

A Deal in Heifers.

Frank Dilnot.

WILLIAM and his partner Simon were the blacksmiths of North Hyben. They owned their forge, insulted customers, and maintained a determined and rasping rule over the village. They were unpopular, but they could not be ignored. Stalwart upholders of law and order and the Church, they took a fierce delight in speaking well of some of them behind their backs. Squire Brierley they thought much of, but that did not prevent them from telling him of his faults in farming, or criticising the architecture of his new house. Consequently there was no particular cause for remark when Mr. Panyon fell under their disapproval. Mr. Panyon was a superior squire who farmed for recreation and did not make it pay; but the Panyons had held their heads erect in Hyben for generations, and were accorded an hereditary respect.

Now, William and Simon had come to the conclusion that Mr. Panyon was living beyond his means, and they not only spoke loudly of it between themselves and to the villagers, but took opportunity of reproving Mr. Panyon in person.

"If," said William, "you was to do away with them there beagles you're keeping, Mr. Panyon, you'd be able to get new harrows and not trouble us with this continual patching up of the old 'uns. 'Pend upon it, sir, I should get rid of they beagles if I was you. You ain't thought any more of because you keeps beagles."

"How dare you speak to me like that?" said Mr. Panyon.

Later in the day William said to his partner:

"This 'ere Panyon is getting a bit overbearing. He was right down rude to me this morning."

"Ah," said taciturn Simon.

"Shan't stand much more of Panyon.

Rettie can write out his bill presently."

"A hity-tity lot," said Rettie, the elderly spinster sister of William. "I hear they have's the butcher call there every day, and there's people like we, living very well, ain't had any butcher's meat, what with the pigs and the fowls, for a matter of thirty years, not since our poor father died."

That evening William trudged up to Mr. Panyon's house with the bill. He looked with grim disdain on the flower beds along the drive and the whitened steps leading up to the front door.

Mr. Panyon came out to see his visitor.

"Can you let me have this little account, Farmer Panyon?" said William, handing over the bill.

"Certainly. But it's rather extraordinary, isn't it? Of course, if you're in want of money——"

"We ain't," interrupted William. "We ain't in no want of money. Weve got the bit of farm, which is freehold, our own, mind ye. But what with beagles and holding your heads so high, we thinks you're getting a bit too finnickin'. We ain't particular about doing your work at all."

It was in the next week that Simon brought to the forge the story that Mr. Panyon's financial affairs were approaching a crisis, that his creditors were beginning to press him, and that Panyon House, the pride of North Hyben for the last 150 years, was in danger.

"Never heard o' such a thing," said William. "Never thought o' it. Believed he was as safe as houses. Who told you, Simon?"

Simon gave incontestable proof.

"Well, to be sure!" said William.

Within a month the difficulties of Mr. Panyon were common property, and the respect of the village had gone to zero. The labourers forgot to touch their hats,