

SCOTCH and HOKONUI

"THERE'S whisky in those hills," the old man said, pointing a bony, gnarled finger at the bush-covered Southland hills.

The man from the city screwed up his eyes and peered through the dusk. He made no comment, hoping that his companion would continue. He was not disappointed. The old man arranged the piece of ryegrass he was chewing so that it was more comfortable in his mouth, for he had a tale to tell.

"It's been going on for years and years," he went on. "The family are true Highlanders, and they know well how to make whisky. But most of it's never left long enough to mature, nor is it blended with other whisky to soften and smooth it."

The old man put such expression into the words that his companion felt thirsty. He ran his tongue lightly over his lips, trying in vain to recapture the smooth, clean taste of mellow Scotch. There was no telling, of course, what the old man might have hidden away in the house. He was a remarkable man. He had been living in the district for sixty or seventy years, and had seldom left his well-kept home. He had little need to, for he had a first-class library of his own, was a keen fisherman and game-shooter, and had, it was believed, a well-stocked cellar. Although he was not a Highlander and Scotch was difficult to come by in the late war years, the old man might, the stranger thought hopefully, be able to illustrate his story with a bottle of the real stuff.

"Yes, it's a strange life these people lead," the old man continued. "They work their farms like other folk around, but in those hills they have their whisky stills, hidden away in the thickest bush. If you were to take a walk over the moonshine territory, you would be watched all the way.



But I don't think you would ever get near one of their stills. Many a police raid there's been, but few stills have been found. They keep their secret well hidden.

"Have you ever read Maurice Walsh or John Buchan's stories of the Highlands?" the old man asked. "You have? Well, the story of these Scotsmen in their New Zealand hills is just as exciting. They have their adventures and their codes, and when the police are about they're right on their toes. Yes, it's a grand life for them. I'm not a Highlander myself, but I like my whisky. It should not be a crime to make the lovely stuff."

The old man chuckled, and the stranger seized the opportunity to ask a question.

"How do they dispose of the whisky?" he asked.

The old man looked at the stranger keenly for a moment or two before he answered.

"Well, it's not so difficult," he said. "Remember the load of turnips that went past an hour ago? For all we know there may be a few dozen bottles of Hokonui hidden away under those bonnie swedes. A load of hay, a ton of spuds—who knows what else there might be in the dray? And it sells all right. Nearly every pub has its