

MISSIONARY CORRESPONDENCE

Hartland, M. S., Paulpietersburg,
Natal, South Africa.

Dear Highway Friends: Once again I greet you from this beloved land of our adoption. I trust this letter will find you all well and enjoying the fellowship of the dear Lord, who has given us such a wonderful salvation, that saves and keeps one satisfied in any land and amidst all circumstances. I am so glad He can keep even an African satisfied. His salvation works just the same here as it does in the homeland when given a chance.

When you think of centuries of custom and tradition to find one as it does these Africans, you will be interested, I am sure, in what I have to say regarding the power of Christ to enable a man to dare to defy custom, even when accepted by the Christian and heathen as well. One of the customs is the buying of your wife, which will cost you eleven cows if you are an African Zulu. When the cows are paid the engagement is officially recognized. To break this engagement was a hard thing, for no matter how the girl might regret this engagement, it cannot be broken without the payment of a heavy fine by the father.

Girls are frequently carried by the father or older brother to the man to whom they are engaged, and forced to marry him. In many cases the man may not have been their choice, but they were told to get the cows. Perhaps their brother wants to get married, and therefore his sister must bring in the cows; so in many cases I suppose it is of two evils choose the lesser (I do not mean that all men are evil, girls), but if she does not choose, the father or brother may choose for her, and the choice may not be as good as the one she sees, though she may not love him, she will choose him because he has the cows to pay for her.

Then again, African girls are like their American sisters, *i. e.*, they change their minds and lose their affection or discover they never really loved him after all. Well, in America, you can break an engagement; you may have some "heart balm to pay." But in Africa, marry you must, or trouble is started.

Well, Alonie's daughter had become engaged to a man, but afterwards the man she really loved asked her and she wanted to say yes, like a sensible girl would, to the man she really loves. Her case was brought up before the church. Every one of the native workers said she should marry the man that paid the cows. All the missionaries (except my wife and myself) said she should marry him. The argument they used was that if she is given her freedom, all the other girls will be throwing down their boys, and then we will have no end of trouble. She had not told them she had already accepted the other fellow if she could break up the engagement. Some of the native workers feared she would be forced into prostitution, for all the native boys would have revenge in their hearts for the one who would dare to throw a man down like that and make a new law for other girls to follow.

Here was Alonie, faced with his loved for his daughter, his love for God and right. What will he do? I urged him to do his duty toward his daughter regardless of custom or cost to himself. All seemed to judge me very unwise, and said when you know the custom and the value you will not talk as you do now.

I argued that we were Christians, not heathens, and what we needed most was men and women that were willing to break with the old life. When Alonie was asked to speak he said he was willing

to sell his last cow to redeem his girl. A hush of disapproval fell on the meeting; then his wife objected, saying she could not live without milk, but Alonie stood firm, believing he was in the right. He believed God would look after him.

The daughter was then called in, and the father told her she was free; that he wanted her to be happy. He urged her to seek the man she loved and not to fool another. The girl was overcome with a mixture of feeling of gratitude and discord—gratitude to her father for her freedom; discord at the others, for she know beforehand how they felt.

We felt the responsibility of freeing her very keenly and prayed that she would provide worthy of this freedom, and that God would bless the father for his stand. The Lord has blessed the father, and the girl has married the man of her choice, and the father has the cows.

We hoped for the best, but did not think that in less than four months all this would come to pass. We felt especially interested in this marriage, first because of the Father Alonie and his fine stand; secondly, because the girl had worked for us up to within a few weeks of her marriage, and while the girl is not a Christian, we believe God is talking to her, and we believe that her father's attitude will do much for her and help her see that to Christianity she owes her freedom to marry the man of her choice.

This letter is long now, but I want to tell a little about a native marriage. When it is carried out by Christians they come to the house or church to be married. After the ceremony the groom goes to his home, and the bride to her father's, and remain separated until after the wedding feast, which may be the next day or a week later. The day of the feast all the friends and relatives come, and there usually is a good open-air service before or after the feast at the bride's home. Then the bride and groom go to their future home, many of their friends following them. Then they spend the night in singing. The next day they have another feast—this at the bridegroom's home—and a religious service. One thing to be remembered, that this takes place rain or shine. At Anna's wedding is the one mentioned; it rained hard while we stood and had our meeting, a fairly long one, with good attention from Christian and heathen alike.

In mission work you must be everything, from a farmer to a nurse, seamstress, merchant and all. They come to us for clothing for the wedding, and because we want to help them and encourage Christian weddings, there is nothing left but to give and do. My wife did all Anna's sewing, besides giving her material for dresses; also the last girl that was married received a dress, and one that is to be married soon is having part of her sewing done by her. Is this mission work? we hear someone say. We assure you it is, for if you get them to dress as Christians you must help them. And you must be ready to do anything you can, from caring for their children to burying them and building coffins, giving swaddling clothes or shroud, etc.

I want to say in closing that the donning of Christian dress is expensive to men and women alike, much more than their old ones; and if we are going to make their living more expensive we must be willing to help them.

Living and dying, or burial, becomes expensive for a native when he becomes a Christian. Nonconformity to custom costs the average heathen man or woman as much, if not a great deal more, as it does an American Christian, but, thank God, we have a few that are paying the price, and Alonie is a sample of what Christ's

power does in an African heart.

Now, friends, do not forget to pray for us and all the workers, both American and native, that God will help us to spread this glorious gospel which breaks all fetters, be they the fetters of cultured America or of ignorant and down-trodden Africans.

With Christian love to all,
D. M. MacDONALD.

Hartland M. S., Paulpietersburg,
Natal, South Africa.

Dear Friends: Once again I will try and continue the picture I have promised you. But let me say that the scenes have changed so often that I am unable to give a complete picture.

My picture today will be the Christmas feasts and attending services. At Hartland we had our regular quarterly meetings, of which Sister Sterritt wrote. The Christmas day came bright and clear. Early in the morning, groups of willing workers are coming to prepare the feast. Goats are to be killed, hens also, and an ox must be cooked the same day, with some corn to go with the meat, and which completes the feast. Paul looked after the cooking and sharing of the meats, while the natives did all the work. When everything was in the pots we called a service of song, preaching, and a few testimonies, which was held outdoors under the tall gum trees. This service was attended by over five hundred,—less perhaps than at other times, but there was another Christmas feast a short distance away which took some of the crowd away from ours.

The object of the feast is, and, I believe, has been, to get heathens interested in the salvation of their souls. Many will come to this feast for the "loaves," and when they hear the story of the Cross, birth and mission of Christ, become interested and begin attending the regular meetings. I saw more heathen in one service at the mission Christmas day than I have ever seen before anywhere apart from a wedding which took place on this farm.

The interest manifested in this meeting was quite satisfactory. When the time for the feast had come, the crowd was divided into little companies which formed circles on the lawn, and in each circle was a pot of stamp (boiled cracked corn), a large dish of meat, and no eating utensils except a carving knife. Now the modern rules of etiquette were all broken. One man would pick up a piece of meat, take a few mouthfuls, then pass it on to the next, until all had a few bites; then another would get a piece and start it around, and so on, while the meat lasted. With the stamp which was in a large pot in the centre of the circle, all would dip down, get a handful and lap it up the way Canadians lap snow up. They are truly sociable in their dealings with each other.

Another interesting feature connected with these feasts is that all who loan pots for the feast expect to have some meat in their pot, as a sort of rent, I presume. Now this works out quite well generally, but at Altona the folks that loaned the pots went home early and when it came time for those that had the serving to look after, to eat, very little was left for them. However, the Sterritt sisters looked around and found something to make up for the loss or shortage.

With regards to the Altona feast, it was carried on much the same as the one in Hartland; not quite so many there, but a good crowd and a fine spirit on in the meetings. Both the "Big Sunday" and Christmas services were very well attended and much interest shown. At Altona both Sunday and Christmas services were held