

"The supper," said one of the group in the Spotted Lion; on Friday evening, "is roast beef and roast mutton, hot, with potatoes and cabbage."

"Ah!" from all lips sympathetically.

"And beer. As much beer as we like. None o' your half-pints with young Squire. I seen the Squire's orders in writing."

"Ah!"—unanimously.

"Seems a kind of a waste now, don't it?" asked a venerable sage, smoking in the corner. "Saturday night an' all. Might ha' bin here as usual, and had the beer to ourselves, and kep' the beef for Sunday."

That was true, and feelingly put.

"And there's a lecture, William?" the ancient sage went on. "Same as two year ago."

"Ay. There's a lecture. But, Lord! after the beef—and the cabbage—and the beer—what's a lecture?"

Alan presided at the supper, supported by the Vicar on his right, and his new bailiff on the left. When every one had eaten as much beef as he possibly could, and the cloth was removed, the men were agreeably surprised by the production of pipes, tobacco, and more beer. The place, to be sure, was not what they were accustomed to for smoking purposes, and the tobacco did not possess some of the qualities which they preferred; but there was always the beer.

The women began to steal away when the pipes were lit, and by the time the room was quite full of smoke, and the Squire was choking, there were none but men present. Then Alan rose to make the speech which inaugurated his co-operative farm.

He saw with a sinking heart that they immediately assumed the attitude which long custom at church made them put on for the reception of a discourse. That is to say, they leaned back in their chairs, left off talking—some of them put down their pipes out of respect—and with eyes fixed upon the rafters, allowed their thoughts to wander in pleasant fields. There was, to be sure, a freshness in being allowed to drink beer and smoke during a sermon.

"My friends—" Here there was a general shuffling of legs, as every man helped himself hastily to another glass of gratuitous beer, the idea emanating from the aged philosopher. It might be—it would certainly be—their last that evening, because no doubt when the sermon was finished they would all

be dismissed with the benediction given, so to speak, dry, as on Sunday.

"My friends—" Alan gave them time to recover and began again. "I have asked you here to-night; not, as happened two years ago, to deliver a lecture, but to ask your advice." He paused here, and looked round, but on no single face did he discern the least gleam or glimmer of interest. Every man's eyes were steadily fixed on the roof, and every man was quietly but resolutely smoking, his mind, of course, in some more congenial place.

This was disheartening. Alan tried again.

"My friends," he said once more, "I want to ask your advice. I stand among you, the owner of this land, and the receiver of its rents."

"Hear! hear!" cried Mr. Bostock; and at an interruption so uncommon in a sermon, many of the hearers recovered consciousness suddenly, and found themselves not in church at all, but in the school-room. Then they realised the position, and relapsed again.

"An owner of land and a receiver of rents," Alan went on, "occupies a position, which, I believe, is only beginning to be generally recognised. He incurs responsibilities, in fact, of the most serious kind."

He paused again. There was no gleam of sympathy in any single eye. But that might be the effect of the tobacco haze.

"The conditions of agriculture are, in this country," he went on, "very different to those in any of the places I have visited. In all countries except England, men farm their own land. Mostly, they farm it with their own hands. Here we have not only the owner, a man of capital, but also the tenant farmer, another man of capital, to come between the labourer and the profits of his labour. That is a state of things which we cannot entirely alter, but may modify."

He stopped again. A low and melodious snore from the end of the table where one of the younger members had fallen asleep, increased his auditors' belief that they were really in church.

"An owner of land in England," Alan continued, "is a trustee; he is a responsible agent; he holds a large part of the public welfare in his hands. It is his duty to leave no stone unturned in the effort to secure the largest amount of happiness attainable by the general mass of mankind."