

## **Doctor To Africa**

The Story of

STIRRETT OF THE SUDAN

By

DOUGLAS C. PERCY

MISSIONARY IN NIGERIA, WEST AFRICA

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THE SUDAN INTERIOR MISSION      Africa

### **CHAPTER SIX**

#### **Lord, The *Hausa* People**

"MAN OF PRAYER!" In every biography of missionaries of the Cross, these three words usually provide the touchstone of their successful service. Livingstone of Africa, Carey of India, Paton of New Hebrides, Taylor of China, Brainard of America: one need only take these representative men in a hurried review around the world of missionary endeavor, and their noteworthy biographical note is that of their prayer life, and utter consecration through prayer to their task. There could be no such biographies if that one salient fact were not vitally true of each of them, and of all who follow in their train.

The "**dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty**," and without prayer the powers of darkness would be overwhelming. It is almost useless to outline even briefly the terrible effects of Satanically-controlled countries on the lives, hearts and characters of those who go to them with the Gospel of redeeming grace; the news of Him who came as the light of the World, that such people might no longer walk in darkness.

Mrs. Jonathan Goforth, the praying wife of that prayer warrior of China, has aptly written:

"The greatest hardship of the missionary's life is not the strange food he eats, nor the house he lives in, nor the trying climate, nor the lack of modern conveniences - not even the homesickness and loneliness of separation from congenial friends and loved ones. The greatest hardship in the missionary's life, and the thing which drives many defeated from the field, is the combat against the powers of darkness. If the missionary is left without sufficient aid in prayer, he suffers. Some brave lives have even gone down into terrible defeat and outbroken sin because the powers arrayed against them have been overpowering and overwhelming."

The people of Africa have associations with demoniac powers that are not readily accepted by or credible to the occidental mind. Behind the face of Africa looms a dark, evil intelligence, the shadow of Satan, the great enemy of GOD and man.

The demon dance, demon and ancestral worship, demon sacrifices, demon possession; these are all the normal living for the benighted, backward peoples of the Sudan. Others more conversant with these vital and sometimes fatal factors in missionary work, have written of them. Read them, and then pray as never before that the assaults made on the stronghold of Satan will indeed prove to be **"mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."**

Dr. A. P. Stirrett was pre-eminently a man of prayer. In seeking information from his host of missionary friends, the most oft-noted remembrance of him is his deep, constant, sincere prayer life. Mr. W. Richmond of the S.U.M., remarked one day: "What a joy to hear Dr. Stirrett pray! His 'Dear Lord JESUS' seems to open Heaven, and one listens as though he were talking to his Master face to face."

As this was being written, word came that the Doctor had to take an enforced rest at the missionaries' haven in the S.U.M. Hospital at Vom, Nigeria. His heart was tired. A missionary who saw him wrote that he seemed to be little conscious of anyone except the presence of his Saviour. He kept speaking to the Lord in a most touching and intimate manner. But a step, and what a greeting for him! **"Well done, thou good and faithful servant,"** was undoubtedly his well deserved praise.

One who has stayed in the same house with Dr. Stirrett will nod an understanding head at the reminiscence:

It is early in the morning, and the sharp brrr of a nearby alarm clock, quickly muffled, echoes through the house. A sleepy-eyed missionary pulls his flashlight from under the pillow, raises the mosquito net, and points the light at his own clock, to see what unearthly hour someone would want to get up. It is 3:45. As he listens, he soon hears a subdued reverent voice in prayer. It is Stirrett, keeping his morning watch. Long ago he told someone that he was determined not to let the sun rise before he was on his knees in prayer, to receive his orders for the day, and not to let it set before carrying them out.

**One recalls using the term "unearthly hour." It is a most apt expression, for it is a heavenly hour, and he spent it thus on his knees before God.**

At the first streak of dawn the now wakeful missionary hears the creaking of a galvanized iron covered door, and the sound of heavy boots disturbing the gravel in a quick trit-trot up the compound path, where the noise is soon lost in the distance. The Doctor is taking his sunrise exercise. Perhaps half an hour later comes the trit-trot down the hill, across the compound (whoever saw the Doctor merely walking?) and his door closes. Then once again is heard the voice of supplication. He thus cared for both soul and body that both might be a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto GOD, which he counted as a reasonable service.

One need not hear his prayer, for those who knew him knew also the burden of his heart: "Lord, the millions of Hausa-speaking Moslems and pagans. Lord, send their wretched Koran and their false ancestral worship to the moles and the bats, and cause Thy Holy Word, the *Hausa Bible*, to have free course in their hearts and lives."

It is holy ground, for here is the one consuming passion of more than 80 years of rich, fruitful living. Here is the travail of soul with which the Lord is indeed satisfied, and which will one day bring to spiritual birth a great host of *Hausa* people, whom no man can number.

Their spiritual father will be *Bature Mai Magani*, and they will step out of the places prepared for them, and thank him for the selfless effort and the unspared life that he dedicated to them.

"Lord, the *Hausa* people!"

Read what some have to say about this mighty atom of a man, who knew where the source of all power lay, with GOD Himself.

Mr. F. Merryweather, another of Dr. Stirrett's "youngsters," told of a long, hot trek with the Doctor, as usual, setting the pace. Shortly after the sun touched its zenith, it was voted that the party stop for lunch and rest until the noontide heat was passed. When all was ready they looked around for the Doctor, but couldn't find him. Finally Mr. Merryweather spied a figure among some trees, and walked over, hoping to get some news of the white man. As he approached nearer he saw it was the Doctor himself, swathed in a blanket, hiding his head and face to keep off the swarms of flies and mosquitoes. He was praying. He had meat to eat, and it was replenishing his soul.

Early one morning at Kufana, Mr. T. Allan stepped outside the small mud hut where he had spent the night, and happened to look toward the end of the mission compound where he had a small garden. His eye caught something in the grass, white and glistening like dew on a quartz rock. His curiosity was aroused and he went towards the object, but as he drew near he saw that it was Stirrett, a light colored blanket damp with dew was thrown over his shoulders as he knelt on the moist ground, praying. He withdrew, with the words spoken of Paul crossing his mind: "**Behold, he prayeth.**"

R. B. Oliver, who lived some years with the Doctor, adds his testimony regarding this man who knew how to pray: "Dr. Stirrett was a man of prayer. Eternity alone will reveal the results of the time spent on his knees. Morning by morning the light was on in his room at 3:45, and one knew that he was commencing his morning watch. If anyone besides the Apostle Paul could have the words '**this one thing I do**' applied to him, it is surely Dr. Stirrett and his praying."

Apart from his daily devotional life, he set aside definite days each week when he fasted and prayed. One can attribute his own unique ministry, and the growth of the work of the Sudan Interior Mission to its present Africa-wide status, to the fact that he prayed, and led his coworkers to pray. He once said to Mr. S. Cassels: "Son, my ear is to the ground, but my eye is on GOD. I can hear the walls of Mohammedanism crumbling."

"Lord, the *Hausa* people!"

He prayed mainly for the *Hausas*, but not exclusively. When the Jos headquarters grew and the staff increased, it was the Doctor who led the prayer meetings. His prayer list was no small bound book. Rather he used long strips of paper, obtained from the cuttings of the Niger Press, and these he kept in his pocket, bound only with a rubber band. That would stretch with the

prayer requests! One could see the little bundle getting bulkier and longer, as he added his own special requests to be remembered, and those laid before the group for prayer. As he grew older, so he became more prayerful for his own work, and those problems and needs of the ever increasing mission family.

These acts of prayer did not diminish with the increase of years, for the very good reason that time had a difficult task in keeping up with him. As he passed his three score years and ten, and stepped into the octogenarian period, his zeal and energy did not diminish a bit. He still took his morning run, rising early for that and his prayer time. He still refused to ride in a car down to the Jos market service, about one mile from the compound. One could almost set a clock by seeing the Doctor leave his room early in the morning, or again in the late afternoon as he headed marketwards, with his shuffling, stiff-kneed trot-faithful, prayerful, zealous. One searches a thesaurus in vain, seeking adjectives that would tellingly describe the impact of the Doctor's life on the Sudan.

To win an African to the Lord one must have the gift of infinite patience and the time to pray. The native is one who has never known an inhibition, who has been permitted to indulge in all the desires of the flesh with neither shame nor stigma.

Behind him lie centuries of darkness, demon worship, fear, superstition, or the false teachings of Mohammed. Not in a day are these easily sloughed off. Rarely, if ever, does one repent and become a new creature in CHRIST on his first hearing the Gospel message. There have been a few, but it is usually necessary to deal slowly and carefully with the darkened soul, teaching and exhorting until the light of the glorious Gospel dawns upon it, the travail of the Spirit brings to birth a new creature, and the Word of GOD begins its work of fruit bearing in the heart.

How often has a night been passed in weeping and prayer for some, who after tasting of the good things of GOD have fallen away into deeper darkness. than before Polygamy, adultery, the love of money, "**the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life,**" all these have broken into the sacred temple of the believing heart and wrought untold havoc. And in the midst of it all, there are GOD's faithful children who continue to teach, preach and pray, and though "**going forth weeping, bearing precious seed, they shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.**"

Through these praying men and women a glorious work is being done. One looks with joy at a clean church, a faithful people, spiritual leaders in the once dark lands of Africa, the "open sore of the world." He who came for the healing of the nations is working through the prayers and efforts of these Christians that spiritual soundness of health may be brought to a sin-sick people.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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