

course; I'll value them for you. Look at the horses and the stock, look at the machines, look at the fields. People come—ah! for miles round—to visit this farm. It's been in print. Bostock's Farm, they called it. And after all these years, there's the rent unpaid, and—I'm not ashamed to say it, because the money's in the land, not in the bank—I go out of it and become the bailiff at a salary of two hundred and fifty, paid weekly, which is five pounds a week, and a house rent-free, and the dairy and a field for the cows, and the pigs, and the orchard, and the farm stock at my valuation. Squire, you've got me dirt cheap. I don't grudge the bargain, because my heart's in the work, and I shall have no more trouble about rent, and give my whole mind to the farm. You'll have to spend a little money on the place," he added, waving his hands with the air of one who commands. "But, Lord! it will all come back to you. Only you wait till we've been at work for a year or so. A little money here and a little there, a steam-engine here and another there. More cattle, more horses. Mr. Dunlop, I believe," he cried in a burst of enthusiasm, "I believe you'll say, come this day five years, that you never did a better stroke of work in all your life than when you got me, Stephen Bostock, to be your bailiff, dirt cheap. It isn't for me to say who's the best man in all the county. Go to Athelston and ask at the farmers' ordinary on market-day, and all I've got to say is—here am I, at your service. Trust everything to me, let me, Stephen Bostock, buy and sell all by myself for the best advantage of the farm, as you say, Mr. Dunlop, and no questions asked, nor interference, nor anything, and—and then wait for the profits to be divided between you and me and the labourers. It's the labourers," he added, after a pause, "that I think on most, not myself, nor you. You've got your rents, Mr. Dunlop. You're a gentleman. I've got my salary—on'y two hundred and fifty, but 'sufficient is enough to a contented mind, and better is a stalled ox with contentment than a dinner of herbs and strife therewith.' But they pore labourers, they've got nothing, only their wages. Well, sir, we'll make it up to them. You and me together, we will."

There was something contagious in the hearty, though vulgar, enthusiasm of the new bailiff, and Alan shook hands with him with effusion. When the Squire was gone

the bailiff, after watching him carefully across a field and a half, sat down and resumed openly that broad grin which he had before concealed behind the handkerchief.

"Me to buy and sell," he said. "*And* the two hundred and fifty! *And* rent free! *And* the dairy! *And* the pigs! *And* the cows! And all to the best advantage of the farm. Dammit, it's fine!" he said this critically. "That's what it is—it's fine." He lay back, and laughed low and long. Then a sudden thought pierced the marrow of his heart, and he sat up again.

"How long will it last? One year? Two years? Stephen Bostock, my lad. But make hay while the sun shines. Buy and sell as much as you can to the best advantage. Ho! ho!—the best advantage—ha! ha!—of the farmer—ho! ho!—and the labourers—ha! ha!—the labourers! Yar!" He added the last words with the most profound contempt, which it was as well that Alan did not witness.

CHAPTER VIII.

"That monster, Custom, who all sense doth eat."

AFTER this gratifying interview with Farmer Bostock, Alan felt himself warranted in at once proceeding to business. Pending the signing of the agreement, which the honest bailiff undertook to get drawn up, he began by inviting the labourers on the farm to meet him on Saturday evening at the schools, when, after supper, he proposed to set forth in simple language, cautiously abstaining from eloquence or metaphor, his scheme for the advance of the higher civilization.

The men were invited to bring their wives, and those of the women whose family ties allowed, accepted with as much readiness as the men. Here it was felt, was a distinct step in advance. On the last occasion when the Squire met them in the school-room, he offered them a lecture, and never so much as a glass of beer to wash it down. Now, whatever suffering might be in store for them in the way of speeches, one thing was quite clear, that there would be compensation in the way of meat and drink. The butcher and the landlord of the Spotted Lion, indeed, were ready to state what amount of compensation.