

WHITE QUEEN OF THE CANNIBALS

The Story of Mary Slessor of Calabar

by

A.J. BUELTMANN

Moody Colportage #6

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CHAPTER FOUR

ON HER OWN

"Mary, how would you like to have a mission station of your own?" asked Daddy Anderson.

"Why, I'd love it," answered Mary.

"It is hard work and very unpleasant at times," said Daddy Anderson.

"I don't care how hard or unpleasant it is," said Mary, "as long as I can work for my Lord."

"Good, then you will be in charge of the Old Town Station, two miles up the river."

It did not take Mary long to pack her things and move to Old Town. But what a sight greeted her when she arrived! The first thing she saw as she came into the village was a man's skull hanging from the end of a pole and swinging slowly in the breeze.

"Where is the mission house?" asked Mary of one of the natives.

"Down that way at the end of the road, Ma," he answered.

Mary found the mission house. It was an old tumble-down shack. It was made of long twigs and branches, daubed over with mud. The roof was made of palm leaves. It was not nearly as nice a home as the one on Mission Hill in Duke Town. When Mary went inside, she found that it was whitewashed and somewhat clean. Mary got busy cleaning up her house, and as she did, she began to make her plans.

"I don't care if my house is not so fine. I am nearer to the jungles. I want to get into the jungles sometime and win those poor, ignorant heathen people for JESUS. I am going to live in a house like the natives and use the tools and things they do - only I'll be a lot cleaner. Then they will feel that I am one of them and I'll be better able to win them for JESUS.

"Then, too, it's cheaper to live that way and to eat bananas. I will be able to send more money home to my poor mother in Scotland. Living this way will also help me get ready for the time when I can go into the jungles. Then I will have to live that way."

Mary held services every Sunday. She started a day school for the children. The grownups came, too. Mary was so friendly and kind that the natives loved her. More and more came to hear about JESUS. Mary showed them that He was the Saviour of the blacks and whites alike. Many came from faraway places to hear the white ma and go to her school.

Mary soon visited all the villages in the neighborhood and every place she went she would tell the people about JESUS. At one place the king of that part of the country came regularly to hear the white ma. He would sit on the bench with the little children and listen to Mary tell about the Saviour who loves all people.

One thing still bothered Mary very much. This was the way the natives treated twins. As soon as twins were born, they would break the babies' backs and stuff the little bodies into a jar made out of a big gourd. Then they would throw the jar out into the jungle. The mother would be sent away out into the jungle to die.

"It is very wicked for you to kill these twin babies," said Mary to the people. "It is a sin against GOD, who said, 'You shall not kill people.' JESUS loves all children. He loves the twin babies, too."

The natives would not listen to her. They were afraid of the evil spirits. One day Mary heard about some twins that were born. She rushed over to the house and took the babies before they were killed. She brought them to her house and took care of them.

"She will have lots of trouble taking an evil spirit into her house," said one of the natives. "Just you wait and see."

"Maybe she is a friend of the evil spirit," said another.

But weeks and months went by and nothing happened. The people began to see that Mary was right. Everywhere the people began to call Mary "the white ma who loves babies."

Another wicked thing the people did was to kill the babies of slaves who died. They did not want to bother taking care of them so they killed them. Mary began to take these little orphans into her home and take care of them. But it began to be too much work for Mary alone. She wrote a letter to the Mission Board asking for someone to take care of these children.

One day a trader came and knocked at Mary's door. He was carrying a little black baby in his arms.

"I found this twin out in the bush," said the trader. "The other one was killed. This baby would have died, but I know how you love these little ones, so I brought it to you."

"Thank you," said Mary, taking the tiny baby in her arms. "I shall call her Janie, after my sister."

Mary adopted the little baby and the baby brought Mary much joy and happiness.

One time Mary took a baby six months old into the mountains. The baby was sick. In the valley it was very hot.

"This child shall not die if the cold can save him," said Mary.

Up in the mountains it was much cooler than in the valley. Mary pitched her tent and stayed there for a time so the baby could get well. One night Mary woke up. She heard a growling noise. She looked around. A panther was in the tent! He had the baby in his mouth! He was going to carry it away!

Mary jumped up. She grabbed a burning stick from the fire and rammed it into the panther's face. With a wild howl the panther dropped the baby and ran off. Mary picked up the baby who was crying now. She looked him over, carefully. He was not hurt. Softly she sang to the baby and rocked him to sleep. After the baby was well, Mary went back to the mission station in the valley.

Another time news came that twins had been born. All the people had thought a lot of the mother, even though she was a slave. Now everyone hated her. The other women in the house cursed her. They broke up the few dishes she owned. They tore up her clothes. They would have killed her but they were afraid of Mary Slessor and what she would do.

They took the two babies and stuffed them into an empty gin box and shoved it at the woman.

"Get out! Get out!" they said, "you have married the Devil. You have a devil in you." They threw rocks at her and drove her out of the village.

Mary met the poor woman carrying her babies in the box on her head. The screaming, howling crowd of people were following her.

"Go back! Go back to your village," Mary told the crowd. Then turning to the woman she said, "Give me the box and come with me to my house."

When Mary opened the box, she found one child dead. The baby's head had been smashed when it was jammed into the box. Mary buried the poor little baby. Soon the owner of the woman came and took her back. She was willing to do this as long as she had no children. The little baby stayed with Mary and became another of her family.

One evening Mary was sitting on the porch of her mission house talking to the children. Suddenly they heard a loud noise. They heard the beating of drums. Then they heard men singing loudly.

"What's that?" asked Mary. She took the twin boys that were with her and rushed down to the road to see what was going on. Here she found a crowd of people. They were all dressed up. Some wore three-cornered hats with long feathers hanging down. Some had crowns. Some wore masks with animal heads and horns. Some put on uniforms with gold and silver lace. Some just covered their bodies with beadwork and tablecloths trimmed with gold and silver. When Mary came, the shouting stopped. The king came forward to meet her.

"Ma," said the king, "we have had a palaver. We have made new laws. The old laws were not GOD's laws. Now all twins and their mothers can live in town. If anyone kills twin babies or hurts the mothers, he shall be hung."

"GOD will bless you for making those wise laws," said Mary.

The mothers of the twins who lived at the mission and other mothers, too, gathered around Mary. They laughed and shouted. They clapped their hands, and with tears running down their cheeks, cried: "Thank you! Thank you!" They made so much noise that Mary asked the chief to stop them.

"Ma, how can I stop these women's mouths?" asked the chief. "How can I do it? They be women."

Mary was happy, but after a while some of the people began to forget the new laws. Quietly and underhandedly they began to go back to doing the old bad things again. This was because they were not Christians. They did not love and trust the Saviour. Mary knew that the main thing to do if she were to get them to live right and do right was to change their hearts. New laws could not really change them. Only faith in JESUS could do that.

"I must help them more. I must lead more of them to JESUS," said Mary. "Many are sick. I will give them medicine, and at the same time tell them about JESUS who makes the soul well and the body, too."

As Mary gave out medicine, many people would often crowd around her to hear her "JESUS talk." She told them of JESUS' love for them. She told them how He had died that they might be saved from everlasting death and be made pure. Mary had her hardships. Often she would not be able to get home at night and would have to sleep in the open. It was not easy to be a missionary, but Mary was gladly willing to do it because she was working for JESUS and saving souls.

One day a man came to the mission house.

"I am the servant of King Okon. King Okon has heard of the white Ma. King Okon has heard how the white Ma loves our people and is kind to them. King Okon invites the white Ma to come and visit our country."

"I shall be glad to come if I may tell your people about JESUS, the Saviour," said Mary. "Sure," said the messenger, "you come and make Jesus-talk."

When King Eyo Honesty VII, Mary's old friend, heard of this invitation, he said:

"Our Ma must not go as an ordinary traveler to this savage land and people. She must go as a lady and our mother, one whom we greatly respect and love."

He brought his own canoe to Mary and said, "The canoe is yours to use as long as you wish."

Mary's eyes filled with tears of thankfulness.

"King Eyo," she said, "I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I accept the offer of your canoe in JESUS' name. I know GOD will bless you for your kindness."

"GOD has blessed me," said the king. "He has sent our white Ma to us."

The canoe was long and slim. It was painted in bright colors. At the front end bright-colored flags were flying. In the middle of the canoe was a sort of tent to protect Mary from the sun. The Christian natives had brought gifts of rice and these were put in the boat. Crowds of people came to say good-bye to the white Ma. At last it began to get dark. The thirty-three natives who were going to row climbed into the boat. Torches were lit and the boat started upstream.

As Mary lay down in her tent in the middle of the boat, she heard the rowers singing as they rowed.

"Ma, our beautiful beloved mother, is on board," they sang, "Ho! Ho! Ho!"

She thanked GOD that He had protected her in Old Town. She prayed that He would protect her still as she went into a part of the country where no one had yet brought the news about a loving Saviour. She prayed that He would bless her speaking, so that many people would believe in the Lord JESUS and be saved forever.

As she prayed, the rowers continued singing their made-up song: "Ma, our beautiful beloved mother, is on board. Ho! Ho! Ho!"

Mary fell asleep and the canoe carried her silently through the night to a new part of the country and to new adventures.

When the sun arose the following morning, the canoe carrying Mary Slessor arrived at King Okon's village. A great shout went up from the people when they heard the white Ma had come.

"You have my room," said the chief. "It is the best room in the village."

It may have been the best room, but it was not a very comfortable one. Rats and big lizards were running back and forth across the floor. There were insects and fleas and lice everywhere.

The people were much interested in the white Ma. They had never seen a white woman before. They crowded into the yard. Many of them touched and pinched Mary to see if she were real. Some were afraid. Their friends laughed at them and pulled them into the yard. They watched Mary eat. They watched everything she did. Mary did not care. She used their interest in her to tell them about JESUS who loved them. She told them that they must love JESUS and trust in Him for salvation.

Twice a day she held services and great crowds came to hear her. She cut out clothes for the people and taught the women how to sew. She gave medicine to the sick and bandaged the wounds of those who got hurt.

"King Okon," said Mary, "I would like to go into the people's homes in the jungle. May I go?"

"No, white Ma, I cannot let you go. This is elephant country. The elephants go wild and run over everything in the jungle. These stampedes have been so bad my people have had to leave off farming and make their living by fishing. I cannot let you go. You might get hurt or killed."

One night Mary saw that the people looked very angry. Some were sad.

"What is the matter?" asked Mary.

"Two of the king's young wives have done wrong. They have broken a law," answered one of the natives. "They thought nobody was looking and went into a room where a young man was sleeping. Each of them will be hit a hundred times with a whip."

Mary went to the king. She asked him to be kinder to these girls. She begged him not to beat them so much.

"Ma, you are right," said the king. "I will call palaver of all the chiefs. If you say we must not whip girl, we must listen to you as our guest and Ma. But the people will say GOD's Word be no good, if it keeps the law from punishing those who do wrong."

Mary saw the king was right. She turned to the girl-wives of the king.

"You have brought shame to the king and the tribe by the silly foolish things you did. GOD's Word teaches men to be kind and merciful and generous, but it does not pass over sin or permit it. I cannot ask the king not to punish you. Ask GOD to help you in the future, so that you will not do bad or foolish things."

All the chief men of the tribe grunted their approval of what Mary had said to the girls. But then Mary turned to the chief men and said:

"You are to blame. Your custom of one man marrying many wives is wrong and cruel. These girls are only sixteen years old and still love fun and play. They are too young to be married. They meant no real harm."

The men did not like to hear that. They did not like to hear that their ways were wrong.

"If punishment is hard," said the old men, "wife and slave will be afraid to disobey."

"King Okon," said Mary, "show that you are a good king by being kind and merciful. Don't be too hard on these young girls."

"All right, Ma," said the king, "I will make it only ten blows with the whip. Also we will not rub salt into the wounds to make them sting."

When the whipping was over, Mary took the girls into her room. There she put healing medicine on their backs while she told them about JESUS who could heal their souls.

At last it was time for Mary to go back to Old Town. The king and the people were sorry to see her go. On her homeward way a tropical storm struck the canoe and the people in it. Mary was soaked. The next morning she was shaking with sickness and fever. The rowers feared their white Ma would die. They rowed as fast as they could for Old Town. Mary was so sick that she had to take a long rest.

A few months later a big storm tore off the roof of her house and again she was soaked as she worked to save the children. Again she became very sick.

"You must go home to Scotland," said Daddy Anderson. "You must go home and rest and get well."

"Since you tell me to do that and the Board has ordered it, too, I can only obey," said Mary. "I am going to take my little black Janie with me. It is too dangerous to leave her here where some of the heathen might steal her and kill her because she is a twin."

With a heart that was sad at leaving Calabar, but glad to have a chance to see her dear ones in Scotland again, Mary sailed for Dundee in April, 1883.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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