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THE BLACKSMITH OF GRUNDERWALD.

(From Sunday at Home).

CHAPTER I.

Travelling in the Tyrol was not an easy business in the year 1769. The country, which might be called an eastward wing of the Alps, and rivals Switzerland in its alternation of towering summit and deep valley, had few roads, and those it had were neither safe nor smooth; its towns, besides being few and far between, were generally small and poor, and their inns afforded but scanty accommodation to strangers. Yet the Tyrol was then, and had been for many an age, the highway of trade and travel between the Teutonic and the Latin race, and the connecting link of the Kaiser's empire, as it existed at the time, with one end on the German, and the other on the Italian soil. Gallant cavalades escorting imperial viceroys to Milan, had wound through its valleys, powerful armies had descended from its heights, to crush insurrection in Lombard cities, or strengthen the hands of Imperial partisans, and Charles the fifth had fled through its mountain passes, pursued by his Protestant enemies to the very borders of Italy.

These days were done before the period of our story, the Lombard cities rested in tranquil bondage under the rule of Austria and the Church; Maria Theresa and her son Joseph jointly occupied the throne of the Kaisers. But the roads of the Tyrol were as bad as they had ever been; and one of the worst, though forming part of the beaten track to the Italian frontier, was that which led to the isolated village of Grunderwald.

The situation of that village was peculiar; a cleft in a great mountain side two thousand feet above the level of the sea, in the form of a deep dell. It was sheltered from mountain storms on the north and east by the pine forest that grew between it and the perpetual snow, but was open to the genial influences of the west and south. It was a rustic place of thatched cottages clustering round an old, but well-preserved church, and encircled by a broad belt of vineyards and cornfields. Its institutions consisted of a well, to which the women resorted for water and gossip, a green on which the young people played, a slow-going windmill, and a blacksmith's forge. Like most of the Tyrolese people, its inhabitants were of the German stock, a strong, active and hardy race, nestling in the mountain's breast: sickness seldom visited their homes. The soil of their dell was reckoned among the most fertile in the Alpine land,

yet nowhere could one see more meagre crops or ill-cultivated fields, less-carefully dressed vineyards or more garden-ground running to waste than in the purlieus of Grunderwald. The roofs of its cottages were generally in want of thatch, the machinery of the draw-well, primitive at the best, was dangerously out of repair; broken-down fences, and hingeless gates were the prevailing fashion. The windmill looked as if it must give up work on some early day; and nothing about the village seemed in good order but the blacksmith's forge.

A short sojourn at Grunderwald would have made the cause of such general dilapidation evident to the least discerning mind.

In common with the majority of the Tyrolese, its inhabitants belong to the Roman Catholic Church, and they now had a high repute for piety throughout the mountain

men and martyrs whom the Church had thought worthy of canonization, overpassed the bounds of his natural good sense and Christian prudence.

The zeal of Father Felix was not according to knowledge, but it was fervent, and brought about a new order of things in Grunderwald. The simple villagers were at first astonished to hear vigils and feasts, of which neither they nor their fathers had dreamed, announced from the altar, and their observance enjoined as the most solemn of Christian duties. Names of which they had never heard the sound were made known to them in the Father's sermons, with ample details of miracles performed and work, of abstinence or flagellation done by way of proving the saint's right to his day. The priest's eloquence and influence soon brought the saints into fashion; there was scarcely

half cultivated, and buildings out of repair.

Thoughtful and intelligent peasants murmured among themselves at the sacrifice of time and the neglect of needful work occasioned by the observance of so many holidays, but nobody really ventured to question the propriety of the new institutions but Ludwig Estermann, the blacksmith of Grunderwald.

Ludwig lived in the freedom of a man who had neither kindred nor connections in the village, and could therefore speak his mind. His native place was on the Swiss frontier, and his sturdy frame and sober, resolute face belonged to the Swiss rather than the Tyrolese stock. He had come to Grunderwald with his wife and their only child, some fifteen years before Father Felix began what the priest called his reforms in the parish, and settled there, as the place was without a blacksmith. In the course of that time death had taken from him his faithful wife. His only child, a fair daughter named Margaret, had grown up to fill, in some degree, the place she left vacant in his heart and home.

The late device for honoring the saints went against his good sense and his conscientious convictions, and Ludwig did not hesitate to express his opinion on the subject.

"No doubt some of them were holy men and servants of God in their day," he said, "though we know nothing about the most of them, by reason of their times and countries being so far from ours; but can any rational man believe that either they or their blessed Master would have the time in which poor Christians ought to work for themselves and their families frittered away in long services and useless holidays?"

Many of the villagers said that "Estermann had the rights of it," yet next day left their ripe corn, or wind-stripped roofs, to crowd the church while mass was said in honor of some unknown saint, and squandered the succeeding hours in idleness or sport.

Many more disputed and grew angry with him, applying every ill name they could think of, from "Lutheran" downward, to the blacksmith, but it was all the same as far as he was concerned. While they kept the saints' days, he attended to the work of his forge or field, set things to rights that happened to get out of order about his premises, and so contrived to have the best kept and most comfortable home in Grunderwald.

The blacksmith's customers were many, but his returns were small, and there was a millstone hanging about Ludwig's neck, in the shape of a debt due to Adam Finkler, the richest man in the village. Some people said he was the oldest man, too, but all agreed that Adam was the best bargain-



country, on account of their strict and abundant observance of saints' days. It was not always so. The number of the canonized had become so great in the progress of ages, that most of their days, and names too, had slipped out of memory among the industrious peasants and hardy hunters of the Tyrol: except the patron of a village or the guardian of a mineral spring from which cures might yet be expected, few of the calendar got any commemoration at all. And so it was in Grunderwald, till Father Felix came to reside there as the village priest.

He was a man devoted to the duties of his office, and the flock committed to his charge. He had nevertheless one spiritual hobby, to which the system he served under gave more than sufficient scope; his ideas of the honor and reverence due to those holy

a week of which two or three days were not given up to martyrs, confessors, or holy hermits. The villagers had no objection to work on the Lord's Day; indeed the Sabbath rest had never been regarded among them, but on a saint's day nothing would tempt man, woman or child in Grunderwald to do any worldly work, or mind any terrestrial business, however needful. After the morning mass and its accompanying ceremonies, the young people played rustic games on the green or danced the hours away; the old smoked and gossiped in convenient places. There was a good deal of beer-drinking done, and the habits of idleness and time-spending thus acquired had an evil effect on the working days; everything that could be shirked or put aside, was allowed to be so, and the necessary consequences were, fields