

MISSIONARY CORRESPONDENCE

Altona Mission,
Feb. 24th, 1942

Dear Highway:

Not long ago I attended a funeral at Hartland and was much interested in the various proceedings that related to this and other burials I have witnessed out here. I thought you also might be interested as well.

When a native dies most natives are very superstitious about the cause of the death, and often attribute it to evil spirits, to some evil-doer, to poisoning, or to bewitchment. As a result, the burial and ceremonies have these ideas in the background.

In the first place the corpse should be buried almost at once, if possible the same day as the person dies. The grave is often dug so that the body can be let down and then shoved to one side in a cave-like opening, so that the body will not be directly below the opening of the grave. The idea is to try and deceive any evil-doer who might want to dig up the body and get parts of it for medicine, and try and make him think the body is not there.

Flat stones are usually placed above or to the side of the body in such a way that after grass mats are put over them the earth will not come in direct contact with the body or coffin. Quite often the personal belongings, such as clothes, blankets, etc., are buried with the corpse. If death was due to bewitchment they are afraid his personal belongings might pass that along to others as well.

Another curious practice is that each relative or friend picks up a clod of the earth dug from the grave, spits on it, and throws it in the grave. Some say this is to honor the dead; others say it is to show that they have not had anything to do with the death of the departed. Oftentimes the natives have basins of water present so that all those present may wash their hands after the ceremony is over. This also may be symbolic in showing absence of guilt or washing away any defilement in connection with the burial ceremonies.

When the grave is filled in, great care is taken to see that every bit of grass, sod, stone, or earth that came out of the grave is replaced or covered up. They take this precaution to prevent evil-doers from taking these things and using them for medicine to kill or bewitch others with.

The last part of the burial is to take the many stones that have been carried to the grave and are spread out carefully to one side, and build up a mound covering the whole grave and the earth above it.

A grave site is sacred and woe betide the people who desecrate it!

Some time after the funeral service, those who helped in the ceremonies, especially those who dug the grave or handled the body, are invited to the kraal of the deceased or a near relative; a cow or some suitable beast is killed and a feast is prepared. This ceremony is to thank those who helped the bereaved in their time of sorrow.

Of course these practises are most strictly carried out at heathen funerals; much of this disappears with the spread and growth of the influence of Christianity. Death is a fearsome thing to the heathen. How different it is with the death of a true Christian? For him or her it is a home-going, freedom from troubles and care, a going to be with the Lord—blessed are the dead who die in the Lord!

Yours in Him,

EUGENE A. M. KIERSTEAD

Altona Mission Station,
Feb. 28th, 1942

Dear Highway Friends:

Last night it suddenly came to me that I had not written my February letter to you. Last year I wrote fifteen Highway letters—a bit more than one a month—and I would like to do as well this year.

We have had quite hot weather this month, but now the days are getting shorter and the nights are getting cooler. The sun sets now about half past six and we are very careful to get the children in and spray our rooms in case a mosquito might get into the house.

We have had a few very heavy rains, and malaria fever has started. Last week our postmaster had three very sick children and he sent to Piet Retief for the doctor, who pronounced the trouble to be malaria. We have heard of some deaths among the natives, but none among the white people. Many of the natives do not get the quinine in time and very few people spray their huts to kill the mosquitoes.

We have had many sick people to tend lately. One case seems as if it might be leprosy, but we cannot be sure as the mother came for medicine but left the sick son at home. There is also a lot of whooping cough among the children. Yesterday a dear little two months old baby was here. The mother said she coughed terribly at night. Poor baby, may the dear Lord help these poor sick people, is my prayer.

Recently our hearts were made sad because two of our girl seekers have chosen heathen boys for their future husbands. I asked our worker Losaya, who has charge of the girls' classes, just what that would mean. She said that the girls would simply have to become heathen for the people of those kraals will not allow Christians or will not allow the girls to wear Christian dress. How sad! I have several heathen friends who are in the same state. They now want to become Christians but their husbands will not allow it.

One woman, who lost her dear little baby girl last year, came one day recently asking for medicine for whooping cough as her three other little girls were all very sick with it. I gave her medicine and then I said, "You should come to church now and become a Christian." Before, she hadn't seemed to want to talk with me along that line but she turned the saddest face to me and said: "Oh, Nkosikazi, I have always wanted to become a Christian." I was much surprised, and then she pointed to the school-girl who stays with her, and went on: "When I wasn't as large as that girl I went to church but soon I met a heathen boy and after I married him he said I couldn't become a Christian. Now he will not allow me to go to church but always I want to be a Christian." I do pray that God will, in some way, speak to that man's heart and if his wife really means what she says, that he will no longer stand in her way.

Another grief she has is that she has only girls and every Zulu seems to prefer boys. This woman will look at our children and tell me how lovely it is that I have boys, but I tell her I think it would be lovely to have girls, but she just shakes her head and says, "Well, yes, it's nice to have some girls to help cook but they are not of much value for soon they marry and leave home so it's the boys that really count for they bring home wives to help look after the kraal.

To-morrow Eugene is going to Mfeni for a special Sunday. It is a very hard trip over rough mountainous trails—it is about fifteen miles from here. Sometimes he takes a bicycle

or car part way and walks the rest of the way and some times he takes the horse. To-morrow there is to be a baptism so Eugene wanted to take the horse to take the necessary clothes, but today our horse was taken sick with the dreaded horse sickness. The disease is nearly always fatal, and they die very quickly. Eugene remembered a remedy that the Sterritt Sisters gave him for the disease and he gave it at once and tonight the horse seemed a bit better. We are trusting God to undertake, if it is His will. A missionary certainly needs a good horse.

The world seems to be in a very troubled state indeed. Some things are already rationed here, prices are soaring, etc., but God is blessing us and our trust is in Him. May God bless and help you all in the homeland, is our prayer.

Yours in His Love,

G. M. KEIRSTEAD

CORRESPONDENCE

HERE AND THERE

My last communication was from Sunny Florida. Just before starting for home I attended the Free Methodist Camp Meeting at Kissimmee. This is a new camp. The attendance was not large but the spirit was good. Rev. L. A. Hoover, the evangelist, preached with power. The last night I attended, the glory fell. Saints marched and shouted and some who had been professing Sanctification rushed to the altar, confessed their need and prayed through. The next day, the 12th of March, I left for home. I reached Jacksonville, Fla., about 4 p. m. and sought out the Tabernacle run by Rev. J. Witty, whom I had met a few years ago in Northern New York, and concerning whose work I had heard glowing reports. Brother Witty is a young man of thirty-five and certainly runs a great institution. The building, a splendid structure, capable of seating fully 1200, is ideally located. With its lofty ceiling and surrounding galleries, it looks as though it had been built for a church, but it was originally a beer-garden and a dance hall. I attended the prayer meeting. About 200, mostly young men and women, were in attendance. Rev. Witty preaches to great congregations and stresses the 2nd work of grace. No offering is taken in any service. Those coming in place their offerings, not in envelopes but the bare money in a box at the door. The pastor's father gave me a good deal of information relative to the work. Seldom does the weekly deposit in the box fall below \$400.00. The pastor runs a weekly paper, and a daily radio broadcast. In six years the work has been built up to these proportions. Mr. Witty began with about 80 members. He is certainly a remarkable young man, very boyish in his appearance, but full of fire and enthusiasm that are contagious.

After that great prayer meeting I had to wait till 12.45 a. m. for my bus. The station was full and surrounded by middies—there is a great naval station nearby. A finer, cleaner, more orderly lot of young men I have never seen. At 10.00 p. m. they filled a big bus, and did it in such a quiet, orderly manner as to win my admiration. No laughing, pushing or the least sign of intoxication. At midnight another bus filled up in the same orderly manner. Among them all I saw not the slightest sign of drinking. Two fine looking fellows stood by with "S. P." on their sleeves. I stepped up to one and said,