

Chapter 11

Truth is the precious harvest of the earth. But once, when harvest waved upon a land, The noisome cankerworm and caterpillar, Locusts, and all the swarming foul-born broods, Fastened upon it with swift, greedy jaws, And turned the harvest into pestilence, Until men said, What profits it to sow?

FELIX was going to Sproxton that Sunday afternoon. He always enjoyed his walk to that out-lying hamlet; it took him (by a short cut) through a corner of Sir Maximus Debarry's park; then across a piece of common, broken here and there into red ridges below dark masses of furze; and for the rest of the way alongside the canal, where the Sunday peacefulness that seemed to rest on the bordering meadows and pastures was hardly broken if a horse pulled into sight along the towing-path, and a boat, with a little curl of blue smoke issuing from its tin chimney, came slowly gliding behind. Felix retained something of his boyish impression that the days in a canal-boat were all like Sundays; but the horse, if it had been put to him, would probably have preferred a more Judaic or Scotch rigour with regard to canal-boats, or at least that the Sunday towing should be done by asses, as a lower order.

This canal was only a branch of the grand trunk, and ended among the coal-pits, where Felix, crossing a network of black tram-roads, soon came to his destination - that public institute of Sproxton, known to its frequenters chiefly as Chubb's, but less familiarly as the Sugar Loaf or the New Pits; this last being the name for the more modern and lively nucleus of the Sproxton hamlet. The other nucleus, known as the Old Pits, also supported its 'public,' but it had something of the forlorn air of an abandoned capital; and the company at the Blue Cow was of an inferior kind - equal, of course, in the fundamental attributes of humanity, such as desire for beer, but not equal in ability to pay for it.

When Felix arrived, the great Chubb was standing at the door. Mr Chubb was a remarkable publican; none of your stock Bonifaces, red, bloated, jolly, and joking. He was thin and sallow, and was never, as his constant guests observed, seen to be the worse (or the better) for liquor; indeed, as among soldiers an eminent general was held to have a charmed life, Chubb was held by the members of the Benefit Club to have a charmed sobriety, a vigilance over his own interest that resisted all narcotics. His very dreams, as stated by himself, had a method in them beyond the waking thoughts of other men. Pharaoh's dream, he observed, was nothing to them; and, as lying so much out of ordinary experience, they were held particularly suitable for narration on Sunday evenings, when the listening colliers, well washed and in their best coats, shook their heads with a sense of that

peculiar edification which belongs to the inexplicable. Mr Chubb's reasons for becoming landlord of the Sugar Loaf were founded on the severest calculation. Having an active mind, and being averse to bodily labour, he had thoroughly considered what calling would yield him the best livelihood with the least possible exertion, and in that sort of line he had seen that a 'public' amongst miners who earned high wages was a fine opening. He had prospered according to the merits of such judicious calculation, was already a forty-shilling freeholder, and was conscious of a vote for the county. He was not one of those mean-spirited men who found the franchise embarrassing, and would rather have been without it: he regarded his vote as part of his investment, and meant to make the best of it. He called himself a straightforward man, and at suitable moments expressed his views freely; in fact, he was known to have one fundamental division for all opinion - 'my idee' and 'humbug'.

When Felix approached, Mr Chubb was standing, as usual, with his hands nervously busy in his pockets, his eyes glancing round with a detective expression at the black landscape, and his lipless mouth compressed yet in constant movement. On a superficial view it might be supposed that so eager-seeming a personality was unsuited to the publican's business; but in fact it was a great provocative to drinking. Like the shrill biting talk of a vixenish wife, it would have compelled you to 'take a little something' by way of dulling your sensibility.

Hitherto, notwithstanding Felix drank so little ale, the publican had treated him with high civility. The coming election was a great opportunity for applying his political 'idee,' which was, that society existed for the sake of the individual, and that the name of that individual was Chubb. Now, from a conjunction of absurd circumstances inconsistent with that idea, it happened that Sproxton had been hitherto somewhat neglected in the canvass. The head member of the company that worked the mines was Mr Peter Garstin, and the same company received the rent for the Sugar Loaf. Hence, as the person who had the most power of annoying Mr Chubb, and being of detriment to him, Mr Garstin was naturally the candidate for whom he had reserved his vote. But where there is this intention of ultimately gratifying a gentleman by voting for him in an open British manner on the day of the poll, a man, whether publican or pharisee (Mr Chubb used this generic classification of mankind as one that was sanctioned by Scripture), is all the freer in his relations with those deluded persons who take him for what he is not, and imagine him to be a waverer. But for some time opportunity had seemed barren. There were but three dubious votes besides Mr Chubb's in the small district of which the Sugar Loaf could be regarded as the centre of intelligence and inspiration: the colliers, of course, had no votes, and did not need political conversion; consequently, the interests of Sproxton had only been tacitly cherished in the breasts of candidates.

But ever since it had been known that a Radical candidate was in the field, that in consequences of this Mr Debarry had coalesced with Mr Garstin, and that Sir James Clement, the poor baronet, had

retired, Mr Chubb had been occupied with the most ingenious mental combinations in order to ascertain what possibilities of profit to the Sugar Loaf might lie in this altered state of the canvass.

He had a cousin in another county, also a publican, but in a larger way, and resident in a borough, and from him Mr Chubb had gathered more detailed political information than he could find in the Loamshire newspapers. He was now enlightened enough to know that there was a way of using voteless miners and navvies at nominations and elections. He approved of that; it entered into his political 'idee'; and indeed he would have been for extending the franchise to this class - at least in Sproxtton. If any one had observed that you must draw a line somewhere, Mr Chubb would have concurred at once, and would have given permission to draw it at a radius of two miles from his own tap.

From the first Sunday evening when Felix had appeared at the Sugar Loaf, Mr Chubb had made up his mind that this 'cute man who kept himself sober was an electioneering agent. That he was hired for some purpose or other there was not a doubt; a man didn't come and drink nothing without a good reason. In proportion as Felix's purpose was not obvious to Chubb's mind, it must be deep; and this growing conviction had even led the publican on the last Sunday evening privately to urge his mysterious visitor to let a little alc be chalked up for him - it was of no consequence. Felix knew his man, and had taken care not to betray too soon that his real object was so to win the ear of the best fellows about him as to induce them to meet him on a Saturday evening in the room where Mr Lyon, or one of his deacons, habitually held his Wednesday preachings. Only women and children, three old men, a journeyman tailor, and a consumptive youth, attended those preachings; not a collier had been won from the strong ale of the Sugar Loaf, not even a navy from the muddier drink of the Blue Cow. Felix was sanguine; he saw some pleasant faces among the miners when they were washed on Sundays; they might be taught to spend their wages better. At all events, he was going to try: he had great confidence in his powers of appeal, and it was quite true that he never spoke without arresting attention. There was nothing better than a dame school in the hamlet; he thought that if he could move the fathers, whose blackened week-day persons and flannel caps, ornamented with tallow candles by way of plume, were a badge of hard labour for which he had a more sympathetic fibre than for any ribbon in the button-hole - if he could move these men to save something from their drink and pay a schoolmaster for their boys, a

greater service would be done them than if Mr Garstin and his company were persuaded to establish a school.

'I'll lay hold of them by their fatherhood,' said Felix; 'I'll take one of their little fellows and set him in the midst. Till they can show there's something they love better than swilling themselves with ale, extension of the suffrage can never mean anything for them but extension of boozing. One must begin somewhere: I'll begin at what is under my nose. I'll begin at Sproxton. That's what a man would do if he had a red-hot superstition. Can't one work for sober truth as hard as for megrims?'

Felix Holt had his illusions, like other young men, though they were not of a fashionable sort; referring neither to the impression his costume and horsemanship might make on beholders, nor to the ease with which he would pay the Jews when he gave a loose to his talents and applied himself to work. He had fixed his choice on a certain Mike Brindle (not that Brindle was his real name - each collier had his sobriquet) as the man whom he would induce to walk part of the way home with him this very evening, and get to invite some of his comrades for the next Saturday. Brindle was one of the head miners; he had a bright good-natured face, and had given especial attention to certain performances with a magnet which Felix carried in his pocket.

Mr Chubb, who had also his illusions, smiled graciously as the enigmatic customer came up to the door-step.

'Well, sir, Sunday seems to be your day: I begin to look for you on a Sunday now.'

'Yes, I'm a working man; Sunday is my holiday,' said Felix, pausing at the door since the host seemed to expect this.

'Ah, sir, there's many ways of working. I look at it you're one of those as work with your brains. That's what I do myself.'

'One may do a good deal of that and work with one's hands too.'

'Ah, sir,' said Mr Chubb, with a certain bitterness in his smile, 'I've that sort of head that I've often wished I was stupider. I use things up, sir; I see into things a deal too quick. I eat my dinner, as you may say, at breakfast-time. That's why I hardly ever smoke a pipe. No sooner do I stick a pipe in my mouth than I puff and puff till it's gone before other folks are well lit; and then, where am I? I might as well have let it alone. In this world it's better not to be too quick. But you know what it is, sir.'

'Not I,' said Felix, rubbing the back of his head, with a grimace. 'I generally feel myself rather a blockhead. This world's a largish place, and I haven't turned everything inside out yet.'

'Ah, that's your deepness. I think we understand one another. And about this here election, I lay two to one we should agree if we was to come to talk about it.'

'Ah ! ' said Felix, with an air of caution.

'You're none of a Tory, eh, sir? You won't go to vote for Debarry? That was what I said at the very first go-off. Says I, he's no Tory. I think I was right, sir - eh?'

'Certainly; I'm no Tory.'

'No, no, you don't catch me wrong in a hurry. Well, between you and me, I care no more for the Debarrys than I care for Johnny Groats. I live on none o' their land, and not a pot's worth did they ever send to the Sugar Loaf. I'm not frightened at the Debarrys: there's no man more independent than me. I'll plump or I'll split for them as treat me the handsomest and are the most of what I call gentlemen; that's my idee. And in the way of hacting for any man, them are fools that don't employ me.'

We mortals sometimes cut a pitiable figure in our attempts at display. We may be sure of our own merits, yet fatally ignorant of the point of view from which we are regarded by our neighbour. Our fine patterns in tattooing may be far from throwing him into a swoon of admiration, though we turn ourselves all round to show them. Thus it was with Mr Chubb.

'Yes,' said Felix, dryly; 'I should think there are some sorts of work for which you are just fitted.'

'Ah, you see that? Well, we understand one another. You're no Tory; no more am I. And if I'd got four hands to show at a nomination, the Debarry's shouldn't have one of 'em. My idee is, there's a deal too much of their scutchins and their moniments in Treby church. What's their scutchins mean? They're a sign with little liquor behind 'em; that's how I take it. There's nobody can give account of 'em as I ever heard.'

Mr Chubb was hindered from further explaining his views as to the historical element in society by the arrival of new guests, who approached in two groups. The foremost group consisted of well-known colliers, in their good Sunday beavers and coloured handkerchiefs serving as cravats, with the long ends floating. The

second group was a more unusual one, and caused Mr Chubb to compress his mouth and agitate the muscles about it in rather an excited manner.

First came a smartly-dressed personage on horseback, with a conspicuous expansive shirt-front and figured satin stock. He was a stout man, and gave a strong sense of broadcloth. A wild idea shot through Mr Chubb's brain: could this grand visitor be Harold Transome? Excuse him: he had been given to understand by his cousin from the distant borough that a Radical candidate in the condescension of canvassing had even gone the length of eating bread-and-treacle with the children of an honest freeman, and declaring his preference for that simple fare. Mr Chubb's notion of a Radical was that he was a new and agreeable kind of lick-spittle who fawned on the poor instead of on the rich, and so was likely to send customers to a 'public'; so that he argued well enough from the premises at his command.

The mounted man of broadcloth had followers: several shabby-looking men, and Sproxtton boys of all sizes, whose curiosity had been stimulated by unexpected largesse. A stranger on horseback scattering halfpence on a Sunday was so unprecedented that there was no knowing what he might do next; and the smallest hindmost fellows in sealskin caps were not without hope that an entirely new order of things had set in.

Every one waited outside for the stranger to dismount, and Mr Chubb advanced to take the bridle.

'Well, Mr Chubb,' were the first words when the great man was safely out of the saddle, 'I've often heard of your fine tap, and I'm come to taste it.'

'Walk in, sir - pray walk in,' said Mr Chubb, giving the horse to the stable-boy. 'I shall be proud to draw for you. If anybody's been praising me, I think my ale will back him.'

All entered in the rear of the stranger except the boys, who peeped in at the window.

'Won't you please to walk into the parlour, sir?' said Chubb, obsequiously.

'No, no, I'll sit down here. This is what I like to see,' said the stranger, looking round at the colliers, who eyed him rather shyly - 'a bright hearth where working men can enjoy themselves. However, I'll step into the other room for three minutes, just to speak half-a-dozen words with you.'

Mr Chubb threw open the parlour door, and then stepping back, took the opportunity of saying, in a low tone, to Felix, 'Do you know this gentleman?'

'Not I; no.'

Mr Chubb's opinion of Felix Holt sank from that moment. The parlour door was closed, but no one sat down or ordered beer.

'I say, master,' said Mike Brindle, going up to Felix, 'don't you think that's one o' the 'lection men?'

'Very likely.'

'I heard a chap say they're up and down everywhere,' said Brindle; 'and now's the time, they say, when a man can get beer for nothing.'

'Ay, that's sin' the Reform,' said a big, red-whiskered man, called Dredge. 'That's brought the 'lections and the drink into these parts; for afore that, it was all kep up the Lord knows wheer.'

'Well, but the Reform's niver come anigh Sprox'on,' said a grey-haired but stalwart man called Old Sleck. 'I don't believe nothing about'n, I don't.'

'Don't you?' said Brindle, with some contempt. 'Well, I do. There's folks won't believe beyond the end o' their own pickaxes. You can't drive nothing into 'em, not if you split their skulls. I know for certain sure, from a chap in the cartin' way, as he's got money and drink too, only for hollering. Eh, master, what do you say?' Brindle ended, turning with some deference to Felix.

'Should you like to know all about the Reform?' said Felix, using his opportunity. 'If you would, I can tell you.'

'Ay, ay - tell's; you know, I'll be bound,' said several voices at once.

'Ah, but it will take some little time. And we must be quiet. The cleverest of you - those who are looked up to in the club - must come and meet me at Peggy Button's cottage next Saturday, at seven o'clock, after dark. And, Brindle, you must bring that little yellow-haired lad of yours. And anybody that's got a little boy - a very little fellow, who won't understand what is said - may bring him. But you must keep it close, you know. We don't want fools there. But everybody who hears me may come. I shall be at Peggy Button's.'

'Why, that's where the Wednesday preachin' is,' said Dredge. 'I've been aforced to give my wife a black eye to hinder her from going to the

preachin'. Lors-a-massy, she thinks she knows better nor me, and I can't make head nor tail of her talk.'

'Why can't you let the woman alone?' said Brindle, with some disgust. 'I'd be ashamed to beat a poor crawling thing 'cause she likes preaching.'

'No more I did beat her afore, not if she scrat' me,' said Dredge, in vindication; 'but if she jabbers at me, I can't abide it. Howsomever, I'll bring my Jack to Peggy's o' Saturday. His mother shall wash him. He is but four year old, and he'll swear and square at me a good un, if I set him on.'

'There you go blatherin',' said Brindle, intending a mild rebuke.

This dialogue, which was in danger of becoming too personal, was interrupted by the reopening of the parlour door, and the reappearance of the impressive stranger with Mr Chubb, whose countenance seemed unusually radiant.

'Sit you down here, Mr Johnson,' said Chubb, moving an arm-chair. 'This gentleman is kind enough to treat the company,' he added, looking round, 'and what's more, he'll take a cup with 'em; and I think there's no man but what'll say that's a honour.'

The company had nothing equivalent to a 'hear, hear', at command, but they perhaps felt the more, as they seated themselves with an expectation unvented by utterance. There was a general satisfactory sense that the hitherto shadowy Reform had at length come to Sproxtton in a good round shape, with broadcloth and pockets. Felix did not intend to accept the treating, but he chose to stay and hear, taking his pint as usual.

'Capital ale, capital ale,' said Mr Johnson, as he set down his glass, speaking in a quick, smooth treble. 'Now,' he went on, with a certain pathos in his voice, looking at Mr Chubb, who sat opposite, 'there's some satisfaction to me in finding an establishment like this at the Pits. For what would higher wages do for the working man if he couldn't get a good article for his money? Why, gentlemen' - here he looked round - 'I've been into ale-houses where I've seen a fine fellow of a miner or a stone-cutter come in and have to lay down money for beer that I should be sorry to give to my pigs ! ' Here Mr Johnson leaned forward with squared elbows, hands placed on his knees, and a defiant shake of the head.

'Aw, like at the Blue Cow,' fell in the irrepressible Dredge, in a deep bass; but he was rebuked by a severe nudge from Brindle.

'Yes, yes, you know what it is, my friend,' said Mr Johnson, looking at Dredge, and restoring his self-satisfaction. 'But it won't last much longer, that's one good thing. Bad liquor will be swept away with other bad articles. Trade will prosper - and what's trade now without steam? and what is steam without coal? And mark you this, gentlemen - there's no man and no government can make coal.'

A brief loud 'Haw, haw,' showed that this fact was appreciated.

'Nor freeston' nayther,' said a wide-mouthed wiry man called Gills, who wished for an exhaustive treatment of the subject, being a stone-cutter.

'Nor freestone, as you say; else, I think, if coal could be made aboveground, honest fellows who are the pith of our population would not have to bend their backs and sweat in a pit six days out of the seven. No, no: I say, as this country prospers it has more and more need of you, sirs. It can do without a pack of lazy lords and ladies, but it can never do without brave colliers. And the country will prosper. I pledge you my word, sirs, this country will rise to the tip-top of everything, and there isn't a man in it but what shall have his joint in the pot, and his spare money jingling in his pocket, if we only exert ourselves to send the right men to parliament - men who will speak up for the collier, and the stone-cutter, and the navy' (Mr Johnson waved his hand liberally), 'and will stand no nonsense. This is a crisis, and we must exert ourselves. We've got Reform, gentlemen, but now the thing is to make Reform work. It's a crisis - I pledge you my word it's a crisis.'

Mr Johnson threw himself back as if from the concussion of that great noun. He did not suppose that one of his audience knew what a crisis meant; but he had large experience in the effect of uncomprehended words; and in this case the colliers were thrown into a state of conviction concerning they did not know what, which was a fine preparation for 'hitting out', or any other act carrying a due sequence to such a conviction.

Felix felt himself in danger of getting into a rage. There is hardly any mental misery worse than that of having our own serious phrases, our own rooted beliefs, caricatured by a charlatan or a hireling. He began to feel the sharp lower edge of his tin pint-measure, and to think it a tempting missile.

Mr Johnson certainly had some qualifications as an orator. After this impressive pause he leaned forward again, and said, in a lowered tone, looking round -

'I think you all know the good news.'

There was a movement of shoe-soles on the quarried floor, and a scrape of some chair legs, but no other answer.

'The good news I mean is, that a first-rate man, Mr Transome of Transome Court, has offered himself to represent you in parliament, sirs. I say you in particular, for what he has at heart is the welfare of the working man - of the brave fellows that wield the pickaxe, and the saw, and the hammer. He's rich - has more money than Garstin - but he doesn't want to keep it to himself. What he wants is, to make a good use of it, gentlemen. He's come back from foreign parts with his pockets full of gold. He could buy up the Debarry's if they were worth buying, but he's got something better to do with his money. He means to use it for the good of the working men in these parts. I know there are some men who put up for parliament and talk a little too big. They may say they want to befriend the colliers, for example. But I should like to put a question to them. I should like to ask them, 'What colliers?' There are colliers up at Newcastle, and there are colliers down in Wales. Will it do any good to honest Tom, who is hungry in Sproxton, to hear that Jack at Newcastle has his bellyful of beef and pudding?'

'It ought to do him good,' Felix burst in, with his loud abrupt voice, in odd contrast with glib Mr Johnson's. 'If he knows it's a bad thing to be hungry and not have enough to eat, he ought to be glad that another fellow, who is not idle, is not suffering in the same way.'

Every one was startled. The audience was much impressed with the grandeur, the knowledge, and the power of Mr Johnson. His brilliant promises confirmed the impression that Reform had at length reached the New Pits; and Reform, if it were good for anything, must at last resolve itself into spare money - meaning 'sport' and drink, and keeping away from work for several days in the week. These 'brave' men of Sproxton liked Felix as one of themselves, only much more knowing - as a working man who had seen many distant parts, but who must be very poor, since he never drank more than a pint or so. They were quite inclined to hear what he had got to say on another occasion, but they were rather irritated by his interruption at the present moment. Mr Johnson was annoyed, but he spoke with the same glib quietness as before, though with an expression of contempt.

'I call it a poor-spirited thing to take up a man's straight-forward words and twist them. What I meant to say was plain enough - that no man can be saved from starving by looking on while others eat. I think that's common sense, eh, sirs?'

There was again an approving 'Haw, haw.' To hear anything said, and understand it, was a stimulus that had the effect of wit. Mr Chubb

cast a suspicious and viperous glance at Felix, who felt that he had been a simpleton for his pains.

'Well, then,' continued Mr Johnson, 'I suppose I may go on. But if there is any one here better able to inform the company than I am, I give way - I give way.'

'Sir,' said Mr Chubb, magisterially, 'no man shall take the words out of your mouth in this house. And,' he added, looking pointedly at Felix, 'company that's got no more orders to give, and wants to turn up rusty to them that has, had better be making room than filling it. Love an' 'armony's the word on our club's flag, an' love an' 'armony's the meaning of 'The Sugar Loaf, William Chubb.' Folks of a different mind had better seek another house of call.'

'Very good,' said Felix, laying down his money and taking his cap, 'I'm going.' He saw clearly enough that if he said more, there would be a disturbance which could have no desirable end.

When the door had closed behind him, Mr Johnson said, 'What is that person's name?'

'Does anybody know it?' said Mr Chubb.

A few noes were heard.

'I've heard him speak like a downright Reformer, else I should have looked a little sharper after him. But you may see he's nothing partic'lar.'

'It looks rather bad that no one knows his name,' said Mr Johnson. 'He's most likely a Tory in disguise - a Tory spy. You must be careful, sirs, of men who come to you and say they're Radicals, and yet do nothing for you. They'll stuff you with words - no lack of words - but words are wind. Now, a man like Transome comes forward and says to the working men of this country: 'Here I am, ready to serve you and to speak for you in parliament, and to get the laws made all right for you; and in the meanwhile, if there's any of you who are my neighbours who want a day's holiday, or a cup to drink with friends, or a copy of the king's likeness - why, I'm your man. I'm not a paper handbill - all words and no substance - nor a man with land and nothing else; I've got bags of gold as well as land.' I think you know what I mean by the king's likeness?'

Here Mr Johnson took a half-crown out of his pocket and held the head towards the company.

'Well, sirs, there are some men who like to keep this pretty picture a great deal too much to themselves. I don't know whether I'm right, but I think I've heard of such a one not a hundred miles from here. I think his name was Spratt, and he managed some company's coal-pits.'

'Haw, haw ! Spratt - Spratt's his name,' was rolled forth to an accompaniment of scraping shoe-soles.

'A screwing fellow, by what I understand - a domineering fellow - who would expect men to do as he liked without paying them for it. I think there's not an honest man who wouldn't like to disappoint such an upstart.'

There was a murmur which was interpreted by Mr Chubb. 'I'll answer for 'em, sir.'

'Now, listen to me. Here's Garstin: he's one of the company you work under. What's Garstin to you? who sees him? and when they do see him they see a thin miserly fellow who keeps his pockets buttoned. He calls himself a Whig, yet he'll split votes with a Tory - he'll drive with the Debarrys. Now, gentlemen, if I said I'd got a vote, and anybody asked me what I should do with it, I should say, 'I'll plump for Transome'. You've got no votes, and that's a shame. But you will have some day, if such men as Transome are returned; and then you'll be on a level with the first gentleman in the land, and if he wants to sit in Parliament, he must take off his hat and ask your leave. But though you haven't got a vote you can give a cheer for the right man, and Transome's not a man like Garstin; if you lost a day's wages by giving a cheer for Transome, he'll make you amends. That's the way a man who has no vote can yet serve himself and his country: he can lift up his hand and shout 'Transome for ever' - 'hurray for Transome'. Let the working men - let colliers and navvies and stone-cutters, who between you and me have a good deal too much the worst of it, as things are now - let them join together and give their hands and voices for the right man, and they'll make the great people shake in their shoes a little; and when you shout for Transome, remember you shout for more wages, and more of your rights, and you shout to get rid of rats and sprats and such small animals, who are the tools the rich make use of to squeeze the blood out of the poor man.'

'I wish there'd be a row - I'd pommel him,' said Dredge, who was generally felt to be speaking to the question.

'No, no, my friend - there you're a little wrong. No pommelling - no striking first. There you have the law and the constable against you. A little rolling in the dust and knocking hats off, a little pelting with soft things that'll stick and not bruise - all that doesn't spoil the fun. If a man is to speak when you don't like to hear him, it is but fair you

should give him something he doesn't like in return. And the same if he's got a vote and doesn't use it for the good of the country; I see no harm in splitting his coat in a quiet way. A man must be taught what's right if he doesn't know it. But no kicks, no knocking down, no pommelling.'

'It 'ud be good fun, though, if so-be,' said Old Sleck, allowing himself an imaginative pleasure.

'Well, well, if a Spratt wants you to say Garstin, it's some pleasure to think you can say Transome. Now, my notion is this. You are men who can put two and two together - I don't know a more solid lot of fellows than you are; and what I say is, let the honest men in this country who've got no vote show themselves in a body when they have the chance. Why, sirs, for every Tory sneak that's got a vote, there's fifty-five fellows who must stand by and be expected to hold their tongues. But I say, let 'em hiss the sneaks, let 'em groan at the sneaks, and the sneaks will be ashamed of themselves. The men who've got votes don't know how to use them. There's many a fool with a vote, who is not sure in his mind whether he shall poll, say for Debarry, or Garstin, or Transome - whether he'll plump or whether he'll split; a straw will turn him. Let him know your mind if he doesn't know his own. What's the reason Debarry gets returned? Because people are frightened at the Debarrys. What's that to you? You don't care for the Debarrys. If people are frightened at the Tories, we'll turn round and frighten them. You know what a Tory is - one who wants to drive the working men as he'd drive cattle. That's what a Tory is; and a Whig is no better, if he's like Garstin. A Whig wants to knock the Tory down and get the whip, that's all. But Transome's neither Whig nor Tory; he's the working man's friend, the collier's friend, the friend of the honest navy. And if he gets into Parliament, let me tell you, it will be the better for you. I don't say it will be the better for overlookers and screws, and rats and sprats; but it will be the better for every good fellow who takes his pot at the Sugar Loaf.'

Mr Johnson's exertions for the political education of the Sproxtton men did not stop here, which was the more disinterested in him as he did not expect to see them again, and could only set on foot an organisation by which their instruction could be continued without him. In this he was quite successful. A man known among the 'butties' as Pack, who had already been mentioned by Mr Chubb, presently joined the party, and had a private audience of Mr Johnson, that he might be instituted as the 'shepherd' of this new flock.

'That's a right down genelman,' said Pack, as he took the seat vacated by the orator, who had ridden away.

'What's his trade, think you?' said Gills, the wiry stone-cutter.

'Trade?' said Mr Chubb. 'He's one of the top-sawyers of the country. He works with his head, you may see that.'

'Let's have our pipes, then,' said Old Sleck; 'I'm pretty well tired o' jaw.'

'So am I,' said Dredge. 'It's wriggling work - like follering a stoat. It makes a man dry. I'd as lief hear preaching, on'y there's nought to be got by't. I shouldn't know which end I stood on if it wasn't for the tickets and the treatin'.'