

TRIBUTE TO MR DAVID JOSEPHUS SOLANKE FRASER (3945)

By AKIWANDE J. LASITE (PRINCIPAL)



In his sermon during the 161st Anniversary Thanksgiving Service of the Sierra Leone Grammar School, Rev. Victor Thorpe, School Chaplain, proposed the concept of "Regentonianism." Unflinching loyalty to and support for the Grammar School and service to humanity are significant strands of the concept. In our day and generation, no greater exponent of the tenets of "Regentonianism" can be found than DAVID JOSEPHUS SOLANKE FRASER who had his home-call on 4th January 2011 at the age of 84. His life, work and contributions to his beloved Alma Mater are so numerous and the elements so mixed in him that nature might stand up and say to all the world ""This was a man!" In terms of involvement in and commitment to the development of the school, DAVID FRASER was in a category of his own.

The Fraser Family of Murray Town has had a long and mutually-rewarding connection with the Grammar School. There is evidence that one David Fraser from Murray Town was admitted to the school in January 1880. This may have been the start of a tradition for almost all male members of the Fraser Family to attend the school. Thus by the time our DAVID FRASER was to embark on secondary education, it was a foregone conclusion that he would be joining the school. This he did in July 1939 and was a pupil till 1945 with an Admission Number which speaks for itself - 3945.

As a pupil, DAVID was an active participant in the school's social affairs. He was a keen sportsman and became Captain of the Cricket Team. He took part in athletics, football, swimming and debates. He joined the First Freetown Troop and became Troop Leader. He also excelled in his academic pursuits and displayed strong leadership qualities. All these blended together to facilitate his selection as Head Boy during the school's centenary, a role that he executed with distinction. Many other honours and calls to serve his school were to follow.

DAVID became a member of the Old Boys Union and served in the Executive up to his death. He was a member of the Board of Governors and one-time Chairman up to his demise. He contributed immensely to the development of the new site at Murray Town through his dynamic leadership. A lasting physical tribute to his efforts was the addition of a third storey to the Administrative Block. A loan was obtained from ECLOF to finance this project and DAVID pioneered the creation of a Development Fund maintained by regular donations from Old Boys through Standing Orders to repay the loan within the stipulated time and obtain a rebate. Through his intervention, special aluzinc roofing sheets were obtained for the Classroom Block after its roof was severely damaged by a storm. As a member of the Estate Committee, he was involved in the construction of the Status Building and the New Classroom Block; visiting the sites and offering advice.

DAVID wrote the first letter of complaint to the Director of the Surveys and Lands Department when illegal activities on the school land were observed. He participated in the numerous meetings on this issue whilst the matter was being pursued in the courts and in the final meetings to plan the demolition exercise. He supervised the construction of a dwarf wall along the Macauley Street side of the property to serve as a deterrent to potential encroachers.

DAVID helped to promote academic excellence in the school by donating prizes, providing books and magazines for the Library and sponsoring some pupils. He was very instrumental in the procurement of school colours, especially when foreign exchange was scarce or the school did not have the means to obtain it. He helped to secure a loan for the production of the special 150th anniversary ties. Hopes were high that new band instruments would be provided for a grand celebration of the school's 160th anniversary. DAVID's substantial initial donation stimulated the fund-raising drive among Regentonians at home and in the diaspora for the instruments to be obtained. In order to facilitate the Principal's attendance at meetings, DAVID donated a car to the school for his use. He took a strong personal interest in the school's performance in public examinations and would request comparative details about other schools. For him, the school should always be second to none.

It was his concern for performance that dictated DAVID's membership and subsequent Chairmanship of the Status Review Committee from its formation in 1993 to its dissolution in 2007. This Committee reviewed our status as a Government-Assisted School and recommended an Independent status. There was great admiration for DAVID's negotiating ability during meetings with Parents, Staff and Government officials at the highest level. His drafting skills were also shown by his astute modification of documents so that a clearer message could be sent to those concerned. He helped to design some of the documents and procedures we are currently using. An independent school needed sustained financial support. DAVID developed the idea of the Regentonia Foundation as a charitable trust that would attract bequests and donations for the school's sustenance, development and the award of scholarships to deserving pupils.

But hush my soul nor dare repine,
The time my God appoints is best
While here to do his will be mine
And his to fix my time of rest

God richly endowed DAVID with time, talents, treasure and a vision to use them in serving humanity. He used every opportunity to "pay back" to his Alma Mater for the knowledge, skills and attitudes that he gained and numerous friendships which developed there. The other contributions that he made to the larger society as an ardent member of the West African Methodist Connexion, Chapel Steward of this church, Mining Engineer and Resident Director of Sierra Rutile, Director of Standard Chartered Bank, Freemason, member of several trusts etc can be traced to the ideals of his family and what he imbibed as a Pupil of the great citadel of learning - the Grammar School - which trains her pupils for service.

Death has brought an end to 72 years of personal connection with the school and we thank God for giving us such a worthy Regentonian.

The Regentonian hymn writer, Nat Stanley says

At last the end has come this day
For one so dear and true
For days of sunshine and of joy
For moments sad and grief and toil
We will remember thee.

DAVID's life and contributions should inspire all of us to use the resources given to us by God in the service of our fellow men. Let us continue the work he started and make society and our school better. The challenge is ours and we owe it to him to raise our Alma Mater to the heights he dreamed of.

The Grammar School Family extends its deepest condolences to Mrs. Emma Fraser and the entire Fraser Family for this irreparable loss. We pray that you will mourn as Christians with the realization that God allowed DAVID to serve humanity well for 84 years. We also pray that God will raise up from among you another Regentonian Fraser to continue the work of DJS.

Fare thee well dear brother, fighter benefactor, mentor and illustrious Fellow Regentonian.

‘Tis manhood’s gleam in boyish eyes
Steadfast and true and keen
The heart that never quailed at need
The soul that ne’er was mean.

MAY HIS SOUL REST IN PEACE