

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 FOURTEEN

JOURNEY'S END

"Send us workers for dark Africa," said Mary. "If I can get the Board to send us one or more workers, I will give half my salary to add to theirs. I will give the house for them to live in and find the servants. You who have so much, won't you do something for these poor people of Africa?"

Mary was speaking in the churches of Scotland telling about her work in Africa. After she had returned to Scotland, she felt much better. The air and climate was much better than in the steaming jungles of Africa. As soon as she was strong enough, she began to go about telling about her work. She urged the people to give money and to send workers to Africa.

Above all, she wanted to get money to support the industrial home for women which she had planned. From May until October she went among the churches telling about the "African sheep" whom the Good Shepherd JESUS wanted brought in.

In October Mary asked to be sent back to Africa. She wanted to carry on her work there.

"I am foolish, I know," said Mary, "but I just feel homeless without any relatives here in Scotland. I am a poor, lonesome soul with only memories."

Back in Africa Mary was busier than ever, holding court, looking after her home, and doing missionary work.

On Sundays she held a half-dozen or more services in the nearby villages in which lived the people with whom she worked during the week. On some of these trips she brought back orphan children to join her already "overstuffed" household. But all this work was too much for her. She became sick again and very weak. Now her eyes began to get weak, so that she could not see as well. But nothing could stop her.

She started the building of the industrial home for women and girls. She planted fruit trees there and planned to raise rubber and cocoa and cattle.

Mary wanted to move again. Some natives had come from Ikpe to see her before she went on her vacation to Scotland. They asked her to bring the Gospel to them. Now they came again.

"We have heard of the great white Mother and we want to learn to be GOD's men," they said.

Mary made a two-day canoe trip to their town. Ikpe was a large town with many people in it. But the people were very wicked. They did all the wicked heathen things that were against GOD's commandments. But there were people in it who wanted to become Christians. They had begun to build a small church building to which they had added two rooms for the missionary.

Mary held a service in the church. Many people had gathered to hear for the first time the news of how JESUS saves us. After the end of the service Mary decided that it was GOD's will for her to move to Ikpe. But she had to arrange for someone to take care of her other work first.

When she came home from this trip she was sick again. As soon as she was a little better she busied herself with the women's home. She wanted to get that running well before she left for Ikpe. The natives of Ikpe sent some more of their people to visit her and beg her to come to Ikpe. Whenever she could, she made trips to that village. Often she took other missionaries with her.

In November, 1909, she resigned from her court work. The government did not like to lose her because she knew so much about the natives and their customs. But the government knew that Mary's first love was her missionary work. They let her give up her court work and thanked her for all she had done.

"Just a few more things to take care of," said Mary, "and I will be ready to start for Ikpe. Those faithful people deserve a worker. They are holding services even though they know very little of Christianity. I must go there. I know GOD wants it."

It was the year 1910 and Mary was sure that now she could begin her work in the new territory that looked so promising. Suddenly Mary became very, very ill. The government sent its official automobile to take her to the Mary Slessor Hospital at Itu. Did GOD want Mary to work at Ikpe? Or would someone else preach the Gospel there?

For many weeks Mary lay sick in the hospital at Itu. At last she was much better.

"You must go to Duke Town for a longer rest," said the doctor.

"But, Doctor," said Mary, "I have my work to do, I cannot spend my time lying in bed."

"If you are unwilling to rest at Duke Town, I shall have to send you to Scotland on a long vacation."

"Very well," sighed Mary, "I will go to Duke Town."

The next day the government sent its boat, the "Maple Leaf," to take Mary down the river to Duke Town. Here she spent many weeks resting and gaining her strength. At last the doctor agreed that she could go back to her work at Ikotobong. Once more the government sent its boat to take her back to her mission station.

"I want to go to Ikpe soon," said Mary, "but first I want to establish a station at Ikot Expene and at other places along the way."

Whenever she felt strong enough, she rode her bicycle through the jungle to Ikot Expene choosing places for schools and churches along the way, talking to chiefs, and getting the things ready for more places where the Gospel could be preached.

The people at Ikpe were holding services even though they knew very little about Christianity.

"Soon the white Ma will come," they said. "She will tell us more about JESUS."

A native teacher from another station, who had received training from Mary, taught the people what he knew about the Gospel.

"Oh, why cannot the church send two workers to Ikpe?" said Mary. "Why don't they use the money on hand for that? If there isn't enough money left after two years, let them take my salary. I shall be only too glad to live on native food with my children."

Mary was busy collecting building materials and other things for the church of Ikpe. At last the time came. GOD wanted Mary at Ikpe. How happy Mary was! How happy were the faithful people at Ikpe who had waited so long!

Mary at once was busy with much work. She quieted mobs, she calmed quarreling chiefs, she held meetings with the crowds, and on Sundays conducted services. One day the smallpox broke out. The government sent down men to vaccinate the natives so the sickness would not spread. Mary heard shouting and yelling in the streets. She looked out of her house. The natives were yelling and shouting and waving guns and swords. Mary went up to the crowd.

"What is this?" asked Mary. The crowd kept yelling.

"Be quiet," shouted Mary and held out her hands. "Let your chief speak."

"Ma," said the chief, "my people are afraid of the white man's juju. It makes the people sick." He meant the vaccination.

"The vaccination may make a little sickness, but it keeps you from getting the big sickness," said Mary. Then she told them how vaccination had helped other tribes. She showed them her vaccination. After a long talk with the chiefs and the people the matter was peaceably settled.

Mary wanted to keep in touch with her former headquarters at Ikotobong.

She made many canoe trips back and forth. These trips were very hard on her and she did not rest well. Many people wondered how Mary could keep on working, but she trusted GOD who made her strong to carry on.

During 1911 a tornado struck Mary's house at Use, one of the stations. She fixed the house herself. During this she strained herself and had a heart attack which was followed by a severe fever. Sometimes the fever was so great she was delirious. But still she would not stop working. She continued to teach school and hold worship services on Sunday.

Dr. Hitchcock of the Slessor Hospital came to see her every week.

"You must not go to Ikpe again," he said. "You must not ride your bicycle. You must spend more time resting."

But Mary disobeyed the doctor and held services the following Sunday. It was too much for her. She almost fainted before the service was over.

"You must stay in bed," said Dr. Hitchcock, "until you are well enough to get up."

"All right, doctor," said Mary.

"And you must eat meat twice a day," said the doctor.

"But I'm not a meat-eater," answered Mary.

"You're going to be, or I will send you to Duke Town for a long rest."

Mary laughed. "I've all my plans made and I must not draw a salary without doing something for it."

At last the doctor sent her to the Slessor Hospital for a rest. Because of her hard work, she had a bad fever sickness. Now Mary saw that she was foolish in not listening to the doctor.

"Life is hardly worth living," she said, "but I am doing what I can to help the doctor to help me, so I can be fit again for another spell of work."

The Christians at Ikpe sent some men to see Mary to ask her when she would be back. "Seven weeks," said Dr. Hitchcock.

"I may run up sooner than that," said Mary. "I'm very well if the doctor would only believe it."

Near the end of 1911 Mary was allowed to leave the hospital. She hurried to her friends at Ikpe. But Mary still was not very strong. Her friends in Calabar and in Scotland urged her to take a long-earned furlough. While thinking about this, Mary decided to have a box on wheels made so that she could get around since the doctor would not let her use her bicycle. Some friends heard about this and they sent her a light cart which could be wheeled by two boys or girls.

"Now I don't need a furlough," said Mary. "Instead of going home as I had planned, I shall stay here and enjoy going over ground in my cart that I couldn't get over otherwise."

A new government road was being built between Ikpe and Ikot Expene. Mary wanted to start schools and churches all along this road. But she was not strong enough to carry out her idea. Her heart was very weak now and she had to rest often. If there had been someone to take her place, she would have gone home for a rest.

Mary wrote to a friend:

"We were never so shorthanded, and I can do what others cannot, what indeed, doctors would not allow them to try. No one meddles with me and I slip along and do my work using less strength than many would have to use."

Mary knew if she took a furlough her work at Ikpe and the other stations would stop because there was no one to take her place. This she did not want to happen. She worked on through the summer of 1912. In September she completed thirty-six years as a missionary in Africa.

"I'm lame and feeble and foolish," said Mary, "but I grip on well."

Her friends were very much worried about her health. It was suggested that she be sent on an expense-paid trip to the Canary Islands. There the climate was milder than it would have been in Scotland during the winter. She was glad to go.

Mary wrote:

"What love is wrapped around me! It is simply wonderful. I can't say anything else. Oh, if I only get another day to work. I hope it will be fuller of earnestness and blessing than the past."

This vacation was a real blessing to Mary. The fevers left her. With no committee meetings, no court cases or other problems to worry about, she grew stronger very quickly. It was not many months before she was back at Duke Town. The doctor gave her an examination.

"You're as sound as an elephant's ivory tusk," said the doctor. "You are good for many years, if you will only take care."

Mary did not like that. She had never been willing to sit and twiddle her thumbs. Now her mind was full of new plans for more work. She wanted to get busy with her work for the Lord.

For the next two years Mary worked hard at Use and Ikpe. She traveled between these two places, sometimes in a canoe, sometimes in the government boat, but mostly in her two-wheeled cart. There was still much to do. She was still fighting the juju worship, the sinful practice of eating people and the murdering of twins.

Eight years had gone by since Mary had left Akpap.

A new church was being finished and the missionaries who now worked there invited Mary to attend the dedication service. Mary wanted to see the dear friends she had loved for years. She decided to go and take her adopted children with her.

From all over Okoyong the people had come to see their Ma, their White Queen. Ma Eme, the missionary's old friend, was there. When they met tears filled their eyes, they were so happy to see one another again. But Mary was sad, too, because Ma Eme had never openly accepted Christianity. Speaking of Ma Eme, Mary said, "My dear and old friend and almost sister, she made the saving of life so often possible in the early days. It is sad that she would not come out for CHRIST. She could have been the honored leader of GOD's work. Hers is a foolish choice. And yet GOD cannot forget all she was to me and how she helped me in those dark and bloody days."

Hundreds of people crowded into the new church at Akpap. Mary remembered the wild parties and drunken fights of the first days of her work among the people. How they were changed! How GOD had changed them through His Gospel! It was wonderful! Mary thanked GOD for His wonderful blessings.

Shortly after her trip to Akpap, Mary was honored by the king of Great Britain. She was chosen by him to be a member of the order of St. John of Jerusalem. This was an honor given only to English Christians who had done great things for GOD. The government people of Calabar decided that they must have a public celebration of this great honor. They sent the government boat for Mary. The little old missionary, now nearly sixty-five, was brought to Duke Town. Here a great crowd filled the biggest hall in town.

The governor made a speech and pinned the cross on Mary's left shoulder. During the speech Mary sat with her head in her hands. When it came time for her to speak, she found it hard to talk. Turning to the boys and girls who were in the hall she said, "Be faithful to the government. Be Christians. Be friends of the mission and be followers of JESUS."

Later she wrote to her friends in Scotland:

"Don't think there is any change in me because I received this honor. I am Mary Slessor, nothing more and none other than the unworthy, unprofitable but most willing servant of the King of kings."

The only change the honor made in Mary was that she worked harder than ever. A government road was opened to Odoro Ikpe. Mary at once started a mission there and reached out into the small jungle settlements. There she talked with the chiefs and the natives. At last she won their consent to build schools and churches. They gave her the land to do this. Now she was beginning all over in a new territory. She had the same hard work, the same troubles, the same heathen customs to fight. But Mary was glad to do it. She thanked GOD for the chance to bring the Gospel to people who had never heard about it.

Mary saw to it that a house was built and then began teaching in the school, holding services, settling quarrels, winning souls for JESUS.

In August, 1914, rumors reached her that Europe was rushing into war. This made her feel sick. She knew that this war would not only bring suffering, horror, and death to many of her dear friends, but it would also hinder the work in Calabar.

Several months went by. The mail came. Mary opened the newspaper. There she read the headlines: Russia declares war! France declares war! England declares war! Mary fainted. The trouble and excitement were too much for her. For two weeks more she carried on her work but it was too much for her. She became weaker and weaker. On Sunday, January 10, 1915, she held her usual church service. After the church meeting she fainted. Dr. Robertson arrived from the Slessor Hospital at Itu. He was able to bring her to, but on January 12 she found it almost impossible to talk. Her last words were a prayer in the African language called Efik.

"O Abasi, sana mi yok," said Mary. "O GOD, release me!"

Janie, the first twin Mary had saved, was now a beautiful black woman. She and other children Mary had saved and adopted were watching beside Mary's bed through the night. A rooster crowed.

"Day must be dawning," said one of the girls.

Day was dawning for Mary, GOD's eternal day. She slipped away from the earth to be with her Saviour in Heaven.

"Our Mother is dead, and we shall be slaves now that our Mother is dead," cried the natives. The news that the white Ma was dead spread rapidly. Natives came from all over the country to see the woman they loved.

Mary's body was taken to Itu where services were held. Then it was taken to Duke Town. Here another service was held. Then the coffin was carried to the beautiful cemetery on Mission Hill. From this place could be seen a large part of the city where Mary had begun her faithful missionary work in Africa. Around her grave the grateful natives gathered and wept for her who had wept and prayed over them.

"Do not cry, do not cry," said old Ma Fuller, Mary's native friend through the years. "Praise GOD for His blessings. Ma was a great blessing."

First the Africans called her "the white Ma who lives alone." Then they called her "the Ma who loves babies." But lastly they called her "eka kpukpru owo," "everybody's Mother."

THE END

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