

At a Boer Farm

By Jessie Adelaide Middleton

A well-known commissioner in South Africa was going his rounds, and stopped his horse at the gate of a farm at which he had often stayed before on similar occasions.

He had become very friendly with Johan Schmidt, the Boer farmer who owned the farm, and they had often had long talks together over their pipes in the cool of the evening.

The farmer was not at all happy in his domestic affairs, and his wife had often left him, but each time he had taken her back and they had lived together as before. She was, however, a perpetual worry to him. The commissioner was aware of this fact, and so, indeed, was everybody in the neighbourhood.

When the Englishman arrived there was nobody at home, but, being on a friendly footing, and having his native servant with him, he entered the house and made himself at home. The servant attended to him, and he sat down in the verandah and smoked while waiting for somebody to return.

Presently the farmer came in, evidently much perturbed, and, after greeting him, said, "Have you seen my wife? Is she here? She has gone off again."

"I have not seen anybody," said the commissioner, "but I knew you would not mind my making myself at home."

"Oh no, certainly not," said the farmer; "do, please, make yourself quite comfortable."

They talked for a little while, and then Schmitt said he must go and look for his wife. He went out, and the commissioner stayed all night alone at the farm, and in the morning got on his horse and rode away.

He next called at a little hotel some miles off and stopped there for refreshment. While having lunch, as he knew the people who kept it very well and knew that they were aware of the state of domestic affairs at the farm, he said to his host and hostess—

"Schmidt is in great trouble again; his wife has gone off once more. Have you, by any chance, seen anything of her?"

"*Schmidt!*" they exclaimed. "Why, he died last week and was buried! "But I stayed last night at the farm, and saw him and talked with him," said the commissioner, quite aghast.

Thereupon they gave him all details, and the affair so shocked him that he never really got over it. The farmer, it seems, had been worrying greatly about his wife, who had gone off again at the time of his death, and his spirit had returned to the house to seek her.

I heard the story from a lady who knows the commissioner well and heard it from his own lips, and also from his wife.