

WHITE QUEEN OF THE CANNIBALS

The Story of Mary Slessor of Calabar

by

A.J. BUELTMANN

Moody Colportage #6

edited for 3BSB by Baptist Bible Believer in the spirit of the Colportage Ministry of a century ago

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CHAPTER TEN

A DISAPPOINTMENT

Mary wrote to the Mission Board;

“Charles and I are very much in love. We would like to be married. Charles is a wonderful Christian and a very fine teacher. He would be a very great help in my jungle work. We hope that you will agree to our marriage and let Charles go into the jungle with me.

“I am ready to do what you say. I lay the whole matter in GOD's hands and will take from Him what He sees best for His work in Okoyong. My life was laid on the altar for that people long ago, and I would not take one jot or tittle of it back. If it be for His glory and the advantage of His cause there to let another join in it, I will be grateful. If not, I will be grateful anyway, for GOD knows best.”

The Board was very much surprised to get this letter. If the Board members had thought about it at all, they had thought that Mary would never marry. She was forty-three years old and Charles Morrison, her sweetheart, was twenty-five. He was a mission teacher at Duke Town. The difference in their ages did not bother the sweethearts. They met and had fallen in love. They wanted to marry.

"I will marry you if the Mission Board will agree to letting you work in the jungle with me," said Mary.

"But suppose the Board will not let me go into the jungle, wouldn't you be willing to come back to Duke Town with me?" asked Charles.

"No, Charles, I couldn't. I love you very much, more than anyone I have ever known, but my work for GOD is in the jungles. There no one else has yet planted the Gospel seed. To leave a field like Okoyong without a worker and go to one like Duke Town with ten or a dozen workers where the people have the Bible and plenty of privileges - that's foolish.

"If GOD does not send you into the jungle with me, then you must do your work and I must do mine where we have been placed."

It was not long after Mary had returned to England that the Mission Board gave its answer to her request. The answer was no.

"What the Lord decides is right," said Mary. "I believe that the Mission Board is giving me GOD's answer because they are His servants."

What Mary suffered no one knew. She longed to have a life's partner by her side in the great work of bringing the Gospel to the jungle, but having given her life to GOD, she felt that He must be her first love.

Charles Morrison, however, took the refusal very hard. He became sick and had to go home. Later he went to America where he died.

Now that Mary was home in England, she soon got over the jungle fevers. People wanted to hear about the missionary work in Africa. Mary went from church to church telling about her work. She did not like to do this. She would rather be in the jungle telling the natives about JESUS.

"It is hard for me to speak," said Mary, "but JESUS has asked me to do it, and it is an honor to speak for Him. I wish to do it cheerfully."

Everywhere people were thrilled to hear about the work for JESUS in the jungle. They wanted to do something, too. They gave money. They sent boxes of clothes and food and other things out to Africa to help the heathen.

Then Mary got sick with influenza and bronchitis. She could not go around speaking any more. Instead, she wrote some articles for a missionary paper.

"The Gospel must be preached to the people of Calabar," she said. "Then the people ought to be taught some trades. They should learn to be carpenters and farmers and the like. We ought to send out people who can teach them these trades so that they can make a living."

This was a new idea to many people. They wrote to other missionaries to find out what they thought about it. Later a school, "The Hope Waddell Training Institute," was started. This school taught the boys and girls of Calabar many trades.

Mary was slow in getting well. She and Janie, the black girl she had brought with her, went to the southern part of England, where the climate was milder. It was hoped that the sea breezes and the mild climate would bring back her health. Days and weeks went by. Little by little Mary got better. The year 1891 came to an end. The bells rang in the New Year.

"Soon we can go back to dear Calabar," said Mary. "Oh, how I want to get back and tell more people there about the Lord JESUS."

In February, 1892, Mary and Janie sailed for Calabar. What new adventures awaited them in Africa?

"Welcome home, Ma, welcome," shouted the people of Okoyong. "GOD bless you. Praise the Lord for sending you back to us!"

When Mary came back to Okoyong, things were much different from what they had been the first time she came. Now there was a fine mission house. Churches and schoolhouses had been built in many of the villages. The people were slowly but surely turning away from their heathen customs. Formerly no chief ever died without the sacrifice of many human lives, but this was not done any more. One of the chiefs said, "Ma, you white people are GOD Almighty. No other power could have done this."

There were still many chiefs who liked to go to war and to fight with other tribes. But Mary had friends who would tell her of the plans of these chiefs. She would have to go to them and persuade them not to fight. One of Mary's dearest friends was Ma Eme. When she would hear of trouble, she would send a messenger to Mary with a medicine bottle. This would mean, "Be ready for trouble."

Mary was so good at settling the arguments between the chiefs that the British government made her a vice-consul. This was something like a governor and judge. The jungle people would not let the white men come and make new laws or settle their arguments, but they did listen to Mary. She was a very fair and honest judge. The people loved and obeyed her.

But life was not easy. Not all the natives were Christians. Even those who were, were not always good Christians but would sometimes slip back into the old heathen ways. Then it was hard for Mary and her helpers to get to the different places. There were no easy roads through the jungles, and wild animals were always there ready to kill the careless traveler.

Mary received many gifts both from the natives and from her friends in England and Scotland. One of the gifts she loved the best was a little steamboat, which the natives called "smoking canoe." The boys and girls in Scotland had given the money to buy this boat.

But Mary was not satisfied. She did not want to take life easy. As soon as she had built a church and the people were beginning to become civilized, she wanted to move on to wilder places.

"I want to start new work," said Mary. "Let those who are younger and who have not been in this work as long as I have, take the places where the work has been begun."

Many of Mary's friends among the natives had gone to Akpap, which was a village south of Ekenge. This village was about six miles from the Cross River. It was a large trading center.

Many heathen came to this village to trade their goods for other things they wanted. Mary wrote to the Mission Board and asked them to let her begin work in this new place.

"We cannot at this time let you start work at Akpap," wrote the Mission Board.

"To start there we would have to build a mission house, and we do not have the money for that. Besides the nearest landing place is Ikunetu. This is six miles from Akpap. The forests are wild and hard to get through. We believe you should continue the work at Ekenge."

Mary wrote again and again, trying to persuade the Board to let her start work at Akpap. At last the Mission Board agreed to let her start work there. They promised to build a mission house and a boathouse for her steamboat.

Mary did not wait for the house to be built. In 1896 she built a two-room native shed. Here she began her work. The house was not as good as the first house she built in Ekenge. This did not bother Mary. She was more concerned about bringing the Gospel to the heathen.

The work here was like that in Ekenge.

The chiefs came with the troubles they were having in their tribes. They wanted her advice.

The people came with their family problems and wanted her to tell them what to do. There were many heathen people who came from the jungle to visit her. Mary taught her classes. She conducted Sunday services. She was busy all the time.

Then one day the smallpox sickness broke out.

"You must all be vaccinated," said Mary to the natives. "I will scratch your arm with this medicine and the smallpox will stay away from you."

Hour after hour, far into the night, day after day, Mary vaccinated the natives. When her medicine ran out, she took blood from the arms of those who had been vaccinated to use as vaccination medicine.

One day a man came running to the house where Mary was living in Akpap. He had run a long way. He was scratched up and sweating. He had run through the jungle without stopping.

"Ma, Ma," he cried, "the smallpox sickness has come to Ekenge. Chief Ekponyong and Chief Edem are sick and many, many more. Come quick, oh, come to Ekenge or we shall all die."

"I will come with you at once," said Mary to the messenger from Ekenge. "I will help your people fight the smallpox sickness."

Mary went back to Ekenge. The smallpox sickness was very bad. Nearly the whole village was sick.

"We must have a hospital," said Mary. "I know what we will do. We will make my house here a hospital."

Soon the house was filled to overflowing with sick people.

She had to be doctor, nurse, and undertaker. Many of her close friends died. Chief Ekponyong, who at first had worked against Mary and then had become her friend, died. Chief Edem, the chief of Ekenge, was very sick.

The tired missionary did everything she could to save the old heathen's life. But one dark night he died.

Mary was all alone. Mary made a coffin for the chief. She put his body in it. Then she dug a grave. She dragged the coffin to the grave and buried it. Completely tired out she dragged herself back to Akpap.

Just at this time Mr. Ovens and another missionary came up from Duke Town. They came to Mary's hut at Akpap. All was still and quiet. Mr. Ovens looked at the other missionary.

"Something is wrong," he said. He knocked loudly at the door. He knocked and knocked again. Finally Mary awoke and opened the door. The missionaries saw how tired and sick she looked.

"What is wrong?" asked Ovens.

Mary told them about the sickness at Ekenge. She told them of what she had done. "I don't see how you could have done that work alone," said Mr. Ovens.

"Won't you go and bury the rest of the dead?" asked Mary. "I was just too tired to do it."

"Yes, we will," said Mr. Ovens. The two missionaries went to Ekenge. There they found the mission house filled with dead bodies. They buried these people and preached to those who were still living about the Saviour.

Mary was weak and sick, but she kept right on working. In one of her letters to a friend she tells about some of her work:

"Four are at my feet listening. Five boys outside are getting a reading lesson from Janie. A man is lying on the ground who has run away from his master, and is staying with me for safety until I get him forgiven. An old chief is here with a girl who has a bad sore on her arm. A woman is begging me to help her get her husband to treat her better. Three people are here for vaccination."

Every evening she would have family worship. Mary sat on the mud floor in one of the shed rooms. In front of her in a half-circle were the many children she had adopted and was taking care of. Behind them were the baskets holding the twin babies she had recently rescued.

The light from a little lamp shone on the bright faces. Mary read slowly from the Bible. Then she explained the Bible reading to the children and prayed. Then she sang a song in the native language. The tune was a Scottish melody and as she sang she kept time with a tamborine. If any of the children did not pay attention, Mary would lean forward and tap his head with the tamborine.

Mary did not get her strength back. She was not well.

The mission committee at Calabar decided that even though they had no worker to take her place, she must go home on a vacation which was long overdue.

"But who will take care of the work at Akpap?" asked Mary.

"Mr. Ovens, the carpenter, who is building the mission house at Akpap, can do the work until we find someone to take your place," answered the chairman of the committee.

"But what shall I do with my many black children? I don't want them to go back to heathen ways of living while I am gone. I don't like to ask the other mission workers to take care of them for me."

"Don't worry, Mary. We will find places for them."

Places were found for all the adopted children except the four black children whom she planned to take along with her. These were Janie, who was now sixteen years old, Mary was five, Alice three, and Maggie was only eighteen months old. Now Mary had to find ways of clothing the children. The rags they wore in the jungle would not do for the trip to Scotland. Mary took her trouble to the Lord, and He wonderfully answered her prayer. When she reached Duke Town, she found that a missionary box had just come, and it had just the things she needed.

Mary took her children on board the big ship. It was the biggest "canoe" that any of the children except Janie had ever seen.

"We're on our way to bonny Scotland," said Mary.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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