

**SEVEN YEARS IN SIERRA LEONE; THE
STORY OF THE WORK OF WILLIAM A.B.
JOHNSON, MISSIONARY
OF THE CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY,
FROM 1816 TO 1823 IN REGENT'S TOWN,
SIERRA LEONE, AFRICA**

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ARTHUR T. PIERSON

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Seven Years in Sierra Leone

The Story of the Work of

William A. B. Johnson

Missionary of the Church Missionary Society
from 1816 to 1823 in Regent's Town
Sierra Leone, Africa

By the

Rev. Arthur T. Pierson, D.D.

Author of

"The Crisis of Missions," "The New Acts of the Apostles"
"The One Gospel," etc. etc.

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TO
MY DEARLY BELOVED FRIEND
THE REV. DONALD FRASER
OF LIVINGSTONIA, SOUTH AFRICA

WHO, WHILE THESE CHAPTERS WERE IN PREPARATION, WAS
ON HIS WAY TO THE DARK CONTINENT; AND TO THE
VAST BAND OF STUDENT VOLUNTEERS, WHOM HE
REPRESENTS, AND WHO ARE LEADING ON THE
MODERN CRUSADE OF MISSIONS FOR "THE
EVANGELIZATION OF THE WORLD IN
OUR GENERATION," THIS RECORD
OF A PIONEER VOLUNTEER AND
HIS GREAT WORK FOR GOD
IS MOST LOVINGLY
INSCRIBED

PREFACE

THERE is an old story of a reed-lute which, in its original rude, crude, native simplicity, gave forth notes of unusual sweetness. Some one, thinking to improve it, varnished and gilded it. It henceforth lost its peculiar power. It shone with the glitter of gold, but it no longer breathed the sweet purity of melody as before.

To preserve the simplicity of a little child, amid the maturity of manhood and the dignity of increasing responsibility and enlarging usefulness, is of foremost consequence, but it represents a gem as rare as it is radiant. It has been said that, while human development is from the cradle onward, the highest Christ-life is from the cross backward to the cradle: it is the man becoming a babe and, in a good sense, remaining a babe, never losing

the childlike spirit; for it is the little ones that get the caresses, held closest to the bosom of the Father, cherished and nurtured in fondling arms.

Some twenty or more years ago I came across an anonymous memoir of William A. B. Johnson, now out of print. It was a stray copy, and in more than one sense it was a rare book. It impressed me then as, on the whole, the most remarkable story of seven years of missionary labor that I had ever read; and now, after a score of years of research into missionary history and biography, that judgment is unhesitatingly reaffirmed.

Such a narrative should not remain out of reach of those who delight in the study of missions. It is one of God's witnesses, and its voice ought not to be silent. Hence this humble effort to give Mr. Johnson's work and witness a wider hearing by reproducing the essential features of the narrative.

The original memoir appears to have been hastily prepared, and consists almost wholly of extracts from the missionary's diary. While there is, therefore, in it the continuity of time

and chronological order, there is no logical arrangement of matter, no grouping of events in classes, and hence no effective contrasts such as show at a glance the wonderful results wrought by the gospel. The aim in this recasting of the narrative has been so to rearrange the matter contained in the memoir as to enable the reader to see as in a panorama the progress of the gospel triumphs in the most disheartening and desperate field which, eighty years ago, defied missionary conquest.

Much that the original journal of Johnson and the former memoir contained is here omitted, as either lacking relevancy or involving repetition. The story must speak for itself, but it would be incredible were not the facts too abundantly attested to allow of doubt. Nothing is more noticeable than the simple, humble, self-distrustful spirit which Mr. Johnson preserved to the end of his life. Perhaps this was the grand secret of his success. The lute never took on the fatal varnish and gilding of self-sufficiency and self-glory. He never ceased to be a little child; he waited to be led, to be taught, to be upheld, uplifted,

upborne; even success never elated or inflated him; and the consequence was that God could be glorified in him as in few others, for he never himself got in the way of the cross. Always behind it, never before it, the crucified Christ was exalted, and proved His words that if He be lifted up He will draw all men unto Him.

As J. Hudson Taylor well says, while some are anxious to be "successors of the apostles," it may be well to seek to be successors of the Samaritan woman, who, while they went for food, but brought back no inquiring soul, forgot herself, her wants, and her water-pot, in her zeal to lead other sinners to her Saviour's feet.

The story of these seven years in Sierra Leone illustrates the great truth that to be grandly useful we need only to surrender ourselves wholly to God's hands. Like Mrs. Stowe in the writing of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Johnson had no thought of doing any great thing. He did not wish to be famous. A door opened before him, and he entered it. A work was before him, and he undertook it