

"I must devote my evenings as well as my days, Miranda," said Alan, on the eve of taking up his residence in the village, "to the people. But I shall be able to see you on Sundays."

"And, Alan, may I come to see you—in the fields?"

Alan laughed.

"You may, if you like. You will find me in a smock-frock."

"A smock-frock? You, Alan?"

Somehow the question of dress goes home to the feminine mind with greater force and directness than to ourselves. Miranda would have preferred seeing her new Crusader cap-à-pie in chain armour. But in a smock-frock!

Alan laughed.

"The uniform came home last night," he said. "In the solitude of my own chamber I put it on. Stay, Miranda. No one is about. Suppose I go and put it on again, for you."

He disappeared for a few minutes, and presently returned, disguised as a British labourer. He had on a smock-frock, a soft felt hat, leggings, gaiters, and corduroy trousers. He carried a whip in his hand, and wore a red cotton handkerchief tied round his neck. No one knows, until he has tried it, how vast a gulf separates those who wear from those who do not wear a collar.

"Alan?" cried Miranda, in a sort of terror, "I am afraid of you. Is it possible for clothes to make all that difference? You look *exactly* like a rustic. Even your own air of distinction, that I was proud of, has disappeared. I believe clothes are live things, after all. To be sure, everything is new, and if you only had a rose in your buttonhole, you would pass for a villager at the opera. But go away quickly, and change before any of the servants see you. If they do your authority is lost."

Alan took possession of his new house with pride mixed with anxiety. Like all genuine enthusiasts, he had very little care about what people said of him. That did not enter into his calculations. The pride arose from the realisation of a dream which had lain in his brain for two years and more; the anxiety from a fear that he might not be strong enough to carry it out. A woman whom he had engaged to wait upon him was in the cottage to receive him.

"You have got everything as I ordered?"

Alan asked. "Breakfast, such as the men all take; things for luncheon—I mean, dinner?"

Everything, she said, had been provided. Thus assured, Alan dismissed her.

It was eight o'clock and a cold rainy evening in October. The fire was burning, and the room was illuminated by a single tallow candle in a brass candlestick. The village was very quiet, and the rain fell outside, pattering upon his doorstep, cheerless. The sensation of being quite alone in a house, even a two-roomed cottage, was chilly. And there was the voluntary deprivation of tobacco, which was to begin from that evening. Abstinence from strong drinks, too, was to commence on the spot. Alan sat and meditated. He tried to picture to himself a village where the people were all cultured, all virtuous, all happy. He tried to lay down for himself laws to guide his conversation with the men, his daily toil, and his evenings. But it was an unpropitious time. For the moment, he took no joy in his projects. In all undertakings of difficulty, that moment is the most unhappy when it has been resolved upon, and on the eve of commencement, because then the dangers stare you most clearly in the face, and success seems most doubtful.

Ten o'clock. He was to rise early, and had better go to bed. He climbed the narrow stairs, bumped his head once or twice against the sloping roof and went to bed, feeling exactly like Alexander Selkirk. He woke in the night choked with the confined air of the little room. It was dark; he had no matches, and could not open the window. With the aid of a brush he smashed a pane of glass, and having thus established a simple ventilator, went to bed again.

He awoke at six, an hour late. Then a touch of human weakness seized him. He would not begin his farm work that day. Next day he would be called in time. And, he thought, as he was awake, he would get up. No one to bring him hot water, no hot water to bring; no use in ringing the bell, no bell to ring. He felt more and more like Alexander Selkirk. Alas, as he reflected, no fire lit, and breakfast to be made by himself.

Downstairs, he threw open the shutter and began with a foolish shame lest any one should see him,—to be sure it was not an occupation which offers, at the first blush, many attractions,—to lay the fire. This is