

"GROOT VADER'S BOSCH."

A SOUTH AFRICAN SKETCH.

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"GROOT VADER'S BOSCH;" or, Grandfather's Wood, is the simple and unpretending name of one of the most romantic and beautiful scenes in South Africa. This lovely spot had been selected as a future place of residence by a brother of the writer, who had emigrated to that colony in 1817, and where he soon after joined him.

Delighted with my new home, I still retain a most vivid recollection of my first impressions after my arrival. I can still fancy myself seated on the high stoop in front of the old house—which from having been built by the former possessor's grandfather, obtained its present familiar appellation—feasting my eyes on the wild beauties of a scene as exquisitely charming, as it was different from anything I had hitherto seen. I had visited some of the wildest glens of my native country; I had seen the fantastic wreaths of mist floating round the peaks of her hoary mountains, and felt all the superstitious awe which such inspire. I could even fancy that I saw the shadowy ghosts of Ossian's heroes of the olden time, poised their airy spears; and that I heard their voices in the melancholy blast that swept over the desert heath. Here, in South Africa, however, all was changed. Here, I found myself amidst scenes more rich in natural beauty, but devoid of all that gloom and superstitious awe, which are engendered by local tradition. The clear unclouded sky glowed with life, and the balmy breezes of a South African spring, passing over myriads of sweet-scented flowers, filled the heart with joy and contentment, and the soul with gratitude to the great Creator of this beautiful world.

The old house, which was built of clay, white-washed with lime, stood on the sloping side of a steep hill, fronting a magnificent chain of mountains four thousand feet high, and extending in far perspective to the west, with a beautiful valley at their base, bounded on the opposite side by the lower range of high hills on which the old house stood. This chain of mountains was broken at intervals by deep ravines, walled in on either side by perpendicular rocks several hundred feet high, and filled with lofty trees towering up among the wild crags. The neighbourhood of the mountains which intercepted the clouds and moisture wafted by the winds from the sea coast, produced a verdure and fertility in this valley unknown in many parts of the Colony, while the "Karoo" or arid country beyond this range of mountains is parched up by almost perpetual

drought. The valley is traversed by a limpid stream, which meanders from side to side, sometimes forming deep glassy pools along the base of the mountains, or of the steep hills on the other side, and fringed by beautiful evergreens drooping into the water. At distant intervals pretty white houses are seen along the valley, embowered among orange and lemon trees, and surrounded with extensive vineyards. Beautiful as such a scene must at all times be,—the reader may easily conceive its surpassing loveliness as the sun descends behind the purple mountains, when a faint blush still overspreads the deep blue sky,—a sky unknown in less genial climes. At such a time it was delightful to sit on the stoop of the old house and listen to the ceaseless din of the crickets and the last chirps of the little bright colored birds as they sped away to their leafy resting places. As the sun goes down, the whole family of the jackals sally forth from their holes in the undulating country or "Ruggens," as this description of country is called towards the sea coast, and fill the air with their wild yells, which, though not unmusical, remind the immigrant that he is in the land of Africa. Our Hottentot servants may be seen wending homeward in the dusk to their little hut or "pou-duck," constructed of reeds, a few hundred yards below our house, where their wives are crouched around the fire, cooking their husbands' supper, while a swarm of nimble, half-naked children are dancing among the bushes. As soon as their evening meal is over, the sound of the "Ramki," an instrument resembling the "Banjo," is heard from the hut, and a great part of the night is spent in dancing or in listening to the wild melody of their native airs.

In witnessing such a scene the careless observer might suppose that the poor Hottentots are as happy a race of human beings as the wide world contains,—surrounded by all the external beauties of nature, in a delicious climate, where care and anxiety for the means of procuring the necessaries of life are almost unknown, and where, during a large portion of the year, clothing may be considered almost superfluous. It is not to be wondered at if the white settler, who is so bountifully endowed with all that is necessary to his own comfort, should overlook or despise the claims of his swarthy brethren,—the original owners of the soil.

It is true that the Almighty, in His mercy, "has tempered the blast to the shorn lamb," and