

I were at work thatching the pigsties. I called Dahl Nell up to me, and in Mosamma's presence gave him a good blowing up, laying stress on the fact, that disgraceful as it was for a man to get drunk at all, the disgrace was still greater when a black man was his boon companion. I did this, partly because I knew it was a rebuke Dahl would wince under, partly because I saw it was necessary to snub Mr. Mosamma; not because I thought there was really any sense in what I said, but then it would evidently have been throwing pearls before swine to have taken high ground in talking to my two auditors. They were both very angry, and yet felt very much humiliated, which was just what I wanted.

A few days after Jimmy complained to me that Mosamma had called him "Jimmy," and had been disrespectful to him; and on my speaking to my friend on the subject, he got into a terrible fury, and said that I was his mistress, and that he would always treat me with respect, but that as to the others he was as good as they were, with all their masters and mistresses! This, from a low-caste Indian, who knew that I knew what he was in his own country, for I had spoken to him in Hindustani, was strong, and I put him down pretty smartly. The result was that two days after, having finished their month, the two worthies departed (I heard them as they passed Jimmy and Mr. Egerton say derisively, "Good-bye, Mister; good-bye, Master"), and Jimmy having to leave for Fahl-plas the day after, I was on the eve of being left in the lurch once more for want of labour, as two men cannot manage ploughing, and sowing, with oxen.

CHAPTER XX.

It was evident that something must be done under the circumstances, and that quickly. The German said he knew where he could get good Kaffirs to work, at a missionary station. He told me the name. It was eight hours on horseback from Grünfontein. I sounded him a little as to whether he would walk there to get them; evidently he was not disposed to do so. I had no horse but Eclipse, and he was not well; besides, even without its being horse-sickness time, I had no fancy to trust Eclipse to a stranger; I knew he would make a battle of it between his rider and himself at some part of the journey, and if he were the conqueror, where should I get my Kaffirs? If the rider were the conqueror, it would only be after severe punishment had been inflicted, and I did not care for my horse to be punished by any one but me. However, the horse as it was could not go; he was still weak from his attack of colic. In this dilemma I bethought me of Mr. O'Grady, and of his horse—a sorry brute, but if there be any truth in the theory of salting, it certainly was salted. It had been through the Zulu war, had had horse-sickness, and had recovered. I asked him if he would lend me the animal, I of course taking all risks; and he very kindly consented. The German set forth on a Saturday, and the

next morning Jimmy too bade me good-bye. So Mr. Egerton and I were left sole possessors of Grünfontein. There was plenty of work for him in the garden, and for me in various ways. I had no one to help me now, for Reva had gone, as I think I said before, and she only washed for me, and I had been unable to get any boy to mind the sheep. There were several who would have come, and played noisily all day near the house or in the garden with other little Kaffirs, whom they would have invited to spend the day and have dinner with them, but there was not one who would mind the sheep, so I preferred doing without them.

Mr. Higgins's sheep were constantly coming astray by twenties or thirties into my kraal, and his cattle were constantly causing me damage by trampling down the sides of the leading water-furrow. Numbers of Mr. Higgins's sheep got lost on the mountains, and at last one of his Kaffirs asked me to go and count them out of the kraal one morning, to see how many were away. I did so, and found more than a hundred missing. I cleaned the house and the pots and pans, and washed up the dishes, counted the sheep out of the kraal, cleaned Eclipse and the stable, cooked dinner, calling Mr. Egerton from the garden occasionally to look after the sheep when they wandered to an unhealthy part of the veldt, or to help with lifting the big pot and kettle, for the fire was on the ground, and I had a tendency to tumble into it if I had to move anything heavy; then towards evening, after I had washed up the things, I cut Eclipse's bed for the night, or helped in the garden at clearing the weeds. After supper Mr. Egerton and I played chess on a small pasteboard chess-board which I made, with absurd little chess-men

that he had cut out of wood, and we talked of all sorts of things of which I had not talked since I came to Africa. Mr. Egerton was very fond of painting, and of reading, and I think it was as pleasant to him as to me to meet with a person to whom he could talk about anything except every-day topics.

Days went on, and the German did not return. On Friday, Jim came to the cottage to buy some meal.

"Strange that German not a coming back," said Jim.

"Yes," I said.

"I'm a thinking he must a taken the wrong road," said Jim.

"Why what wrong road?" asked I; "he knew the road. I don't think he can have taken the wrong road."

Jim's eyes twinkled, "Well, I was a thinking as he might a taken it on purpose," said Jim.

"What!" I exclaimed.

"Well," continued Jim in a stolid sort of way, although with a twinkle in his eye, "I said to my mate when I saw him a ridin' off on that there horse, as how he'd never come back."

"Do you really think he has stolen the horse?" I asked.

"Lor bless you, ma'am, yes," said Jim, smiling at my simplicity. "I did say to my mate as how it would be well if we was to offer to let our Kaffir go for you to get boys from his kraal; but then, you see, I said it certainly was no business of ours."

"I wish you had warned me, Jim," I said. "I never thought of his stealing the horse!"

"You have to be very particular in these parts, ma'am," said Jim, "more especially with them furriners. I knew a

Frenchman as jumped a horse"—and he paused reflectively. "No, ma'am, I've no manner of doubt as how he's in the Free State now with that there horse."

This was pleasant. I went down to Mr. O'Grady's little canvas house below the spur where the hut stood. Mr. O'Grady still believed in the German's honesty. So did Mr. Egerton. But days went on; Saturday came, and Sunday, and passed. Jim was triumphant; we had all given up the missing German. He had asked me to give him some money for the road, saying, he had none of his own, and what I had given him amounted to his wages—the things he had left behind were of no value. I gave him up at last, and I told Mr. O'Grady that he must name his price for the horse. He said that there was a salted horse for sale, in the valley, for twenty-six or seven pounds, and that, if he liked it when he saw it, he would ask me to buy it for him. He was to see it on Tuesday.

On Monday evening Mr. Egerton and I had finished supper and were playing chess (Mr. O'Grady lived in his canvas house), when the dogs jumped up and barked, there was a sound of horses' hoofs and the German rode up, with three Kaffirs following him. He had been delayed owing to the difficulty of getting Kaffirs. He said he knew that we should all think he had jumped the horse. He was very good-humoured about it when we confessed we had thought so, made us each a present of a handkerchief he had bought at the missionary's store, and ate a hearty supper. Two days after I engaged two other Kaffirs, and the work went on quickly and well. Jimmy used to come over of a Saturday to spend Sunday, when we used to be very merry, carrying our conversations on sometimes until after we were all in bed—at least

if Mr. Egerton's and Jimmy's blankets could be called bed, the partition between my room and the sitting-room not in any way impeding it. Mr. O'Grady, in the meantime, drew a multiplicity of plans and elevations and diagrams of doors and windows, and partitions of stalls, &c., but I could not get him to give me the specification I wanted; he said he must wait for his partner—and his partner was not forthcoming.

At last one afternoon he appeared. He was full of importance; he twittered and chirped, and said now everything would go on delightfully. I pressed him for the specification, and at last a very detailed one was offered for my inspection. I went over it carefully, and got Mr. Sparrow to give me estimates as to cost. It ran up much higher than he had led me to suppose it would. It was very hard to bring things to a clear understanding, for he twittered and chirped so much about his head, and how overtaxed his brain was, and made so many digressions about the society he was used to, and so many polite speeches to me, that time went by, and I was often obliged to interrupt our business talks, to go about necessary household duties; but at last I pointed out things I should wish cut out, as merely unnecessary luxuries, and the specification was taken back to be revised.

It was drawing near the time when the Higginases were to return, and at last I got a letter telling me when I might expect them. They had left me the key of Surprise, and sometimes on Sundays I would walk over there to air the house; or sometimes, if the moon was up, I would go after work was over, and play on the piano. On one of these occasions I remember being struck by Mr.

Egerton's delight at seeing a carpet which I had stretched out in one of the rooms. He said he had not seen one for years, that it was quite refreshing. It was also refreshing to me to hear any one say, as he did, when by chance I happened to turn over a waltz and play it, "Oh, don't play that stupid thing; go on with Norma, or Mozart's Twelfth Mass."

Looking forward to the Higginases' return, I was often struck by the curious gulf that lies invariably between the European settlers in this country and those born in it—a gulf which is rendered wider, doubtless, when the European settler has been bred amongst all the refinements of European life, but which exists even when he is of the lower middle, or even of the labouring class. To the European, life here is an excitement—it is a race after wealth. There is something of the spirit of the gambler in all who try their fortunes out here. They may work in the fields sowing crops, or they may tend their herds and flocks—unexciting occupations you would say—but all this represents a portion of a game on which they have generally staked all they have; and to all, there must be something of excitement in such a game, whether it be dice or oxen, cards or seeds of corn, that are the counters. Then further; until a settler here becomes demoralized, he always looks forward to something beyond what he has—it may be to go home; it may be to bring some dear one out to him; it may be to become very rich for the mere sake of being very rich; but there is always something. How different are this man's thoughts, as he glances over his cultivated lands, and at his live-stock, from those of the Africander farmer, who, standing perchance by his side, thinks of all his possessions as things

that he has perhaps won by toil, but with which, now that he has them, he is contented, looking for nothing beyond. His crops will realize a price which will enable him to live as he is living. If they fetch a higher price than usual, he can perhaps get a new waggon, or indulge in a half-bred English horse; or perhaps, if he be a very enterprising character, he may think he will some time take his children to Natal, and let them behold the sea, and the great ships that he would be afraid to trust himself on, though, may be, he has faced a lion in his day; his cows will calve, his ewes will lamb, and he will every year mark some of their little ones for his own little ones, so that when they are men and women they too will have flocks and herds, without having to take away from their old father. The two talk of the market-prices, and of the oxen, &c., as if they had a common interest; but they are as far separated from each other as a gamester is from the man who plays a quiet rubber of whist for sweets, with his wife and children of an evening. Of course if, joined to this, there be in the one the existence of a remembrance of all the artistic culture—the refinement—the romance—the historic remains—which can be the portion only of him who has lived in old countries, and which is denied to one born and bred in South Africa, the gulf is enormously widened. Once this had struck me forcibly at Surprise, when Mr. Higgins, looking at a representation of an angel on the cover of a photograph-book that was lying on the table, said to me, "What a beautiful thing! I wonder if there can exist such beautiful things." "I don't think that is so very beautiful," I said. "One can easily imagine a more beautiful angel than that." I remember the look in his eyes as he

said, "Yes, I dare say you can. But do you know, I don't think any of us Africanders can imagine much; we haven't got the training; we never see anything." I felt so sorry for what I had said, but his words were a commentary on what I said before as to the commonplaceness of the country. What training more than that which Nature gives him does an Italian, or a Swiss, or even many a German or Frenchman want, to render him capable of imagining things of beauty? What taught the Greeks to become masters of the beautiful to all succeeding ages? Mr. Higgins was a man capable of admiring nature; his wife had a most sensitive appreciation of natural beauties, but they had never seen beauty. The greatest beauty Mr. Higgins ever saw, by his own confession, was a sunset lighting up the valley that lay below Surprise. I remember, one evening, his asking me in good faith if I had ever seen anything to surpass it in all my wanderings.

The consciousness that this great gulf lay between the Higginses and myself, struck me painfully now. It was irremediable; but as I looked forward to their return, and felt how delighted I was that I should soon see them, I could not help lamenting in my heart, that our friendship should have this flaw in it.

One evening after dark, Fiervaree came to the door of the cabin to say that Mr. Higgins had come, and wanted the key of the house. The waggon were to come in next day. I had just got the specification from Mr. Sparrow, and he had brought me the contract to sign as well, but I declined signing it until I had gone to Pretoria to see about the prices of material. Mr. Sparrow had urged me to go quickly, and said Mr. O'Grady could

go with me, that he would give me every opportunity of getting things cheaply, and would save me a great deal of trouble. Mr. Sparrow was disturbed in his mind about one thing. Mr. O'Grady was, he twittered, a very young man—a good young man; he did not like to expose him to the temptations to be met with at Pretoria; could not I suggest any place where he could stay with some kind, respectable family? Mr. Sparrow was paternally interested. It struck me that as Mr. O'Grady was considerably over twenty, and had been in the volunteers, he must have seen sufficient of this wicked world and its doings, for his innocence not to suffer much from a three days' stay in Pretoria. I said I was sorry, but I could only suggest that he could sleep at the waggon. Then there was one other little point that Mr. Sparrow was uneasy about. He was subject to palpitations, and he wanted a bottle of brandy, but he did not like to put temptation in a young man's way, although Mr. O'Grady was sober—oh, yes, a strictly sober young man indeed, said the little bird, shaking its head at me as if it had discovered me in a mental doubt as to the young man's virtuous disposition with regard to alcoholic drinks. Would I be so good as to bring him a bottle of brandy? Thinking that Mr. O'Grady must be a very odd young man if he found no difficulty in refraining from entering the public-houses of Pretoria, but was liable to fall into the error of uncorking and drinking out of a bottle of brandy belonging to somebody else and entrusted to his charge, I replied that I would bring the brandy myself with pleasure.

I passed the day before I was to start, on horseback, for Pretoria with Mr. O'Grady as my companion, princi-

pally at Surprise, taking the plans with me. I went there also in the morning on the day of my departure. Somehow Mr. Sparrow seemed to take it ill my showing the plans to Mr. Higgins; and he and his partner had some disagreement, in which they were mixed up with some men they had hired to work, one of whom I had cautioned them against, as belonging to the drunken trio I had had working on the dam. They seemed irritated, and talked a great deal, until I was obliged to cut them short and saddle up. I gave Mr. O'Grady a little start of me. As I bade Mr. Sparrow good-bye, he laid his hand impressively on my horse's neck. "Now remember," he said, "you need do nothing, absolutely nothing. Mr. O'Grady will save you all trouble. You must just let him know where he can find you whenever he wants you, at any moment, and he will do everything." I said I felt much obliged for Mr. O'Grady's benevolent intentions as to my comfort.

The German had already started for Pretoria in charge of the waggon. He could not drive, but had a Kaffir driver, and also a Kaffir foreloper, but of course I wanted a responsible man in charge. I only hoped he would not become irresponsible at Pretoria.

I had promised to see on my way to Moy-plas, where I meant to sleep, the wife of a certain Fenter, an old Boer, whose house was not far from Cucumoor's. Fenter had ridden over to Surprise that morning to beg of me to do so, and I had promised; but the little Sparrow and his partner had delayed me, and it was rather late when I started. Added to this, Mr. O'Grady's sorry little pony was not up to keeping to a quick canter, although his master insisted he was. He would not let me leave him

and ride on alone ; he said he was afraid of losing the road ; and he protested that his horse was so fresh he absolutely had to hold him in ; although, if I cantered fast for any time, I could hear the poor little animal blowing behind me, and hear a cut given to it every now and then ; and once, when Eclipse got far before it, it lifted up its poor little voice and whinnied for him to stop. Of course after that I kept Eclipse at a very slow pace, and so by the time we had to take the turn for Fenter's house it was nearly dark.

The house was a very small one, built of unburnt brick, and, as is general with Boer, or even English Afrianders' houses, stuck down in the veldt without any attempt at making its surroundings pretty. Hearing the horse's tramp, Fenter, a small, thin, delicate-looking old man, came out. He was surprised to see me so late, and surprised, too, to see me with a companion. I introduced Mr. O'Grady as a builder, which explained everything ; and then I told how I had been delayed, and asked old Fenter whether he could give me stabling for Eclipse. He said " Yes, for both horses." I did not ask whether he could put O'Grady and me up, for, arriving late at a Boer's house on such an errand as mine, I knew that to be unnecessary ; some sort of shakedown was sure to be provided. After I had cleaned Eclipse, and given him his forage, I adjourned to the house. There old Fenter introduced me to Mrs. Fenter. As is very often the case amongst the Boers, the lady's proportions made up for what was wanting in those of her lord and master. If old Mrs. Fenter had been asked to sit in a stall at the Italian Opera, I don't think she would have been able to get in. She was a jolly-looking woman by nature, but just then she looked somewhat woebegone, having ery-

sipelas in her face—not badly, but doubtless enough to be very uncomfortable. Old Fenter was deaf. Mrs. Fenter having tied up her head in numerous bandages, was so artificially. O’Grady sat on the edge of his chair, and grinned at nothing in particular, occasionally varying his amusement by a chuckle, also at nothing in particular. Old Fenter occasionally asked a question of me, or made remarks about O’Grady and myself to his wife—not offensively; personally I have seldom found Boers offensive—but from a sort of natural rudeness which is in the race, and with which, being natural, it would be absurd to get annoyed. A little girl who helped in the house, and who I suppose was some sort of relation, looked covertly at me, and when she caught my eye smiled pleasantly and rather shyly, whilst I endeavoured in bad Dutch, to converse—or rather, to hold a soliloquy. This was a thing I was getting accustomed to—not very amusing, but good as practice. My auditors were generally much what they were in this case, only the number of fat women and shy little girls with pleasant smiles was sometimes multiplied, and a hulking young man or two, or a young matron already running to fat, thrown in. The soliloquy always had the same headings—the big dam I was making (the biggest dam in that part of the country, some one would always remark parenthetically), the fine span of salted oxen I had bought from Mr. Higgins, at which some one would always say, “Are you sure they *are* salted?” and when I said I had been at Surprise when they salted, they would wag their heads and say, “Ah, yes, that is right,” and ask the price, and wag their heads again, and say, “Ah, yes, that was not too much for salted oxen, real salted oxen—oxen that had had redwater and

lung-sick." Then I would tell what crops I was going to put in, and ask advice about it (the Boers like an English person to ask advice from them); and then I would tell of how I thought I might get manure from Hermann Potchieter's old kraal, which would lead to a little discussion between members of the family I was talking to, and give me time to think what should be my next heading; and then I would tell how many sheep in my kraal had had fever; and when I was running very low, I knew I could always make the whole party laugh by saying how I had tried to make bread myself, and how bad it was. That point was always a success, and led to my being asked whether the Boer bread was not nice; and that led to my saying how very nice the Boer biscuits were, and that we did not know how to make them in England; and that was always a second success. I flatter myself that my Boer neighbours thought me rather agreeable. They certainly thought me cracked, but that did not matter in the least.

Supper on this occasion caused a pause in my soliloquy. It was the usual bread and mutton and coffee. Old Fenter said grace. Presently I saw preparations being made for a bed on the floor of the sitting-room—there were only two rooms besides the little kitchen in the house. Then old Fenter signified to O'Grady that he was to sleep in the sitting-room, and Mrs. Fenter lighted a candle and took me into the bedroom, which was doorless—a curtain doing duty as door. It was a small room, with a four-post bed at one side, nearly occupying the whole side. This bed had hangings of white calico, which shut it in and made a sort of box of it. At the other side of the room was a trestle bed. Mrs. Fenter

pointed to this as mine. Now, as I had intended to sleep at Moy-plas I had taken no nightdress with me, for I knew I could get one there, and I had sent up all my small amount of luggage in the waggon to Pretoria. As Mrs. Fenter had not given me any garment of the sort, I simply removed my shoes, and lay down on the bed. I knew that Boers never undress at night, even in case of illness, so I was prepared for this; but what I was not prepared for was to see old Fenter toddle into the room. Mrs. Fenter had just removed her upper dress, and then rolled into bed, raising the curtain to do so. The little girl had lain down near the foot of the same bed. I lay quietly watching old Fenter's operations. I rather wondered what he was going to do. There was a light hung on the wall at the other side of the four-poster, and I could see the portly form of Mrs. Fenter cast in shadow against the white curtain. Old Fenter divested himself leisurely of his coat and of his feldt-schoons, or field-shoes, made of untanned leather; stockings he had none; and then (having apparently an idea that going to bed was a process which demanded a certain amount of privacy, although compatible with having a small girl in bed with Mrs. Fenter and himself, and a strange lady in the same room) he, instead of boldly raising the curtain, like Mrs. Fenter, proceeded to creep in from the bottom of the bed, very cautiously, on hands and knees. A few minutes after, portentous snores proclaimed that the three occupants of the couch were fast asleep. I went to sleep, too, and slept till dawn.

I cleaned Eclipse (I always carried his brush and comb with me), had early coffee, and O'Grady and I up-saddled in the still dewy morning, and departed.

We had breakfast at Moy-plas, where I found Harriett's pig still flourishing; and after a short rest, saddled-up once more.

I had postponed a little of my talk on business with O'Grady, until I should be taking this ride to Pretoria with him, for the Sparrow and he, being fond of frequent digressions from the main subject of discourse, were apt to take up a great deal of time before coming to the point, and time was precious at Grünfontein. O'Grady seemed troubled in his mind. He at last asked me whether I really meant to let him and his partner carry out the contract? I said, certainly I did; was I not going to Pretoria on purpose to get materials for them to work with? He then repeated the kind offer Mr. Sparrow had made in his name, to save me all trouble if I would only let him know where he might find me at any moment. I suggested that this would be difficult, as I had a great deal of business on hand, and should be here, there, and everywhere during the day. I asked if it would not do for me to tell him some particular hour when he would be sure to find me at some appointed place. O'Grady seemed surprised, he had not known that I had business in Pretoria.

"Not about getting estimates, &c., for material?" I asked.

O'Grady thought that *he* was going to Pretoria for that purpose. If *I* were going to do this business, what was the use of his going also? I suggested that two heads were better than one occasionally, as also proverbially; to which proposition O'Grady, with a look of thoughtfulness, agreed.

We off-saddled half way to Pretoria, against my usual

custom, but I was sorry for O'Grady's pony, and we reached Pretoria late.

O'Grady left me, to go to the house of an acquaintance, where he had arranged for himself to put up, so that I conclude his senior partner's anxieties on his account had been allayed. I rode on, anxious to find the German and my waggon, and discover whether he had been drinking or not. I found the oxen grazing on a piece of common land towards the middle of the town. The Kaffirs were with them, and one of them took me to where the German was, with the waggon, on the market-square. I then went to the house of my kind friend Mrs. Parker, where I had an invitation, and sent Eclipse to the stables of the "European" under the German's charge.

In the ensuing days I found out satisfactorily that the cost of material would enormously exceed anything that it had been estimated to me at. I found out, too, that the German could be as thorough in getting drunk, as in doing anything else. This did not surprise me; the former discovery did. Of course, I heard the same talk about my purchase of Grünfontein as I had heard before. In the meantime, O'Grady seemed gradually getting excited, and at last one evening called on me, and after much beating about the bush told me that he found he and the Sparrow had been mistaken, that they could not execute the building for what they had said, and handed me an estimate for nearly double the stated amount. The result was, that he went down to Grünfontein next day to tell the fact to the Sparrow, while I remained a day behind to attend the weekly auction on the market-square. I had never attended an auction

before, and I had a vague idea that I was doing something very disreputable. I knew that in my new character of an enterprising farmer, auctions were in my way; but I felt rather nervous in taking to this clearly-defined line. The German, being sober, looked respectability itself, and I kept him close to me, hoping thereby to cover myself with a little of his ægis of propriety. I wanted a second horse, and the German confided to me that he wanted to buy a horse, if I would buy one for him, and let him work for it; in the meantime I could use it, he said. I thought I saw a way to killing two birds with one stone. In the meantime, one horse after another was brought out; they were none of them good horses, some miserable brutes, but the German was caught in the excitement of seeing horses, and hearing the bidding; time after time he almost begged me to bid for some animal: "Its legs are swollen, yes, but they will come all right," or, "Its chest is narrow, but that won't matter." He was a good judge of a horse, I think, but he was excited. At last a very thin, dirty, shaggy brown pony was brought out; nobody seemed to fancy him, and it was hard to get the bidding up to fifteen pounds, but he was a thorough good little horse for all that. I was hesitating whether I would tell the German to say "sixteen," when William Sturton, who happened to be there, said, "If you want a horse, that one is salted. I happen to know he has come from Dammerland." This decided me, and the German walked off quite pleased with his prize.

I left Pretoria early next morning, as early at least as the opening of the "European" stables (seven o'clock) would allow. The waggon had gone on a little in front,

but I soon picked it up, and had breakfast at the first outspan. Then leaving it to follow, I rode on. I had much to think of, and not very pleasant thinking either. From the time when I arranged to buy Grünfontein, I had known that to make it pay a certain class of buildings would have to be erected on it. It was not a farm, to the best of my belief, that could be made pay by working it in the higger-mugger fashion of the country. I had been careful in making all my calculations before going in for it, believing that I was making them on trustworthy data; now I found that I had been grossly, although I do not mean wilfully, misled. The meaning of all this to me was, that I must give up Grünfontein or be ruined. Of course I chose the former alternative, but it was very painful. I dreaded parting from the Higginses, and going as it were out into the unknown again. I knew that Mr. Higgins would be greatly disappointed at my not buying the place. I had worked so hard to improve it; had counted labour and hardship as nothing if I could but push on the work there; it was such a pretty place for this country! However, the truth was too obvious; to me Grünfontein meant ruin. I was sorry about Mr. Egerton, too. I knew that breaking up Grünfontein would very likely throw him on his beam-ends again, and that meant probably ruin to him. Then what was I to do? Of course I had to look for another farm, but in the meantime what was I to do with my oxen, with my sheep, with little Roughy and Moustache?

I found Moy-plas bright and home-like, and the usual cheery welcome awaiting me. I started after breakfast the next day, and it was early in the afternoon when I rode up to Grünfontein.

Mr. Egerton, who was working at a large new fowl-house that I was making, came to meet me. He had been expecting me, having heard I was coming from O'Grady, and had something ready for my tea. I had hardly finished telling him the result of my visit to Pretoria, when Mr. Higgins rode up on Wellington. I felt I was in for it, and I told him, too. I watched him anxiously. People in Pretoria had said I placed too great trust in his high-mindedness in money-matters; I was putting him to the test.

If this were not a history of mere facts, without embellishments of any sort, or any flights of imagination—if it, moreover, were written for the sake of amusing or merely making money, not with a further object of giving any one who reads it a truthful conception of this country, I should be much tempted to make Mr. Higgins what I had imagined him; but as it is, truth compels me to say that he fell a little short of my ideal. He did not oppose my leaving Grünfontein, but he did ask for compensation beyond the improvement of the crops, and the bricks that I left on it. If I had not received much kindness at his wife's and his hands—kindness which it is not likely I shall ever have it in my power to repay—I think my natural pugnacity would have asserted itself; as it was, I paid the compensation, feeling more sorry that he had asked for it than that I had to pay it, although I was hard up for money too. Only when I was leaving Grünfontein for Pretoria, there, as I well knew, to have the whole matter discussed, and to be forced into speaking of it myself, did I tell Mr. Higgins that I thought he had not acted quite rightly—told him exactly what I should say to any one who might force me to express an

opinion on the matter, but told him, too, that I hoped we should ever remain friends. In truth, I believe there is not a man in the country who would have acted better than Mr. Higgins, and few who would have acted as well. South Africa is a bad training-school for high class morality in money-matters—or indeed, in any matter whatever.

CHAPTER XXI.

BEFORE I left Grünfontein various arrangements had to be made, amongst others the disposing of the wool of my sheep, which I had had lying by for some time. I arranged with James Higgins that he was to buy it, and I sent it over to Fahl-plas on the waggon, with the German in charge. I had discharged the brickmakers, Jim promising in case I wanted his services, in any capacity, to come to me, and I was only waiting for a few days before discharging all the Kaffirs but two, who were to act as driver and foreloper to the waggon. I had determined upon going to the bush-veldt to trade amongst the Boers. The winter was drawing near again, and the migration to the bush-veldt was beginning. I thought I would go first to Pretoria and meet some goods that I expected would be soon there, as I had sent to England for them some time before—whatever was deficient I could buy wholesale there; that I would go to the bush-veldt, taking with me the German, Egerton, and the Kaffirs; that, if I were fortunate enough to get rid of the goods quickly, I could leave the German in charge of the waggon and oxen, at some place where the grazing was good, and, with Mr. Egerton, could ride to Pretoria, and when there look out for a

new farm. All I should require would be a third horse, to carry a blanket or two and the saddle-bags.

Accordingly, I sent off the wool to Fahl-plas, telling the German that I would follow on horseback for I had other business there. I saddled Eclipse towards evening. He had been hurt by the saddle, and was not quite well, but I arranged the saddle on him so that it seemed not to touch the sore, before mounting. At the end of a sharp canter he seemed uneasy, and I stopped to see if anything had gone wrong. Alas! the sore on his back was bleeding. I had no choice but to return home. The question now was what was to be done? When I reached Grünfontein, it was too late for me to ride to Fahl-plas that evening on the brown pony, even if I could ride so far on him at all; but my saddle did not fit him, and I knew a long ride on him would give him sore withers. It was, however, necessary for me either to go to Fahl-plas myself or send a message. I could of course send Mr. Egerton, but there was an objection to this. I had an idea that the German was covertly jealous of my treating Egerton as my equal when work hours were over. Now if I sent Egerton to Fahl-plas, Jimmy would be sure to take him into the house and have him to dinner, &c., whilst the German would be left outside with the waggon; besides, I should have to let Egerton ride the pony—Eclipse could not bear the saddle—and I did not know if this might not annoy the master-in-prospect of the other quadruped. Mr. Egerton came to my assistance by proposing to walk, saying he thought the German might dislike his riding the pony; however, I would not listen to this. The risk had to be taken, for I was absolutely obliged to send a message

where I could not go myself. Egerton started on the pony the next morning early.

In the evening I saw the waggon coming along the road at the foot of the hill. The German was walking beside it, and even from a distance one could see that he was all bristling with rage. He hardly waited a moment after he saw me before his wrath found utterance. From living amongst Boers and English for so long, he always talked a mixture of German, Boer lingo, and English, difficult at times to understand; but when wrath quickened his utterance he became quite unintelligible. I never knew the immediate cause of this outburst, although I could easily divine it; but the outcome of it was, that he vowed he hated Egerton, couldn't—wouldn't bear with him—and that if Egerton were to stay he wouldn't remain another day—that I could keep the horse myself. Of course when any one tells you that you must send some one else away if you mean to retain the services of the speaker, it means either that there is a legitimate cause of complaint, or else that the speaker must go. There was no particular cause of complaint even by the German's own admission. His complaint was founded on generalities, and so, although he was a valuable servant, I said of course if he couldn't agree with Egerton he must go as he said, but that he couldn't go immediately, unless he wanted to forfeit his month's pay, as he was engaged by the month, and his time was not yet up. He saw this, like a practical man as he was, although he was in a rage.

Egerton came home on the pony soon after. It had been just as I said. If Jimmy had not been at Fahl-plas I dare say the German's pride might not have suffered so much, but the English-bred boy made a sharp distinction

between the respectable servant and the gentleman's prodigal son. The former had been given brandy in the store, and had bought more drink. Farther than that he had been taken no particular notice of, as he had the waggon to sleep in, and his food and means of cooking with him. The latter had dined with the family, and had coffee under the verandah. Egerton was not a careful master for a horse—he was not very careful about anything, himself included—but on this occasion I afterwards heard from Jimmy that the pony had been treated just as I should have treated it myself; still, I dare say the idea of his prospective pony having been ridden by the man who was treated as his social superior, added to the German's anger.

I was now in a difficulty. Egerton could not manage oxen at all, to say nothing of driving, and it was necessary to have somebody besides the somewhat raw Kaffirs to manage the oxen, for I am physically incapable of working with such very unwieldy beasts. In this dilemma I bethought me of "Jim." He, I knew, could not only work somewhat with oxen, but could drive them fairly well. I sent him word that I wanted him. In the meantime I arranged with Mr. Higgins that my sheep should be herded with his until such time as I could send for them. I was sorry, for I knew how little he looked after his own sheep, and I could not expect anything better for mine. Still I could do nothing else. I had nowhere to leave my flock except with him. The German did whatever I wanted of him punctually, but I could see him talking a great deal to the two Kaffirs I had kept, and at last he came and told me confidentially that they had told him that they did not wish to stay. On ques-

tioning the boys myself, however, I found that they were quite willing to go with me to Pretoria, and they even said to the bush-veldt. I was content so long as they would go to Pretoria.

On Saturday Jimmy made his appearance as usual. Jim was with him, and had a little donkey, that he had bought and trained while with me, packed up with his various traps. As they came up I noticed that Jim had got himself up very smart, and I was disagreeably surprised by his putting out his hand to greet me in Boer fashion. I hate snubbing a man publicly, and the German and Egerton were near me when he came up to me, besides Jimmy, so I took the proffered hand, reflecting that he must have been getting spoiled since I had last seen him.

It was drawing towards evening, and presently Jimmy, Egerton, and I had supper. The German had long before asked me to give him board-wages, and let him cook for himself. I then called Jim to supper, but he said he was going to have supper in Eclipse's ante-room with the German, and would make his bed there. Jimmy was eager to come with me on my trading expedition; but my prospects were too unsettled and uncertain for me to consent to this, as he had a very good berth at Fahl-plas: we sat up late, discussing plans for the future. The next morning we were having an early breakfast, when Jimmy, who was sitting so that he could see through the open door, said suddenly,—

“I say, you had better go and see what's up; there's Jim packing up his donkey.”

I went out immediately. Jim and the German were standing under the wild fig-tree with the donkey ready packed.

"Why, Jim," said I, "what's the matter? I was just going to call you in to breakfast."

Jim looked a little this way and a little that way. Then it came out. "He had heard—heard things—he saw he shouldn't get on," &c.; but I was determined to get to the bottom of it, and the bottom of it was that the German and he had been talking, and that he had heard that Egerton was treated differently from one of them, and that he wouldn't stand it. He admitted that he knew that Egerton was a gentleman by birth and education; he admitted that I made no difference between him and any other man while they were at work, but still he would not stand it. Once that I made him speak out—and spoke out myself—he was quite reasonable, and perfectly respectful. He took his own view of the matter; it was one I could understand. With Jimmy he said he would work side by side, and treat him as a young gentleman; but Egerton had brought himself down to his (Jim's) level, and there he should remain—he had lost his title to social superiority. Jim was very ignorant, and he expressed this in his own language, which is very different from mine; but that was the meaning of what he said.

I said that I could not take his view of the case; that Egerton was doing his best to work well, and to redeem himself; and that I was bound to stand by him, such being the case.

"I'm afraid, ma'am, as you'll be the loser by it," said Jim.

"I'm afraid I shall, Jim," said I; "but right is right, whatever comes of it."

"Yes," Jim assented. "You be right there, ma'am;

but I couldn't work with him like that—it would be no use my trying; but I wishes you all success, ma'am, as I am sure you deserves it."

And with that Jim and I shook hands, and he and his donkey departed down the hill.

I had moved from under the tree to the bridge, as I spoke to him, so as to be out of Egerton's hearing. I took a stroll in the garden before I returned. That spiteful little German had determined to pay me out for discarding him rather than Egerton; and he was doing so.

When I returned to the cabin Mr. Egerton interrupted some remark I made as I opened the little half-door.

"Mrs. Heckford," he said, looking very pale, "I must leave you—I am ruining you."

I said, "Nonsense;" but I felt there was a good deal of truth in what he said.

"No," he went on, "you may say that; I knew you would; but as an honourable man I have no choice in the matter, and can leave you none. You must see this yourself."

There was more truth in this than even in his former remark, and yet it was but superficial truth after all—such truth as passes current in the world—but not real truth; for ruin can never come to any one through doing what is right, and it is undoubtedly right for one weak human being to stand firm against the tide of ignorance and selfishness which will always set in against any other weak human being, who having once fallen publicly, tries to rise, even though it may be by dint of hard labour, and though his efforts may be made in a spirit of all humility, as were Mr. Egerton's. Surely there can be

no dictate of honour which should tell such a one that he must cast aside the help that is voluntarily held out to him by one, who, fully estimating the cost of what he does, is prepared to do it fearlessly. It cannot be honourable wilfully to throw away the chance of redeeming oneself; and if any one here is disposed to say that a man ought to be able to do so without some external help when he has once fallen, I would advise that person, before he is quite sure in the matter, to come out here and see whether, after studying life in Pretoria for a little, he will not change his mind.

It is not easy to make all this evident to a man of delicate susceptibilities, with the usual ideas about honour, which, however strong they may be, are in nine cases out of ten very vague in men's minds, and who is smarting from a severe and recently-inflicted wound. I almost despaired of dissuading Mr. Egerton from packing up his small stock of goods, and starting then and there for Pretoria; but I gained my point in the end.

Jimmy remained with me until I left Grünfontein. I could not let him go; it was hard enough to have to bid good-bye to him and to the Higginses at all, without dividing the good-byes. I paid off the German, and let him go; packed the waggon, killed one pig, and sold the other; loaded up my fowls for the Pretoria market; counted my sheep, with poor Hans and my pretty little pet ram, to Mr. Higgins; commended Ada's cats to Augustus's mercy; and then, having bid good-bye to the Higginses and to Jimmy, and started the waggon off, Mr. Egerton and I mounted our horses, and left pretty Grünfontein with little Roughy and Moustache as our companions. Moustache cared not a pin, but

Roughy evidently felt much as I did—that he was going away from what he knew into a dreary unknown region, where there would be no more little Kaffirs to bark at, as they danced on moonlight nights; no more fowls to chase, no more trots over to Surprise and games with Fido. Poor little dog! A presentiment of evil seemed to have taken possession of him. He could hardly be got to leave the place, and when he at length followed us, it was with a drooping tail, and with a little miserable yelp every now and then, as if he was crying for pretty Grünfontein and homelike Surprise. I could have cried as I turned my back on them, if crying had been of any use.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was a bright afternoon as Mr. Egerton and I rode towards Pretoria; and as I looked at the waggon with its indifferent driver, and utterly untutored forelooper, at Mr. Egerton, who knew as little about oxen and waggons as I did, and at the span of splendid oxen committed to our joint charge, I wondered in my heart whether I were not a great fool to go in for the undertaking I had just entered upon. But, as I have said, it was a bright afternoon, and if there was risk in what I was about to do, there was also the excitement that always attends risk; and before I was many miles from Surprise I felt that the whole thing was rather enjoyable. We outspanned for the night near to Cucumoor's farm. There was a new moon; and although it was chilly, it was still pleasant for sleeping out. The waggon was too full for me to be able to sleep in it, if I had wished to do so; but I dislike sleeping in a waggon when there are horses and oxen to be looked after, unless I have very trustworthy attendants. My Kaffirs were not trustworthy, I knew, and Mr. Egerton, when he was once asleep, was very hard to waken. I had my blankets spread near to where Eclipse was tied to the waggon—for he had an objection to being tied, and was accustomed to a loose stall, and

I thought it probable he might require my ministrations during the night, which, in fact, was the case. It was a long time since last I had slept in the open air, and I enjoyed it. The next day, early, we passed Moy-plas, where I paid a visit. John Higgins was there; he laughed as he bade me good-bye. "You'll be well salted by the time you come back from the bush-veldt," he said. I picked up the waggon and Mr. Egerton a little before we had to pass the Crocodile. The oxen took the waggon through well; but I could see that the driver was not up to much. That evening we outspanned close to Dass-poort, so as to be able to get in early to market next morning.

I had forage and seed oats, pumpkins and fowls for sale. As I sat on Eclipse, close by the waggon, waiting for these various articles to be sold, two or three persons whom I did not know, spoke to me by name. Presently one man, who seemed to know me quite well, though I had not the least remembrance of him, was accosted by a very goodnatured-looking man with a brown beard. I saw them both looking at me, and then heard the man with the beard ask who I was. "Oh!" said my unknown acquaintance, "don't you know? that's Mrs. Heckford; let me introduce you;" and so he did. The man with the beard was Mr. Hans Felman, and his introducer told me if I wanted to hear about farms he was the very man to tell me about them. Mr. Felman then spoke very politely, saying if he could be of any use to me he should be most happy. I asked where I could see him if I wanted information. He told me where he lived, and asked me to call on his wife. I had much to do, having after the market to deliver the things I had sold; then

to find out where my English goods were, and to load them up (they had just come up to Pretoria, and were still on the waggon that brought them); then I had to select and buy other goods, so as to have a fair stock to take to the bush-veldt. Then I had to unpack all these goods, and write out a list of their selling prices; besides, I had to get a third horse. The packing out and pricing of the goods I did at a farm close to Pretoria, belonging to a young Englishman, where I had obtained leave to outspann. There was very little grass to be had; but on his farm the grazing was still pretty fair. I slept in the veldt, and we had our camp-fire, and cooked for ourselves, of course. Indeed, the house was at some distance from where my waggon was. It was a house of only two rooms, and a little kitchen outside. In it the young farmer with his young Boer wife and two little children lived.

I got through all I had to do at the end of a week. My new horse was a big, bony, unkempt colt, barely three years old, and only half-broken. He had excellent points: but one thing I saw would always spoil his beauty, he had a fiddle head, so I called him Violin. He was very thin, and rather depressed in spirits, as well as in condition, but he had a vicious way of rolling his eye back, and an equally vicious way of flicking his tail straight up and down, as if he had a hinge in the middle of it. Mr. Egerton hated him from the first, and prophesied that he would turn out badly; and Violin, I suppose in consequence, never liked him. He soon learnt to know me, and would let me handle him as I liked; but he was a troublesome beast with most other people. After some bargaining, I bought this animal for fifteen pounds, and I was now ready to start.

Mr. Egerton and I were eating our supper by the camp-fire; I had been showing him a photograph of myself, which I had had done in Pretoria at Mrs. Higgins's request. I had a presentiment of evil hanging over me, and the look of this photograph displeased me, and strengthened it. It was a very nice photograph—as a pleasing representation of myself I was more than satisfied with it—but the individual represented in it struck me, as I looked at her, to be absurdly unfitted for a “Smouse,” as a trader in a waggon is called here. Looking at that picture, it struck me that I was not only doing a foolish thing, but a ridiculous thing. Mr. Egerton had told me that he had heard some talk between the boys about wanting their pay raised. In the midst of my meditations they broached the subject. They said if their pay was not raised they would not leave Pretoria. I knew their game. They had waited to tell me this till all was ready to start. The time for the bush-veldt trading was going by; other traders were getting in before me—they thought they could extort money—for drivers were scarce in Pretoria then—Kaffirs, as a rule, not liking to go away from their kraals in the winter. I told them plainly that I should not raise their wages a penny; and we all turned in for the night soon afterwards. The next morning my friends said they were going. They hung about, however, apparently waiting for something, I meanwhile saddled up to ride to Pretoria to look for another driver, leaving Mr. Egerton in charge of the waggon. Then they asked me to pay them their wages, but I pointed out to them, that when servants left one at a moment's notice, even though towards the end of their month, they forfeited all pay. They knew well

enough that I could have them put in prison, so they held their peace, and I rode off on the brown pony Dandy. I had arranged the saddle so as to fit him as well as Eclipse; and he was a better horse for work in Pretoria, Eclipse being too larky to be left standing alone if I had business indoors. Dandy was full of spirit; but although quite young, he was quietness itself.

All that day I hunted for a driver, and other people kindly hunted for me, but I could get none. Day after day passed; every morning I saddled up, and bade Mr. Egerton good-bye: every evening I rode back to the waggon, to see him waiting by the camp-fire, that showed me in the half-darkness where the waggon stood, as I cantered over the veldt, always to tell the same story. I rode over to neighbouring kraals: it was of no use.

I had got the gentleman on whose farm I was outspanned, to have my oxen herded with his oxen. Mr. Egerton and I slept by the loaded waggon; got up early; and while he lit the fire and made early coffee, I cleaned the horses alone, until, coffee being made, he took his share of the work. Then I saddled up for my hopeless search. It came on bitterly cold; every morning the grass was white with hoar frost, and so were our blankets. In the middle of all this, one evening I felt unwell, and the next day I was choking with a violent attack of bronchitis. I went on my quest as usual that day, and for several succeeding days—but I could hardly speak. The nights were very bad. I would have gone into town to sleep at a friend's house but for two reasons, one, that I had the horses to look after; I was afraid of leaving them altogether to Mr. Egerton's care. He had been so long in South Africa that he had acquired a

good deal of South African carelessness as to horses; besides, I thought, as he must remain at the waggon, it was only right I should not shirk roughing it. I shall never forget that man's kindness at that time; how he would get up when he heard me coughing, and get me whatever he could to relieve me; and how jolly he was over it all, as if it was the pleasantest thing in the world to turn out of his bed and walk about in a bitter cold night. He did all this in such a perfectly natural and unaffected way, so that it seemed as if it were an everyday occurrence for him to have to act nurse to a bronchitic lady in the open veldt.

At last, after I had spent about a fortnight there, I determined to try to go into Pretoria, instead of remaining on the farm—I seemed no nearer than before to getting a driver. I got the gentleman on whose farm I was outspanned to lend me a driver; Mr. Egerton acted forelooper, and I led Violin and Dandy, and rode Eclipse.

I had, some days previously, called on Mrs. Hans Felman. She received me very kindly; and she and her husband did all they could to help me out of the dilemma I was in. Mr. Felman was a Boer from the old colony, his wife a Transvaal Boer. They had three children—two girls and a boy. Their house, on the outskirts of Pretoria, was built after the usual fashion of Boer farmhouses. It stood on a large piece of ground, or erf, with fruit and other trees round it, and would have been a very pretty house and place only that numbers of Kaffirs were allowed to congregate there, in return for their doing a little work, and they kept the whole surroundings of the house in a mess with the heads of oxen, a favourite dinner with them, partly because it is rather a cheap dish, and partly, I

think, because it gives them plenty of fiddle-faddle work to prepare it. I may mention, incidentally, that I have seen Kaffirs throw away the brains as nasty, although they will eat the intestines with the dung just pressed out! The horns of these numerous heads, old bones, and old rags, bestrewed the Felmans' otherwise pretty erf. One evening, by moonlight, I happened to walk across it: it looked like a charnel-house! In one corner of the erf, the farthest from the farm-house, was a diminutive house of one room, measuring about nine feet by seven, but with a fireplace. As it was impossible for me to put up at any hotel in Pretoria, and desirable that I should have some place of abode (for the waggon was too full to accommodate me), I arranged to take this eligible domicile for thirty shillings a month. It was not a very inviting-looking residence. It had a small window, closed by a shutter, and the door opened directly upon a swampy sort of pond. It was a peculiarly damp and low-spirited-looking spot; one where, if you dug a hole for a stake, the chances were that a frog would hop out of it, and that a series of other reptiles of the same species would periodically make their appearance from it, whilst the stake would decline to become fixed. The liveliness of its general appearance was enhanced by a gap in a neighbouring quince-hedge having been filled up with the skulls of oxen. The fact that this place commanded a rent of thirty shillings a month, tells sufficiently plainly that house-rent in Pretoria was rather high. Its advantage to me was that the Felmans allowed me to bring my waggon into their enclosed erf; also to let my horses graze in it—and these were two things of great advantage to me, particularly as most audacious stealing goes on in Pretoria.

Of course there was no furniture in the room. Mr. Egerton and I rigged up a table, and made seats of packing-cases. My bed was made on the floor. Mr. Egerton slept outside—and a funny picture it would have made of an evening, when Mr. Egerton was cooking our evening meal, whilst I lay on the blankets on the floor, playing with the dogs and talking. But coming to Pretoria did not seem to bring us any nearer to procuring a driver; neither could I hear of any farm likely to suit me; so at last, in despair, I began looking about for a house in Pretoria.

Houses of five or six rooms sometimes fetched more than that number of hundred pounds; and I know of one nice cottage of five rooms, standing, it is true, in a very large and productive garden, which, shortly before the war, fetched two thousand five hundred pounds. I did not find it easy to get a house to suit my taste and my pocket. At last I heard of one which had a stable attached, a thing I was particular about; and just at the same time a gentleman, previously unknown to me, called at my funny little abode, and told me that he heard that I was in want of a driver, and that he could recommend me a good one, a bastard or half-caste, who had served with him while he was the Government transport officer. I was really delighted. The man came to be inspected—a fine-looking man with a good face, and who spoke English: his name was Hendrick. I engaged him at the wages he had been receiving from his former employer, viz., half-a-crown a day. He brought me a Hottentot of the name of Hans, who, he said, was a good forelooper, and to whom I was obliged to give one-and-sixpence a day; and Hans besought me to engage a

small Hottentot boy (also a Hendrick) who had been left to his charge. This I eventually did, at ten shillings a month. I was now ready to start, when suddenly I got an offer of a very nice farm close to Pretoria, at the rent of sixteen pounds a month. There were some law difficulties in the way of my concluding the bargain—the lease had been mortgaged. I was in too great a hurry to get the waggon out of the village to stop, (for drivers and foreloopers have a pleasing habit of getting drunk in Pretoria,) so I arranged that I would take it out a day's trek, leave it in Mr Egerton's charge while I rode back with Hendrick to settle matters, and then rejoin the waggon.

It was a beautiful moonlight evening towards the end of June, when at last, after so many troubles, I started for the bush-veldt. I was more than a month later than I ought to have been: however, I was glad to be off late though it was. We outspanned for the night about three miles out of Pretoria, and I was wakened out of my first sleep by a lively riding-party from the town going out to a farm-house near. The next morning early we started again, and outspanned for breakfast at Derdepoort—a pass through the Magaliesberg—where we were almost cut in pieces by the sharp wind which seems to be always blowing in this spot. Here I met two men coming from Waterberg with waggons loaded up with leather. They bought some pipes and some sugar from me, and I remember them particularly as having been my first customers. We inspanned after breakfast, and a long trek brought us, towards evening, to a missionary station, where there was a good-sized kraal of Kaffirs, supposed to be Christianized. Whatever progress they may have

made in Christianity, they had made but little in civilization in general. Their kraal was on a bare slope towards a small river. There was little shelter to be got from the cold wind—but we had a good supper, and were all soon asleep.

I started the next morning by the light of the setting moon for Pretoria. It was bitterly cold, but as long as the moon lasted I did not mind so much, for we could canter. At last, however, the moon failed us, and, as the dawn was yet about half-an-hour off, we had to walk. Just before the waning light of the moon failed altogether, I had felt my watch-chain, which was tucked inside my habit, get loose, and before I had time to put it in again, it swung as I cantered, and seemed to catch on something. When at last the day broke sufficiently for me to be able to distinguish objects clearly, I found that it had broken, and that some keepsakes I had on a ring, through which the chain was passed, were lost. I suppose there is a lurking superstition in all of us; anyhow, I confess that I could not help feeling that the loss of these trinkets that I had carried with me for years, which had been my companions in many vicissitudes, and which, of no great value in themselves, were dear to me from the memories attached to them, was like a bad omen.

I reached Pretoria just as the Felmans were going to breakfast. I was perished, and sat by the kitchen-fire sipping some hot coffee with great gusto, whilst kind Mrs. Felman got me some bacon and eggs, which I thoroughly enjoyed. The treaty about the farm fell through, and I had only just time to leave word with an agent, that he might offer four hundred pounds for the house in Pretoria, which I previously mentioned, before

I had to start out to the waggon. It was already late in the afternoon, but we pushed along sharply, and got to our destination about half-past nine, very cold indeed.

Mr. Egerton had shot a hare and had some hare-soup awaiting me, which I, and Hendrick, also enjoyed ; and so I was fairly in for my bush-veldt experience, for we were to start early next morning, and to get to the outskirts of the bush-veldt the day after.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WE made but one trek the next day, and outspanned by the Apis river, in a thick and rather pretty bush, near to the other waggons—one, the property of a Boer, going to Pretoria with a load of planks for sale; the other, belonging I think also to a Boer, but an Anglicized Boer. The former gentleman was very fat, and toddled about like a barrel on legs (a common thing with the Boers). He bought some trifle, I forget what, and told me that his wife was dead, and that he had always to take his little boy about with him. The said boy was a shy bright-eyed child, with a strongly developed taste for sweets, in which his fond parent somewhat sparingly indulged him; whilst I, prompted thereto by his motherless condition, indulged him freely. The other people outspanned at this place also came to the waggon and bought something; but I remember them chiefly because, later in the evening, a spanking pair of horses in a spider, brought the sheriff from Pretoria to serve a writ on them.

The night was very dark, and I was almost startled as we sat round our camp-fire to see an individual suddenly illuminated by its ruddy light, who asked in English (and Hibernian English too) where was the nearest water. He and his companions, he told us, were old Australian

gold-diggers—they were going to Zoutpansberg, gold prospecting; they were travelling alone, except for their donkeys, and none of them could speak Dutch or Kaffir. I sent one of my boys to show the way to the water, and afterwards this man sat and talked for a while, and had a cup of coffee.

Early in the morning we inspanned. We had to make a long trek that day to get as far as the Eland river for the evening outspan. Our gold-digging acquaintances were just putting the packs on their donkeys; they were going a different road from us. I was looking at the way that one of their packs was padded, so as to avoid any chance of the animal's back being hurt by it, when Mr. Egerton uttered an exclamation of delight, caused by his having discovered two birds, and, jumping off Dandy, he threw the reins to me, and before I had time to gather up the assembled reins of Eclipse and the two led horses, he fired, quite close to them. I certainly was greatly gratified at the manner they all stood fire, but, whether it was owing to his finding a report close to his ears disagreeable or not, I cannot say, but, after that Dandy never would stand still when his rider dismounted to fire, but would instantly trot away with his head well in the air to prevent his tripping over the bridle, and refuse to be caught. He had a comical way of looking behind him to see the exact time when he must quicken his pace so as to avoid being caught; and many a time after that, was poor Mr. Egerton's temper tried by Dandy's antics and my amusement thereat. After this we slightly lost our way, but coming to a farm-house, were directed rightly, and crossing the Pinaar's river, on a very rickety bridge, we outspanned for breakfast. The bridge was

made of logs and sods, and the Pinaar's river was only a small affair then, but, as I afterwards saw, could become a tremendous torrent in an hour.

When we started again we were fairly in the bushveldt, and very uninteresting bushveldt it was. Thick bush was on either side of our narrow road, but there was no fine timber; and as all the trees were thorn-trees, the effect was infinitely monotonous. There was no game of any sort to be seen; once we heard a sound of an axe, and going in search of its proprietor, found a young Boer cutting firewood, with his horse browsing beside him. Of course he looked a little surprised at seeing a lady, and asked who we were, and was farther a little surprised at hearing that I was a "Smouse." He told us that there were a lot of traders on in front, and that trade in the bushveldt was slack.

We reached the Eland river about an hour after noon, much in advance of the waggon, and off-saddled. Mr. Egerton took his gun and went off; I lay down to watch the horses browsing, and to look at the view, there being nothing else to do. A long line of tall reeds marked the course of the river between high banks. The ground was clear of trees for about a hundred yards on the side where I was sitting, but on the other for much farther. On my side the ground soon began to undulate, but on the other the hills were a long way off. Sheltered amongst the scrubby trees on my side, and about a hundred and fifty yards off from where I lay, were tents of Boers, stationed there with their flocks and herds. The grass was very dry, and near where I lay it was much eaten off, it being the usual place for outspanning, being near to a drift, where the cattle could easily go

down to water. After I had had two or three half-dozes, and had watched a large flock of sheep being driven towards the tents by a Kaffir, and when the sun was getting low, I saw the waggon emerging from the bush. This meant dinner, whereat my soul rejoiced.

The next morning early, I made up my mind to ride over to the tents and inform their occupants that I was a "Smouse." I did not particularly enjoy the prospect of doing this, for novelty is not always charming, though it certainly was something quite new to me.

Moustache and Boughy of course announced my approach by a little skirmish with some of the Boers' dogs. Boers are not very demonstrative: they generally stand in a stolid manner near the tent, and say good-day in an equally stolid manner, although they may be really dying of inquisitiveness about a stranger. The individuals in the first tent I went to did this exactly, and when I told them that I was a "Smouse," and asked if they wanted anything, they said "No," in a manner so completely exhaustive, that I felt it would be useless to attempt conversation, so I rode on to the farther tent. Here I found two women and several children. Both the women were big, strapping, peasant-like women. They asked me into the tent. The men of the family, they told me, were in Pretoria, and they expected them out next day. They gave me coffee, asked numbers of questions as to what had brought me out to this country; whether I was married; whether I had any children with me; whether I had ever had any children; who the white man with me was; and a great many others of a similar nature. They said they would come to the waggon and buy, and they displayed all that they had to display, namely, their little

children and their pets—two little night-apes: funny small beasts, all furry and soft, and with such big eyes and ears, and such long tails, that they remain on your mind as having eyes, ears, and tails, and nothing else. The night-apes are very agile, and the Boers are fond of them as pets; the orthodox way of displaying them to admiring friends being, to swing them about by a piece of string attached to a collar round the small beast's neck. The Boers say the animal has no objection to the proceeding—in fact, rather likes it—but perhaps they may be in error. The springs the little ape makes, whilst undergoing the process, are very surprising, considering that it has nothing to spring from.

I was very glad to perceive that I could make myself fairly understood by these women, and could understand them fairly. I was not only anxious to be able to do so because it was necessary for my success in trading, but also because I was desirous of knowing something of the people. Up to the time of which I am now writing, my knowledge of the Boers was small. I had seen numbers of them, and had even been kindly received at their houses, but our conversation had been necessarily very limited. I had been able to observe that most of them are dirty and untidy—even the relations of the famous Paul Krüger, living in a state of dirt and disorder, that reminds one of an Irish hovel; while at the same time, I had heard many accounts of their absurd ignorance—of how they believed the earth to be flat, and that the sun and stars were made expressly as lamps for our benefit, &c.; and I had been amused to learn that Paul Krüger had privately expressed his opinion, that the footman of his noble English host was both a better

dressed and better mannered man than his master! Horrible tales had also been told to me of the brutality this Paul Krüger and others were capable of, when left to themselves, by men who had, in the olden time, served under or with them against the Kaffirs: of how they had taken little babies, too young to be easily reared, away from their mothers, who had perhaps been slaughtered, and had thrown them all into a heap in a kraal, and, covering them with dry grass and bushes, had set fire to it; of how they had shot nursing mothers in cold blood, and let them linger in misery for days, if the shot had not proved immediately fatal; of how children had been dragged from their mothers' arms and taken away as slaves, the mothers being shot if they ventured to run after the capturers, and annoy them by their despairing wailing. I had heard that the Boers were a treacherous, lying, hypocritical people, with all the faults but with none of the virtues supposed to belong to rough peasants; and I had even spoken to a Boer who, a very few years ago, dragged a Kaffir to death tied to his horse. I thought I would now begin to learn a little of them from my own observation.

I had not long returned to the waggon, and I was sitting on the grass, when the two women came up. They sat down by my side, and asked me if I had some cotton of a particular size. I said I would look. Then they asked if I would take eggs in exchange. Having expressed my willingness to do so, they asked if I had needles of a particular size; and I said once more that I would look. Mr. Egerton had to do the looking, by-the-way, and did not much enjoy it; my department was the talking business! My customers now expressed their

desire to see some "kommekies" (be it understood that a "kommeke" is a small bowl used by the Boers instead of a cup—handles being inconveniently given to breaking on trek); I said I had, and then they asked what was their price. I named it, but my visitors threw up their eyes in horror. "Oh!" they said, "that is more than we give in Pretoria." I ventured to remark that the bush-veldt was not Pretoria. Then they asked what would I give for eggs. I said a shilling a dozen. Once more they were seized with surprise and horror; they had never heard of such a low price; all traders gave more. But I was obdurate. How those women did haggle over a penny more or less in the price of a few "kommekies" and a few eggs; the penny having to be subtracted in the former and added in the latter case. At last, to get rid of them, I let them have the coveted little bowls at almost cost price, and got the eggs at my own. But my customers were aggrieved—they rose to depart, and, as they wished me farewell, the elder woman patted her pocket fondly.

"Ah!" she said, addressing her companion, "I have plenty of money in it—I wanted to buy—but the woman gives so little for eggs, and her things are so dear!"

Mr. Egerton and Hendrick were indignant, and I made them worse by laughing at them; but the best of the joke we had to find out afterwards—half of the eggs were addled!

Not long after this, two Boers, father and son apparently, rode up to the waggon and dismounted. The father held his hand out to me across the disselboom, evidently expecting me to get up to take it, but I was too comfortable lying down.

"I can't reach so far," said I.

"No more can I," quoth he. "Have you any boots?"

"Yes."

"What is their price?"

"Eighteen shillings."

"You must not tell lies," remarked my visitor.

I assured him I was adhering strictly to truth; upon which he said I might show him the boots; but they were not strong enough for his fancy; and he and his son rode on to another trader, who was, I heard, stationed not far off.

Then Mr. Egerton's wrath against the rudeness of Boers in general, and of this Boer in particular, burst forth, regardless of my endeavours to point out to him, that, as friends and relations, in Boer-land, constantly recommend each other (in a friendly spirit) not to lie, the expression was doubtless only a playful allusion to the fact, that traders are in the habit of making as good bargains as they can.

Soon after we inspanned, and Mr. Egerton and I riding on in front, we presently came upon the encampment of the trader we had heard of. He was stationary there for a time, and had set himself up very comfortably. After a few words we rode on, following the right bank of the Eland river, towards its junction with the Elephant river. The bush was thick, and the banks were so steep, that although we were close to the river the whole time, we were not aware of it; and here I may remark that it requires to get one's eye accustomed to the bush-veldt before one can discover where the course of a river or the source of a spring lies, and also where a Boer encampment lies, for the Boers draw up their waggons

and pitch their tents often in the midst of thick bush ; and a trader's eye must often be as practised as a hunter's, to see the little white speck they present amongst the green foliage.

Mr. Egerton and I overshot many at our first outset, giving Hendrick a laugh at our want of experience when he came up with the waggon.

The next day brought us to a Kaffir kraal. The river ran between it and us, but I halted the waggon, and sent Hendrick over on Dandy to ask if I could get mealeas for the horses, and whether the Kaffirs would care to buy. He soon returned, escorted by a troop of whooping and yelling children, all nearly, and many quite, naked, who evidently looked upon the arrival of a "Smouse" as a delightful interruption to the monotony of their existence. They were closely followed by numbers of men and women : the former dressed in every variety of attire, from a worn-out European suit to a strip of rag round the loins ; the latter wearing girdles of leather, fringed, and more or less ornamented with beads or brass buttons round their waists, without any other covering in the case of their being young girls ; the married women had in addition skins thrown round their shoulders or passed under one arm and fastened over the opposite shoulder. Many carried baskets containing mealeas, pumpkins, &c., on their heads, and babies in their arms.

This motley crowd of men, women, and children, literally besieged the waggon, chattering and screaming like so many monkeys, and clambering up on the wheels, and jumping backwards and forwards across the disselboom in an ape-like manner. As their excitement abated, and as they fell into groups, the *coup d'œil* was effective—