

as coarse as the bristles of a hog. He was short and rather stout of build ; was somewhat 'horsey' in make-up ; and had a face rather handsome. But that he was low-bred, there could not be the shadow of a doubt.

'I thought you had eluded me, Aster,' he said in the most familiar way ; 'thought you had stolen away up the river with that book.'

'Oh, indeed. I have been reading here during the greater part of the afternoon. Mr. Gray, let me introduce to you Mr. Ham ; Mr. Ham, Mr. Gray.' Roland bowed with much politeness ; but Ham's stiff, pompous bend was an assertion of superiority.

"I have probably broken in upon your *tête-à-tête* with this young man, Aster ; so I'll take a turn out and have a jaw with your guv'nor.' In a moment he was gone.

'This is your next door neighbour, I presume, Miss Aster ?'

'Yes ; he and papa are great friends. He consults papa upon nearly everything that he does upon his farm ; and papa in turn consults him concerning our affairs.'

'I suspected as much. I presume that you and he are very intimate friends. I observe that he calls you "Aster."'

'I did not ask him to do so ; and since he chooses to adopt this familiar fashion I cannot well rebuke him, papa and he are such friends.'

'Then do you permit *me* to call you Aster ?'

'O indeed, I wish that you would do it ; and all the time.' As she said this her eyes brightened.

'Thanks, Aster. I now feel that I am on equal footing with the rest. You are sure that you will not mind me Astering you before *him* ? Doing it frequently ?'

'Not a bit. I shall be pleased ; I shall be *very much* pleased, because he seemed to take a pleasure in being familiar before you. And we are not such great friends after all.'

'You must not talk nonsense, Aster. It would never