

## **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 ONE**

#### **"There Will Your Heart Be Also"**

THE LIVERPOOL SMOG had closed in for the night, and the feeble light of the street lamps only accentuated the ghostly appearance of those who were abroad.

Footsteps would sound eerily from a distance, but it wasn't until the walker approached closely enough to be touched with the outstretched arm that his form materialized. The fog was a clinging, damp, swirling curtain of mist, with its large percentage of soot leaving its telltale mark on anything that was off-black.

Beneath one of the all too feebly flickering lights, in one of the poorer sections of that great port, stood a small, spare figure, who from the rear looked much like a schoolboy out a little too late at night. He continually shrugged himself deeper into his light topcoat, as though to shake off the damp air, and to generate a little warmth against its chill. A closer look would have belied the schoolboy supposition, for the man had a full beard, crisply brown, not yet touched with gray. In his hands he held a small black book, and was eagerly scanning its pages, holding it that the light might be to the best advantage on its fine printing.

Footsteps beat a quick tattoo as some pedestrian hurried to his fireside, and they approached nearer and nearer to the still form of the street light reader. A man came dim-shaped out of the fog, stopped into the weak ore of light, and in passing glanced at the half shrouded face. He paused, went on, then stopped and turned back, stepping again into the full light. With a slight start the small man looked up, revealing a not unhandsome face, but one so small boned and fine that it might have seemed girlish were it not for the full beard.

"Stirrett!" exclaimed the newcomer, "what in the world are you doing here? Come along to my house, man. It's just a step. I'm on my way home from the Rescue Mission," he added, "and I need a good supper. Come along," and so saying he put his arm through that of the reader and pulled him away from the post.

The man addressed held back, irresolute for a moment, then slipping his book into his pocket, he allowed the other to lead him into the fog and along the street.

"I was just reading a letter from a very dear Friend of mine," he explained, tapping his pocket, and as he spoke he chuckled into his beard.

"That was no letter," his friend chided him.

"A precious letter to me," insisted the smaller man; "that was my New Testament," and he again laid his hand on his pocket as though to assure himself that his treasure was safe.

The other smiled in understanding sympathy, and as they walked on, leaving the slums behind, he questioned the man more closely as to where he was staying.

"To be very frank," replied the one addressed as Stirrett, "you are taking me away from my room. Not that it matters," and that quaint chuckle rolled out again, "since tonight is my night for exercise."

His companion stopped and turned to look at the figure that barely reached his shoulder, even with the high-crowned hat he was wearing. And as he looked at him, there flashed through his mind all that he had heard of this man in the past few days. Being a member of the Liverpool Council of the Sudan Interior Mission (a task that didn't take up too much time in that early year of 1901), he had read the letter from Canada regarding Stirrett offering himself for service in the Sudan, and of the Mission board's indecision regarding him.

Now the fellow had turned up in Liverpool, unheralded and unknown until he had presented himself to the council a few days previous. He looked now as though a good wind would blow him away, to say nothing of a life in the tropics. Still, there was something of a bed rock quality in that unobtrusive manner of his, something of quiet determination. But why did he room in the slums? And why read under a street lamp at this hour of the night? Still, that Toronto letter. What was it all about now? and the council member ran over the details in his mind: Stirrett was a pharmacist whose qualifications were good, but whose age was against him. One doesn't go to the "white man's grave" at 37 years of age. Or if he does, he soon fills one, by all reports. However, he had to be given every opportunity. After all, "**with God all things are possible.**" "Where were you taking your exercise?" he interrupted his chain of thought to ask Stirrett. "You looked as though you were holding up the lamp post. And, anyway, this is a night for a warm fire, not a cold fog."

"Well," said Stirrett with some hesitancy, "I found a young fellow cold and shivering in a doorway near my room, and - well, he has my bed for the night," and the good man looked almost ashamed at his confession.

"No bed, eh? Well, come along with me anyway. I can put you up for the night. If you are set on going to Africa, you might as well start healthy," and with a playful prod he urged Stirrett to his home for the night.

A bed to a cold, homeless stranger? A room in the slums of Liverpool that he might minister to the people of greatest need? Mrs. A. W. Banfield enlarged on the story of this self-abnegation of the Doctor. Going to the field herself in 1905, she told how the Liverpool council found that the young Canadian medical man alternated his bed and a park bench with the homeless wanderer whom he sought to win to CHRIST.

He supplied the man with bread and jam, meanwhile giving him the Bread of Life. The same story continued on the mission field. When the great bunches of bananas arrived at their mission station, it was the little Doctor who took the overripe, nearly bad ones that no one else could eat. His usual comment was, "Mustn't waste them. Mustn't waste them."

These were minor links in the great chain of faith and good works that was Andrew Park Stirrett's life, the man who was soon to be known as the *Bature Mai Magani* of the Central Sudan.

Little is known of his early years before we find him in Liverpool on his way to carry the Gospel to the vast Sudan; and it has been almost impossible to get any information from him regarding them. Born on September 30th, 1865, in Camlachie, Ontario, Canada, youngest son of a strong Presbyterian home and sturdy Scotch parents (from Strathaven, Scotland), is the sum total of the biographical sketch he was willing to give, only adding that he had been converted in early boyhood.

His own devotion to the work of the Lord had called him to the severing of most, if not all his home ties, so that to him there was no need of going "home" on furlough. He was at home in Africa. He did make an occasional trip to Canada for the sake of his health, but "home" was where his heart was, amongst the millions of Hausa-speaking people of Nigeria and the Sudan.

One can see by the dates of his arrival on and departure from the field, the increasingly long periods given to his adopted people, and the decreasingly shorter periods to the land of his birth. During the 46 years between 1902 and 1948 Dr. Stirrett spent 41 years on the field and only five at home. His longest periods of service were from 1921 to 1929, and again from 1936 until his death in 1948.

Stirrett died in harness, as he would have wished, and was borne to the "white man's grave" on the stalwart shoulders of his beloved people and fellow missionaries.

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