

NEW ZEALAND STORIES.

The Editor desires to state that New Zealand Stories by New Zealand writers, will be published on this page regularly. The page will be open to any contributor, and all accepted stories will be paid for at current rates. Terms bright sketches of Dominion life and people, woven in short story form, are required, and should be headed "New Zealand Stories."

The Lady Poacher

By FORESTER CLARKE.

BOTH shepherds and Maoris hung about the men's quarters of Te Waka station, while a sallow-looking cook dished up the evening meal. Several sheep dogs squatted panting at the open door, anxious to see the men's repast. Presently a bright-looking young Maori took his place at the table.

"What price Rangit?" one of the shepherds called out. Rangit grinned and passed down a mouthful of hot beer.

"Yes, Rangit got on his tugs before now that he can go down to the pub and pop to Cissie before the hop begins."

"No, to lose he talk to Cissie. He ask her who poison his dog, and Cissie say a red haired fox, and point over to Lonsola's house, and to boss he wild" accused Rangit, with disgust.

"You can't blame them for laying poison, as long as they put notices about," said the same shepherd, who was a new hand.

"No, that's right too, but you see old Murdoch has a great set on them, and when he took ill and had to go to Wellington, he sent for his nephew, and to him against them. I heard to-day that he had turned ranger as well as being here in order to catch the girl about a license," explained the old shepherd.

"That will be to clever pokie," muttered Rangit a little later, as he saddled his horse. He rode quietly away until he reached the creek, then turned swiftly into a narrow billie track that led over the hill to Lonsola's house.

"What Rangit, what's gone wrong with you?" Miss Lonsola asked from the porch.

"I can't tell you what to new, less she told that to good dog he bit her to death," said Rangit,

and lowering his voice, he told her of the fishing license.

Marion's laugh rang out over the manuka covered hills.

"It was fine of you to come and warn me Rangit, and now I'll be prepared."

"You go careful Wahine Marion—him nice philler and he only know what old Murdoch tell him," warned Rangit, as a parting injunction.

Marion slowly re-entered the house and made her way to the kitchen, where Maggie and a half-caste Maori were just removing the last of a batch of bread from the oven.

"Maggie, did you ever wish yourself a man?" she asked abruptly, seating herself on a three-legged stool.

"Why, no! Miss Marion, why?"

"Well I wish I were a man to-night, and I'd go down to Te Waka and give old Murdoch's nephew the most unmerciful thrashing, and then I'd stand over him and tell him that my father was a gentleman, which his uncle was not, and I'd tell him that when my father had the misfortune to lose his sheep, his crafty old uncle insisted on lending him money, and before my father had time to meet the bill, his Shylock uncle foreclosed and took the best part of our land as payment, the rich valley and the dear little creek, and left my father only the hills, and now he'd make us get a license to catch a few trout and then stop us trespassing on his land!" Marion stopped for want of breath.

"Don't go worrying your head, Miss Marion, your poor mother she worry till she die."

"Yes, and I'd tell him that too," continued Marion, her eyes flashing, "and I'd tell him that I'll just shoot as many game as I like, and catch as many trout as I want."

"Perhaps he isn't as bad as old Murdoch," suggested Maggie.

"Yes, he is, worse I believe, for he told Cissie before them all that he meant to catch me, and Huta says he was prowling about the creek early this morning, and that's how his dog took the poison," and Marion sat nursing her knee and wrinking up her brow. Presently a smile lighted her face. "Maggie, I believe I'll best him yet. Good night!" And she left as abruptly as she came.

A glorious November day, with the sun glinting on the innumerable manuka covered hills that stretched down to the blue sea, only the deep gorges and gulches between making a break. But they made up for the monotony of the hills for they were laden with ferns and mosses and creeping vines, and the tiny streams racing down the hill-sides and tumbling in little falls over broken limestone and rock, and the tiny tracks the sheep had made circling the hills round and round.

Along one of these tracks Donald Murdoch was slowly making his way with his eyes intently fixed on the little creek at an angle where the best trout sported.

Presently he almost ran forward as he caught sight of a rod and white sun-blond and blouse. Down the hill at full speed he got tangled in a lawyer vine. By the time he extricated himself and got up the next steep pinch, he had lost sight of the bonnet but there were half-a-dozen shiny shining trout dangling from a tree overhanging the creek.

"Love, but I've got her at last," he breathed, and then he found himself facing a stiff cliff. "I'm out and it's what's foot's country is this!" and fell well down a little gully—again on a rise, and "Thank Heaven, she's still there," as he saw the fish hanging, and caught a glimpse of white from the bank.

Then when he gained the last little rise he looked down on the angler. "What in the name—oh, confound it!" he broke off with a red face, and quick-

ly made tracks over the hill until hidden from view.

For there, sitting on the bank, was Marion, calmly taking off her stockings, her blouse already half off showing one white arm. No sooner was he over the hill than she snatched a Maori kit and bundled fish and boots into it, and folding up her rod she waded waist-deep through the creek to a steep bank on the opposite side, covered with wine-berry and climatis. Taking a strong hold of the wine-berry she climbed up several feet and disappeared through a small opening, closing the creepers back after her, crawled a few feet through and dropped on the other side. In a few minutes she was inside her own orchard, Rangit had shown her the cave before, hidden with bracken fern and scrub on the land side.

Donald Murdoch was in a quandary. He waited some time, then ventured to peep over the hill—no sign. Came a bit closer, then walked boldly to the spot where Marion had sat. Amazingly he stayed about him. From his hiding place he had commanded a view of the creek both ways, except the cleft where Marion had hidden. A cold sweat broke over him. "Glad, but I can't stand this, I'd better face the music," and his hurriedly made his way round by the little rustic bridge and into the heart of a sweet smelling garden. His sweetness sent a chill down his spine. "What it?" He shook himself together and knocked.

Presently a stately man with white hair and beard was looking inquiringly into his face. In utter confusion Murdoch stammered out "Good morning."

"Good morning to you sir, can it be possible you are our new neighbour Mr. Murdoch?" the old man asked courteously extending his hand.

"Yes—er—how do you do, I thought I would like to look you up and your—er—daughter?"

"Why of course sir, come in, there's no occasion in the least; why the old fool should extend to the younger branches—none whatever," he answered holding the way into his house. "Maggie tell Miss Lonsola that Mr. Murdoch has done us the honour to call."

Poor Murdoch mistook his lips. Then there was a vision of a tall girl in white with glorious auburn hair and soft peachy skin. The old man was introducing them and Murdoch was on his feet, taking her hand and looking into the depths of a pair of clear hazel eyes.

"Oh I am thankful to meet you," was all he could say, to the old man's utter astonishment, but presently the fruit dawned on Marion and she could scarcely keep from laughing—that this big, brown, handsome man in the knicker and gaiters was the hateful Murdoch's nephew!

Somehow quite naturally he found himself stopping to lunch and then away



THERE ARE OTHER CORONATIONS.