

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

~ out-of-print and in the public domain ~

CHAPTER NINE

VICTORIES FOR MARY

"Oh ma, do not leave us. Please do not leave us," begged the other prisoners as the poor woman prisoner got ready to drink the poison.

"Lord, help me and help these poor people," prayed Mary.

Mary went up to the woman. The woman raised the cup of poison to her lips. Mary grabbed her arm.

"Run," she whispered. "Run to the mission house."

Before the crowd knew what was happening, Mary and the woman had run far into the jungle. They went to the mission house. No one would dare to harm anyone in the mission house. Mary then went back to the other prisoners.

"O GOD, I thank Thee that I was able to help this poor woman get away. Help me to save these other prisoners also."

When Mary got back to the other prisoners, the argument with the chiefs started again.

"An innocent person will not die if he drinks the poison," said Ekponyong. "Only a bad, guilty person will die."

"That is not right," answered Mary. "Poison will kill anyone, good or bad. Chief Edem, you know it was an accident that your son died. It was not the fault of any of these people. Please let them go free."

"I want my son to be buried in a box like the white people," said Chief Edem. "Will Bwana Ovens make a fine box for my son?"

"I will make a coffin for your son if you will let the prisoners go free," said Mr. Ovens.

"No, no," said Chief Edem.

"Then I will not make a box for you."

"Well, then I will let some go free," said Chief Edem.

"No, you must not let them go free," said Ekponyong.

"If I want to let them go free, I can," said Chief Edem. "I am chief, don't forget that."

"Show that you are a great and wise chief," said Mary. "Let them all go free."

Chief Edem thought a while. Then he spoke.

"If Bwana Ovens will make a fine box for my son then I will let all go free but Mojo, Otinga, and Obwe," said Chief Edem.

"But why keep them?" asked Mary.

"Mojo and Otinga are related to Etim's mother. They planned bad things against my boy. Obwe is related to Chief Akpo who has run away because he is guilty. Now if I let these others go will you build me a box Bwana Ovens?"

"Yes, I will build you a box," said Mr. Ovens.

"Please let the three go free, too," said Mary. "They have done you no wrong."

"We have done more for you than we have ever done before. We will do nothing else," said Chief Edem. He turned his back on Mary and walked away.

People from other villages came to take part in the wild parties that were always held when there was a funeral. Mary tried again and again to get Edem to free the three prisoners. Mary and Mr. Ovens managed to take Mojo and Otinga to the mission house where they were safe. Again Mary pleaded for Obwe. Chief Edem was very angry.

"Will you not have me honor my son? You have run off with my prisoners. I will burn down the mission house. I will send you back to Duke Town. Then you cannot trouble me any longer."

"Brother, you do not speak wisely," said Ma Eme, Edem's sister.

"The white Ma has done many good things for us. If we burn down the mission house you will have a bad name among all tribes. Chain Obwe in the white Ma's yard so that the village people cannot harm her. She cannot get away and you can find out later whether she is guilty or not."

"Very well," said Chief Edem, "I will do that. But the three must be killed for the funeral. What kind of a funeral will that be for a chief's son if no one is killed? He will have no one to go with him on the way to the dark land."

The next day two missionaries came from Duke Town in answer to Mary's note.

It was a great honor to have so many white people at a funeral. Chief Edem was no longer as angry as he had been. The missionaries showed slide pictures. The natives had never seen anything like it before. It pleased them very much and it also quieted them down.

The next day when the funeral was held, a cow was killed and put in the coffin with Etim instead of the people who were thought to have worked witchcraft against him.

Mary was glad and thankful to GOD that she had been able to save the prisoners. The last of the prisoners was let go free on the promise that if Chief Akpo was caught he would take the poison test. Mary heard that Etim was the only chief in Okoyong ever to be buried without some people being killed as a human sacrifice. The people of the jungle thought Mary was wonderful indeed.

Mary thought that this trouble was over, but a short time later Etim's uncle, who lived in a nearby village, was accused of having killed the young man. He came to Ekenge and met with the village chiefs.

"I am willing to take the poison bean test," said the uncle, "if all of the chiefs will take the test. That means you, too, Edem. Those who are innocent will not be hurt. I will take the test, but all the other chiefs must, too."

When Mary heard that Etim's uncle was going to take the poison bean test if the other chiefs would, she rushed to the village. The men were arguing. They were shaking their swords and guns at one another. Mary looked around until she found the bag of poison beans. She took them and ran off with them.

The chiefs could not find the poison beans. Finally, they quieted down. Chief Edem went to Mary.

"Give me the poison beans," he said. "I know you have taken them."

"Yes, I took them," said Mary, "but I will not give them to you. There has been enough trouble and sadness and fear. When will you be satisfied that your son's death was an accident?"

Chief Edem turned around and went back to the village. He sent all the chiefs home. Nothing more was said about the poison bean test.

Now Mary began to plead for Akpo, the chief of the village which the witch doctor had said had caused Etim to be killed.

"Chief Edem, let him come home. Forgive him. He has done you no wrong."

GOD softened Edem's heathen heart. After several weeks he agreed to let Akpo come home.

"You may tell him," Edem said to Mary, "that all thought of revenge is gone from my heart. If he wishes to return to his own village, he may do so, or he may go anywhere in Okoyong in safety."

Nothing like that had ever been done before in the jungle. The heathen people did not forgive. They always took revenge. Akpo did not believe Edem had forgiven him. He did not want to trust Edem. At last Mary convinced him that Edem meant just what he said and that Akpo could really go home.

Mary and Akpo came to his home village of Payekong. The houses had been burned. The cattle had been stolen. But it was still home. Tears came to Akpo's eyes. Thankfully the chief kneeled at Mary's feet.

"Oh, Ma, thank you, thank you for what you have done for me and my people. I and my people will always do whatever you ask."

Akpo kept his promise. Other chiefs often argued with Mary and threatened to hurt her, but Akpo and his people always helped her and did whatever she wanted them to do.

Chief Edem now was kind to Akpo and his people. He built houses for them and helped them get their gardens started again. He gave them some cattle, too. After some time had gone by, Chief Edem came to Mary. He kneeled down before her.

"Thank you, Ma, for being brave. Thank you for keeping after me until I let those prisoners go. I am glad that people were not killed at the time of Etim's death. Your ways are better than ours. We are tired of the old ways."

Many other people came and told her how glad they were that the old ways were changing. They said that they knew the old ways were bad. Mary had had a very hard time in the jungles, but now things were going better. She was busy all the time, teaching and nursing. She journeyed through the jungle where the wild animals were, but she did not fear. She was trusting GOD to take care of her as He had taken care of Daniel in the lions' den. Always she told the people of the loving Saviour who had died for their sins.

After a time Mary fell sick. She caught the jungle fever. She became very weak.

"Mary," said Ovens, "you must take a vacation. You must get away from the jungle for a while. You must go to England for a long rest. That way you can get well and come back to work here at Okoyong."

"You are right," said Mary. "Much as I hate to leave my work here, I know I must go. I will ask for a furlough at once."

For three years Mary had worked in Okoyong. But already there was a change among the heathen people.

The Gospel of JESUS has a wonderful power to change hearts and lives. As soon as word came that another worker was being sent to take her place, Mary got ready to leave for England.

At last the day came that Miss Dunlop, the new worker, arrived. Mary was ready to leave. Her friends carried her trunk and suitcases down to the Ekenge landing. A great crowd had come to the landing to tell her good-bye and wish her a safe journey. Mary was telling them to help Miss Dunlop and to remain true to the Bible teaching. Suddenly a man was seen running through the crowd. He ran up to Mary.

"Come, white Ma, a young man has been shot in the hand, and he wants your medicine!"

"Don't go Ma," said Ma Eme, Mary's friend. "You are tired and sick. You must get back to England. If you go with this man you may miss your boat. Let someone else go."

"It is a bad tribe. They are always fighting. It is dangerous to go," said Chief Edem. "Do not go with the man."

"You cannot go," said her other friends at Ekenge. "You are too sick to walk. The wild animals in the jungle will kill you. The wild warriors are out. They will kill you in the dark, not knowing who you are."

"But I must go," said Mary.

"If you must go," said Chief Edem, "then you must take two armed men with you. You must get the chief of the next village to send his drummer with you. When the people hear the drum, they will know that a protected person is traveling who must not be hurt."

It was night. Mary Slessor and the two men marched out into the darkness. The lanterns threw strange shadows that looked like fierce men in the darkness. At last Mary and her guard came to the village where they were to ask for the drummer. They told the chief what Chief Edem had said, but the chief did not want to help them.

"You are going to a fighting tribe," said the chief. "They will not listen to what a woman says. You had better go back. I will not protect you."

"You don't think a woman can do much. Maybe you are right," said Mary to the chief. "But you forget what the woman's GOD can do. He can do anything. I shall go on."

Mary went on into the darkness.

The natives watched her go. She must be crazy, they thought. She had talked back to their chief who had the power to kill her. She had walked on into a jungle where wild leopards were ready to jump on her. She was going where men were drinking and making themselves wild. But Mary was not afraid.

Once in talking about her trips through the jungle Mary said, "My great help and comfort was prayer. I did not used to believe the story of Daniel in the lions' den until I had to take some of those awful marches through the jungle. Then I knew it was true. Many times I walked alone, praying, 'O GOD of Daniel, shut their mouths!' and He did."

After pushing on through the darkness, Mary saw the dim outlines of the huts of the village. All was quiet. Suddenly she heard the swift patter of bare feet. She was surrounded by warriors shouting, pushing and shaking their spears.

"What have you come for?" asked the chief.

"I have heard a young man is hurt. I come to help him. I also heard that you are going to war. I have come to ask you not to fight," said Mary.

The chief talked with some of his men. Then he came up to Mary.

"The white Ma is welcome," he said. "She shall hear all we have to say before we fight. All the same we shall fight. Here is my son wounded by the enemy. We must wipe out the shame put on us. We must get even for this bad thing. Now Ma you may give my son your medicine. Then you must rest. Women, you take care of the white Ma. We will call her at cockcrow when we start."

Mary fixed the young man's hand. Then she laid down in one of the huts for an hour's sleep. It seemed as though her eyes were hardly shut, before she heard a voice calling her.

"Ma, they are going to battle. Run, Ma, run!"

The warriors were on the warpath. Mary could hear their wild yells and the roll of the war drums. Mary ran after them. She was tired from the hard trip to their village. She was weak from the sickness she had. But nothing could stop her. She caught up with the warriors just as they were getting ready to attack an enemy village.

"Behave like men," she yelled, "not like fools. Be quiet now. Do not yell and shout."

The warriors became silent.

"GOD says that revenge is wrong," said Mary. "He will pay back wicked people for the wrong things they do. You should not try to get even. Leave that to GOD."

"No, no," said the chief. "If we do not pay back for the wrong done us, the tribe will not be afraid of us. They will do more bad things to us."

"Yes, yes," shouted the warriors. They kept shouting and shaking their swords and guns.

"Did the whole village hurt you? Did the whole village shoot the young man? When you fight against the village you will hurt many women and children. They are innocent. They have done nothing. Let us pray to GOD about it."

All the warriors were quiet as Mary prayed. She asked GOD to please stop the war if it was His will. She prayed for the young man who had been hurt. She prayed for whoever it was that hurt him, that he might turn away from his wickedness and become a Christian. She prayed for the people of the village.

Then Mary spoke to the warriors.

"You stay here," she said, "I am going over to the village."

Fearlessly she walked over to where the line of village warriors were drawn up with their swords and spears.

"Hello," said Mary.

The warriors said nothing. Mary looked over the angry faces. Then she laughed.

"Nice bunch," she said. "Is this the way you welcome lady visitors?"

The warriors stirred uneasily. They did not say anything.

"Where is your chief?" asked Mary. "Surely he is not afraid to talk to me."

An old chief stepped out from behind the village warriors. To Mary's surprise he kneeled down in front of her.

"Ma," he said, "we thank you for coming. It is true we shot the young man, the young chief of those who have come to fight us. But it was one man who did it. The whole village was not at fault. Please make peace. Tell us what we must do."

Mary looked into the face of the chief. It was Chief Okurike. Long ago she had made a hard trip through the jungle in pouring rain to help when he was deathly sick. Because of what she had done then, he was now at her feet asking her to make peace. Mary shook hands with Chief Okurike. Then she spoke to his warriors.

"Stay where you are," she said. "Some of you find a place where I can sit in comfort. I am hungry. Bring me breakfast. I will not starve while men fight."

The warriors did as she told them.

"Now," she said, "choose two or three men to speak for you. We shall have a palaver. In that way we will settle this thing."

The four men met and talked with one another while Mary ate breakfast.

"Why do you want to fight and kill because one drunken man wounded your young chief?" Mary asked the men from the fighting tribe. "Let the tribe of the drunken youth pay a fine."

A long talk followed. Sometimes it became very exciting. The arguing grew loud. The father of the young man wanted to have the man who had shot him punished hard. When the men became angry, Mary would stop them.

"Let us pray about this," Mary would say. After she had prayed they would settle the point. Finally Mary and her GOD won out.

The fighting tribe at last agreed to be satisfied with a fine. The village paid the fine. They did not use money. So the fine was paid in barrels and bottles of trade gin.

Now Mary was worried. What should she do? She knew the warriors would drink the gin right away. She knew this would make them fight after all in spite of their promises. A quick thought came to her. According to the law of these people, clothes thrown over anything gave it the protection of your body. No one else could touch it. Mary snatched off her skirt. She took off all the clothes she could spare. She spread them over the barrels and bottles. Now no one could touch them.

Mary took the one glass the tribe had. She gave one glassful to each chief to show that there was no trick and that the barrels and bottles were really filled with gin.

Then she spoke to them about fighting. "If all of you go to your homes and don't fight," said Mary, "I'll promise to send the stuff after you. I must go away. I have been sick and I must go where I can get strong again. I am going across the great waters to my home. I shall be away many moons. Will you promise me that you will not fight while I am gone? It will make me very happy if you will make that promise. It will make me sad if you don't, for I will always be wondering whether you are fighting and hurting one another."

"I will promise," said the chief of the village, "if the other chief will."

All the warriors looked at the chief whose son had been hurt. For a long time he said nothing. His tribe had always been fighters. It would be hard for them to give up fighting. The chief rubbed his chin. He scratched his head.

"Yes, Ma," he said finally, "I will promise that we will not fight while you are gone." The two villages kept the promise made by their chiefs. When Mary came back the two chiefs could say, "It is peace."

Mary was very tired. Slowly she tramped through the hot jungle. After many hours she came to Ekenge.

"We have sent your trunks and things on ahead," said Chief Edem. "Here are my best rowers and best soldiers. They are ready to take you to Duke Town."

Mary once more stepped into the canoe. This time there was no one to call her back. Little black Janie, whom Mary had adopted, was with her.

"Good-by, good-by, Ma," shouted the crowd. "GOD keep you safe and bring you back to us again."

The rowers pulled their oars strongly, and swiftly down the slow moving river went the canoe.

Three years Mary had spent in Okoyong. Already she had seen a change in the heathen people. A greater change was still to come. Mary was going to see more of the power the Gospel has to change heathen hearts and lives.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
