

half-mile spurt, then we'll have the laugh against the old boy," said I, and we spurred on hopefully.

But this little demon trotter never seemed to slacken his speed. He kicked mile after mile behind him in slashing style, never breaking from the trot. It was only by spurring our horses into a gallop and going at racing speed that we could eventually catch him. Then he pulled up, but we had to admit that this pony of his even now obeyed the rein unwillingly. He danced along like a racehorse who has just had his preliminary canter, and wonders when the race is to begin.

"Best bit of stuff this side the line, boys," grunted the old chap complacently. "I never keep bad uns."

We readily agreed with him. We thought we'd seen all sorts of horses before, but had evidently made a mistake.

The old gentleman invariably pulled up at every wayside accommodation house we passed. He always required accommodating with either a long beer or a whisky. It was part of his creed. "A man spends his capital in putting up a house on these upcountry tracks to supply travellers with drink," he said, "and where is he if the travellers won't give him the opportunity? I reckon the man who doesn't stop and take a liquor, even if he isn't extra thirsty, is a mean hound. He's depriving a fellow-creature of his living. Knocking shingles off the poor fellow's roof, that's just come there to oblige him and his fellow travellers. I'd make it a penal offence—that's what I would!

"Here, landlord, fill these up again!"

And the old chap looked fiercely around as if to see if any of the delinquents he denounced were within hearing.

"Mind you, boys," he added, mildly, after the order was obeyed, and his share of it had gurgled

down his capacious throat, "I don't advocate drunkenness. It's disgusting. Especially in fellows of your age. But a glass or two taken like this hurts no man."

It amused us to notice how careful the old chap was to warn us boys, as he would persist in calling us, though we considered we had passed that stage ages ago.

We came to the conclusion that there were many in the district of the same creed as our old friend, or that the nature of the road made it an exceedingly thirsty one to travel for houses of call were thicker than usual.

After passing a number, and carefully avoiding showing any preference, in our treatment of them, the old gentleman became still more loquacious.

"We shorthorn breeders in New Zealand, you know, boys, are a jovial lot. We can hold our own anywhere when the whisky goes round."

"I can easily believe it!" said I.

"I remember a trip I once took to Australia," he continued, ignoring my remark. "I wanted to see what sort of cattle they had over there. I was driving up in a coach to some place with an ungodly name. It was raining hard, and the five passengers were all inside, no one hankered after the box seat. I never in my life saw such an unsociable lot of fellows. Two of them were parsons. I didn't expect much from them. The other two looked like station holders, and should have had something to say. I didn't care to tackle the parsons, but I put a question or two to the others. They replied certainly, but a bare 'yes' or 'no' doesn't make a fellow communicative. I stood it all the morning as well as I could. But it was a terrible strain. I'm a bit fond of a chat myself. When we stopped at a pub, I asked them to join me. I thought it was maybe the want of whisky that had tightened their tongues. But they