

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 TWO

A BRAVE GIRL

"Quit pestering us to come to church. If you don't let us alone, we'll hurt you," shouted Duncan, the leader of a group of tough boys in the slums.

Mary prayed GOD to make her brave and then said, "I will not stop trying to get you to come to church. I will not stop trying to tell you about JESUS, the Saviour. Do whatever you like."

These boys had often tried to interrupt and break up the services, but Mary went out into the streets and tried to persuade and coax the young people to come and hear the Word of GOD.

"All right then," said Duncan. "Here goes."

He took a piece of lead from his pocket and tied it to a long string. He began to swing it around his head. Each time he whirled the lead, it came closer to Mary's face. Mary did not move. The gang watched. They held their breath as it came closer and closer to her blue eyes. Mary did not blink. Finally, it grazed her forehead. Still Mary did not move. Duncan dropped the piece of lead to the ground.

"We can't scare her, boys," he said. "She's game."

"There is Someone who is far braver than I am. He's the One who makes me brave. Won't you come to the services and hear about Him?" asked Mary.

"All right, Spunky, I will," said Duncan. "And the rest of the fellows will, too. Come on, boys, we're going to the church tonight and no funny business."

This was not the only time that Mary had to face the tough boys and girls of the slums. But she had a Friend who was closer to her than even her dear mother. He made her strong and brave and true. Mary loved her Saviour, and was ready to do whatever He might want her to do.

Her class grew larger all the time. She visited the members in their slum homes. She fitted herself into the family. If the baby needed tending, she tended to it. If someone was sick, she helped to nurse the sick person. Always she told the family about CHRIST and His power to save. The people of the slums came to love this home missionary and many of them were won to CHRIST through her work.

The years went by. Did Mary still remember she wanted to be a missionary in Calabar? Yes, she remembered, but now she had all she could do to support her family. Since Robert, the would-be missionary, had died, Mother Slessor hoped that her youngest son John would be a missionary. But GOD had other plans. John became sick. He was sent to New Zealand for his health, but died when he arrived in that country. Was there to be no missionary from the Slessor family?

Whenever missionaries came to the Wishart Church or to Dundee, Mother Slessor, Mary, Susan and Janie would go to hear them. At home they would read the stories of missionaries and their work. They read missionary magazines. They read about the missionaries in China, Africa, Japan, India, and even Calabar.

One day William Anderson, a missionary to the West Coast of Africa, came to the little church. He told of the great need for missionaries in Africa. He told of the bad things which the people did who did not know JESUS.

Sitting in church, listening to the missionary, Mary saw in her mind a picture of Africa. It was not a beautiful picture. She saw captured Negroes being taken to other lands as slaves. She saw alligators and crocodiles swimming in the muddy waters, ever ready to eat black children who would come too close to the river. She saw cannibal chiefs at their terrible feasts and fearful battles with spears and arrows. She saw villages where trembling prisoners dipped their hands in boiling oil to test their guilt; where wives were killed to go with their dead chief into the spirit-land. But these things did not frighten the Scottish girl who was afraid to cross a field if a cow was in it. She longed to go to Africa.

"Why don't I become a missionary?" Mary asked herself as she worked the looms in the factory. "Can I leave my home? Does Mother still need my help? Susan and Janie are working now. They could get along without me. But will I be brave enough? There are tropical jungles, and black men who eat people. There are wild animals, sicknesses, and death. GOD can make me brave to face all of these things."

Mary prayed, "O GOD, if it is Your will, let me go as a missionary to Calabar. Let me be a teacher to teach these black people the story of salvation. You have commanded us, Your disciples, to carry the Gospel to the farthest parts of the earth. Use me, O Lord, to help carry it to Calabar. Hear me, for the sake of JESUS, my Saviour."

It was 1874. The news flashed around the world: "Livingstone is dead." The great missionary had died on his knees in Africa. Everywhere people were talking of this great man who had given his life to tell the people of Africa about the Saviour. Mary made up her mind! She must go to Calabar! But what would her mother say? And if her mother agreed, would her church send her out to that field? Mary went to her mother.

"I want to offer myself as a missionary," said Mary Slessor to her mother. "Are you willing?"

"My child, I'll willingly let you go. You'll make a fine missionary, and I'm sure GOD will be with you."

"Thank you, Mother," said twenty-six-year-old Mary. "I know GOD will be with me and will make me strong and brave to serve Him."

Mother Slessor was very happy. There was going to be a missionary in the family after all. But there were some people who did not agree with Mother Slessor. They shook their heads in doubt. Others thought Mary was very foolish to risk her life in that way.

"You're doing real well at the factory," said one of them. "And you're doing missionary work right down there at the mission. Why rush away to those people way off in Africa? Seems to me missionary work ought to begin at home."

"Yes," said Mary, "it should begin there, but not end there. There are some who cannot go to Africa. They can do the work at home. If GOD lets me, I want to take His Word to those people who have never heard of Him or His love."

The next year, 1875, Mary offered herself to the Foreign Mission Board of her church. She asked to be sent to Calabar. Then she waited. Waiting is hard sometimes. Mary had to wait until the Board had a meeting. Then when the meeting was over, she had to wait for the secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions to write her a letter. Early in 1876 the letter came. How excited Mary was! Her hands shook as she tried to open the letter. Had they accepted her offer or refused it?

"Mary dear," said her mother, "you are so nervous, you had better let me open that letter."

"I'll manage, Mother," said Mary. She finally got it open, and she read:

Dear Miss Slessor, I take great pleasure in informing you that the Board of Foreign Missions accepts your offer to serve as a missionary, and you have been appointed teacher to Calabar. You will continue your studies for the teaching profession at Dundee. May GOD richly bless you in His service.

"Oh, Mother, I'm accepted! They're going to send me to Calabar!"

"Praise GOD from whom all blessings flow," said Mother Slessor. "That is wonderful news indeed. To Calabar! Oh, I'm so happy I could shout for joy!"

In March another letter came. This letter told her that she was to spend three months at a teachers' college in Edinburgh. All Mary's friends in Dundee gathered at the train as she got ready to leave for Edinburgh.

"Come, Mary," said Duncan, the tough boy from the slums, who was now a grown man and a faithful worker at the mission, "give us a speech."

"I can't make a speech," said Mary, "but I'll just ask you this: Pray for me."

While Mary was at the school in Edinburgh, some of the other girls she met there tried to talk her out of being a missionary. They did not want her to go off to Africa where there were wild animals and man-eating heathen, and all kinds of terrible sicknesses.

"Don't you know that Calabar is the white man's grave?" asked one of her school friends.

"Yes," answered Mary. "But it is also a post of honor. Since few volunteer for that section, I wish to go because my Master needs me there."

At last the time had come for Mary to leave for Africa. For fourteen long years she had worked at the looms in the weaving factory. As she worked, she had dreamed of Calabar. Now her dream was going to come true. Mary went to the city of Liverpool. There she went on board the ship, the "S. S. Ethiopia." As she got on board she looked around. Everywhere were barrels of whiskey.

"Hundreds of barrels of whiskey, but only one missionary," said Mary sadly.

The boat whistle blew. The engines chugged. The "S. S. Ethiopia" was on its way. It was August 5, 1876. Mary saw the shoreline of Scotland become dimmer and dimmer. She looked forward to seeing the coast of Africa and the land of Calabar.

"At last I am on my way to Calabar," said Mary Slessor as the "S. S. Ethiopia," sailed southward. "How Mother would like to be with me! How often she prayed that GOD would send more missionaries to Calabar. I didn't think then that I would really be one of them."

It did not take Mary long to make friends on board the ship. Among the friends she made were Mr. and Mrs. Thomson.

"So you are going to Calabar," said Mr. Thomson. "Aren't you afraid of that wild country?"

"Oh, no," said Mary, "because GOD is with me. He will take care of me. JESUS said, '**Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,**' and I am trusting in His promise."

"Do you know what this country is like?" asked Mrs. Thomson.

"Only what I have read about it," said Mary. "You've been there before, haven't you?"

"Yes, we have," said Mrs. Thomson.

"My husband wants to build a home where tired missionaries can rest and rebuild their strength for their wonderful work. He has explored the West Coast and chosen the Cameroon Mountains as the place for that home. We are going there now to build this home for missionaries. Missionary work in Africa is so hard that missionaries need a place where they can rest from time to time."

"I think that's wonderful of you!" said Mary. "I know the Lord will bless the work you are doing. Won't you tell me about Africa?"

"Well," said Mr. Thomson, "the climate is very hot. The sun is so strong and hot that white people don't dare go out without a hat to protect their heads. The rivers are very muddy and often flow through dark, gloomy swamps that white people can hardly get through."

"But often," broke in Mrs. Thomson, "there are beautiful green banks with the most beautiful flowers. You will see the prettiest birds in all the world dressed in the brightest reds and greens and blues and purples. You will see the long-legged cranes and the funny pelicans with their big beaks."

"And don't forget the man-eating crocodiles that are swimming in the river or lying on the banks. They look like an old log, but if you get near them, look out! They seem lazy and slow, but they can snap off a leg or drag you into the river as quick as a wink. Then in the jungles are the lions, and elephants, and other wild animals."

"I am most frightened of the swift and terrible tornadoes," said Mrs. Thomson.

"And, Miss Slessor," said Mr. Thomson, "don't forget that the natives are wild and fierce and many of them are cannibals who would be glad to eat you."

"I shall not fear," said Mary. "GOD is leading me. He is my good Shepherd. He can protect me from fierce beasts and the wild people. I am happy He has chosen me to bring the messages of the Saviour to these wild people. He will call me home to Him when the work He has for me is done. Till then nothing can really harm me."

Four weeks passed. The ship was plowing through the tropical sea. The air was warm, but the sea breezes made it very pleasant. The ship turned landward and soon Mary could see the shore of Africa. How thrilled and happy she was - Africa at last! On September 11 the ship entered the tumbling, whirling waters of the Cross and Calabar Rivers which here joined and poured into the sea. Mary had read about these rivers, and now she actually saw them. She saw, too, the pelicans and the cranes. She saw crocodiles, about which Mr. Thomson had told her, lazily slide off the sandbanks into the muddy waters of the river.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomson stood with Mary at the rail of the ship as it sailed up the river. They would point out to her interesting sights as they passed along.

"Look," said Mrs. Thomson, "there is Duke Town. That is where your mission is."

Mary saw clay cliffs. She saw mud houses with roofs of palm leaves. Duke Town did not look in the least like Dundee or the other cities in Scotland which Mary knew. Duke Town did not look pretty, but Mary did not care. To her it looked beautiful, because here she would have the chance to serve the Lord.

Soon native canoes came out to the steamer. Then the boats of the traders.

All was hurry and bustle as the great ship anchored and prepared to unload the part of its cargo that had been sent to Duke Town. Mary looked about, wondering how she was going to go ashore.

A tall Negro came up to Mary. He bowed and said, "Are you the new white ma that is coming to the mission?" By ma the native meant *lady*. They called all white ladies "ma."

"Yes, I am," said Mary.

"Mr. Anderson sent me to bring you ashore and take you to the mission house."

Mary was lowered from the great ship into a large canoe. Her baggage was brought down and placed in the boat. Then with powerful strokes the rowers sent the boat skimming across the water toward Duke Town. Mary was helped ashore by the tall Negro who had come for her.

"At last," she said to herself, "at last I am in Calabar."

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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