

## **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 EIGHT**

#### **The Deaf Shall Hear the Words of the Book**

As A *HAUSA* SCHOLAR Dr. Stirrett had few equals. He spoke the language fluently, and had a thorough knowledge of its grammar, intonation and idiom. At the first inter-mission conference held at Lokoja in 1910 he was nominated to serve on the Standing Literature Committee, and later was one of the most faithful members of the Hausa Bible Translation Committee. When others tired, left the field or were otherwise sidetracked, he never flagged in his pursuit of seeing the whole vernacular Bible in the hands of the people.

When the translation first started, the members of the committee worked in their own spare time. This method proved far too slow for the energetic Doctor, who felt more and more the urgency of giving the people the Word in their own tongue. He laid aside a great deal of his other work and concentrated his efforts to that end. No sacrifice of time, sleep or pleasure was too much for him.

He burned the midnight oil very literally, in careful, prayerful translation. All versions were carefully noted; each chapter, each verse, each word carefully turned over, compared and the best translation given. These translation notes were turned over to Dr. W. R. Miller, of the C.M.S. in Nigeria, who had the final compilation of the text.

The result is a Word that is indeed God-breathed, and in the *Hausa* tongue speaks with the same potency, purity and power as our sublime Authorized Version.

In this task, too, one must be amazed at the Doctor's capacity for work. While giving himself wholly to this stint he did not neglect his people and his prayer. Often he sat up until the early hours of the morning to finish the translation of the chapter or a book, and still arose at 3:45 for his private devotions.

This was followed with a sunrise prayer meeting for native Christians, his medical work, market

service, then back to the translation again. He has himself confessed that the crowning joy of his life came in November, 1932, when the British and Foreign Bible Society sent the first shipment of *Hausa* Bibles, and he held one lovingly in his hands, seeing a new day dawning for the furtherance of the Gospel in Nigeria.

Shortly afterwards he sent a circular letter to all the missionaries, suggesting to them that they teach their cooks and houseboys to read. Then send these to their own people and take on other illiterates, until they too had mastered the reading of the Word of GOD themselves, then return to their home. Thus one by one the *Hausa* Bible would reach many.

He urged the opening of classes for religious instruction for all ages, where the people could be gathered together in a simple reading class, and those to whom school privileges were totally impossible would not be without the instruction and comfort of the Scriptures. Hundreds of C.R.I.'s have for many years thus been nibbling at the vast body of illiterates in Nigeria, their only textbook being the *Hausa* Bible or shorter portions of it.

The value of the *Hausa* Bible is not exhausted in the church life, nor in the addition of the C.R.I.'s. It also is the key Book taught in the mission elementary schools, established throughout Nigeria.

There has sometimes been criticism from the homeland regarding missions that establish schools, and seek to bring the enlightenment of education to a most backward people. These same people will pick the best of schools and colleges for the training of their own children, and if it is possible and spiritual wisdom obtains, they prefer those schools that are definitely Christian and evangelical. Yet they would deny others the most elementary education.

Such shallow thinking and lack of discernment is scarce worth the space of comment.

To bring the Gospel of redeeming grace, a Gospel of enlightenment and power, to start a mind working out the mystery of Divine truth as it is in CHRIST, to have that same mind groping for an understanding of the world and its peoples, then to keep it in mental darkness is unthinkable to those who work with them.

Then, too, there is the added danger of leaving the whole leveling of education in the hands of statetrained men, who in the Nigerian field are for the most part Mohammedan Hausa-speaking teachers. These men have an insidious influence on the minds of young Africa, and as they stand before their pupils as the epitome of the longed-for education, so their words and actions are accepted, and Mohammedan minors are in the making.

To balance this out-of-proportion picture, there are mission schools, led by godly, spiritual teachers, whose daily lesson begin with religious instruction, reading and teaching the *Hausa* Bible (Old Testament in the morning, New Testament in the afternoon); and include such subjects as the life of CHRIST and the life of Paul.

Education will come, indeed must come. Young Africa is clamoring for it. Where mission stations have not had schools, the young people have deserted to Roman Catholicism where education is made a major item. Or they attend state-owned schools, and lose their faith and embrace that of the false prophet.

In keeping first things first: the preaching of the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST is the primary concern. "**Yea, woe is me if I preach not the Gospel of Christ.**" Men and women and children are urged into the personal acceptance of CHRIST as Saviour. On such a foundation the work of opening minds and imparting instruction cannot but be a boon to the work of the church, while underlying every phase of mission activity is the solid rock of the Word of GOD.

As an aid in the understanding of the *Hausa* Bible Dr. Stirrett made a valuable contribution with the issuing of a cross reference book, linking up the different Scriptures, that the chain of truth might be followed link by link until the whole Word lies open before them. He also added a glossary of words and expressions used, since many of the lesser known phrases would have little meaning to the bush African, and the explanations offered of terms, necessarily used either from the English or in advanced Hausa, have done much to clear the pathway for the reader.

Eleven of his *Hausa* hymns have also been incorporated into the widely used *Hausa* Hymn Book, constituting part of the grand marching and devotional songs of the African church.

His footsteps in the sands of African life will not soon be obliterated, nor his memory soon forgotten.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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