



Illustrated by H. West.

OF all my various experiences in this land of the Southern Cross I reckon the most nearly tragic was when my old chum, Jim Ford, and I tried to revive the ancient ways of chivalry while on a shooting expedition in the North some fifteen years ago.

It was an autumn evening with a smoky atmosphere, coppery-red sunset, a mysterious feeling that something was going to happen abroad in the air, and all the concomitants of a never-to-be-forgotten night that one loves to brag about afterwards.

Jim and I were standing by the wheel of a dirty little steamer that was trying to break a previous four-miles-an-hour record up one of the Kaipara rivers. We were yarning with the captain, and being shown where the beauty spots of the neighbourhood might have been, if only it had occurred to Providence to put them there, when our whistle gave a pathetic squeal, and, slowing down round a high cliff, we ran in close to land in one of the deepest and darkest little bays I have ever seen. Huge pohutukawas fringed the beach and stretched their curious twisted trunks down over the deep water, which lay silent, black as ink, and suggestive

of nameless horrors underneath. Above the native trees a wall of dark pines stood outlined against the sunset sky, and through them we caught occasional glimpses of a light from some habitation within the shades.

The sound of rough voices now fell upon our ears, there was a swish in the water, and a boat shot alongside us. A couple of islanders turned their ugly faces up at us, and proceeded to catch the goods that were thrown to them from the stern of our boat. As they went back we watched them disappear in the gloom of the pohutukawas, and all grew still for a moment, then suddenly from the blackness in the pine grove above, there came the sound of a voice singing. Rich, clear and quivering, it thrilled the silence of the night, then weird and witchlike, died away in sweetest echoes that merged into the whispering of the wind in the pine trees above.

I clutched Ford's arm in ecstasy, and we both looked enquiringly at the captain.

He smiled with the pride of superior knowledge which puts the hall mark upon a man's want of breeding, and remarked carelessly, "Oh, it's the young leddy as is kept up there!"

"Kept up there!" I exclaimed,