



By COLONEL MORRIS.

Illustrated by Frances Hodgkins.

IT is just 11 p.m. The swing doors of the bar entrance of an hotel, situated in a goldfields township in Otago, are thrust open, and two or three late customers come laughing from within. It is the hour for closing. A sound of scuffling is heard, once more the doors fly open, and a man is shot out into the road where, after a stagger or two, he subsides on his back in the mud. The burly barman, who has just ejected him, stands in the doorway with heightened colour and outstretched arm, his white shirt sleeves rolled up above the elbow gleaming in the bright light above the bar counter. "None of yer bloomin' rot now, Slippery Sam," he cries, "ye've got yer skin full—so be off! If ye give me any more of yer cheek I'll knock yer blamed head off! Be off, and sleep where ye can! If I catch yer in the stable again, I'll have yer run in as sure as eggs is eggs! I'm not going to have the whole bloomin' shanty burnt down 'cos of ye—so there!" As he concluded he turned and went into the bar again.

The figure on the road slowly rose from its recumbent position, and revealed itself in the bright light from the large lamp over the front door as that of a man certainly not

more than middle aged, but as wan and emaciated, as weak and tottery as an old man of three score and ten. His face was bloated, his eyes bleared and bloodshot, his hair long, tangled and unwashed. His clothes, soiled, patched and ragged, had the appearance of being cast on him with a pitchfork, and kept in their place by a miracle. He shook his fist at the closed bar door, and stooped as though groping for a stone; but, as light after light within was extinguished, he seemed to think better of it, and staggered reeling from side to side out of the circle of light cast by the lamp until he was swallowed up by the mirky night.

The sun rose the following morn on an ideal day for the anxious farmer. A bright clear sky without a fleck, a cool gentle breeze tempering the promised heat, for the sun just clearing the horizon looked like a disc of polished copper.

In the large paddock adjoining the hotel there were already signs of work, although it was but 5 a.m. The morrow was Christmas day, and farmer McLeod and his son William were anxious to get in their hay crop before the holiday, as in the uncertain climate of Central Otago it was impossible to calculate on fine weather for forty-eight hours ahead. Farmer McLeod was a big burly man, his round, rubicund face, the result of health and an open air life, was the picture of cheerfulness and good temper. His son William, or "Wully" as every one called him, a great stalwart fellow, over six feet high, and strong as a lion, was a true "chip of the old block."

"Here, Wully, here comes the dray at last!" cried the old man, smiling indulgently as he looked across to where his son was agreeably employed in^{ly} whispering into the ears of an extremely pretty girl in a blue spotted print and huge sun bonnet, which hid her blushing cheeks from all but Wully. This was a niece of McLeod's down from Dunedin for a few weeks' country air and exercise to freshen her up after a long winter spent in a close factory. But it was patent to all that sweet Nelly Douglas would never more return to such slavery, for had not