

## LITERATURE, &amp;c.

## The British Magazines.

From the London People's Journal.

## THE ORPHAN CHAMBER.

A TALE FOR EMIGRANTS.

By Georgina C. Munro.

'What do you think I've been doing?' said Robert Anderson to his brother colonist, Mark Reid, as they sat together before the latter's house, towards the close of a sultry December day in South Africa.

'You have bought a new waggon,' exclaimed Reid, whose heart was filled with the desire of adding another to his own possession.

'No!—I've been making my will.'

'Making your will,' echoed Reid. 'Ha, ha, ha, ha! you are really growing a rich man, Anderson; I wish you joy. When is the family vault to be built, and your coat of arms engraved?'

'Not for a long while yet,' replied prudent Robert, shaking his head and laughing. 'But it is every man's duty who has anything to leave; and I'd advise you to see about your own will, no one knows what may happen to him.'

'Well, and suppose I should happen to die some of those days,' said Reid, 'my wife and the young ones would never quarrel about the little I've left behind. They'd all stick together, and I hope do as well as I lived to work for them.'

'Of course you know your own business best,' observed Anderson. 'But it's what one should do anywhere; and they do say that there's something in this country makes it the first thing proper to be seen about.'

'Papa, papa, see what a beautiful bird William has brought me!' cried a bright-eyed little girl of six, Reid's youngest, darting out of the house with an emerald and ruby plumaged sugar-bird struggling between her tiny hands.

'Ah, indeed, what a pretty thing!' replied the father, lifting the child on his knee. 'Take care you don't hurt it, my dear. See, we'll tie a bit of twine round the bird's leg, and then Annie can keep it quite safe without harming it.' And so, entering heart and hand into the little one's pleasures, the fond parent forgot to inquire into what might deeply affect his children's interests. Then, in a few minutes more, his wife and Mrs. Anderson came out to sit in the lengthening shadow, and there was no after opportunity for resuming the conversation.

Meanwhile, in a shady kloof, or ravine, cutting deep into the hill which towered above Reid's dwelling, two young hearts were dreaming away the sultry hours in visions of future happiness. How bright were the scenes they pictured! Bright, not with the light of gold or gems; not glittering with splendor, nor brilliant with riches, rank, and fame. It was their own affection which cast the sunny glow around the coming years; and a humble cottage home, and a life of industry and devotion to each other's happiness, formed their ideal of felicity. And they had good reason to so look forward, for the parents of both were well inclined to their marriage, and there frowned no barrier between them.

How pleasant it was to wander amid the luxuriant vegetation of the kloof, plucking the gay blossoms which hung high on the tree-boughs, or, clustering round their feet, truly wreathed their path in flowers. How sweet when wearied of their light labor, to sit upon the grassy bank, and while the refreshing breeze stole gently through the jasmine and myrtle leaves around them, look on the tall hills stretching afar in the cloudless sunlight, and dream that the brightness of that clime was cast also on their lot.

'What a happy day has this been,' said Edward Reid; 'if but every one resembled it—'

'We should be very useful people, shouldn't we?' asked Grace Anderson, with a merry laugh. 'And, hark! there's your sister Mary calling us,—this day is over now, so far as our truant rambles are concerned,' added the light-hearted girl springing to her feet.

The youth followed her with a sigh, loth to end that glad bright holiday. But clouds pass quickly from happy and hopeful spirits, and his voice was soon the gayest amongst those who gathered round the tea-table on the smooth grass before the dwelling, to enjoy at once the coolness of the sunset atmosphere, and Mrs. Reid's delicious cakes. Laughter, and jest and merriment went round, and the general happiness of the two families appeared—and in most cases truly—as a spontaneous outpouring of grateful hearts to him who had surrounded them with so many blessings. And then came inspanning the Anderson's wagon, and then farewells, by some breathed most reluctantly; for, in those latitudes, daylight lingers but a short time after the sunset, and prudent Robert as he was often called in jest, was anxious to pass the roughest portion of the homeward road ere he should be left to pursue it beneath the doubtful star-beams.

On the following morning, as Reid watched his cattle pass out to pasture under charge of his second son, and his sheep wander away, tended by the third, it occurred to him, as to many other men, to consider and compare the past, the present, and the future. A life of labor and hard struggling with the world had been his in his native land; and when his wife's father died, and left him three or four hundred pounds, they had come to the conclusion that, with a family of boys growing up,

the wisest thing they could do was to emigrate to a country where this sum, seconded by their own exertions, would place them all in comfort.—They had accordingly bought in England—knowing them to be cheaper at home—all articles of house-keeping, and farm apparatus, which were advisable and within their means, caring not that, when arrived on the small farm, they had purchased in the eastern province of the Cape Colony, their money was nearly expended. For all this property was but capital with which they were to increase it. They had required no hired laborers, for as yet their own family was sufficient for all; and now when two years nearly had passed, Reid beheld himself with an comfortable house, a wagon, and a couple of span of oxen, which, with other cattle, and two or three fields already under cultivation, formed the nucleus of future prosperity, and with their frugality and industry, what bright prospects were there not to cheer them on.

As these pleasant feelings swelled within Reid's heart, while contrasting the past and the future, there came into his mind the recollection of what Anderson had said the evening before about the propriety of making a will.—The knowledge that his family were aware of his wishes respecting the disposition of his property, and would deal honestly and kindly by each other if he were gone, had hitherto precluded all anxiety on this point; but as his neighbor's words recurred to him, Reid wondered whether there might not be something in them, after all. He would at least enquire. Not to day, however, for he had to finish hedging in the piece of ground he was adding to his garden—nor to morrow; for he had promised his wife to fix shelves in her dairy, and could not disappoint her. But some day soon he would ride over to Anderson's and hear all about it. So resolved, Mark Reid, in that fearlessness of health and strength which made him

'—Look on death as lightning always far Off, or in Heaven.'

But the close of the third day beheld him laid on the couch of sickness, stricken even unto death; and with the next sun his spirit passed away.

As the newly widowed woman wept in anguish beneath the sudden blow, surrounded by the children it had made fatherless, she held it as a coarse intrusion on the sacredness of their grief when the veldt cornet,\* who was but little known to her, demanded if her late husband had left a will. She replied that he had not; and relapsed into the indulgence of her heartfelt sorrow, from which she was only aroused by the intimation that strangers were preparing to take entire possession of the property of herself and children, and placing official seals on everything in the name of the Orphan Chamber—for the purpose of equitable division. It was in vain she declared her intention of administering to the estate, and carrying out the known wishes of the deceased in every respect—in vain Edward's desire to have the direction or division of the property confided to his mother was echoed by all her other children. They had no voice in the matter. The law must be obeyed, and on this point it was peremptory. From the richest to the poorest it equally affects the families and possessions of all who die intestate. The Orphan Chamber—instituted for the protection of the rights of all children, and the guardianship of minors—seizes at once upon the effects, disposing of everything according to its unalterable rules, without, when any of the heirs are under age, paying the slightest regard to the wishes or feelings of the bereaved, taking it for granted that any person who did not desire such inevitable interference with his concerns and arrangement of his property would dispose of it by will.

When the heart is filled with mourning for a beloved one, other misfortunes, however heavy, often pass by, almost unfelt; but there are some whose very nature is to aggravate sorrow; and the abrupt announcement of utter ruin could have been borne with greater composure by the Reids than the irritating prying and spying, and authority of that Chamber, which even those to guard whose interests it was designed regarded as an offensive, not as a protective power. And yet they did not suffer as much temporary annoyance as some have suffered in like circumstances; for they were permitted to retain in their own possession such articles of clothing as were requisite for their comfort, which have in some cases been refused. Then, as time went on, there came another shock, in the tidings that everything was to be sold off, since a just division would otherwise be impracticable. Even the farm was to be brought to the hammer, as it was estimated at considerably more than half the total value of Reid's property, or the widow might perhaps have been allowed to retain it at a valuation, the share allotted to her by law being—as she had six children—one half of the entire property, and one seventh of the remaining half. Vainly did the widow and her eldest son, who was but twenty, exclaim against the immense sacrifice this would occasion; they might as well have essayed to stop a locomotive at full speed.

The day of sale at length arrived; and with bitter feelings the sorrowing family witnessed their possessions brought forth, to be scattered abroad by the whirlwind of a public Auction. Nothing was spared: the most grasping creditor could not have been more rigid than were, in

\* Veldt Cornet—Field Cornet, a civil functionary, fulfilling, in rural districts, the multifarious duties of coroner, assessor, registrar, &c., &c. *NOTES BY J. D.*

the conscientious performance of their duty, these agents of a kindly intended law. And alive only to the evils it brought on them, it is no wonder that the sufferers could not recognise the broad bases of equity on which it was established, nor do justice to the true motive of rules framed so strictly for the prevention of fraud towards the weak and helpless.

The fortune of sales by auction is quite a lottery; and the Reid's that day drew a blank. The assemblage was small, and consisted of persons either having little need of the things offered, or little money to spare in purchasing. So that, with the exception of the waggon and oxen, which possessed a sort of intrinsic value, everything went as low as is frequent at forced sales. Even the farm, with all its improvements, sold for one third less than Reid had paid for it. There were a good many bargains bought that day; but the unfortunate family knew that all their once brilliant prospects had now passed away.

'I am very sorry to see the turn that matters have taken,' said Anderson, as he mounted his horse towards the conclusion of the sale. 'Tell your mother, Edward, that my good woman sent her half a dozen kind messages, only I would not wish to see her at such a time as this.'

When people speak thus concerning a change in one's worldly circumstances, the truth of their friendship may well be doubted. Edward was too inexperienced to draw such an inference, but he felt a chill come over the heart which had been sorely tried that day, and his voice trembled as he inquired, almost timidly—'and Grace; how is she?'

'Why, she's well,' replied the farmer, settling his broad-brimmed hat with a resolute air. 'To say the truth—only for her, I'd ask you all to come over and stay at our place until you could look a little about you. But I must speak out plainly, young man; all the nonsense that's been going on between Grace and you must be done away with altogether. It was a different thing while your father lived, and you had a prospect of having a house and a few cattle to yourself on a corner of the farm, in a year or two; but there's an end to all that now, and I must do my duty as a father. And so you see it will be best for all parties that you keep away for the present.'

Harsh and unfeeling as would have been those words at any time, they were most cruelly insulting at that moment; and, as the youth replied, proudly and bitterly, 'You may be sure I will not trouble you with an unwelcome visitor,' he felt that misfortune has many a sting we dream not of till it pierces.

'I'm glad to hear it—good bye,' said Anderson, as he rode off to his own happy and prosperous home.

Edward returned to the house, and entered the room where his mother sat, clasping the hands of her weeping children in her own, and listening to the sounds without, which told too truly the progress of the sale. He looked on her pale and tearful face, and felt that it would then be the extreme of selfishness to allow his mind to dwell on his individual sorrow, when his first duty was to do his best to support and console his mother and the helpless ones around her. In an hour the sale was ended; and the Reids left their old home, and took up their abode for the time in a little cottage in Bathurst, too fully aware of the extent of their misfortunes to suffer disappointment on the subsequent statement of their affairs. Yet even in this there was delay, and the money advanced from time to time to Mrs. Reid for the subsistence of herself and family in the meanwhile, occasioned considerable expenditure in the proceeds of the sale. At length it came, and, as they had expected, when the expenses of every kind had been deducted, the total amount had shrunk to little more than a hundred pounds, making each child's share—of one fourteenth part—a sum little needing the already executed formality of appointing trustees.

And this was the result of the sale and scattering of property, which, left in its original form, was fully capable of maintaining them all in comfort, and, as years went on, would, from time to time, have furnished ample means of establishing the younger members of the family advantageously in life. Could Reid but have foreseen the evil that would be wrought to those most dear to him by what was first his ignorance, then his neglect, he would have known no rest until the will was executed which should preserve to them in peace and security, the fruits of his industry and good fortune.

Good to some often springs from ill to others; and the melancholy example of the Reids had the effect of inducing every settler in the neighborhood, who had not already made his will, to lose no time in guarding his family against similar consequences of his disease. Meanwhile the Reids, in their fallen circumstances, were considering how best to employ the little left to them; and, with the consent of the trustees, who gave her up her children's money for the purpose, the widow repurchased their own wagon, and two span of oxen from the neighbor, who kindly gave them back at the same price he paid for them. With Edward for driver, and the youngest boy, William, for leader, the wagon was to form their chief dependence, by plying with loads between Graham's Town and Port Elizabeth; and the second son was taken to assist in the store with which they had dealt in the first-named town, where Mrs. Reid herself tried her fortune with an humble shop.

It is a hard life, that of driving a waggon 'on the road;' under the waggon or beneath a bush, is the best resting place they know, in

the wildest weather; and the narrow limits of the waggon box the space into which all their appliances of comfort must be contracted. But the young Reids cared little for such hardships; they were working for those who loved them well, and that feeling would smooth the roughest pillow. Yet this mode of life was the best calculated to win Edward from his regrets for bygone hopes. The hours and days which he would spend with William as sole companion, and the past and most fertile subject of conversation or reflection, tended but to encourage saddening thoughts, and to deepen his love for Grace, even while he believed she had forgotten him.

Two years had passed away; and the morning sun shone down gaily into a broad valley, along which wound a line of vined green, marking the course of a little stream of pure sweet water. The white tent of a waggon was gleaming forth beside a group of myrtles, and some seven yoke of powerful black oxen were grazing near, while a thin thread of smoke curled above the trees, and the merry voices of Hottentots rose on the hushed and moveless air. Now another waggon might be seen amid the trees, as it descended the nearest hill, drawn only by the usual number of twelve oxen, but they were fine animals and in good condition, as those which were ever kindly treated, and under a master's eye. It proceeded up the valley, but not so far as the first waggon, for perceiving that others were on the ground before them, the new comers halted at a distance, and unyoking their oxen from the heavily laden vehicle, set them free, to seek food and rest for the next few hours. The Reids—for it was they—then sat down to their humble meal of sun-dried meat, the usual fare of wagoners, and after awhile the younger fell asleep in the cool shade of the mimosa, for they had been travelling since early dawn. But Edward slept not: there were feelings busy at his heart which warred against repose. At length he observed that the oxen were straying out of sight with a quickness which threatened desertion, and resolved to turn them back. He had to pass the strange waggon. And a glance told him that it was fitted up in the most comfortable manner for travelling; the Hottentots also, who still sat chatting by the fire were well dressed, and, to all appearance, servants of some person well to do in the world. Edward saw all this without thinking of it; then, in rounding a clump of trees, he came suddenly upon the retreat of the travellers themselves. There was Kafir matting spread on the ground, and hung on the branches to deepen the shade, and hampers stood by, and baskets of grapes and figs and apricots lay on the mats. On the further side sat a female in widow's dress, which did not, however, prevent his recognising her; and he was passing rapidly when she looked up, with a start which attracted the attention of a person opposite.

'Edward!' exclaimed a gentle voice, as he was still hurrying on; and turned to meet Grace Anderson's kind smile and outstretched hand.

'Why would you run away from us?' asked the mother, as she also greeted him most cordially.

'I know not—circumstances have changed, and you might now not be glad to see me,' said Edward, in great agitation.

'As glad as ever,' murmured Grace, in a low, sweet tone, which went to his heart.

'Circumstances may change but they cannot alter us,' replied Mrs. Anderson; 'we are in all respects the same as you found us in former days.'

'May I believe it?' exclaimed Edward, turning to Grace; and, carried away by the delightful intoxication of such unlooked for happiness, he held out his hand. Grace placed her own in it frankly as of old, and each felt that in that simple act a solemn pledge was given and received.

Mrs. Anderson had been some months a widow, so much Edward Reid already knew; but he now beheld the advantages of Anderson's testamentary arrangements, in the air of comfort and prosperity spread around his old friends. Their circumstances had not been very dissimilar at the period of his father's death, and under the careful management of his mother and himself, their own farm might, in all probability, have advanced to the same flourishing condition at which the Andersons' must have arrived. But, instead of all their prosperity vanishing away like a dream, the latter had suffered no vexations or injurious interference with their concerns. Anderson had himself determined how the affairs of his family should be conducted, and his property apportioned among his children, who were as many as Reid's, and yet younger; and all the law required was a rigid performance of his behests. And so their farm might continue to improve in value every year as though the eyes which were now closed forever still watched its progress. Poverty and hardship and worldly care, would not depress the spirits or cloud the brows of those with whom he now conversed. What a contrast to his own family—fallen in fortunes, and struggling with adversity.

That thought seemed to recall him from a blissful vision to cold and stern reality. 'I had forgot,' said he, with sudden sadness, 'that all was not as once it was. I am too poor to hope—to dream as I am doing?'

'Why so,' inquired Mrs. Anderson. 'Her father did not leave Grace portionless, and there is none to whom I would as soon she carried her little fortune, than one whom I have known and liked so long. She has some cattle and sheep, and there is plenty of room for them to graze; and then our own people