

I've got my own bit of ground rented from Mr. Stark, an' pretty soil it is too. The first crop of wheat I takes off it will more than pay the expenses of clearing! That'll make your mouths to water, I reckon. Such crops as come up I never did see or hear tell about, an' if anybody had told me there was such fat virgin land in the world, just natural with never a load of muck on it since the Flood, I should have said the man was a liar. An' there ban't no Duchy in Vermont! An' never a bigger-minded, more generous gentleman living than Mr. Stark. Thousands upon thousands of acres he've got. Blamed if I don't believe as you could put Dartmoor down in the middle an' lose it! He'm a great farmer; an' I've heard un say 'tis the best of the human crafts after sailing. T'other sorts of business teach a man to be rich, an' powerful like, an' witty; but the land—where should us be without that? It keeps the world alive an' finds food an' clothes for all the humans on the earth."

"'Tis true," said Woodman. "An', what's more, I hold as the land be next to the Bible for keeping a man out of mischief—so long as he sticks to it. 'Tis the sticking does it. If Adam's self had but kept to his job——"

"Putt says a bit more; us can have a tell after," interrupted Beer. Then, amid real and lively interest, he narrated a matter with which, elsewhere, the master and his wife were also most deeply concerned.

Maurice Malherb sat and calculated the value of his next year's crop of wool. As usual, he set it as high as his hopes. He had sold the Malherb amphora for eighteen thousand pounds, and henceforth found himself and his farm in prosperous circumstances.

Now Annabel read slowly the budget from Cecil Stark. It was in the nature of a diary, and anon Malherb, pushing his papers and figures violently from him, spoke.

"For love of Heaven, leave that solid prosing, and look forward to the end. Grace—how is it with her? There should be great news. But he's so balanced, so self-contained, so methodical. He'll set things in their proper order though the heavens fall. Look on—look on to the end!"

"He writes from day to day, dear Maurice."

"Let him. We need not read so. Turn the pages quickly."