness in life would be to creep away somewhere and never arrange anything about anything for ever.

"But it did after this become clear to her that certain preparations would undoubtedly have to be made, and she braced herself to driving into Meuke with Ilse (her maid) and going to Königsberg for a day's shopping. . . .

"The young lady behind the counter very politely called Ingeborg gnädige Fräulein and inquired whether her child was a boy or a girl.

"Lord God," cried Ilse, "how should we know."

"But Ingeborg, with dignity and decision said it was a boy.

"Then," said the young lady, "you require blue ribbons."

"Do I?" said Ingeborg, very willing to believe her.

"The young lady sorted out small garments from green calico boxes labelled 'For Firsts.' There were little jackets, little shirts, little caps, every thing one could need for the upper portion of a baby.

"So," said the young lady, pushing a pile of these articles across the counter to Ingeborg. . . .

"But," said Ingeborg, laboriously searching out her words, "the baby doesn't leave off there, at its middle. It'll go on. It'll be a whole baby. It'll have legs and things. What does one put on the rest of it?"

"It'll have a rest, Ilse," said Ingeborg, also appealing to her. "These things are just clothes for cherubs."

"Ach so," said the young lady, visited by a glimmer of understanding: and turning round she dexterously whipped down more green boxes, and taking off the lids brought out squares of different materials, linen, flannel, and a soft white spongy stuff.

"Swaddle," she said, holding them up.

"Swaddle?" said Ingeborg.

"Swaddle," confirmed Ilse.

And as Ingeborg only stared, the young lady gradually plumbing her ignorance, produced a small mattress in a white and frilly linen bag, and diving down beneath the counter, brought up a dusty doll which she deftly rolled up to the armpits in the squares, inserted it into the bag with its head out, and tied it firmly with tapes.

"So," she said giving this neat object a resounding slap; and picking it up she pretended to rock it fondly in her arms. "Behold the First Born," she said.

After that Ingeborg put herself entirely into these experienced hands. The one thing she would not buy was a sewing machine to make her own swaddle, though Ilse assured her that true mothers always did it for themselves, and that it was one of the chief joys of this blessed time seeing the house grow fuller and fuller of swaddle.

* Smith Elder & Co., 15, Waterloo Place, London.

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