

THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM

BY OLIVE SCHREINER.

A TALE OF LIFE IN THE BOER REPUBLIC.

(Continued From Last Week.)

CHAPTER XI.

HE SNAPS.

"I have found something in the loft," said Em to Waldo, who was listlessly piling cakes of fuel on the kraal wall a week after.

The boy put down the cake he was raising and looked at her.

"I don't think they are very nice, not stories," she added, "but you can go and take any you like."

So saying, she took up the plate in which she had brought his breakfast and walked off to the house.

After that the boy worked quickly. The pile of fuel Bonaparte had ordered him to pack was on the wall in half an hour. He then went to throw salt on the skins laid out to dry.

He watched the boy shuffle off with the salt pot under his arm. Then he stood in his doorway and raised his eyes to the quiet blue sky and audibly pronounced this riddle to himself:

"What is the connection between the naked back of a certain boy with a greatcoat and a salt pot under his arm and the tip of a horsewhip? Answer: No connection at present, but there will be soon."

Bonaparte was so pleased with this sally of his wit that he chuckled a little and went to lie down on his bed.

There was broad baking that afternoon, and there was a fire lighted in the brick oven behind the house, and Taut Sannie had left the great wooden chair in which she passed her life and waddled out to look at it.

Not far off was Waldo, who, having thrown a pail of food into the pigsty, now leaned over the sod wall looking at the pigs. Half of the sty was dry, but the lower half was a pool of mud, on the edge of which the mother sow lay with closed eyes, her ten little ones sucking. The father pig, knee deep in the mud, stood running his snout into a rotten pumpkin and wriggling his curled tail.

Waldo wondered dreamily as he stared why they were pleasant to look at. Taken singly, they were not beautiful; taken together, they were. Was it not because there was a certain harmony about them? The old sow was suited to the little pigs and the little pigs to their mother, the old boar to the rotten pumpkin and all to the mud. They suggested the thought of nothing that should be added, of nothing that should be taken away. And, he wondered on vaguely, was not that the secret of all beauty, that you who look on—So he stood dreaming and leaned farther and farther over the sod wall and looked at the pigs.

All this time Bonaparte Blinkins was sloping down from the house in an aimless sort of way, but he kept one eye fixed on the pigsty, and each gyration brought him nearer to it. Waldo stood like a thing asleep when Bonaparte came close up to him.

In old days, when a small boy playing in an Irish street gutter, he (Bonaparte) had been familiarly known among his comrades under the title of Tripping Ben, this from the rare ease and dexterity with which, by merely projecting his foot, he could precipitate any unfortunate companion on to the crown of his head. Years had elapsed, and Tripping Ben had become Bonaparte, but the old gift was in him still. He came close to the pigsty. All the defunct memories of his boyhood returned on him in a flood as with an adroit movement he inserted his leg between Waldo and the wall and sent him over the pigsty.

The little pigs were startled at the strange intruder and ran behind their mother, who sniffed at him. Taut Sannie smote her hands together and laughed, but Bonaparte was far from joining her. Lost in reverie, he gazed at the distant horizon.

The sudden reversal of head and feet had thrown out the volume that Waldo carried in his breast. Bonaparte picked it up and began to inspect it as the boy climbed slowly over the wall. He would have walked off sullenly, but he wanted his book and waited till it should be given him.

"He!" said Bonaparte, raising his eyes from the leaves of the book which he was examining. "I hope your coat

has not been injured. Of an elegant cut. An heirloom, I presume, from your paternal grandfather? It looks nice now."

"O Lord, O Lord," cried Taut Sannie, laughing and holding her sides, "how the child looks—as though he thought the mud would never wash off! O Lord, I shall die! You, Bonaparte, are the funniest man I ever saw."

Bonaparte Blinkins was now carefully inspecting the volume he had picked up. Among the subjects on which the darkness of his understanding had been enlightened during his youth political economy had not been one. He was not, therefore, very clear as to what the nature of the book might be, and, as the name of the writer, J. S. Mill, might, for anything he knew to the contrary, have belonged to a venerable member of the British and Foreign Bible society, it by no means threw light upon the question. He was not in any way sure that political economy had nothing to do with the cheapest way of procuring clothing for the army and navy, which would be certainly both a political and an economical subject.

But Bonaparte soon came to a conclusion as to the nature of the book and its contents by the application of a simple rule now largely acted upon, but which, becoming universal, would save much thought and valuable time. It is of marvelous simplicity, of infinite utility, of universal applicability. It may easily be committed to memory and runs thus:

Whenever you come into contact with any book, person or opinion of which you absolutely comprehend nothing, declare that book, person or opinion to be immoral. Resolutely, vituperate against it, strongly insist that any man or woman harboring it is a fool or a knave, or both. Carefully abstain from studying it. Do all that in you lies to annihilate that book, person or opinion.

Acting on this rule, so wide in its comprehensiveness, so beautifully simple in its working, Bonaparte approached Taut Sannie with the book in his hand. Waldo came a step nearer, eyeing it like a dog whose young has fallen into evil hands.

"This book," said Bonaparte, "is not a fit and proper study for a young and immature mind."

Taut Sannie did not understand a word and said: "What?"

"This book," said Bonaparte, bringing down his finger with energy on the cover, "this book is sleg, sleg, davel, davel!"

Taut Sannie perceived from the gravity of his countenance that it was no laughing matter. From the words sleg and davel she understood that the book was evil and had some connection with the prince who pulls the wires of evil over the whole earth.

"Where did you get this book?" she asked, turning her twinkling little eyes on Waldo. "I wish that my legs may be as thin as an Englishman's if it isn't one of your father's. He had more sins than all the Kafirs in Kafirland, for all that he pretended to be so good all those years and to live without a wife because he was thinking of the one that was dead! As though ten dead wives could make up for one fat one with arms and legs!" cried Taut Sannie, snorting.

"It was not my father's book," said the boy sullenly. "I got it from your loft."

"My loft! My book! How dare you?" cried Taut Sannie.

"It was Em's father's. She gave it me," he muttered, more sullenly.

"Give it here. What is the name of it? What is it about?" she asked, putting her finger upon the title.

Bonaparte understood. "Political economy," he said slowly.

"Dear Lord!" said Taut Sannie. "Cannot one hear from the very sound what an ungodly book it is? One can hardly say the name. Haven't we got curses enough on this farm?" cried Taut Sannie eloquently—"my best imported Merino ram dying of nobody knows what, and the Siorthoru cow casting her two calves, and the sheep eat up with the scab and the drought? And is this a time to bring ungodly things about the place, to call down the vengeance of Almighty God to punish us more? Didn't the minister tell me when I was confirmed not to read any book except my Bible and hymn-book, that the devil was in all the rest?" said Taut Sannie, with vigorous energy, "and I never will!"

Waldo saw that the fate of his book was sealed and turned sullenly on his heel.

"So you will not stay to hear what I say?" cried Taut Sannie. "There, take your polly-golly-gominy, your devil's book!" she cried, flinging the book at his head with much energy.

It merely touched his forehead on one side and fell to the ground.

"Go on!" she cried. "I know you are going to talk to yourself. People who talk to themselves always talk to the devil. Go and tell him all about it. Go, go! Run!" cried Taut Sannie.

But the boy neither quaked nor slackened his pace and passed sullenly round the back of the wagon house.

Books have been thrown at other heads before and since that summer afternoon by hands more white and delicate than those of the Boer woman; but whether the result of the process has been in any case wholly satisfactory may be questioned. We love that with a peculiar tenderness, we treasure it with a peculiar care, it has for us quite a fictitious value, for which we have suffered. If we may not carry it anywhere else, we will carry it in our hearts and always to the end.

Bonaparte Blinkins went to pick up the volume, now loosened from its cover, while Taut Sannie pushed the stumps of wood farther into the oven. Bonaparte came close to her, tapped

which were very farseeing. He looked at the pot. It was rather a small pot to have taken three-quarters of an hour in the filling. He looked at the face. It was flushed. And yet Taut Sannie kept no wine. He had not been drinking. His eyes were wide open and bright. He had not been sleeping. There was no girl up there. He had not been making love. Bonaparte looked at him sagaciously. What would account for the marvelous change in the boy coming down the ladder from the boy going up the ladder? One thing there was. Did not Taut Sannie keep in the loft "bul-tongs" and nice smoked sausages? There must be something nice to eat up there. Ah! That was it!

Bonaparte was so interested in carrying out this chain of inductive reasoning that he quite forgot to have his boots blacked.

He watched the boy shuffle off with the salt pot under his arm. Then he stood in his doorway and raised his eyes to the quiet blue sky and audibly pronounced this riddle to himself:

"What is the connection between the naked back of a certain boy with a greatcoat and a salt pot under his arm and the tip of a horsewhip? Answer: No connection at present, but there will be soon."

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Bonaparte grinned and to watch the process brought his face so near the oven door that the white hair on his eyebrows got singed. He then inquired if there were any more in the loft.

Learning that there were, he made signs indicative of taking up armfuls and flinging them into the fire. But Taut Sannie was dubious. The deceased Englishman had left all his personal effects specially to his child. It was all very well for Bonaparte to talk of burning the books. He had had his hair spiritually pulled, and she had no wish to repeat his experience.

She shook her head. Bonaparte was displeased. But then a happy thought occurred to him. He suggested that the key of the loft should henceforth be put into his own safe care and keeping, no one gaining possession of it without his permission. To this Taut Sannie readily assented, and the two walked lovingly to the house to look for it.

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