

KAFIRS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Copied from the October Quarterly paper of the S. P. O. F. P.

In this paper we propose to lay before the reader, first, a specimen of Kafir superstition in the proceedings of a "witch-doctor;" and secondly, an instance of the efforts which Missionaries are making to bring these heathens under the influence of Gospel light and love.

Among the Kafirs some persons are set apart, after a regular initiation and trial, as priests or "witch-doctors." They are so called because they are supposed to possess a peculiar power of detecting, or, as their expression is, "smelling out," witchcraft. When a Kafir incurs the dislike or jealousy of the chief of his tribe, the chief commonly gets rid of him in the following way. The chief privately tells the witch-doctor that he wishes to kill the man, and take his cattle, and promises the doctor a reward if he will help him to fulfil his wish.

When this has been arranged between them, the chief sends the unsuspecting Kafir away on some errand, and entices his wife and children out of their hut. The witch-doctor then enters the hut, "and steals from it some two articles, both alike, and of the same kind; as, for instance, two pipes or two spoons. One of these he buries under the floor of the hut, covering the spot over with the matting, so as to prevent its being observed by the inmates on their return; the other like article he takes away, and buries it in the same spot or part, within the chief's hut. Having done this, on the return of the Kafir and his family, he administers a quantity of diluted vegetable poison to the chief's cattle, in the water which they drink; he also mixes it with the milk and food of the chief, his wives and children, and awaits the result. Very frequently, having done thus much, he disappears from the 'kraal,' and goes off in the night to some neighbouring tribe—for the twofold purpose of disarming suspicion as to his having any thing to say to the matter, as well as to increase his own importance in the eyes of his tribe, by the confusion which he knows will be created by searching and sending for him.

The effect of the poison is, of course, soon made manifest by the chief and his household, and his cattle also become violently sick, perhaps one or two of the weakest among them dying; or, what is regarded as equally unimportant, a child or two from his young nursery being added to the number.

Search is immediately made for the 'witch-doctor,' as of course it is at once conclusively seen that 'somebody has bewitched the chief.' This is a crime of high treason, and one always visited by capital punishment; the greatest excitement then prevails to see who is to be 'smelt out' as the delinquent.

On the arrival of the witch-doctor, his first care is to alleviate the sufferings of the bewitched; and, with every expression of concern and outward demonstrations of alarm, lest the life of the chief should be sacrificed through the malignity of the dose of witchery which he has unfortunately swallowed, he hurries about, officially preparing medicines, and administering remedies to man, women, children, and cattle alike. His consummate skill seldom fails in affecting a speedy cure; and then, all apprehension as to the mischief spreading further being allayed, he next appoints a day for the ceremonial of 'smelling out the witch.' Great preparations are made for this solemn ordeal. An extensive gathering of the tribe is convened, and the oxen are slaughtered, and devoured in the revolting manner in which this is always performed.

The cattle are all removed from the interior of

their 'kraal' or inclosure, in the centre of which an immense fire is lighted. Around this the tribes assemble, and sit in rings in mute silence and expectancy; whilst large baskets, full of bullocks' blood hot from the animals' veins, are passed round and drank off in silence.

As night approaches (for their deeds of darkness are always, by choice as well as by instinct, performed 'in the night season'), the 'doctor' appears in the ring, quite naked, except a few tigers' tails as a fringe round his loins. A low solemn chant is then raised by the women; whilst several old crones, placed in the rear with sticks, and ox hides stretched upon frames, beat time to the singing. The cadences of this are first very slow, but gradually increase, whilst the 'doctor' leaps and dances, and shows in the wildest and most demoniacal manner. The lurid glare of the fire; the pitchy darkness of the surrounding night (the time chosen usually being at the new moon, and in the darkest weather); together with the glaring eyes, inflamed countenances, and excited frames of the swarthy community, and dusky 'doctor' in the centre; these all combine to make the scene one of the wildest and most awful that can well be imagined upon earth.

A few hours of such employment and fare as this suffice to bring the assembled tribe into a state of absolute frenzy, and fit them for being engaged in any scenes, or amount of barbarity and cruelty. This the 'witch-doctor' anticipates, and so soon as he deems their feelings and evil passions to be sufficiently inflamed, he then ceases dancing, as gradually subsiding in time to the music, as he before rose and increased to that degree of rapidity which kept him in a motion so excessive, that he not unfrequently falls upon the ground, during his evolutions, quite exhausted.

A solemn silence then ensues, during which the 'doctor' rests himself, and then proceeds, with a bundle of divining rods in his hand, to walk round throughout the assembly. As he approaches the chief, he watches the rods in his hand, and dexterously makes one of them move, or leap out, from amongst the rest. He then singles out this rod, and throws the others into the fire, and being rubbed with a kind of inflammable matter, they there crackle and blaze brightly, thus demonstrating to the Kafirs that they are charged with supernatural powers; with the remaining one he then proceeds through the assembly again, and this time he makes it vibrate, not only when opposite the chief, but also when in front of the victim whom he is about to single out. When this is perceived, he stands several minutes confronting this man, and gazing intently at him, whilst the silence of death ensues. This process he repeats three times, and then he leaves the 'kraal' and proceeds to the chief's hut. Here he walks about, always making the rod leap from his hand when ever he comes over the place where he buried the article which he had stolen from his victim's hut. He then marks this spot by driving an 'assegai' into it, and proceeds to the suspected man's hut. Here also he goes through the same mummeries and pretends to discover the corresponding spot in this hut to that in the other, and marks it in a similar manner.

The next part of the proceedings is to commence excavations at these spots, which is done by numbers of the surrounding Kafirs; when, as a necessary consequence, the articles deposited there are brought to light. This is deemed conclusive evidence, and on it the supposed culprit is seized, tried, condemned to death, and all his cattle are forfeited to the chief. From hence the 'witch-doctor's' promised fee is paid, and too great honour cannot be heaped upon him, by the tribe, for having so ably delivered the chief from the influence of the wizard.

The most terrible part of the picture then appears—the death of the victim. The usual manner of this is by causing him to be stung to death by ants and reptiles, or by burning.

Such is a specimen of Kafir superstition and cruelty as described by a Clergyman who lived many years in South Africa (Rev. F. Fleming's "South Africa," pages 273–278). Surely it is high time that the light of God's truth should be made to shine upon these benighted people.

The Rev. W. Greenstock, a Missionary who is well acquainted with the Kafir language, was sent last May by the Bishop of Grahamstown to a place called East London, in British Kaffraria, where he has both English and Kafirs to attend to. Last June he wrote to say, "This is an excellent position for a Mission to the Kafirs: so many are collected in the neighbourhood . . . I have twelve Kafirs, old and young, in my household: three are baptised, and two more will be soon. They have regular worship in their own language twice daily." In his Journal Mr. Greenstock writes thus:—

"May 2d (Sunday).—Went soon after sunrise to the Kafir location. All the natives seemed very sleepy, but Kona collected a few in his hut, and I had service with them. While they were getting together, I had an opportunity of speaking to Kona on the duty of thankfulness for his recent deliverance from prison. I reminded him that through God's mercy he had time given him to hear the Word in peace, and that it is the Lord who disposes all hearts. He acknowledged all this, and said that while he was in prison he had remembered God. I preached to them on Ps. ix. 17. When the people delayed to come together, Kona said, 'Don't they know that Europeans worship twice on a Sunday?'"

In the afternoon went again to the Kafirs. Kona had got his hut cleaned out, and some grass put for me to kneel on, with an evident desire of having worship in decency and order. The house was well filled with an attentive congregation. After Ps. lxxvii., Confession and Lord's Prayer, I read Ps. ix. Then we sang the hymn, 'Bawo, ngabubelo bako,' to the tune of 'Sicilian Mariners.' They joined in very heartily, and the melody was very cheering. Then I stood up and recited the Creed, and addressed them on 2 Pet. iii. 9, closing all with the General Thanksgiving, and the blessing from Num. vi. On coming out of the hut a man asked me to persevere in teaching them. He said, 'We are living in great ignorance, but you may find some one (convert) if you continue.' I answered, 'Let it be you.' He replied, 'Perhaps it may be;' and we parted.

OBITUARY.

At the residence of her husband, Bloor-street, in this city, Rebecca Wilson, the beloved wife of Thos. J. Preston, Esq., aged 49 years. During a protracted suffering, which she bore with christian resignation, she was surrounded by a large and affectionate family, comforted by the ordinances of the Church, and sustained by an humble faith in an atoning mercy. She patiently resigned her spirit to God who gave it, at three o'clock on the morning of the 9th inst.

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