

An election in a country-side fifty years ago was confusion itself, and thus was it in Little Bubbleton. Only Master Catchpole held his own. His serenity was undisturbed, his great nature alone was calm, while all else was turmoil.

"You'll vote for the Honourable Reginald Finewater, will you not, *Mister* Catchpole?" sweetly asked Squire Hardnut.

"Not if I *knows* it," replied Master Catchpole. "I be not like poor Timothy Hardiron, an' yet I *be* like 'im, Squire. To spake in order, I *be* like 'im because I've a got four good argyments why I should vote, but I *be not* like 'im because my argyments be different to 'is, and leads to a different conclusion. 'Is argyments be, first, a wife an' five children—six argyments in one; secondly, three parts of the work 'e does comes from Squire Hardnut; thirdly, 'is 'ouse belongs to the 'Onable Reginald 'isself; fourthly, if 'e *don't* vote for Reginald 'e'll have to starve—from all which 'e do conclude—as the pason do say—that 'e *must* vote for the 'Onable Reginald, an' 'e *do* vote for 'im accordingly. *My* argyments, be—firstly, I got no family but myself an' the cat; secondly, my father bein' born before me, left me my cot and half-a-crown a-week; thirdly, I do cobble the shoes o' the entire parish, an' thur's a lot on 'em wunt ax Squire nor Reginald whether I *must* cobble 'em; and, fourthly, that bein' so, I can please myself. Now, Squire, I do read the Proverbs o' Solomon, an' thur I do find it said, 'When a man can do as he likes let 'im do as 'e ought.' A gold proverb, that, Squire. That bein' so, I votes *against* 'Onable Reginald, strait and cluir."

And he did.

Now, the misfortune of Widow Barton was, not that she had a vote and gave it wrongly, but that she had no vote at all to give, for when the Honourable Reginald found himself shut out of the House of Commons because five men, who, had they been sensible, would have voted for him, were so foolish as to vote against him, and so place him ten votes below his opponent, he looked about him. One result of which was that he addressed his landed supporters on the sin and folly of allowing widows to live in houses which would give votes to occupiers were those occupiers men. Squire Hardnut heard the address with tingling ears, for had he not—political sinner that he was—allowed three widows to live in houses upon his own estate, thereby contributing the lion's share to the defeat of the Honourable Reginald? But he repented, and his repentance was practical. Widow Hardnut received notice to quit. The Squire took it himself, softened it down as he best could, folded half-a-crown in the notice paper, and with many sincere regrets told the sorrowful woman that nothing but "grave reasons of State" would cause him to act thus. Though silenced, Widow Barton was still saddened, and unfolded her news, with many a sad foreboding, to her son, upon his return home. The effect upon him was bad. He had had many a chat lately with old Master Cathpole, from whom he had heard many things fit to turn older heads than his, and here, to give them point, was a