

WHITE QUEEN OF THE CANNIBALS

The Story of Mary Slessor of Calabar

by

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Moody Colportage #6

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BLESSINGS UNNUMBERED

GOD blessed Mary's work in cannibal land and more and more people were won for JESUS. Chief Onoyom stayed true to his faith.

"Come," he said to his people, "we must build a church here at Akani Obio. Let us go to the jungle and cut down trees for the house of GOD."

Chief Onoyom and his people went to the woods. The chief went to a tree and got ready to cut it down.

"Chief," they cried, "you are not going to cut that tree, are you? You know that is the juju tree."

"I know it is the juju tree," said Onoyom, "and I am going to chop it down."

"The juju will be angry. He will not let us. He will kill us," cried the people.

"Ma's GOD is stronger than our juju," said Chief Onoyom. "Cut it down."

The people began to chop. The trunk of the tree was thick. After a while they stopped.

"See, we cannot cut it," they said.

The heathen natives were glad.

"Aha," they said, "our juju is stronger than Ma's GOD."

The next morning Chief Onoyom took some men who wanted to be Christians. Before beginning to chop at the tree they knelt and prayed that the white Ma's GOD would prove stronger than the juju. Then they got up and began to chop. Soon the tree fell with a mighty crash.

Ma's GOD had won!

The juju tree was used for a pulpit and seats in the church building. A large group of people came to the dedication services. They were quiet and well-behaved. What a great change the Gospel had made! Only two years before the people were wild savages.

Mary had to hold services at Arochuku out-doors, but now the people built a church and a schoolhouse. At other villages along Enyong creek congregations were organized, and churches and schoolhouses were built.

In 1905 Mary had to go to the Mission Council meeting at Calabar. During the meeting Mary was called on to tell about her work.

"GOD has done great things in cannibal land. We have congregations at Itu, Arochuku, Oko, Akani Obio, Odot, Amasu, and Asang. In all of these places churches have been built. In many of them we have built schoolhouses too. Many of the cannibals are being won for CHRIST. But we need more workers. In all this wide country of the Aros, I am the only white missionary. My six months' leave is almost up. Who will take care of these people who are as dear to GOD as you or I? Now they are being taken care of by native workers, but these have only little training. Send workers to cannibal land to change these man-eaters into Christians."

The Council was thrilled by Mary's report. They voted that she could spend six more months in cannibal land, but again they said she would have to pay her own expenses. This did not bother Mary. She had never been paid much salary.

In the first years she sent most of it back home to take care of her mother and sister. After they had died she used me most of it for her colored Christians. She had adopted many black children whose parents had thrown them out. But money never bothered Mary. She had a little bit saved up. She was happy that she could go to cannibal, land and win souls for CHRIST.

"But where shall I work now?" Mary asked herself. "Shall I keep on working on upper Enyong creek or shall I go south to the Ibibios? The Ibibios are the worst heathen in this part of Africa. The worse the people are, the more they need help. I should go to the Ibibios."

Meanwhile the Mission committee in Scotland decided to build a hospital at Itu.

Dr. Robertson was to be the head of it. The Mission committee chose a name for the hospital. They named it, "The Mary Slessor Mission Hospital." The people in Scotland gave the money so the hospital could be built.

"It seems like a fairy tale," said Mary when she was told about it, "and I don't know just what to say. I can just look up into the blue sky and say, 'Even so, Father; let me live and be worthy of it all.' It is a grand gift and I am so glad for my people."

Now that Itu was taken care of, Mary had all the more reason to go south to the Ibibios.

In their country the government was building roads and setting up courts. The government people wanted Mary to come to that country too, because she knew so much more about the people and customs in cannibal land.

"Get a bicycle, Ma," said one of the government men. "Here is the road. Come as far as you can. And we'll soon have a motorcar for you."

Mary started out. She took along one of the boys she had adopted. It was twelve-year-old Etim. He could read and she needed his help. Once more Mary was beginning mission work in a new part of the country where Christians had never been.

Mary and Etim went to Ibibio-land. Mary started a school and a small congregation. Etim was made the teacher of the school. He proved to be a very good teacher. Soon he had a class of fifty children.

"It is my hope," said Mary, "that Ikotobong will be the first of a chain of stations stretching across the country."

Mary went to visit the old chief of Ikotobong.

"What do you think of our work here?"

"It is good," said the chief. "I am happy you came. There are many things that are strange to me and my people. We do not understand them. I am glad for the light. We will give Etim food as pay for teaching. We will help build a schoolhouse and a church."

Mary was happy that the people were willing and anxious to learn. But she wanted to go to a new part of the country and start more places. The government officer at Ikot Expene gave Mary a bicycle.

"I think it's GOD's will that I learn to ride this bicycle. Think of an old lady like me on a bicycle!" said Mary. "The new road makes it easy to ride, and I'm running up and down and taking a new work in a village two miles off. It has done me all the good in the world, and I will soon be able to do even more work."

The treatment of the women in Ibibio was very bad. They were treated worse than slaves. The men could do whatever they wanted to do with them. They were often beaten. They were bought and sold like cattle. Mary wanted to help the poor women.

"I want to build a home for girls, orphans, twins and their mothers, and those who have run away from harems," said Mary. "I also want to start a school where trades and skills can be taught. All the women know how to farm. They know how to weave baskets and make simple sandals. But I want them to know many more things so that they can take care of themselves. I am going to look for a place with good land and pure water near the roads and the markets. Then I will write to my friends and to the Mission Board for help."

Mary's furlough had first been for six months and then was made six months longer. In April, 1906, it came to an end. She was supposed to go back to Akpap, because the Mission Council expected her to settle down in one place and work there. They appointed her to work at Akpap and that is where they expected her to work.

"I do not want to settle in one place," said Mary. "GOD gives me different gifts; I think my gift is to explore and start new congregations. Others are better fitted to take care of them after they are started than I am. GOD is pushing me onward. I don't dare look backward. Even if my dear church turns against me and will not have me as its missionary, I must go forward. I can find food for myself and the children. That is all I need. GOD will help me."

Mary thought and prayed much over this matter. She thought of starting a store or taking a government job so she could earn money to take care of the missionary work. She wrote a long letter to the Mission Board. She told how GOD had blessed the work at Itu and the villages on Enyong creek.

Then she wrote:

"In all this how plainly GOD has been leading me. I did not think of doing these things in my lifetime, but GOD has led me on. First Itu, and then the Creek, then back from Aro, where I had set my heart, to a lonely, spooky, wilderness. There no one ever went, but now miles of roads are being built.

"The Board says I am to go back to Akpap in April. I love no other place on earth so well. But I dare not think of leaving the crowds of untamed, unwashed, unlovely savages, and take away the little sunlight that has begun to flicker out over its darkness.

"I know that I am pretty old for this kind of work. But GOD will help. Whether the church permits or not, I feel that I must stay here. I must even go farther as the roads are made. I cannot walk now and I must be careful of my health. But I can get four wheels made and set a box on them and the children can pull me. I dare not go back. If the Board insists, I will risk finding some other way to support myself and my family."

As April drew closer day by day, Mary anxiously waited for the Mission Board's answer.

The Mission Board wrote to Mary:

We are sending John Rankin to look over the field where you have been working. After he has made his report we will decide what you should do.

Mr. Rankin visited the different places in cannibal land where Mary had started congregations. He talked with the chiefs and the people. One chief talking about Mary and the other women missionaries said, "Them women be the best men for the mission."

He wrote to the Board:

Close to Arochuku, within a circle of less than three miles in diameter, there are nineteen large towns. I visited sixteen of these. Each of them is larger than Creek Town. Most of the people are anxious to help. Already many of them have begun to live in GOD's way. Even the head chief of all the Aros wants us to do mission work in his country. He told the other chiefs he is going to rule according to GOD's way. He wants missionaries to be sent to his people. He offers to build a house at Arochuku for any missionary who will come.

The Mission Board was thrilled when they read this report. They agreed to give the money for the work which Mary had planned. They appointed Rankin to take charge of the stations at Itu and Arochuku. They agreed to let Mary go into the new territory. She did not have to go back to Akpap.

This made Mary very happy. Now she could work full time among the Ibibios. She offered to pay for the building of a mission station among the Ibibios if there was no money in the homeland treasury.

In May the government appointed Mary to take charge of the courts in the Ibibio district as she had done in Okoyong. It paid her for this work so now she had money to carry on her mission work whether the Board paid her or not.

Court was held at Ikotobong. Three chiefs and a jury helped Mary in trying the cases, but Mary's word was law. Mary was fair and kind, but at the same time she saw to it that those who did bad things were punished.

In a letter to a friend she wrote:

GOD help those poor helpless women. They are treated worse than animals. Today I had a crowd of people. How wicked they were! I have had a murder, a poison bean case, a suicide, a man branding his slave wife all over her face and body, a man with a gun who shot four people. It is all horrible.

But her work as judge did not stop her from doing her mission work.

Everywhere she went she told the natives of JESUS' death for them. She opened schools and churches for natives. She also was thinking about the other missionaries. She planned a place for them where they could spend weekends or where they could rest when they were getting over sickness. She chose a place half-way between Itu and Ikotobong on Enyong Creek. It was high above the lowlands where most of the sickness was. A friend sent her a check for \$100 and Mary used it as a start for this rest home. She had the ground cleared and a small English house built.

Although Mary was busy she was not well. During most of 1906 she had been ailing.

"If you want to keep on with your missionary work," said the government doctor, "you must go home to Scotland where you can rest up and get the fever out of your system."

Mary did not want to leave her work. A few days after her talk with the doctor, when he came to see her again, she was much better.

"It looks as if GOD wants me to stay. Does that sound like He could not do without me! I do not mean it so. How little I can do! But I can at least keep a door open for missionary work so others can come and do more."

The year 1907 came. Mary was much worse. She could walk only a few steps. When she wanted to go anywhere, she had to be carried. At last she decided to do as the doctor told her and go to Scotland for a vacation.

"Oh, the dear homeland!" she said with tears in her eyes. "Shall I really be there and worship in the churches again? How I long for a look at a winter landscape, to feel the cold wind, and the frost in the cart ruts! How I want to take a back seat in a church and hear the congregation singing, without a care of my own! I want to hear how they preach and pray and rest their souls in the hush and silence of our home churches."

Mary took her six-year-old Dan, one of the many children she had adopted. The government officers were kind and helpful to her in getting ready for her trip.

"GOD must repay these men," said Mary, "because I cannot. He will not forget that they did it to a child of His, unworthy though she is."

Mary was now a wrinkled, shining-eyed old lady, almost sixty years old. She was carried on board the ship that would take her to Scotland. Her friends, both white and native, cried and wondered if she would ever come back to Africa again.

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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