

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 THREE

IN AFRICA

"Welcome, welcome, Mary," said "Mammy" Anderson, as she hugged Mary. Mammy Anderson and her husband, William Anderson, were among the first missionaries at Duke Town in Calabar. "This is Daddy Anderson," said Mammy Anderson, "and Daddy, this is Mary Slessor, just come from bonny Scotland to help us."

Daddy and Mary shook hands. "Long ago you preached in our church in Dundee," said Mary. "You told how many missionaries were needed. I wished then I could help you. I hope I can."

Mary liked this fine Christian couple from the start. The mission house where they lived was high on a hill above the town. Mammy took Mary around the house and the yard, which they called a compound. She showed Mary where the workers stayed who helped at the mission house. She showed her the school where the little black children were taught to read and write and told of the dear Saviour who had died for them, too, that they might be saved from sin and Hell and go to Heaven.

"And here," said Mammy, "is the bell. I am putting you right to work. One of your jobs will be to ring the rising bell for morning prayers. You ring this at six o'clock. Then everyone will get up, and we will have prayers in the chapel."

That was Mary's first job, but alas! Mary often overslept and did not ring the rising bell in time. One morning she awoke and saw that it was very bright outside.

"Dear me," said Mary, "I've overslept again." She jumped out of bed, slipped into her clothes and rang the bell, loud and long. Soon the workers began coming, rubbing their eyes and yawning.

"What's the idea of ringing the bell now?" asked one of them. "It's much too early."

"But look how bright it is," said Mary.

Daddy Anderson laughed.

"Mary, Mary," he said, "it's only two o'clock in the morning. The light you see is our bright tropical moon. It's not the sun." And all the workers laughed, and Mary laughed with them.

"I guess I'm not a very good bell-ringer," she said.

Mary's real job was to teach the children in the school on Mission Hill.

She remembered how she had played when she was a little girl that she was teaching the children of Calabar. Now she was really doing it. She loved the little black children. After school she would take long walks with them into the bush. There they saw beautiful birds of many bright colors, and beautiful flowers of all kinds.

Mary ran races with the black children. How they loved that! She climbed trees as fast as any boy. The black children loved their white ma who taught them and played with them. But playing with the children often made Mary late for meals.

"Mary, Mary," scolded Mammy Anderson gently, "you are late again. I am going to punish you. You go to your room. Since supper is over, you'll just have to go to bed without it."

Mary went to her room. In a little while she heard a knock at her door.

"It's Daddy, Mary," said a deep voice. "Please open your door."

Mary opened the door. There stood Daddy Anderson with his hands full of biscuits and bananas which he was bringing to her with Mammy's consent.

"I thought you might be hungry," said Daddy Anderson.

"You and Mammy are perfect dears," said Mary. "I don't deserve all your kindness."

Mary soon began to visit the different yards or compounds in Duke Town. Missionaries had been here for thirty years, but there weren't many of them. They worked chiefly in Duke Town, Old Town, and Creek Town - three towns at the mouth of the Calabar River.

They also had opened a station at Ikunetu and Ikorofiong on the Cross River. One day Mary was at one of the stations with another missionary. When he finished his talk, he said, "Mary, won't you speak to these people?"

Mary stood up. "Please read John 3:1-21," she said. The missionary did. Then Mary told the people how they could be born again.

She told them of the joy that they would have if they took JESUS into their hearts. She told them of the hope of life after death with GOD in Heaven. The natives listened. They liked her talk. After that whenever she came to that district, crowds would come to hear her speak.

"Mammy," said Mary, after she had come from a trip to the outstations, "it hurts my heart to see how cruel these people are. And those awful, ugly, cruel gods they pray to. The chiefs are so cruel and mean and have no mercy. And then that terrible secret society, the Egbo. I saw some of their runners dressed in fearful costumes scaring the people and whipping them with long whips. I saw a poor man whom they had beaten almost to death. Then there is that horrible drinking. They are worse than wild animals when they become drunk. And worst of all is that they have slaves and sell their own people as slaves."

"Ah, lassie," said Mammy Anderson, "you haven't seen anything yet. There are millions of these black people in the bush and far back in the interior. Most of them are slaves. They don't treat a slave any better than a pig. The slaves sleep on the ground like animals. They are branded with a hot iron just as animals are. And just as the farmers back home fatten a pig for market, so the girls are fattened and sold for slave wives. The slaves can be whipped or sold or killed. When a chief dies, the tribe cuts off the heads of his wives and slaves and they are buried with him. The tribes are wild and cruel. Many of them are cannibals, who eat people. They spend their lives in fighting, dancing, and drinking. But the way they treat twins is one of the worst things they do."

"What do they do to twins?" asked Mary.

"They kill them," said Mammy Anderson. "Sometimes they bury the twins alive and sometimes they just throw them out into the bush to die of hunger. The mother is driven into the bush. No one will have anything to do with her. She is left to die in the jungle or to be eaten by the wild animals."

"But why do they do such cruel, wicked things to harmless babies?" asked Mary.

"They believe that the father of one of the twins is an evil spirit or devil. But they don't know which one's father was a devil, so they kill both to be sure of getting the right one."

"That must be stopped," said Mary. "I will fight it as long as I live. I will never give up. JESUS loves twins just as much as other children. The natives must learn that. They must learn that GOD said, '**Thou shalt not kill.**' I'll teach them."

Mary made many friends, not only among the children whom she taught, but also among the grown-up natives. One day she heard a chief speaking to his people about GOD and His love. He was a Christian. Mary thought that he made a very fine talk. She could tell he was very sincere. He talked so that everyone could understand him.

"Who is that chief?" asked Mary of the man standing next to her.

"That is King Eyo Honesty VII," said the man.

"King Eyo Honesty? I must talk to him."

As soon as she could, Mary went up to the chief.

"King Eyo Honesty," said Mary, "I am Mary Slessor. Many years ago the missionaries told my mother about you. They told her what a fine Christian you were. She told us. She will be very happy when I tell her that I have met you."

"I am very happy to have met you," said King Eyo Honesty. "Perhaps I could write a letter to your mother and tell her how happy I am that I have met you. I would tell her how happy I am that her daughter has come to teach my people about GOD."

"Mother would be very happy, I know, to get a letter from you."

For many years the African chief and Mary's Scottish mother wrote letters to one another.

Every day when school was over, Mary went to visit the natives in their homes. She would tell them about JESUS and how He loved them. She told them JESUS wanted to save them. She told them that JESUS had paid for their sins by dying for them. If they loved and trusted in JESUS, He would take their sins away.

One Sunday morning as she was walking through the village, she saw one of the old men who came to church all the time sitting at the door of his mud house. He looked very sad.

"Ekpo," said Mary, "why aren't you on your way to GOD's house? Mr. Anderson will be looking for you. He will miss you."

"If your heart were sad, would you go any place?" asked Ekpo.

"But why is your heart sad?"

"My son, my only son, is dead. Even now he is buried in the house."

"Ekpo, let me tell you a story," said Mary.

"A long time ago there were two sisters. They had a brother. They loved him very much. They loved him like you loved your son. He became sick. The two sisters sent a messenger to JESUS to tell Him. When JESUS came, the brother was dead. Martha, the one sister, said to JESUS, **'Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died. I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask Him.'**

"JESUS said, 'Your brother will get up from the grave.'

"Martha said, 'I know that he will get up from the grave in the resurrection at the last day when all the dead shall come out of their graves.'

"JESUS said to her, **'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even though he dies, he will live. Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.'** "

"Did the brother get up from the grave?"

"Yes, JESUS went to the grave and said, 'Lazarus, come out,' and Lazarus did.

"But, Ekpo, later Lazarus died again. Then his body stayed in the grave, but his soul was with GOD. He was happy. All Christians are happy with GOD. Your son was a Christian, wasn't he?"

"Oh, yes, Ma, he was," said Ekpo's wife, who had come to the door while Mary was talking.

"Then don't you see, GOD has taken him. He is with GOD. He is happy. If you believe in JESUS, then some day you, too, will be with GOD and will see your son again."

"Well," said Ekpo, "if GOD has taken him, it is not so bad."

"Come, then," said Mary, "let's go to GOD's house and thank Him that your son was a Christian and is now with GOD in Heaven."

Mary knew there was a great deal to do. There were so many people who did not know about JESUS. There were so many who were terribly mean and cruel. But Mary knew that with the Lord on her side she would not lose in the fight against sin and wickedness. Every day she would tell the natives about JESUS. Every day she would show them their sins and the Saviour.

For three years Mary worked hard. Then she became sick. It was the terrible coast fever.

Sometimes she was so sick, she did not know what was happening. She was very tired. She wished that she could see her mother and sisters.

"Calabar needs a brave heart and a strong body," said Mary. "I don't have much of a brave heart, but I often feel the need of it when I am sick and lonely."

"Mary, you must go home to Scotland and rest," said Mammy Anderson, "then you will get well from the fever. You will never get well here."

"That's true, Mammy," said Mary, "but you know that I cannot leave my field of work until the Board of Missions says I may."

"That's right, but you have a furlough coming. I do hope we hear from the Board soon."

In June, 1879, the letter came. Mary read it gladly. It told her that she could come home for a year's vacation. It did not take Mary long to pack. She left for Scotland on the next steamer. There were tears in her eyes as she stood on the deck. There on the shore were her black friends waving good-by to their white ma. They were crying, too.

"Come back again! Come back again! GOD bless you and keep you!" they said.

Mary waved to them.

"I will be back," she said.

Mary loved Africa. She loved the people there, but she knew if she wanted to get well she would have to go home. Then, too, she was anxious to see her mother and sisters again.

The ocean trip did Mary much good. The cool ocean breezes blew the fever away. It made her cheeks pink again. Every day she prayed for the people of Africa. She prayed that she might go back again. She prayed that more missionaries would be sent out to show these poor people the way to Heaven.

How happy Mary's mother and two sisters were to have her with them again! And how happy Mary was to be with them! They could not hear enough about Calabar. It made Mary's mother very happy to know that her daughter had taught the black children the way to Heaven. She was glad to hear about the other missionary work which Mary had done. But other people, too, were anxious to hear about Calabar. So Mary had to speak at Wishart Church and other churches.

Mary told about the heathen, the wicked things the heathen natives did to twins, the mean way they treated slaves, and the many other cruel, wicked things these people did.

"There is only one thing that will change these people," said Mary. "There is only one thing that will turn these heathen from their sins. That is the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST, the good news about the Saviour. But who will tell these people about JESUS? We need many, many more missionaries. If you cannot go yourself, you can send gifts and offerings for this work. We need money so the missionaries can buy food and clothing. We need money so that they can build homes and churches and hospitals. Have pity on these poor people! Pity the poor little children! Help them now! Above all, pray for these people, and pray for your missionaries that GOD will bless their work with these lost souls."

Everywhere Mary went she won friends for Calabar. The people who heard Mary wanted to help make Christians of the heathen people. Many prayed. Many gave. Men and women gave gifts of money for the work. Boys and girls brought their little gifts, too. They knew the hymn:

If you cannot give your thousands
You can give the widow's mite.
And each gift you give for JESUS
Will be precious in His sight.

Mrs. Slessor was not well. Living in the crowded, dusty, smoky city made her sick. Mary found a little home out in the country. Here were clear blue skies and pleasant fields. Mary's mother was much better after they moved her. Mary's sisters enjoyed it also. The months passed quickly. Soon the year would be over.

"What do you want to do when you go back?" asked Mrs. Slessor.

"I want to go on up the river. I want to go where missionaries have never been. I want to go to Okoyong and tell the people there about JESUS. I am praying GOD that sooner or later He will let me go and work there."

"Isn't it much more dangerous there?" asked Mrs. Slessor.

"Yes, it is," answered Mary, "but I am not afraid because I know that GOD is with me and His angels are watching over me."

June came. Mary had been home a year. Now she was in good health again. She wanted to get back to Africa. July, August, September went by and then the good news came. Mary was to leave in October for Calabar. It was a happy day for her when she got on the ship that would take her back to the Africa she loved.

On the ship she found the Rev. and Mrs. Hugh Goldie. They, too, had been missionaries in Calabar for many years, and now after a short vacation were going back once more. All the way to Africa the friend talked about the great work of winning souls for JESUS, especially the souls of the people of Calabar.

At last the big steamship entered the mouth of the Calabar and Cross Rivers. It was not far now to Duke Town. Soon Mary would learn what work she should do. Would it be work she wanted to do? Would it be work in the jungles? Mary would soon know.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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