

THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM

BY OLIVE SCHREINER

A TALE OF LIFE IN THE BOER REPUBLIC.

(Continued From Last Week.)

"No, it never seems so to me," she answered. The sun had dipped now below the hills...

CHAPTER III

"I WAS A STRANGER, AND YE TOOK ME IN."

As the two girls rounded the side of the "kopje" an unusual scene presented itself.

On the doorstep stood the Boer woman, a hand on each hip, her face red and fiery, her head nodding fiercely.

"I'm not a child," cried the Boer woman in low Cape Dutch, "and I wasn't born yesterday."

There the German overseer mildly interposed that the man was not a tramp, but a highly respectable individual...

"Don't tell me!" cried the Boer woman. "The man isn't born that can take me in."

The stranger took off his hat, a tall battered chimney pot, and disclosed a bald head, at the back of which was a little fringe of curled white hair...

"What does she remark, my friend?" he inquired, turning his crosswise looking eyes on the old German.

"Ah—well—ah—the—Dutch—you know—do not like people who walk in this country—ah!"

"My dear friend," said the stranger, laying his hand on the German's arm, "I should have bought myself another horse, but crossing five days ago, a full river, I lost my purse—a purse with £500 in it."

The German would have translated this information, but the Boer woman gave no ear.

"No, no! He goes tonight. See how he looks at me, a poor, unprotected female! If he wrongs me, who is to do me right?"

"I think," said the German in an undertone, "if you didn't look at her quite so much it might be advisable. She—ah—she—might—imagine that you liked her too well—in fact—ah!"

"Certainly, my dear friend, certainly," said the stranger, "I shall not look at her."

Saying this, he turned his nose full upon a small Kaffir 2 years of age. That small naked son of Ham became instantly so terrified that he fled to his mother's blanket for protection, howling horribly.

Upon this the newcomer fixed his eyes pensively on the stamp block, folding his hand on the head of his cane.

"You vagabonds se Engelschman!" said Tant' Sannie, looking straight at him.

This was a near approach to plain English, but the man contemplated the block abstractedly, wholly unconscious that any antagonism was being displayed toward him.

"You might not be a Scotchman or anything of that kind, might you?" suggested the German. "It is the English that she hates."

"My dear friend," said the stranger, "I am Irish, every inch of me—a drop Irish, mother Irish. I've not a drop of English blood in my veins."

"And you might not be married, might you?" persisted the German. "If you had a wife and children, now!

Dutch people do not like those who are not married."

"Ah," said the stranger, looking tenderly at the block, "I have a dear wife and three sweet little children, two lovely girls and a noble boy."

This information having been conveyed to the Boer woman, she, after some further conversation, appeared slightly mollified, but remained firm to her conviction that the man's designs were evil.

"For, dear Lord," she cried, "all Englishmen are ugly! But was there ever such a red rag nose thing with broken boots and crooked eyes before? Take him to your room!" she cried to the German.

The German having told him how matters were arranged, the stranger made a profound bow to Tant' Sannie and followed his host, who led the way to his own little room.

"I thought she would come to her better self soon," the German said joyously. "Tant' Sannie is not wholly bad—far from it, far." Then, seeing his companion cast a furtive glance at him, which he mistook for one of surprise, he added quickly: "Ah, yes, yes, we are all a primitive people here—not very lofty. We deal not in titles. Every one is Tanta and Oom— aunt and uncle. This may be my room."

"My friend, my dear friend," said the stranger, seizing him by the hand, "may the Lord bless you, the Lord bless and reward you—the God of the fatherless and the stranger. But for you I would this night have slept in the fields, with the dew of heaven upon my head."

Late that evening Lyndall came down to the cabin with the German's rations. Through the tiny square window the light streamed forth, and without knocking she raised the latch and entered. There was a fire burning on the hearth, and it cast its ruddy glow over the little dining room, with its worm eaten rafters and mud floor and broken, whitewashed walls, a curious little place, filled with all manner of articles.

Next to the fire was a great tool box; beyond that the little bookshelf with its well worn books; beyond that, in the corner, a heap of filled and empty grain bags. From the rafters hung down straps, "reims," old boots, bits of harness and a string of onions. The bed was in another corner, covered by a patchwork quilt of faded red lions and divided from the rest of the room by a blue curtain, now drawn back.

The German rubbed his hands and hesitated. "Ah—well—ah—the—Dutch—you know—do not like people who walk in this country—ah!"

"My dear friend," said the stranger, laying his hand on the German's arm, "I should have bought myself another horse, but crossing five days ago, a full river, I lost my purse—a purse with £500 in it. I spent five days on the bank of the river trying to find it—couldn't; paid a Kaffir £9 to go in and look for it at the risk of his life—couldn't find it."

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rolled together as a scroll and the stars shall fall as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs and there shall be time no longer...

Tonight, when Lyndall looked in, Waldo sat before the fire watching a pot which simmered there, with his slate and pencil in his hand.

"Since this morning, poor fellow! A gentleman, not accustomed to walking—horse died—poor fellow!" said the German, pushing out his lip and glancing commiseratingly over his spectacles in the direction of the bed where the stranger lay, with his flabby double chin and broken boots through which the fresh shone.

"I think he is a liar! Good night, Uncle Otto," she said slowly, turning to the door.

Long after she had gone the German folded his paper up methodically and put it in his pocket.

The stranger had not awakened to partake of the soup, and his son had fallen asleep on the ground. Taking two white sheepskins from the heap of sacks in the corner, the old man doubled them up and, lifting the boy's head gently from the slate on which it rested, placed the skins beneath it.

"I was a stranger, and ye took me in," he read.

He turned again to the bed where the sleeper lay.

Very tenderly the old man looked at him. He saw not the bloated body nor the evil face of the man, but, as it were, under deep disguise and fleshy concealment, the form that long years of dreaming had made very real to him.

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"Believe him? Why, of course I do. He himself told me the story three times distinctly."

"If," said the girl slowly, "he had walked for only one day, his boots would not have looked so, and if—"

"If," said the German, starting up in his chair, irritated that any one should doubt such irrefragable evidence. "If! Why, he told me himself! Look how he lies there," added the German pathetically, "worn out, poor fellow! We have something for him, though," pointing with his forefinger over his shoulder to the sauceman that stood on the fire.

"We are not cooks—not French cooks, not quite—but it's drinkable, drinkable, I think, better than nothing, I think," he added, nodding his head in a jocular manner that evinced his high estimation of the contents of the sauceman and his profound satisfaction therein.

"The child's gray black eyes rested on the figure on the bed, then turned to the German, then rested on the figure again."

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the Duke of Sutherland was born—brought me to my mother. There is only one name for that child," she said.

"The connection," said Bonaparte, "is one which could not be easily comprehended by one unaccustomed to the study of aristocratic pedigrees, but the connection is close."

"Is it possible?" said the German, pausing in his work with much interest and astonishment. "Napoleon an Irishman?"

"Yes," said Bonaparte, "on the mother's side, and that is how we are related. There wasn't a man to beat him," said Bonaparte, stretching himself, "not a man, except the Duke of Wellington. And it's a strange coincidence," added Bonaparte, bending forward, "but he was a connection of mine. His nephew, the Duke of Wellington's nephew, married a cousin of mine. She was a woman! See her at one of the court balls—amber satin, daisies in her hair! Worth going a hundred miles to look at her! Often seen her there myself, sir!"

The German moved the leather things in and out and thought of the strange vicissitudes of human life which might bring the kinsmen of dukes and emperors to his humble room.

Bonaparte appeared lost among old memories.

"Ah, that Duke of Wellington's nephew!" he broke forth suddenly. "Many's the joke I've had with him. Often came to visit me at Bonaparte Hall. Grand place I had then—park, conservatory, servants. He had only one fault, that Duke of Wellington's nephew," said Bonaparte, observing that the German was deeply interested in every word.

"He was a coward, what you might call a coward. You've never been in Russia, I suppose?" said Bonaparte, fixing his crosswise looking eyes on the German's face.

"No, no," said the old man humbly. "France, England, Germany, a little in this country—it is all I have traveled."

"I, my friend," said Bonaparte, "have been in every country in the world and speak every civilized language excepting only Dutch and German. I wrote a book of my travels—noteworthy incidents. Publisher got it—cheated me out of it. Great rascals, those publishers! Upon one occasion the Duke of Wellington's nephew and I were traveling in Russia. All of a sudden one of the horses dropped down dead as a doornail. There we were—cold night—snow four feet thick—great forest—one horse not being able to move sledge—night coming on—wolves."

"Spreet," says the Duke of Wellington's nephew.

"Spreet, do you call it? says I. 'Look out!'"

"There, sticking out under a bush, was nothing less than the nose of a bear. The Duke of Wellington's nephew was up a tree like a shot. I stood quietly on the ground, as cool as I am this moment, loaded my gun and climbed up the tree. There was only one bough."

"Bon," said the Duke of Wellington's nephew, 'you'd better sit in front!'"

"All right," said I, 'but keep your gun ready. There are more coming! He'd got his face buried in my back.'"

"How many are there?" said he. "Four," said I.

"How many are there now?" said he. "Eight," said I.

"How many are there now?" said he. "Ten," said I.

"Ten, ten" said he, and down goes his gun.

"Wallie," I said, 'what have you done? We're dead men now.'"

"Bon, my old fellow," said he, 'I couldn't help it, my hands trembled so!'"

"Wall," said I, turning round and seizing his hand, 'Wallie, my dear lad, goodby. I'm not afraid to die. My legs are long; they hang down. The first bear that comes, and I don't hit him, off goes my foot. When he takes it, I shall give you my gun and go. You may yet be saved, but tell oh, tell Mary Ann that I thought of her, that I prayed for her!'"

"Goodby, old fellow!" said he. "God bless you," said I.

"By this time the bears were sitting in a circle all round the tree. Yes," said Bonaparte, impressively fixing his eyes on the German, "a regular, exact circle. The marks of their tails were left in the snow, and I measured it afterward. A drawing master couldn't have done it better. It was that saved me. If they'd rushed on me at once, poor old Bon would never have been here to tell this story. But they came on, sir, systematically, one by one. All the rest sat on their tails and waited. The first fellow came up, and I shot him; the second fellow—I shot him; the third—I shot him. At last the tenth came. He was the biggest of all—the leader, you may say."

"Wall," I said, 'give me your hand. My fingers are stiff with the cold. There is only one bullet left. I shall miss him. While he is eating me you get down and take your gun, and live, dear friend, live to remember the man who gave his life for you! By that time the bear was at me. I felt his paw on my trousers.'"

"Oh, Bonnie, Bonnie!" said the Duke of Wellington's nephew. But I just took my gun and put the muzzle to the bear's ear. Over he fell—dead!"

Bonaparte Blenkins waited to observe what effect his story had made. Then he took out a dirty white handkerchief and stroked his forehead and more especially his eyes.

"It always affects me to relate that adventure," he remarked, returning

the handkerchief to his pocket. "Ingratitude—base, vile ingratitude—is recalled by it. That man, that man, who but for me would have perished in the pathless wilds of Russia, that man in the hour of my adversity forsook me."

The German looked up. "Yes," said Bonaparte, "I had money, I had lands. I said to my wife: 'There is Africa, a struggling country. They want capital; they want men of talent; they want men of ability to open up that land. Let us go.'"

"I bought £8,000 worth of machinery—winnowing, plowing, reaping machines. I loaded a ship with them. Next steamer I came out, wife, children, all. Got to the Cape. Where is the ship with the things? Lost—gone to the bottom! And the box with the money? Lost—nothing saved!"

"My wife wrote to the Duke of Wellington's nephew. I didn't wish her to. She did it without my knowledge."

"What did the man whose life I saved do? Did he send me £30,000; say, 'Bonaparte, my brother, here is a crumb? No; he sent me nothing.'"

"My wife said, 'Write.' I said: 'Mary Ann, no; while these hands have power to work, no; while this frame has power to endure, no. Never shall it be said that Bonaparte Blenkins asked of any man.'"

The man's noble independence touched the German.

"Your case is hard; yes, that is hard," said the German, shaking his head.

Bonaparte took another draft of the soup, leaned back against the pillows and sighed deeply.

"I think," he said after awhile, rousing himself, "I shall now wander in the benign air and rest—the gentle cool of the evening. The stiffness hovers over me yet. Exercise is beneficial."

So saying, he adjusted his hat carefully on the bald crown of his head and moved to the door. After he had gone the German sighed again over his work:

"Ah, Lord! So it is! Ah!"

He thought of the ingratitude of the world.

"Uncle Otto," said the child in the doorway, "did you ever hear of ten rascals sitting on their tails in a circle?"

"Well, not of ten exactly, but bears do attack travelers every day. It is nothing unheard of," said the German.

"A man of such courage too! Terrible experience that!"

"And how do we know that the story is true, Uncle Otto?"

The German's ire was roused. "That is what I do hate!" he cried: "Know that it is true! How do you know that anything is true? Because you are told so. If we begin to question everything—proof, proof, proof—what will we have to believe left? How do you know the angel opened the prison door for Peter except that Peter said so? How do you know that God talked to Moses except that Moses wrote it? That is what I hate!"

The girl knit her brows. Perhaps her thoughts made a longer journey than the German dreamed of, for, mark you, the old dream little bow their words and lives are texts and studies to the generation that shall succeed them. Not what we are taught, but what we see, makes us, and the child gathers the food on which the adult feeds to the end.

When the German looked up next, there was a look of supreme satisfaction in the little mouth and the beautiful eyes.

"What dost see, chicken?" he asked. The child said nothing, and an agonizing shriek was borne on the afternoon breeze.

"O God, my God, I am killed!" cried the voice of Bonaparte as he, with wide open mouth and shaking flesh, fell into the room, followed by a half grown ostrich, which put its head in at the door, opened its beak at him and went away.

"Shut the door! Shut the door! As you value my life, shut the door!" cried Bonaparte, sinking into a chair, his face blue and white, with a greenishness about the mouth. "Ah, my friend," he said, tremulously, "eternity has looked me in the face! My life's thread hung upon a cord! The valley of the shadow of death!" said Bonaparte, seizing the German's arm.

"Dear, dear, dear!" said the German, who had closed the lower half of the door and stood much concerned beside the stranger. "You have had a fright. I never knew so young a bird to chase before, but they will take dislikes to certain people. I sent a boy away once because a bird would chase him. Ah, dear, dear!"

"When I looked round," said Bonaparte, "the red and yawning cavity was above me and the reprehensible paw raised to strike me. My nerves," said Bonaparte, suddenly growing faint, "always delicate, highly strung, are broken, broken! You could not give a little wine, a little brandy, my friend?"

The old German hurried away to the bookshelf and took from behind the books a small bottle, half of whose contents he poured into a cup. Bonaparte drained it eagerly.

"How do you feel now?" asked the German, looking at him with much sympathy.

"A little, slightly, better."

The German went out to pick up the battered chimney pot which had fallen before the door.

"I am sorry you got the fright. The birds are bad things till you know them," he said sympathetically as he put the hat down.

"My friend," said Bonaparte, holding out his hand, "I forgive you. Do not be disturbed. Whatever the consequences, I forgive you. I know, I believe, it was with no ill intent that you allowed me to go out. Give me your hand. I have no ill feeling, none!"

"You are very kind," said the German, taking the extended hand and feeling suddenly convinced that he was receiving magnanimous forgiveness for

(Continued next week.)