

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 TWO

"Here Am I, Send Me"

IN THE SEARCH FOR INFORMATION regarding Dr. Stirrett, a very close friend and co-worker suggested: "If you can find a verbal can opener, you might get your desired information from the Doctor himself. Otherwise, it will have to wait and be revealed on the other side."

The Doctor, however, would not respond to any "verbal can opener" until he was asked how he was led to the mission field. Since he would be magnifying his Lord and not himself in answering such a question, he agreed to dole out some meager information, but one longs for the details that are omitted from his account.

"My first touch with the S.I.M. was while I was in Toronto in business as a pharmacist. Roffe was distributing religious literature, and one day while calling on him he handed me a small pamphlet called *'The Burden of the Sudan'* by R. V. Bingham. The reading of this led me to get in touch with the founder of the S.I.M., who made me so welcome to his home, and furnished me with so much information, that although I had previously been thinking of several fields of service, I then decided that the Sudan of Africa was the place where I should go.

"My intention was to go as a self-supporting missionary," he went on, "and carry on medical work, thus earning enough to keep me while in the service for the Lord in the Sudan. While in business as a druggist in Toronto, Canada, I had been taking medical lectures at the University of Toronto, hoping to obtain my degree there. Now that I was going to Africa I would need special medical training for the tropics. Mr. Bingham handed me a little announcement of the School of Tropical Medicine in Liverpool, and thither I determined to go. I had a little money invested in Toronto, which I did not want to touch lest I should need it when I arrived in Africa. Thus I was left with no funds for my journey, schooling in Liverpool, and the trip to Africa. This made me dependent upon the Lord for the supply of all my need."

In hearing the Doctor speak about his financial affairs in those early days, one notices his

reticence and characteristic habit of not letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing. Mr. Bingham has told more fully of what became of his income from the drug business, what happened to the two stores that he owned, plus the apartments above them, and where his stocks and bonds amounting to some thousands of dollars were left.

They were all brought, as the believers of old had done, and put into the common stock of the Mission to which he was linking his life and talents, and he did not hold back enough to pay the paltry few hundred dollars necessary to cross the Atlantic. Here is New Testament Christianity in action! The rent from one of his stores alone would have given him an income that would ease the straitened circumstances of his Liverpool days. But Andrew Stirrett had counted the cost, and it was not too much to give his all!

Mr. Bingham has also confessed to being overwhelmed at the wholehearted giving of the man, and for the first four years of his joining the Mission, the funds and deeds were held intact for him, in trust. But he had put his hand to the plow, and could not turn back. When he returned to Canada in April, 1906, for his first furlough, he settled back into his interrupted medical studies, and in less than a year had received his degree at the University of Toronto. At this time, too, he turned over the last threads of legal rights to his property and stocks to the Sudan Interior Mission.

As he once more set his face to the field in November, 1907, he had turned his back on all that most people hold dear, and gave himself without stint or measure to his *Hausa* people. From this time on he drew the same humble allowance as his fellow-missionaries. There can be no regret in this Barnabas-like act, and doubtless the Doctor had all but forgotten the deed. It is written down in the heavenly record, and profit a hundredfold will be his!

This willingness of each member of the Sudan Interior Mission to share and share alike, as the Lord supplies, is aptly called the "Pentecost Plan," and is the keystone of the true faith mission, the cement for its corporate fellowship.

From the newest recruit to the general director, all draw the same allowance. Missionaries are able to go to the field, whether or not they are supported by a church in the homeland. "I have a full allowance," says one in effect, "here, you take half, and there will be two of us to work for the Lord." And it has been one of the miracles of mission financing that this policy more often than not, has resulted in an almost full allowance for all. As the workers increased, so the supply increased. "**Prove me now**," said the Lord, and with this promise we will go ahead.

One incident in Stirrett's life after he felt the Lord's hand was upon him, is unforgettable. When he knew that he would be giving up his lucrative business, he circularized his whole neighborhood, informing the people of his intention, and adding that if at any time in the years when he had served them, they had received goods which had not been as represented, he would gladly refund the cost to them.

There is no record that anyone took up this modern Zacchaeus' offer, although one can imagine some "**fellows of the baser sort**" might have decided it was a good quick-profit scheme, and have brought their complaints tenfold. But one could also imagine the druggist, in the utter sincerity of his purpose making good any and all claims, and thus leave his place of business,

firm in the belief that he had done what he could to glorify the Lord JESUS, Whom he loved and Whom he served.

The Doctor continued his own short recital. "I finally hit upon a plan which would bring me the first part of my journey without cost. I had a friend in Toronto who was in the cattle export business, and to him I applied for passage, offering to work my way across to England.

He agreed to let me go, and set a day for me to be at the stockyards, ready for the journey to the boat and then to Liverpool."

No Pullman journey that. For three days the Doctor and the drovers lived on the top of the cattle cars, and the keen fall air and hard work must have been a severe trial to the student and pharmacist.

"Attending cattle was new work for me," he went on with sublime understatement, "and I did it so badly that the other men agreed I would not need to go down to the cattle pens in the hold of the ship, but could stay in the forecastle and attend to the food for them. This suited me much better, and I continued at that job until we arrived in Liverpool."

A better cook than a cowboy! One wonders how the men fared at sea, since the Doctor had no previous experience as a cook, and later on the mission field, never revealed any culinary ability, according to the stories told by co-workers of the early days!

The missionary had very little to say about that wild trip across the North Atlantic. Who could describe the conditions of cattle boats in those early years of the century, when little difference was made between the living conditions of the men and the animals? The violent rolling as the ship was buffeted by the autumnal storms; the constant overpowering stench of hemmed-in cattle; the incessant bawling at the unaccustomed roll and pitch of the freighter. And yet what a training for the medical missionary-to-be!

For the next half century he was to know the foul huts of pagan Africa, the acrid stench from woodsmoke and sweating bodies mingled in one nauseating fetid, malodor to test the strongest stomach, the unspeakable odors of ulcerated bodies - the whole miasma of evil living and loathsome smells of native villages. He was to see women give birth to their children in the field, on the path, or on the less clean mud floor of the small, round, grass-roofed huts, where they elicit as little concern, care and comment as the calving of the cows in the hold of the cattle boat. He was to see the same women and children bought, sold and beaten and killed with less concern from the men than was shown a seasick cow in the dank below-deck stall.

Perhaps this was a fitting preface to the life he was about to write with "sweat, toil and tears" into the history of missions in Africa, and the Lord in His wisdom led him into it. Liverpool dock, the customs shed, the immigration officials, and at last he was free in the streets, ready for the next stage of his venturing with GOD.

His first task was to get himself cleaned up and somewhat presentable before appearing at the Medical Department of the Liverpool University, to which was affiliated the School of Tropical Medicine. And he would need a thorough cleaning after the wild crossing on a cattle boat. He could do but little about the barnyard odors that had penetrated into his suitcase and clothing, but

at least he was clean again, and with jaunty step he set out for the University.

Before leaving Toronto he had no idea when the fall session might start, but when he appeared before the Secretary and asked when the first class would be, he received the answer: "Tomorrow morning at nine o'clock." Just in time to a day! And the Doctor adds: "How wonderfully did the Lord guide me!"

This last phrase of the Doctor's is characteristic of him. In July, 1947, we went to see him as he sat in front of his little, one-roomed house in Jos, Nigeria, engaged as ever in writing something that would help his beloved *Hausas* to understand the *Hausa* Bible, of which he had had a large share in translating.

He had already written a cross reference concordance, along with several other books, and was now preparing a chapter by chapter exposition of the Word. The hand that held the pen was now large-veined and mottled, an unhealthy color, but these small hands had ministered to two generations of missionaries and natives. One could look at them, now stiff-jointed and scarred, and think of the hands of JESUS that wrought with such infinite love and pity for the healing of the people, and which were finally pierced by those whom He had come to seek and to save.

"Good morning, Doctor," we greeted him, as he squinted over the top of his glasses at us. "How are you keeping?"

"Not keeping," he replied, calling us by name, "not keeping. Being kept. The Lord is keeping me," and his half chuckle curled over the end of his staccato sentence, as it had done since those first far-off days when he began to **"follow on to know the Lord."**

The 45 years already spent in Africa had taken their toll on the man before us. But it had left mellowed his mind and heart. At 82 years of age his frame was shrunken and dried looking; stooped shoulders took ill-afforded inches from an already small body; a jerky, stiff-kneed walk lessened his stature still more to somewhere over five feet. The full beard was gone, his head was bald and pink, but the eyes that squinted through the glasses still twinkled in their faded blueness, and his memory was as keen as that of many a younger man. **"Paul the aged"** came to mind as we turned away from him, wondering if we should see him when another year rolled around.

Mr. H. G. Farrant, of the Sudan United Mission, gives a delightful sketch of the Doctor: "He was an individualist. He gradually freed himself from secretarial duties and administrative work, and settled down to the jobs that he could do by himself. He was completely engrossed in his task of aiding the *Hausa* people in an understanding of the *Hausa* Bible, to the exclusion of all else. I frequently saw him sitting outside his house in Jos, bent over his writing. He never looked up. The sun beat down on a head entirely uncovered by hair. He felt no discomfort; knew no time.

Sometimes I would go over and speak to him; again I would pass by. But I never saw him without my thoughts being filled with this untiring 82-year-old man. It seemed to me that he would never die. He would only grow smaller and browner, until like a beech leaf in the autumn, one day he wouldn't be there."

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