

How the Reverend paid his Footing.

BY KERON HALE.

Illustrated by W. A. Bowring.



DUMAN nature is the same all the world over," said the seers of old. The Reverend Eustace Whalley was always anxious to believe the words of wisdom; but between man, represented by his Oxford colleagues, and man, misrepresented by the struggling farmers and township drift of a wilderness back in the Southern Alps, the resemblance was infinitesimal.

He was young and had ideals, but "Tairoa" buried them all in a couple of months. It was the raw material that he found on the desolate wind-swept plains and bush-choked gullies of his parish. Clay for the potter. Plenty of it—extending even to the sod houses cowering under the scanty scrub-belt that flanked their nor'-west ends. But the raw material did not want "the parson." He had arrived in early autumn, when the salvation of their souls counted as nought beside the salvation of their crops.

"Winter's the time for religion," said Jummet, the churchwarden, when the Reverend Eustace, with ashamed tears in his eyes, came out of the empty schoolroom that served for church. "God 'elps them as 'elps themselves, sir, and if we don't 'elp ourselves pretty quick these days, the wind won't leave us much grain in the straw. 'Sides, these chaps don't cotten to parsons much. You'll hev to give 'em time to git used to you, like, afore they'll come to church."

The stars were fighting against the Reverend Eustace, so he turned his attention to a place where harvests came not, and where men toiled year in and year out, and swore with patient and persistent regularity at each season as it came.

There were the dregs of an old gold mine over the hill behind Tairoa, and the names

of the men who worked there were a terror in the land. But the Reverend's parish extended to the confines of eternity among these mountains, and, therefore, his duty lay over that hill.

"They'll kill you if you go!" was the assurance of the constable; "they've got a regular derry on parsons!"

"They won't know I'm a parson," returned the Reverend, and he climbed into his newly-acquired saddle and turned his pony's head hillwards. He had dressed to suit his company, knowing that to-day more virtue lay in a flannel shirt and slouch hat than in full canonicals.

The white pony puffed its stertorous way to the top of the hill, and the new Alexander looked down on his unconquered country, rather anxiously.

There was bush below, and beauty, and brilliant sunshine. Water sparkled along an open shoot to a stony creek. Heaps of mullock and open cuts along a face, gave red and brown glories to the picture, and the men crawled about peacefully.

They took no notice of the Reverend when he hitched his pony to a dead honeysuckle by the shoot, and strolled up to a man working a hose. But across the creek Smith nudged his mate, and jerked his thumb in the direction of the new-comer.

"'Oo's the nipper?"

"Dunno! Looks a bloomin' fool! 'E won't git much change out o' Dowson, I bet!"

The Reverend was smiling, and asking innocent questions of the camp "boss"; and Dowson, putting him down as a "bit dotty," suffered them with unusual amiability.

"Yuss, I said 'e could come agin," he told the men later. "'E's jist a bloomin' Juggins! Goin' ter write a book, maybe! We'll give 'im somethin' ter put in it!"