

From 1916-1941, Abbie Swales served five terms in Sierra Leone at the girls' school at Bonthe. Throughout those years, she knew a Sierra Leonean named Henry Becker. Henry was one of their brightest, most spiritual young ministers.

Henry became a highly successful minister and evangelist in the Gbangbaia area. But he became drawn to opportunities to make money, lots of it. He left the mission staff and became a successful trader...but drifted far, far from the Lord.

Henry continued attending church services, which meant continual contact with missionaries. They all worked on Henry, trying to bring him back to the Lord. But he was thoroughly entangled in business matters and polygamy, and though he felt God tugging on his heart, he didn't know how to extricate himself.

One Sunday at the end of the service, Henry stood and told the young men in the congregation, "You know what I once was and what I am now. I beseech you, do not follow in my footsteps. Be true to the Lord."

This struggle continued for years.

As Abbie Swales began her final term in 1937, she developed a special burden for Henry Becker. She contended, "He once knew the Lord. He *has* to return to Him." For the next three years she prayed for him and pleaded with him, but Henry remained unmoved.

Finally, the time came for Abbie to leave Sierra Leone for what would be the last time. While waiting for a ship, she spent three weeks living with missionaries Clarence and Erma Carlson in Gbangbaia. Every day, she walked down the hill to Henry's house to urge him to return to the Lord. And every day, the Carlsons watched her come back in tears, her mission a failure.

The day Abbie left for Freetown, she told Carlson, "I am committing Henry Becker to you now. Don't forget about him. He *must* come back to the Lord."

Some days later, Carlson visited Henry Becker. He found Henry sitting at a table holding a letter – a letter which Abbie had written in Freetown before boarding her ship. Henry had just received it that morning.

After reading the letter, Henry said to himself, "What can you do with a woman who won't give up on you?" He then knelt at the table and surrendered himself to the Lord. When Carlson showed up shortly thereafter, he told him what had happened and said, "I have committed what is left of my life to Him."

Within six months, Henry Becker was back in the ministry, and remained there for the rest of his life. Carlson wrote, "I never heard him preach an evangelistic sermon that did not bring a response. Ever since his return to the Lord, he has been making up for lost time."

Becker served as a minister into his 80s, and became known as "the grand old man of the conference." He passed away in his 90s. George Fleming described him as "a grand Christian gentleman, beloved by all."

Abbie Swales passed away on Christmas Day, 1965.

