

LETTER FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

Hartland,
Paulpietersburg,
Natal, South Africa,

Dear Friends: Jan. 8th, 1923.

Our Xmas this past season was one of great success.

It would, no doubt, be intensely interesting to give full details but there were too many to write them all.

For some weeks we had talked up the food problem and tried to find out how many goats, etc., could be secured. Also the mealies (Indian corn) and how this should be prepared. So early on Xmas morning goats, cooking pots and cooks and butchers began to arrive. As fast as a goat was slaughtered it was skinned and cut up. Not a bit was wasted for the intestines make a very dainty dish for some and the blood is also cooked for the heathen guests.

Fourteen goats and four or five hens were killed. Meali meal ground, also some mealies were crushed and cooked as rice and all put into their several pots and these assembled in one place back of our kitchen, in the midst of a great fire. There were sixteen pots in all and of various sizes, from three gallons to ten, and one was an earthen pot, used to boil the beer in, and held about sixteen gallons.

Now you would like to see the cooks how they prepared the various foods, the fires they built, how several took little tit-bits of meat or intestines, run a green stick through and roasted them before the fire.

It is so interesting to mingle with them at such times and talk with or listen to them. Bits of news, gossip and chances to hear real troubles, abound and often much good is done around the cooking pots.

Dishes to serve such a large quantity of food became a real problem. I had my soap moulds ready (ten paraffine tins which had been cut in half)—but these with every basin, dish pan, bake pans, biscuit tins were assembled, but far inadequate to serve so many people. So bath tubs and a long sheet of corrugated iron helped.

Six hundred people were not a small congregation to get seated conveniently on the grass, but our helpers accomplished this. Each dish had nice large pieces of meat and about a quart of either porridge or stamp-meali rice, placed beside it and some of the meat broth poured over the lot.

As the crowd was so large, the dishes were too few and this bewildered our cooks and waiters as they feared many would get no chance to eat. But here is where the heads of the European come in to help, and all were well served; there was no confidence, all was orderly and so decent. I was so pleased to see this; no pushing, crowding nor grabbing, each seemed to realize they must be on their good behaviour and were. This was such a contrast to the first Xmas or two when there were so few who had learned a tiny bit of decent manners for such a time. Such scrambling, grabbing for the meat, etc., was so disgusting, our hearts misgave us if we had done the wise thing.

But we remembered their hunger (it was famine time) and their heathenishness, so we concluded to try it again and we did.

No games, no dancing but a good preaching service with as many testimonies as possible, made it such a profitable time hundreds sat and listened so attentively and many were heathen.

Our new church building will hold about 400 but of course this crowd could not get in. The Wattle grove was splendid and made one think of Beulah and its grove at home.

After the meeting came the feast. After the feast each was presented with one match box and all were pleased and thankful.

It was an exhausting day and used up about every atom of strength we possessed, but it was a highly profitable one and opened my eyes to the size of our congregation, or the people we minister to here.

Dr. Sanders went alone across the Pongola the following Sunday and stayed to the Xmas feast there on New Year's Day. Had a splendid time, spiritual uplift, several baptized and 300 partook of the feast there. River very full but he went and came in safety for which we give thanks, for 'tis God who is our protector.

The next Wednesday Dr. Sanders and I started off to visit our church at Kua Lembe. One horse trap and horse back was our conveyance as the road is long and in places very bad. We arrived at our Dutch neighbor's, eight miles from home, at 7.20 a. m. Had a nice rest of an hour and three quarters, then came on to Paulpietersburg, arriving at noon, and just in time to escape a heavy shower of rain which cleared up sufficiently for us to leave at 2 p. m. and push on to our next stage, a Dutch friend who lives 13 miles beyond Paulpietersburg.

We mistook the best road and took across farms, one which was full of gates to open and shut and very rough, but we arrived safely and received a warm welcome at our friend's.

Rained during the night and the rats would not let us sleep. They even ran over our pillows.

Perhaps right here I better give you a little idea of what these rats are and their destructiveness. Some one told me they came from Australia with forage for horses during the English and Boer War. Gradually they are increasing and spreading over the country. They destroy most everything, for what they do not eat they gnaw holes in—grain of any kind, harness, especially if freshly dubbed, horses' leather halters, even horses' hoofs, shoes, meat (if they can get at the housewife's supply of fresh meat.) Gnaw holes anywhere and everywhere. They annoy people at night by the noise they make over their heads above wooden ceilings and are a real plague. "Wyli as a rat" is a good expression for they can not be caught in traps; will not take the poisoned bait, etc., greatly to the despair of these farmers.

Next day about 9 a. m. it cleared, so by ten we were off for the last 24 miles of our 60 mile journal. It was a bad road all

the way and threatening rain but God answered prayer and we did not get a drop of it.

Because of the extreme wet in a certain part of the road we left our trap at a Dutch man's house, mounted our horses, climbed over the mountainous hill and arrived at a Dutchman's by the name of Jordan on Thursday night.

As I had ridden on horse back over 40 of the 60 miles I was extremely tired and somewhat lame, but over the grass grown roads the horse was easier than the trap.

Later. At home Dec. 22nd.

Sunday, the 7th. About 60 came to service. It looked rainy but we began in a grove and had to move to the carriage which was so kindly loaned to us, and God blessed us very much.

The Pevaam had filled pretty full while we were in the meeting and the water was cold so we concluded hail as well as rain must have fallen a few miles above. This proved true as we learned afterwards. It took some time before we could find a safe place for baptism as the river ran like a mill-race. At last at the mouth of a small river flowing into the Pevaam (which had not had a shower or hail so the water was warmer) we found what we were looking for and baptized five, all young people save one, quite an old woman who seemed so happy.

On our walk back it rained some but not enough to mkae the people wet. Twenty-three took communion; the five joined the church and three children were presented to the Lord, one being Timoto's baby. Quite a number of testimonials had been given during the day. Some gave talk of trials, temptations and of defeat, others of God's help and blessing. They were so thankful we had come, came to talk and for help, and it was good to be able to help them.

Monday fifty came for the Xmas feast which had been so delayed, and another service was held on the side of a hill giving a grand view of river, valley, cliffs and high green hills in the foreground. Many tall bell shaped flowers dotted the hillside, greatly adding to the beauty of the scenery.

Next morning we left for a short visit—just a day and over night—to some friends, but when we got there we found ourselves unable to leave for a week. Rain every day, river full and dangerous to cross. However, this time was not wasted for everywhere we went we found troubled hearts and real sorrow over the sin of one man. Here was our opportunity to help and we did as best we could.

The servants in the kitchen and the boys outside gladly came in for evening prayers and I trust good was done.

Sunday as we could not cross the river to meet the church we held a meeting with the eight servants and were glad of the chance. Not until Tuesday could we start on our return journey and even then could only cross this river Pevaam by taking a long way round where it broadens out. The water was above the knees of the young man who led my horse, but the current was strong.

Wednesday night arrived safely at