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An African King's Funeral

(By the Rev. Frank W. Read.)

Among other thoughts that come to the African missionary when alone in the midst of heathenism, are these:—The utter hopelessness of the heathen condition; the contrast between their debased and ignorant state and our happy and enlightened one; and the knowledge that there is no hope for them but in the gospel of the Blessed God, with the assurance that it will be the power unto salvation of all them who believe on the Son of God. After a perusal of the following brief account of an African native burial, with these thoughts in mind, one's personal attitude in regard to the whole question may be re-suggested, and the reader may be led to ask himself again, 'Am I doing my duty in regard to this matter,

this again, below, are built the compounds of the resident chiefs, who, with the ruler, form the governing body. Some of these have their permanent residence there; but others reside temporarily, going to and from their respective districts over which they hold rule. Outside these compounds again are the remains of a mud and wattled fence that once ran around the hill and closed the whole in. Now, however, the glory of the palace has departed; for, according to custom, since the old chief's death, who did not keep the place up, it has been left to go to ruin, to be rebuilt by the new chief.

Five days before such a funeral as this, the time of the women is given up to brewing the beer for the guests, during which time they are arriving from all parts of the country. These are accommodated, as far

the corpse. This continues during the second night, and the night before the funeral.

On the morning of the funeral, the whole place is like a hive of people. Chiefs with their clans have been gathering during the past five days, and late arrivals are still coming in. Up in the dead chief's compound, some of the young men are busy adorning the bier, which consists of a palm-pole with a frame fastened on, to which is suspended as much colored cloth as can be attached, reaching nearly to the ground. When the last artistic touches are made, this is taken into the house where the corpse is, and the corpse, being wrapped in an ox-skin just taken from one of the oxen killed in honor of the dead, as part of the religious ceremonies, is tied to the pole. The hoofs of the ox are left dangling, and appear below the curtains of the cloth, striking together as the bearers carry the corpse on their shoulders. To the native mind this is very pleasing, as a finishing touch suitable to an occasion so important. The widows sit crouched together all the morning, covered over with cloths. Later in the day, after the corpse has been carried out, these are conducted in single file, going in a crouching manner, with the cloths still over them, to a house in one of the lower outer compounds; and later, they go to the river in the same way to undergo some rite of purification by bathing.

During the preparations referred to, a renowned fetish priest and some assistants are conducting religious ceremonies. Men, women, and children crowd about them, struggling to be sprinkled with water from a bark trough in which have been placed some herbs and other decoctions. The sprinkling is done with a bunch of twigs in one hand and a fowl in the other, both being dipped in the water and sprinkled over the body of each one presenting himself. The significance of this ceremony is, that good crops will be insured for the women during the reign of the incoming chief, and good hunting for the men.

Preparations for conducting the corpse out into the open country seem to be completed about midday; but the rain which has been threatening begins to fall, whereupon some of the fetish doctors get together, and call upon all the parents of twins, with their children to congregate in one spot and sing a chorus as a charm, which they do with all their might. This is to cause the rain to cease, which it did within half an hour, a verification of its power over the elements. If it had not succeeded, however, some other evil-disposed persons or spirits with greater power would have destroyed the influence of their charm—all of which is good native logic.

The funeral procession now forms for descent into the adjacent country, where further ceremonies are to take place before burial. The corpse is carried by some of the old men, counsellors of the dead chief; others play musical instruments, and one assists the priests in strewing the pathway with a charm in the form of roots and leaves of a certain tree reduced to a pulp. The relatives and more important people of the Ombala follow behind in single file, the general crowd either following also, or



A MISSION STATION, WEST AFRICA.

either in the way of giving, or praying, or going?

The capital ('ombala') of the Ondula country, two days north of the Sakanjimba Station of the American Board Mission, in South Angola, was recently the scene of the obsequies of a late chief, and the induction of a new one. The place is beautiful for situation, strategic also, evidently chosen at its foundation with a view to defence.

It is built upon a large round hill, covered with huge granite boulders, with others of a lesser size scattered all around its sides. At the summit is the chief's enclosure, the huts being built largely upon a foundation of soil carried up from the lower sides of the hill, and deposited upon the bare rock. Around this, in clear spaces below, are built the houses of his wives and immediate followers, all surrounded by a palisade having two gates, one on each side of the hill, opposite each other. Around

as possible, in the houses, huts being built for those who cannot be so provided for. On the fifth day, the proceedings proper take place; but preparatory ceremonies, religious or otherwise, precede the burial. Morning and night, for several days, previous to interment, the crier, from an elevated point, shouts a warning to all to shut up their animals and take care of their children during the coming days until the funeral is over, lest they disappear. Plunder of this kind is permissible, and was much more carried on in older times than now. Three nights before the funeral, the widows of the dead chief began to wail for the dead, whose corpse has that day been removed from a hut near by, into the cooking house, the only sound building remaining in the compound. In the cold and darkness, they sit on the rocks and wail, and cry most mournfully for some hours. In the day-time, they sit in the house with