

THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM

BY OLIVE SCHREINER

A TALE OF LIFE IN THE BOER REPUBLIC.

(Continued From Last Week.)

CHAPTER VI.

BONAPARTE BLEINKING MAKES HIS WEST. "Ah, what is the matter?" asked Waldo, stopping at the foot of the ladder...

"Lyndall made him angry," said the girl tearfully; "and he has given me the fourteenth of John to learn. He says he will teach me to behave myself when Lyndall troubles him."

"What did she do?" asked the boy. "You see," said Em, hopelessly turning the leaves, "whenever he talks she looks out at the door, as though she did not hear him. Today she asked him what the signs of the zodiac were, and he said he was surprised that she should ask him; it was not a fit and proper thing for little girls to talk about."

"Then she asked him who Copernicus was, and he said he was one of the emperors of Rome, who burned the Christians in a golden pig, and the worms eat him up while he was still alive. I don't know why," said Em plaintively, "but she just put her books under her arm and walked out, and she will never come to his school again, she says, and she always does what she says. And now I must sit here every day alone," said Em, the great tears dropping softly.

"Perhaps Tant' Sannie will send him away," said the boy in his mumbbling way, trying to comfort her. "No," said Em, shaking her head, "no. Last night when the little Hottentot maid was washing her feet he told her he liked such feet and that fat women were so nice to him, and she said I must always put him pure cream in his coffee now. No; he'll never go away," said Em dolorously.

The boy put down his skins and fumbled in his pocket and produced a small piece of paper containing something. He stuck it out toward her. "There, take it for you," he said, this was by way of comfort.

Em opened it and found a small bit of gum, a commodity prized by the children, but the great tears dropped down slowly on to it.

Waldo was distressed. He had cried so much in his morsel of life that tears on another seemed to burn him. "If," he said, stepping in awkwardly and standing by the table, "if you will not cry, I will tell you something, a secret."

"What is it?" asked Em, instantly becoming decidedly better. "You will tell it to no human being?" "No."

He bent nearer to her and with deep solemnity said: "I have made a machine!" Em opened her eyes.

"Yes, a machine for shearing sheep. It is almost done," said the boy. "There is only one thing that is not right yet, but it will be soon. When you think and think and think all night and all day, it comes at last," he added mysteriously.

"Where is it?" "Here! I always carry it here," said the boy, putting his hand to his breast, where a bulging out was visible. "This is a model. When it is done, they will have to make a large one."

"Show it me." The boy shook his head. "No, not till it is done. I cannot let any human being see it till then."

"It is a beautiful secret," said Em, and the boy shuffled out to pick up his skins.

That evening father and son sat in the cabin eating their supper. The father sighed deeply sometimes. Perhaps he thought how long a time it was since Bonaparte had visited the cabin, but his son was in that land in which sighs have no part. It is a question whether it were not better to be the shabbiest of fools and know the way up the little stair of imagination to the land of dreams than the wisest of men, who see nothing that the eyes do not show and feel nothing that the hands do not touch. The boy chewed his brown bread and drank his coffee, but in truth he saw only his machine finished, that last something found out and added. He saw it as it worked with beautiful smoothness, and over and above, as he chewed his bread and drank his coffee, there was that delightful consciousness of something bending over him and loving him. It would not have been better in one of the courts of heaven, where the walls are set with rows of the King of Glory's amethysts and milk white pearls, than there, eating his supper in that little room.

As they sat in silence there was a knock at the door. When it was opened, the small woolly head of a little alger showed itself. She was a messenger from Tant' Sannie. The German was wanted at once at the homestead. Putting on his hat with both hands, he hurried off. The kitchen was in darkness, but in the pantry beyond Tant' Sannie and her maids were assembled.

A Kaffir girl who had been grinding pepper between two stones knelt on the floor, the lean Hottentot stood with a brass candlestick in her hand, and Tant' Sannie, near the shelf, with a hand on each hip, was evidently listening intently, as were her companions. "What may it be?" cried the old German in astonishment.

The room beyond the pantry was the storeroom. Through the thin wooden partition there arose at that instant, evidently from some creature ensconced there, a prolonged and prounging howl, followed by a succession of violent blows against the partition wall.

The German seized the churn stick and was about to rush round the house when the Boer woman impressively laid her hand upon his arm. "That is his head," said Tant' Sannie; "that is his head."

"But what might it be?" asked the German, looking from one to the other, churn stick in hand.

A low hollow bellow prevented reply, and the voice of Bonaparte lifted itself on high.

"Mary Ann, my angel, my wife!" "Isn't it dreadful?" said Tant' Sannie as the blows were repeated fiercely. "He has got a letter. His wife is dead. You must go and comfort him," said Tant' Sannie at last, "and I will go with you. It would not be the thing for me to go alone—me, who am only 33, and he an unmarried man now," said Tant' Sannie, blushing and smoothing out her apron.

Upon this they all trudged round the house in company, the Hottentot maid carrying the light, Tant' Sannie and the German following and the Kaffir girl bringing up the rear.

"Oh," said Tant' Sannie, "I see now it wasn't wickedness made him do without his wife so long, only necessity."

At the door she motioned to the German to enter and followed him closely. On the stretcher behind the sacks Bonaparte lay on his face, his head pressed into a pillow, his legs kicking gently. The Boer woman sat down on a box at the foot of the bed. The German stood with folded hands looking on.

"We must all die," said Tant' Sannie at last. "It is the dear Lord's will."

Hearing her voice, Bonaparte turned himself on to his back.

"It's very hard," said Tant' Sannie, "I know, for I've lost two husbands." Bonaparte looked up into the German's face.

"Oh, what does she say? Speak to me words of comfort!" The German repeated Tant' Sannie's remark.

"Ah, I—I also, two dear, dear wives, whom I shall never see any more!" cried Bonaparte, flinging himself back upon the bed.

He howled until the tarantulas that lived between the rafters and the zinc roof felt the unusual vibration and looked out with their wicked bright eyes to see what was going on.

Tant' Sannie sighed; the Hottentot maid sighed; the Kaffir girl, who looked in at the door, put her hand over her mouth and said, "Mow—wah!"

"You must trust in the Lord," said Tant' Sannie. "He can give you more than you have lost."

"I do, I do," he cried. "But, oh, I have no wife! I have no wife!"

Tant' Sannie was much affected and came and stood near the bed.

"Ask him if he won't have a little pap—nice, fine, flour pap. There is some boiling on the kitchen fire."

The German made the proposal, but the widower waved his hand.

"No; nothing shall pass my lips. I should be suffocated. No, no! Speak not of food to me!"

"Pap and a little brandy in," said Tant' Sannie coaxingly.

Bonaparte caught the word.

"Perhaps, perhaps—if I struggled with myself—for the sake of my duties I might imbibe a few drops," he said, looking with quivering lip up into the German's face. "I must do my duty, must I not?"

Tant' Sannie gave the order, and the girl went for the pap.

"I know how it was when my first husband died. They could do nothing with me," the Boer woman said, "till I had eaten a sheep's trotter and honey and a little roaster cake, I know."

Bonaparte sat up on the bed with his legs stretched out in front of him and a hand on each knee, blubbering softly.

"Oh, she was a woman! You are very kind to try to comfort me, but she was my wife. For a woman that is my wife I could live, for the woman that is my wife I could die, for a woman that is my wife I could— Ah, that sweet word wife! When will it rest upon my lips again?"

"Do not be afraid," said the German, "do not be afraid. I do not forget the boy at the fire. I crack for him. The bag is full. Why, this is strange," he said suddenly, cracking open a large nut, "three kernels! I have not observed that before. This must be retained. This is valuable." He wrapped the nut crumbly in paper and put it carefully in his waistcoat pocket. "Valuable, very valuable," he said, shaking his head.

"Ah, my friend," said Bonaparte, "what joy it is to be once more in your society!"

The German's eye glistened, and

When his feelings had subsided a little, he raised the corners of his turned down mouth and spoke to the German with fobby lips.

"Do you think she understands me? Oh, tell her every word, that she may know I thank her!"

At that instant the girl reappeared with a basin of steaming gruel and a black bottle.

Tant' Sannie poured some of its contents into the basin, stirred it well and came to the bed.

"Oh, I can't, I can't! I shall die, I shall die!" said Bonaparte, putting his hand to his side.

"Come, just a little," said Tant' Sannie coaxingly, "just a drop."

"It's too thick, it's too thick. I should choke."

Tant' Sannie added from the contents of the bottle and held out a spoonful. Bonaparte opened his mouth like a little bird waiting for a worm and held it open as she dipped again and again into the pap.

"Ah, this will do your heart good!" said Tant' Sannie, in whose mind the relative functions of heart and stomach were exceedingly ill defined.

When the basin was emptied, the violence of his grief was much assuaged. He looked at Tant' Sannie with gentle tears.

"Tell him," said the Boer woman, "that I hope he will sleep well and that the Lord will comfort him as the Lord only can."

"Bless you, dear friend! God bless you!" said Bonaparte.

When the door was safely shut on the German, the Hottentot and the Dutch woman, he got off the bed and washed away the soap he had rubbed on his eyelids.

"Bon," he said, slapping his leg, "you are the entest lad I ever came across. If you don't turn out the old hymns and prayers, and pummel the ragged coat, and get your arms round the fat one's waist and a wedding ring on her finger, then you are not Bonaparte. But you are Bonaparte. Bon, you're a fine boy!"

Making which pleasing reflection, he pulled off his trousers and got into bed cheerfully.

CHAPTER VII.

HE SETS HIS TRAP.

"May I come in? I hope I do not disturb you, my dear friend," said Bonaparte late one evening, putting his nose in at the cabin door, where the German and his son sat finishing their supper.

It was two months since he had been installed as schoolmaster in Tant' Sannie's household, and he had grown mighty and more mighty day by day. He visited the cabin no more, sat close to Tant' Sannie drinking coffee all the evening and walked about loftily with his hands under the coat-tails of the German's black cloth and failed to see even a nigger who wished him a deferential good morning. It was therefore with no small surprise that the German perceived Bonaparte's red nose at his door.

"Walk in, walk in," he said joyfully. "Boy, see if there is coffee left. Well, none. Make a fire. We have done supper, but"

"My dear friend," said Bonaparte, taking off his hat, "I came not to sup, nor for mere creature comforts, but for an hour of brotherly intercourse with a kindred spirit. The press of business and the weight of thought, but they alone, may sometimes prevent me from sharing the secrets of my bosom with him for whom I have so great a sympathy. You perhaps wonder when I shall return the two pounds?"

"Oh, no, no! Make a fire, make a fire, boy. We will have a pot of hot coffee presently," said the German, rubbing his hands and looking about, not knowing how best to show his pleasure at the unexpected visit.

For three weeks the German's diffident "Good evening" had met with a stately bow, the chin of Bonaparte lifting itself higher daily, and his shadow had not darkened the cabin doorway since he came to borrow the two pounds. The German walked to the head of the bed and took down a blue bag that hung there. Blue bags were a specialty of the Germans. He kept above 50 stowed away in different corners of his room, some filled with curious stones, some with seeds that had been in his possession 15 years, some with rusty nails, buckles and bits of old harness, in all a wonderful assortment, but highly prized.

"We have something here not so bad," said the German, smiling knowingly, as he dived his hand into the bag and took out a handful of almonds and raisins. "I buy these for my chickens. They increase in size, but they still think the old man must have something nice for them. And the old man—well, a big boy may have a sweet tooth sometimes, may he not? Ha, ha!" said the German, chuckling at his own joke, as he heaped the plate with almonds. "Here is a stone, two stones, to crack them, no late patent improvement—well, Adam's nutcracker. Ha, ha! But I think we shall do. We will consume a few without fashionable improvements."

Here the German sat down on one side of the table, Bonaparte on the other, each one with a couple of fat stones before him and the plate between them.

"Do not be afraid," said the German, "do not be afraid. I do not forget the boy at the fire. I crack for him. The bag is full. Why, this is strange," he said suddenly, cracking open a large nut, "three kernels! I have not observed that before. This must be retained. This is valuable." He wrapped the nut crumbly in paper and put it carefully in his waistcoat pocket. "Valuable, very valuable," he said, shaking his head.

"Ah, my friend," said Bonaparte, "what joy it is to be once more in your society!"

The German's eye glistened, and

Bonaparte seized his hand and squeezed it warmly. They then proceeded to crack and eat. After awhile Bonaparte said, stuffing a handful of raisins into his mouth:

"I was so deeply grieved, my dear friend, that you and Tant' Sannie had some slight unpleasantness this evening."

"Oh, no, no!" said the German. "It is all right now. A few sheep missing, but I make it good myself. I give my 12 sheep and work in the other eight."

"It is rather hard that you should have to make good the lost sheep," said Bonaparte. "It is no fault of yours."

"Well," said the German, "this is the case: Last evening I count the sheep at the kraal. Twenty are missing. I ask the herd. He tells me they are with the other flock; he tells me so distinctly. How can I think he lies? This afternoon I count the other flock. The sheep are not there. I come back here. The herd is gone; the sheep are gone. But I cannot—no, I will not—believe he stole them," said the German, growing suddenly excited. "Some one else, but not he. I know that boy. I knew him three years. He is a good boy. I have seen him deeply affected on account of his soul. And she would send the police after him! I say I would rather make the loss good myself. I will not have it. He has fled in fear. I know his heart. It was," said the German, with a little gentle hesitation, "under my words that he first felt his need of a Saviour."

Bonaparte cracked some more almonds, then said, yawning, and more as though he asked for the sake of having something to converse about than from any interest he felt in the subject:

"And what has become of the herd's wife?"

The German was alight again in a moment.

"Yes; his wife. She has a child 6 days old, and Tant' Sannie would turn her out into the fields this night. That," said the German, rising, "that is what I call truly, diabolical cruelty. My soul abhors that deed. The man that could do such a thing I could run him through with a knife!" said the German, his gray eyes flashing and his bushy black beard adding to the murderous fury of his aspect. Then, suddenly subsiding, he said:

now well, Tant' Sannie gives her word that the maid shall remain for some days. I go to Oom Muller's tomorrow to learn if the sheep may not be there. If they are not, then I return. They are gone; that is all. I make it good."

"Tant' Sannie is a singular woman," said Bonaparte, taking the tobacco bag the German passed to him.

"Singular! Yes," said the German; "but her heart is on her right side. I have lived long years with her, and I may say I have for her an affection which she returns. I may say," added the German, with warmth—"I may say that there is not one soul on this farm for whom I have not an affection."

"Ah, my friend," said Bonaparte, "when the grace of God is in our hearts, is it not so with us all? Do we not love the very worm we tread upon and as we tread upon it? Do we know distinctions of race or of sex or of color? No!"

"Love no amazing, so divine, it fills my soul, my life, my all."

After a time he sank into a less fervent mood and remarked:

"The colored female who waits upon Tant' Sannie appears to be of a virtuous disposition, an individual who—"

"Virtuous!" said the German. "I have confidence in her. There is that in her which is pure, that which is noble. The rich and high that walk this earth with lofty eyelids might exchange with her."

The German here got up to bring a coal for Bonaparte's pipe, and they sat together talking for awhile. At length Bonaparte knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"It is time that I took my departure, dear friend," he said, "but before I do so shall we not close this evening of sweet communion and brotherly intercourse by a few words of prayer? Oh, how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the dew upon the mountains of Hermon, for there the Lord bestowed a blessing, even life for evermore."

"Stay and drink some coffee," said the German.

"No, thank you, my friend. I have business that must be done tonight," said Bonaparte. "Your dear son appears to have gone to sleep. He is going to take the wagon to the mill tomorrow. What a little man he is!"

"A fine boy."

But, though the boy nodded before the fire, he was not asleep, and they all knelt down to pray.

When they rose from their knees, Bonaparte extended his hand to Waldo and parted him on the head.

"Good night, my lad," he said. "As you go to the mill tomorrow we shall not see you for some days. Good night. Goodbye. The Lord bless and guide you, and may he bring you back to us in safety to find us all as you have left us!" He laid some emphasis on the last words. "And you, my dear friend," he added, turning with redoubled warmth to the German, "long shall I look back to this evening as a time of refreshment from the presence of the Lord, as an hour of blessed intercourse with a brother in Jesus. May such often return! The Lord bless you," he added, with yet deeper fervor, "richly, richly!"

Then he opened the door and vanished out into the darkness.

"He, he, he!" laughed Bonaparte as he stumbled over the stones. "If there isn't the rarest lot of fools on this farm that ever God Almighty stuck legs to! He, he, he! When the worms come out, then the blackbirds feed. Ha, ha, ha!" Then he drew himself up. Even when alone he liked to pose with a certain dignity. It was second nature to him.

He looked in at the kitchen door. The Hottentot maid who acted as interpreter between Tant' Sannie and himself was gone, and Tant' Sannie herself was in bed.

"Never mind, Bon, my boy," he said as he walked round to his own room. "Tomorrow will do. He, he, he!"

(Continued next week.)

Medmenham Abbey.

Medmenham Abbey, Bucks, England, standing on ground which Danish tradition has made its own, and almost washed by the Thames, is in the market, after being restored at a cost of \$10,000. Little real trace had remained of the old monastic house, founded by the Cistercians in 1200, and the picturesque remains were those of a manor of the Duffields, who held the property from the time of the dissolution till 1779. In the middle of that century a set of pseudo "Franciscans" came into occupation of the abbey, an order whose rites and ceremonies would have horrified the old Cistercian tenants. Bacchic revelry, devil-worship and other practices were ascribed to the bloods of the days who forefathered at Medmenham, with Sir Francis Dashwood as their presiding genius. The story goes that one night, in the midst of the "monks' orgies, the party were overwhelmed with terror at the apparition of a huge ape, which had been lowered down the chimney. For once, they thought the object of their attentions had appeared a person, and the meetings came to a sudden end. The notorious Wilkes was one of them.

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Witness my hand and seal of said County Court this 4th day of November, 1899.

J. F. COCHRAN, County Judge. By Dudley Cochran, Clerk.

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