

venture. Again, he failed and was insolvent within a year. The family lived in abject poverty as a result.



However, Olive was not to remain with her parents for long. When her older brother Theophilus (1844–1920) was appointed headmaster in Cradock in 1867, she went to live with him along with two of her siblings. She also attended his school and received a formal education for the first time. Despite that, she was no happier in Cradock than she had been in Wittebergen or Healdtown. Her siblings were very religious, but, like many learned Victorians, Olive had already questioned the Christianity of her parents, and it was the cause of many arguments that she had with her family.

Consequently, when Theo and her brother left Cradock for the diamond fields of Griqualand West, Olive chose to become a governess. On the way to her first post at Barkly East, she met Willie Bertram, who shared her views of religion and who lent her a copy of Herbert Spencer's *First Principles*. This text was to have a profound impact on her. While rejecting religious creeds and doctrine, Spencer also argued for a belief in an Absolute that lay beyond the scope of human knowledge and conception. This belief was founded in the unity of nature and a teleological universe, both of which Olive was to appropriate for herself in her attempts to create a morality free of organised religion.

After this meeting, Olive travelled from place to place, accepting posts as a governess with various families, later leaving them because of personal conflict with her employers. One issue which always surfaced was her unusual view of religion. Her apostasy did not sit well with the traditional farm folk she worked amongst.

Another factor was that she was somewhat unconventional in her relationships, for she was uncertain as to how to relate sexually to her male employers in many cases, and men in general.

In his study of Schreiner's character, Karel Schoeman writes:

As far as Olive's sexuality is concerned there is little known, because however open she was [as a woman] for her time, this was merely relative, and the information that may be used as the primary evidence in this regard, is included and appeared as an addendum in the case studies that appear in [Havelock] Ellis's *Studies in the psychology of sex ...* ("History IX", 236)

And this person, who Schoeman identifies strongly with Schreiner in agreement with other researchers, is described by Ellis as ...

[Someone who]... from girlhood experienced erotic day-dreams, imagining love-stories of which she herself was the heroine; the climax of these stories has developed with her own knowledge of sexual matters ... She regards herself as very passionate ... but her sexual emotions appear to have developed very slowly and have been somewhat intellectualised ... (Schoeman, 236, 1989)

During this time she met Julius Gau, to whom she became engaged under doubtful circumstances. For whatever