

HUSTLER'S EXPLOITS.

A YANKEE IN MAORILAND.

By "QUILL."



WANTED a journalist, apply AX, 'Star' Office." So ran the advertisement in the evening newspaper, and as I was weary of the clerical work upon which I was then engaged, I put in an application for the position.

On the Wednesday, two days after I had applied, I received a short note, signed by Richard Hustler, asking me to call at the "Laurels" at half-past four on the following day.

I was shown into a large room, and the heat of a blazing fire in the grate felt "good." It was indeed a wretched day. A southerly gale howled dismally, and every now and then a squall came screaming along, bringing with it cold, drenching showers.

Hustler greeted me warmly, and then referred to "my" very bad climate. I smiled inwardly. It is the usual habit of travellers when anathematising bad weather to refer to it in this possessive way.

Whilst Hustler was commenting upon the peculiarities of my climate, I took the opportunity of carefully observing him. He was an American, and spoke with all the confidence and force so characteristic of that civilisation. His voice was strong and resonant, which bespoke abundance of vitality; whilst the broad shoulders and massive body proclaimed him to be a man of immense strength. The clean-shaven face with its heavy under-jaw, and the large and rather sensuous mouth gave power if not refinement in his face. In short, here

was a man who never would be cornered.

We soon came to terms. The story of the rise and progress of Rutland, one of the leading cities in New Zealand, required to be written optimistically.

"The good people here," Hustler said, "are modest, and I want you to describe the principal commercial undertakings in a flattering manner." The "copy" was required for a book he intended publishing, to be entitled the "Rise and Progress of Rutland."

I left the warm room, pondering as to what his dodge might be. I felt that there was deception somewhere, and I did not like it. However, I reflected that after all it was no business of mine. All I had to do was to write to order.

I toiled away and posted my articles regularly, but as for the payments, they at last became so irregular, that I was obliged to withhold the "copy" until arrears had been settled.

One day, whilst hurrying through Queer Street, I was greeted by a hearty "good morning" from a hansom cab, which almost dashed on to the pavement at my side. The next moment Hustler was shaking hands with me, and begging me to cross over with him to the Imperial Hotel as he wished to speak to me privately. The man was evidently agitated.

"Look here," he commenced, holding up for my inspection twenty or thirty orders, signed by the prominent merchants of Rutland, for £50 and upwards, for the publication of the articles I had written. I waited for an explanation, marveling at the same time at his power