

"Yes, but you surely do not propose to cut my timber for nothing?"

"Well, it won't cost ye much. We'll do it friendly like."

"Why not name a price?"

"Well, ye see, ye could pay us something for our time. We'll 'ave to knock off Guvment roadmakin' to do yer job."

"What is your regular charge per hundred feet?"

"Look 'ere, mate, ye talk as if a bloke was tryin' to do ye! We're the best sawyers in the place, though I say it myself, and we won't slip ye up. Just say the word, and me and my mate we goes on the job."

"I don't do business in that way, Mr. Drake. I'll calculate how much timber I want, then if you care to give an estimate, it will be considered. Now let us change the subject."

"Well, if that's all the thanks a bloke gets for trudgin' 'alf a mile through the bush to do 'is neighbour a good turn—for a paltry little job like yourn, ye won't get no tenders at all."

I ignored these and other disconnected grunblings, and turned my attention to the camp-oven, in which my uncooked bread had been set to rise. The Bloke cooled down, and assisted me with his advice.

"Kneaded that batch two 'ours ago, did ye?" he said. "And when did ye set yer sponge? It's goin' to be 'cavy bread, mate. Praps yer yeast is bad. I'll bring ye down some of mine as I pass to-morrer, then ye can start a fresh lot. No, it ain't no trouble."

I felt rather ashamed of my churlish refusal to give him pit-sawing at daily wages. He seemed kind-hearted and friendly. Of course I did not decline his yeast, of which I so evidently stood in need. He gave me a few hints on baking, and I received them in the right spirit. Then he put my gratitude to a practical test.

"Ye'll not be usin' yer 'orse much?" he began. "I'd like to borrow 'im to-morrow,

to go packin'. I got five 'orse loads at Eketahuna, and so I'm borrowin' extra 'orses."

"My pony isn't fit for packing. Not strong enough."

"Oh! I'll pack light on 'im."

"I'm afraid it's impossible."

The Bloke evidently considered me a very disagreeable man. His eyes gleamed maliciously.

"By gosh!" he exclaimed, "ye foll in, right enough when ye give six pound for that moke!"



THERE HE SAT—THE BLOKE, SO SELF-STYLED.

"Indeed?"

"'E was offered to me for thirty bob. 'No,' says I, 'I wouldn't 'ave 'im if ye slung 'im at me!' 'E aint fit for them bush roads at all."

I smoked in silence. The Bloke's eyes roved round the whare. "Whatever's that dripping from the chimbley?" he cried. "Fat, ain't it?"

"Oh, never mind!"

But the Bloke's head was already up the wide chimney. "What's this up 'ere?" he cried.

"If you must know, it is a ham I am smoking."