

MISSIONARY CORRESPONDENCE

Altona Mission,
Nov. 28, 1939

Dear Highway Friends:

In some of my recent letters I have tried to tell you something about our Transvaal outposts and native workers. Now let us go into our Altona church and go up to the pulpit. The white missionaries are behind the pulpit. The men preachers are sitting on their right, the women workers on their left. Along the right side are benches on which the men young women, and older girls sit. Along the left wall are boxes on which are the prayer women. The rest of the floor can be, or is, occupied by married women and others sitting on goat skins.

The services are carried on much the same as they are at home except for the fact that several preach, most everybody wants to testify, and usually several want to be prayed with; some for healing, some to be delivered from beer, snuff and suchlike, or for salvation and sanctification. Services last for two, three, or four hours. Quite often the whole congregation prays in unison—saint and sinner alike—and then one feels almost as if one was in a Beulah altar service. Nowadays, it is not unusual to have the whole congregation dressed as gaily as natives can dress and no bare bodies in evidence anywhere. Even some of the heathen are taking to what was formerly thought of as Christian dress. It would do your heart good to hear the natives sing; they may be singing one of our familiar English hymn tunes but it is usually with variations, repetitions, and a rendering peculiarly their own.

Some services here have a feature that our homeland churches do not have. Parents bring their children to present them to the church. The parents and native-worker pastor promise that they will do all they can to train the child in Christian ways rather than in heathen ways and will endeavor to so train the child that when he comes to the years of understanding he may give himself to seek the Lord, get saved, be baptized, and join our church. Prayer and the laying on of hands and blessing the children, complete the ceremony. Those who are presented are thought of as Church babies.

Another feature of our African Church is that those who want to become Christians stand up and say: "Ngiya i Tanda inkosi" (I love the Lord). By this they state their desire to go the Christian way, to seek for forgiveness, and to eventually join the church they take this stand in. If a person leaves one church and goes to another they often go through the same or a similar procedure. When a heathen takes this stand it is indicative of his break with heathenism. It may be some months or years before he leaves off heathen practices and gets the evidence of sins forgiven. During this period he is known as a seeker.

A third feature is the practice of disciplining church members and seekers who fall back into sin. The members and seekers are supposed to attend special classes periodically and report their spiritual condition to their spiritual caretaker or native worker. If a person reports that he has committed sin he is usually brought before the missionaries and native workers who investigate the facts and endeavor to restore the backslider. If the sin is such as that of

adultery, beer drinking, fighting, and so on, the person is set aside from partaking of communion until such times as he repents, makes restitution, and gets forgiveness. If he does these and lives consistently for three months he may be restored to church fellowship.

Many churches around us, particularly the native supervised churches, are very lax in this practice; consequently their standards of teaching and living are lower than what we hold up. Just recently a woman from the Independent church sought admittance into our church. She brought a church letter stating she was energetic as a Christian and was in good standing. We examined her and found out she had no evidence of sins forgiven; in fact, she said her church had never told her she ever had any sins! She later confessed to stealing. This in her eyes was not serious as she had only stolen from her white man or landlord. We did not accept her as a full church member; she was accepted as a seeker.

Yours in Christian love,

EUGENE A. M. KIERSTEAD

A. M. S., South Africa
Jan. 2nd, 1940

Dear Highway Friends:

Christmas is over with all its hurry and excitement and we are settling down to the regular routine of missionary life—if such a life can have regular routine. With the usual interruptions it is hard to keep it regular, but with God's help we are resolved to do our best for our Master.

The feast was held at Hartland on the Saturday before Christmas. Eugene and George, with two of our women workers and a Christian boy, left here early on Friday so as to be able to attend part of the quarterly meeting that was being carried on at that time.

Several of our men and boys went around by way of the bridge as the Pongola River was very full. Many wished to be there but were unable because of this. I believe all those present had a good time in the Lord for which we thank Him.

The following Thursday was the day for the Christmas feast here at Altona. It was most interesting to me to watch the proceedings. The people had enough money to buy an ox and two goats. Several brought hens also, and the only things they asked us for was salt and onions to cook with their meat.

The day before the large ox was killed and dressed and the following morning the goats and hens were added so there was plenty of meat.

The day was very nice and the crowds began to come shortly after dinner. We were glad to have with us Brother and Sister MacDonald and Daniel, also an old lady missionary, Miss Moe, who is visiting them at present. One of the women workers came with them by car and the night before several men and boys arrived by bicycles, and all were an inspiration and blessing.

The missionaries and workers sat on the veranda while the congregation sat on the grass in front. We had feared that we might have a disorderly crowd as a fight had taken place at a nearby mission during their feast, but considering the large number present they were very quiet and orderly. We began our service by singing several hymns after which we had prayers. Then several of our workers gave short talks. They spoke of what Christ-

mas meant and what a good opportunity it was for people to seek God. Several of the missionaries spoke briefly and I think Miss Moe was the last speaker. She is a very zealous worker for the Lord and she also encouraged the people to come to Jesus now. Many came and knelt for prayer and then followed a lovely prayer service which I feel was owned and blessed of God. It was a beautiful way for the service to close and I believe all were helped and strengthened.

It has been the custom to give each person present a box of matches so after the benediction, Eugene gave out 980 boxes of matches. You can see by that that the crowd was large indeed.

Many presents were on the Christmas tree and even though to Canadians it was a queer looking Christmas tree, with its broad leaves, etc., still it was very pretty with its trimmings and gifts. Several remembered us with small gifts which we appreciated very much—especially we appreciated their thoughts for us.

After the presents were enjoyed the people had their feast of meat. Their diet is mostly porridge and they certainly enjoy these feasts of meat.

We were very weary and tired that night but so very grateful to God for the good day and especially for the good prayer service when God came near and blessed our souls.

Early the following Saturday morning Eugene left for Mbucu for a service and feast there on that day. He remained for Big Sunday the next day and came back on Monday.

The Lord was present at our services here on Sunday. Since our teacher has been away on holiday I have tried to preach a little in Zulu. I find it hard work but I think most of them can understand me and that is a little encouragement.

The S. S. is small again now as so many of the children have to watch the gardens and cattle. For the past quarter the attendance has averaged about twenty. Sometimes we seem to see so little for our labors but God's word says that "His word shall not return unto Him void," so we must take courage and press on for I feel that teaching the children and young people is a very important part of our work. A good part of those who attend Sunday School are Christians or seekers and I do earnestly pray that God will keep them from the harm and danger that Satan would be so glad to bring upon them.

The war is affecting our mails, and Canada seems to be farther away now that it takes six weeks to get a letter but I am so glad that "where Jesus is, 'tis Heaven there." Praise His dear name!

Yours in His dear service,

GLADYS KEIRSTEAD

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

Dear Homeland Friends: Jan. 1, 1940

I greet you this New Year with II. Timothy 2:15. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." It is my New Year's verse and my heart longs for the approval of God.

The usual Christmas feasts and special services are pretty well over now. God has continued to set His seal upon the work, and we have seen much of His blessing and power.

Our dear old friend, Miss Malla Moe, is here again to spend Christmas with us, and what a