



By ANNIS McLEOD.

Illustrated by Harry West.

THE train had reached the heart of the gorge, and was creeping up and up slowly, cautiously. One of the few passengers in the first class pushed his book aside, and looked out of the window for a moment.

"My word!" he remarked, "a cheerful place to live in."

Another imitated the first speaker in everything but the remark.

"Preferable to die in," he answered.

A woman in a far corner of the carriage put her hand to her eyes quickly, and turned her head away. The action was involuntary—the face behind the hand white and drawn. Silence fell for a moment.

The dull, swaying windows showed a land of grey hills seamed with deep gullies, gaunt, rock-strewn, so steep that a stray tussock, or twisted broadleaf, or scrap of tumatakuru had barely courage to cling and brave the fury of the mountain wind that swept along their cliff-like faces. The train crept slowly on. Spidery viaducts lay before—behind. Below a mountain torrent, thick and yellow, churned swiftly onwards, bearing traces of man's handiwork in every little dirty ripple that danced as gaily as ever its undefiled predecessor had done in the days when gold-mining was unknown.

The first passenger tapped the window impatiently. "I vote we get out and stretch our legs," he said. "The blessed thing's actually stopping again."

The woman in the corner rose as the train drew up at a flag station. The second passenger glanced after her.

"Wonder why on earth she's getting out here! Lady, too."

She had been well directed, apparently, and unhesitatingly set out upon the narrow path that ran in steep zigzags up the hill on the left, three words only singing in her brain: "Preferable to die—to die."

* * * * *

It had happened so many dreary centuries ago that even the pitiful remembrance of it was fast vanishing into that soul-darkness which came pressing down upon him so