

Doctor To Africa

The Story of

STIRRETT OF THE SUDAN

By

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MISSIONARY IN NIGERIA, WEST AFRICA

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THE SUDAN INTERIOR MISSION Africa

CHAPTER FIVE

Quit You Like Men, Be Strong

SOME OF THE STORIES handed down from Dr. Stirrett's "youngsters," as one called himself, are hilarious experiences when looked at in retrospect, lightening the load of the burdensome task to a large degree.

In those days before the mission grew large, the new missionaries usually went through the Doctor's hands, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse, depending on their reception of the training, or occasionally, the rejection of it.

One such was Mr. F. X. Stanley, who first contacted the Doctor in his capacity of physician-advisor early in 1909. Sometimes the good Doctor made his lessons for the probationer similar to his medicine, that is to say, hard to swallow. One literal swallowing that he insisted on was the huge plate of guinea corn porridge for everyone at least once a day. This was liberally sprinkled with much palm oil and a little tinned milk. "There was no room for milk on those plates," reminisced Mr. Stanley. The Doctor would ask the Lord's blessing on the food, then as an appetizer would say: "Get that into you, brother, and you will be able to stand the country." Well, it was hard to get down, but it went, and Mr. Stanley is still in the country!

During this time that they were together, the Doctor took young Stanley to a clear point in the bush which gave way to the distant horizon, and pointing to the hills that were evident on the skyline he said:

"Brother, do you see those hills?"

"Brother, do you see those hills?"

"I do," replied the other. Perhaps palm oil and porridge were also good for the eyes.

"Well, you are to go there and start a work for the Lord at Kpada. It will be hard and difficult. Are you willing to go?"

"I'll go anywhere that I'm most needed," replied Stanley.

"Praise the Lord for that!" remarked the Doctor, "the Lord will give you souls down there in that hard place."

In a few days they set off, with Dr. Stirrett, Mr. F. Lang and Stanley in the party. The Doctor was on fire as usual, and at every stopping place he and his co-workers would hold short services. Mr. Lang acted as cook for that part of the trip, somewhat to the relief of Mr. Stanley, and although the food was all of native variety, it was good. And no palm oil!

After landing at Kpada and picking out a site for the future station, they parted company with Mr. Lang who was to return by another route. They had a farewell breakfast and each group started off, Stirrett and Stanley taking the shortest route home. It was a sorry parting as far as the young missionary was concerned. He soon discovered that the Doctor knew nothing about preparing food, and cared less. His idea of a good dinner was a cold yam and palm oil.

For breakfast it was porridge and palm oil. Mr. Stanley must have longed for the "**leeks and garlic and fish of Egypt**" as he tramped the hot, dusty miles, throat caked with dust, and the body soaked with sweat.

To add to this hunger torment, he found himself soon lagging behind the older man, but was too ashamed to confess it.

At long last they made their first stop, a welcome respite for the weary traveler. As he sat down he noticed a man coming along the path with a great calabash of ripe bananas on his head, and immediately began haggling for some of them. He finally ended up with his arms full of the luscious fruit. He was just going to enjoy himself when the Doctor spied him.

"Wait, brother," he remonstrated, "you are on the road, and must be careful." Being new to the country and under authority, Stanley had to perforce content himself with one banana, and saw the rest packed away in their load. While he slowly and carefully tasted every morsel of that banana, the Doctor gathered some people around him and had a service. When both had finished, they pushed on.

At least, Stanley had to push, he was so tired. The Doctor always seemed to walk on air. And those bananas followed on.

The final stop for camp was made at 2 p. m., with Stanley staggering with hunger and fatigue. As he gently lowered himself to the ground under the great spreading boabab tree, he began mentally thinking of all that he wanted to eat, thoughts in which bananas were uppermost. Not so the Doctor. They had settled for only a few minutes, and Stanley was beginning to feel the glow of tired ease, when the other's voice broke into his reverie.

"All right, brother," the rapid staccato voice jabbed him fully awake, "let's get into town and give

the people the Gospel first, then we can have some food." With honest reluctance Stanley dragged himself after the other, still longing for bananas, or even porridge and palm oil - anything that would fill the void that was clamoring more loudly than ever for nourishment. Surely the other had meat to eat that one knew not of.

At 6 p.m. they returned to their camp, and at last had a meal, a full satisfying dinner, prepared largely by the hungry Stanley. When they had finished he began wondering how long it would be before he could decently leave his companion and get to bed. As he was turning over in his mind the delights of his camp cot, he saw the doctor pick up his stick and lantern.

"All right, brother," those ominous words again. "Let's get into town and meet the people who have been on their farms all day," and off they went, with Stanley wondering what the shortest time was that a missionary had stayed on the field. It looked as though he would be setting a new record.

The next day was a repetition of the first, save that Stanley had more muscles, bones and joints than were in evidence before, and they were now adding their clamor to the rest. To add to his agony, they now lost their way, and long before Patigi was even in sight, pride had to go before a fall, and he called out: "Doctor, I can't go any farther," and he promptly lay down on the path.

The other turned in instant sympathy. "All right, brother," and the words he spoke sounded different this time, "you sit here and rest."

Thankfully the other stretched out on the grass. "You go on," he urged his companion, "and I'll catch upon you." Vain hope!

"No, no," replied the other. "I'll wait for you," and he continued his walking up and down in front of the prostrate man, whistling and singing. This was worse than the walking, and since he couldn't rest with the other moving around like that, the exhausted man got up and painfully started off. Again and again he fell back and had to stop, still with his companion waiting each time. They finally arrived at the crest of a hill, and as the sun began to drop, a great glowing orb in the west, they sighted Patigi station compound. As they approached, Stanley gave a cry of lustful joy as he saw the lady missionaries waiting at the front of the house, each with a glass of lime juice for the weary travelers. Stanley grabbed his with scarce a word of thanks, and it was down, barely touching his throat as it went. The Doctor looked at him.

"Be careful, brother," he admonished, "you are too hot for much of that," and with that he passed into his room. Stanley looked at him for a moment, then he, too, went into the house - and headed straight for a full pitcher of lime juice. He downed six glasses without a pause, but decided to refrain from telling his companion about it.

The next morning was Sunday, and the Doctor was up early as usual, bright and fresh as a spring breeze. Stanley was so stiff he could hardly move. At 7 a.m. the older man appeared at his bedroom door. "Well, Frank," he said, "are you ready for a trip to the village for the morning service?"

Stanley looked at him in amazement, then blurted out: "Doctor, I won't be able to go anywhere but to the table and bed," and sank back on his cot again. The Doctor gave his little chuckle, then

turned and disappeared in the direction of the village, "as his custom was."

In his eagerness to help his adopted people, he forgot himself entirely, and sometimes his co-workers would find it impossible to keep up with him. But he served his generation by the will of GOD, and black and white found him unstinting in that service.

~ end of chapter 5 ~
