

of papers for discussion. At the hour of assembling, there was no one there at all. Presently the cobbler of the village dropped in casually. After him, pretending not to be his friend, came in a stranger, who practised the art of cobbling in the cathedral town of Athelston, near Weyland. And then the schoolmaster looked in. The cobbler of Athelston, after a decent pause, rose energetically, and asked Alan if this was a place for freedom of speech.

"Certainly, my friend," said the young reformer. "We are met together to discuss all points."

"Then," quoth the cobbler, "I am prepared to prove that there is no God."

Alan assured him that political and social problems, not theological, were the object of the Village Parliament. But he would not be convinced, and after a few withering sarcasms directed against autocrats, aristocrats, and priests, he retired, followed by his friend, the village cobbler, who secretly nourished similar persuasions. There is something in the smell of leather which is fatal to religion.

There was then only the schoolmaster left. He was a moody, discontented man, who chafed at being under the rule of the vicar, and longed for the superior freedom of a school board. Being by right of his profession a superior person, he cherished the companion vices of contempt and envy. These naturally go with superiority; and he came to the Parliament like some of those who go to church, namely, with the intention of scoffing. His intention was gratified, because, as no one came at all, he had the satisfaction of going home and scoffing in his lodgings at the Squire. Alas! a secret scoff within four walls brings no real satisfaction with it. You *must* have two to bring out the full flavour of a scoff. Fancy Mephistopheles enjoying a solitary sneer! That is one reason why hermits are such exceedingly jolly dogs, ever ready for mirth, and credulous to a fault.

"It is no use," said Alan to the schoolmaster, "not the slightest use bringing forward a measure for discussion when there is no one present but you and me. Let us adjourn the house."

As they passed the Spotted Lion together they heard the voices of the rustics in high debate. The taproom was their true House of Parliament.

There was once a good and faithful missionary who, after weeks of unrewarded labour, succeeded one evening in persuading three native boys to mount with him into an upper chamber, there to make inquiry. He naturally began with fervent prayer, and being carried away by fervour, continued this exercise aloud, with eyes closed, for the space of forty-five minutes, or thereabouts. On opening his eyes, this poor labourer found that the three inquirers had stealthily crept away during his uplifting, and were gone.

Alan felt as sad as my friend the missionary. People who will not be led, and to whom it is useless to point the way, must be gently pushed or shoved in the right direction—a truth which Baxter perceived many years ago, and which is illustrated by a well-known tract. Therefore, as self-reform was not to be hoped for, he began to reform the village for them.

First, he opened a shop in the village on the most enlightened co-operative principle. It was that by which the purchasers divide the profits in proportion to their purchases. Alan first proposed to the village shopkeeper that she should exchange her shop for the post of manager under the new system. But she was a person of defective imagination, and could not be persuaded to see the advantages of the offer. Alan then issued a tract, in which he explained exactly and clearly the method to be followed. Every purchase, with the name of the purchaser, was to be entered in a book, and at the close of the year, when the books were made up, the profits were to be divided equitably according to the amount of the purchases. The shop was to be a sort of universal provider. Alan entrusted the management to a young man who promised to give it his undivided care for fifteen shillings a week, rent, fire, and candles. The young man was not pleasant to look upon, but he was highly recommended by his uncle, who had a grocery establishment in Athelston. He was a Particular Baptist by conviction, and ready to preach if invited. He was only eighteen, and had sandy hair, which, of course, was not his fault.

"We must succeed, Miranda," cried Alan, in a sort of rapture, standing in the newly-opened shop. "We sell everything at ten per cent. over cost price. We sell everything of the best, there will be no