

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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A BUSH TRAGEDY.

It was late afternoon in a quiet bush township among the foothills of the main dividing range. The Great South Road meandered up hill and down dale in its journey from Auckland to Wellington. Sometimes it ran a narrow line between the green forest, at other times the bush gave place to small clearings, and upon each one of these was built a small farmhouse surrounded by a garden plot. Upon the crest of a hill in the main township stood the school-house. It was a primitive structure, and around it stretched the playground, shut off from the surrounding bush by the usual post and rail fence. The school faced the road and beyond the road the unbroken bush waved, a dense forest to where the snow-capped Ruahines touched the horizon. The children had been dismissed some time ago and had taken their way home. Then out of the school door stepped Ivy Brown, the young pupil teacher. She picked up her bridle and sent out a ringing call. Immediately in answer to that call, trotted up her horse, Fairy, a lovely dapple grey. A horse with a pedigree, she held her aristocratic head high, but gentle as well as spirited, she submitted to the caresses of her young mistress. Deftly saddling her steed the young teacher started for her five mile ride home. After leaving the township behind, the road ran, a narrow line between the mighty forest giants on either side. Ivy loved this part of the road. It always reminded her of the aisle of a great cathedral, and

after a busy day at school, its quiet and rest were most soothing. Today the road was carpeted with the red berries shed by the lofty rimu trees, and as the sun through the boughs glinted upon them, they recalled to the young girl's mind the text "And I saw a sea of glass with mingled fire."

Suddenly the quiet was broken by rude noises, shouts of men and trampling of hoofs. Glancing around Ivy saw a trap containing two young farmers. Hansen, who was driving, was very drunk and lashed the horse furiously. Ivy's horse became restive, and a fearless horsewoman, she gave it free rein. Her pursuers tried in vain to overtake her, for Fairy could show a clean pair of heels to any horse in that district.

As she crossed the railway line, the sound of racing hoofs brought her father to the door of his office. She pointed to the men behind her as she rode on home.

Mr Brown knew both men well, and had mourned to see the deterioration in them caused by frequent drinking bouts. For nearly two years Mr Brown had appeared every 3 months before the Licensing Bench with a petition against the issue of a license in his riding. But at last one had been forced upon them and this was the result.

He took them into his office, ordered a cup of strong coffee, and later saw them partially sobered, into their trap for the journey home.

Around the tea table that night Ivy told the story of her mad ride.

"Was it safe to let them go home?" asked Mrs Brown of her husband.

"Oh yes!" he replied "quite, I think. Hansen was almost sober, and they both promised me to go straight home. If they let the old horse alone he'll take them home."

"Remember, Alf, there is the hotel right on the roadside. Will they pass it?"

"I believe they'll keep their promise and go straight on."

"Hansen might" she said "but I don't trust Pedersen. It'll surprise me if he goes by a hotel."

And there the matter was allowed to rest. The next morning as Ivy dismounted in the school paddock, the children clustered round her and spoke in awed tones.

"Oh! teacher, Clara Hansen's father is killed."

"What do you mean, children? killed! Who killed him?"

"Strong drink killed him" spoke the schoolmaster from the doorstep. He's the first result of our new hotel." Then he went on to give her more particulars. Contrary to their promise, the two men had visited the hotel upon their way home. Once there, they stayed until closing time, then 11 p.m. When they left, the horse was the most sensible member of the trio. But he was not allowed to have his way and was driven past the home gate. Rounding a sharp curve at a dangerous speed the trap had been overturned and both men flung down the gully. There they lay until discovered in the morning. Hansen had fallen with his head in the fork of a fallen tree, and his neck was broken. Pedersen escaped with a broken leg and severe bruises.