

WORLD DOMINION

The World Dominion Movement advocates Informed Continuous Co-ordinated Evangelism to reach everyone at home and abroad. Its basis is belief in the Deity and Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the World's Only Saviour, and in the Final Authority of Holy Scripture.

Editor: THOMAS COCHRANE.

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The Village of the Emaciated Gogo

W. KENDALL GALE

The Rev. W. Kendall Gale sent us this article some time ago. We publish it now in affectionate remembrance of our friend.—EDITOR.

MAHIAGOGO is situated in a deep hollow among the hills, rather a trough or hole than a hollow. Mahiagogo! *Mahia* means thin. The *gogo*—pronounced goo-goo—is a fish, but with a head so big in proportion to its body, and so flinty, that even the sharpest axe can scarcely cleave it; hence Mahiagogo is 'The Village of The Emaciated Gogo.' In the Marofotsy country the word *gogo* is employed as a simile. If a person is unusually pig-headed, so stubborn and self-willed that nothing can change him or bring him to reason, he is said to *milohan-gogo*, that is to have the head of a gogo. I should like to introduce the word into Great Britain as being far more expressive than the term pig-headed, because it defines a state of mind and spirit deeper and more stupid than even pig-headedness. It is the last word that 'ticks off' concentrated, pig-headed, donkey-like stubbornness.

Why the people chose such a spot for their village when there is elevated ground all round, where they could get air which means health, is a puzzle. It is now the coldest part of the cold season in the Marofotsy—that is, as they count coldness, and yet, on my arrival, such was the heat that I had to strip off every garment except what decency demanded, and still perspiration rolled off me. What Mahiagogo must be like in the hottest part of the hot season defies description—it must be inferno. The huts are either made of bamboos or wattle and daub. All are very tiny, so that four or five sleeping on the floor (they have neither bedsteads nor mattresses) must fill the whole space and be 'pernicious snug.'

I visited Mahiagogo for the first time in 1928, and, being a fairly large village, I started a 'cause' there. I have been but twice since—a year ago and this visit. The cause has not thriven for a number of reasons. For one thing

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the people are not Marofotsy but Tsimihety,* belonging to a tribe in the far north-east of Madagascar, while the Marofotsy country is almost in the heart of the island. Now the Tsimihety speak a dialect quite unknown in this part of the country, hence the difficulty of understanding what they say, and the problem of instructing them. They are a tiny 'foreign' colony in a 'distant' land. Moreover, not one of them can read or write, and, even if one presented them with a Bible and hymn-book, they could not read it or understand it. A year ago the evangelist and I spent three solid hours trying to teach them one hymn and the Lord's Prayer and failed utterly, much as a British Sunday-school teacher would fail were he to try to teach the Primary the twenty-third Psalm in Hebrew. There is the problem and it has to be tackled and mastered somehow. Meanwhile the 'cause' languishes, not because the people are unwilling to gather for worship, but because everything has seemed futile so far.

It must be remembered also that the people are still raw heathen, and we—the evangelist and I—while in deadly earnest, so far have been quite unable to get our messages across because of the language difficulty. The people gather regularly for worship, but it is not Christian worship. In the centre of Mahiagogo there is a sacred enclosure, fenced round with poles. Within this enclosure again there is a block of crystal on which liquid honey is poured to be licked off by the spirits, though I fancy the rats get it. Over this stone is also scattered a small quantity of the first-fruits of the rice harvest, likewise devoured by the rats. Evidently they have recently slaughtered an ox as a sacrifice to the spirits of their ancestors, for the skull and horns of the ox are impaled on a pole. The ancestors had to be content with short commons, I fear, for even the skull is skinned, while the meat was divided among the inhabitants for a mighty gorge. Around this enclosure the entire population gathers for heathen ancestor worship, to cry frantically and shriek in a frenzy beseeching

* The Gospel of St. Luke in Tsimihety was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1924.

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their ancestors for certain benefits or protection from this or that. One distressing and almost revolting practice is to *mihanjaka*, that is, to sway backwards and forwards and sideways with almost dazing swiftness, which they continue until they topple over in a swoon foaming at the mouth, in which unconsciousness they babble like idiots. The babbling is listened to excitedly as something oracular. The spirits are supposed to be speaking to the crowd through the incoherent mutterings of the individual writhing on the ground. These 'Delphic' oracles must be instantly and implicitly obeyed. There stands the enclosure, sacred to them, evidence of a still engrained idolatry, while my tiny 'cause' languishes.

I sat down to wait, for such a village and such a people cannot be passed by lightly. 'Night brings the crows home,' and night brought the people back to their village. We cleared out a hut to give us more space, and at 5.30 p.m. it was crammed with a motley crowd of smelly raga-muffins. Darkness was falling so I showed and explained my roll of Scripture pictures at once. The people glared, they were spellbound, they were fascinated. I tried to explain the pictures one by one in the simplest Malagasy, and they seemed to understand the stories about the Christ. They chattered; they giggled; they guffawed; they rocked with laughter; they discussed the pictures one by one, endeavouring to decipher them, sometimes awed into silence. They were a rabble! It was desperately hard work speaking to such a crowd. Have any of my readers ever tried to preach the Gospel in such circumstances? I was almost distraught by the hubbub. I was fighting frantically to get the messages of the pictures home. I was making myself hoarse by shouting in a voice louder than the combined volume of theirs. But though I was straining vehemently to make myself heard, they were also straining to understand, so it was all to the good. Then came a talk with the people about meeting regularly for Christian worship. We then tried to have a time of devotion, but they only knew scraps of three hymns. They struggled to repeat the Lord's Prayer and could not manage

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it. We asked someone to lead in prayer and were met with blank faces and silence, not a soul knowing how to frame the simplest petition. I tried to teach them to pray by saying, 'You cry to your ancestors around the *douany* (sacred enclosure), so why can you not cry to God for blessing and salvation and protection, using much the same petitions?' It was a new thought to them.

Sorrow and emotion stirred me to the depths as I gazed upon that pathetic crowd. I looked through the door and saw that sacred enclosure standing proudly and defiantly. Had it had a face I should have detected a sneer, and had it had a head I should have seen that head wagging in scorn. I looked again and saw in imagination that sacred enclosure razed to the ground and, instead of shrieks rending the air, I heard these very people singing the praises of One, Jesus. Instead of people lying wriggling, writhing, babbling in unconsciousness on the ground, I saw men and women sitting at the feet of Jesus clothed and in their right minds. That will come. It must come, for the Gospel of Christ cannot be preached in any village without mighty and beneficent changes taking place. I have seen this happen in a thousand villages in Madagascar.

I was sitting in my hut writing to my son and his wife—my last bit of work before 'turning in.' My lantern was alight and burning brightly. My stretcher was up and waiting for me. I was tired after an exhausting day. I heard a hubbub outside my hut, and, though not startled, I went to investigate. There stood quite a large company of young people, gabbling like geese. I asked them what I could do for them. To my extreme astonishment and joy they replied, 'We have come to pray!' I could scarcely believe my ears. They packed the hut. They were still the same irresponsible chatterboxes to whom life seemed to be one unbroken giggle. We tried those three hymns again with as little success as before, so I became singing-master with pupils, but without accomplishing much, the language being the difficulty. I bellowed that I might lead them through the intricacies of the simplest Sankies. I then read a passage from Luke and offered

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prayer. During prayer they had the grace to bow their heads and close their eyes, and when I said 'Amen' they too repeated it with a lively snap as though they endorsed my prayer and wished its fulfilment. Finally we struggled through the Lord's Prayer and dispersed; they to a hut in the village to spend a couple of hours singing their native songs accompanied by clapping and dancing, though whether heathen or not I could not detect.

Mahiagogo has thus begun the ascent; its young people approaching the missionary for prayer of their own accord, which was much better than my calling them together for that purpose, for, in such spontaneity there is life. Has the 'praying' at last caught the imagination of the folks at Mahiagogo? Of its young people—certainly. And therein there is hope, and thus, even in the few years that remain to me of missionary service in Madagascar, I now anticipate seeing a live Church at Mahiagogo, for the young people are quickly picking up the Marofotsy dialect, when fuller instruction can proceed.

Yesterday morning I had thought the 'cause' quite dead. Last night I was to discover that there was life in the 'corpse.' In my twenty-six years in Madagascar I have never known a Church to die or the people of the most benighted village not to awake eventually, for Christ is irresistible and invincible.

Kendall Gale Memorial Fund

A Memorial Fund, to perpetuate the memory of Kendall Gale and to forward the work which he founded in Northern Madagascar, has been opened at the offices of the London Missionary Society, Broadway, Westminster, London, S.W., to which contributions may be sent.

Many of our readers who have so often read with interest the articles by Kendall Gale which appeared in *WORLD DOMINION* will be interested to know that a booklet has been published by the London Missionary Society, entitled, *Kendall Gale—Pioneer Missionary in North Madagascar, 1908-1935*. It is written by the Rev. Harold A. Ridgwell, who was his colleague for over twenty years, as a tribute of affection and esteem. (Post paid 4½d.)