

THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM

BY OLIVE SCHREINER.

A TALE OF LIFE IN THE BOER REPUBLIC.

(Continued From Last Week.)

CHAPTER VIII.

HE CATCHES THE OLD BIRD.

At 4 o'clock the next afternoon the German rode across the plain, returning from his search for the lost sheep.

The German questioned her as to how she came there. She muttered in broken Dutch that she had been turned away.

Dismounting quickly, he went to the great chest where his provisions were kept. Here he got out the little meal, a few mealies, a few roaster cakes.

The woman shook her head. She would sleep in the field.

The German reflected. Kaffir women were accustomed to sleep in the open air, but then the child was small, and after so hot a day the night might be chilly.

"It will be just the same if he comes back tomorrow," said Lyndall.

The two girls sat on the step of the cabin waiting for the German's return.

"There he comes," she said, "whistling 'Ach Jerusalem du schone!' so loud I can hear him here."

"Perhaps he has found the sheep."

"Found them?" said Lyndall. "He would whistle just so if he knew he had to die tonight."

"You look at the sunset, oh chickens?" the German said as he came up at a smart canter.

The German looked up. He thought the Dutchwoman, come out to cool herself in the yard, called to some misbehaving servant.

"You old vagabond of a praying German, are you deaf?"

Tant Sannie stood before the steps of the kitchen. Upon them sat the lean Hottentot. Upon the highest stood Bonaparte Blenkins, both hands folded under the tails of his coat and his eyes fixed on the sunset sky.

house. "Very strange," the girls followed him. Em still weeping, Lyndall with her face rather white and her eyes wide open.

"And I have the heart of a devil, did you say? You could run me through with a knife, could you?" cried the Dutchwoman.

"I am bewildered, I am bewildered," said the German, standing before her and raising his hand to his forehead.

The German turned to Bonaparte, who still stood on the step absorbed in the beauty of the sunset.

"Do not address me, do not approach me, lost man," said Bonaparte, not moving his eye nor lowering his chin.

"That is a crime from which all nature revolts; there is a crime whose name is loathsome to the human ear.

"What are you going to do with them?" she whispered.

"Burn down the window."

"But won't the whole house take fire and burn down too?"

"Yes."

"But will it not be very wicked?"

"Yes, very, and I do not care."

She arranged the nightgown carefully in the corner of the window, with the chips of the frame about it.

Lyndall wiped a drop of blood off the lip she had bitten.

"I am going to sleep," she said. "If you like to sit there and howl till the morning, do. Perhaps you will find that it helps. I never heard that howling helped any one."

Long after, when Em herself had gone to bed and was almost asleep, Lyndall came and stood at her bedside.

"Here," she said, slipping a little pot of powder into her hand.

Then she crept back to her own bed. Long long after, when Em was really asleep, she lay still awake and folded her hands on her little breast and muttered:

"When that day comes and I am strong, I will hate everything that is weak and help everything that is power." And she bit her lip again.

The German looked out at the cabin door for the last time that night. Then he drew out a pen and paper and sat down to write, rubbing his old gray eyes with his knuckles before he began:

"My Chickens—You did not come to say good-bye to the old man. Might you? Ah, well, there is a land where they part no more, where saints immortal rise.

the invincible, in the hour of his triumph, moved to give her place.

The Hottentot ceased to laugh, and an uncomfortable silence fell on all the three in the doorway.

Once in their room, Em sat down on the floor and wailed bitterly. Lyndall lay on the bed, with her arm drawn across her eyes, very white and still.

"Hoo, hoo!" cried Em. "And they won't let him take the gray mare, and Waldo has gone to the mill. Hoo, hoo! And perhaps they won't let us go and say good-bye to him. Hoo, hoo, hoo!"

"I wish you would be quiet," said Lyndall without moving. "Does it give you such felicity to let Bonaparte know he is hurting you? We will ask no one. It will be supper time soon. Listen, and when you hear the clink of the knives and forks we will go out and see him."

Em suppressed her sobs and listened intently, kneeling at the door. Suddenly some one came to the window and put the shutter up.

"Who was that?" said Lyndall, starting.

"The girl, I suppose," said Em. "How early she is this evening!"

But Lyndall sprang from the bed and seized the handle of the door, shaking it fiercely. The door was locked on the outside. She ground her teeth.

"What is the matter?" asked Em. The room was in perfect darkness now.

"Nothing," said Lyndall quietly, "only they have locked us in."

She turned and went back to bed again. But ere long Em heard a sound of movement. Lyndall had climbed up into the window and with her fingers felt the woodwork that surrounded the panes.

"What are you doing?" asked Em, who heard the falling fragments.

Her companion made her no reply, but leaned on every little crossbar, which cracked and gave way beneath her.

"I will leave it neat. They shall not say I did not leave it neat," he said. Even the little bags of seeds on the mantelpiece he put in rows and dusted.

"Do you think you will be able to?"

"No, but I am trying."

"In an agony of suspense Em waited. For ten minutes Lyndall pecked. The hole was three-eighths of an inch deep. Then the blade sprang into ten pieces.

"What has happened now?" asked Em, blubbering afresh.

"Nothing," said Lyndall. "Bring me my nightgown, a piece of paper and the matches."

"What are you going to do with them?" she whispered.

"Burn down the window."

"But won't the whole house take fire and burn down too?"

"Yes."

"But will it not be very wicked?"

"Yes, very, and I do not care."

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out to seek his fortune and comes back with it in a bag, it may be.

"I love my children. Do they think of me?" an old Otto, who goes out to seek his fortune.

Having concluded this quaint production, he put it where the children would find it the next morning and proceeded to prepare his bundle. He never thought of entering a protest against the loss of his goods. Like a child he submitted and wept. He had been there 11 years, and it was hard to go away. He spread open on the bed a blue handkerchief and on it put one by one the things he thought most necessary and important—a little bag of curious seeds which he meant to plant some day, an old German hymn-book, three misshapen stones that he greatly valued, a Bible, a shirt and two handkerchiefs. Then there was room for nothing more. He tied up the bundle tightly and put it on a chair by his bedside.

"That is not much. They cannot say I take much," he said, looking at it.

He put his knotted stick beside it, his blue tobacco bag and his short pipe, and then inspected his coats. He had two left, a moth eaten overcoat and a black alpaca out at the elbows. He decided for the overcoat. It was warm certainly, but then he could carry it over his arm and only put it on when he met some one along the road. It was more respectable than the black alpaca. He hung the greatcoat over the back of the chair and stuffed a hard bit of roaster cake under the knot of the bundle, and then his preparations were completed.

The German stood contemplating them with much satisfaction. He had almost forgotten his sorrow at leaving in his pleasure at preparing. Suddenly he started. An expression of intense pain passed over his face. He drew back his left arm quickly and then pressed his right hand upon his breast.

"Ah, the sudden pang again!" he said.

His face was white, but it quickly regained its color. Then the old man busied himself in putting everything right.

"I will leave it neat. They shall not say I did not leave it neat," he said. Even the little bags of seeds on the mantelpiece he put in rows and dusted.

Then he undressed and got into bed. Under his pillow was a little story book. He drew it forth. To the old German a story was no story. Its events were as real and as important to himself as the matters of his own life. He could not go away without knowing whether that wicked old re-leited and whether the Baron married Emilina. So he adjusted his spectacles and began to read. Occasionally, as his feelings became too strongly moved, he ejaculated: "Ah, I thought so! That was a rogue. I saw it before. I knew it from the beginning." More than half an hour had passed when he looked up to the silver watch at the top of his bed.

"The march is long tomorrow. This will not do," he said, taking off his spectacles and putting them carefully into the book to mark the place. "This will be good reading as I walk along tomorrow," he added as he stuffed the book into the pocket of the greatcoat, "very good reading." He nodded his head and lay down. He thought a little of his own troubles, a good deal of the earl of Emilia, of the Baron, but he was soon asleep, sleeping as peacefully as a little child upon whose innocent soul sorrow and care cannot rest.

It was very quiet in the room. The coals in the fireplace threw a dull red light across the floor upon the red lions on the quilt. Eleven o'clock came, and the room was very still. One o'clock came. The glimmer had died out, though the ashes were still warm, and the room was very dark. The gray mouse which had its hole under the tool box came out and sat on the sacks in the corner. Then, growing bolder, the room was so dark, it climbed the chair at the bedside, nibbled at the roaster cake, took one bite quickly at the candle and then sat on its haunches listening. It heard the even breathing of the old man and the steps of the hungry Kaffir dog going his last round in search of a bone or a skin that had been forgotten, and it heard the white hen call out as the wildcat ran away with one of her brood, and it heard the chicken cry. Then the gray mouse went back to its hole under the tool box, and the room was quiet. And 2 o'clock came. By that time the night was grown dull and cloudy. The wildcat had gone to its home on the "kopje." The Kaffir dog had found a bone and lay gnawing it.

An intense quiet reigned everywhere. Only in her room the Boer woman tossed her great arms in her sleep, for she dreamed that a dark shadow with outstretched wings fled slowly over her house, and she moaned and shivered. And the night was very still.

But, quiet as all places were, there was a quite peculiar quiet in the German's room. Though you strained your ear most carefully, you caught no sound of breathing.

He was not gone, for the old coat still hung on the chair, the coat that was to be put on when he met any one, and the bundle and stick were ready for tomorrow's long march. The old German himself lay there, his wavy black hair just touched with gray thrown back upon the pillow. The old face was lying there alone in the dark, smiling like a little child's—oh, so peacefully! There is a stranger whose coming, they say, is worse than all the ills of life, from whose presence we flee away trembling, but he comes very tenderly sometimes, and it seemed almost as though death had known and loved the old man, so gently it touched him. And how could it deal hardly with him—the loving, simple, childlike old man?

So it smoothed out the wrinkles that were in the old forehead and fixed the passing smile and sealed the eyes that they might not weep again, and then the short sleep of time was melted into

the long, long sleep of eternity.

"How has he grown so young in this one night?" they said when they found him in the morning.

Yes, dear old man, to such as you time brings no age. You die with the purity and innocence of your childhood upon you, though you die in your gray hairs.

(Continued next week.)

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A glance at the state treasurer's books reveals the fact that tax collections for the fiscal year ending November 30, 1899 were considerably lighter than in previous years. Notwithstanding this fact, the receipts from all sources during the year amount to more than \$2,500,000. It is impossible to give the exact figures until the treasurer makes his annual report, which will not be available for this issue. Receipts for the principal current funds will run about as follows for the past fiscal year:

General..... \$800,000
Sinking..... 105,000
Temporary School..... 627,000
Temporary University..... 105,000

Total..... \$1,697,000

During the same period, registered general fund warrants and interest, were paid amounting to something over \$550,000; state bonds amounting to over \$98,000 were redeemed out of the sinking fund, over \$620,000 was apportioned to the various counties out of the temporary school fund, and practically all of the temporary university fund has been used in the payment of university warrants.

On the fourth of the present month the December apportionment will be made, and from present appearances it will be near the \$300,000 mark.

In volume of receipts the permanent school fund stands next to the general fund, about \$600,000 having been received by the treasurer during the fiscal year; about \$244,000 of this came from sales of common school lands and saline lands, and the remaining \$356,000 was simply a return of money formerly invested; of this latter sum, \$98,000 comes from redemption of state bonds held by the permanent school fund, \$113,000 came from the redemption of county bonds, and about \$205,000 from the redemption of general fund state warrants purchased as an investment for the permanent school fund early in Treasurer Meserve's first term.

At the beginning of the fiscal year just closed there was an uninvested balance of \$238,468.03 in the permanent school fund; at the end of the same period the balance is about \$50,000 less. During the year \$121,000 in county bonds and about \$539,000 in general fund state warrants have been purchased as an investment, and were it not for the frequent returns of money already invested, it would not take long to invest every dollar of the permanent school fund as fast as it accumulates. It will be noted that the net accretions to that fund for the year were about \$244,000, while the investments were over \$700,000.

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