

The Story of an African Farm

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of us, seen dimly in the dark as they move round our bed. It is very consoling.

In the day we learn our letters and are troubled because we cannot see why a-a-w should be know and p-a-l-m pool. They tell us it is so because it is so. We are not satisfied. We want to know. We like better to build little stone houses. We can build them as we please and know the reason for them.

Other joys, too, we have incomparably greater than even the building of stone houses.

We are run through with a shudder of delight when in the red sand we come on one of those white wax flowers that lie between their two green leaves flat on the sand. We hardly dare pick them, but we feel compelled to do so; and we smell and smell till the delight becomes almost pain. Afterward we pull the green leaves softly into pieces to see the six threads run across.

Beyond the "kropje" grow some pale green hairy leaved bushes. We are so small they meet over our head, and we sit among them and kiss them, and they love us back. It seems as though they were alive.

One day we sit there and look up at the blue sky and down at our fat little knees, and suddenly it strikes us: Who are we? This I—what is it? We try to look up upon ourselves, and ourself beats back upon us. We are hardly got up in great fear and run home as hard as we can. We can't tell any one what frightened us. We never quite lose that feeling of self again.

And then a new time rises. We are 7 years old. We can read now, we read the Bible. Best of all, we like the story of Elijah in his cave at Horeb and the still small voice.

One day, a notable one, we read on the "kropje" and discover the fifth chapter of Matthew and read it all through. It is a new gold mine. Then we took the Bible under our arm and rushed home. They didn't know it was wicked to take your things again if you have once looked them, wicked to go to law with them. We are quite breathless when we get to the house. We tell them that we have discovered a chapter they never heard. We tell them what it says. The old wise people tell us they know all about it. Our discovery is a man's nest to them, but to us it is very rare. The Ten Commandments and the old "Thou shalt" we have heard about long enough and don't care about it, but this new law sets us on fire. We will deny ourselves. Our little wagon that we have made we give to the little Kaffirs. We keep quiet when they throw sand at us, feeling, oh, so happy. We conscientiously put the crooked soap for ourselves at breakfast and take the burned roaster cake. We save our money and buy threepence of tobacco for the Hottentot maid who calls us names. We are ecstatically virtuous. At night we are profoundly religious. Every night we say, "Eternity, eternity, hell, hell, hell," and the silence talks of God and the things that shall be.

Occasionally also unpleasantly shrewd questions begin to be asked by some one, we know not whom, who sits somewhere behind our shoulder. We get to know him better afterward. Now we carry the questions to the grown up people, and they give us answers. We are more or less satisfied for the time. The grown up answers are very wise, and they say it was kind of God to make hell and very loving of him to send men there, and, besides, he couldn't help himself, and they are very wise, we think, so we believe them, more or less.

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Forget! We turn away and shrink into ourselves. They find our hands over our eyes. O God, do they not understand that the material world is but a film, through every pore of which God's awful spirit world is shining through on us? We keep as far from them as we can.

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"Then 14 years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas and took Titus with me also."

For an instant our imagination seizes it. We are twisting, twirling, trying to make an allegory. The 14 years are 14 months; we are in jail, and the devil is Barnabas; Titus is—then a sudden lurching comes to us. We are liars and hypocrites. We are trying to deceive ourselves. What is Paul to us—and Jerusalem? Who are Barnabas and Titus? We know not the men. Before we know we seize the book, swing it round our head and fling it with all our might to the farther end of the room. We put down our head again and weep. Youth and ignorance—in there anything else that can weep? It is as though the tears were drops of blood congealed beneath the eyelids. Nothing else is like those tears. After a long time we are weak with crying and lie silent, and by chance we knock against the wood that stops the broken pane. It falls. Upon our hot, stiff face a sweet breath of wind blows. We raise our head and with our swollen eyes look out at the beautiful still world, and the sweet night wind blows in upon us, holy and gentle, like a loving breath from the lips of God. Over us a deep peace comes, a calm, still joy. The tears now flow readily and softly. Oh, the unutterable gladness! At last, at last, we have found it! "The peace with God." "The sense of sins forgiven." All doubt vanished, God's voice in the soul, the Holy Spirit filling us! We feel him, we feel him! O Jesus Christ, through whom, through you, this joy! We press our hands upon our breast and look upward with adoring gladness. Soft waves of bliss break through us. "The peace with God." "The sense of sins forgiven." Methodists and revivalists say the words, and the mockin' wood shoots out of its lip and walks by smiling—"Hypocrite!"

There are more foils and fewer hypocrites than the wise world dreams of. The hypocrite is rare as icebergs in the tropics, the fool common as buttercups beside a water course. Whether you go this way or that you tread on him. You dare not look at your own reflection in the water, but you see one. There is no cant phrase, rotten with age, but it was the dress of a living body, now but at heart it signifies a real bodily or mental condition which some have passed through.

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Next morning the Bible we kiss, we are God's forever. We go out to work, and it goes happily all day, happily all night, but hardly so happily, not happily at all, the next day, and the next night the devil asks us, "Where is your Holy Spirit?"

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We remember the sermon there in the sunlight. One comes and asks why we sit there nodding so moodily. Ah, they do not see what we see!

A moment's time, a narrow space, Divide me from that heavenly place Or shute me up in hell.

So says Wesley's hymn, which we sing evening by evening. What manner sunshine and walls, men and sheep? "The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." They are real.

The Bible we bear always in our breast, as God's forever. We learn to repeat it. We weep much, for in sunshine and in shade, in the early morning or late evening, in the field or in the house, the devil walks with us. He comes to us as a real person, copper colored face, head a little on one side, forehead knit, asking questions. Believe me, it were better to be followed by three deadly diseases than by him. He is never silenced—without mercy. Though the drops of blood smelt out on your heart, he will put his question. Softly he comes up (we are only a wee bit child): "Is it good of God to make hell? Was it kind of him to let one be forgiven unless Jesus Christ died?" Then he goes off and leaves us writhing. Presently he comes back.

"Do you love him?" Waits a little. "Do you love him? You will be lost if you don't."

We say we try to.

"But do you?" Then he goes off. It is nothing to him if we go quite

mad with fear at our own wickedness. He asks on the questioning devil. He carries nothing what he says. We long to tell some one, that they may share our pain. We do not yet know that the cup of affliction is made with such a narrow mouth that only one lip can drink at a time and that each man's cup is made to match his lip.

One day we try to tell some one. Then a grave head is shaken solemnly at us. We are wicked, very wicked, they say. We ought not to have such thoughts. We ought to be good. We are wicked, very wicked. That is the comfort we get. Wicked? O Lord, do we not know it? Is it not the sense of our own exceeding wickedness that is drying up our young heart, making it wither, making all life a dust bin for us?

Wicked? We know it! Too vile to live, too vile to die, too vile to creep over this (God's) earth and move among his believing men. Hell is the place for him who hates his master, and there we do not want to go. This is the comfort we get from the old.

And once again we try to seek for comfort. This time great eyes look at us wondering, and only little lips say: "If it makes you so unhappy to think of these things, why do you not think of something else and forget?"

Forget! We turn away and shrink into ourselves. They find our hands over our eyes. O God, do they not understand that the material world is but a film, through every pore of which God's awful spirit world is shining through on us? We keep as far from them as we can.

One night, a rare, clear moonlight night, we kneel in the window. Every one else is asleep, but we kneel reading by the moonlight. It is a chapter in the prophets telling how the chosen people of God shall be carried on the eagles' shoulders. Surely the devil might leave us alone. There is not much handle for him there. But presently he comes.

"Is it right there should be a chosen people? To him who is Father to all should not all be dear?"

How can we answer him? We were feeling so good till he came. We put our head down on the Bible and bluster with tears. They we fold our hands over our head and pray till our teeth grind together. Oh, that from that spirit world, so real and yet so silent, that surrounds us one word would come to guide us! We are left alone with this devil, and God does not write per to us. Suddenly we seize the Bible, turning it round and round, and say hurriedly:

"It will be God's voice speaking to us, his voice as though we heard it."

We yearn for a token from the luxuriously silent One.

We turn the book, put our finger down on a page and bend to read by the moonlight. It is God's answer. We tremble:

"Then 14 years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas and took Titus with me also."

For an instant our imagination seizes it. We are twisting, twirling, trying to make an allegory. The 14 years are 14 months; we are in jail, and the devil is Barnabas; Titus is—then a sudden lurching comes to us. We are liars and hypocrites. We are trying to deceive ourselves. What is Paul to us—and Jerusalem? Who are Barnabas and Titus? We know not the men. Before we know we seize the book, swing it round our head and fling it with all our might to the farther end of the room. We put down our head again and weep. Youth and ignorance—in there anything else that can weep? It is as though the tears were drops of blood congealed beneath the eyelids. Nothing else is like those tears. After a long time we are weak with crying and lie silent, and by chance we knock against the wood that stops the broken pane. It falls. Upon our hot, stiff face a sweet breath of wind blows. We raise our head and with our swollen eyes look out at the beautiful still world, and the sweet night wind blows in upon us, holy and gentle, like a loving breath from the lips of God. Over us a deep peace comes, a calm, still joy. The tears now flow readily and softly. Oh, the unutterable gladness! At last, at last, we have found it! "The peace with God." "The sense of sins forgiven." All doubt vanished, God's voice in the soul, the Holy Spirit filling us! We feel him, we feel him! O Jesus Christ, through whom, through you, this joy! We press our hands upon our breast and look upward with adoring gladness. Soft waves of bliss break through us. "The peace with God." "The sense of sins forgiven." Methodists and revivalists say the words, and the mockin' wood shoots out of its lip and walks by smiling—"Hypocrite!"

There are more foils and fewer hypocrites than the wise world dreams of. The hypocrite is rare as icebergs in the tropics, the fool common as buttercups beside a water course. Whether you go this way or that you tread on him. You dare not look at your own reflection in the water, but you see one. There is no cant phrase, rotten with age, but it was the dress of a living body, now but at heart it signifies a real bodily or mental condition which some have passed through.

After hours and nights of frenzied fear of the supernatural desire to appease the power above, a force quivering excitement in every inch of nerve and blood vessel, there comes a time when nature cannot endure longer, and the spring long bent recoils. We sink down emaciated. Up creeps the deadly delicious calm.

"I have blotted out as a cloud thy sins and as a thick cloud thy trespasses and will remember them no more forever."

We weep with soft, transporting joy. A few experience this. Many imagine the experience it. One here and there lies about it. In the main "the peace with God, a sense of sins forgiven," stands for a certain mental and physical reaction. Its reality those know who have felt it.

And we on that moonlight night put down our head on the window. "O God, we are happy, happy, thy child forever! Oh, thank you, God!" And we drop asleep.

Next morning the Bible we kiss, we are God's forever. We go out to work, and it goes happily all day, happily all night, but hardly so happily, not happily at all, the next day, and the next night the devil asks us, "Where is your Holy Spirit?"

"I have blotted out as a cloud thy sins and as a thick cloud thy trespasses and will remember them no more forever."

No month by month, summer and winter, the old life goes on—reading, praying, weeping, praying. They tell us we become utterly stupid. We know it. Even the multiplication table we learned with so much care we forget. The physical world recedes farther and farther from us. Truly we love not the world, neither the things that are in it. Across the bounds of sleep our grief follows us. When we wake in the night, we are sitting up in bed weeping bitterly or find ourself outside in the moonlight dressed and walking up and down and wringing our hands, and we cannot tell how we came there. So pass two years as men reckon them.

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