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The Story of an African Farm.

By OLIVE SCHREINER.

[CONTINUED.]

And, we add, growing a little colder yet: "There is no justice. The ox dies in the yoke beneath its master's whip. It turns its anguish filled eyes on the sunlight, but there is no sign of recompense to be made it. The black man is shot like a dog, and it goes well with the shooter. The innocent are accused, and the accuser triumphs. If you will take the trouble to scratch the surface anywhere, you will see under the skin a sentient being writhing in impotent anguish."

And, we say further, and our heart is as the heart of the dead for coldness: "There is no order. All things are driven about by a blind chance."

What a soul drinks in with its mother's milk will not leave it in a day. From our earliest hour we have been taught that the thought of the heart, the shaping of the raincloud, the amount of wool that grows on a sheep's back, the length of a draft and the growing of the corn depend on nothing that moves immutable, at the heart of all things; but on the changeable will of a changeable being whom our prayers can alter. To us, from the beginning, nature has been but a poor, plastic thing, to be toyed with this way or that, as man happens to please his deity or not, to go to church or not, to say his prayers right or not, to travel on a Sunday or not. Was it possible for us in an instant to see nature as she is—the flowing vestment of an unchanging reality? When a soul breaks free from the arms of a superstition, bits of the claws and talons break themselves off in him. It is not the work of a day to squeeze them out.

And so, for us, the humanlike driver and guide being gone, all existence, as we look out at it with our chilled, wondering eyes, is an aimless rise and swell of shifting waters. In all that weltering chaos we can see no spot so large as a man's hand on which we may plant our foot.

Whether a man believes in a humanlike God or no is a small thing. Whether he looks into the mental and physical world and sees no relation between cause and effect, no order but a blind chance sporting, this is the mightiest fact that can be recorded in any spiritual existence. It were almost a mercy to cut his throat, if indeed he does not do it for himself.

We, however, do not cut our throats. To do so would imply some desire and feeling, and we have no desire and no feeling. We are only cold. We do not wish to live, and we do not wish to die. One day a snake curls itself round the waist of a Kaffir woman. We take it in our hand, swing it round and round and fling it on the ground—dead. Every one looks at us with eyes of admiration. We almost laugh. Is it wonderful to risk that for which we care nothing?

In truth, nothing matters. This dirty little world full of confusion, and the blue rag stretched overhead for a sky is so low we could touch it with our hand.

Existence is a great pot, and the old fate who stirs it round cares nothing what rises to the top and what goes down and laughs when the bubbles burst. And we do not care. Let it boil about. Why should we trouble ourselves? Nevertheless the physical sensations are real. Hunger hurts, and thirst; therefore we eat and drink. Inaction pains us; therefore we work like galley slaves. No one demands it, but we set ourselves to build a great dam in red sand beyond the graves.

In the gray dawn before the sheep are let out we work at it. All day, while the young ostriches we tend feed about us, we work on through the fiercest heat. The people wonder what new spirit has seized us now. They do not know we are working for life. We bear the greatest stones and feel a satisfaction when we stagger under them and are hurt by a pang that shoots through our chest. While we eat our dinner we carry on baskets full of earth, as though the devil drove us. The Kaffir servants have a story that at night a witch and two white oxen come to help us. No wall, they say, could grow so quickly under one man's hands.

At night, alone in our cabin, we sit no more brooding over the fire. What should we think of now? All is emptiness. So we take the old arithmetic, and the multiplication table, which with so much pains we learned long ago and forgot directly, we learn now in a few hours and never forget again. We take a strange satisfaction in working arithmetical problems. We pause in our building to cover the stones with figures and calculations. We save money for a Latin grammar and an algebra and carry them about in our pockets, poring over them as over our Bible of old. We have thought we were utterly stupid, incapable of remembering anything, of learning anything. Now we find that all is easy. Has a new soul crept into this old body, that even our intellectual faculties are changed? We marvel, not perceiving that what a man expends in prayer and ecstasy he cannot have over for acquiring knowledge. You never shed a tear or create a beautiful image or quiver with emotion but you pay for it at the practical, calculating end of your nature. You have just so much force. When the one channel runs over, the other runs dry.

And now we turn to Nature. All these years we have lived beside her, and we have never seen her. Now we open our eyes and look at her.

The rocks have been to us a blur of brown. We bend over them, and the disorganized masses dissolve into a

many colored, many shaped, carefully arranged form of existence, here masses of rainbow tinted crystals half fused together, there bands of smooth gray and red methodically overlying each other. This rock here is covered with a delicate silver tracery, in some mineral resembling leaves and branches. There on the flat stone, on which we so often have sat to weep and pray, we look down and see it covered with the fossil footprints of great birds and the beautiful skeleton of a fish. We have often tried to picture in our mind what the fossilized remains of creatures must be like, and all the while we sat on them. We have been so blinded by thinking and feeling that we have never seen the world.

The flat plain has been to us a reach of monotonous red. We look at it, and every handful of sand starts into life. That wonderful people, the ants, we learn to know; see them make war and peace, play and work, and build their huge palaces. And that smaller people we make acquaintance with who live in the flowers. The bitto flower has been for us a mere blur of yellow. We find its heart composed of a hundred perfect flowers, the homes of the tiny black people with red stripes, who move in and out in that little yellow city. Every bluebell has its inhabitant. Every day the "karroo" shows us a new wonder sleeping in its teeming bosom. On our way to work we pause and stand to see the ground spider make its trap, bury itself in the sand and then wait for the falling in of its enemy. Farther on walks a horned beetle, and near him starts open the door of a spider, who peeps out carefully and quickly pulls it down again. On a "karroo" bush a green fly is laying her silver eggs. We carry them home and see the shells pierced, the spotted grub come out, turn to a green fly and flit away.

We are not satisfied with what Nature shows us and will see something for ourselves. Under the white hen we put a dozen eggs and break one daily to see the white spot wax into the chicken. We are not excited or enthusiastic about it. But a man is not to lay his throat open. He must think of something. So we plant seeds in rows on our dam wall and pull one up daily to see how it goes with them. Aladeen buried her wonderful stone, and a golden palace sprang up at her feet. We do far more. We put a brown seed in the earth, and a living thing starts out—starts upward—why, no more than Aladeen can we say—starts upward, and does not desert till it is higher than our heads, sparkling with dew in the early morning, glittering with yellow blossoms, shaking brown seeds with little embryo souls on to the ground. We look at it solemnly from the time it consists of two leaves peeping above the ground and a soft white root till we have to raise our faces to look at it, but we find no reason for that upward starting.

We look into the dead ducks and lambs. In the evening we carry them home, spread newspapers on the floor and lie working with them till midnight. With a startled feeling near akin to ecstasy we open the lump of flesh called a heart and find little doors and strings inside. We feel them and put the heart away, but every now and then return to look and to feel them again. Why we like them so we can hardly tell.

A gander drowns itself in our dam. We take it out and open it on the bank and kneel, looking at it. Above are the organs divided by delicate tissues; below are the intestines artistically curved in spiral form and each tier covered by a delicate network of blood vessels standing out red against the faint blue background. Each branch of the blood vessels is comprised of a trunk, bifurcating and rebifurcating into the most delicate hairlike threads, symmetrically arranged. We are struck with its singular beauty. And, moreover (and here we drop from our kneeling into a sitting posture), this also we remark—of that same exact shape and outline is our thorn tree seen against the sky in midwinter; of that shape also is delicate metallic tracery between our rocks; in that exact path does our water flow when without a furrow we lead it from the dam; so shaped are the antlers of the horned beetle. How are these things related that such deep union should exist between them all? Is it chance, or are they not all the fine branches of one trunk, whose sap flows through us all? That would explain it. We nod over the gander's inside.

This thing we call existence, is it not a something which has its roots far down below in the dark and its branches stretching out into the immensity above which we among the branches cannot see? Not a chance jumble, a living thing, a One. The thought gives us intense satisfaction. We cannot tell why.

We nod over the gander, then start up suddenly, look into the blue sky, throw the dead gander and the refuse into the dam and go to work again.

And so it comes to pass in time that the earth ceases for us to be a weltering chaos. We walk in the great hall of life, looking up and round reverentially. Nothing is despicable; all is meaning full. Nothing is small; all is part of a whole whose beginning and end we know not. The life that throbs in us is a pulsation from it, too mighty for our comprehension, not too small.

And so it comes to pass at last that, whereas the sky was at first a small blue rag stretched out over us and so low that our hands might touch it, pressing down on us, it raises itself into an immeasurable blue arch over our heads, and we begin to live again.

CHAPTER XV.
WALDO'S STRANGER.

Waldo lay on his stomach on the red sand. The small ostriches he herded wandered about him, pecking at the food he had out or at pebbles and dry sticks. On his right lay the graves, on

his left the dam. In his hand was a large wooden post covered with carvings, at which he worked. Doss lay before him basking in the winter sunshine and now and again casting an expectant glance at the corner of the nearest ostrich camp. The scrubby thorn trees under which they lay yielded no shade, but none was needed in that glorious June weather, when in the hottest part of the afternoon the sun was but pleasantly warm. And the boy curved on, not looking up, yet conscious of the brown serene earth about him and the intensely blue sky above.

Presently, at the corner of the camp, Em appeared, bearing a covered saucer in one hand and in the other a jug with a cup on the top. She was grown into a premature little old woman of 16, ridiculously fat. The jug and saucer she put down on the ground before the dog and his master and dropped down beside them herself, panting and out of breath.

"Waldo, as I came up the camps I met some one on horseback, and I do believe it must be the new man that is coming."

The new man was an Englishman to whom the Boer woman had hired half the farm.

"Hum!" said Waldo. "He is quite young," said Em, holding her side, "and he has brown hair and beard curling close to his face and such dark blue eyes. And, Waldo, I was so ashamed! I was just looking back to see, you know, and he happened just to be looking back, too, and we looked right into each other's face, and he got red, and I got so red. I believe he is the new man."

"Yes," said Waldo. "I must go now. Perhaps he has brought us letters from the post from Lyndall. You know, she can't stay at school much longer. She must come back soon. And the new man will have to stay with us till his house is built. I must get his room ready, Goodby!"

She tripped off again, and Waldo carved on at his post. Doss lay with his nose close to the covered saucer and smelled that some one had made nice little fat cakes that afternoon. Both were so intent on their occupation that not till a horse's hoofs beat beside them in the sand did they look up to see a rider drawing in his steed.

He was certainly not the stranger whom Em had described, a dark, somewhat French looking little man of eight and twenty, rather stout, with heavy, cloudy eyes and pointed mustaches. His horse was a fiery creature, well caparisoned. A highly finished saddlebag hung from the saddle. The man's hands were gloved, and he presented the appearance—an appearance rare on that farm—of a well dressed gentleman.

In an uncommonly melodious voice he inquired whether he might be allowed to remain there for an hour. Waldo directed him to the farmhouse, but the stranger declined. He would merely rest under the trees and give his horse water. He removed the saddle, and Waldo led the animal away to the dam. When he returned, the stranger had settled himself under the trees, with his back against the saddle. The boy offered him of the cakes. He declined, but took a draft from the jug, and Waldo lay down not far off and fell to work again. It mattered nothing if cold eyes saw it. It was not his sheep shearing machine. With material loves, as with human, we go mad once, love out and have done. We never get up the true enthusiasm a second time. This was but a thing he had made, labored over, loved and liked, nothing more—not his machine.

The stranger forced himself lower down in the saddle and yawned. It was a drowsy afternoon, and he objected to travel in these out of the world parts. He liked better civilized life, where at every hour of the day a man may look for his glass of wine and his easy chair and paper; where at night he may lock himself into his room with his books and a bottle of brandy and taste joys mental and physical. The world said to him—the all knowing, omnipotent world, whom no locks can bar, who has the catlike propensity of seeing best in the dark—the world said that better than the books he loved the brandy and better than books or brandy that which it had been better had he loved less. But for the world he cared nothing. He smiled blandly in its teeth. All life is a dream. If wine and philosophy and women keep the dream from becoming a nightmare, so much the better. It is all they are fit for, all they can be used for. There was another side to his life and thought, but of that the world knew nothing and said nothing, as the way of the wise world is.

The stranger looked from beneath his sleepy eyelids at the brown earth that stretched away, beautiful in spite of itself, in that June sunshine; looked at the graves, the gables of the farmhouse showing over the stone walls of the camps, at the clownish fellow at his feet, and yawned. But he had drunk of the hind's tea and must say something.

"Your father's place, I presume?" he inquired sleepily.

"No; I am only a servant."

"Dutch people?"

"Yes."

"And you like the life?"

The boy hesitated.

"On days like these."

"And why on these?"

The boy waited.

"They are very beautiful."

The stranger looked at him. It seemed that as the fellow's dark eyes looked across the brown earth they kindled with an intense satisfaction. Then they looked back at the carving.

What had that creature, so coarse clad and clownish, to do with the subtle joys of the weather? Himself, white handed and delicate, he might hear the music which shimmering sun-

shine and solitude play on the finely strung chords of nature, but that fellow! Was not the ear in that great body too gross for such delicate mutterings?

Presently he said: "May I see what you work at?" The fellow handed his wooden post. It was by no means lovely. The men and birds were almost grotesque in their labored resemblance to nature and bore signs of patient thought. The stranger turned the thing over on his knee.

"Where did you learn this work?"

"I taught myself."

"And these zigzag lines represent?"

"A mountain."

The stranger looked.

"It has some meaning, has it not?"

The boy muttered confusedly:

"Only things."

The questioner looked down at him—the huge, unwieldy figure, in size a man's, in right of its childlike features and curling hair a child's—and it hurt him. It attracted him, and it hurt him. It was something between pity and sympathy.

"How long have you worked at this?"

"Nine months."

From his pocket the stranger drew his pocketbook and took something from it. He could fasten the post to his horse in some way and throw it away in the sand when at a safe distance.

"Will you take this for your carving?"

The boy glanced at the 25 note and shook his head.

"No; I cannot."

"You think it is worth more?" asked the stranger, with a little sneer.

He pointed with his thumb to a grave.

"No; it is for him."

"And who is there?" asked the stranger.

"My father."

The man silently returned the note to his pocketbook and gave the carving to the boy and, drawing his hat over his eyes, composed himself to sleep. Not being able to do so, after awhile he glanced over the fellow's shoulder to watch him work. The boy carved letters into the back.

"If," said the stranger, with his melodious voice, rich with a sweetness that never showed itself in the clouded eyes, for sweetness will linger on in the voice after it has died out in the eyes—"If for such a purpose, why write that upon it?"

The boy glanced at him, but made no answer. He had almost forgotten his presence.

"You surely believe," said the stranger, "that some day, sooner or later, these graves will open and those Boer uncles with their wives walk about here in the red sand with the very fleshy legs with which they went to sleep? Then why say, 'He sleeps forever? You believe he will stand up again?'"

"Do you?" asked the boy, lifting for an instant his heavy eyes to the stranger's face.

Half taken aback, the stranger laughed. It was as though a curious little tadpole which he held under his glass should suddenly lift its tail and begin to question him.

"No?" He laughed his short, thick laugh. "I am a man who believes nothing, hopes nothing, fears nothing, feels nothing. I am beyond the pale of humanity, no criterion of what you should be who live here among your ostriches and bushes."

The next moment the stranger was surprised by a sudden movement on the part of the fellow, which brought him close to the stranger's feet. Soon after he raised his carving and laid it across the man's knee.

"Yes, I will tell you," he muttered; "I will tell you all about it."

He put his finger on the grotesque little manikin at the bottom (ah, that man who believed nothing, hoped nothing, felt nothing—how he loved him!), and with eager finger the fellow moved upward, explaining over fantastic figures and mountains, to the crowning bird from whose wing dropped a feather. At the end he spoke with broken breath—short words, like one who utters things of mighty import.

The stranger watched more the face than the carving, and there was now and then a show of white teeth beneath the mustaches as he listened.

"I think," he said blandly when the boy had done, "that I partly understand you. It is something after this fashion, is it not?" He smiled. "In certain valleys there was a hunter."

He touched the grotesque little figure at the bottom. "Day by day he went to hunt for wild fowl in the woods, and it chanced that once he stood on the shores of a large lake. While he stood waiting in the rushes for the coming of the birds a great shadow fell on him, and in the water he saw a reflection. He looked up to the sky, but the tiling was gone. Then a burning desire came over him to see once again that reflection in the water, and all day he waited and waited, but night came, and it had not returned. Then he went home with his empty bag, moody and silent. His comrades came questioning about him to know the reason, but he answered them nothing. He sat alone and brooded. Then his friend came to him, and to him he spoke.

"I have seen today," he said, "that which I never saw before—a vast white bird, with silver wings outstretched, sailing in the everlasting blue. And now it is as though a great fire burned within my breast. It was but a sheen, a shimmer, a reflection in the water, but now I desire nothing more on earth than to hold her."

"His friend laughed.

"It was but a beam playing on the water or the shadow of your own head. Tomorrow you will forget her," he said.

"But tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow the hunter walked alone. He sought in the forest and in the woods,