

Maclise's Goose.

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Illustrated by the Author.

CHAPTER I.



MAIWHARE, in the Province of Hawke's Bay, is not a well known holiday resort. This is not surprising, as Maiwhare is not by any means an enticing place to the casual visitor. However, the train stops there, if

requested, and the belated passenger can walk, if he likes, as far as the Criterion Hotel, and have a little refreshment of a doubtful character; "fusel-oil" is cheap at Maiwhare, and the trade is large on Saturday night.

Fourteen bushmen, a bricklayer, and two bullock drivers get paralytically drunk at the Criterion every Saturday. It is their "week-end," and they would not resign their right to it for all the policemen in Hawke's Bay.

But the business of "The Cri" does not consist entirely of these regular customers. Commercial gentlemen in various lines occasionally pass the night there; Austrians have been known to dine there, and two Maoris, an ex-policeman, and four swagsmen caroused in the back parlour for four hours in a regardless-of-expense style only last week.

The "boss" was delighted, Dan Bargle had been for two years president of the Criterion, and found it suited his retiring

nature to a nicety. An unjust and inquisitive Legislature would have insisted on his resigning the unlimited freedom that his sanguine nature loved so well, had he not with native tact preferred to depart for the genial shores of New Zealand, there to make his home and fortune.

Christmas time was Dan's harvest; he laid himself out for it. Not that he expected much from the fourteen bushmen and their companions; their spare cash had come into the till during the year. It was the holiday-making farm hands, sheep shearers, cattle drivers and regular labourers that he loved; men who planked down their cheques on their intended way to town, who furnished him a generous crop of profits every year; many of them returning to work, well satisfied, long before they got to Napier; they had had their fun, and spent their money. They had kept up Christmas regardless of expense. What more could they want?

In the month of November, last year, Bill Maclise, of Dashmere, got his cheque and "the sack" at the same time. The cheque was all right, but the sack came too soon. Bill was an optimist, and a lazy parasite. He left at the combined request of his employer and his employer's manager, and went straight to the Criterion Hotel, Maiwhare, planked down his money, and Dan Bargle kept him drunk for a week, then showed him the door.

Now Bill Maclise was a sensitive man, and was naturally indignant at this unjust treatment, and it was in high dudgeon that