

wonderful talent for romancing I ever met with or heard of, except in Lever's creation of "Potts" in "A Day's Ride." He was a better fellow by far than Krishian, although dirtier, and worse to shake hands with. Of the younger members of the family I have no distinct knowledge; to hear their names, you would have thought they were a family of pups. There were Tic, and Tol, and Toss, besides others. The father and mother had come from the old colony, where they had had, and lost, money, and in consequence considered themselves something better than those of their neighbours who were as poor as they, but they let their children, big and little, be on terms of equality with the Urlams Kaffirs.

There was a small one-roomed cabin, situated at the lower end of Mr. Higgins's property, originally built by William Sturton, who, like his brother Arthur, had married a Miss Higgins. He had built it for himself and his wife, before he hired a farm in the valley near to his brother, and since then the cabin had remained tenantless. Just before Mr. Higgins went to Natal, Krishian and Dahl had asked to be allowed to occupy this eligible residence, and to till some ground near to it, in return for their services on the farm. Mr. Higgins had consented, saying, however, that they must come alone! He had had previous and disagreeable knowledge of the whole family as tenants.

"You will see that the whole troop will come so soon as you go away," Mrs. Higgins had said.

"Then I will send them packing, when I come back," replied her husband, causing Mrs. Higgins to laugh in a way that told me she doubted his ferocity. True enough, two days after Mr. Higgins's departure, a waggon was

seen depositing the whole family and their baggage at the cabin. How they all managed to pack into that diminutive abode, Heaven only knows! but houses here are wonderfully elastic. They commenced tilling some adjoining ground in a leisurely manner, made themselves very much at home at Surprise in a cringing sort of way, and did as little as possible. On Mr. Higgins's return no change was made; he, an over-easy master for Kaffirs, was not likely to be less so for people of white race. Mrs. Nell would sometimes pay a day's visit at Surprise, where her conversation was a mixture of flattery and gossip; she knew everything about everybody, and her curiosity was unbounded. She would follow Mrs. Higgins about as she did her household work, sitting down in the nearest chair and pouring forth a stream of talk. She and her husband were very anxious for Mr. Higgins to adopt one of their small fry, a diminutive but perfect specimen of a Dutchman—chubby, stolid, with little knickerbockers, short jacket, and broad hat, all complete, only wanting a pipe to be quite perfect. I don't know whether he was Tic, Toss, or Tol, but anyhow his parents, whilst giving him an excellent character, were anxious to part with him, partly, they averred on account of his own surprising attachment to Mr. Higgins; Mrs. Higgins, however, resolutely rejected this handsome present. Dahl Nell often favoured Surprise by a short visit, generally asking for a loan of something, which it was difficult to get back again, and enlivening his conversation by stories of doubtful veracity. Once he gave a touching description of the death of an acquaintance of the Higginses, who was in robust health at the time; but his grandest flight of fancy, that I ever

heard of, was reserved for a farmer who lived at some distance. Chancing to meet this individual, the baby-faced Dahl recounted to him that he had been fortunate enough to obtain from old Mr. Higgins the loan of his span of oxen, that he had also got a waggon, and was prepared to ride transport to the Diamond Fields, familiarly called the "Fields." High prices were being given for produce there at the time, and transport was also high, and many a young man's dream was to be able to get a span and a waggon to take loads there. I suppose Dahl as he had trudged along on foot to where he met the farmer, had dreamed a pleasant day-dream of how at some future time he might make enough money to afford himself a horse. The farmer pricked up his ears, and the affair ended by a bargain being struck for Dahl to take a load for him to the Fields. How Master Nell got out of his contract I don't know, but as he had no means of fulfilling it he must have got out of it somehow, probably scathlessly, for the Nell family seemed to have a knack of wriggling out of difficulties in safety.

Why Mr. Higgins trusted his valuable cattle to go to the bush-veldt under the care of these people I can't say, but the Nell family were delighted to be so trusted. They would have milk all the winter, could make butter, and sell it afterwards if they chose to take the trouble of putting it in jars, or if not eat it themselves; they could have meat too, which was a luxury to them, for they could easily invent a story to account for the death of an animal; and then they were paid into the bargain. They had got an old tent-waggon and departed happy, and by the time Mr. Higgins came up to them had killed a cow. They said she had gone blind! they swore she had

—so blind that she could not see where to walk ; but it was strange that the Kaffirs with them had been unable to detect her inability to distinguish surrounding objects. I forgot to mention that amongst other talents Mrs. Nell possessed that great female accomplishment of being able to weep to order, and this always settled the matter with Mr. Higgins.

CHAPTER XI.

I HAVE a pleasant remembrance of winter at Surprise—the bright crisp morning air as I walked through the hoar-frost to the stable, there to warm my hands by cleaning Eclipse; the cheery breakfast of bread and mutton, or sometimes eggs, occasionally pleasantly diversified by hot scones, and which my exercise always caused me to enjoy, although I confess I missed the milk; then lessons. I don't maintain that they were always pleasant—that would be impossible; and the school-room—a bare room, with the rafters showing overhead, a mud floor, and with a big deal table, two forms, one chair, and a big packing-case for furniture—was sometimes bitterly cold; but Mrs. Higgins would bring, or send us in, little iron dishes of hot embers to warm our toes, and we wrapped ourselves up in all sorts of jackets and shawls. Rough would curl up in my lap and act muff; and so we pulled through, and except when little Sarah's grief at not being able to have a good romp instead of saying lessons, became overwhelming, we used to be quite merry over our spelling-books, geography, &c. Dinner of mutton, pumpkin, potatoes, and sometimes crushed mealies, made a diversion; and then afternoon tea, when Mrs. Higgins generally managed to get an egg to beat up in my tea,

and make a substitute for milk. I used to enjoy that tea, I lolling on the table—having been sitting too long for standing not to appear preferable to sitting to me; Mrs. Higgins, always with some work in her hands, sitting on the sofa; and the children running about the room chattering, as children always do when let out of school. The singing lesson generally came after; and then I hastened off to catch Eclipse (for although he would let himself be driven up towards the house by the little Kaffirs, he would not let himself be caught except by me) and take him to the stable, to give him his evening feed and bed him up.

Just before starting for the bush-veldt, Mr. Higgins (having sent the Kaffir Jonas away) had given me his house as a stable for Eclipse, but before that, I used to feed him outside the old stable under the big syringa-trees of an evening, and many a pretty Rembrandt-looking group have I seen of the Kaffirs, little and big, sitting round this evening fire, which threw fitful lights on the trunks of the surrounding bushes and trees, and on the long grass, also on elf-like little figures dancing some uncouth Kaffir dance, and chanting some equally uncouth Boer ditty, interrupted by peals of ringing laughter as one or the other played some trick off on his or her companions. Great amongst the trick players were little Sarah (who, free from school, was wild with spirits) and Fiervaree the small groom. Then to walk to the house, and see the light of the bright wood fire in the drawing-room gleaming through the darkness, and know how cosy it would be that evening after our supper of bread and tea, when we would all draw round the fire, and with the three youngest girls curled up on the ground, or sitting in the

big fireplace, a petition would be put up by a chorus of young voices for a story, and I had to recall old German "Mährchen" and eastern "Arabian Nights," and make De la Motte Fouqué's charming "Undine" come forth from the treasury of my memory, to delight these pretty little Africanders, who hung on my words as if I had been a veritable Scheherazade. There were two additions to our family always in the room; these I had forgotten to mention. One was a dassy, or rock rabbit, a round furry little beast, guiltless of a tail, and with the brightest eyes, and the sharpest of white teeth, which it was not slow to use. It was still quite young, but when annoyed was very fierce, and would fly at any one it fancied meant to offend it, as at any dog or horse that in any way molested it, making a queer snapping noise, and curling up its little upper lip in a savage manner that seemed quite preposterous in such a soft little furry beast. It was wonderfully active, and although its legs were almost too short to be visible, and it had no neck to speak of, and was besides as fat as a plump partridge, it thought nothing of taking the most prodigious jumps up, down, or sideways. The mischief this little animal delighted in was something wonderful. It had a great taste for flowers; roses it particularly affected; and whether it saw one in a girl's hair, or in a vase on a high chimney-piece, was quite immaterial to it. To jump from the floor on the young lady's shoulder and seize its prey, or to spend a whole afternoon in practising jumps at the chimney-piece, was the same to Master Dassy. He always got the rose in the end. And if there was not a rose, he would demolish whatever in the flower line there was. The numbers of vases full of water that small animal over-

turned was wonderful ; but at times he would become the victim of an insane desire to break something. Once he made up his mind to break a very pretty glass vase. He showed his intention early in the morning, and in spite of the vase being repeatedly placed in positions that were supposed to be safe from his assaults, it was broken before evening. We were at supper when we heard the crash, and arrived in the drawing-room just in time to see Master Dassy scuttling away, his little black eyes dancing with glee, and the vase, broken in pieces, lying on the floor. At meal-times Dassy was great. He would make one spring from the sofa to the table, and once there he would put one little paw on the side of a dish, and tilt up the cover with his little snub nose, look what was inside, and if he liked it nibble a little, if not put down the cover and go to another dish. I have often looked at him sitting in the middle of the table eating alternately from four dishes. If he was interfered with, he would charge at the offender, barking, and showing his teeth, and if he could not bite his enemy, he would at least fasten on and worry his sleeve. If there was nothing else to eat he would nibble hair or wool mats, and window blinds, sometimes even he would sit on my shoulder and nibble my hair. He and Rough were great friends, and he would curl up on Rough's back, or between his paws, and look exquisitely comfortable. Dassy was a Sybarite. His slumbers were not to be disturbed with impunity. He generally slept in his master and mistress's bed, and would bite them if they, in moving, interfered with him. In the morning he would have his early coffee, and if it were not given quickly to him in a saucer, he would jump up and upset the cup ; then he would hop up to the window, and pop

his nose through a hole in one of the panes to try what the temperature was, and if it was cold he would retreat to bed again. There was a thin muslin curtain hung over the lower part of the window which interfered a little with him, so one day he nibbled it away exactly over where it had acted as a curtain to his loop-hole. He was a most engaging little animal; and when at last he fell sick, and his appetite failing, waxed thin, and at last so feeble that he could hardly move, his little face and ways were most touching. He would still try to eat a rose, and if he saw one, would look first at it, and then at anyone who happened to be near him, imploringly. A few nights before he died I had occasion to go into the kitchen after the family were in bed. Dassy was curled up in the still warm ashes of the fire, and as I came in I was struck by the mute appeal in his eyes. I thought he might want something to drink, and brought water and then milk to him; but he would not touch either, but still looked imploringly at me. I stroked the poor little back, now quite sharp and bony, and puzzled my brains as to what the little thing could want. Suddenly he crawled over to a small piece of half-burnt wood, and took it up, then looked straight at me, nibbled it and put it down. I saw then what he wanted, and got him food, which he ate greedily. I had not thought of it before, for he had persistently refused food for days. During the winter, however, Dassy was still well and mischievous, and Fido, Roughy, the two cats, Dassy, and a little prairie-dog, or meer-cat, formed members of our evening party.

The meer-cat, an animal I had often seen in the Zoological Gardens, was even funnier than the dassy. With its long black bushy tail, long sharp nose, and bead-like eyes,

it looked as if it would be the more active of the two. But the dassy beat it hollow in jumping. Meer-cat, however, would canter along as quick as a horse, and many a time has he even outrun Eclipse as he cantered; when, jumping up on a convenient ant-heap, this little piece of absurdity would stand bolt upright, balancing himself on his tail, and with his fore paws crossed, and his head turning from side to side, would survey his surroundings with the greatest complacency, until the horse, being abreast of him, he would jump down, and with his tail erect make off to the next nearest ant-heap. Sometimes he would lie on his back propped against a stone, with his fore paws crossed, his tail turned up between his hind legs, head thrown backwards, and his eyes cast up in a most sentimental manner. Really, however, he cast up his eyes to keep a sharp look-out for hawks, of which he was terribly afraid. At other times he would play hide and seek with Dassy, or throwing one fore paw round the cat's neck, sit for half an hour examining her fur in the way monkeys do, or he would compose himself to sleep, leaning back cross-pawed in the chimney corner, or perhaps, after vain efforts at keeping in an absolutely erect position poised on his tail in front of the fire, and after sundry bobs and nods and sudden awakings, accompanied with those demonstrations of great wakefulness which I have so frequently observed and practised during sermon-times in my youthful days, he would suddenly collapse into a little furry ball, and sleep so soundly that he would emit little snores and let himself be handled without awaking. He was as mischievous as Dassy, only in a different way, and having been accustomed in his early youth to follow the fashion of meer-cats and live in a

hole, he was never tired of grubbing, either in or out of doors.

Sometimes our evening's amusements were diversified by making pancakes, or by playing games, such as magic music and friar's ground; and sometimes the children would give me a good laugh by chasing old Khrid as she went about her duties in the kitchen, carrying a lighted candle in a pewter candlestick poised on her head.

Occasionally a chance visitor from the outer world would drop in unexpectedly—strangers travelling through the country for the first time, or people out for a day or two from Pretoria, or sometimes people of the country travelling on business. Whatever or whoever they were, they met with genial hospitality at Surprise. Then, at other times, Jimmy would come up to pay a visit on Sunday, one of the girls and I would ride down to the valley, or I would ride over to the farmhouse where the post was left, for letters.

One hideous episode alone, broke the pleasant monotony of this time. One night I was awakened by a loud tapping at my door and Mrs. Higgins's voice calling me. I jumped up in a fright, thinking that one of the children must be ill, but was glad to hear that it was only a Kaffir child, the little daughter of a certain Andreas, who lived in a small separate kraal on Mr. Higgins's estate. Andreas affected to be something better than the usual kraal Kaffirs, but his wife was a mere savage, dressed in skins and blankets, and his children ran about either naked or with only a narrow girdle on. Mrs. Higgins took me into the kitchen, where I saw Andreas with the little girl squatted on the floor, and the mother with a baby in her arms standing close by. After examining the child I felt con-

vinced that she had taken poison—some vegetable poison ; I could not say what. The history told by her father, and which, owing to my still imperfect knowledge of Dutch, had to be interpreted to me by an old Englishman who was building a stone cattle-kraal at Surprise, and who had been aroused from his sleep in the lumber-room by these late visitors, was this. The mother had gone a short time before to a neighbouring kraal where the family of Andreas's brother's wife lived. She had taken the girl with her, and from the day she returned she had been ailing. The father seemed greatly distressed ; the mother did not seem in the least interested. After doing what I could for the child and leaving the kitchen, I communicated my opinion as to the cause of the illness to Mrs. Higgins. She then reminded me that this very Andreas, shortly after my arrival at Surprise, had been accused of poisoning his brother, Roykraal by name, having administered a certain poison to him which had caused him to go mad. That Roykraal, a fine lad not long married, had gone raving mad for a time, and had since remained in a half mad state, whilst he looked quite old, was certain. He had deserted his wife, and generally wandered about talking nonsense to himself. Andreas had been accused before the captain or chief of his tribe, but the charge had fallen through in some way. I remembered too that Mrs. Higgins had, at the time, said that Roykraal's people would take revenge. I also remembered that a short time before, Andreas and his wife had had a desperate disagreement, ending by Mrs. Andreas running away to her father across the mountain. This is a usual form of husband-bullying among the Kaffirs. Girls are sold high amongst these people, an

attractive and active girl fetching a considerable price in cattle for a wife. She has to work hard afterwards, for the cultivation of the fields is done principally by the women; but if her husband displeases her she walks off to her old home; and as it is considered a great disgrace to a man for his wife to be in her father's kraal, he generally buys her back, paying the father one or more head of cattle to restore her. Andreas had bought his better half back again, after grieving over her departure for some days; but shortly after she had betaken herself for a visit to the kraal of the father of Roykraal's wife, and the eldest of Andreas's children, and his favourite, was ill since then. It struck me as strange that Mrs. Andreas, who was of course well aware of the vindictiveness of her own race, should have chosen Mrs. Roykraal's kraal as a place to make an excursion to with her children. I watched the child until early morning, then went to have some sleep. When I saw her later, although still weak and at times light-headed, she could eat with relish; and as it is not pleasant to nurse any one, especially a dirty Kaffir, in one's kitchen, I agreed with Mrs. Higgins that the child might be taken to her home. We cautioned the parents that they must not leave her alone a minute.

The day passed as usual. I was very sleepy in the evening and went to bed early. I always slept with my window open, and Rough always lay curled up at the foot of my bed. Some way on in the night I was startled by his furious barking, and jumping up, I saw a black head protruded inside of my window, whilst its owner said, in a frightened voice, that Andreas's child was dying, and that he had brought it. I let the people into the kitchen, and

called Mrs. Higgins. It was a frightful scene. The child was in the most raving delirium I ever saw, convulsed in a most horrible manner, and her howls were unearthly, interrupted, every now and then, by the most touching appeals to her father—touching because of the sound of her voice and her action. Her own father could not understand what she said. He had brought her tied on his back, which she had lacerated with her nails and teeth. The poor fellow had no thought for himself, but with anguish in his face and voice he besought me to save his child. I asked if he had remained all day with the girl; he answered that he had been obliged to go away once or twice, but that the mother had remained with her. That more poison had been administered was, however, certain. I looked at the mother; she was squatted in the chimney corner, rolled up in two blankets, and was looking at her daughter's writhings with a stolid curiosity. Then a horrid suspicion crossed my mind.

The child, after taking some medicine, became quiet, but soon began to get deadly cold. We got all the blankets we could to roll round her, and put hot bricks to her feet and the calves of her legs. The mother never moved. At last, the child still being cold, I ordered Andreas to take one of the blankets off his wife, as she was warm enough with one, sitting as she was by the fire. The patient was just getting a little warmer, and I had turned away from her for a few minutes, when I noticed that the mother moved and began to arrange the blankets round her child. I watched her to see what she was going to do, and was horrified to see that she pulled her own blanket out, uncovering the child, and proceeded

to roll it round herself, saying, it was explained to me, that she was sure the girl was dying, and that she could not remain, but was going home. It struck me that Andreas was afraid of the woman; but I pulled her blanket off somewhat ungently, and again rolled it round the child, telling the woman that she might go without it if she chose; but she crouched up again by the fire. The father again made a passionate appeal to me to save the little girl's life; and Mrs. Higgins having come into the kitchen, I asked her to tell him that I was doing all I could, but that I was combating no disease, but poison, and that it was a poison which I had not the proper means at hand to combat successfully. The wretched man wrung his hands. "Oh!" he exclaimed wildly, "if I could but get to — (mentioning a Kaffir name) behind the mountain, he would save her." Saul, the driver, who was standing close by Mrs. Higgins and me, whispered, "That's the man he got the poison for Roykraal from."

I shall never forget that night—the almost dark kitchen, the awe-struck group standing round the child with her father kneeling by her, the witch-like figure of the mother crouched in one corner of the large fireplace, with an impish-looking boy of about twelve—the shepherd—crouched in the opposite one, with a grin on his face, and with his lanky bare arms and legs looking more like a hideous spider than anything else, and the sickening conviction that was growing upon me that the mother was an accomplice to the poisoning!

Towards morning I had so far succeeded that the child was warm, and appeared to be sleeping naturally. I felt quite worn out, and not wishing to disturb the children's routine by sleeping the next day, I told the father to call

me so soon as the little girl should awake, and then I lay down on my bed in my clothes. It was already dawning, and it was still very early morning when I awoke. I got up and hastened to the kitchen. All but the elf-like Kaffir boy were gone; he, as usual, was making early coffee. He told me that at break of day, the mother had insisted upon removing the child to the old stable near the garden. He said the child had seemed to him better. I drank the coffee, and Mrs. Higgins sent a boy to ask how the patient was. The answer came back that the child was again in convulsions; but on seeing me preparing to go, the boy said it was useless—that as he left, the woman, regardless of Andreas, had rolled her child tight up in a blanket, and had started for her kraal with her burden on her back. It was evidently a hopeless case. In the afternoon I rode down to the kraal, two small huts in a little yard enclosed with reeds. The yard was lined with women, squatting on the ground and talking, the mother amongst them. In the principal hut Andreas was seated on the ground, holding his little girl in his arms. She was in a stupor, which I saw at once was the precursor of death; several kraal Kaffirs were squatted round; one of them, called Old Jas, a relation of Roykraal, with a most diabolical grin on his face. The child died that evening, and amidst much shrieking of the women, amongst whom the mother distinguished herself, was buried in her father's little cattle-kraal—the place of honour amongst Kaffirs—and the huts were deserted as being ill-omened, Andreas and his family going to the big kraal.

No farther notice was taken of the matter, but I heard various stories of Kaffirs having poisoned even white

people's children in revenge, which, together with what I had seen, finished the disgust which I already felt for Kaffirs as a nation. The men who knew the Kaffirs best, and to whom I mentioned my conviction of the woman's guilt, said they had no doubt that I was right in my conclusions; that Kaffir women were quite capable of poisoning their own children in revenge upon their husbands.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. HIGGINS returned from the bush-veldt ill-content with the management of the Nell family, but thinking that he had set them on the right path. We had hoped for a little butter, but none was sent. Things went on in much the same way after his return, with the exception that the story-telling came to an end, except when one of the children did not feel well and went to bed early, getting me to sit by the bed-side, or on the bed, and recount tales. I rather think there was a good deal of "foxing" done on little Sarah's part: Augusta never "foxed" about anything.

It was mid-winter, and the grass-fires were wonderful and terrible to look at, as they swept along before the wind. Of course it depends on the strength of the wind whether they are dangerous or not, and it has always appeared strange to me how little the knowledge that the wind may rise or veer in a minute, seems to trouble the farmers. One evening I was going to bed, when I observed the whole sky ablaze from an evidently large fire at the other side of that part of the mountain which formed a spur in front of my window. The trees clothing the mountain side, and the magnificent precipice at its top, stood out in effective relief against the flame-coloured

masses of smoke which were rolling, not towards Surprise, but, driven by the south wind northward over the mountain. The danger, so long as the wind remained steady, was not to us, for although the lurid light seemed near, I knew the fire could not even have reached the confines of Mr. Higgins's property. However, I called him—he had not yet gone to bed—and showed him the fire. "It is far off," he said; "don't be frightened, the wind is not blowing this way." "But suppose it changes in the night?" said I. "Oh, it won't change," he answered, laughing, and returned quietly to his rest.

I was convinced Mr. Higgins was not infallible about the wind, and I knew that Eclipse was shut up in a house surrounded by such long grass that it nearly reached to the thatched roof, so I opened my window wide, and resolved to wake several times during the the night; this I can do when I choose. The first time I awoke the fire was no closer, it was being slowly driven northward; the second time the wind had changed, evidently only a short time before I awoke (it is possible its change woke me, for there was a slight breeze blowing into my room), and the smoke was pouring over the spur in the direction of the house. I had lain down in some of my clothes in case of emergency, and I immediately hastened through the dressing-room to Mr. Higgins's room, and tapping at the door told him of the change of wind. I had awakened and startled Harriet Sturton and the children, who were sleeping on the floor in the drawing-room. By the time I regained my room the flames could be seen, dancing amongst the foliage along the top of the spur. I now dressed; and taking a bridle in my hand, I went down to Eclipse's stable, so that in case of the wind rising I

might be able to get him out of it and into safety quickly. I did not go in, but waited and watched the scene. It was impressive. The moon was a little past the full, and shed her light on all around; to the north-west she was eclipsed by the fire, that came steadily on, curling round the foot of the precipice, whose projecting crags it lit up fitfully, with its many tongues licking up the long grass, and shooting along the stems of the trees and amongst their branches, until they, instead of standing out black against a lurid background, looked like enormous torches. It came closer and closer, till I could not only feel its hot breath, but could hear the roar of the flames and the crackling of the grass and bushes; then at last some Kaffirs came from the houses beyond the dam, and extinguished the fire by beating it down with big branches, It broke out again during the day, however; and the next evening, as I was riding back alone from a visit to the valley, I saw its red serpent-like track creeping up and across the mountain.

I was beginning to understand the Boer language now, and even to talk it, having practised it with the little Kaffirs who used to congregate round me morning and evening while I was attending to my horse. These impromptu lessons had become rarer since I had a separate stable for Eclipse, still I had occasional visitors even there. Once I remember a young Kaffir, the very imp who had reminded me of an ugly spider the night of the Andreas tragedy, standing for a long time, lolling through one of the little windows of the stable, looking at me while I turned up the bedding and cleaned the stall after I had turned Eclipse out; for, strange to say, I had vainly offered a shilling a week to any boy who would do

this for me. All were willing to take the shilling, but none would do the work as I chose it to be done, a very small cleaning of a stable going a long way in the Transvaal. The abovementioned young gentleman watched me with great interest for some time, and I said nothing to him, just to see what was coming (I knew it would not be an offer of assistance), then, turning to a small girl who came to tell me that breakfast was ready, he observed with great unction, "No; thus I would never work for a horse."

I was beginning to think that it was time for me to look about for a farm, as I had not intended to remain more than one year as a governess. I had learned a good deal in various ways, too, during the past months, as much as, without neglecting my duties, I should ever learn, and hence, having seen some advertisements in the *Volkstem* and *Argus* which looked promising, and hearing that Arthur Sturton with his wife and Jimmy were going to Pretoria for the races in September, and would take their waggon, I asked leave to go too, as I should be able to send up a dress in their waggon and not be entirely dependent on my habit, as I must be in the event of riding up alone. Mr. Higgins was going to the races also, and upon my getting the desired permission, it was agreed that Mrs. Higgins and the children should accompany him.

Only two events that occurred between Mr. Higgins's return and our going to Pretoria have left any particular impression on my mind, in addition to that made by the fire. The first was the return of the cattle from the bush-veldt in the early spring, very shortly before we started. It was a beautiful afternoon when the little

Kaffirs came running with the news that the herd was in sight, but a long way off. We all turned out, lessons being hurried on in honour of the occasion, to see them come up. And a pretty sight it was; the cows, with their calves, born in the bush-veldt, trotting beside them, the sturdy oxen, and the frisky young cattle, all coming in a long line across the fresh young grass of the hill-side and under the thorn-trees, bellowing a welcome to their old home, and the evening sun throwing their shadows far along the ground.

They no longer found their poor old companion who had been too ill to follow them to the bush-veldt. He had got better, and had almost weathered out the winter, but after being left for a few nights of bitter cold rain without any covering, shivering in the kraal, into which from old habit he used to put himself at night, he one morning tottered over to the waggon he used to draw, and fell dead beside the disselboom, his old place when trekking. I was present when the Kaffirs skinned and opened the carcass, preparatory to eating it. The poor ox—a valuable one, who, but a short time before he got ill, had, with his mate, prevented the waggon being overturned, by their intelligence in holding back when the rest of the oxen were taking it into danger—died simply of neglected inflammation of the lungs.

The second event was the visit of the Bishop of Pretoria, who came and went on a jolly and evidently petted pony. He confirmed the three eldest girls, also old Mr. and Mrs. Higgins; and I shall never forget the singularly impressive sight of this world-worn couple, kneeling beside their two young daughters and their fair-haired grandchild in the drawing-room at Surprise, and answering from

their careworn hearts that they steadfastly believed in that religion from which they had drawn comfort in all their many troubles, whilst the children's fresh lips repeated the same words, without even an idea of what steadfast belief meant.

We used to have occasional religious services in the drawing-room, Mr. Richardson coming from Rustenberg twice, riding; and then a young Englishman (not in holy orders), who was tutor to the children of an English Africander farmer at some distance, being entrusted by the bishop with the spiritual care of the district in which Surprise was the largest farmhouse. On these occasions old Mr. and Mrs. Higgins and the Sturtons, who lived in the valley, and sometimes John or James Higgins and family, would be our guests, also Jimmy; and while I played the piano (for owing to my lameness I could not play the harmonium), the young people sang the hymns. The young amateur clergyman was a very amusing person, and used to convulse us with laughter at his absurd anecdotes of his life at a Boer's where he had at first been tutor. He certainly did not seem to have slept on roses there. Besides being tutor in the English Africander's family, he had to help with a store and mill; at last he found his duties too onerous, and all attempt at church services ceased.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE were many preparations to be made for going to Pretoria—dresses to be made for the children, and biscuits baked for us all, for we were to live in the waggon whilst there—and the children were in great glee. At last the morning came; the waggon was packed; bedding, and boxes, and provisions, were all put in, and lastly Mrs. Higgins and her children. Then the waggon started, leaving Mr. Higgins and me to follow on horseback. We gave them a fair start; and, leaving the old Englishman who had been building the new stone kraal, in charge of the place, and of the dogs and other pet beasts, who all had to be shut up until we were gone, and having locked up the front part of the house, we mounted our horses and followed.

We came up with the waggon about half way to Moy-plas, outspanned just across a deep spruit. The travellers were having a tea-dinner, so we off-saddled and enjoyed it with them; then leaving them once more, we rode on. For some distance the road was uninteresting, its chief advantage being that it was good for cantering; but as we neared Moy-plas and crossed the tributary of the Crocodile River, which I had previously crossed when riding to Fahl-plas, we came to a farm which made a

great impression upon me. Stretching right across the valley and to the top of the ranges on either side, with water from two tributaries of the Crocodile irrigating it, with its broad lands, magnificent orchard, its out-buildings, and its small but trim farmhouse, it looked the perfection of a Boer farm, and made one picture to oneself what it might be if it were an English one. The owner of this fine property—a tall, gaunt woman with a pleasant face, the widow of three husbands—was standing by the gate of the little yard in front of her house, a yard trim as a room, with oleander and other trees round it, and shut in by a low whitewashed wall. She received us cheerily, looked inquisitively at me when Mr. Higgins introduced me as his children's schoolmistress, told us that Arthur Sturton's waggon had passed, that he had paid her a visit with Jimmy, and that she thought Jimmy was rude because he did not shake hands all round, but she was delighted at my attempts to talk Dutch, and told me I must pay her another visit. She was surrounded by children of various ages, and all related to her in some way, whose parents lived in some of the buildings which looked like barns. This old lady was a remarkable woman. Hospitable and free-handed to all, of whatever nation they might be, she was yet a frugal manager. She and her first husband had started in life with a waggon and a span of oxen. I don't know what sort of man he was, but she was a host in herself. If her oxen stuck in a difficult drift, she would tuck up her petticoats, pull off her boots, and leaping from the waggon take the whip from her Kaffir and drive the team through herself. If labour was scarce at harvest time, or when water had to be led on the lands, she thought nothing of doing the necessary work, but she attended to

her household duties withal. She had never allowed her children to take any part in politics, and I don't think any one exactly knew what she thought of British rule. Like all Boer women and men, she regarded husbands and wives as articles so necessary to household comfort that no time must be lost in replacing them when lost; still she was of opinion that there was some limitation as to age in the matter, and I heard a delightful story about her reception of a suitor after the demise of No. 3.

Mr. Higgins was riding home from Pretoria one day when he met a young Boer, so magnificently got up that he knew he must be going a-courting; for Boers array themselves splendidly, and pay great attention on such occasions to the quality and colour of their saddle-cloths, a very favourite sort being a large-patterned drugget with much green and red in it, and with a broad yellow woollen fringe. The young Boer seemed disconcerted when Mr. Higgins asked him where he was going, and still more so when Mr. Higgins playfully inquired whether the fair one was Lettie Matersen. This aroused Mr. Higgins's suspicions. Shortly after he had occasion to pass by Mrs. Matersen's farm, and, as usual, went in to pay a visit. He asked if she had lately seen —— (mentioning the young man's name). "Yes," she said, "he had been there;" and then went on to tell how the unfortunate individual had been dealt with by her. He had come to pay a visit, and the old lady instantly saw through his motives. She tormented him with questions as to whom he was going a-courting to, and as she knew all her neighbours, soon forced him into a corner by making him confess it was to none of them he was bound. She was deaf to his assertion that he was searching for

a lost ox (a favourite excuse with a would-be suitor), although he described all its marks ; and at last when she extorted from him that she was the object of his hopes and fears, she turned sharp on him with " Ah, ah ! You young idiot. You have come a-courting of my farm, have you," &c., &c., until she drove him frantic from the house.

We reached Moy-plas as the sun was beginning to get low, and found the Sturtons' and old Mr. Higgins's waggons there already—for Alice and Ada had persuaded the old people to take them to the races.

I must try to describe Moy-plas. It was a large, irregular-shaped cottage, whitewashed and thatched, and it looked more like an English farmhouse than any place I had seen in the Transvaal. It was approached by a road branching a little off the highway to Pretoria, and the back of the house was turned to this road and to the outbuildings, which partially enclosed the sheep and goat kraal. At each side of these were sheds for protecting the animals in bad weather. The front of the house opened on a verandah, from which a step led to a yard like Mrs. Matersen's, this in its turn opened on a strip of grass, with a well-kept path leading to a little bridge across the broad water-furrow (like a rivulet), and into a trim garden and orchard, where you might walk under rows of big orange and lemon trees, and along hedges of figs, pomegranates, and quinces. There were vines, too, kept low and trim, and lots of brandy was made at Moy-plas. Inside, the idea of an English farmhouse was suggested by the wooden ceilings, with their supporting rafters, painted and polished, and the ample cupboards. One apartment, the dining-room, was papered with prints cut from the *Illustrated News* ; many of them recalled the

ghosts of former days to me, in a manner that was almost pleasant from the sense of strangeness that it awakened in me.

Old Mr. and Mrs. Sturton were already at Pretoria, having gone there on account of Mr. Sturton's illness, and Harriet with her elder sister Maria, and her younger Clara, were to follow them in Arthur Sturton's waggon. The youngest girl, Lettie, was at Pretoria. Two sons—Percy, a jolly young fellow with a ferocious beard, and Augustus, who was still a child—were to be left in charge of the farm, which, like Mrs. Matersen's, stretched from the top of the Magaliesberg across the valley to the top of the opposite range. William and Alfred, the two remaining sons, were the one on his farm, the other at school near Fahl-plas, his tutor being the amateur clergyman.

During the afternoon two rakish-looking men rode up, and were introduced to me as I sat under the verandah: they, too, were going to the races. One was an Englishman I had often heard of, Charlie Harris; the other, a Boer, whom, however, I took for an Englishman, as he spoke English perfectly, and I did not catch his name, Van der Veer, when he was introduced. I must here remark that it is far more the custom to talk of people by their Christian and surname together, than to use the term "Mr." It is very common, indeed, to use the Christian name alone. These individuals did not stay long, not even off-saddling. The Sturtons made me have my meals in the house, but the others cooked beside their waggons, and I had a picnic tea by old Mrs. Higgins's camp fire.

Our waggon came in late, and in the very early dawn

it and its occupants, together with Arthur Sturton's and old Mr. Higgins's waggons, and many accompanying waggons laden with forage for the Pretoria market, were got under way. They were to outspan for breakfast immediately after they had crossed the Crocodile. Mr. Higgins, Arthur Sturton, and I, waited for early coffee, and then started after them on horseback, Percy Sturton riding with us so far as the first outspan.

Very pretty the wooded drift of the Crocodile looked that morning, the river flowing past it towards the deep cleft through which it winds its way to the back of the Magaliesberg. All but one of the waggons were already outspanned on the opposite side, and the camp fires alight, the ladies and children standing in groups looking down at the one forage waggon which had stuck in the drift. I rode on, and Mr. Higgins and Percy Sturton, dismounting and taking the whips, soon drove it through.

We outspanned that evening close to Dasspoort, and within two miles of Pretoria, which lies on the other side of it. The name is derived from the number of dassies that used to live in the rocks at either side; none are to be seen now, but the name remains.

The next morning we inspanned early, and Mr. Higgins rode on before the waggons so as to be early on the market with samples of his forage. We all followed in the waggon, Eclipse being led. I thought Dasspoort looked very pretty in the early morning light, the road being cut out of the face of the rock a few feet above the course of the Apis river; and even before we outspanned on the outskirts of the village, I remarked that it had greatly increased in size since I had seen it last, and that a great deal of building was going on.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE great excitement during our stay at Pretoria was the races, but other things, too, made an impression on my mind. First of all, the sleeping in the waggon. Mr. and Mrs. Higgins slept in the back part with little Sarah; a curtain divided them from Augusta and myself; and Sannee made up a sort of bed for herself on a box which stood across the fore part of the waggon, called the waggon-box, from which she had a tendency to roll down on my head in the night. Our washing arrangements were very limited; and camp life, though jolly in its proper place, is a bore on the outskirts of a village, particularly when the village calls itself a city. However, we rubbed along. We found old Mr. Sturton very ill, and the arrangements for taking care of him were such as made my hair stand on end. A bare room had been hired at an enormous rent, in a house whose owners did not trouble themselves much about the illness of their tenant. A few things had been put in hastily, and there he lay, in danger of his life, with the cooking having to be done in his room, or outside, in a sort of yard, into which the refuse from all the neighbouring houses was thrown. There were no means of keeping the rooms fresh and clean—no comfort which an invalid requires. On the arrival of his daughters another small room (also bare) was hired, and here the girls slept,

and sometimes sat, on mattresses spread on the ground ; all this discomfort was not caused by want of money, but because the necessary accommodation was not to be had.

I, of course, saw my kind acquaintances again at Pretoria, and then there were the races. These were much better than I expected. The horses looked more up to the mark than I thought they would—the jockeys, also—and the running was not at all bad. Eclipse, remembering his old racing days, I suppose, was in a great state of mind at the first start. I rode with Mr. Higgins to see that, and then we separated, and I presently fell in with Mr. Van-der-veen at the Higgins's waggon, which was drawn up in a line with many other waggons. The scene was characteristic of South Africa—the ox-waggon element predominating—but there were also traps of various kinds drawn up in line, a little grand stand, with the ring close to it—refreshment and other tents, a number of men on horseback, and two women besides myself. Mr. Van-der-veen proposed to go with me to see another start, and told me that one of the horses in this particular race belonged to an old Boer who believed greatly in him. He said he was glad to see Boers doing this sort of thing—it approached somewhat to civilization—in short, he talked altogether so much as if he had nothing to do with the Boers in general, that I was much surprised when I heard afterwards that he was the son of a Boer. He and I then went to the Edinburgh Hotel, where I had put up my horse during my stay at Pretoria ; there we had lunch while the horses had a feed. I had been rather amused at Mr. Van-der-veen proposing this proceeding, although I thought it a very good one.

By the end of the day the male portion of the community were getting very lively, and rows were plentiful. Poor old Mr. Sturton participated unpleasantly in this part of the day's programme, for while the noise outside his window was unceasing, his hosts favoured him with snatches from "Bonnie Dundee," and other ballads, until a late hour; and Mrs. Sturton would not interfere, or allow me to interfere, because she thought it likely that if we did the invalid would be told to march the next morning, in spite both of his illness and the high rent he was paying.

The next day I did not go to the races, as I thought the surroundings of the course would be too lively; and on the third the waggons started on their homeward way. I remained behind, having affairs at Pretoria which, owing to all places of business being shut during the first two days of the races, I had been unable to get through before. I picked up the waggons at their first outspan, and had tea. Mr. Higgins had already arrived on horseback from Pretoria, and before we started James Higgins and his wife, with Alice and Harriett Sturton, in his covered-top cart, drawn by two good horses, came up; and, after a short rest, I started for Moy-plas in their company, but on horseback. Half-way we stopped at a Boer's house, where I was asked to prescribe for the children, who were very ill with whooping-cough; and by night-fall we reached Moy-plas once more. The waggons came in the next morning; and in the afternoon Mr. Higgins, Arthur Sturton, and I started for home, leaving the rest to follow.

Two events had taken place during our absence, both of them unpleasant. A neighbouring farmer, Do Krüger

—brother of the well-known Paul— had been murdered by one of his Kaffirs ; and a tremendous grass fire had swept up to within a yard or so of the house Surprise, and to within about three feet of Eclipse's stable ; it had even destroyed part of the rose hedge bordering the upper lands.

The circumstances of Do Kruger's (pronounced Kreer) death were singular. He had an old quarrel going on with some Kaffirs, who lived in a little kraal just where his property touched Mr. Higgins's. Of late the quarrel had been getting worse, the Kaffirs being very disobedient. They had lands given them to cultivate for their own use in lieu of payment (a common arrangement in the Transvaal), and the natural consequence was that they wanted to work on their own lands when their master wanted them to work on his. The letting of water was the immediate cause of dispute. Do wanted water let on his lands, whilst the Kaffirs persisted in spending their time letting it on theirs. At last Do, having made up his mind to go to the bush-veldt to see how his cattle were getting on there, thought he would make an example. He called on some of his neighbours, amongst others on William Sturton, to ask them to accompany him to the little kraal, as he meant to give the Kaffirs a good lesson. This was a common practice amongst the Boers before English rule. William Sturton declined, but several Boers agreed ; and the next day, saddling his horse and bidding good-bye to his wife, he started for the bush-veldt, intending to settle his quarrel with the Kaffirs *en route*. His friends joined him at his own house, and having all reached the little kraal, Do called the Kaffirs. One only came out of the hut, to whom Do said that he must immediately let on

water to the land. The Kaffir replied, that he would do so after he had watered his own, no doubt speaking disrespectfully as well as disobediently. Upon this the Boers leapt off their horses and made a rush for the huts, forced their way in, overturning a small child, and seized the man who was particularly obnoxious to them; but just as Do entered the house, a man of the name of Manell hit him over the head with a stick with a heavy knob at the end of it, here called a "knob-kirrie," and felled him. His friends were intent on belabouring the man they had caught; but Do called out, "Leave him alone and help me out—they have killed me." He walked a short way towards his house and crossed a spruit, then he said he must sit down. A large blood tumour had already formed behind the ear where he had been struck. He soon became unconscious, and died shortly after he was carried home. Strange to say, he received his death-blow on the very spot where his father had cruelly killed a Kaffir. His wife, a very fat woman, had seen her former husband brought home dead, killed by lightning. She went into convulsions and wept unceasingly, and did all the proper things to testify to the intensity of her grief on the occasion of Do's demise, and married for the third time six months after. The two men—Manell, the one who killed him, and Paul, the one who was going to be beaten—on hearing he was dead, ran away to Pretoria. They got there whilst we were there, and were caught whilst sitting by Mr. Higgins's camp-fire. After a long imprisonment Manell was hanged.

The pretty farm of Surprise was a mass of black, with the ashes still lying on part, and the whitish effect they gave to the otherwise black prospect made it almost

ghastly. Fido and the other animals were all right, except Rough—he was gone. It appears that he had got into one of the rooms when we were locking up the house, and had been shut in. The Kaffirs hearing him whining had, after two days, forced a window open and let him out, when he immediately rushed off to Eclipse's stable, and then down towards the valley, the way I used to ride. I therefore concluded that he had gone back to Mr. King's, whom he had left to come to me, and this was the case. Mr. King came up the next day, and told us that he had seen Rough sneaking about his cottage; but I had not time to go down for him. The day after Mr. King came again, and brought his big dog. This dog knew me, and must have told Rough on returning home that I was at Surprise, for that very evening Roughly came running in at the door, and up to me.

The old life began again, disturbed only by my constant inquiries about farms. There were, of course, plenty of people willing to sell if they could induce me to pay exorbitantly; but none of the Boers in the vicinity, who had good farms, were disposed to part with them at all. At Pretoria I had not been able to arrange anything.

Shortly after our return the dreaded "lung-sickness" broke out among the cattle. Investigation proved that an ox had died of lung-sickness in the bush-veldt, but the fact had been hushed up by the Nell family, who swore it died of what they call here "heart-water," in order to save themselves trouble; for it is of the utmost importance when a case of "lung-sickness" occurs, to inoculate the grown cattle, and to drench the young ones. They take the disease after these operations, but have it slightly and become "salted," that is, are not liable to have it

again; whereas if they take the disease naturally (and if it once breaks out in a herd it is sure to run through it) they are most likely to die of it. It was also found that the Nells had let some of Mr. Higgins's cattle get into the kraal of a man whose bush-veldt farm touched Mr. Higgins's, and had let them remain there a whole night, although it was well known that there was lung-sickness in it. The worst part of the whole was, that when the disease broke out at Surprise they said it must have been caused by the malice of this very man (who was on bad terms with Mr. Higgins), for that he had buried the intestines of the cattle he had lost by "lung-sickness" close to the place where Mr. Higgins's cattle went to water. At first Mr. Higgins believed the story, but subsequently found it to be untrue. I had now an opportunity of seeing the operations of inoculating and drenching. The lungs of a "lung-sick" animal are smashed up, and the liquid from them strained through fine gauze. It is necessary to kill the animal in order to obtain the lungs in a proper state. For drenching, the liquid thus obtained is mixed with about two parts of water, and given to the animal as a drink—about a bottle-full being used. For inoculation, a strip of linen, or more commonly cotton rag, is threaded through a packing-needle, dipped in the liquid, and drawn through the lower part of the tail like a seton; or the tip of the tail is split, the rag inserted, and the wound bound up. Great inflammation ensues, the tail generally rotting off, more or less. I have seen oxen with no tails at all. Sometimes the inflammation produces swelling of the parts above and around the tail, and then the animal generally dies in great agony; one of Mr. Higgins's oxen died thus. If at the time of the

operation these parts be well smeared with tar, and in case of the inflammation spreading very high, the animal be bathed every morning with salt and water, death seldom ensues; but few masters take so much trouble. The day when these operations took place at Surprise was a regular field-day, Mr. King, and Arthur Sturton, and the Nells coming to help. Some of the oxen and other cattle were very restive, and it was dangerous work for the men; still, on the whole, I was surprised to see the business done so quietly.

CHAPTER XV.

IN the beginning of November I at last decided to accept an offer Mr. Higgins had made me of buying half his farm, including the small house his father had hitherto occupied. I need not enter into the various reasons which induced me to do this, but need merely say that, all things considered, it appeared the best thing I could do, and that I bought the farm conditionally. I was not to pay the purchase-money for some months, and was to be free to leave the farm, if I chose to do so, before that time. I was to take Jimmy to live with me, as he and I had agreed ; and besides, I had engaged the services of a young Englishman who, with another, had come to Mr. Higgins's place looking for work. It was much to be suspected that they were deserters ; however, the one had evidently been a working farmer, and the other a groom ; so Mr. Higgins arranged to take the former, and I the latter.

Before I left Surprise I was called upon to doctor one of William Sturton's children, the baby, who was dangerously ill with inflammation of the lungs. It had been ailing for some time, but not much notice was taken of its illness until one day, when, having ridden over to see the sick wife of a neighbouring Boer, I took William

Sturton's on my way home, and was shown the child. It was very ill then, but before two days were over it was so bad that I remained with it and Alice, and, later on, Mrs. Higgins came to nurse it. That was not my first experience of the misery of illness in this country, but yet I must revert to it, it made so painful an impression on me. A small house, consisting of two rooms and a kitchen; one of the rooms used as a store and general sitting-room; a father, mother, and three young children; no servant but a dirty, more than half-savage Kaffir; no convenience of any sort! Fancy nursing a baby, choking with inflamed lungs, in a room where, if the window was opened, the draught could not do otherwise than come on the bed; where the door into a draughty passage was being perpetually opened by the two elder children, who, when not quarrelling, were always crying, and both of whom had sore eyes and no one to look after them. If the window were kept shut the heat was stifling; and so it became necessary to open a window at the top of the gable, which had been intended as the door of a loft, but which, owing to the ceiling not being put in, still opened into the room. I remember this was decided upon late in the evening when we were all suffocating, and to do it an enormous, roughly-made ladder had to be brought in by William Sturton and the Kaffir, and left in the room, so that we might be able to get up to shut the window if necessary. Even with this window open the heat was dreadful, and I felt the fever I had had badly in India, and the approach of which I was only too well acquainted with, creeping over me and prostrating me. After two days of incessant care, the baby so far recovered that it was out of immediate danger; but I was obliged

to lie by for a day or two—and even then I felt weak.

On the 19th November, I at last moved into my new abode, old Mr. Higgins and his family going to live at Pretoria. I bought his flock of sheep, and old Mrs. Higgins's fowls and two pigs; and Ada, much to her regret, had to leave me her two cats, for the good reason that they positively refused to be put into the waggon. One was a fine grey-and-white tom, the other, Tom's mother, was a very ancient specimen of the feline race, with a crooked eye, and the most surprising voice a cat was ever gifted with. I was not able to afford as yet to buy a waggon or oxen, wishing first to feel my way, and there not being any immediate necessity for oxen, as it was not time for ploughing. I also tried to do with as little furniture as possible, and as few servants. A small bed and a dressing-table and washing-stand, made of old cases, together with a chair and a box, made up the furniture of my bedroom. The bed was lent by Mrs. Higgins. A deal table, three old chairs, and a horizontal piano, which had been old Mr. Higgins's, and which I used as a table, adorned the sitting-room; while planks, supported on the rafters, gave standing room to various articles, and others of a very miscellaneous character were hung on nails and lines round the walls. The third little apartment, partitioned off like the others with canvas, was a lumber and forage room, and here Barrie the groom slept—Jimmy sleeping sometimes in it, sometimes in the sitting-room. As I mentioned before, doors there were none, except the outer one. A curtain hung over the entrance into my room alone; windows also there were none, only large square holes in the wall,

which could be closed at will by shutters of stretched canvas. Goat and sheep skins did the duty of carpets, and the skins of two tiger-cats and one wild cat which had been killed at Surprise, hung on an old folding arm-chair, completed the Robinson Crusoe look of the place. After experience of the same, I think a Robinson Crusoe cabin is nicer to read about than to live in; and yet sometimes of an evening, with the light of a dip made from the fat of my own sheep, lighting up, in the feeble manner of dips in general, the motley ornaments of bridles, saddles, bits, fire-arms, tools of various sorts hanging on the walls, and faintly showing the dogs crouching on the floor and the cats' heads peering from off the rafters overhead, I used to think that it would not make a bad picture of an African-squatter's "interior." It will be observed that I say "dogs," for besides my own Rough I generally had two visitors; one was a half-bred brown pointer left behind by old Mr. Higgins—a dog of an undecided character, who never could make up his mind to whom he would belong. He was not one of those independent dogs who decline to belong to any one—but go on visits to their friends; on the contrary, he was a very slavish, poor brute, addicted to yowling piteously if any one raised a hand to him; but he was always running away from one place to another, and kept in a circle between my place, "Grünfontein," the Nells, and the Kaffir kraal. The other visitor looked like a half-bred turnspit. He had belonged to James Higgins, at whose house I had first made his acquaintance, and bestowed on him the name of "Moustache"—for he had a ferocious pair at the time. He was afterwards presented to a Kaffir of the name of Mangwan,

who in his turn made him a present to his son and heir, called Magaliesberg. This young gentleman and his father valued the dog highly, in spite of his preternaturally long back, nose and tail, the shortness and crookedness of his legs, and his generally ridiculous appearance. The only thing Magaliesberg objected to was his moustache, and that he cut off. They failed, however, in awakening corresponding sentiments in the ugly quadruped's breast, for he always ran away to me whenever he could, and had to be fetched home again, looking the picture of dejection. Considering that he got next to nothing to eat, and that the deficiencies in his feeding were made up by plenty of beating, it is perhaps natural that Moustache preferred Grünfontein to his master's kraal.

I had a great deal to do at Grünfontein, before it could be called a farm. Old Mr. Higgins had indeed made a diminutive dam, and had a good piece of cultivated ground lying beneath it; also a splendid orchard, but the place was terribly neglected. I began by cleaning out and enlarging a tiny dam which was near the cabin; and by making a rough bridge over the large drain from this dam, which was also to serve for a drain from the large upper dam, which I had not as yet commenced.

I must give a little description of the property I now called my own. It was perhaps as pretty a property as one could see in the Transvaal. It was bounded to the north by the precipices of the Magaliesberg, jutting out in bold bluffs and receding into clefts, which rendered it very picturesque, the ground, at first broken and covered with trees, ran abruptly downwards, then up again, forming a sort of upland valley, and then

sloped sharply down to the valley, having reached some little way across which, my property ended. A sharp wooded spur ran out from the mountain side, about half-way down the incline, and here the cabin and funny little out-houses had been built between masses of rock and tangled brushwood, while the water, diverted from a rivulet, came babbling down to the tiny dam near the house, making a path for itself sometimes between the rocks, and, until I made a drain and bridge, occasionally made a swamp quite close to the cabin. A rough road led from the cabin round the lands to Surprise, but the shorter way was by a narrow path through the orchard, and across a piece of ground that I afterwards cleared and tilled, and which then went by the name of the Upper Lands, to where it suddenly dipped into a deep and rugged ravine, down which a rivulet from the side of the rock high up, gurgled pleasantly beneath tall ferns and overhanging trees. Some stepping-stones lay in the water to help passers-by, and then the path, climbing up the opposite side of the ravine, brought one to a grassy and partially wooded slope, which, being passed, the boundary of Grunfontein was also passed, and that of Surprise entered. A pretty scrambling path it was, which, if you took it on horseback, necessitated much bending of the head, and putting aside of boughs, and gave the rider the chance of picking luscious figs and soft peaches without dismounting, by merely stretching out his hand; and many a time Eclipse has been startled by the birds he himself had startled from feasting on the fruit. And oh! what a quantity of fruit there was. How it lay in heaps under the trees that still were overladen! Kaffir girls came in troops to gather it in for me to dry and

make vinegar of it; little Kaffirs from Surprise came to steal it; any and all who came to Grunfontein might eat as much as they cared for; the Nell family sent their children daily to pull a big basket full; the pigs ate of what fell to such an extent that they waxed ridiculously fat without getting any other food; and still such quantities went to waste before it could be gathered or eaten off the ground, that one trod on masses of fruit when walking through many parts of the orchard.

The boundary of the other side of Grunfontein was another deep and wooded ravine, even prettier than the one near the garden; but the prettiest spot in the whole property was just below where the cabin had been built. Here the spur of the mountain terminated in a small, level platform, round whose outer edge the rocks formed a sort of low wall, breaking off suddenly, and falling in jagged masses first to another smaller and lower platform, then in all manner of rough grotesque shapes into the sloping valley beneath. On the upper platform stood a beautiful syringa-tree; the rockery below was thickly interspersed with shrubs of different sorts intertwined with the beautiful wild clematis.

Standing on either platform you could look up the valley for forty miles. On a clear day you might catch sight of a white speck where the house at Moy-plas was, and could see as far as Dass-poort; or you could look down the valley until it ended in the undulations which one rode over going to Fahl-plas. Many an evening have I stood gazing at the changing light on the valley, on the opposite mountains, and on the nearer range of the Magaliesberg, and have tried to conjure up what Grunfontein would look like on the evening when I should at last

have made it fit for the reception of the guests I hoped to bring to it. Then a pretty cottage should stand near the syringa-tree; then the natural rockery should have been made still more attractive by flowers and ferns interspersed between its graceful bushes; then the land below should be waving with crops; then the old cabin should be my calf-house, and a herd of sleek cows should be lowing on their way home to their well-kept sheds; and then Eclipse and other horses should have an English-kept stable, and not a straw-hovel, to eat their evening meal in.

The high road from Pretoria ran through the valley portion of my property, and I used to think how I should point out the house when it first came in sight, and so on, like a great many dreams a great many people have doubtless dreamed in wild homes, which they are trying to shape into civilized ones.

In the meantime it was rough work at Grünfontein. Besides Jimmy and Barrie I had only a Kaffir woman, called Reva (Manell's wife) to help during the day—she went away early in the evening and came late in the morning—and a little Kaffir boy to mind the sheep. I rose at early dawn, called the little shepherd, who slept in the straw kitchen, to light the fire, roused Jimmy and Barrie, and generally got to work before the sun shot his first rays upwards behind Witt-waters Randt, where it intercepted the eastern horizon. As I wanted to push on with the work as fast as I could, I did as much as I could myself, so that Jimmy and Barrie could get on with what I could not do. The cleaning of the horse and stable, the looking after the sheep that were lame or sick, often the skinning and cutting up of one of them, fell to my share,

at times also cooking, and cleaning the house, and other domestic duties—when Reva gave herself a holiday—besides superintending the work. Then there was the fruit-drying; and this was an important business, for dried fruit, besides being useful for one's own winter use, sells well in the Free State.

Parties of Kaffir girls used to come from different kraals, some thirty miles distant, to pull the fruit and spread it on things made of wood and reeds, called stellassees, that look something like stretchers. Each girl would bring a large conical-shaped basket on her head; into this she would pull the fruit, and she expected to be allowed to fill it once for her own benefit as payment. These young savages looked very picturesque, with their necks and arms and ankles ornamented with beads, gay handkerchiefs, or a gay strip of cloth bound round their heads, skins or blankets loosely hanging from their often shapely shoulders, walking in single file, with their baskets poised on their heads, or sitting in a circle cutting the fruit up and spreading it on the stellassees; but they had to be kept in order, or they would eat more than they plucked or cut up, and would talk their time away instead of working. Once or twice I had even to threaten them with my whip. The peaches and apricots alone have to be cut up; the figs have to be peeled, and gradually flattened out as they dry. When the fruit is all settled on the stellassees, they are placed on poles fixed in the ground, and the fruit left to dry in the sun. It has to be continually turned, and some experience is required to know when it is dry enough to put in a sack. Of course it must not be let get wet, and many a time the stellassees had to be brought into the house, and piled on the rafters

or wherever a place could be got for them. Then there is another way of preserving peaches and apricots without sugar, when they are too ripe to dry well. They are squeezed in the hand to a pulp, and the skins and stones being thrown away, the remainder is spread upon a plank previously smeared with fat. The paste dries quickly in the sun, and can then be folded up like thick paper, and is very nice to eat. I made a quantity of dried fruit, and in consequence I was kept hard at work, for the turning, and flattening, and squeezing, and the hunting away of the fowls—they would flutter up and oftentimes upset a stellasse, if not watched—devolved of course on me, although, in the last-mentioned part of my duty Rough and Moustache were valuable coadjutors, making sorties from where they would be lying in the shade, at my cry of “Sah! Sah!” accompanied by much barking and whisking of tails, to the confusion of the assembled fowls, who would rush off in dire confusion for a few yards, then stop and begin picking about in an apparently innocent manner, but with a tendency to come stealthily closer and closer to the stellassees. I have often amused myself watching their tactics. There was one hen of a more enterprising turn of mind than the rest. She used to go on picking away, keeping her eye on me all the while, always coming nearer and nearer, I used sometimes to pretend not to see her; for an instant she would stand, with head erect and a little on one side, looking at me, and then come picking along in a straight line for the stellassees. If I moved she would at once turn and take a circuitous route; but if she caught my eye she would give a frightened cackle, and make off as if the dogs were behind her, but only to commence

operations again. Those fowls were altogether rather a nuisance, for they insisted on coming into the cabin, showing as great pertinacity about that as about the fruit, and when in, they would get on the table. This was particularly agreeable, if, dinner being laid, I had just gone out to call to Reva to go for Jimmy and Barrie, and on returning found a party of fowls picking in the dish; or if the dough for the bread was left uncovered for a moment whilst Reva and I went out, and the result was, its being all trodden upon and picked. Jimmy used to take their disregard of our wishes as something personal, and call them "insulting creatures," and throw broom handles, brushes, and boots after them.

Having but one servant, it was impossible in such an establishment as mine to keep up the usual distinctions between master and man. Barrie had his meals with us and passed the evening in the common sitting-room.

He was not either a bad-looking or a badly-educated young fellow this Barrie (not that Barrie was his name; I don't know what his name was), that is to say, if by education one understands book-learning. He wrote a very good hand, read fluently, and was fond of improving himself, reading history by preference in his leisure-hours. But I am afraid he was but a bad sort of a fellow, or was on the road to become one. He had a great talent for deception, and gloried in it; he had a favourite theory that dishonesty was the best policy; he was very sharp, very lazy, very noisy, very violent, but a good-humoured, merry fellow nevertheless. He never showed his violence to me or to my animals, except by a vicious look, but the look told of what was going on within; and one evening, when Eclipse, who hated him, made him run about three

miles to catch him, and then had to be caught with Mrs. Higgins's assistance, I heard that he confided to the latter that if he had been his horse he would have shot him had a rifle been handy, "but that the missus was that particular as he daren't touch the brute." On the whole Barrie restrained himself creditably, for his language, although certainly inelegant, never became intolerable while he was in my company; and this must have cost him an effort. If he kept up a certain respect of manner towards me, he was inclined to be the reverse of respectful in his manner of talking of, and even to, the Higginses and Sturtions, and had to be periodically checked about it.

It is certainly demoralizing for English servants to come to this country. They may begin fairly; but even serving under one whom they acknowledge as undeniably their social superior, their ideas of master and man are liable to become confused after a time. The master cannot refuse to associate, on what appears to be terms of equality to the man, with Africander farmers both of English and Dutch origin, many of whom are in no way superior to the servant, whilst many are his inferiors, and only a few his superiors. They may be rich people, but the English servant knows well enough when they belong to the two first classes; but often when he remarks that those of the last class have no more "book-learning" than he has, he classes them with the former, although in their breeding they may be infinitely far removed from him. It is not easy to keep up the proper distance between master and servant when the very people whom he is called upon to bring in coffee to whilst they sit on a visit to his master, and behind whom he is expected to ride as long as his master rides by their side, are ready to drop into familiar

conversation with him the next moment, or if they do not do so with him, will be on familiar terms with some one who is on familiar terms with him. For this reason, and others also, after many trials, I have come to the conclusion that it is more comfortable, and better in all ways, to have coloured servants than white ones. The Kaffirs are bad as a rule; but there is a class of half-castes between white and Hottentot blood, here called "bastards," in which very excellent servants may be found.

To return to Grunfontein. My sheep caused me a good deal of trouble, the tick tormenting them terribly, and several catching a sort of fever which is very fatal in this part of the Transvaal. My neighbours lost largely by both causes; but I took great care of my sheep, often working for two hours in the kraal with them, and I lost hardly any. I became quite an expert sheep-doctor, and could throw a good sized lamb alone. There was one splendid wether, a pet from his lambhood, which I had bought with a promise not to kill him. He was quite too nice a beast for me to think of such a thing, even without the promise. He would trot up to me and hunt all over my hands and pockets for salt, and then run to the door, or inside if he could, and refuse to go out till he got some. His name was Hans. I say *was*, for I fear my poor old sheep has been butchered by this time by the Boers. Many a time some Boer visitor has said to me admiringly, "Oh! there you have got a fine wether!" with a truculent expression of face and voice, indicating carnivorous tendencies. Of horse-disease, as long as Eclipse grazed on my own property or that of Mr. Higgins, I was not much afraid, these farms forming a sort of healthy oasis in the midst of an unhealthy country