

# GOLD

## A KORERO Report

THE CLAIM MANAGER was bearded, with a battered hat falling in carefree curves over his greying hair. He must have been nearly seventy, but the fresh glow of his complexion was that of a much younger man, and the twinkle in his eye told of experience and humour rather than age. Clad in a rough, grey shirt with fraying braces supporting strong twist trousers, he might well have been one of the early diggers who panned for gold in the rush days of the Coast during the latter half of last century.

As he stood beside the roaring race with darting fork assisting the boulders that rolled down the muddy torrent it needed little imagination to picture him bending over a pan beside a bush-edged creek, washing the dirt with skill and patience, until in the bottom of his dish appeared the dull flakes of yellow gold that eighty years ago brought thousands of eager adventurers to the wild hills of Westland in search of sudden fortune.

With typical West Coast willingness to assist, he led the way down the large pipe-line that brings the water from high in the bush down to the sluicing claim. In a shallow creek beside his hut he panned out a few colours from a dish of dirt, dried it over his fire, and blew it on his copper pan until the gleaming flakes of gold lay nestling against the bottom lip. And then the years that have changed the outward face of Westland rolled back and gold yielded itself not to mine or dredge, but to the courage, patience, and skill of the individual digger who sought it with his two hands in the days when the Coast was young.

To-day this digger manages a large sluicing claim where modern methods tear the gravel from the hills and send it hurtling down a narrow wooden race



to lose its precious cargo as it goes. But he has seen the Coast in other days, days fast imbedded in the memories of the old-timers, days which live again only when a couple of them meet in the convivial atmosphere of a "pub" and retell old stories of sudden riches and sudden deaths, of great difficulties and hardships and the courage that overcame them, of heroism, hospitality, and stout hearts.

Gold was found in Westland in 1864, and within a year thousands of diggers had flocked to the Coast. Communications were negligible in those days. Transport by sea was the usual method, with treacherous river-bars to be negotiated before a digger landed amidst the other innumerable difficulties of an almost virgin country. Food-supplies were irregular, mountain torrents dangerous, and many a man lost money and life in the wild bush country that drops so steeply from the Alps. But hopes were high, and though comparatively few found the dreamt-of El Dorado, many fortunes were made and lost as the adventurers scoured the Coast. Four men collected 1,200 oz. of gold in four months, nearly half the quantity shipped from the Coast in 1864. The next year gold to the value of over a million pounds was exported. 1866 was the record year, when over 500,000 oz. was won from the fields at a value of over £2,000,000.