

principal points of his speech had been printed in clear type and in a few words. He put them on the table.

"Now," he said, "let this be the first evening Parliament of the new community! I leave these papers with you, so that you may understand, by reading them, exactly what it is that I propose, by your help, to institute. We shall now leave you to your deliberations. Pray send for any more beer that you may require."

The Vicar, Mr. Bostock, and the Squire gone, the men, alone and comfortable, looked at each other with amazed and turbid understandings.

"What did he say, William?" asked the same old sage who had lamented the loss of a Saturday night and the waste of good beef.

"Three shillin' a week," replied William.

"And the Squire, he'll come and live along of us."

"We don't want no Squire," growled the blacksmith.

"And farmer Bostock, he's to be bailiff."

There was another growl.

Then William, a young man, spoke again.

"Squire said we was to have what beer we wanted. How much do we want?"

One suggested a pint all round; another, and a thirstier, rose to a pint and a half. There were about fifteen men present. William, with a boldness which marked him out for future success, soared higher.

"Let's hev' a cask," he said. As there were fifteen men present, that was about three quarts apiece. The cask was brought, and instantly tapped. The deliberations were conducted as long as it lasted, which was at least three hours.

No conclusion was arrived at. But the imagination was let loose upon the Squire's future manner of life, and how his father would like it. "William," presently asked the old man, "they papers as the Squire left on the table. What's they for?"

"Pipe-lights, gaffer," said William promptly.

"Oh! and very thoughtful of the Squire, too. Reach me one, William."

This, alas! was the end of the Squire's little tract.

CHAPTER IX.

"Strong reasons make strong actions."

THE cottage in which Alan proposed to carry out his project was one of the humblest in the village. It consisted of two rooms; that on the ground-floor opening directly on the little front garden, and paved with stone, was ten feet square and eight feet high. That on the floor above was of the same superficial area, but had a sloping roof, so that the cubical contents were much smaller. In fact, it was a room in which a man would hesitate to swing a cat, from the dreadful uncertainty whether the cat might not clutch the walls and turn to rend him. The room was lighted by a small window containing two panes only.

"You must have a curtain across the door, Alan," said Miranda, inspecting the arrangements. "I will make it for you of some cheap stuff, so that it may be copied by the village. A flower-box may be put in the window for mignonette and wall-flowers. You may put a little bookcase opposite the window. And, for very comfort's sake, you must have some carpet over the cold stones. I can't very well send you blankets at Christmas, Alan, can I? Let me send you a piece of carpet instead—oh! good serviceable carpet; Kidderminster, not Turkey carpet at all."

"I have been thinking," said Alan, "that one way of getting to understand these people, will be by asking them here and giving them tea, with—with jam, I suppose, and so forth."

It was not till she was alone that Miranda felt a temptation to laugh over the picture of the peasants eating their way to the Higher Culture through piles of jam. They agreed that, as regards the furniture, simplicity must be studied first, and that æsthetic effect must be practically made of secondary importance. They fixed upon a wooden arm-chair, a deal table, unvarnished, and two or three common strong chairs for the coming visitors, who were to eat jam. The bookcase presented difficulties. Should it be fitted for the use of the village, or for that of the Squire? It was with a sigh that Alan pronounced for the village, and filled it with works on practical husbandry, political economy, agricultural chemistry, and other works known to be in constant demand by English villagers.