

HEATHEN PRIESTS IN AFRICA.

The people believe that the priest can control the spirit world—that he can send witches into persons, and can drive them out—that he can bring the rain, can cure them when sick, or cause them to die.

An English missionary tells us that not many years ago there was a great drought in the place where he was living. For miles around the ground was dry and hard, and there was hardly any grass or green leaves. The people were in such distress they decided to go to a rain-maker named Gqindiva, and beg him to have pity on them, and send rain. The missionary decided to go with them, thinking he might show them that the Uninini Wemvula had no power over the clouds.

So, one morning, more than a thousand men and women gathered about the rain-maker's kraal, and after he had made them wait a long time in the burning sun, he came out to see what was wanted. He had on no dress, nor covering of any kind, but his face and hands and arms had streaks of red paint on them, and he wore on his head a turban made of the skin of a wild animal. In his hand he held a long javelin, and a short, knobbed stick.

"Why have you come to my kraal?" he asked.

"We have come to ask rain from the Uninini Wemvula," was the answer; "the land is dead with drought, and we are in great distress."

After the cattle which they had brought had been given to him, Gqindiva and his servants began to go round in a circle, going faster and faster every minute, while the women sang a horrid song, and beat time with their hands. Soon Gqindiva grew very much excited, and exclaimed:

"I cannot obtain rain, there is a hindrance. Something turns or prevents the rain."

At this the people were much excited too; and the missionary, fearing, as often happens at such times, that some poor man or woman would be seized and killed, because he might be the one who prevented the rain, thought it was time for him

to speak, so he said to one of the chiefs in Caffre style:

"I am a child, I know nothing of your customs; but I know what God has told us in his Word, and I know it is true. Will you allow me to ask Gqindiva some questions? I cannot understand what he has said about the rain."

"You are my teacher," answered the chief; "I do not understand myself. Speak what you think; Gqindiva will explain."

"Now, Gqindiva," said the missionary, "you say you can make rain?"

"I do not say so; I say I seek the rain."

"And when you seek it you find it, and bring it to the country?"

"I have often given rain to the country," said Gqindiva; "these chiefs know I have. Why did they come here to ask if they did not know I have the rain?"

"I think the rain comes from God. Here, in the book it says, 'God gives rain,'" said the missionary, and then he read from the Testament he had in his hand, "God, in times past, suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with joy and gladness."

"The book says truly," said the rain-maker; "I say too that God gives the rain."

"How is that?" said the missionary. "You said just now you have the rain; you give the rain."

"I have the rain from the spirits, and I would give it, but I am hindered. I have tried these three moons to bring it, but something turns it away."

"Who is it that hinders the rain from falling, and how is it done?" asked the missionary.

"Do you ask me who hinders the rain?"

"It is I who ask."

"You are the hindrance."

"How do I hinder the rain from falling?"

"I have offered cattle to the spirits," said Gqindiva, "and I have often burned