

A black and white close-up portrait of Olive Schreiner. She is wearing a dark, textured headscarf and a teardrop-shaped earring. Her gaze is directed slightly to the left of the frame. The background is plain white.

***OLIVE
SCHREINER***

***THE STORY
OF AN AFRICAN
FARM***

Olive Schreiner

The Story of an African Farm

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by (AKA Ralph Iron) Olive Schreiner

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Preface.

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I have to thank cordially the public and my critics for the reception they have given this little book.

Dealing with a subject that is far removed from the round of English daily life, it of necessity lacks the charm that hangs about the ideal representation of familiar things, and its reception has therefore been the more kindly.

A word of explanation is necessary. Two strangers appear on the scene, and some have fancied that in the second they have again the first, who returns in a new guise. Why this should be we cannot tell; unless there is a feeling that a man should not appear upon the scene, and then disappear, leaving behind him no more substantial trace than a mere book; that he should return later on as husband or lover, to

fill some more important part than that of the mere stimulator of thought.

Human life may be painted according to two methods. There is the stage method. According to that each character is duly marshalled at first, and ticketed; we know with an immutable certainty that at the right crises each one will reappear and act his part, and, when the curtain falls, all will stand before it bowing. There is a sense of satisfaction in this, and of completeness. But there is another method—the method of the life we all lead. Here nothing can be prophesied. There is a strange coming and going of feet. Men appear, act and re-act upon each other, and pass away. When the crisis comes the man who would fit it does not return. When the curtain falls no one is ready. When the footlights are brightest they are blown out; and what the name of the play is no one knows. If there sits a spectator who knows, he sits so high that the players in the gaslight cannot hear his breathing. Life may be painted according to either method; but the methods are different. The canons of criticism that bear upon the one cut cruelly upon the other.

It has been suggested by a kind critic that he would better have liked the little book if it had been a history of wild adventure; of cattle driven into inaccessible kranzes by Bushmen; “of encounters with ravening lions, and hair-breadth escapes.” This could not be. Such works are best written in Piccadilly or in the Strand: there the gifts of the creative imagination, untrammelled by contact with any fact, may spread their wings.

But, should one sit down to paint the scenes among which he has grown, he will find that the facts creep in upon

him. Those brilliant phases and shapes which the imagination sees in far-off lands are not for him to portray. Sadly he must squeeze the colour from his brush, and dip it into the gray pigments around him. He must paint what lies before him.

R. Iron.

“We must see the first images which the external world casts upon the dark mirror of his mind; or must hear the first words which awaken the sleeping powers of thought, and stand by his earliest efforts, if we would understand the prejudices, the habits, and the passions that will rule his life. The entire man is, so to speak, to be found in the cradle of the child.”

Alexis de Tocqueville.

Glossary.

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Several Dutch and Colonial words occurring in this work, the subjoined Glossary is given, explaining the principal.

Alle wereld!—Gosh!

Aasvogels—Vultures.

Benauwdheid—Indigestion.

Brakje—A little cur of low degree.

Bultong—Dried meat.

Coop—Hide and Seek.

Inspan—To harness.

Kapje—A sun-bonnet.

Karoo—The wide sandy plains in some parts of South Africa.

Karoo-bushes—The bushes that take the place of grass on these plains.

Kartel—The wooden-bed fastened in an ox-wagon.

Kloof—A ravine.

Kopje—A small hillock, or “little head.”

Kraal—The space surrounded by a stone wall or hedged with thorn branches, into which sheep or cattle are driven at night.

Mealies—Indian corn.

Meerkat—A small weazel-like animal.

Meiboss—Preserved and dried apricots.

Nachtmaal—The Lord’s Supper.

Oom—Uncle.

Outspan—To unharness, or a place in the field where one unharnesses.

Pap—Porridge.

Predikant—Parson.

Riem—Leather rope.

Sarsarties—Food.

Sleg—Bad.

Sloot—A dry watercourse.

Spook—To haunt, a ghost.

Stamp-block—A wooden block, hollowed out, in which mealies are placed to be pounded before being cooked.

Stoep—Porch.

Tant or Tante—Aunt.

Upsitting—In Boer courtship the man and girl are supposed to sit up together the whole night.

Veld—Open country.

Velschoen—Shoes of undressed leather.

Vrijer—Available man.

THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM

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Part I.

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Chapter 1.I. Shadows From Child-Life.

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The Watch.

The full African moon poured down its light from the blue sky into the wide, lonely plain. The dry, sandy earth, with its coating of stunted karoo bushes a few inches high, the low hills that skirted the plain, the milk-bushes with their long finger-like leaves, all were touched by a weird and an almost oppressive beauty as they lay in the white light.

In one spot only was the solemn monotony of the plain broken. Near the centre a small solitary kopje rose. Alone it lay there, a heap of round ironstones piled one upon another, as over some giant's grave. Here and there a few tufts of grass or small succulent plants had sprung up among its stones, and on the very summit a clump of prickly-pears lifted their thorny arms, and reflected, as from mirrors, the moonlight on their broad fleshy leaves. At the foot of the kopje lay the homestead. First, the stone-walled sheep kraals and Kaffer huts; beyond them the dwelling-house—a square, red-brick building with thatched roof. Even on its bare red walls, and the wooden ladder that led up to the loft, the moonlight cast a kind of dreamy beauty, and quite etherealized the low brick wall that ran before the house, and which inclosed a bare patch of sand and two straggling sunflowers. On the zinc roof of the great open wagon-house, on the roofs of the outbuildings that jutted from its side, the moonlight glinted with a quite peculiar brightness, till it seemed that every rib in the metal was of burnished silver.

Sleep ruled everywhere, and the homestead was not less quiet than the solitary plain.

In the farmhouse, on her great wooden bedstead, Tant Sannie, the Boer-woman, rolled heavily in her sleep.

She had gone to bed, as she always did, in her clothes, and the night was warm and the room close, and she dreamed bad dreams. Not of the ghosts and devils that so haunted her waking thoughts; not of her second husband the consumptive Englishman, whose grave lay away beyond the ostrich-camps, nor of her first, the young Boer; but only of the sheep's trotters she had eaten for supper that night. She dreamed that one stuck fast in her throat, and she rolled her huge form from side to side, and snorted horribly.

In the next room, where the maid had forgotten to close the shutter, the white moonlight fell in in a flood, and made it light as day. There were two small beds against the wall. In one lay a yellow-haired child, with a low forehead and a face of freckles; but the loving moonlight hid defects here as elsewhere, and showed only the innocent face of a child in its first sweet sleep.

The figure in the companion bed belonged of right to the moonlight, for it was of quite elfin-like beauty. The child had dropped her cover on the floor, and the moonlight looked in at the naked little limbs. Presently she opened her eyes and looked at the moonlight that was bathing her.

"Em!" she called to the sleeper in the other bed; but received no answer. Then she drew the cover from the floor, turned her pillow, and pulling the sheet over her head, went to sleep again.

Only in one of the outbuildings that jutted from the wagon-house there was some one who was not asleep.

The room was dark; door and shutter were closed; not a ray of light entered anywhere. The German overseer, to whom the room belonged, lay sleeping soundly on his bed in the corner, his great arms folded, and his bushy grey and black beard rising and falling on his breast. But one in the room was not asleep. Two large eyes looked about in the darkness, and two small hands were smoothing the patchwork quilt. The boy, who slept on a box under the window, had just awakened from his first sleep. He drew the quilt up to his chin, so that little peered above it but a great head of silky black curls and the two black eyes. He stared about in the darkness. Nothing was visible, not even the outline of one worm-eaten rafter, nor of the deal table, on which lay the Bible from which his father had read before they went to bed. No one could tell where the toolbox was, and where the fireplace. There was something very impressive to the child in the complete darkness.

At the head of his father's bed hung a great silver hunting watch. It ticked loudly. The boy listened to it, and began mechanically to count. Tick—tick—one, two, three, four! He lost count presently, and only listened. Tick—tick—tick—tick!

It never waited; it went on inexorably; and every time it ticked a man died! He raised himself a little on his elbow and listened. He wished it would leave off.

How many times had it ticked since he came to lie down? A thousand times, a million times, perhaps.

He tried to count again, and sat up to listen better.

“Dying, dying, dying!” said the watch; “dying, dying, dying!”

He heard it distinctly. Where were they going to, all those people?

He lay down quickly, and pulled the cover up over his head: but presently the silky curls reappeared.

“Dying, dying, dying!” said the watch; “dying, dying, dying!”

He thought of the words his father had read that evening —“For wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat.”

“Many, many, many!” said the watch.

“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

“Few, few, few!” said the watch.

The boy lay with his eyes wide open. He saw before him a long stream of people, a great dark multitude, that moved in one direction; then they came to the dark edge of the world and went over. He saw them passing on before him, and there was nothing that could stop them. He thought of how that stream had rolled on through all the long ages of the past—how the old Greeks and Romans had gone over; the countless millions of China and India, they were going over now. Since he had come to bed, how many had gone!

And the watch said, “Eternity, eternity, eternity!”

“Stop them! stop them!” cried the child.

And all the while the watch kept ticking on; just like God’s will, that never changes or alters, you may do what you please.

Great beads of perspiration stood on the boy's forehead. He climbed out of bed and lay with his face turned to the mud floor.

"Oh, God, God! save them!" he cried in agony. "Only some, only a few! Only for each moment I am praying here one!" He folded his little hands upon his head. "God! God! save them!"

He grovelled on the floor.

Oh, the long, long ages of the past, in which they had gone over! Oh, the long, long future, in which they would pass away! Oh, God! the long, long, long eternity, which has no end!

The child wept, and crept closer to the ground.

The Sacrifice.

The farm by daylight was not as the farm by moonlight. The plain was a weary flat of loose red sand, sparsely covered by dry karoo bushes, that cracked beneath the tread like tinder, and showed the red earth everywhere. Here and there a milk-bush lifted its pale-coloured rods, and in every direction the ants and beetles ran about in the blazing sand. The red walls of the farmhouse, the zinc roofs of the outbuildings, the stone walls of the kraals, all reflected the fierce sunlight, till the eye ached and blenched. No tree or shrub was to be seen far or near. The two sunflowers that stood before the door, out-stared by the sun, drooped their brazen faces to the sand; and the little cicada-like insects cried aloud among the stones of the kopje.

The Boer-woman, seen by daylight, was even less lovely than when, in bed, she rolled and dreamed. She sat on a chair in the great front room, with her feet on a wooden stove, and wiped her flat face with the corner of her apron, and drank coffee, and in Cape Dutch swore that the beloved weather was damned. Less lovely, too, by daylight was the dead Englishman's child, her little stepdaughter, upon whose freckles and low, wrinkled forehead the sunlight had no mercy.

"Lyndall," the child said to her little orphan cousin, who sat with her on the floor threading beads, "how is it your beads never fall off your needle?"

"I try," said the little one gravely, moistening her tiny finger. "That is why."

The overseer, seen by daylight, was a huge German, wearing a shabby suit, and with a childish habit of rubbing his hands and nodding his head prodigiously when pleased at anything. He stood out at the kraals in the blazing sun, explaining to two Kaffer boys the approaching end of the world. The boys, as they cut the cakes of dung, winked at each other, and worked as slowly as they possibly could; but the German never saw it.

Away, beyond the kopje, Waldo his son herded the ewes and lambs—a small and dusty herd—powdered all over from head to foot with red sand, wearing a ragged coat and shoes of undressed leather, through whose holes the toes looked out. His hat was too large, and had sunk down to his eyes, concealing completely the silky black curls. It was a curious small figure. His flock gave him little trouble. It was too hot for them to move far; they gathered round every

little milk-bush, as though they hoped to find shade, and stood there motionless in clumps. He himself crept under a shelving rock that lay at the foot of the kopje, stretched himself on his stomach, and waved his dilapidated little shoes in the air.

Soon, from the blue bag where he kept his dinner, he produced a fragment of slate, an arithmetic, and a pencil. Proceeding to put down a sum with solemn and earnest demeanour, he began to add it up aloud: "Six and two is eight—and four is twelve—and two is fourteen—and four is eighteen." Here he paused. "And four is eighteen—and—four—is, eighteen." The last was very much drawled. Slowly the pencil slipped from his fingers, and the slate followed it into the sand. For a while he lay motionless, then began muttering to himself, folded his little arms, laid his head down upon them, and might have been asleep, but for the muttering sound that from time to time proceeded from him. A curious old ewe came to sniff at him; but it was long before he raised his head. When he did, he looked at the far-off hills with his heavy eyes.

"Ye shall receive—ye shall receive—shall, shall, shall," he muttered.

He sat up then. Slowly the dulness and heaviness melted from his face; it became radiant. Midday had come now, and the sun's rays were poured down vertically; the earth throbbed before the eye.

The boy stood up quickly, and cleared a small space from the bushes which covered it. Looking carefully, he found twelve small stones of somewhat the same size; kneeling down, he arranged them carefully on the cleared space in a

square pile, in shape like an altar. Then he walked to the bag where his dinner was kept; in it was a mutton chop and a large slice of brown bread. The boy took them out and turned the bread over in his hand, deeply considering it. Finally he threw it away and walked to the altar with the meat, and laid it down on the stones. Close by in the red sand he knelt down. Sure, never since the beginning of the world was there so ragged and so small a priest. He took off his great hat and placed it solemnly on the ground, then closed his eyes and folded his hands. He prayed aloud:

“Oh, God, my Father, I have made Thee a sacrifice. I have only twopence, so I cannot buy a lamb. If the lambs were mine, I would give Thee one; but now I have only this meat; it is my dinner meat. Please, my Father, send fire down from heaven to burn it. Thou hast said, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou cast into the sea, nothing doubting, it shall be done. I ask for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

He knelt down with his face upon the ground, and he folded his hands upon his curls. The fierce sun poured down its heat upon his head and upon his altar. When he looked up he knew what he should see—the glory of God! For fear his very heart stood still, his breath came heavily; he was half suffocated. He dared not look up. Then at last he raised himself. Above him was the quiet blue sky, about him the red earth; there were the clumps of silent ewes and his altar—that was all.

He looked up—nothing broke the intense stillness of the blue overhead. He looked round in astonishment, then he bowed again, and this time longer than before.

When he raised himself the second time all was unaltered. Only the sun had melted the fat of the little mutton chop, and it ran down upon the stones.

Then, the third time he bowed himself. When at last he looked up, some ants had come to the meat on the altar. He stood up and drove them away. Then he put his hat on his hot curls, and sat in the shade. He clasped his hands about his knees. He sat to watch what would come to pass. The glory of the Lord God Almighty! He knew he should see it.

“My dear God is trying me,” he said; and he sat there through the fierce heat of the afternoon. Still he watched and waited when the sun began to slope, and when it neared the horizon and the sheep began to cast long shadows across the karoo, he still sat there. He hoped when the first rays touched the hills till the sun dipped behind them and was gone. Then he called his ewes together, and broke down the altar, and threw the meat far, far away into the field.

He walked home behind his flock. His heart was heavy. He reasoned so: “God cannot lie. I had faith. No fire came. I am like Cain—I am not His. He will not hear my prayer. God hates me.”

The boy’s heart was heavy. When he reached the kraal gate the two girls met him.

“Come,” said the yellow-haired Em, “let us play coop. There is still time before it gets quite dark. You, Waldo, go and hide on the kopje; Lyndall and I will shut eyes here, and we will not look.”

The girls hid their faces in the stone wall of the sheep-kraal, and the boy clambered half way up the kopje. He

crouched down between two stones and gave the call. Just then the milk-herd came walking out of the cow-kraal with two pails. He was an ill-looking Kaffer.

“Ah!” thought the boy, “perhaps he will die tonight, and go to hell! I must pray for him, I must pray!”

Then he thought—“Where am I going to?” and he prayed desperately.

“Ah! this is not right at all,” little Em said, peeping between the stones, and finding him in a very curious posture. “What are you doing Waldo? It is not the play, you know. You should run out when we come to the white stone. Ah, you do not play nicely.”

“I—I will play nicely now,” said the boy, coming out and standing sheepishly before them; “I—I only forgot; I will play now.”

“He has been to sleep,” said freckled Em.

“No,” said beautiful little Lyndall, looking curiously at him: “he has been crying.”

She never made a mistake.

The Confession.

One night, two years after, the boy sat alone on the kopje. He had crept softly from his father’s room and come there. He often did, because, when he prayed or cried aloud, his father might awake and hear him; and none knew his great sorrow, and none knew his grief, but he himself, and he buried them deep in his heart.

He turned up the brim of his great hat and looked at the moon, but most at the leaves of the prickly pear that grew just before him. They glinted, and glinted, and glinted, just

like his own heart—cold, so hard, and very wicked. His physical heart had pain also; it seemed full of little bits of glass, that hurt. He had sat there for half an hour, and he dared not go back to the close house.

He felt horribly lonely. There was not one thing so wicked as he in all the world, and he knew it. He folded his arms and began to cry—not aloud; he sobbed without making any sound, and his tears left scorched marks where they fell. He could not pray; he had prayed night and day for so many months; and tonight he could not pray. When he left off crying, he held his aching head with his brown hands. If one might have gone up to him and touched him kindly; poor, ugly little thing! Perhaps his heart was almost broken.

With his swollen eyes he sat there on a flat stone at the very top of the kopje; and the tree, with every one of its wicked leaves, blinked, and blinked, and blinked at him. Presently he began to cry again, and then stopped his crying to look at it. He was quiet for a long while, then he knelt up slowly and bent forward. There was a secret he had carried in his heart for a year. He had not dared to look at it; he had not whispered it to himself, but for a year he had carried it. “I hate God!” he said. The wind took the words and ran away with them, among the stones, and through the leaves of the prickly pear. He thought it died away half down the kopje. He had told it now!

“I love Jesus Christ, but I hate God.”

The wind carried away that sound as it had done the first. Then he got up and buttoned his old coat about him. He knew he was certainly lost now; he did not care. If half the world were to be lost, why not he too? He would not pray for

mercy any more. Better so—better to know certainly. It was ended now. Better so.

He began scrambling down the sides of the kopje to go home.

Better so! But oh, the loneliness, the agonized pain! for that night, and for nights on nights to come! The anguish that sleeps all day on the heart like a heavy worm, and wakes up at night to feed!

There are some of us who in after years say to Fate, “Now deal us your hardest blow, give us what you will; but let us never again suffer as we suffered when we were children.”

The barb in the arrow of childhood’s suffering is this: its intense loneliness, its intense agony.

Chapter 1.II. Plans and Bushman Paintings.

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At last came the year of the great drought, the year of eighteen-sixty-two. From end to end of the land the earth cried for water. Man and beast turned their eyes to the pitiless sky, that like the roof of some brazen oven arched overhead. On the farm, day after day, month after month, the water in the dams fell lower and lower; the sheep died in the fields; the cattle, scarcely able to crawl, tottered as they moved from spot to spot in search of food. Week after week, month after month, the sun looked down from the cloudless sky, till the karoo-bushes were leafless sticks, broken into the earth, and the earth itself was naked and bare; and only the milk-bushes, like old hags, pointed their shrivelled fingers heavenward, praying for the rain that never came.

It was on an afternoon of a long day in that thirsty summer, that on the side of the kopje furthest from the homestead the two girls sat. They were somewhat grown since the days when they played hide-and-seek there, but they were mere children still.

Their dress was of dark, coarse stuff; their common blue pinafores reached to their ankles, and on their feet they wore home-made velschoen.

They sat under a shelving rock, on the surface of which were still visible some old Bushman paintings, their red and

black pigments having been preserved through long years from wind and rain by the overhanging ledge; grotesque oxen, elephants, rhinoceroses, and a one-horned beast, such as no man ever has seen or ever shall.

The girls sat with their backs to the paintings. In their laps were a few fern and ice-plant leaves, which by dint of much searching they had gathered under the rocks.

Em took off her big brown kapje and began vigorously to fan her red face with it; but her companion bent low over the leaves in her lap, and at last took up an ice-plant leaf and fastened it on to the front of her blue pinafore with a pin.

“Diamonds must look as these drops do,” she said, carefully bending over the leaf, and crushing one crystal drop with her delicate little nail. “When I,” she said, “am grown up, I shall wear real diamonds, exactly like these in my hair.”

Her companion opened her eyes and wrinkled her low forehead.

“Where will you find them, Lyndall? The stones are only crystals that we picked up yesterday. Old Otto says so.”

“And you think that I am going to stay here always?”

The lip trembled scornfully.

“Ah, no,” said her companion. “I suppose some day we shall go somewhere; but now we are only twelve, and we cannot marry till we are seventeen. Four years, five—that is a long time to wait. And we might not have diamonds if we did marry.”

“And you think that I am going to stay here till then?”

“Well, where are you going?” asked her companion.

The girl crushed an ice-plant leaf between her fingers.

“Tant Sannie is a miserable old woman,” she said. “Your father married her when he was dying, because he thought she would take better care of the farm, and of us, than an English woman. He said we should be taught and sent to school. Now she saves every farthing for herself, buys us not even one old book. She does not ill-use us—why? Because she is afraid of your father’s ghost. Only this morning she told her Hottentot that she would have beaten you for breaking the plate, but that three nights ago she heard a rustling and a grunting behind the pantry door, and knew it was your father coming to spook her. She is a miserable old woman,” said the girl, throwing the leaf from her; “but I intend to go to school.”

“And if she won’t let you?”

“I shall make her.”

“How?”

The child took not the slightest notice of the last question, and folded her small arms across her knees.

“But why do you want to go, Lyndall?”

“There is nothing helps in this world,” said the child slowly, “but to be very wise, and to know everything—to be clever.”

“But I should not like to go to school!” persisted the small freckled face.

“And you do not need to. When you are seventeen this Boer-woman will go; you will have this farm and everything that is upon it for your own; but I,” said Lyndall, “will have nothing. I must learn.”

“Oh, Lyndall! I will give you some of my sheep,” said Em, with a sudden burst of pitying generosity.

“I do not want your sheep,” said the girl slowly; “I want things of my own. When I am grown up,” she added, the flush on her delicate features deepening at every word, “there will be nothing that I do not know. I shall be rich, very rich; and I shall wear not only for best, but every day, a pure white silk, and little rose-buds, like the lady in Tant Sannie’s bedroom, and my petticoats will be embroidered, not only at the bottom, but all through.”

The lady in Tant Sannie’s bedroom was a gorgeous creature from a fashion-sheet, which the Boer-woman, somewhere obtaining, had pasted up at the foot of her bed, to be profoundly admired by the children.

“It would be very nice,” said Em; but it seemed a dream of quite too transcendent a glory ever to be realized.

At this instant there appeared at the foot of the kopje two figures—the one, a dog, white and sleek, one yellow ear hanging down over his left eye; the other, his master, a lad of fourteen, and no other than the boy Waldo, grown into a heavy, slouching youth of fourteen. The dog mounted the kopje quickly, his master followed slowly. He wore an aged jacket much too large for him, and rolled up at the wrists, and, as of old, a pair of dilapidated velschoens and a felt hat. He stood before the two girls at last.

“What have you been doing today?” asked Lyndall, lifting her eyes to his face.

“Looking after ewes and lambs below the dam. Here!” he said, holding out his hand awkwardly, “I brought them for you.”

There were a few green blades of tender grass.

“Where did you find them?”

“On the dam wall.”

She fastened them beside the leaf on her blue pinafore.

“They look nice there,” said the boy, awkwardly rubbing his great hands and watching her.

“Yes; but the pinafore spoils it all; it is not pretty.”

He looked at it closely.

“Yes, the squares are ugly; but it looks nice upon you—beautiful.”

He now stood silent before them, his great hands hanging loosely at either side.

“Some one has come today,” he mumbled out suddenly, when the idea struck him.

“Who?” asked both girls.

“An Englishman on foot.”

“What does he look like?” asked Em.

“I did not notice; but he has a very large nose,” said the boy slowly. “He asked the way to the house.”

“Didn’t he tell you his name?”

“Yes—Bonaparte Blenkins.”

“Bonaparte!” said Em, “why that is like the reel Hottentot Hans plays on the violin—

‘Bonaparte, Bonaparte, my wife is sick;
In the middle of the week, but Sundays not,
I give her rice and beans for soup’—

It is a funny name.”

“There was a living man called Bonaparte once,” said she of the great eyes.

“Ah yes, I know,” said Em—“the poor prophet whom the lions ate. I am always so sorry for him.”

Her companion cast a quiet glance upon her.

“He was the greatest man who ever lived,” she said, “the man I like best.”

“And what did he do?” asked Em, conscious that she had made a mistake, and that her prophet was not the man.

“He was one man, only one,” said her little companion slowly, “yet all the people in the world feared him. He was not born great, he was common as we are; yet he was master of the world at last. Once he was only a little child, then he was a lieutenant, then he was a general, then he was an emperor. When he said a thing to himself he never forgot it. He waited, and waited and waited, and it came at last.”

“He must have been very happy,” said Em.

“I do not know,” said Lyndall; “but he had what he said he would have, and that is better than being happy. He was their master, and all the people were white with fear of him. They joined together to fight him. He was one and they were many, and they got him down at last. They were like the wild cats when their teeth are fast in a great dog, like cowardly wild cats,” said the child, “they would not let him go. There were many; he was only one. They sent him to an island on the sea, a lonely island, and kept him there fast. He was one man, and they were many, and they were terrified at him. It was glorious!” said the child.

“And what then?” said Em.

“Then he was alone there in that island with men to watch him always,” said her companion, slowly and quietly. “And in the long lonely nights he used to lie awake and think of the things he had done in the old days, and the things he

would do if they let him go again. In the day when he walked near the shore it seemed to him that the sea all around him was a cold chain about his body pressing him to death.”

“And then?” said Em, much interested.

“He died there in that island; he never got away.”

“It is rather a nice story,” said Em; “but the end is sad.”

“It is a terrible, hateful ending,” said the little teller of the story, leaning forward on her folded arms; “and the worst is, it is true. I have noticed,” added the child very deliberately, “that it is only the made-up stories that end nicely; the true ones all end so.”

As she spoke the boy’s dark, heavy eyes rested on her face.

“You have read it, have you not?”

He nodded. “Yes; but the Brown history tells only what he did, not what he thought.”

“It was in the Brown history that I read of him,” said the girl; “but I know what he thought. Books do not tell everything.”

“No,” said the boy, slowly drawing nearer to her and sitting down at her feet. “What you want to know they never tell.”

Then the children fell into silence, till Doss, the dog, growing uneasy at its long continuance, sniffed at one and the other, and his master broke forth suddenly:

“If they could talk, if they could tell us now!” he said, moving his hand out over the surrounding objects—“then we would know something. This kopje, if it could tell us how it came here! The ‘Physical Geography’ says,” he went on

most rapidly and confusedly, "that what were dry lands now were once lakes; and what I think is this—these low hills were once the shores of a lake; this kopje is some of the stones that were at the bottom, rolled together by the water. But there is this—How did the water come to make one heap here alone, in the centre of the plain?" It was a ponderous question; no one volunteered an answer. "When I was little," said the boy, "I always looked at it and wondered, and I thought a great giant was buried under it. Now I know the water must have done it; but how? It is very wonderful. Did one little stone come first, and stop the others as they rolled?" said the boy with earnestness, in a low voice, more as speaking to himself than to them.

"Oh, Waldo, God put the little kopje here," said Em with solemnity.

"But how did he put it here?"

"By wanting."

"But how did the wanting bring it here?"

"Because it did."

The last words were uttered with the air of one who produces a clinching argument. What effect it had on the questioner was not evident, for he made no reply, and turned away from her.

Drawing closer to Lyndall's feet, he said after a while in a low voice:

"Lyndall, has it never seemed to you that the stones were talking with you? Sometimes," he added in a yet lower tone, "I lie under there with my sheep, and it seems that the stones are really speaking—speaking of the old things, of the time when the strange fishes and animals lived that are