

THE WIDOW'S ONLY SON.

The day had come. Europe was in a blaze. Germany had poured her hordes over Belgium and Northern France. England had joined the fray to protect Belgium and her Dominions over the seas had hastened to the help of the Motherland. In far-off Zealandia young men were leaving farm and office and hurrying to enlist and fight under the Union Jack.

Among the first to hear the call was Jack Frazer. He hesitated for a time on account of his mother who was a widow, and he her only child. Their home was a lovely little farm situated on the shores of Cargill Harbour, one of those beautiful land-locked harbours which are one of Zealandia's chief charms. Jack's father had been a fine type of farmer. He and his young wife had purchased this farm in its wild state, and by dint of hard and constant toil had converted it into the cultivated and beautiful home that it was. One day the father left for town in his boat accompanied by his two little daughters. On their return trip a heavy storm swept up the harbour, and the boat was swamped by the waves, and father and children perished. Great was the grief at the stricken homestead, but for her boy's sake the devoted mother kept a brave face. She gave her boy a good education, and when after a year at an agricultural college he came home to take the burden of farm management off his mother's shoulders her joy was deep if silent. The affection between the two was a very real and strong one. Now had come a bolt from the blue. Her boy inheriting the spirit of his soldier ancestors wanted to take his part in the great struggle, and do his share to defend the Empire which he so loved. The brave mother stifled the cry of her lonely heart and gave her free consent for her boy to follow what he thought the path of duty. Then how quickly events followed on. Jack was gone to camp, then home on final leave. How precious to the mother was every minute of that time, and oh the contrast. Youth looking forward to the future, eager to be in the fray, and Age dwelling in the present and dreading the time when it should be over. Mrs Frazer went to Windsor to see her boy embark, and once more Jack and his mother spent pleasant hours together, the memory of which were to comfort the lonely

mother in the dark anxious days to come. She gave him tender and loving words of counsel. Bravely she gave the last kiss, and the smile as she watched him march aboard the transport was like sunlight playing upon a grave. Then she returned to her deserted home to watch for news of her boy and to pray without ceasing for him.

Jack arrived in Egypt and threw himself with ardour into their training. One night a comrade went with him into the city. There he said "Come and have a drink Jack." Now Jack had left home a teetotaler, but one night returning to camp after their heavy march over the ranges in wind and rain the rum ration had been served out. Jack longed for a cup of hot soup or hot coffee, but only rum was provided by the military authorities, and feeling the need of something he drank it. Now with his resisting power weakened by the rum ration he yielded to his mate's entreaties and followed him into the bar. One drink was followed by another, and then with brain bemuddled and passion inflamed by alcohol he followed a fair-haired, painted and bedizened woman to her quarters. The "strange woman" had got Jack in her clutches.

Next morning thoroughly ashamed of himself, Jack resolved never to touch a drop of drink again. He kept his resolution and won golden opinions from his officers. The dark hour of shame was almost forgotten, and Jack looked eagerly forward to winning fame and distinction in the battle front. Alas! Alas! Jack is ill, and he goes on sick parade. Questioned by the medical officer he relates his dark experience. Sadly as he looks at the bright young face the doctor gives his verdict. Not for him the path to honour and fame, but back to disgrace and the seclusion of a quarantine camp.

"Doctor," falters Jack, "do you mean I am never to be well again?"

"My boy," was the reply, "it is no kindness to mislead you. You have an incurable disease, and in its worst form."

"What a price to pay for one night's folly, or rather for one glass of rum," moaned Jack.

Jack was sent back on a transport. Thoughts of his mother drove him nearly mad. Gone were all his lofty

dreams of winning honour and glory in defence of his country, only disgrace, ruin, and death awaited him. For a time he meditated self-destruction, but the boy was no coward, and resolved to face the consequences of his folly. Remorse preyed upon his health, and left him only the shadow of his former rosy, happy self. Arrived in Zealandia, no welcome home awaited him, and his companions in misery, only the Defence launch to take them over to Quarantine Island, and Oh! the pity of it! from his island prison Jack could look across the harbour and see the roof of his mother's home.

At Jack's request, the doctor visited his mother and told her the sad story of her boy's disgrace. Grief had weakened the boy, a sharp attack of influenza had prostrated him and the doctor told Mrs Frazer that her son was in a dangerous state of health. Jack longed to be with his mother, and she begged the doctor to intercede with the military authorities that her boy might end his days at home, and that she might have the sad task of nursing him. Upon the doctor representing that Jack's span of life had nearly run out, and how he and his mother longed to spend the last few days alone, permission was given for Jack to be sent home.

How he longed, yet dreaded, to see his mother; but who can fathom the depths of a mother's love? Mrs Frazer received her boy with open arms. His own little room, spotless and clean, awaited him. Everything looked so unchanged that it was hard to realise that such dark memories were between now and the days he had lived his care-free boyish life there.

"Mother! mother!" sobbed Jack, "how good to feel your arms around me again, and to know that you have forgiven me."

"My only boy," whispered his mother, "thank God I have you once more to be my own. We will forget the dark past, and look forward to a brighter future. Darling, this earth is not all. You will, through God's mercy, leave earth's sorrows and stains behind when you enter the new life beyond the grave."

Jack grew steadily weaker, and at last the end was very near.

"Mother," said Jack, "it was the rum ration that ruined me. Had I