

white light of love that was going to flood Hermie's life. But during the last ten minutes there had come to her a thought of the material advantages that would accrue to the girl—Stevenson would have four or five thousand a year at his father's death. It had been very sweet to sit and think of dear little flower-faced Hermie lifted for ever above the sordid cares of wretched housekeeping.

"My love—my dear," she faltered, "I—I am old enough to be your mother—could you trust me—won't you—"

But Hermie, with the blind young eyes of a girl, saw nothing outside her window but tiresome Miss Browne, crying a little into her handkerchief (she often cried),

stammering out sentences that seemed to have no beginning or end (her sentences seldom had), twisting her fingers about (she never kept them still).

This, when the girl's excited heart wanted to be away from all voices, all eyes, and go over the strange sensations, with the moon alone for witness.

"Miss Browne," she said, making a strong effort not to speak unkindly, "I have a headache to-night, and want to be alone. Would you be so kind as to keep what you have to say till morning, and tell me then?"

Nothing could have been swifter than the way Miss Browne melted away into the darkness.

(To be continued.)

THE SALTNER;

OR,

WATCHER IN THE VINEYARDS, TYROL.

BY DORA DE BLAQUIÈRE.

IT is in the autumn when the grapes are ripening, from the middle of August till the end of October, that the Saltner, or watcher in the vineyards, makes his annual appearance

in the neighbourhood of Meran. There the vines are trained on raised frames and trellises, so high as to allow free passage beneath; and the vineyards stretch their long length through the joint valleys of the Adige and the Passer. They climb far up the sides of the encircling mountains, and round those of many a castle in that much-peopled district which is known under the name of the Burggrafnamte, the province of the counts of the mountains. Both the name and the jurisdiction date back some hundreds of years—to the fourteenth century at least—and every foot of ground is full of antiquarian interest; and the Saltners are a living survival of a mediæval day.

In an eighteenth century guide to the Tyrol, which we found at Meran, the primitive name for them was said to be Wald-hüter, or wood-guardians, the word Saltner (from the Latin *saltus*) being a relic of the days when people turned their names into Latin equivalents, and it was scholarly and fashionable to consider one's mother-tongue vulgar.

The dress worn by the Saltner sufficiently attests its age. A colossal hat, cocked and worn as the first Napoleon wore it, is adorned with the feathers of the turkey and the goose, the domestic fowl and the eagle, as well as with the tails of the squirrel, the fox, and sometimes the wolf. The short jacket-sleeves and very short breeches are all of leather, with metal chains across the front of the jacket, on which hang many tusks of the wild boar. The short leather sleeves reach to a little above the elbow and are attached by leathern thongs to the coat, leaving a portion of the white shirt visible.

The wide black leather belt belongs to the national Tyrolean dress, and it is embroidered with the quills of the turkey feathers. The putting on of this belt seemed to be like the assumption of a Roman toga; for every man has one, and they are expensive, but last a lifetime. They are made by one family only in the Tarnthal, near Botsen, who have had the sole right to make them for centuries.

The knees of the Saltner are bare, like the Scottish Highlanders, and white stockings, high leather gaiters, and boots finish a costume which is certainly mediæval in its origin. His armament is curiously mixed: for the halberd which he carries in his hand is quite of the Middle Ages, and the revolver



"THE SALTNER."

seems an anachronism. He carries also a whistle and a good-sized switch.

In spite of his formidable appearance, his power over life and limb is but small, for when he has captured a thief amongst the vines, he must at once take him to the owner of the vineyard, for with him lies the power of punishment, and he must decide whether the prisoner shall be set free on payment of a small fine, or be sent to prison, pending a legal process. As we have often heard the sound of a revolver fired in the night, we think there must be a good many alarms; and the Italians are credited with being the only depredators, often carrying off large baskets of grapes.

On closer inspection the ferocity of the Saltner's appearance vanishes, and he generally proves to be a pleasant-looking man, with a long pipe, a tendency to gossip with the passer-by, and an appetite for the "Tabaks Kreuzer" he is entitled to levy, which is insatiable. But I do not at all wonder at it, when I recall the lonely vigils in the deserted vineyards, with no companion, save his pipe, to cheer him through the dark and weary nights.

The paths into the vineyards are all closed by the middle of August, and "Durchgang Verboten" is the order of the day. The notice is sometimes posted up, but the Saltner's form of closing the paths is much more picturesque. The hedges are covered at this season with the berberis, and he breaks off branches of the crimson-tinted

berries, and shapes them into a star-like figure, in the centre of which he fixes a roughly cut-out wooden hand, spread wide open, with the fingers pointed outwards from the vineyard, as if forbidding all ingress. Sometimes the hand is wanting, but the branches are there, and you may trace the presence of the unseen watcher by the withered branches which he has fixed up to guard the ripening grapes.

Several well-known German writers have immortalised the Saltners. Paul Heyse, in his *Tales of Meran*, irreverently calls them "those living scarecrows," and overlooks their picturesque appearance entirely. But their duties are hard and tedious, and for weeks they are not permitted to leave the vineyards even for their food, which is sent to them by the farmers around them; and in rain or storm they have a very small straw hut as a refuge, while the traditional rate of payment is but small. They must be men of good character, and in the prime of life, and be well able to defend themselves, and capture any foreign roughs who may attack them.

In recent years they have shown a desire to wear a more comfortable head-covering than the one shown in the picture; but still, on ceremonial occasions, they will not appear without it; and it is said that a thousand of them—past and present Saltners—gathered to welcome the Emperor at the "Hofer Festival," two years ago, in the Passeierthal, when every Tyrolean costume was represented.



A SCOTS THISTLE.

By LESLIE KEITH, Author of "Lisbeth," "Cynthia's Brother," etc.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE best-laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft aglee."

Beth was doomed to prove once again in her own experience the truth of these pithy lines, for on the day before the travellers set out Claire became suddenly ill.

Beth first heard of her indisposition when she came in to lunch. She had been sent in the brougham with a long list of commissions to execute for her step-mother, and the novelty of being trusted alone, and the pleasure of driving in the keen frosty air, with the ever-present thought of to-morrow's happiness, had combined to raise her spirits to a very cheerful height.

She went into the dining-room with her hat on, her colour bright with exercise; and her father, looking up from the joint he was carving, was quick to notice how pretty she was.

"Here's a cheerful face!" he said. "You don't look as if you wanted the doctor, Betty."

"Does anybody?" Her glance went round the table and noticed one vacant place. "Where's Claire?"

"I've just been telling dear papa"—Mrs. Bethune's voice was lugubrious—"I didn't dare to disturb you earlier, Richard—that Claire is ill. Was there ever anything so tiresome? And everything ready for to-morrow, and not a possibility of putting the visit off. The Hills would never be made to understand."

"Surely they must have had an occasional cold