



Chris Sparrow pictured with some of Solusi Mission's local farm laborers and their families.

From *A Living Sacrifice: Unsung Heroes of Adventist Missions* by D.J.B. Trim.

## Sparrow, Christopher R. (1862–1935)

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Christopher Sparrow was a pioneer Adventist missionary and farmer in South Africa, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and Kenya. He was born in November 1862 in Barthust, Grahamstown, in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. He was the eldest of 12 children born to Frederick and Emma Sparrow. He was named after his maternal

grandfather Christopher Fincham.<sup>1</sup> His father was a Methodist minister and a farmer in the Barthust district. He became an Adventist in 1895 and began active ministry by becoming a missionary. He was sent to various mission stations to work among the Africans. Chris Sparrow served as a missionary for many years in Bulawayo and in various places in South Africa. He had made his mark at Nyamandhlovu, a mission station near Bulawayo. He married Mahalah (May) Reed who had become an Adventist at Solusi.<sup>2</sup>

By 1914 Chris and May served at the Maranatha Mission in Martindale in the Cape (previously run by his brothers David and Charles Sparrow). Their son, Owen Sparrow, served at the Glendale Mission in Southern Rhodesia, while Laurie served in Cape Town. Laurie Sparrow married Nellie de Lange in July 1914, and together they served as missionaries at Glendale Mission in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Chris and May eventually retired from active ministry and, along with their son Willis, chose to move to Kenya to join his brother, David, who had moved there in 1911. In 1925 they acquired land that was registered as Farm 730/1 on the Uasin Gishu Plateau. The land was most certainly negotiated for him by David. They joined the growing number of European Adventists on the Plateau. But even after retiring from active ministry, Chris continued evangelism work among the Europeans and the Africans, helping establish Kaigat, the first Adventist church in the Nandi reserve in 1931.

Four of their five children were active in ministry in the church and were working among the Africans in the south. Coming to Kenya at the age of 63 was more about retirement from active ministry and a change in his career to farming. Like his brother David, he was appointed as a juror in the district.

Chris Sparrow was quite popular among his fellow farmers in the Uasin Gishu district. In 1930 they elected him president of the local chapter of the Kenya Farmers Union. He made it quite clear that he would not hold any meetings on Saturday. He continued to be active in mission work among the Europeans and the Africans.

On Friday, August 30, 1935, perhaps running late for an appointment, Chris Sparrow failed to see an oncoming train as he approached the railway crossing in his car. His car was smashed by the speeding train and he was severely injured, losing consciousness. He was rushed to the Eldoret Hospital where he lay in a coma for seven days, passing away on Friday evening, September 6, 1935. He was 72 years and 10 months old.<sup>3</sup> He was laid to rest at the Eldoret Cemetery after a service held at the St. Matthews Anglican Church which had been borrowed by the Adventists for his funeral.

Writing in *The Southern African Division Outlook* Elder William Cuthbert, who had conducted the funeral service, said, "At the time of his death he (Chris Sparrow) was our Sabbath school superintendent. He passed away a staunch believer in the Advent message which he embraced forty years ago. We laid him to rest in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life."<sup>4</sup>

Chris Sparrow was survived by his wife Mahalah and five sons Owen, Laurie, Stewart, Melvin, and Willis. Like their father, Laurie and Owen were deeply involved in ministry as were Stewart and Melvin.

It was only Willis who came to Kenya with his parents. Willis took over the land after Chris died and continued working on it. However, he soon sold the land and moved to Eldama Ravine where he acquired another piece of land before moving to Tanganyika where he continued farming. Mahalah Sparrow left Kenya for Southern Rhodesia and passed away there on March 18, 1942, at the age of 79. She was buried, according to her wishes, at the Solusi Cemetery next to her only daughter who had died young. She was survived by her five sons.

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## SOURCES

General Notice No. 1654 of December 23, 1935. *The Official Gazette of the Colony & Protectorate of Kenya*, vol. XXXVII – no. 67, The Government Printer, Nairobi.

*Southern African Division Outlook*, vol. XXXIII, no. 19, October 15, 1935.

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## NOTES

1. From a write-up by E. M. Sparrow compiled circa 1988 and graciously loaned to the author by Yvette Sparrow who keeps the manuscript in her private collection.
2. Ibid.
3. General Notice No. 1654 of December 23, 1935, *The Official Gazette of the Colony & Protectorate of Kenya*, vol. XXXVII – no. 67, The Government Printer, Nairobi, 1354.
4. *Southern African Division Outlook*, vol. XXXIII, no. 19, October 15, 1935, 8.

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