

The Life Story of Madam Christiansa Kwaley Sawyer.

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I was born of pagan parents in an insignificant village near Accra. I was full of fun in my early childhood. On one occasion I was playing with my friends in the open we saw a strange person with a load on his back. Drawing near to us the man sat down, opened his bag, and pulling out a beautiful linen frock, he presented it to me. This man next pulled out a little book and started to read aloud. My friends and I could not make out a word of what he was reading; but we, somehow, managed to catch up a phrase: 'Olonfemi' which in the Yoruba language might be translated "God's love or "God is love."

After he had finished reading he handed the book to me as a second gift. At this stage my friends ran away home and left me alone with the strange man. I felt so paralysed that I could not run and follow them.

A short while after my friends had left, the news that I had been kidnapped spread like wild fire through the village; and out came a band of angry looking men, with my own mother in their midst, shouting and rushing furiously to beat the man. But for the timely intervention of my elder brother, Moses Noite Kofi the poor man would have been beaten to death.

After this man had gone it was suggested by some that the whole incident was an act of a fetish and the only solution for it would be to consult the oracles. But here too my brother interposed and objected strongly to the suggested scheme. I must make mention here that, this brother of mine afterwards became a baptised Christian and a leading member of the Presbyterian Church, then known as the Basel Mission.

A little while after this incident the monotony of our village life was broken by the sound of a hand-bell. We all, old and young rushed to the scene, and there we found a European called Schrenk and an African catechist Daniel Ablorh with their carriers standing in the open and 'making a noise' with open books in front of them. I immediately rushed home for the book presented to me and putting on my white frock I went and took my stand by the European and joined in making the noise too.

My action aroused the indignation of the on-lookers who began to shower abuses of all kinds on me, thus bidding me come out from amongst the noise makers. The European missionary then inquired from them the reason, and the reply which was given was that I was looking too dirty and would soil his body with dirt. He however insisted that I should stand firm by him.

After the close of the meeting Rev. Mr. Schrenk inquired from me whether I would like to go to school, to which I replied in the affirmative. They then left for their station - Abokobi.

On a second occasion the same people as before came to my village and great was my joy when I received from the European as a gift a doll and a ball. That gift came to me as a pleasant surprise, and served as a means in drawing me closer to these



periodical visitors. It was during this visit that Rev. Schrenk took hold of my hand and turning to Mr. Ablorh he addressed him thus: "Mr. Ablorh this is thy spiritual child, take good care of her."

On the third occasion a visit was paid by a number of school girls and their teachers on a preaching excursion. As I kept on hearing and looking at them I was attracted by one of the girls, and walking straight to her I embraced her and told her that I would like to go with her to Abokobi. The name of this girl was Miss Sarah Hesse. But my desire to follow these visitors to Abokobi was frustrated by my relatives who locked me up in a room at the time the excursionists were about to leave. But this sort of thing was not to continue indefinitely, God himself was quietly working out and shaping His plans on my behalf and sooner or later I was going to find my wishes fulfilled by His grace.



Part ii.

Some time after the visit of the girls from Abokobi, the news was flashed that Catechist Daniel Ablorh, my spiritual father, was coming to start work in my village. My joy knew no bounds and when at last he arrived I indeed found in him a real spiritual father. He lost no time in sending me over to Abokobi where I met my old friend Sarah Hesse and several others who did everything to make pleasant and comfortable my stay in Abokobi.

After some years of successful work in Abokobi I left finally to stay at home with my parents as a confirmed and avowed Christian.

But alas, the sudden death of my mother was to be the beginning of graver trials and troubles. My mother died at a time when I was expecting my first child. What then was going to happen to me? Nobody could tell that except the spirit of my departed mother. Accordingly my relatives went to consult a medium who brought the following message home to me from my dead mother that unless I submitted myself to certain pagan rites I would never live to see the arrival of my baby, and would bring a curse on my family. This request, despite my refusal as a Christian, was constantly pressed upon me until at last I reluctantly yielded.

The great day arrived, drums were beating, and fetish priests began to take their seats in order to watch a young expectant mother become possessed of a spirit. For hours I was to stand leaves which were said to have the power of ~~containing~~ water and some act immediately. Now and again I would receive from the priests the following questions:-

"Do you not yet feel yourself possessed? Do you not experience some sensational feeling in the head? To which I replied "No, not the slightest feeling."

An elder sister came to whisper into my ears: "You just move your head here and there to give the impression of having been possessed. That would set you and the others free." "But how could I pretend to do a thing like that", I said to her. She then left me with chagrin and never returned.

It was now approaching noon-day, and there was not the slightest sign of a change excepting for the fact that both my tormentors and myself were now beginning to feel tired and hungry.

Just imagine, a young expectant mother being made to stand for something over 4 to 5 hours without any food or water. Indeed such is the power of darkness over those living without the Great Light of the world. And so it continued until at last finding himself absolutely frustrated, the leading fetish priest held me by the neck from behind and dragged me to the outskirts of the village where he gave me a sharp push which made me fall on my face. All of them rushed to the scene to join the priest in howling curses and abuses on me. I was then left alone to await my doom.

After the crowd had dispersed I quietly rose up to go home. Everyone at home became annoyed with me and nobody would come near me. At night my own sisters would not permit my sharing with them

Part 11 (contd).

the same sleeping accommodation, and no house would welcome me under its roofs.

That night the birth of my child was unattended by the willing and tender help of my women relatives: The fear of the fetish so bound them that even the midwife refused assistance. It was only after the child was born that nature overuled the fear of their hearts and they rejoiced with me that a man child had been born.



Part iii.

The Fire Incident.

I was married to one Jacobson Williamson Sawyer, a Sierra Leone merchant and settler in Accra.

One night as we were both in bed a fire suddenly broke out in the house. My husband who was then fast asleep gave no heed to my alarm. A number of on-lookers were standing by, but none of them would lend a helping hand. Some were jeering at me as I kept on moving to and fro to fetch water from the nearby pond to quench the raging flames. In my moment of distress I met three men girded with simple loin cloths walking towards me. These men struck me as being like fisher-folk. My appeal to these men for help was met with ready response, and to my utter amazement I found them on top of the roof very busy cutting and removing the flaming thatch from the top of the roof to enable me to pour water on the flames. Thus in a very short time was averted what would have been a really serious calamity.

I then turned round to thank these men who helped me in my trouble but they were nowhere to be found. Every effort that has since been made by me to trace these men was met with failure. No, they had gone without stopping to receive even a word of thanks from a young wife.

How these men got up on the roof without a ladder - for we had none in the house, and how they whom I met with not even a stick in their hands should find cutlasses to cut down the thatch, are facts which still baffle my thoughts. I pause to ask: Was that anything short of a miracle? - "Some say it thundered, others say an angel hath spoken to him." I firmly believe the three men to be God's own 'wingless' angels sent in the nick of time to the rescue. "Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not."

This ends the autobiography of Madam Christiana Kwaley Sawyer a devoted servant of God who passed away peacefully on Wednesday, March 8th, 1950, at Christiana House, Accra, at the age of 91.

She was buried on Thursday, 9th March at Christiansborg cemetery.



Part iv.

Christiana Kwaley Sawyer as we knew her.

("Precious in the sight of the Lord is the Death of His Saints").

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By the death of Christiana Kwaley Sawyer the Accra Congregation in particular, and the Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast in general, have lost a most devoted and loving Church leader whose place it will be difficult to fill.

She was a religious enthusiast, a keen listener and Sermon critic endowed with a sound knowledge of the Scriptures.

Collecting money for the cause of Christ appealed to her greatly; and despite her age and broken health she would go from house to house to collect the annual offerings for the Church's Extension Fund. She held an unbroken record for topping the list of contributions to the church.

She had a remarkable gift for organization and she was mainly responsible for the present banding together of our Presbyterian Women's Classes with uniforms and badges to distinguish them; and her love of the hymns of the Church made it a natural habit of the Women's Classes sing joyously when together.

On Sundays she would conduct an early morning prayer service with her section of the Women's Class and prepare them for sharing in the Bible readings at the morning and evening services.

She was a strict disciplinarian who believed in decisive and courageous action. But like many others she at times becomes rather intolerant and apt to forget that the race is not always for the swiftest? Nevertheless one of her most striking qualities was her readiness to ask for forgiveness whenever she was at fault with anyone including even little children. Indeed in her faith and simplicity she was very like a child to the like of whom Christ promised the gift of the kingdom of God.

In the latter months when her physical life was ebbing low her spirit was the more alive and quick to the Presence of the Eternal. It was true indeed that Prayer was the air which she breathed. She might be seemingly lifeless and unconscious of the world around but the voice of prayer never ceased to rouse a response in the depths of her spirit. Anyone who had the privilege of sharing that deep and sweet communion of her spirit with the Father came away realising that she had been in touch with Eternity and that she was no longer a citizen of this world but was already being received into the Heavenly City, into the Peace and Strength of the Father's Presence.