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Heathen Children in the Light of Jesus

Mission Stories with Illustrations

by Frieda Pfinzner.

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Please Read!

I'm supposed to write a prologue, but I believe that if I say this upfront, the reader will say: "Oh, I don't have to read this."

Still I would like to speak about that which is very close to my heart, and therefore I would also like it to be heard. When you play and want to make yourself noticeable, you shout, each person as loud as they can. And even if I cannot shout, I would speak as loud as I can:

There is nothing more precious, interesting, and beautiful than what happens in the mission field, where the Lord Jesus really is the center and his Spirit finds a place to have an influence.

As I read this book, it resonated inside of me: "And you, and you? Shouldn't you be a little bit ashamed—no, very—because of these courageous children, who believe, trust, and long to recognize the Lord Jesus, our king, and then serve him?"

I hope that every reader will feel the same way, but at the same time I wish success for this book, so that it will cause the hearts of those who read it to burn ardently for those foreign lands and souls of children that still don't know of Jesus.

May we all feel it in such a way that we also carry the responsibility to follow the command of Jesus, "Go out into all the world." Because only when we do that, can we legitimately pray, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Berlin, October 1912

An African Princess

It's really almost a sin to take a child into all this dark paganism," Aunt Johanna said to her brother, a missionary from Africa. "I believe that a child can do more for children than any adult can," came the reply. "What is more, all my blacks, whether old or young, are children." - "For nine years I have missed my small daughter terribly," the mother now said. "I can't stand it any longer."

When Gretel (for so the young girl of this story was named) was a small, delicate three-year old, the doctor said she couldn't bear the climate in Africa. So the parents took their child to "Aunt Johanna" in Bremen. Now Gretel was a big 11-year-old girl, so father and mother returned from Africa in order to get their child.

"I can't live without Gretel any longer," the mother said. "Me neither," said Aunt Johanna. "If you take Gretel to Africa, then I will come as well."

And so Gretel traveled with her Father, Mother and Aunt Johanna to Africa.

At first she missed her school friends terribly in the strange land. Indeed, she watched from a distance all the Negro children at the mission station; but it was completely unacceptable to her, when one of them came near her, or wanted to touch her. She didn't want to play with them, either.

"The poor child looks at the Negro children like she looked at the monkeys behind their fence at the Zoo, long ago. It was absolutely gruesome of you, to rob the poor little thing of all proper acquaintances," said Aunt Johanna reproachfully to her brother.

"She'll have friends soon enough," was the answer, "as soon as she figures out that all these little black creatures have souls—that these souls are just as priceless to the Savior as her own soul is. I'd really like my daughter to become a blessing to others."

Gretel did not properly understand what her father meant by that.

But one day something completely new happened in Gretel's life—and that was a true African princess. She was called "Fränzchen"; but that was not her proper name. She was a real princess, and her father, who died of the sleeping sickness, owned more livestock than all the other chieftains around.

Fränzchen was no "Fairy Tale Princess" dressed in velvet and silk, with flashy diamonds and precious gems. When Gretel saw her for the first time, she wore no more than cotton shirt without sleeves, and about her neck, a necklace made of hippopotamus teeth.

When her father, the old chief Mtesa died, the “Princess” decided to live with the mission people and ran away from home to the mission house. There, she hid under the bed on which Gretel was resting while her parents had gone out. But Uledi, Fränzchen’s brother, followed his sister. He stood in front of the bed with a long bamboo stick and by knocking and pushing, his ambush succeeded in bringing her forth into daylight like a ball from under the bed. Suddenly, a pair of long brown arms and a head popped up from under the dark bed, and in the next moment the African princess stood on her feet.

Just then, Gretel’s father came home and Fränzchen told him that it would be her wish to live with him and be his daughter.

“What do you think?” The missionary asked his small daughter, “You have always wished for a sister.”

“But never a pitch black one,” was the unwilling answer. Gretel did not know at that time that the value of a person is not based on their color.

The father looked on the sad and disappointed child and then said, “We, however, want to keep her here.”

He spoke about that at length with Fränzchen’s brother and finally he agreed as well.

And so Fränzchen joined the mission people. She was certainly not yet called “Fränzchen” in those days. Her brother called her “Ananga” and she called herself “Kama-lu-li.” However, as early as her second day there, she announced, “Now I am a Christian and so I should also have a Christian name. I would like to be called, ‘Philipp,’ after my new father.” After the people told her that ‘Phillip’ was only a name for men and boys, she returned, “Well, then I am now a boy. My new father should also have a son.”

She didn’t really understand that that would never do, but then she said “Then I want to be called ‘Gretel,’ like my new sister.” ---“That won’t work either,” insisted the missionary, “for if both of my little girls are named ‘Gretel,’ and I call one of them, then most certainly the wrong one will always come. She also didn’t want to be named ‘Johanna,’ after Aunt Johanna.” In short, it took a long, until a fitting name was found for the princess.

One day, Gretel received some exquisite chocolate from an uncle in Bremen. It tasted so good to the little African princess that she asked that she should be called “Chocolate,” but that was also considered unacceptable.

Then one day, she saw a picture on the wall of Aunt Johanna’s room. It was a picture of a lady, whose lovely and friendly countenance instinctively reminded her of a deep, peaceful lake upon which the moon shone.

She asked the missionary who the lady was. And he explained to her, that the lady in the picture was called “Fränzchen” (little Franziska) by her friends, and that she was very good, and that old and young, rich and poor loved her.

Then the little princess stood up and said, “I want to become a ‘Fränzchen’ too. I also want to be good and well behaved so that my face will also be as lovable and beautiful as the face of Fränzchen in the picture.”

Gretel had to laugh out loud at the thought that this comical little black creature would want to look like “Aunt Fränzchen.” But the father explained that the African princess would be called “Fränzchen” from now on, so long as she was dear and well-behaved and listened to father and mother.

And Fränzchen was really as good and well behaved as only a Negro child can be. She helped the missionary to understand the blacks and she managed them much better than he himself did. He explained to her, why one shouldn't do or think or say evil or ugly things; and Fränzchen then explained it to the blacks. They always understood the child.

When there were quarrels and contention among the Negroes, then the missionary would first ask Fränzchen for her advice. She then would lay her finger on her nose and think a little while and then say, "Dear new father, send the both of them that are arguing in the mountains and let them herd the cattle," or something similar depending on what had happened.

The missionary always did what Fränzchen said, which always proved to be the right thing to do. At length, Aunt Johanna and Gretel became very jealous of Fränzchen.

"Phillip," Aunt Johanna said to her brother one day, "it really is a disgrace when a grown man allows a heathen child to lead him about by the nose!" "The blacks here are all children!" came the answer. "Why should I be ashamed because Fränzchen understands them better than I do? Does it not say in the Bible, 'And a little child shall lead them?'" <<Isaiah 11:6>>

"Yes, Father, but if you allow yourself to be led by a child," Gretel said, "then I, your only child, should be the one to do it. Aunt Johanna and I are so sad and ashamed."

The next time the missionary really didn't listen to Fränzchen. Then something horrible happened. The cause of it all was a Hampelmann. <<Hampelmann, or a jumping jack, is a wooden toy with hinged arms and legs that move about when its string is pulled, making it do jumping jacks.>> The missionary made it for his daughter, having fashioned and painted it himself. Gretel and Fränzchen were delighted to have such a plaything. They ran into the village to show off their new toy, and all the black men and women shrieked and cried at the sight of it waving its arms and legs. They thought it was alive and ran away from it. After one or two days the two children were finally tired of their joke.

They had almost completely forgotten the Hampelmann as Father and Mother began to realize that something wasn't quite right among the blacks, and that something bad was underway. They sat together in groups, whispered, looked around, and looked over their shoulders. They pointed and waved their hands like they always did when they were up to something. The missionary could not get anything out of them, but Fränzchen knew quickly what it was. They were terribly angry and alarmed by the Hampelmann.

"They say this is a new God, the one that you have seated in place of the great heavenly God," explained Fränzchen to her father. "And ever since the new God is there, their cattle have died, and all kinds of evil spirits have entered into their stomachs and stab them with sharp spears."

"Just tell them they ate their cantaloupes once again before they were ripe and they got stomachaches," the missionary answered, "and the cattle died because they didn't keep the well clean. Tell them that the Hammpelman is just a wooden toy that I made for my daughters."

"I already told them a couple of times," Fränzchen answered. "But they say that if that's true, you should bring the wooden toy and burn it in front of their eyes." "Good," the Father said. "Then bring it out in the village and burn it."

“If you allow that, Father Phillip,” said Fränzchen while looking quite intelligent, “then they will still think it is a god and that you only burned it because you are afraid of them.

Take your knife, go to them and make a new Hampelmann out of a piece of wood right before them. Then they will believe that it is nothing more than a piece of wood.”

“Have I ever lied to them about anything? Why should they not believe my words,” answered the missionary. “That seems very foolish to me.” But he took his knife out of the bag and intended to go out.

Aunt Johanna, who had heard all of this, interjected and said, “Philipp this is so ridiculous! You do everything that the child says, as if she were as clever as Solomon. If Fränzchen says you should eat hay, than you would surely do that as well.”

“But I believe she is right,” mumbled Father Philipp to himself, but he put his knife back in his bag. “Papa maber, papa manwora,” said Fränzchen, which means “Dear, good, best, Father”---“make the toy in front of their unbelieving eyes!”

But he didn’t do what she said; and what then followed proved that Fränzchen had been right.--- In the night, the blacks held a council and came to the decision to steal Gretel, carry her to the swamp, hide her in a hippopotamus’ pit and keep her hidden there until the missionary destroyed the new god in front of their eyes.

A hippopotamus’ pit is a large deep hole that the natives dig in the ground and use to capture hippopotami. They cover it with long, thin bamboo, and lay leaves and vines and grass on the top so that it looks just like the rest of the ground. When a large hippopotamus crosses the thin ceiling covering the deep hole, it breaks through and sinks in with a loud crack. If a hippopotamus is unable to climb out of the hole, then surely Gretel had even less of a chance.

Of course, they didn’t want to hurt the child. Everything would have been okay, had they not allowed two Negroes from a different tribe to take the child. The two outsiders had only been in town for a few weeks, and it was probably their idea that the Hampelmann was a god. At first they didn’t want any part of the whole plan. However, it was explained to them that they had not yet learned anything from Bwana Phillip (as the missionary was called). And if it turned out that the whole business with the Hampelmann was a mistake, Bwana Phillip would not be so mad at them, as he would be if people from his own tribe had done it. He would think that they had simply not known any better.

The two Negroes were not allowed to tell the people of the village where they had taken the child. This way, if Bwana Phillip asked where she was, the villagers could look him directly in the eyes and say truthfully that they didn’t know. However, the two outsiders had to promise that Gretel would be well cared for, and that she would be brought back after 14 days.

That evening, Gretel went to bed as usual and soon fell asleep. When she woke up, she was being carried on a straw mat and after a while, she was lowered down into a pit.

The child slept and dreamt, on and on, during that first long night and during the following days. She felt neither hunger nor thirst. She dreamt she was drinking clear, fresh water and was eating cakes and chocolate. And then it seemed to her like she just almost five years old, and she would sit on a nice little stool in her Kindergarten in

Bremen. And again, it seemed to her, as if she flew down from somewhere into a pit, and then as if she were at home with her Father and Mother in the mission house.

The bad thing was, Gretel had had nothing to drink or eat while in the pit. The foreign Negroes, who had carried her there, were supposed to bring her something to eat every day. But right after they lowered the child into the pit, they had a terrible realization about what they had done, and they ran away over the border. They put some bread and water at the opening of the cave. But, it was out of reach for Gretel. Those poor people had no idea that the child in the pit was facing painful starvation.

The Negroes have a belief that white people only die if shot with a gun. So they thought that if whites wanted to die, they would just shoot themselves. These poor, foreign Negroes had never lived near a Mission House and were still full of ignorance.

When the missionary later found both criminals and told them that Gretel could have starved to death, they said: „Oh, not at all, Bwana Philipp,” for they were very sure that there was no gun in the pit.” * <<*Blacks believed that whites could not die unless being shot by a gun. Since there was no gun in the pit where Gretel was, they assumed she could not have died.>>

When Gretel dreamed again that she was flying around the pit, she opened her eyes just a little and saw a large, black pie at the top of the cave’s edge. She recognized it immediately. It must have been the exact one she had once made out of the mud to make Francis mad. She stuck into it two buttons from her shoes for eyes and a red piece of flannel as the mouth. And when her work was done, she dragged Fränzchen there, took a deep bow in front of her and said: “your honorable Princess Ananga, behold the portrait of your gorgeous visage, which I, your humble servant, just made for you.” – And then Fränzchen started dancing around the pie.

As Gretel looked more carefully, she noticed that the pie up there looked much more like the Negro child than the one she had once made. And then suddenly the pie fell over the cave’s edge directly into the pit and started laughing and crying – that was when Gretel finally woke up completely for the very first time.

She now noticed where she was and how badly she missed her father and her mother, because the pie was actually Fränzchen herself. The Negro child seemed to be so beautiful. She was as beautiful as a flower, or a star or a lake when hit by moonshine, or anything just as beautiful. But Gretel could not tell her that.

For a very long time, she was completely still and couldn’t say anything at all. Then, when Fränzchen gave her meat-broth to drink, which had been prepared from the dried meat, Gretel’s first words were, “More! More!” – And now, I bet you want to know how Fränzchen found the pit?

While the missionary questioned the natives, to find out where his child had probably been hidden, Fränzchen’s brother Uledi came. He had just returned from a hunting expedition and told the father that he had met the strangers alone without the child. Then, the missionary knew that the hiding place could not be too far away. The natives scoured the area in all directions; but they probably would have found the child too late, if it weren’t for someone else who had come first.

When Fränzchen discovered that Gretel had been stolen out of her bed, she took off without a word. She followed the trail of the foreign Negroes until she lost it in a swampy thicket. Then she asked Father in Heaven if He would lead her; and she just kept going until she found the hiding place.

Afterwards, she said she went almost the entire time with her eyes closed. When she had reached her destination, she was terribly scratched and torn all over from the thorns and vines, through which she had to clear a path for herself.

If the Negroes had hidden Fränzchen instead of Gretel in the pit, the African Princess could have quickly gotten out and gone back home, perhaps faster than her abductors. The Negro child was very inventive and could climb as well as the apes in the jungle. She would have simply pulled the tough long vines into the pit. She would have held on tightly to one of them and climbed up one side of the pit and she would have done it with more grace than a lady ascending a staircase.

The two children stayed two days and two nights in the pit resting themselves. They played “Robinson Crusoe” and “Friday” so that the time didn’t seem so long to them.

Fränzchen fed her small comrade from time to time, just a little at a time, and when she wasn’t doing that, she was working on her little ladder of vines, on which Gretel would be able to climb to the top of the pit. She named it the “living ladder,” because the vines were still rooted in the earth.

And then they left very early one morning. They did not know the way, but they knew that it would be dangerous to go deeper into the bush where the vines and bushes became thicker and where there were so many insects. They kept up a strenuous march. It seemed to Gretel as if they traversed millions of miles, Fränzchen always up front to clear the way. At times they even had to crawl on their hands and feet.

They actually intended to walk the whole night through, but around evening Gretel stumbled over a root and fell headfirst into the bush. In an instant Fränzchen sat beside her, in order to comfort her and rest for a bit, just for a minute – but they stayed there the whole night.

Many eyes peered curiously out of the bush at the two children, all kinds of lights seemed to be swirling around them, and on the moist ground insects and worms and beetles crawled. The tired eyes of the children fell shut – Gretel listened, as Fränzchen talked in her sleep. She wanted to wake her up, but she noticed that she was also speaking loudly. Finally the night passed, and on the next morning they resumed their journey - very tired and sleepy, even Fränzchen. They stumbled into one of those terrible thorn bushes, which people in Africa called “wait a while.” And they really had to wait a while, before they could continue walking.

And then they had another terrible adventure. There is in Africa a fly, which has the shape and size of a bee. The Africans called it “war fly,” because if anyone trapped it and pinched it anywhere just a little, then it fought like a soldier at war. And if the one who caught it allowed it to fly again, then it flew directly to his cattle, even if it was a thousand miles away, and stung them in revenge, so that the cattle died.

Naturally this is all unlikely, but the superstitious Negroes have imagined it so themselves. “I want to catch a warrior fly and make it mad, just a little bit,” Fränzchen thought after they had successfully come out of the Bush. “And if we let it fly, we can follow its course. Father Philipp would rather lose his old cow than to lose his two daughters.”

Immediately, she swatted her hand at a fly buzzing around. She rolled it up in the corner of her cotton shirt so that her finger would not be stung. She pressed slightly on the fly, let it go into the air, and gave it a slap.

But the fly had stung Fränzchen in the hand through the cotton shirt—Gretel had seen the whole thing. Fränzchen cried out because of the pain and flailed around in the bush. Gretel sat there and thought of how terrible it would be to lose Fränzchen just when she had started to love her black sister so dearly.

“Oh, Fränzchen,” she cried, “you’ll die now! And then I’ll be by myself with your dead body and I will be so afraid of you!”

“My dead body won’t hurt you,” Fränzchen said, wrinkling her nose the same way Aunt Johanna sometimes does. “If I must die,” she continued after a while, “let me hold Father Philipp’s hand; for then I know I will go to his heaven.”

And there I will be reunited with the real Fränzchen, whose name I bear, and I will wait for you. When you see me again, Gretel, I will look completely different because I won’t have a black outside any more, and you will see only white on me.

And so they started off again, but Gretel kept crying because she was worried every second she would be left completely alone in the bush—alone with Fränzchen’s black, cold corpse. The day grew oppressively hot, and Fränzchen still lived.

. Two Negroes from father’s mission station approached with a litter. Their names were Kalulu and Schumari and they had wandered about aimlessly until they found the children.

Oh, how wonderful it was to be able to stretch completely out on the litter where no thorns stuck them, and no insects crawled over them. Hand in hand the two children fell asleep, and when they woke again, they were at home and everyone stood around them and hovered over them and kissed them and cried.

Yes, and even Auntie Johanna, who always said that it is improper and “common” to show your feelings, cried, and she was even the loudest of all. She kissed both children right in front of the eyes of the fat German postman, and what was the strangest of all—she kissed Fränzchen first.

The doctor said, if Gretel had remained just a little bit longer without nourishment in the pit, then she would have gotten malaria and would have died.

The missionary had, in the meantime, found the foreign Negroes and went with them directly to the mission station, but they would have arrived too late at Gretel’s hiding place. Fränzchen, the despised, little, black princess, had saved the life of her new sister.

And Gretel had learned that the worth of a person does not lie in his skin color, and from now on she was very fond of the Negro child and all her black brothers and sisters at the mission station.

But one more thing you must hear: As the natives saw how the two children in the litter were being carried around, they cried bitterly. And as they noticed how scratched and torn both looked, they stood in a ring around the litter and went backwards on their heels, threw their heads back and howled and wailed with a terrible noise. There is almost nothing more monotonous and soothing as when Negroes cry! It sounds just like when a big Newfoundlander howls because he feels lonely. They were truly sad from their hearts and didn’t just cry because they were afraid of the punishment. They even begged the missionary that he would hit them, and since he didn’t do that, they hit themselves with thorny twigs. ---Uledi, who had thought the whole thing up, hit his head on a tree the whole time, bored his broad nose in the sand and howled the loudest of all.