

back every Thursday nigh on fifty year, barrin' when the snow had drifted too deep; and I've never come to no harm on this road, lonesome as it be. But I can understand how a gentleman like yourself, from Lon'on mebbe, should find it a bit solitary-like."

"Solitary! Well, yes, it is solitary, there's no denying that," answered his companion in a deep, mellow voice that conveyed a volume of information, true or false, concerning the owner's pedigree, disposition, and education; and all in his favour. "But I mustn't let London suffer for my nervousness. I'm as nervous as a cat to-night, I confess, and for my life I couldn't tell why! I'm a Yorkshireman."

"Eh, not from Lon'on!" exclaimed the old villager, glancing back involuntarily towards the place where the stranger's Gladstone bag lay in the bottom of the cart.

The young Yorkshireman smiled.

"I come from London just now, certainly, as my luggage-labels attest," he said. "But that doesn't make me a Londoner any more than the fact of my being on my way to Scotland makes me a Scotchman."

"Scotchman! Eh, no, you don't need to be that," struck in the old man with decision. "I've no greet love for Scotchmen myself, though we've got one of them for landlord now, and he's not a bad sort isn't Lord Kildonan. But surely, sir, if you're journeying to Scotland, it's a good bit out of your way to go to Branksome. It's getting southwards again like."

The gentleman did not answer, and the villager, after a short pause, went on in reluctant apology.

"Of course it's no business of mine, sir, and I ask your pardon if I've been too free like, but——"

The stranger cut him short, speaking slowly and with a sort of drowsiness in his manner.