

# National Parent-Teacher

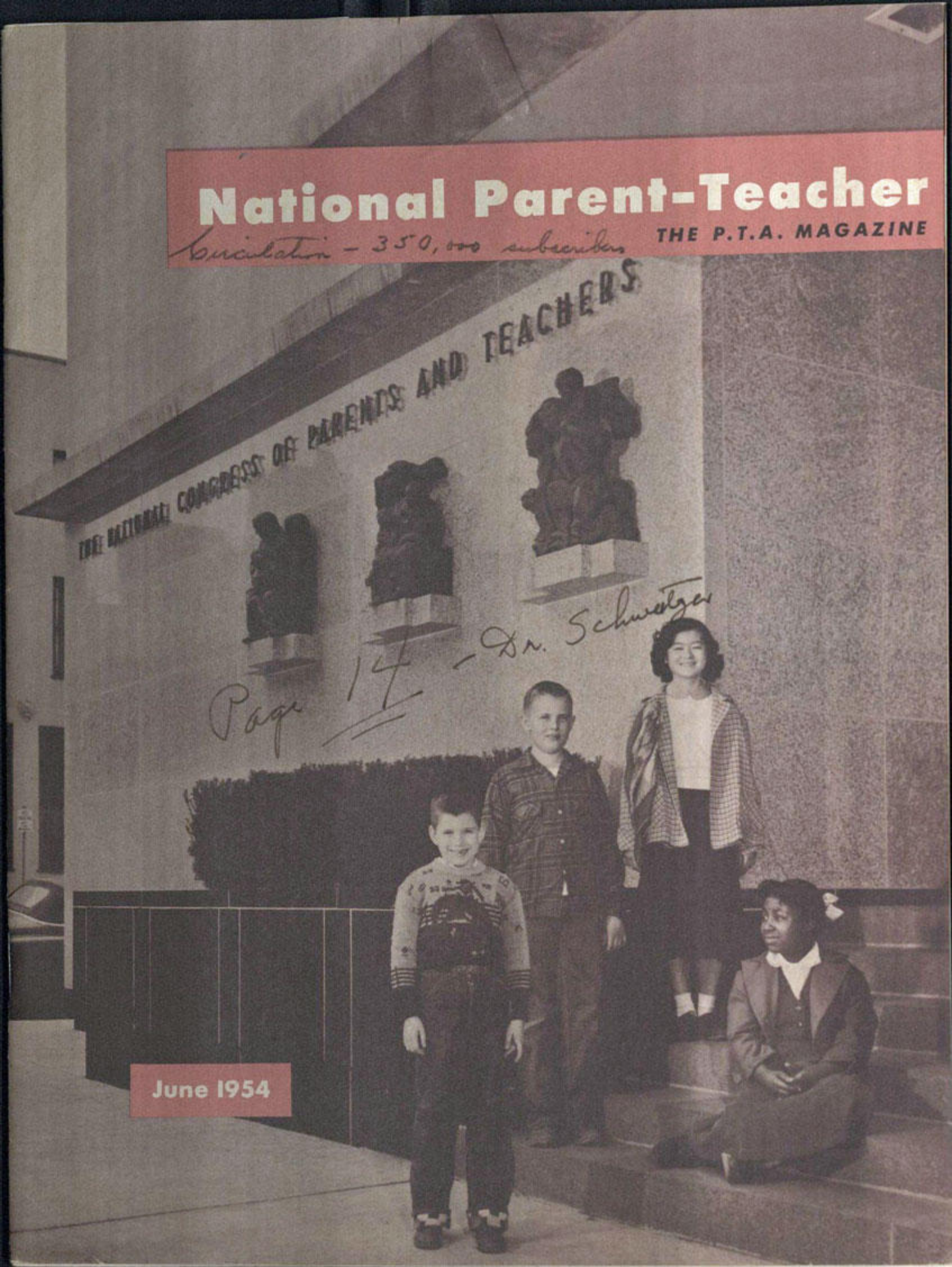
THE P.T.A. MAGAZINE

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THE NATIONAL CONGRESS OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS

*Page 14 - Dr. Schweitzer*

June 1954





# Objects of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers



To promote the welfare of children and youth in home, school, church, and community.

To raise the standards of home life.

To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth.

To bring into closer relation the home and the school, that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the training of the child.

To develop between educators and the general public such united efforts as will secure for every child the highest advantages in physical, mental, social, and spiritual education.

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## 9-54

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**8,822,694**

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# National Parent-Teacher

THE P.T.A. MAGAZINE

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Charl Ormond Williams

# A Pilgrimage

Under this photograph is written in French: "To Miss Charl Ormond Williams, in memory of the days spent at Lambaréné in May 1953. With my good wishes, Albert Schweitzer." He added a caption: "Canoeing on the Ogowe."



*À Miss Charl Ormond Williams en souvenir des jours passés à Lambaréné en mai 1953. Avec mes vœux, Albert Schweitzer.*  
Sur l'Ogowe en canoë

FOR my first journey around the world I set up some definite objectives that I was fortunately able to achieve, though not without considerable difficulty. On previous trips to Europe I had tramped the art galleries, museums, palaces, government buildings, and public parks. This time I decided to see people—well known and unknown, rich and poor, without regard to creed or color. I wanted to visit young countries that were flapping their wings, trying to get out of the cage of colonialism; and old countries long held under the yoke of tyranny, now struggling to learn the ways of democracy.

At the top of the list of people whom I wished to see was Albert Schweitzer, but it was not easy to locate him before my departure. After telephoning several ministers in Washington, without avail, I turned to the French Embassy, where I had the good luck to find his nephew, Peter Paul Schweitzer. I asked this gracious and charming young man if he would write a letter about me to his uncle. He must have written a very good one, for his uncle gave me a warm welcome.

I too wrote Dr. Schweitzer and sent him my Cairo address. When I arrived there I found a letter from him telling me to "come at any date that suits you and stay as long as you wish."

I, like the rest of the world, knew about his life and work at Lambaréné. A host of books and articles has appeared during the past year extolling the superb achievements that won him the Nobel peace prize. The writers of these articles have characterized Dr. Schweitzer as the "man of our century," "the world's finest man," "a merry, witty, and vigorous saint," and "a seven-story man." And after I had known him a week at his hospital and later read several more of his books, I could fully appreciate these encomiums.

## By Launch, Taxi, Plane, Canoe

I landed in Leopoldville in the Belgian Congo by plane in the hottest weather I have ever known, and there I sweltered for five days until May 5, 1953. Before I took off for Lambaréné, I got up at five o'clock and went down to the wharf to see the gorgeous sunrise on the Stanley Pool, a wide stretch of water that looks like a lake. Then I boarded a small launch for Brazzaville, the capital of French Equatorial Africa, thirty minutes across the river.

Only one other person was in the section reserved for Europeans, and he sat facing me. Since little English is spoken in the Congo and French Equatorial Africa I was somewhat concerned about getting

a taxi to the airport. I studied the face of this man, decided he was intelligent and very likely able to speak English, so I spoke to him. He was a native Catholic priest at a mission school about forty miles away. I do not know what I would have done without his help. He got a taxi for me, rode part of the way, then directed the driver to the airport.

As I stood at the desk in the airport office, a woman approached and heard me say I was going to Lambaréné. Her face brightened considerably, and she introduced herself as Mrs. John Gould Fletcher of Arkansas. She had read the story of my trip in the Memphis paper but never dreamed we would meet in Africa on our way to the same place. She was going to visit her nephew, a young physician on Dr. Schweitzer's hospital staff. For practically the whole trip she and I were the only passengers on a plane built for twenty-eight people.

Mrs. Fletcher's nephew met us at the airport, which was nothing but a small clearing in the primeval forest. Soon we were loaded into a small truck and bumped over a very rough road to the Ogowe River, where a motor canoe awaited us. Since we were only forty miles south of the equator, the sun beat down on us unmercifully. We would probably have had sunstrokes had it not been for the two huge umbrellas made of dark blue denim, always carried on such trips.

When we arrived at the hospital—located on the mainland and not at Lambaréné, a little town on an island in the river—we were met by a number of the staff. Dr. Schweitzer himself greeted us as we stepped out of the canoe. His smile and his hand-clasp left no doubt in our minds about our welcome. From that moment we were looked after and shown everything we should see. We became members of his large family, all of whom were very cordial.

We were each assigned a room in a rather new house which had about ten rooms, built in a row with a porch running the whole length. They were open on two sides for cross ventilation but thoroughly screened against mosquitoes. The furniture was simple but adequate. Since I was brought up on the "bowl and pitcher" technique, I did not miss the bathtub. Everyone is required to wear a helmet during the day, even in cloudy weather, and I was given one, since I had none of my own.

Our first meal was dinner at seven o'clock and was typical of all meals. I was assigned a place facing Dr. Schweitzer at the long refectory table. He said grace, and then the twenty-eight people around the table began a lively conversation in Swiss, Dutch, German, Danish, French, and English. That devoted staff is a little United Nations, recruited from many countries. Dr. Schweitzer speaks French and German but very little English, so we had to talk to him through his interpreter, "Miss Emma." I missed much in not being able to converse with him in at least one of those two languages.

A few years ago Charl Ormond Williams retired from the National Education Association, where as director of field service she had made an inestimable contribution to the teaching profession. With characteristic energy she immediately set out to plan a trip around the world. But this was to be no ordinary trip, touching briefly at traditional ports of call for nine out of ten tourists. Her consuming interest was people—people living under all manner of governments, in all manner of climates, in countries old and new. Accordingly she planned her "fabulous journey," as she now calls it, around the people she wanted to see.

First among these was a person whom many believe to be the greatest man of our time, perhaps of our century, Albert Schweitzer. A genius with gifts far beyond the ordinary human endowment—musician, theologian, philosopher, physician—Dr. Schweitzer from his remote hospital in the African jungle has influenced the whole civilized world. He has done this not so much by his works, great as they are, as by the sheer power of his humility, his love of humanity, the spirit of dedication with which he has served his fellow men throughout his long life.

It was to meet Albert Schweitzer that Charl Ormond Williams made her pilgrimage into the heart of equatorial Africa. And here is the story of that meeting, written especially for P.T.A. members. Many of them gratefully remember Miss Williams as national chairman of School Education, a position in which she served the National Congress of Parents and Teachers for almost twenty years.



The children at the hospital nursery are taken outdoors for a meal in the open air.

After the meal Dr. Schweitzer went to the piano and announced the hymn that all sang in German. Next he read a short passage from the Bible and concluded the little service with a prayer. Then coffee was served at small tables, where we had our first real talk with him.

Everyone went to bed early and arose at six, for breakfast at seven-thirty. Before breakfast that first morning I went to the largest ward in the hospital and spoke to all the patients—men, women, and children—in my inadequate French. When the nurse saw them later, every one of them told her of my visit. That day I made two visits to the leper colony about half a mile away. Those treated are taught how to wrap bandages on hands or feet. Many of the people have leprosy, but they go about their work as if they were perfectly normal. We were assured that we were in no danger of infection, though we did wash our hands often and thoroughly in soap and water.

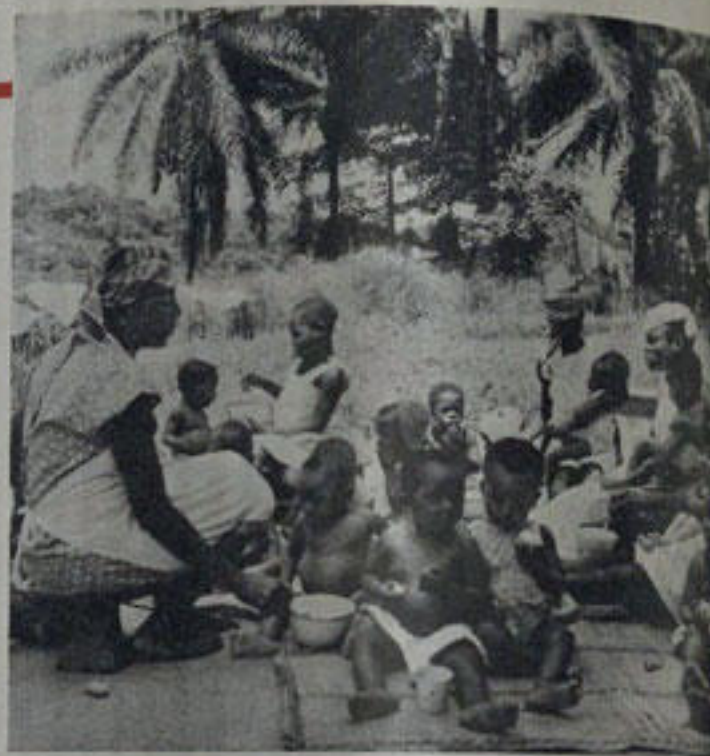
After dinner that second day we all spent an enjoyable evening listening to a recording of a pipe organ recital Dr. Schweitzer had given in London on behalf of his hospital. Later in the week he played for me on his other piano, one with organ pedals attached, that had been given to him by the Paris Bach Society. He invited me to sit on the bench beside him, where I watched with great interest the technique of this gifted man.

Before my visit I had read that Dr. Schweitzer said he played every evening "for my deer." There they were, two of them, standing near by with their noses against the chicken wire, listening intently. In fact, there are animals all over the place—two half-grown chimpanzees in a pen near the study and about seventy-five small goats of every hue, whose cries sounded like those of babies in distress. One day I saw two black, ungainly animals loping around the yard and learned they were baby gorillas, playmates of the children.

### The Hospital by the River

I feel sure that Dr. Schweitzer's hospital, located high up on a ridge by the river, has no counterpart anywhere on earth. It is nondenominational and is supported by gifts from all over the world as well as by the lectures, books, and the organ recitals Dr. Schweitzer gives back in Europe. You may have read about Miss Emma's recent tour of our country when an internationally known American pharmaceutical firm gave her twenty-nine tons of tropical medicines for the hospital. A trucking firm sent it to New York for shipment to Lambaréné.

That the hospital was primitive I had learned earlier from pictures and a story about it in a magazine. I was, however, a little shocked to find no



sheets on the beds, until Dr. Schweitzer explained it was difficult enough to get people to sleep on the low beds, since they were all accustomed to sleeping on the floor or the ground.

These patients come from miles away in the interior and are either brought in native canoes or carried through the jungle on the shoulders of men and women. Their families often come with them and are put to work on various projects to help pay for their upkeep. If a patient isn't critically ill, his family prepares his food in a little iron pot just outside the door of his room. Thus wood smoke keeps floating into the sickrooms, to the horror of visiting doctors from modern hospitals. Dr. Schweitzer says that the people would be afraid to come to a hospital of chromium, white enamel, and glass! The smoke makes them feel at home.

One day at dinner I asked the young Hungarian surgeon who sat next to me if he ever let anyone watch him operate. "Sometimes," he said.

"Would you let me look on?"

"Surely. Come over Thursday morning."

I was at the operating room before he arrived and saw two patients being prepared for their operations. Before the surgeon began his arduous work the young Arkansas doctor asked me if I wanted a bottle of smelling salts. "For what?" I asked. I watched those two two-hour major operations without flinching and added much to my education.

The idea of this hospital did not spring "full grown from the head of Jove" or from Dr. Schweitzer's head either. Rather it was the culmination of years of soul searching on his part. Young Albert Schweitzer was exceedingly fortunate in his forebears. His parents

and other relatives were men and women of wisdom, piety, and devotion to their fellow men. Although not wealthy, they contrived to give him the best education obtainable. He has said that he was not the top student in his classes, and I have a feeling this was deliberate on his part. He loved his classmates so much that he would not even wear clothes that they did not possess.

His childhood was happy, and as the years went by he felt that he should not take for granted all that had been done for him. One sentence in his *Memories of My Childhood and Youth* stands out in my memory: "My father was my dearest friend." Fathers please take notice!

### A Servant of Mankind

Dr. Schweitzer and his devoted wife first came to primitive Africa in 1914. She had taken nurse's training in order to help him in his work, and she remained with him as long as she could endure the enervating climate of that steaming jungle. As a result of their labor and the help of many people, there are forty-six crude buildings in the area, but there will be others now that Dr. Schweitzer has received the Nobel prize money.

On my arrival I told him I had brought two of his books for him to autograph: *Memories of My Childhood and Youth* and *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. The latter, when published forty-two years ago, rocked the theological world, and I told him I wanted to discuss this book with him alone. On my last evening he called me to his study, where he autographed both books and gave me a signed photograph of himself, several pictures of his work, a black elephant carved by one of his boys, and a letter opener. Then I asked him several questions of importance to me, and the discussion of his book began. It continued for nearly two hours, until the gong sounded for dinner. I could have continued it for hours more. I shall always be grateful to him for his "theological lecture," as he called it.

I am glad that I did not ask Dr. Schweitzer why he "wasted" his talents in that primitive country. He writes poignantly in one of his books about the barrage of similar questions hurled at him by his compatriots and associates in Europe when he announced his "mad career." True, he possesses talents far beyond the aspiration and reach of most men. He has won eminence in at least seven fields of knowledge and could have had a spectacular career as teacher, preacher, theologian, philosopher, medical doctor, organist, and writer. As a matter of fact, in the midst of his back-breaking work in Africa he has managed to pursue several of these interests and is now absorbed in completing his monumental book *Philosophy of Civilization*.

The seventh and final day of my extraordinary visit came too soon. Before I went to the boat, I

made another visit to the hospital to see the two operated patients and all the others I had visited the first morning. I told them I was leaving and wished them good days ahead. Feeble as my speech was, they understood, and even the very sick ones smiled. I also said good-bye to the groups working on various projects, some of whom I had taught to count to twenty and to say a number of other English words. Finally all gathered at the wharf where I kissed the little Dutch children and some of the older ones, and Dr. Schweitzer kissed me on my cheek. I was almost in tears when I left.

Dr. Schweitzer would stand out in any group of men anywhere in the world. With his tousled, mouse-gray hair, a long mustache, sun-tanned face and arms, and piercing brown eyes, he is a commanding figure. He has a keen sense of humor, and his eyes sparkle when he is amused. He is equally at home with in-

Dr. Schweitzer wrote under this photograph: "To Miss Charl Ormond Williams, who is now living in this house."



tellectuals and with those whose learning is scanty. He believes that everyone should know how to do manual work, and has himself cleared the forest and built some of the buildings. He is an amazing person, and it was a great privilege to meet and know him.

The contribution of this heroic seventy-nine-year-old man does not lie in the number of patients he has healed or in the number of lives he has saved; for, as he says, we must all die some day. The essence of his work, which will stand the test of time, is the moral example he has given the world of supreme unselfish devotion to one's fellow men.