

delight in every cottage, and to form a West-end club, except for the drink and luxurious living, and the cigars and the easy-chairs, in every village. But the vision was momentary. It faded before Miranda's resolute reply, and he walked away sorrowful. He would have to fight the battle single-handed.

Among the farms on his estate was one of three hundred acres, leased by a certain Stephen Bostock. It was the smallest—it was the lowest rented, the least productive, and the tenants were the least satisfactory of any upon his estate. He went to Stephen Bostock himself. He pointed out, having ascertained these facts from his agent, that he, Stephen Bostock, was getting deeper every year in the mire, that he had no money, that things were certain to get worse with him instead of better, and then he asked him what he proposed to do.

Stephen Bostock was a man with a very red face, as many rustics have, and a very long, square chin, as few rustics have. The red face was due to habitual intemperance, whenever he could find the money; the long, square chin was a mark and certain proof of cunning, obstinacy, and self-reliance. A long chin means tenacity—a square chin means resource. When you get them both together, you have such a man as Stephen Bostock.

Stephen Bostock was between forty and fifty years of age. He who has made no money at fifty never will make any. That is why a man of forty-five who has made none begins to grow anxious. Stephen Bostock had nothing in the world except the lease of a farm whose rent he could not pay, a dairy whose proceeds kept the house supplied with meat and drink, and a wife and daughter who looked after the dairy, kept chickens and ducks, and saw that the pigs were fed. He was a small tenant-farmer, one of the most hopeless class, rapidly becoming rarer, in this realm of England. If the land were their own, they could live on it, thrive on it, work on it, and be happy. But it is not, and so the class deteriorates, starves for a while, becomes bankrupt, either sinks back to the soil, or goes to Canada, where free-lands can be taken up, and men become at a stroke yeomen, after the fashion of their ancestors.

"You see, Bostock," said Alan, "things

seem getting worse instead of better with you."

"Yes, sir," he replied, "they certainly be. A little ease in the rent, now, might make everything right."

"No, it would not," Alan went on; "nothing will make everything right with you. The land is suffering from starvation and neglect. You have no stock, and next to no horses. You have got through all your money, whatever that was, and nothing can save you."

"A good spell of rainy weather," began Stephen, his mind turning feebly in the direction of turnips.

"No, no," said the Squire. "Now, listen to me, Bostock. Suppose I were to take the lease off your hands—don't speak, but listen. Suppose I were to offer you to remain where you are, in your own house, not as a tenant of the farm, but its bailiff, on a salary?"

"Oh!" said Stephen, startled, "on a celery" (he pronounced it so), "and in my own house! Without rent? As bailiff! Ah!"

"On a salary to be fixed between us." Stephen resolved that, if it depended on him, it should be fixed pretty high. "And that you should look after the practical business of the farm, which I intend to work on my own plans: that you should faithfully fulfil your part of the contract; that is, buy and sell, arrange the rotation of the crops, and direct the labour of the farm, to the best advantage of the proprietor, exactly as if it was your own."

Here Stephen Bostock, who began by staring hard, comprehended the position, and that so suddenly, that he was compelled to produce a red cotton handkerchief to hide a grin which, despite every warning of politeness, *would* spread from ear to ear.

"A celery: manage the farm for the Squire; go on living in the house, rent-free; buy and sell for the best advantage—ho! ho!—for the best advantage of the farm."

It really was too much.

Was it real?

Yes; before him stood the young Squire with grave and resolute face, square brows, and solemn blue eyes—eyes which somehow took the grin out of the corners of his mouth, and enabled him to lay down the pocket-handkerchief.

"Let me hear it all over again," he said.