

Wellington, characteristically taking a first-class berth, and living in the most expensive hotel while he looked about for a situation, and found none. When his money was gone, he accepted a short engagement in the orchestra of the theatre, on the expiration of which he was fain to shave off his moustache and join a variety company as comic singer. This burst up at Waipukurau, and each member of it had to shift for himself. Thus it was that Cyril Fortescue came to tramp the country as "John Smith."

Six months had passed, during which his

the morning off you go, and you won't even take the trouble to shut my gates, and my sheep get mixed. I'm sick of you! Try some other station."

"You won't have us, won't you?" growled the ruffian. "Then all I've got to say is, you'll be sorry for this! D—— you, you white-livered cur!"

A blow from McQuoid's fist felled him, and he picked himself up bleeding, and went off with his mate, both vowing vengeance.

The next day McQuoid called to Smith: "I'm going to ride to Gisborne. Meet me at nine at the boundary gate, and if I bring back any papers, you can take them across to Melville."

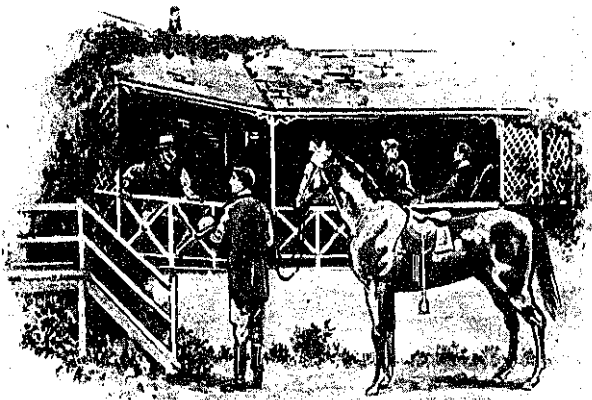
At half-past eight, Cyril was sitting under a clump of firs at the trysting place. Suddenly his meditations were interrupted by the sound of voices. He recognised them as those of the sundowners of the previous evening.

"Once we've fixed that up, down he must come, and then it's 'ard if you an' me can't settle 'im!"

"Stop yer jawin', an' come down at once, or we shall miss 'im!"

Fully convinced that there was some plot against McQuoid, Cyril watched the fellows till they disappeared at a turn in the road. He would have liked to get past them to warn their intended victim, but that was impossible. Presently he caught a glimpse of them as they descended into a hollow where the road was overhung by trees. Here they stopped, and Cyril, getting through the fence, stalked them as near as he could.

Hark! A horse's hoofs clattering down the opposite hill. Nearer and nearer; and then a crash! The horse had fallen and had thrown his rider, who was instantly set upon by the ruffians. A heavy blow under the ear from Cyril's fist, struck one senseless. The other rose and threw himself upon Cyril.



"MY NAME'S HAMILTON—CAPTAIN HAMILTON, OF THE 17TH LANCERS."

duties as groom had brought him into almost daily contact with Jessie McQuoid. On these occasions each was "on guard." But although his manner was that of a superior sort of servant towards his mistress, and her communications to him were strictly limited to matters affecting her horse, their eyes were traitors, and betrayed the secret so jealously guarded by their tongues.

One evening, two evil looking fellows carrying swags came up to McQuoid and asked for quarters.

"Didn't you see the notice?" asked the irate Scot.

"Yes, boss, but we've been walking all day, and we thought that for once——"

"Now look here! You fellows come here and get your tucker and shake-down, and in