

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 TWELVE

AMONG THE CANNIBALS

"The mission Board says that they cannot open a mission station at Arochuku now," said Mary.

"I have asked GOD to give me a mission station where His Gospel can be preached to the Aros. I trust in CHRIST who is able to do more than I am able to ask or think. I know GOD will give me what I have asked."

"What are you going to do now?" asked Miss Wright.

"I am going to do what I believe GOD wants me to do. I am going to take some native Christians and make a beginning in the land of the Aros."

Mary took some native boys whom she had trained. They were able to help with school-work and church services. Mary and the boys went to Amasu, a little village which was nearer the creek than Arochuku. Here she opened a school. It was soon filled with boys and girls thirsty for book and the loving GOD. She held church services for the people, and many of them came to hear the white Ma teach about JESUS.

At last it was time for Mary to go back to Akpap. She left the native Christians to carry on the work of the school and church. The people of the village gathered around her. They said,

"Come again soon, white Ma. If you do not care for us, who will care for us?"

As Mary went down the river in her canoe, she thanked GOD that He had let her open this new field to the Gospel. Suddenly there was a canoe barring her way. In it was a tall native.

"I have been waiting for you. My master at Akani Obio sent me to stop you and bring you to his house."

Mary told her rowers to follow the native to his master's place. Soon they came to a trading place. Here Mary was greeted by a handsome young man.

"I am Onoyom Iya Nya, the president of the court and the chief of this district. This is my wife. Won't you please honor us by coming into our house?"

Onoyom and his wife led Mary to a European-type house, which was very nicely furnished. Onoyom's wife invited Mary to have some food with them. While they ate, Onoyom talked.

"Many times I have sent my servants to find you," said Onoyom, "but they never found you until today. I am happy that you have come."

"But why did you seek me? Why did you want me to come to you?" asked Mary.

"When I was a boy," said Onoyom, "I served as a guide to a missionary. He told me the Gospel story. I wanted JESUS for my Saviour. But my tribe beat me and punished me in other ways until I gave up the white man's religion and followed the juju religion of the tribe. I took part in Arochuku feasts where we ate 'long pig,' that is, men and women."

"But why do you want to talk to me?" asked Mary.

"I never forgot what the missionary told me about CHRIST. Later I had troubles and sickness. I tried witchcraft to find the person who placed the troubles and sickness on me. Instead, I met a white man. He said to me, 'How do you know it is not the GOD of the white man who is angry with you? He is all-powerful.' I said, 'How can I find this GOD?' I hoped he would tell me, but he said, 'I am not worthy to tell you. Find the white Ma who goes to Itu and she will tell you.' O Ma, please tell us about your GOD."

Tears of joy ran down Mary's cheeks. Onoyom called all the members of his family and the servants together. Mary told them of JESUS and His power to save them. She read from the Bible, prayed with the people, and promised to come back again on her next trip.

"I will build a church for you," said Chief Onoyom. "I have money. I will give \$1,500 for a mission house and school."

As Mary rode down the Enyong creek she thought of the new missionary work that was opening up.

"O GOD," she prayed, "I thank You for the new places at Itu and Amasu. I thank You for the chance to build a church at Akani Obio. Please let me open a station soon at Arochuku. There with Your blessing I hope to conquer the cannibals for CHRIST."

"I do hope," she said to herself, "that the Board will soon send an ordained minister to take over the Akpap station. I must persuade Miss Wright to go with me to Itu. I am sure GOD will give her courage to come with me. This Enyong creek region will give us all the work for CHRIST we can handle and more. We must go forward for CHRIST."

Mary made many trips to Akpap, to Itu and Amasu. She stopped at many little villages and lonely huts along Enyong creek to tell the people about the Saviour who had died also for those with black skins. Often she slept on mud floors. She ate yams and native fruits.

GOD blessed the work at Itu and Amasu. The people of Itu built a church and more than three hundred of them attended the services. At Amasu the school grew fast. The natives were learning to read.

The natives at Itu started to build a six-room house at Itu for Mary. It was to be one of the finest homes in which the missionary had ever lived.

"I am afraid it is too much work for you," said Mary to the natives. "It is too big."

"No, it is not too much." said the people of Itu. "Nothing is too much to do for you. We shall do it."

Another time a native woman knelt at Mary's feet. She washed Mary's tired feet in warm water.

"You are so kind to me," said Mary thanking her.

"I have been so afraid, Ma, that you would think us unworthy of a teacher and take her away," said the woman. "I could not live again in darkness. I pray all the time. I lay my basket down and pray on the road."

"That is good," said Mary. "Prayer can do anything. I know. I have tested it. Of course, GOD does not always answer our prayers the way we want them answered, but He does answer them and in the way that is best for us. Trust GOD always."

One day Mary thought of a new plan she wanted to try out. She had been in the jungle for five years. She was due to get a year's vacation at home in Scotland. Instead of this she asked for something else. She wrote to the Mission Board:

"I would like to have leave from the mission station at Akpap for six months. This time I would spend traveling between Okoyong and Amasu. I would visit many places which I do not have time to visit now. Already I have seen a church and a mission house built at Itu, and a school and a couple of rooms at Amasu. I have visited several towns at Enyong and have found good enough places to stay.

"I shall find my own canoe and crew. I shall stay at any one place just as long as I think wise. The members of my family [she meant the twins and slave children and other unwanted children she had adopted] shall help in teaching the beginners in the schools.

"I plan to live at Itu as my headquarters. I will look after the small schools I have started at Idot and Eki. I will visit and work for JESUS in the towns on both sides of Enyong creek all the way to Amasu. I will live there for a while or travel among the Aros telling them of JESUS. Then I will come back by easy stages to Itu and home."

Please send an assistant to help Miss Wright at Akpap, so I will be free to do this new work in the jungle. I would like Miss Wright to help me with some work among the cannibals, in some places, so that I will have more time for pioneer work in the places farther away.

Itu should be our main station. We can reach the various tribes best from it. It is the gateway to the Aros and the Ibibios and near many other tribes. That is why it became a slave market. It could be reached so easily. It is only a day's journey from the seaport of the ocean steamers, having waterway all the year round and a good beach front. Itu is a natural place for our upriver and downriver work to come together.

Mary was now fifty-six years old. She had suffered much from sickness and from the lack of many things. Now she wanted to go on a "gypsying tour of the jungle," as she called it. This was hard and difficult work. There were many dangers from wild animals and wild people. These tribes she wanted to visit did not know anything about the Saviour, or GOD's Word, but they did know how to do many wicked things like killing and eating people. Many a younger and stronger person than Mary would be afraid to tackle the job she had planned to do. Mary was not afraid. GOD had given her the chance to reach the wild cannibals. She was willing to die trying to bring the Gospel to them.

"I am willing to go anywhere," said Mary, "provided it be forward among the cannibals."

Mary anxiously waited for the answer from the Mission Board giving her permission to work for six months in the cannibal country. The answer did not come and did not come. At last she decided to go on a short trip through that country to encourage the black workers she had sent there. She went to see the Wilkies and Miss Wright.

"I am going on a short trip through the cannibal country," said Mary. "I am inviting you to be my guests on this trip. I want you to see what GOD is doing among the cannibals. Won't you come with me?"

"We'll be glad to go with you," said Mr. Wilkie.

Mary and her friends first visited Itu, where they met Colonel Montanaro, who had first taken Mary to Itu. Then they went to Akani Obio.

Here Chief Onoyom had a big party for them.

"Ma, when are you going to come and stay a long time with us?" he asked. "I want you to bring the Gospel to me and to my people."

"I hope it will be soon," said Mary. "I am praying every day that the Mission Board will let me work in your country."

Mary and her friends now went to Amasu to see the Gospel work that was being done there. Then they visited the villages around Arochuku where the Long Juju was.

Then they started back to Akpap. They visited many very small villages on the way back. Everywhere the people said to them, "We want to learn book."

They meant they wanted someone to teach them to read the Bible.

At last they arrived at Akpap. Here there was the letter from the Mission Board. Mary's hands shook as she opened the long-awaited letter. Would it give her permission to go to cannibal land or would it tell her to come home and take her furlough in the usual way?

"You may make the jungle trip that you plan, but you will have to pay your own expenses during this time. We do not have any money for that work."

Mary was happy.

Mary took the little money she had and bought supplies at Duke Town. Then she got her canoe ready. She took a crew of black rowers to row the canoe and a group of the black children she had adopted.

"It seems strange to be starting with a family on a gypsy life in a canoe," wrote Mary, "but GOD will take care of us. Whether I shall find His place for me upriver or whether I shall come back to my own people again, I do not know. He knows and that is enough."

At last Mary and her group of travelers came to Itu, which was deep in cannibal land. Mary had started the work here and then left native workers to carry on. Now there were three hundred people in the church. Mary found that the mission house at Itu was not finished.

Mary herself mixed the cement for the floor while Janie did the whitewashing. Someone asked Mary how she learned to make cement.

"I just stir it like oatmeal, then turn it out smooth with a stick and all the time I keep praying, 'Lord, here's the cement. If it is to Your glory, set it,' and it has never gone wrong."

Every day Mary made calls and helped to solve the problems of the people of Itu.

In the evenings she would hold prayer in the yards of many of the people. Always Mary told the people of the Saviour who died for them.

The news that Mary the white Ma was in cannibal land soon spread far and wide.

The tom-toms calling through the jungle told the different tribes where Mary was. From Ibibio southward, the natives sent messages to Mary.

"Please, Ma," they said, "send us a teacher."

"It is not 'book' I want," said a chief in his message, "I want GOD."

"We have three in hand for a teacher," said Chief Onoyom of Akani Obio. "Some of the boys have already finished the books Mr. Wilkie gave us. We can do no more until you send us help."

Mary spent the night praying to GOD to send more workers to Africa.

"O Britain," said Mary, "filled full of ministers and church workers, but tired of Sunday and of church, I wish that you could send over to us what you are throwing away!"

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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