

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 ELEVEN

CLOUDS AND SUNSHINE

"The other missionaries at Calabar," said Mary, "work as hard, if not harder, than I do. We need more workers to preach the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST for your lost black brothers and sisters. They have souls just as you do. JESUS loves them just as He does you. We must tell them of His love. I would like to go farther inland to people who have never heard the Gospel and make a home among the cannibals."

Mary was giving a talk at one of the churches. As soon as she was well enough to make speeches, many of the churches wanted to hear her. The people were very much interested in the black children she had adopted and brought with her. Many of them had never seen black people before.

Mary had some trouble speaking in English. For many years now she had been speaking almost all the time in the African language. It was sometimes hard for her to say the right English words, but the Holy Spirit helped her, and the people remembered her talks and gave generously for the work in Africa.

Late in the year 1898 Mary and the black children got on the big "canoe" and sailed back to Africa. They spent a happy Christmas on the ship.

Once more strong and well, Mary went back to work in Akpap. She taught the children and grownups. She worked with the sick. She visited in the bush and in the jungle. During this time Mary had the joy of seeing six young men become Christians. These young men she trained and sent to the neighboring villages as Gospel workers. She had hoped for more helpers, but was grateful that GOD had given her these. More and more of the jungle people heard about her. Bushmen traveled hundreds of miles to see the white Ma who told them about JESUS.

Mary used every chance she had to tell the Gospel to heathen who had never heard it.

The stories the visiting people told about their lands and the inland tribes filled Mary with the desire to explore other parts of the country.

Often in the mission boat or in a canoe she traveled to villages farther away. On one trip the canoe in which Mary was riding was attacked by a hippopotamus. Mary thought her end had come. Nevertheless, she bravely fought off the animal, using metal cooking pots and pans as weapons.

In the southern part of Nigeria was a strong, wild tribe called the Aros. They were a proud but wicked people. They made war on peaceful tribes. They would steal people from peaceful villages and make them slaves. They prayed to the Devil, and they killed people as human sacrifices to please their idols. They were cannibals who ate people.

The government decided to make this tribe stop doing these bad things. A small band of soldiers was sent against this tribe to make them obey. This made Mary sad. She knew that sending soldiers to fight against these people would not change them. She knew that only the Gospel could change the black men's hearts. She wished she could go to this tribe with the Gospel of JESUS, but the government said no. The government officers feared there might be a tribal war which would even come to Okoyong. They decided that Mary would be safer in Creek Town than Akpap. Sadly Mary left her friends and spent three months in Creek Town.

Her Okoyong friends did not forget her. They came often to visit her and brought her gifts. They also brought their quarrels to her to settle. They called her their queen. Finally, Mary was allowed to go back to Akpap.

Three years went by. It was now fifteen years since Mary had first come to Okoyong. On the anniversary of the day that she came a celebration was held. Seven young men whom Mary had won for CHRIST were baptized.

W.T. Weir, a missionary from Creek Town, helped in organizing the first Okoyong Christian Church. The following Sunday the church was filled to overflowing. Mary presented eleven children for baptism. The Lord's Supper was served for the first time to natives and white workers who had accepted CHRIST as their Saviour. After songs had been sung and speeches made by others, Mary got up to speak.

"You must build a church large enough to take care of all who come to hear GOD's Word. Okoyong now looks to you who have accepted CHRIST as your Saviour and who have joined the church for proof of the power of the Gospel, more than it looks to me. I am very happy over all that has been done these past fifteen years, but it is GOD who did it. To Him belongs all the glory. Mission houses, schools, and a church have been built. Wicked heathen customs have been stopped. Chiefs have quit fighting, and women are much better off than they were when I came. Let us praise GOD for this and let us go on and do greater things. The Lord will help us and will bless our work."

Mary was happy the way the work was going, but she was not satisfied. She wanted to go to other places.

"This cannibal land of deep darkness with woods of spooky mystery is like a magnet," said Mary Slessor. "It draws me on and on."

"Where is this country where you want to work?" asked Miss Wright, one of the teachers at the Girls' Institute at Calabar.

"It lies to the west of the Cross River. It stretches for miles and miles toward the Niger River."

"Haven't any missionaries been there?"

"None have gone into the forest. Missionaries and traders have gone along the edge of it when they went up the Cross River."

"What tribes live in this dark and mysterious country?" asked Miss Wright.

"The Ibo tribe lives in most of the country, but they are ruled by the Aros clan," said Mary.

"Who are they? Tell me something about them, Mary. I know so little about the tribes, except those who come to Calabar or send their girls to our Institute."

"The Aros clan are a wise but tricky people. They live in thirty villages near the district of Arochuku, where I would like to begin a mission. They are strong and rule the Ibo tribe because of their trade and religion. They trade slaves, which their religion furnishes. When they cannot get enough slaves that way, they raid Ibo villages and capture the people who live there and sell them."

"You say their religion furnishes them with slaves? How is that possible?"

"The Ibo tribe and the Aros pray to the juju god. They believe the juju god lives in a tree. They think this tree is holy. Each village has its own god and sacred tree, but the main juju used to be about a mile from Arochuku."

"But you haven't told me about the slaves," interrupted Miss Wright.

"I am just coming to that," said Mary. "This main juju, called the Long Juju, was reached by a winding road that goes through a dense jungle and leads at last to a lake. In the center of the lake is an island on which was the Long Juju. Here hundreds of people came to ask advice from the priests and to worship. When the people came here, the Aros clan had captured them. Then they were either sold as slaves, sacrificed to juju, or eaten by the tribe."

"How terrible!"

"The Aros are tricky. One of their tricks, was to throw some of the people they captured into the water. The water at once turned red. The priests would tell the people that juju had eaten the men.

"The people believed it, but really the red was only coloring the priests had thrown into the river."

"Is the juju still there?" asked Miss Wright.

"No. The British soldiers went over the Cross River. They had a battle with the natives and beat them. They captured Arochuku. Then they chopped down the Long Juju. But of course the natives still have their village jujus. They still do many wicked things."

"And you want to work among those terrible people?"

"Yes, don't you think they have a great need for the Gospel?"

"Oh, they do! But I would not have the courage to work among them."

"I have no courage," said Mary, "except what GOD gives me."

"Tell me, Mary, have you gone into that country at all?"

"I have made some short exploration trips. I told the traders to tell the chiefs that someday I would come to their country to live, but their only answer was, 'It is not safe.' That is what the people told me when I wanted to go to Okoyong. I trust in my heavenly Father and I am not afraid of the cannibals no matter how fierce and cruel they may be."

"But Mary, did you know that when a chief died recently, fifty or more people were eaten at the funeral ceremonies, and twenty-five others had their heads cut off and were buried with the chief?"

"Yes, I heard that. But things were almost as bad when I came to Okoyong. GOD blessed my work, and He can protect me in this strange new land of the cannibals. I do hope the Mission Board will let me go and work among the Aros and Ibos."

The missionaries in Calabar wanted Mary to work at Ikorofiong and at Unwana, which were two towns farther up the Cross River from Akpap. But Mary did not think these were good places for her work. She wanted to be where she could reach the most people. She wanted to work at Arochuku, the chief city of Aros which was also near the Efik, Ibo and Ibibio tribes. She wanted to open her first station at Itu, which was on the mouth of Enyong creek, her second station at Arochuku and a third at Bende.

The missionaries at Calabar did not agree, but they decided to wait until a worker could be found to take Mary's place at Akpap. Mary would not leave these people until they could be taken care of by Christian workers.

"Send a minister to take care of a station. I cannot build up a church the way a minister can," said Mary.

It looked as though Mary would not get to go to the land of Aros.

Then Miss Wright, the teacher from the Girls' Institute, asked to be sent to Akpap as an assistant. This request was sent to Scotland for the Board to approve. Mary now decided to start work at once. In January, 1903, with two boys, Esien and Efiom, and a girl, Mana, whom she had carefully trained, she loaded her canoe with food and other supplies and set off for the land of the cruel cannibals.

They did not know how the people there would treat them, but they trusted in GOD to take care of them and help them in their work. Mary found a house for them.

"I am leaving you here," said Mary to the three natives, "to begin a school and hold church services for the people of Itu. I must go back to Akpap but I will come again as soon as I can."

But Mary had to stay at Akpap longer than she expected. At last she was able to come again to Itu and to visit the school and the church services.

"You have done wonderfully well," she told the three workers. "GOD has blessed your work. My heart was filled with joy when I saw so many people, young and old, at the services. And your school is filled with people who want to learn book and learn the will of GOD. Now we must build a church and a schoolhouse."

Mary began mixing the mud and doing the other work that was necessary for building a building in Africa. The native workers and the people of Itu helped her gladly. It did not take long with many willing hands to build a church and school. Two rooms were added to the church building.

"These two rooms are for you, Ma," the people said. "You must have a place to stay when you come to us."

After the church and school were built, Mary went back to Akpap. Here she heard good news.

"The Board in Scotland has given me permission to be your assistant at Akpap," said Miss Wright.

"Wonderful!" said Mary. "Now I can spend more time at Itu and more time in the jungle."

On a beautiful morning in June, 1903, Mary packed her clothes and supplies and marched the six miles down to the landing beach at Ikunetu. Here she waited for the government boat which would take her to Itu.

She waited and waited. At last she found one of the natives and asked, "Where is the government boat? Is it late?"

"No, Ma, it long time gone."

So Mary had to walk back six miles through the jungle to the mission house at Akpap.

"Why, Mary," said Miss Wright, "what are you doing here? I thought that by this time you would be traveling on the government boat to Itu."

"I am in GOD's hands," said Mary, "and He did not mean for me to travel today. I have been kept back for some good purpose."

The next week when she again made the trip to board the boat, Colonel Montanaro who commanded the government soldiers in that part of the country, was on the boat.

"I will be happy to have you travel with me and my soldiers," said the colonel. "You will be safer that way. I am going to Arochuku."

"That is just what I would like to do," said Mary. "Now I see why GOD did not let me travel last week. I have been wanting for a long time to visit the chief city of the Aros. I want to see more about this juju religion."

Some time before, the government had sent soldiers into the country to make the chiefs stop the juju worship. The chiefs had promised to stop it, but it still went on secretly. After reaching Arochuku, Mary followed the jungle paths over which the slaves had been made to walk for hundreds of years. She came to the place of the Long Juju. There Mary saw the human skulls, the bones and the pots in which the bodies had been cooked. Mary shivered when she thought of the cannibal feasts.

Mary thought the people might be against her, but instead they welcomed her. They had heard about the good things she had done in the jungle.

"O GOD," prayed Mary, "I want to bring the Gospel to these man-eaters for whom CHRIST died. Please, dear GOD, make the home church and the Mission Board see the great need here so that they will let me win this part of the country for CHRIST."

Mary promised the people of Arochuku she would come again and open a school. Then she returned to Akpap and wrote the Mission Board for permission to open a station at Arochuku. Soon the answer came back!

We are sorry, but it will be impossible at this time to open work at Arochuku. We do not have the money or the workers.

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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