Towards the hour of noon Harry Hodson, of Upcourt Farm, was slowly ascending the long slope that led to his dwelling. In his left hand he carried a hare, which swung slightly to and fro as he stepped out, and the black-tipped ears rubbed now and then against a bunch of grass. His double-barrel was under his right arm. Every day at the same hour Harry turned towards home, for he adhered to the ways of his fathers and dined at half-past twelve, except when the stress of harvest, or some important agricultural operation, disturbed the usual household arrangements. It was a beautiful October day, sunny and almost still, and, as he got on the high ground, he paused and looked round. The stubbles stretched far away on one side, where the country rose and fell in undulations. On the distant horizon a column of smoke, broadening at the top, lifted itself into the sky; he knew it was from the funnel of a steam-plough, whose furnace had just been replenished with coal. The appearance of the smoke somewhat resembled that left by a steamer at sea when the vessel is just below the horizon. On the other hand were wooded meadows, where the rooks were cawing--some in the oaks, some as they wheeled round in the air. Just beneath him stood a row of wheat ricks--his own. His gaze finally rested upon their conical roofs with satisfaction, and he then resumed his walk.

Even as he moved he seemed to bask in the sunshine; the sunshine pouring down from the sky above, the material sunshine of the goodly wheat ricks, and the physical sunshine of personal health and vigour. His walk was the walk of a strong, prosperous man--each step long, steady, and firm, but quite devoid of haste. He was, perhaps, forty years of age, in the very prime of life, and though stooping a little, like so many countrymen, very tall, and built proportionately broad across the shoulders and chest. His features were handsome--perhaps there was a trace of indolence in their good-humoured expression--and he had a thick black beard just marked with one thin wavy line of grey. That trace of snow, if anything, rather added to the manliness of his aspect, and conveyed the impression that he was at the fulness of life when youth and experience meet. If anything, indeed, he looked too comfortable, too placid. A little ambition, a little restlessness, would perhaps have been good for him.

By degrees he got nearer to the house; but it was by degrees only, for he stayed to look over every gate, and up into almost every tree. He stopped to listen as his ear caught the sound of hoofs on the distant road, and again at the faint noise of a gun fired a mile away. At the corner of a field a team of horses--his own--were resting awhile as the carter and his lad ate their luncheon. Harry stayed to talk to the man, and yet again at the barn door to speak to his men at work within with the winnowing machine. The homestead stood on an eminence, but was hidden by elms and sycamores, so that it was possible to pass at a distance without observing it.

On entering the sitting-room Harry leaned his gun against the wall in the angle between it and the bureau, from which action alone it might have been known that he was a bachelor, and that there were no children about the house to get into danger with fire-arms. His elderly aunt, who acted as housekeeper, was already at table waiting for him. It was spread with a snow-white cloth, and almost equally snow-white platter for bread--so much and so well was it cleaned. They ate home-baked bread; they were so many miles from a town or baker that it was difficult to get served regularly, a circumstance which preserved that wholesome institution. There was a chine of bacon, small ale, and a plentiful supply of good potatoes. The farmer did full justice to the sweet picking off the chine, and then lingered over an old
cheese. Very few words were spoken.

Then, after his dinner, he sat in his arm-chair--the same that he had used for many years--and took a book. For Harry rather enjoyed a book, provided it was not too new. He read works of science, thirty years old, solid and correct, but somewhat behind the age; he read histories, such as were current in the early part of the present century, but none of a later date than the end of the wars of the First Napoleon. The only thing modern he cared for in literature was a 'society' journal, sent weekly from London. These publications are widely read in the better class of farmsteads now. Harry knew something of most things, even of geology. He could show you the huge vertebrae of some extinct saurian, found while draining was being done. He knew enough of archaeology to be able to tell any enthusiastic student who chanced to come along where to find the tumuli and the earthworks on the Downs. He had several Roman coins, and a fine bronze spearhead, which had been found upon the farm. These were kept with care, and produced to visitors with pride. Harry really did possess a wide fund of solid, if quiet, knowledge. Presently, after reading a chapter or two, he would drop off into a siesta, till some message came from the men or the bailiff, asking for instructions.

The farmstead was, in fact, a mansion of large size, an old manor-house, and had it been situate near a fashionable suburb and been placed in repair would have been worth to let as much per annum as the rent of a small farm. But it stood in a singularly lonely and outlying position, far from any village of size, much less a town, and the very highway even was so distant that you could only hear the horse's hoofs when the current of air came from that direction. This was his aunt's--the housekeeper's--great complaint, the distance to the highway. She grumbled because she could not see the carriers' carts and the teams go by; she wanted to know what was going on.

Harry, however, seemed contented with the placid calm of the vast house that was practically empty, and rarely left it, except for his regular weekly visit to market. After the fashion of a thoroughbred farmer he was often rather late home on market nights. There were three brothers, all in farms, and all well to do; the other two were married, and Harry was finely plagued about being a bachelor. But the placid life at the old place--he had succeeded to his father--somehow seemed to content him. He had visitors at Christmas, he read his books of winter evenings and after dinner; in autumn he strolled round with his double-barrel and knocked over a hare or so, and so slumbered away the days. But he never neglected the farming--everything was done almost exactly as it had been done by his father.

Old Harry Hodson was in his time one of the characters of that country side. He was the true founder of the Hodson family. They had been yeomen in a small way for generations, farming little holdings, and working like labourers, plodding on, and never heard of outside their fifty-acre farms. So they might have continued till this day had not Old Harry Hodson arose to be the genius--the very Napoleon--of farming in that district. When the present Harry, the younger, had a visitor to his taste--_i.e._ one who was not in a hurry--he would, in the evening, pull out the books and papers and letters of his late father from the bureau (beside which stood the gun), and explain how the money was made. The logs crackled and sparkled on the hearth, the lamp burnt clear and bright; there was a low singing sound in the chimney; the elderly aunt nodded and worked in her arm-chair, and woke up and mixed fresh spirits and water, and went off to sleep again; and still Harry would sit and smoke and sip and talk. By-and-by the aunt would wish the visitor good-night, draw up the clock, and depart, after mixing fresh tumblers and casting more logs upon the fire, for well she knew her nephew's ways. Harry was no tippler, he never got intoxicated; but he would sit and smoke and sip and talk with a friend, and tell him all about it till the white daylight came peeping through the chinks in the shutters.

Old Harry Hodson, then, made the money, and put two of his sons in large farms, and paid all their expenses, so that they started fair, besides leaving his own farm to the third. Old Harry Hodson made the money, yet he could not have done it had he not married the exact woman. Women have made the fortunes of Emperors by their advice and assistance, and the greatest men the world has seen have owned that their success was owing to feminine counsel. In like manner a woman made the policy of an obscure farmer a success. When the old gentleman began to get well to do, and when he found his teeth not so strong as of yore, and his palate less able to face the coarse, fat, yellowy bacon that then formed the staple of the household fare, he actually ventured so far as to have one joint of butcher's meat, generally a leg of mutton, once a week. It was cooked for Sunday, and, so far as that kind of meat was concerned, lasted till the next Sunday. But his wife met this extravagant innovation with furious opposition. It was sheer waste; it was something almost unpardonably prodigal. They had eaten bacon all their lives, often bacon with the bristles thick
upon it, and to throw away money like this was positively wicked. However, the-old gentleman, being stubborn as a
horse-nail, persisted; the wife, still grumbling, calmed down; and the one joint of meat became an institution. Harry, the
younger, still kept it up; but it had lost its significance in his day, for he had a fowl or two in the week, and a hare or a
partridge, and, besides, had the choicest hams.

Now, this dispute between the old gentleman and his wife--this dispute as to which should be most parsimonious--was
typical of their whole course of life. If one saved cheese-parings, the other would go without cheese at all, and be
content with dry bread. They lived--indeed, harder than their own labourers, and it sometimes happened that the food
they thought good enough was refused by a cottager. When a strange carter, or shepherd, or other labourer came to the
house from a distance, perhaps with a wagon for a load of produce or with some sheep, it was the custom to give them
some lunch. These men, unaccustomed even in their own cottages to such coarse food, often declined to eat it, and went
away empty, but not before delivering their opinion of the fare, expressed in language of the rudest kind.

No economy was too small for old Hodson; in the house his wife did almost all the work. Nowadays a farmer's house
alone keeps the women of one, or even two, cottages fully employed. The washing is sent out, and occupies one cottage
woman the best part of her spare time. Other women come in to do the extra work, the cleaning up and scouring, and so
on. The expense of employing these women is not great; but still it is an expense. Old Mrs. Hodson did everything
herself, and the children roughed it how they could, playing in the mire with the pigs and geese. Afterwards, when old
Hodson began to get a little money, they were sent to a school in a market town. There they certainly did pick up the
rudiments, but lived almost as hard as at home. Old Hodson, to give an instance of his method, would not even fatten a
pig, because it cost a trifle of ready money for 'toppings,' or meal, and nothing on earth could induce him to part with a
coin that he had once grasped. He never fattened a pig (meaning for sale), but sold the young porkers directly they were
large enough to fetch a sovereign a-piece, and kept the money.

The same system was carried on throughout the farm. The one he then occupied was of small extent, and he did a very
large proportion of the work himself. He did not purchase stock at all in the modern sense; he grew them. If he went to
a sale he bought one or two despicable-looking cattle at the lowest price, drove them home, and let them gradually
gather condition. The grass they ate grew almost as they ate it--in his own words, 'They cut their own victuals'--_i.e._
with their teeth. He did not miss the grass blades, but had he paid a high price then he would have missed the money.

Here he was in direct conflict with modern farming. The theory of the farming of the present day is that time is money,
and, according to this, Hodson made a great mistake. He should have given a high price for his stock, have paid for
cake, &c., and fattened them up as fast as possible, and then realised. The logic is correct, and in any business or
manufacture could not be gainsaid. But Hodson did just the reverse. He did not mind his cattle taking a little time to get
into condition, provided they cost him no ready money. Theoretically, the grass they ate represented money, and might
have been converted to a better use. But in practice the reverse came true. He succeeded, and other men failed. His
cattle and his sheep, which he bought cheap and out of condition, quietly improved (time being no object), and he sold
them at a profit, from which there were no long bills to deduct for cake.

He purchased no machinery whilst in this small place--which was chiefly grass land--with the exception of a second-
hand haymaking machine. The money he made he put out at interest on mortgage of real property, and it brought in
about 4 per cent. It was said that in some few cases where the security was good he lent it at a much higher rate to other
farmers of twenty times his outward show. After awhile he went into the great farm now occupied by his son Harry,
and commenced operations without borrowing a single shilling. The reason was because he was in no hurry. He slowly
grew his money in the little farm, and then, and not till then, essayed the greater. Even then he would not have ventured
had not the circumstances been peculiarly favourable. Like the present, it was a time of depression generally, and in
this particular case the former tenant had lived high and farmed bad. The land was in the worst possible state, the
landlord could not let it, and Hodson was given to understand that he could have it for next to nothing at first.

Now it was at this crisis of his life that he showed that in his own sphere he possessed the true attribute of genius. Most
men who had practised rigid economy for twenty years, whose hours, and days, and weeks had been occupied with
little petty details, how to save a penny here and a fourpenny bit yonder, would have become fossilised in the process.
Their minds would have become as narrow as their ways. They would have shrunk from any venture, and continued in the old course to the end of their time.

Old Hodson, mean to the last degree in his way of living, narrow to the narrowest point where sixpence could be got, nevertheless had a mind. He saw that his opportunity had come, and he struck. He took the great corn farm, and left his little place. The whole country side at once pronounced him mad, and naturally anticipated his failure. The country side did not yet understand two things. They did not know how much money he had saved, and they did not know the capacity of his mind. He had not only saved money, and judiciously invested it, but he had kept it a profound secret, because he feared if his landlord learnt that he was saving money so fast the rent of the little farm would have been speedily raised. Here, again, he was in direct conflict with the modern farmer. The modern man, if he has a good harvest or makes a profit, at once buys a 'turn-out,' and grand furniture, and in every way 'exalts his gate.' When landlords saw their tenants living in a style but little inferior to that they themselves kept up, it was not really very surprising that the rents a few years back began to rise so rapidly. In a measure tenants had themselves to blame for that upward movement.

Old Hodson carried his money to a long distance from home to invest, so anxious was he that neither his landlord nor any one else should know how quickly he was getting rich. So he entered upon his new venture--the great upland farm, with its broad cornfields, its expanse of sheep walk and down, its meadows in the hollow, its copses (the copses alone almost as big as his original holding), with plenty of money in his pocket, and without being beholden to bank or lawyer for a single groat. Men thought that the size of the place, the big manor-house, and so on, would turn his head. Nothing of the kind; he proceeded as cautiously and prudently as previously. He began by degrees. Instead of investing some thousand pounds in implements and machinery at a single swoop, instead of purchasing three hundred sheep right off with a single cheque, he commenced with one thing at a time. In this course he was favoured by the condition of the land, and by the conditions of the agreement. He got it, as it were, gradually into cultivation, not all at once; he got his stock together, a score or two at a time, as he felt they would answer. By the year the landlord was to have the full rent: the new tenant was quite able to pay it, and did pay it without hesitation at the very hour it was due. He bought very little machinery, nothing but what was absolutely necessary--no expensive steam-plough. His one great idea was still the same, _i.e._ spend no money.

Yet he was not bigoted or prejudiced to the customs of his ancestors--another proof that he was a man of mind. Hodson foresaw, before he had been long at Upcourt Farm, that corn was not going in future to be so all in all important as it had been. As he said himself, 'We must go to our flocks now for our rent, and not to our barn doors.' His aim, therefore, became to farm into and through his flock, and it paid him well. Here was a man at once economical to the verge of meanness, prudent to the edge of timidity, yet capable of venturing when he saw his chance; and above all, when that venture succeeded, capable of still living on bacon and bread and cheese, and putting the money by.

In his earlier days Hodson was as close of speech as of expenditure, and kept his proceedings a profound secret. As he grew older and took less active exercise--the son resident at home carrying out his instructions--he became more garrulous and liked to talk about his system. The chief topic of his discourse was that a farmer in his day paid but one rent, to the landlord, whereas now, on the modern plan, he paid eight rents, and sometimes nine. First, of course, the modern farmer paid his landlord (1); next he paid the seedsman (2); then the manure manufacturer (3); the implement manufacturer (4); the auctioneer (5); the railroad, for transit (6); the banker, for short loans (7); the lawyer or whoever advanced half his original capital (8); the schoolmaster (9).

To begin at the end, the rent paid by the modern farmer to the schoolmaster included the payment for the parish school; and, secondly, and far more important, the sum paid for the education of his own children. Hodson maintained that many farmers paid as much hard cash for the education of their children, and for the necessary social surroundings incident to that education, as men used to pay for the entire sustenance of their households. Then there was the borrowed capital, and the short loans from the banker; the interest on these two made two more rents. Farmers paid rent to the railroad for the transit of their goods. The auctioneer, whether he sold cattle and sheep, or whether he had a depot for horses, was a new man whose profits were derived from the farmers. There were few or no auctioneers or horse depositories when he began business; now the auctioneer was everywhere, and every country town of any consequence
had its establishment for the reception and sale of horses. Farmers sunk enough capital in steam-ploughs and machinery to stock a small farm on the old system, and the interest on this sunk capital represented another rent. It was the same with the artificial manure merchant and with the seedsman. Farmers used to grow their own seed, or, at most, bought from the corn dealers or a neighbour if by chance they were out. Now the seedsman was an important person, and a grand shop might be found, often several shops, in every market town, the owners of which shops must likewise live upon the farmer. Here were eight or nine people to pay rent to instead of one.

No wonder farming nowadays was not profitable. No wonder farmers could not put their sons into farms. Let any one look round their own neighbourhood and count up how many farmers had managed to do that. Why, they were hardly to be found. Farmers' sons had to go into the towns to get a livelihood now. Farming was too expensive a business on the modern system—it was a luxury for a rich man, who could afford to pay eight or nine landlords at once. The way he had got on was by paying one landlord only. Old Hodson always finished his lecture by thrusting both hands into his breeches pockets, and whispering to you confidentially that it was not the least use for a man to go into farming now unless he had got ten thousand pounds.

It was through the genius of this man that his three sons were doing so well. At the present day, Harry, the younger, took his ease in his arm-chair after his substantial but plain dinner, with little care about the markets or the general depression. For much of the land was on high ground and dry, and the soil there benefited by the wet. At the same time sheep sold well, and Harry's flocks were large and noted. So he sauntered round with his gun, and knocked over a hare, and came comfortably home to dinner, easy in his mind, body, and pocket.

Harry was not a man of energy and intense concentrated purpose like his father. He could never have built up a fortune, but, the money being there, Harry was just the man to keep it. He was sufficiently prudent to run no risk and to avoid speculation. He was sufficiently frugal not to waste his substance on riotous living, and he was naturally of a placid temperament, so that he was satisfied to silently and gradually accumulate little by little. His knowledge of farming, imbibed from his father, extended into every detail. If he seldom touched an implement now, he had in his youth worked like the labourers, and literally followed the plough. He was constantly about on the place, and his eye, by keeping the men employed, earned far more money than his single arm could have done. Thus he dwelt in the lonely manor-house, a living proof of the wisdom of his father's system.

Harry is now looking, in his slow complacent way, for a wife. Being forty years of age, he is not in a great hurry, and is not at all inclined to make a present of himself to the first pretty face he meets. He does not like the girl of the period; he fears she would spend too much money. Nor, on the other hand, does he care for the country hoyden, whose mind and person have never risen above the cheese-tub, with red hands, awkward gait, loud voice, and limited conversation. He has read too much, in his quiet way, and observed too much, in his quiet way, also, for that. He wants a girl well educated, but not above her station, unaffected and yet comely, fond of home and home duties, and yet not homely. And it would be well if she had a few hundreds—a very small sum would do—for her dower. It is not that he wants the money, which can be settled on herself; but there is a vein of the old, prudent common sense running through Harry's character. He is in no hurry; in time he will meet with her somewhere.