

# *Preface*

When in 1946 I started writing a biography of Olive Schreiner, I wrote the work in Afrikaans. Subsequently, however, the constant discovery of new material and the publication of several new studies on her life and personality have necessitated my revising much I had written on the subject. As none of the existing biographies is satisfactory and nowhere near definitive, I decided to rewrite this biography in English.

My aim throughout has been a completely objective approach, and particularly to give an accurate portrait of a truly remarkable woman.

During 1955 when the centenary of Olive Schreiner's birth was commemorated all over the world, one was grateful for the many and varied assessments of her work and personality, and the warm tributes paid by all, irrespective of race, colour or creed. These have proved invaluable in the revision of the present work.

I have been fortunate in having an intimate knowledge of nearly all the places in which Olive Schreiner lived. I have covered the same roads she travelled, sat at the same railway stations and often spent time in the villages in which she stayed. This was mostly coincidence, and only rarely have I gone out of my way to visit some of her favourite places, such as Matjiesfontein. I have also spent many years in the isolation she knew so well. And as a final coincidence I found myself staying with relatives opposite the building where she died. This intimate knowledge of her South African background, in some cases unchanged to this day, has helped in more ways than can be assessed in understanding the woman. The strangeness, the beauty and the loneliness of the area from Dordrecht to De Aar, Kimberley to Grahamstown, has been part of my life as it was of hers.

I have made a departure in retaining the correct Afrikaans names for farms and isolated places which gain nothing by being anglicised.

So many people have helped me in various ways through the years with this study, that it would be unfair to single out any for special mention, but I would like to convey my deep gratitude to all of them. I also wish to thank Havelock Ellis's executors for permission to use the frontispiece, and Ernest Benn, Ltd., for permission to quote from their (originally T. Fisher Unwin) publications.

Johannes Meintjes.

Grootzeekoegat,  
Molteno, 1965.