

"Yes, yes. Of course you are right. You always are. You are the most wonderfully practical little woman in the world. What shall we do? Have you decided that?"

"I think we had better try to keep a store."

"A store! Good gracious! Why a store? Isn't that rather—rather——" he paused for a word, and I supplied it in my usual manner.

"*Infra dig*, you would say, and I suppose it is. But the fact remains that we must do something, and a store seems about the only thing that we can manage. The only thing that does not require skilled labour of some kind, and unfortunately neither you nor I have had the training to fit us for getting our own living. We might take up land. Mr Staunton says that any one can farm. But I doubt it. I don't think you would know which end of a plough to hold, and I'm very sure I should not. And there would be trees to fell and the land to clear." (This of course was a mistake, as we should be scarcely likely to take up a North Island bush section; but my knowledge of up-country life at that time was chiefly obtained from American books of life and adventure in the Far West, and a log cabin in the midst of a half-cleared paddock was my idea of a country life.)

Jack acknowledged that he had never seen a plough near enough to pass an opinion as to its business end, but opined "that what man had done man might do," and that he supposed he could learn.

"There's no time for that. We must begin to earn some money at once. How much do you think we have spent since we came out two months ago?"

"Don't know, and don't much care. About twice as much as we ought, I suppose."

I told him, and he made a little grimace.

"I call it great economy," he declared. "I used to spend twice as much at home."

"Well, at that rate our money will last us exactly three years and eight months. And what is to become of us at the end of that time? There is nothing for it but to try the store. You see I could help in that. Keep the books and mind the shop. Oh! I really

think I shall like it. Quite a number of great people at Home have gone into trade of late years," and I mentioned several well-known instances in London Society. "One has only got to weigh out the things carefully and see that one makes no mistakes. Always give good articles, and never charge too much or too little. Oh! I am certain we shall like it, and at any rate we shall be doing something."

My eagerness carried the day. Jack had no feeling one way or the other. Work, of the kind that earns daily bread, was not an inherited instinct with him. Not that he was lazy, he was full of life and energy, but he had no commercial instincts and never acquired them.

So we bought a section in a rising township, and proceeded to erect a house and store.

The township was certainly rising in the sense that it had not yet risen, and I may add, in parenthesis, that it is still rising in the same sense.

We saw it first on paper, and it looked very imposing. The plans were nicely drawn and colored in mathematical parallelograms, with here and there a corner cut off to suit the exigencies of the land, through which a creek wound its serpentine course, interfering a good deal with the said parallelograms. Through the centre of the plan ran a high road or main street, and there were several minor streets at right angles. One good large section was marked "Church"—the church of the future; another was allocated for a school, and all the rest were pretty much at our disposal. It was explained to us that a store, a blacksmith's forge, later a hotel, and still later a school and a bank, go to form a rising township in New Zealand. Our store would therefore be the nucleus of Strathelare.

The township was ten miles from the nearest railway station, and two from the pleasant homestead of our kind friends, the Stauntons, who invited us to stay with them while our own house was being built.

When I first saw Strathelare, my heart sank, for I found it consisted of two cottages