



BY ALICE F. WEBB.

*Illustrated by Harry West.*

It is a calm evening in December. The native grass on the hills is soft and dry and silky, beautiful pale cream in colour, and painfully slippery under foot. The cattle, which have been standing in the creek, or slowly pushing through the scrub all day, have come out now, and are clambering ponderously up the hill to the stockyard, followed by a bare-legged, bare-headed little boy, whose sole clothing is a blue cotton shirt and a pair of small moleskin pants, supported by what were once braces, but now is—brace. On the hill top they pause, and here Billy, coming forward, takes down the slip rails, and lets through his herd. The seven old cows go through first, heaving deep sighs as they climb slowly over the rails. The young cattle hustle each other and press through, three or four at a time, for Billy invariably lashes the last, which makes haste desirable.

Billy hastens his movements a little more than usual to-night, for there is to be a concert in the township this evening, and he desires to be early. His method of milking is to chase a cow into the bail, peg its neck securely, place a running noose round its hind leg, and strain the leg back

as far as possible, making fast the rope. He then produces a staggering calf, whose legs seem to telescope suddenly if he is too roughly touched. The cow in the bail struggles at sight of her calf, who seems a little dazed by the sudden release from his pen. He stands with legs wide apart, and an imbecile expression on his face, gazing round him.

Bill gives him an admonishing push, but his legs give way under him, and he collapses in a helpless heap. Billy assists him to rise, and conducts him to his mother. They do battle for the milk, and when it is divided between them, the calf is seized by his ear, and being assisted by Billy's knee, he is incarcerated once more. That cow is released, and the same ceremony is gone through with all the others.

Just as the milking is finished, Billy's father rides up.

"Done your milking, Bill? Well, come and take off the saddle, and tie up the dogs," he calls, and dismounts, going into the house quickly, while his tired, dusty dogs lie down near by, panting, and the old bay horse stands with eyes shut, mouth open and ears drooping, exactly where his master dismounted.