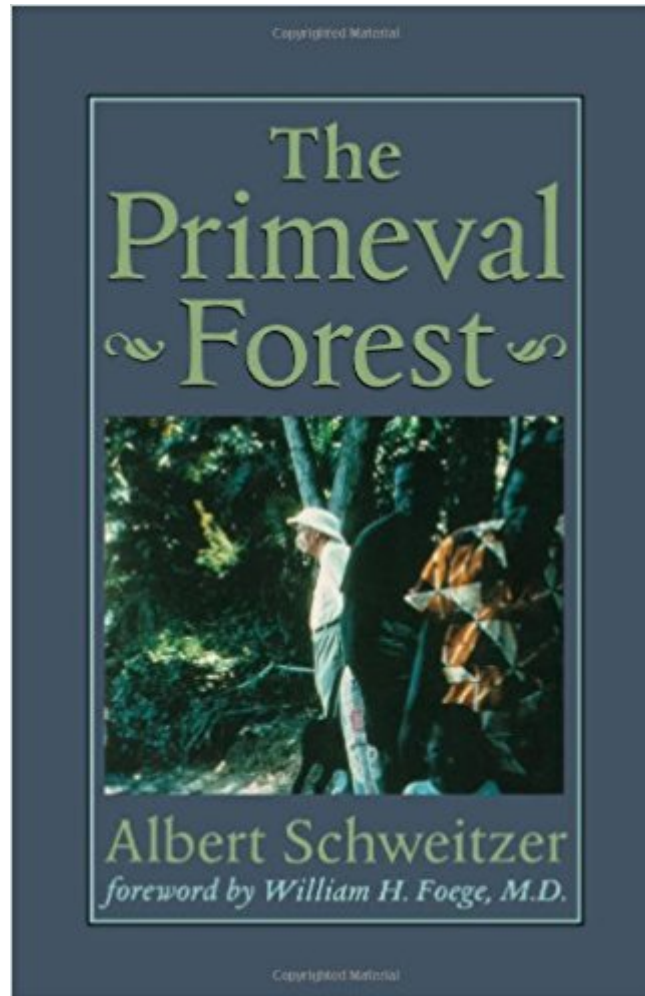




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The Primeval Forest (The Albert Schweitzer Library)



Synopsis

"There, in this sorry world of ours, goes a great man." —Albert Einstein, on Albert Schweitzer

In July of 1913, thirty-eight-year-old medical doctor Albert Schweitzer gave up his position as a respected professor at the University of Strasbourg and celebrated authority on music and philosophy in order to go as a physician to French Equatorial Africa (present-day Gabon). The *Primeval Forest* is Schweitzer's own fascinating story of these eventful years — a thrilling tale of his amazingly successful attempt to practice modern medicine and surgery in the face of wild elephant raids, marauding leopards, famine, and flood — a story rich in human interest and high drama. Schweitzer describes how he and his wife, a qualified nurse, worked to establish a hospital in the steaming jungle at Lambaré. At first they treated patients in the open air, amid unbelievably primitive conditions — with few drugs, medicines, or adequate instruments. But they worked tirelessly, caring for as many as forty cases a day, battling the misery caused by sleeping sickness, leprosy, pestilence, and plague. And, as the years went on, they gradually built a more permanent hospital to alleviate the terrible suffering of the Congo people.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Here, in Dr. Schweitzer's own words, is the inspiring and unforgettable account of his years in Africa; his thrilling jungle adventures, and his amazing experiences in bringing modern medicine and

surgery to the French Congo. The record of Schweitzer's day-by-day experience is told so vividly that a responsive reader cannot fail to relive these stirring events." (Richmond Times-Dispatch)

Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952. While still a young man he demonstrated extraordinary abilities in a wide range of pursuits, including science, theology, and music. In 1908 he published his magisterial study of the life and works of Johann Sebastian Bach. He studied medicine from 1905 to 1913 at the University of Strasbourg, then founded a hospital in French Equatorial Africa, where he spent most of the remainder of his life. Schweitzer used his Nobel Prize stipend to expand the hospital and to build a leper colony. His book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* is also available from Johns Hopkins.

A simple and straightforward telling of his actual experiences. No exaggeration nor sugar coating.

Although a great admirer of Dr. Albert Schweitzer for some years, it is only now that the opportunity has presented itself to finally read and relish the doctor's own account of his beginnings and reasons for working in equatorial Africa. Schweitzer's reason(s) for giving up his position as professor in the University of Strasbourg, his prolific literary work, his ground-breaking work on Bach, (he was the world authority at the time) and his music... the doctor writes, "I had read about the physical miseries of the natives in the virgin forests; I had heard about them from missionaries, and the more I thought about it the stranger it seemed to me that we Europeans trouble ourselves so little about the great humanitarian task which offers itself to us in far-off lands." (P. 9) Dr. Schweitzer has a lot to say concerning the extensive damages wrought on the native African as a result of colonialism. We take their natural resources as if they were our own; we have given them our diseases; we have given them alcoholism and we push the Word of the Lord down their throats and somehow justify this pillage & plunder as "civilizing the savages". Schweitzer, first and foremost, realized that the colonized natives are experiencing great suffering in terms of the many diseases that plague the continent, and felt that he, a white man, needed to take responsibility; therefore he chose to become a medical doctor at the age of thirty. Once attaining his qualifications, he set out with his wife to West Africa amongst the many protests from his contemporaries. This book was first published in 1922, but Schweitzer set sail for Africa in July 1913, to go on and establish his famous hospital in Lambarene, West Africa. The hardships in establishing a hospital in such primitive conditions to then begin treating the natives straight away with little or adequate medical supplies is almost unthinkable, but he forged on, building the hospital, treating horrific

disease and dealing with the culture of the West African. He writes about the belief system of the native's (fetishist) and the affect of their conversion to Christianity. There is a chapter the doctor devotes entirely to the most prevalent tropical diseases he comes across most weeks and months. These descriptions are graphic, truly conveying the horror and utter suffering the patient experiences if left untreated. In Dr. Schweitzer's conclusion, he writes about something he calls "The Fellowship of those who bear the Mark of Pain." In distilled terms, anyone who has experienced great pain and has been treated to a successful outcome should realize the extent of pain and suffering of the native African. This empathy should awake the white man, and force them to help with the aid of modern medicine, the pain and suffering of the native African. Any medical student or doctor thinking about working in primitive conditions in any developing country, should certainly read this book. I believe it is inspiring in every sense of the word.

This book will have most of its appeal to those with interest in medicine, missionary work, or anthropology. It consists of Schweitzer's medical case histories, travels, hospital administrative chores, reflections on African and European culture, and general overview of his first decade and a half in Gabon on the west coast of Africa. Schweitzer's candid comments about the Africans and the harsh conditions under which he worked help make this book better than the average account of third world philanthropic endeavors. Schweitzer shows true insight and compassion for those he came to help and I found the book highly engaging.

I read this book out of curiosity because my grandmother remembers Dr. Schweitzer very well. I found this book very offensive because of the imperialistic language of "superior Europeans coming to the rescue of inferior childlike Blacks". He calls us "children of nature" and "savages." Read the book, it's all in there.

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