The Story of an African Farm

Continued from First Page

move it. He could not leave those valleys with it. Then again he took it out and looked at it.

"'Oh, my beautiful, my heart's own!' he cried. 'May I not keep you?'

"He opened his hands sadly.

"'Go,' he said. 'It may happen that in Truth's scale one note is like to yours. I shall never hear it.'

"Sadly he opened his hand, and the bird flew from him forever.

"Then from the shuttle of imagination he took the thread of his Wishes and threw it on the ground, and the empty shuttle he put into his breast, for the thread was made in those valleys, but the shuttle came from an unknown country. He turned to go, but now the people came about him, howling.

"'Fool, bound, demented lunatic!' they cried. 'How dared you break your cage and let the birds fly?'

"The hunter spoke, but they would not hear him.

"'Truth! Who is she? Can you eat her? Can you drink her? Who has ever seen her? Your birds were real. All could hear them sing. Oh, fool! Vile reptile! Atheist!' they cried. 'You pollute the air!'

"'Come; let us take up stones and stone him!' cried some.

"'What affair is it of ours?' said others. 'Let the idiot go,' and went away. But the rest gathered up stones and mud and threw at him. At last, when he was bruised and cut, the hunter crept away into the woods, and it was evening about him."

At every word the stranger spoke the fellow's eyes flashed back on him—yes, and yes, and yes! The stranger smiled. It was almost worth the trouble of exerting oneself, even on a lazy afternoon, to win those passionate flashes, more thirsty and desiring than the love glances of a woman.

"He wandered on and on," said the stranger, "and the shade grew deeper. He was on the borders now of the land where it is always night. Then he stepped into it, and there was no light there. With his hands he groped, but each branch as he touched it broke off, and the earth was covered with cinders. At every step his foot sank in, and a fine cloud of impalpable ashes flew up into his face, and it was dark. So he sat down upon a stone and buried his face in his hands to wait in that Land of Negation and Denial till the light came.

"And it was night in his heart also.

"Then from the marshes to his right and left cold mists arose and closed about him. A fine, imperceptible rain fell in the dark, and great drops gathered on his hair and clothes. His heart beat slowly, and a numbness crept through all his limbs. Then, looking up, two merry whisp lights came dancing. He lifted his head to look at them. Nearer, nearer they came, so warm, so bright, they danced like stars of fire. They stood before him at last. From the center of the radiating flame in one looked out a woman's face, laughing, dimpled, with streaming yellow hair. In the center of the other were merry, laughing ripples, like the bubbles on a glass of wine. They danced before him.

"'Who are you,' asked the hunter, 'who alone come to me in my solitude and darkness?'

"'We are the twins Sensuality!' they cried. 'Our father's name is Human Nature, and our mother's name is Excess. We are as old as the hills and rivers, as old as the first man, but we never die,' they laughed.

"'Oh, let me wrap my arms about you!' cried the first. 'They are soft and warm. Your heart is frozen now, but I will make it beat. Oh, come to me!'

"'I will pour my hot life into you,' said the second. 'Your brain is numb, and your limbs are dead now, but they shall live with a fierce free life. Oh, let me pour it in!'

"'Oh, follow us,' they cried, 'and live with us! Nobler hearts than yours have sat here in this darkness to wait, and they have come to us and we to them, and they have never left us, never. All else is a delusion, but we are real, we are real. Truth is a shadow, the valleys of superstition are a farce, the earth is of ashes, the trees all rotten, but we—feel us—we live! You cannot doubt us. Feel us. How warm we are! Oh, come to us! Come to us!'

"Nearer and nearer round his head they hovered, and the cold drops melted on his forehead. The bright light shot into his eyes, dazzling him, and the frozen blood began to run. And he said:

"'Yes. Why should I die here in this awful darkness? They are warm; they melt my frozen blood!' And he stretched out his hands to take them.

"Then in a moment there arose before him the image of the thing he had loved, and his hand dropped to his side.

"'Oh, come to us!' they cried.

"But he buried his face.

"'You dazzle my eyes,' he cried, 'you make my heart warm, but you cannot give me what I desire. I will wait here—wait till I die. Go!'

"He covered his face with his hands and would not listen, and when he looked up again they were two twinkling stars, that vanished in the distance.

"And the long, long night rolled on.

"All who leave the valley of superstition pass through that dark land, but some go through it in a few days, some linger there for months, some for years, and some die there."

The boy had crept closer. His hot breath almost touched the stranger's hand. A mystic wonder filled his eyes.

"At last for the hunter a faint light played along the horizon, and he rose to follow it, and he reached that light at last and stepped into the broad sunshine. Then before him rose the almighty mountains of Dry Facts and Realities. The clear sunshine played on them, and the tops were lost in the clouds. At the foot many paths ran up. An exultant cry burst from the hunter. He chose the straightest and began to climb, and the rocks and ridges resounded with his song. They had exaggerated. After all, it was not so high, nor was the road so steep. A few days, a few weeks, a few months at most, and then the top! Not one feather only would he pick up. He would gather all that other men had found, weave the net, capture Truth, hold her fast, touch her with his hands, clasp her!

"He laughed in the merry sunshine and sang loud. Victory was very near. Nevertheless, after awhile the path grew steeper. He needed all his breath for climbing, and the singing died away. On the right and left rose huge rocks, devoid of lichen or moss, and in the lavalike earth chasms yawned. Here and there he saw a sheen of white bones. Now, too, the path began to grow less and less marked. Then it became a mere trace, with a footmark here and there; then it ceased altogether. He sang no more, but struck forth a path for himself until he reached a mighty wall of rock, smooth and without break, stretching as far as the eye could see. 'I will rear a stair against it, and, once this wall climbed, I shall be almost there,' he said bravely and worked. With his shuttle of imagination he dug out stones, but half of them would not fit, and half a month's work would roll down because those below were ill chosen. But the hunter worked on, saying always to himself, 'Once this wall climbed, I shall be almost there, this great work ended!'

"At last he came out upon the top, and he looked about him. Far below rolled the white mist over the valleys of Superstition, and above him towered the mountains. They had seemed low before. They were of an immeasurable height now, from crown to foundation surrounded by walls of rock that rose tier above tier in mighty circles. Upon them played the eternal sunshine. He uttered a wild cry. He bowed himself on to the earth, and when he rose his face was white. In absolute silence he walked on. He was very silent now. In those high regions the rarefied air is hard to breathe by those born in the valleys. Every breath he drew hurt him, and the blood oozed out from the tips of his fingers. Before the next wall of rock he began to work. The height of this seemed infinite, and he said nothing. The sound of his tool rang night and day upon the iron rocks into which he cut steps. Years passed over him, yet he worked on, but the wall towered up always above him to heaven. Sometimes he prayed that a little moss or lichen might spring up on those bare walls to be a companion to him, but it never came."

The stranger watched the boy's face.

"And the years rolled on. He counted them by the steps he had cut—a few for a year, only a few. He sang no more. He said no more, 'I will do this or that;' he only worked. And at night when the twilight settled down there looked out at him from the holes and crevices in the rocks many strange, wild faces.

"'Stop your work, you lonely man, and speak to us,' they cried.

"'My salvation is in work. If I should stop but for one moment, you would creep down upon me,' he replied. And they put out their long necks farther.

"'Look down into the crevice at your feet,' they said. 'See what lie there—white bones! As brave and strong a man as you climbed to these rocks. And he looked up. He saw there was no use in striving. He would never hold Truth, never see her, never find her. So he lay down here, for he was very tired. He went to sleep forever. He put himself to sleep. Sleep is very tranquil. You are not lonely when you are asleep, neither do your hands ache nor your heart.' And the hunter laughed between his teeth.

"'Have I torn from my heart all that was dearest? Have I wandered alone in the land of night? Have I resisted temptation? Have I dwelt where the voice of my kind is never heard and labored alone to lie down and be food for you, ye harpies?'

"He laughed fiercely, and the echoes of despair slunk away, for the laugh of a brave, strong heart is a death blow to them.

"Nevertheless they crept out again and looked at him.

"'Do you know that your hair is white,' they said, 'that your hands begin to tremble like a child's? Do you see that the point of your shuttle is gone? It is cracked already. If you should ever climb this stair,' they said, 'it will be your last. You will never climb another.'

"And he answered, 'I know it!' and worked on.

"The old, thin hands cut the stones ill and jaggedly, for the fingers were stiff and bent. The beauty and the strength of the man were gone.

"At last an old, wizened, shrunken face looked out above the rocks. It saw the eternal mountain rise with walls to the white clouds, but its work was done.

"The old hunter folded his tired hands and lay down by the precipice where he had worked away his life. It was the sleeping time at last. Below him over the valleys rolled the thick white mist. Once it broke, and through the gap the dying eyes looked down on the trees and fields of their childhood. From afar seemed borne to him the cry of his own wild birds, and he heard the noise of the people singing as they danced, and he thought he heard among them the voices of his old comrades, and he saw afar off the sunlight shine on his early home, and great tears gathered in the hunter's eyes.

"'Ah, they who die there do not die alone!' he cried.

"Then the mists rolled together again, and he turned his eyes away.

"'I have sought,' he said, 'for long years I have labored, but I have not found her. I have not rested. I have not repined, and I have not seen her. Now my strength is gone. Where I lie down worn out other men will stand young and fresh. By the steps that I have cut they will climb; by the stairs that I have built they will mount. They will never know the name of the man who made them. At the clumsy work they will laugh; when the stones roll, they will curse me. But they will mount, and on my work; they will climb, and by my stair! They will find her, and through me! And no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.'

"The tears rolled from beneath the shriveled eyelids. If Truth had appeared above him in the clouds now, he could not have seen her—the mist of death was in his eyes.

"'My soul hears their glad step coming in,' he said, 'and they shall mount, they shall mount!' He raised his shriveled hand to his eyes.

"Then slowly, from the white sky above, through the still air, came something falling, falling, falling. Softly it fluttered down and dropped on to the breast of the dying man. He felt it with his hands. It was a feather. He died holding it."

The boy had shaded his eyes with his hand. On the wood of the carving great drops fell. The stranger must have laughed at him or remained silent. He did so.

"How did you know it?" the boy whispered at last. "It is not written there, not on that wood. How did you know it?"

"Certainly," said his stranger, "the whole of the story is not written here, but it is suggested. And the attribute of all true art, the highest and the lowest, is this—that it says more than it says and takes you away from itself. It is a little door that opens into an infinite hall where you may find what you please. Men, thinking to detract, say, 'People read more in this or that work of genius than was ever written in it,' not perceiving that they pay the highest compliment. If we pick up the finger and nail of a real man, we can decipher a whole story—could almost reconstruct the creature again from head to foot. But half the body of a Mumboo-jumbow idol leaves us utterly in the dark as to what the rest was like. We see what we see, but nothing more. There is nothing so universally intelligible as truth. It has a thousand meanings and suggests a thousand more." He turned over the wooden thing. "Though a man should carve it into matter with the least possible manipulative skill, it will yet find interpreters. It is the soul that looks out with burning eyes through the most gross fleshly filament. Whosoever should portray truly the life and death of a little flower—its birth, sucking in of nourishment, reproduction of its kind, withering and vanishing—would have shaped a symbol of all existence. All true facts of nature or the mind are related. Your little carving represents some mental facts as they really are, therefore 50 different true stories might be read from it. What your work wants is not truth, but beauty of external form, the other half of art."

He leaned almost gently toward the boy. "Skill may come in time, but you will have to work hard. The love of beauty and the desire for it must be born in a man. The skill to reproduce it he must make. He must work hard."

"All my life I have longed to see you," the boy said.

The stranger broke off the end of his cigar and lighted it. The boy lifted the heavy wood from the stranger's knee and drew yet nearer him. In the doglike manner of his drawing near there was something superbly ridiculous, unless one chanced to view it in another light. Presently the stranger said, whiffing, "Do something for me?"

The boy started up.

"No; stay where you are. I don't want you to go anywhere. I want you to talk to me. Tell me what you have been doing all your life."

The boy slunk down again. Would that the man had asked him to root up bushes with his hands for his horse to feed on, or to run to the far end of the plain for the fossils that lay there, or to gather the flowers that grew on the hills at the edge of the plain. He would have run and been back quickly—but now!

"I have never done anything," he said.

"Then tell me of that nothing. I like to know what other folks have been doing whose word I can believe. It is interesting. What was the first thing you ever wanted very much?"

The boy waited to remember, then began hesitatingly, but soon the words flowed. In the smallest past we find an inexhaustible mine when once we begin to dig at it.

A confused, disordered story, the little made large and the large small, and nothing showing its inward meaning. It is not till the past has receded many steps that before the clearest eyes it falls into co-ordinate pictures. It is not till the I we tell of has ceased to exist that it takes its place among other objective realities and finds its true niche in the picture. The present and the near past are a confusion, whose meaning flashes on us as it slinks away into the distance.

The stranger lighted one cigar from the end of another and puffed and listened with half closed eyes.

"I will remember more to tell you if you like," said the fellow.

He spoke with that extreme gravity common to all very young things who feel deeply. It is not till 20 that we learn to be in deadly earnest and to laugh. The stranger nodded, while the fellow sought for something more to relate. He would tell all to this man of his—all that he knew, all that he had felt, his most inmost sorest thought. Suddenly the stranger turned upon him.

"Boy," he said, "you are happy to be here."

Waldo looked at him. Was his delightful one ridiculing him? Here, with his brown earth and these low hills, while the rare wonderful world lay all beyond. Fortunate to be here!

The stranger read his glance.

"Yes," he said, "here with the karroo bushes and the red sand. Do you wonder what I mean? To all who have been born in the old faith there comes a time of danger, when the old slips from us, and we have not yet planted our feet on the new. We hear the voice from Sinai thundering no more, and the still, small voice of reason is not yet heard. We have proved the religion our mothers fed us on to be a delusion. In our bewilderment we see no rule by which to guide our steps day by day, and yet every day we must step somewhere." The stranger leaned forward and spoke more quickly. "We have never once been taught by word or act to distinguish between religion and the moral laws on which it has artfully fastened itself and from which it has sucked its vitality. When we have dragged down the weeds and creepers that covered the solid wall and have found them to be rotten wood, we imagine the wall itself to be rotten wood too. We find it is solid and standing only when we fall headlong against it. We have been taught that all right and wrong originate in the will of an irresponsible being. It is some time before we see how the inexorable 'Thou shalt and shalt not' are carved into the nature of things. This is the time of danger."

His dark, misty eyes looked into the boy's.

"In the end experience will inevitably teach us that the laws for a wise and noble life have a foundation infinitely deeper than the fiat of any being, God or man, even in the groundwork of human nature. She will teach us that whoso sheddeth man's blood, though by man his blood be not shed, though no man avenge and no hell await, yet every drop shall blister on his soul and eat in the name of the dead. She will teach that whoso takes a love not lawfully his own gathers a flower with a poison on its petals; that whoso revenges, strikes with a sword that has two edges—one for his adversary, one for himself; that who lives to himself is dead, though the ground is not yet on him; that who wrongs another clouds his own sun, and that who sins in secret stands accused and condemned before the one judge who deals eternal justice—his own all knowing self.

"Experience will teach us this, and reason will show us why it must be so, but at first the world swings before our eyes, and no voice cries out: 'This is the way. Walk ye in it!' You are happy to be here, boy. When the suspense fills you with pain, you build stone walls and dig earth for relief. Others have stood where you stand today and have felt as you feel, and another relief has been offered them, and they have taken it.

"When the day has come when they have seen the path in which they might walk, they have not the strength to follow it. Habits have fastened on them from which nothing but death can free them; which cling closer than his sacerdotal sanctimony to a priest, which feed on the intellect like a worm, sapping energy, hope, creative power, all that makes a man higher than a beast, leaving only the power to yearn, to regret and to sink lower in the abyss.

"Boy," he said, and the listener was not more unsmiling now than the speaker, "you are happy to be here. Stay where you are. If you ever pray, let it be only the one old prayer, 'Lead us not into temptation.' Live on here quietly. The time may yet come when you will be that which other men have hoped to be and never will be now."

The stranger rose, shook the dust from his sleeve and, ashamed at his own earnestness, looked across the bushes for his horse.

"We should have been on our way already," he said. "We shall have a long ride in the dark tonight."

Waldo hastened to fetch the animal, but he returned leading it slowly. The sooner it came the sooner would its rider be gone.

The stranger was opening his saddlebag, in which were a bright French novel and an old brown volume. He took the last and held it out to the boy.

"It may be of some help to you," he said carelessly. "It was a gospel to me when I first fell on it. You must not expect too much, but it may give you a center round which to hang your ideas instead of letting them lie about in confusion that makes the head ache. We of this generation are not destined to eat and be satisfied as our fathers were. We must be content to go hungry."

He smiled his automaton smile and rebuttoned the bag. Waldo thrust the book into his breast, and while he saddled the horse the stranger made inquiries as to the nature of the road and the distance to the next farm.

When the bags were fixed, Waldo took up his wooden post and began to fasten it on to the saddle, tying it with the little blue cotton handkerchief from his neck. The stranger looked on in silence. When it was done, the boy held the stirrup for him to mount.

"What is your name?" he inquired, ungloving his right hand when he was in the saddle.

The boy replied.

"Well, I trust we shall meet again some day, sooner or later."

He shook hands with the ungloved hand, then drew on the glove and touched his horse and rode slowly away. The boy stood to watch him.

Once when the stranger had gone half across the plain he looked back.

"Poor devil," he said, smiling and stroking his mustache. Then he looked to see if the little blue handkerchief were still safely knotted. "Poor devil!"

He smiled, and then he sighed wearily, very wearily.

And Waldo waited till the moving speck had disappeared on the horizon, then he stooped and kissed passionately a hoof mark in the sand. Then he called his young birds together and put his book under his arm and walked home along the stone wall. There was a rare beauty to him in the sunshine that evening.

CHAPTER XVI.

GREGORY ROSE FINDS HIS AFFINITY.

The new man, Gregory Rose, sat at the door of his dwelling, his arms folded, his legs crossed and a profound melancholy seeming to rest over his soul. His house was a little square daub and wattle building, far out in the "karroo," two miles from the homestead. It was covered outside with a somber coating of brown mud, two little panes being let into the walls for windows. Behind it were the "sheep kraals" and to the right a large dam, now principally containing baked mud. Far off the little "kopje" concealed the homestead and was not itself an object conspicuous enough to relieve the dreary monotony of the landscape.

Before the door sat Gregory Rose in his shirt sleeves, on a camp stool, and ever and anon he sighed deeply. There was that in his countenance for which even his depressing circumstances failed to account. Again and again he looked at the little "kopje," at the milk pail at his side and at the brown pony, who a short way off cropped the dry bushes—and sighed.

Presently he rose and went into his house. It was one tiny room, the whitewashed walls profusely covered with prints cut from The Illustrated London News, and in which there was a noticeable preponderance of female faces and figures. A stretcher filled one end of the hut and a rack for a gun and a little hanging looking glass diversified the gable opposite, while in the center stood a chair and table. All was scrupulously neat and clean, for Gregory kept a little duster folded in the corner of his table drawer, just as he had seen his mother do, and every morning before he went out he said his prayers and made his bed and dusted the table and the legs of the chairs, and even the pictures on the wall and the gun rack.

On this hot afternoon he took from beneath his pillow a watch bag made by his sister Jemima and took out the watch. Only half past 4! With a suppressed groan he dropped it back and sat down beside the table. Half past 4! Presently he roused himself. He would write to his sister Jemima. He always wrote to her when he was miserable. She was his safety valve. He forgot her when he was happy, but he used her when he was wretched.

He took out ink and paper. There was a family crest and motto on the latter, for the Roses since coming to the colony had discovered that they were of distinguished lineage. Old Rose himself, an honest English farmer, knew nothing of his noble descent, but his wife and daughter knew—especially his daughter. There were Roses in England who kept a park and dated from the conquest. So the colonial Rose farm became Rose manor in remembrance of the ancestral domain, and the claim of the Roses to noble blood was established in their minds at least.

Gregory took up one of the white, crested sheets, but on deeper reflection he determined to take a pink one, as more suitable to the state of his feelings. He began:

Kopje Alone, Monday Afternoon.

My Dear Jemima—

Then he looked up into the little glass opposite. It was a youthful face reflected there, with curling brown beard and hair, but in the dark blue eyes there was a look of languid longing that touched him. He redipped his pen and wrote:

While I look up into the little glass that hangs opposite me, I wonder if that changed and sad face—

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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8 p. m.	Ocean Steamships. For San Francisco sails every five days	4 p. m.
8 p. m. Ex Sundy Saturday 10 p. m.	Columbia River To Astoria and way Landings	4 p. m. ex. Sundy
6 a. m. Ex Sundy	Willamette Five Oregon City, Newberg, Salem & way-landings.	4:30 p. m ex. Sund
7 a. m. Tuesday Thursday and Satur	Willamette & Yamhill Rivers Oregon City, Dayton and way landings	3:30 p. m Mo., We and Fride
6 a. m. Tues Thur and Sat.	Willamette River Corvallis and way landings	4:30 p.m Tues Th. and Sa.
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