

MARY SLESSOR  
OF CALABAR

PIONEER MISSIONARY

BY

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## IX. POWER THROUGH PRAYER

The power which enabled Mary Slessor to live so intensely, to triumph over physical weakness, and to face the dangers of the African bush, and gave her the magnetic personality that captivated the hearts of white and black alike, was derived from her intimate and constant contact with the Unseen, and the means of that contact were prayer and the Bible.

She had an implicit belief in the reality of prayer, simply because she had tested its efficacy every day of her life, and had never found it to fail. When her old friend, Mr. Smith of Dundee, asked for her testimony to include in his book, *Our Faithful God: Answers to Prayer*, she wrote:

My life is one long daily, hourly, record of answered prayer. For physical health, for mental overstrain, for guidance given marvellously, for errors and dangers averted, for enmity to the Gospel subdued, for food provided at the exact hour needed, for everything that goes to make up life and my poor service, I can testify with a full and often wonder-stricken awe that I believe God answers prayer. I know God answers prayer. I have proved during long decades while alone, as far as man's help and presence are concerned, that God answers prayer. Cavillings, logical or physical, are of no avail to me. It is the very atmosphere in which I live and breathe and have my being, and it makes life glad and free and a million times worth living. I can give no other testimony. I am sitting alone here on a log among a company of natives. My children, whose very lives are a testimony that God answers prayer, are working round me. Natives are crowding past on the bush road to attend palavers, and I am at perfect peace, far from my own countrymen and conditions, because I know God answers prayer. Food is scarce just now. We live from hand to mouth. We have not more than will be our breakfast to-day, but I know we shall be fed, for God answers prayer.

She realised that prayer was hedged round by conditions, and that everything depended upon the nature of the correspondence between earth and heaven. She likened the process to a wireless message, saying, "We can only obtain God's best by fitness of receiving power. Without receivers fitted and kept in order the air may tingle and thrill with the message, but it will not reach my spirit and consciousness." And she knew equally well that all prayer was not worthy of being answered. Those who were disappointed she would ask to look intelligently at first causes as well as regretfully at second causes. To one who said he had prayed without avail, she wrote: "You thought God was to hear and answer you by making everything straight and pleasant—not so are nations or churches or men and women born; not so is character made. God is answering your prayer in His way." And to another who was in similar mood she wrote: "I know what it is to pray long years and never get the answer—I had to pray for my father. But I know my heavenly Father so well that I can leave it with Him

for the lower fatherhood.” In this as in other things she had to confess that she herself often failed. “I am a poor exponent of faith,” she would say. “I ought to have full faith in our Father that He will do everything, but I am ashamed of myself, for I want to ‘see,’ and that sends faith out of court. I never felt more in sympathy with that old afflicted father before in his prayer, ‘Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief’—every syllable suits me.”

She had absolute faith in intercession. “Prayer,” she said, “is the greatest power God has put into our hands for service—praying is harder work than doing, at least I find it so, but the dynamic lies that way to advance the Kingdom.” She believed that some of her official friends, the Empire-builders, were kept straight in this way: “The bands that mothers and sisters weave by prayer and precept are the strongest in the world.” There was nothing she asked her friends more often at home to do than to pray for the Mission and the workers. “Don’t stop praying for us,” she pleaded, and her injunctions were sometimes pathetic in their personal application: “Pray that the power of Christ may rest on me, that He may never be disappointed in me or find me disobedient to the heavenly vision when He shows the way, pray that I may make no false moves, but that the spirit will say, ‘Go here and go there.’” “She was always convinced that it was the prayers of the people in Scotland that carried her on and made the work possible. “It is so customary to put aside those who, like myself, are old-fashioned and unable for the burden and heat of the day; but in my case it is care and love and forbearance all the way through; and all this I trace back to the great amount of prayer which has ever followed me, to the quality more than the quantity of that intercession. Prayer-waves pulsate from Britain all through Calabar.” To one who had always prayed for her she also wrote: “I have always said that I have no idea how and why God has carried me over so many funny and hard places, and made these hordes of people submit to me, or why the Government should have given me the privilege of a magistrate, among them, except in answer to prayer made at home for me. It is all beyond my comprehension. The only way I can explain it is on the ground that I have been prayed for more than most. Pray on, dear one—the power lies that way.” She also urged prayer for the Mission Committees, Home and Foreign—”We expect them to do so much and to do it so well, and yet we withhold the means by which alone they can do it.”

Almost invariably, when acknowledging money, she would beg the donors to follow up their gifts by prayer for workers. “Now,” she would say, “let us ask God earnestly and constantly for the greater gift of men and women to fill all these vacant posts.”

She used to pray much for her friends in all their circumstances, asking for many things for them that they desired, but eventually her petition came to be, “Lord give them Thy best and it shall suffice them and me.”

Her religion was a religion of the heart, and her communion with her Father was of the most natural, most childlike character. No rule or habit guided her. She just spoke to Him as a child to her Father when she needed help and strength, or when her heart was filled with joy and gratitude, at any time, in any place. He was so real to her, so near, that her words were almost of the nature of conversation. There was no formality, no self-conscious or stereotyped diction, only the simplest language from a quiet and humble heart. It is told of her that when in Scotland, after a tiresome journey, she sat down at the tea-table alone, and, lifting her eyes, said, “Thank ye, Faither —ye ken I’m tired,” in the most ordinary way, as if she had been addressing her friends. On another occasion, in the country, she lost her spectacles while coming from a meeting in the dark. Snow lay on the ground, and there seemed little hope of recovering them. She could not do without them, and she prayed simply and directly: “O Father, give me back my spectacles.” Early next morning the milk-boy saw something glistening in the snow, and she had the spectacles in time to read her Bible. A lady asked her how she obtained such intimacy with God. “Ah, woman,” she said, “when I am out there in the bush I have often no other one to speak to but my Father, and I just talk to Him.” It was in that way she kept herself in tune with the highest. Sometimes, when there had been laughing and frivolous conversation before a meeting, she lost “grip,” and was vexed and restless and dumb. But a little communion with her Father would put matters right. Once, oppressed by a similar mood, she foresaw complete failure, but the minister who presided, as if conscious of her attitude, prayed in such a way as to lift the burden from her heart, and she was given not only a calm spirit but also an eloquent tongue.

How natural it was for her to pray is evidenced by an incident at one of the ladies’ committee meetings at Duke Town. Speaking of it she said, “All the ladies were laughing and daffin’ over something of a picturesque sort, when it struck me we ought to be praying rather, and I just said so, and at once the whole lot jumped up, and we went into the nearest room and were closeted with our Master for a bit.” Sometimes in the Mission House she would call the children to prayer at odd hours, and Jean would remonstrate and say, “Ma, the time is long past.” “Jean,” she would reply, “the gate of heaven is never shut.” She said she wished to teach them that they could pray anywhere and at any time, and not only in the church.

“We are not really apart,” she once wrote to a friend in Scotland, “for you can touch God direct by prayer, and so can I.”

## X. BIBLE STUDENT

She had always been an earnest and intelligent student of the Bible, and to her it grew more wonderful every day. She believed that the spread of the Book was the simplest and most natural and direct way of preaching the Gospel and keeping it pure. Her own reading of it was mainly accomplished in the early morning. As soon as there was light enough—which was usually about 5.30—she took a fine pen and her Bible and turned to the book she was studying in the Old or New Testament. She underlined the governing words and sentences as she went along in her endeavour to grasp the meaning of the writer and the course of his argument; word by word, sentence by sentence, she patiently followed his thought. Sometimes it would be three days before she completed a chapter, but she would not leave it until she had some kind of idea as to its purpose. She was her own commentator, and on the margin she noted the truths she had learned, the lessons she had received, her opinions about the sentiment expressed, or the character described. If her expositions were not according to the ordinary canons of exegesis, they had the merit of being simple, fresh, and unconventional. Her language was as candid, often as pungent, as her remarks in conversation, its very frankness and force indicating how real to her were the life and conditions she was studying. When one Bible was finished she began another, and repeated the process, for she found that new thoughts came as the years went by. On one occasion we find her interested in a recent translation, reading it to discover whether it gave any clearer construction of the more difficult passages. Such sedulous study had its effect upon her character and life; she was interpenetrated with the spirit of the Book; it gave her direction in all her affairs—in her difficult palavers she would remark, “Let us see what the Bible says on this point”—it inspired her with hope, faith, and courage. Often after an hour or two of meditation over it she felt no desire for ordinary literature, all other books seeming tame and tasteless after its pages.

Some of the later Bibles she used are in existence, and bear testimony to the thoroughness of her methods. Almost every page is a mass of interlineations and notes. As one turns them over, phrases here and there catch the eye, arresting in thought and epigrammatic in form; such for instance as these:

*God is never behind time.*

*If you play with temptation do not expect God will deliver you.*

*A gracious woman has gracious friendships.  
 No gift or genius or position can keep us safe or free from sin.  
 Nature is under fixed and fine laws, but it cannot meet the need of man.  
 We must see and know Christ before we can teach. Good is good, but it is  
 not enough; it must be God. The secret of all failure is disobedience.  
 Unspiritual man cannot stand success.  
 There is no escape from the reflex action of sin; broken law will have its  
 revenge.  
 Sin is loss for time and eternity.  
 The smallest things are as absolutely necessary as the great things.  
 An arm of flesh never brings power.  
 Half the world's sorrow comes from the unwisdom of parents.  
 Obedience brings health.  
 Blessed the man and woman who is able to serve cheerfully in the second  
 rank—a big test.  
 What they were weary of was the punishment, not the sin that brought it.  
 Slavery never pays; the slave is spoiled as a man, and the master not less so.  
 It were worth while to die, if thereby a soul could be born again.*

She was deeply interested in the earlier books, for the reason that the moral and social conditions depicted there were analogous to those she had to deal with in Calabar. Every now and then we come across such remarks as these: “a Calabar palaver,” “a chapter of Calabar history,” “a picture of Calabar outside the gospel area,” “this happens in Okoyong every day.” Her own experience helped her to understand the story of these primitive civilisations, and her annotations on this part of the Bible have always the sharpest point. To the sentence, “The Lord watch between me and thee,” she appends, “Beautiful sentiment, but a *mbiam* oath of fear.” Jacob she terms in one place a “selfish beggar.” Of Jael she says, “Not a womanly woman, a sorry story; would God not have showed her a better way if she had asked?” and of part of Deborah’s song she remarks, “Fine poetry, poor morality.” Her opinion of Jezebel is thus expressed: “A vain, heartless woman; one of the most revolting stories in history, and she might have been such a queen! A good woman is the most beautiful thing on earth, but a had woman is a source of corruption. . . . Had only her soul been clean, dogs might have been welcome to her body.”

The book of Job was always well studied. She had a great admiration for the “upright, wealthy, greatly-feared, and respected sheikh,” and little or none for the “typical philosophers,” who came, Calabar fashion, and sought to comfort him in his day of trial. Job was not, in her view, rebellious; “his plaint was a

relief to his own spirit, and an appeal for sympathy.” On chapter ix. she writes, “The atmosphere is clearing; the clouds are scattering, glimpses of sunshine, of starlight, and beauty; the spirit swings back on its pivot and begins to see God.” Farther on, “Right, Job—turn to God! Leave it to Him—the fit of depression will pass when you have sounded the depths, and profit will follow.” On chapter xviii. her comment is, “Such is the friendship of the world”; on chapter xx., “How very sure the fool is in his explanations of God’s ways”; on chapter xxvii., “The ultimate values of life shall be fixed not by wealth but by character”; on chapter xxviii., “A very mine of gems and precious things—exquisitely lovely thoughts and language. Poetry like this in the earliest ages of the world!” Of Elihu’s contentions in chapter xxxiv., “A good many truths, but served up with bitter herbs, not with love”; on chapter xxxvii., “Beautiful poetry, but a very bleak and barren picture of God; hard, arbitrary, selfish, self-centred, striking terror into His works, and compelling obedience and service. Nature cannot reveal Him, Elihu!” On the next chapter, “The God of nature turns the picture, and behold it is no more destruction and blind force, but beneficence and gracious design and beauty,”—and so on to the end, when we read, “The voice of humanity demands some such judgment and relief from the mysteries and trials and misrepresentations of this life. The poem rings true to the cry of the spirit of man. Is there a modern drama in any language to come near to this ancient production?”

The New Testament was brooded over and absorbed with a care and thoroughness which must have made every line and every thought familiar to her. St. John was her favourite book. A few specimens of her remarks may be given:

*“When the people saw that Jesus was not there . . . they took shipping and came . . . seeking for Jesus.”*

*“The secret of our failures in winning men; they don’t find Him with us.”*

*“The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came and tempted Him that He would show them a sign from Heaven.”*

*“Man’s cry for the moon! What does a sign prove? Is God known by magic?”*

*“And the people asked Him saying, What shall we do then? . . . ‘He that hath two coats let him impart to him that hath none.’ “*

*“By love serve.”*

*“And He said unto them, When I sent you without purse and scrip and shoes lacked you anything?”*

*“No, Lord, never was lack with Thee!”*

*“And her parents were astonished, but He charged them that they should tell no man what He had done.”*

“Life will tell. Speech will end in chatter.”

These illustrations, picked out at random, will serve to indicate what an intimate companion she made of her Bible, and with what loving patience and insight she studied it for the illumination and deepening of her spiritual life.

## XI. BACK TO THE OLD HAUNTS

Eight years had passed since she had left Akpap, and she had never been back, although she had paid flying visits to the hinterland. Miss Amess, with whom her friendship had grown close, was in charge, being minister, doctor, dispenser, teacher, and mentor to the people, and with her was Miss Ramsay. They had built a new church, which was almost ready, and Miss Amess determined to bring “Ma” over and have the Macgregors to meet her. “Ma” could not resist the temptation to revisit the scenes of her greatest adventures, and went in July 1913, taking the children with her, except Mary, and ordering the others at Calabar, including the two youngest, Whitie and Asuquo, who were also natives of the district, to join her.

Her arrival caused much excitement, and her stay was one long reception. All day the Mission House was like a market; from far and near the people came to kiss their Mother. She could scarcely be got to come to meals. On the first day when she was called, she said, “These are my meat to-day,” and then she told those about her what Christ had said to His disciples after His conversation with the woman of Samaria. Such love as the ladies saw on both sides they had not thought possible between missionary and native. She seemed to remember the names of most of the people, and all the details of their family histories. One after another came forward and talked and revived stories of the old times. But she seemed vexed to see so many who were interested in her, and with no concern for the things of God, and with these she pled earnestly to come to church and give themselves to the Saviour. Two notable figures were Mana, and the mother of Susie, Iye.

The children were a source of astonishment to all. These healthy, happy, handsome young people, the babies that had been cast away or despised—it was wonderful! They gazed upon them in a kind of awe. A few of the older men and women held aloof from the twins, but not in any offensive way, and the general disposition was to ignore the stain on their birth.

There was a touching meeting with Ma Eme, who could not conceal her affection and joy at seeing her old “Ma” again. Much to Mary’s sorrow she was still a heathen, and a very zealous one, as she sacrificed daily to the spirits in the crudest way, with food and blood, in abasement and fear. So strong was superstition rooted in her nature that she would not touch the twins, although she confessed it was marvellous that they had grown up.

The two women, bound by so strange a friendship, talked long about the old days. It was, “Do you remember this?” “Do you remember that ?” and then would follow reminiscences of the killing time when they worked hand in hand in secret for the preservation of life. Nothing that “Ma” could say would induce Ma Eme to throw off her allegiance to her African beliefs, and at the end of a long day she left, the same kind, high-bred, mysterious heathen woman that she had always been. She died shortly after. “My dear old friend and almost sister,” said Mary, “she made the saving of life so often possible in the early days. It is sad that she did not come out for Christ. She could have been the honoured leader of God’s work had she risen to it. I cannot fancy Okoyong without her. She made a foolish choice, and yet God cannot forget all she was to me, and all she helped me to do in those dark and bloody days.”

A service was arranged, but the throng who wished to hear “Ma” was so great that it had to be held in the unfinished church, and thus Mary had the joy of being at the first service. Over four hundred well-dressed natives were present, the largest number ever in a church in Okoyong. She thought of the wild old days, and contrasted them with the present scene. “Truly,” she said to herself, “one soweth and another reapeth.” She spoke for half an hour, giving a strong, inspiring talk on the duties of those who are believers to the world around them.

With her usual thought for others she sat down and wrote to her old comrade, Miss Wright (Mrs. Rattray), in England, giving her the details of her visit, and accounts of the people. “This house,” she said, “is full of memories of you, and you are not forgotten.” She described with pride and hope the way in which the ladies were conducting the station, and praised them in her usual generous manner. After she left, it seemed to them that they had greater influence among the people than ever.

## XII. ROYAL RECOGNITION

The friends who had known her long were noticing that a new softness and graciousness were stealing into her life. She never grew commonplace, and was original as ever, but her character was mellowing, and her love and humility

becoming even more marked. "Love will overcome all," was her belief, and love, for her, included all the qualities of the Christian faith—simplicity, kindness, patience, charity, selflessness, confidence, hope. In herself she was conscious of many faults. "I don't half live up to the ideal missionary life," she said, with a sigh. "It is not easier to be a saint here than at home. We are very human, and not goody-goody at all." Often she was deep in the valley of humiliation over hasty words spoken and opportunities of service let slip. But she was saved from depression by her sense of humour. She laughed and dared the devil. Of one who had just come out she wrote: "She is very serious, and will take life and work more in the sense of tasks than of a glad free life . . . we want one to laugh, to hitch on to the yoke, and joke over all that we don't like." She also became less uncompromising in her views. "My opinions," she acknowledged, "may not just suit every one, and it is possible other people may be right and I far wrong. . . . But although we differ amongst ourselves, and some things differentiate our work, we are all in full friendship and sympathy with one another."

It was not possible for self-abnegation to go farther than it did in her case. She was unable to see that she had done anything out of the common. "I have lived my life very quietly and in a very natural and humble way," she would say, and all the credit of her work was given to God. "It isn't Mary Slessor doing anything, but Something outside of her altogether uses her as her small ability allows." She did not say "my plan," or "my scheme"—if she did she checked herself and said, "What God wants me to do." And she always paid generous tribute to her girls, who, she said, did more than she did, though no one counted it to them. She was distressed to receive letters praising her. One who saw her go out from Scotland to her lifework, and had lovingly followed her career ever since, wrote saying that her reward would be a starry crown in the glory land, and her reply was, "What would I do with starry crowns except to cast them at His feet!"

Nothing illustrated this feature so notably as an event which occurred shortly after her visit to Akpap. Two years previously a few of her friends in Calabar, official and missionary, had talked over the possibility of securing some public recognition of her unique service. Mr. Macgregor wrote an account of her lifework for the Government, but it was not until Sir Frederick Lugard arrived as Governor-General of the united provinces of Northern and Southern Nigeria that action was taken. He was so struck by the heroic record placed before him that he at once sent home a strong recommendation to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, that Mary's services should be brought to Royal notice. The Secretary of State was equally impressed, and laid the matter before the

Chapter-General of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in England, of which the King is Sovereign Head, and the Duke of Connaught Grand Prior. This was done, and she was selected for admission. When she received the august-looking document asking her to accept the honour, she said to herself, "Now, who has done this? Who am I, and what is my distinction that I should have it?" She was in a quandary how to answer, but eventually complied with the request, thinking that would be the end of it. Shortly afterwards came a letter stating that "her selection had received the sanction and approval of His Most Gracious Majesty King George V." The Chapter-General, it was stated, elected her "with particular satisfaction" to the grade of Honorary Associate. This honour is only conferred on persons professing the Christian faith, who are I eminently distinguished for philanthropy, or who have specially devoted their exertions or professional skill in aid of the objects of the Order. The Badge of an Honorary Associate is a Maltese Cross in silver, embellished at the four principal angles with a lion passant guardant and a unicorn passant alternately. it is worn by women on the left shoulder, attached to a black watered riband tied in a bow.

"Ma" kept the matter a secret, even after she had received the diploma, but the silver Badge came through the Colonial Office to the Commissioner at Duke Town, and the honour being made public, her friends schemed to get her down to a formal presentation. It was a difficult problem, but it was solved by a letter being sent stating that the decoration had arrived, that, of course, she would not care to have it given to her surreptitiously, and that her duty was to come to Calabar for it. A telegraph form, ready for dispatch, and bearing the one word "Coming," was enclosed. They knew she would get agitated, and have no peace until the telegram was out of her hands. Their surmise was correct. She sent the message and committed herself to the ordeal.

She was not elated at the prospect of appearing at a Government function; neither was she perturbed, and she went about her duties as usual. Miss Gilmour, one of the new lady agents, tells how on the eve of her departure she gathered the bairns for family worship, and in a simple and beautiful way read to them the story of the Good Shepherd and the sheep that followed. Then, as an illustration, she took the story of Peter's denial of our Lord, and showed that Peter sinned because he followed "afar off." "Eh, bairns," she said, "it's the wee lassie that sits beside her mother at meal times that gets all the nice bittocks. The one who sits far away and sulks disna ken what she misses. Even the pussy gets more than she does. Keep close to Jesus the Good Shepherd all the way."

A Government launch was sent to bring her down, an honour she felt as much as the bestowal of the insignia, and as she walked up to the Macgregors' house—the Wilkies were in Scotland—there were many who were struck by the dignity of her appearance, dressed though she was in an old but clean cotton dress, straw hat, and list shoes. On the Saturday afternoon she went to an “At Home” at the Barracks, where she was lionised in a quiet way.

She attended a cricket match--she was an advocate of all games, and believed they were excellent civilising agencies—and also witnessed a sham fight, where the “enemy” dressed themselves up as “savage warriors” and attacked the Barrack Hill. She was much impressed, and kept saying to her old friend the Hon. Horace Bedwell, the Provincial Commissioner, “That’s just splendid. Look how the officers lead them.” On Sunday she spoke for three-quarters of an hour to the boys in the Institute in Efik, and no boys could have listened more intently. On Monday night she was at Government House at dinner.

The presentation took place in the Goldie Memorial Hall on Wednesday, Mr. Macgregor presiding. All the Europeans who could leave business gathered to do her honour. The boys of the Training Institute and the girls of the Edgerley Memorial School were also in the hall. Had it not been that Mr. Bedwell and Mrs. Bedwell were beside her, and that it was the former who made the presentation, she would have felt more nervous. As it was, she sat with her head buried in her hands. Mr. Bedwell spoke of her unique work and influence, and of her genius for friendship in a way that overcame her. She could not at first find words to reply. She turned to the children, and in Efik told them to be faithful to the Government, for at bottom it was Christian, and, as the silver Badge proved, friendly to missions. Self was thus entirely effaced in her interpretation of the act; she made it appear to be the recognition by the Government of the work of the Mission, and suggested that it might have been awarded to any member of the staff.

Having recovered her courage she spoke in English, saying that she did not understand why she had been chosen for the distinction, when others deserved it more. In a closing passage of simple beauty, she gave God the honour and praise for all she had been able to accomplish. What had impressed her at the sham fight was that the officer was always in front leading and guiding his men. “If I have done anything in my life it has been easy because the Master has gone before.”

Forty Europeans came to tea at the Macgregors', and “Ma” was brilliant and entertaining. On Thursday her hosts convoyed her back to Use. Mrs. Bedwell had presented her with a bouquet of flowers, and she had taken out the roses of

which she was passionately fond—and placed them in water. On her arrival she carefully planted one of the stems, and to her great joy it grew and flourished in front of her hut.

“Don’t think,” she wrote home, “that there is any difference in my designation. I am Mary Mitchell Slessor, nothing more and none other than the unworthy, unprofitable, but most willing, servant of the King of Kings. May this be an incentive to work, and to be better than ever I have been in the past.”

At home the honour was made known chiefly through the Record of the Church, in which Mr. Macgregor gave some account of her romantic career. He stipulated that this should be anonymous, for “Ma,” he feared, would never forgive him if she knew that he had been connected with it. She gained a repute that was akin to fame. Congratulations from all parts of the world were showered upon her. Sir Frederick Lugard sent his “hearty and sincere congratulations, and his appreciation of this well-earned reward for her life of heroic self-sacrifice.” In confusion of heart she escaped to Ikpe. “I shall never look the world in the face again until all this blarney and publicity is over,” she said. “I feel so glad that I can hide here quietly where no one knows about newspapers and Records, and do my small portion of work out of sight.”

For a time she was kept busy replying to the correspondence that the event evoked, and to all she made the same modest reply, that she saw in the honour “God’s goodness to the Mission and her fellow-labourers, who were levelling and building and consolidating the work on every side. It is a token that He means to encourage them in the midst of their discouraging circumstances.”

### XIII. BATTLE FOR A LIFE

Each new kindness shown her was an incentive to harder service. She threw herself again into work with an extraordinary keenness. Dissatisfied with what she was doing at Ikpe, she moved in all directions in her “box on wheels,” prospecting for new spheres of usefulness, fording rivers, crossing swamps, climbing hills, pushing through bush, traversing roads that were unsafe and where by the law people had to go in couples, and often putting up at villages six or ten miles distant. She saw crowds of people, and hundreds of women and children in every street, but no light; not even a desire for it, though here and there she found a disciple or two. She met with more opposition from the chiefs than she had done in all her experience. They would not hear of “God fashions,” and would not permit teachers to enter their districts or churches to be built; they forbade all meetings for worship. She braced herself, body and mind, for the fight. She spent days in palaver, but they would not give in. She

insisted that at least the right of the disciples to meet and worship in their own homes must be recognised. When the chiefs saw her face, set with iron resolution, they were afraid, wavered, and agreed. They then became quite friendly. “We don’t object to schools,” they admitted. “We want our children to learn to read and write, but we want no interference with our fashions. If houses of God are built, we shall all die, and we are dying fast enough.”

“I shall never give you teachers without the Gospel,” she declared. “If you don’t take the one, you won’t have the other. But I’m going to bring both. I shall put up a shed on the roadside, and hold services there whenever I get a chance.”

“All right, Ma,” they said with something like admiration. “Come yourself, but don’t send boys.”

And then she remembered. “How can this poor tabernacle do it, even with six lads to push and pull and carry the cart through the streams? But I have opened the way, and that is something.”

In Ikpe itself the currents of heathenism ran deep and strong, and she found progress as difficult as in Okoyong. But she solved all the problems in the same fearless way as she had done there. Unlike those in other centres, the women and girls of the town took no interest in the work, and would not come forward, and she knew there was no hope for the community unless she secured their sympathy and attachment to the cause. At first a few girls had ventured to sit by themselves in church. Then some village accident made the chiefs believe that their juju was angry because the girls had forsaken their sacrifices and deserted the heathen plays, and they placed pressure on them to return. Some were flogged and made to pray before a clay-pot with an egg in it, and all were forced out on the moonlight nights to take part in the plays. “If they don’t do that,” demanded the chiefs, “how can they have children for us?” The girls lost courage and forsook the church, but she did not blame them. “Poor things, they are as timid as hares, and have never had a choice of what to do until I came. But the chiefs—I will be hard on them!”

One day she gathered all those who were faithful to the church laws, and interviewed the chiefs. The spokesman for her party urged that the antagonism that had been shown should cease; he agreed that any one who broke the ordinary laws should be punished, but no girl or young man should be compelled to sacrifice or pray to idols, or be ostracised or fined for fearing God. The words were received with scornful looks and laughs, the chiefs being hardly able to restrain themselves, but they had a wholesome fear of “Ma,” and were never outwardly disrespectful in her presence. They looked at her. She kept a severe and solemn face, and they were a little nonplussed.

“Ma, have you heard?” they asked.

“Am I not here?” she replied.

Taking the gift of rods that had been offered, the chiefs retired. When they returned they said: “Ma, we hear. Let the present of rods lie, we accept of it, and we promise that we will respect God’s laws, in regard to the joining in our sacrifices; and in regard to the Sabbath, we shall respect it and leave our work; but we will not join in the confusions of the church, that we cannot do.”

“God will doubtless be immensely pleased and benefited by your wondrous condescension,” said she with good-humoured sarcasm, and they laughed heartily and tried to be friendly, but Mary airily told her people to rise and go.

Fearing she was not pleased, the chiefs made to accompany her.

“I’m going round to see a woman in the next street,” said Mary pointedly. They stopped dead at once. Here was the “confusion” they referred to, for the woman was a twin-mother.

It was the old weary battle over again.

Her patience and persistence eventually won a victory for the girls. They were allowed to return to church, but the line was drawn at the day-school. The chiefs said girls were meant to work and mother the babies, and not to learn “book.” Even the boys who attended, each burdened with an infant to justify the waste of time, were not allowed to bring a baby girl. If the baby of the home was a girl, he looked after her there and his place was vacant. Mary began to think of teaching the girls apart from the boys, when one day several girls marched in; she courted them with all the skill she possessed, and gradually one or two chiefs brought their daughters, who returned with dresses from the Mission box, and that ended the opposition.

But there was no end to the struggle over twins. Time and again she had to send the girls to bring babes to the Mission House, and many a stirring night she had, she sleeping with them in her bed, whilst outside stealthy forms watched for a chance to free the town from the defilement of their presence. The first that survived was a boy. The husband, angry and sullen, was for murdering it and putting the mother into a hole in the swamp. She faced him with the old flash in her eye, and made him take oath not to hurt or kill the child. He even promised to permit it to live, for which magnanimity she bowed ironically to the ground, an act that put his courage at once to flight. She had come to realise that it was not good to take twins from their mother, and she insisted on the child being kept in the home. Jean was sent to stay and sleep with the woman, and as she had, on occasion, as caustic a tongue as “Ma,” the man had not a very agreeable time. It was decided later to bring the woman and child to the hut, and there, beneath her verandah, they rigged up a little lean-to,

where they were housed, Jean sleeping with them at night and keeping a watchful eye on the mother. "It is really," said "Ma," "far braver and kinder of her to live with that heathen woman with her fretting habits than it is for her to go out in the dark and fight with snakes. Jean has as many faults as myself, but she is a darling, none the less, and a treasure." All going well, they went on Sunday to church and left the mother. When they returned they found she had broken the baby's thigh and given him some poisonous stuff. With care the boy recovered, but they redoubled their precautions, hoping that when the parents saw how handsome and healthy and normal the little fellow was, they would consent to keep him.

"Ma" was due at Use, but she would not leave Ikpe until she had conquered. Another month passed, and she was running out of provisions, including tea. To be without tea was a tremendous deprivation. She thought of the big fragrant package that had been sent out as a gift, and was lying fifty miles away but un-get-at-able, and felt far from saintly as she resorted to the infusion of old leaves. One Sunday evening there was a shout. A canoe had arrived, and in it was a box. With sudden prescience Jean flew for a hammer and chisel and broke it open, and sure enough inside was the tea from Use. Mary marvelled, and with all the young folk round her stood and thanked God, the Lord of the Sabbath, for His goodness. The beverage had never tasted so sweet and invigorating. Though her thrifty Scottish nature rejoiced that she had been able to save a little, she confessed that she would never be a miser where tea was concerned. Whenever she received

a package she invariably sent a share to old Mammy Fuller at Duke Town. "Mammy," she told a home friend, "has lived a holy and consecrated life here for fifty years, and is perhaps the best-loved woman in Duke Town. Uncle Tom in the old cabin is a child in the knowledge of God to Mammy. So we all love to share anything with her, and she especially loves a cup of tea."

The parents of the twin were at last persuaded to take the big happy child home and provide for it. Four days later they sent for Jean, who returned, carrying a weak, pinched form that had death written on its face. It succumbed shortly afterwards—and that was the end of "Ma's" strenuous fight and Jean's ten weeks' toil by night and day.

#### XIV. A VISION OF THE NIGHT

She was down at Use for Christmastide with all her children about her, and was very happy at seeing the consummation of her efforts to build a new church. The opening took place on Christmas Day.

“A bonnie kirk it is,” she wrote. “Mr. Cruickshank officiated, and was at his very best. Miss Peacock, my dear comrade, and her young helper Miss Couper—a fine lassie—came and spent the whole day, so we had a grand time, the biggest Christmas I’ve ever had in Calabar. Three tall flag-poles with trade-cloth flags in the most flaming colours hung over the village from point to point embracing the old and the new churches. The people provided a plain breakfast in their several homes for over eighty of our visitors, who therefore stayed over the forenoon. It made our Christian population look fairly formidable, and certainly very reputable as a force for uplifting and regenerating society. It looks but yesterday that they were a horde of the most unlikely and unresponsive people one could approach, and yet the Gospel has made of them already something to prove that it is the power of God unto salvation to a people and to an individual every and anywhere.”

It was to her “one of the reddest of red-letter days,” such a day as only comes at rare intervals, and she fell into the snare, as she said, “of being carried away with it,” with the result that at night she was down with fever. This kept recurring every alternate night. It was the harmattan season, in which she always wilted like some delicate flower in the sun, and she grew so limp and fragile that she could not sit up. She felt that she would be compelled to go home in the summer with the Macgregors, but the idea frightened her, chiefly because of the stir that had been caused by the honour she had received. “I dare not appear at home after all this publicity,” she said. “I simply could not face the music.” As she recovered a little she superintended the work of the girls outside, and was amused at the way her advice was now received. “Jean and Annie do not hesitate to set it aside quietly in their superior way; it often works out better than mine, truth to tell—though I say it does so by accident!” This was a different house-mother from the one who ruled years before.

In one of her fever nights, tossing in semi-delirium, she had a vision. She had been following the Chapman-Alexander Mission in Glasgow with keen interest, and in the long watches her excited brain continued to dwell on the meetings. She dreamt, or imagined, that out of gratitude for what had been accomplished, two young Glasgow engineers had taken a six months’ holiday, and come out with their motor car to Calabar. They spent their days running up and down the Government Road through Ibibio, singing and giving evangelistic addresses, she interpreting, the girls, who were packed into the cars, doing the catering and cooking, and the Government Rest Houses providing the lodging. “What a night it was!” she wrote. “The bairns were afraid, for I was babbling more than usual, but to me it was as real as if it had all happened. We ran backwards and forwards between Itu and Ikpe, spending alternate Sundays with the Churches, and taking Miss Peacock to her outstations, and visiting Miss Welsh. It was magnificent.”

The vision did not pass away; she took it as a sign from God; and out of it in the morning she formulated a scheme which one day she hoped would be realised. "It is strange," she said, "that it has never dawned on us before. Here is the Government making use of the motor car to do its work. Why should not the Church do the same when the roads are here? It would permit one man to do the work of three, it would save strength, and make for efficiency. The reason why I have been able to go farther than my colleagues, is that I have had the privilege of using Government conveyances by land and water; to have a car and a mechanic missionary would be supplying us with a grand opportunity for multiplied service." She expatiated on the matter in letters to her friends at home, and the longer she thought of the idea, the more it fired her imagination. Within a few days she was flying over the ground in the Government car on her way to Ikpe with many a "ca' canny" to the driver—and her experience brought the conviction that the proposal was a good one. It might be too novel a plan for the Church to take up officially, but she thought wealthy men in Scotland might materialise her vision as a thank-offering.

## XV. STORMING THE CITADELS

The Government road went as far as Odoro Ikpe, where a Rest House, used as a shelter by officials on the march or on judging tours, and the one seen by Mr. Macgregor, had been built on the brow of a hill above the township. It was Saturday when she arrived here, and she climbed the ascent, taking over an hour to do it, and was captivated by the situation. It had the widest outlook of any spot she had seen; she seemed to be on the very roof of the world. A vast extent of bush stretched out before her, unbroken save by the white road winding down the hill, and instead of the stifling stillness of the plains, a soft breeze blew and cooled the atmosphere. It was five miles from Ikpe, and the centre of a number of populous towns. For months past she had been praying for an entrance into these closed haunts of heathenism, and as she sat down in the lonely little Rest House, she made up her mind not to move a step further until she had come to grips with the chiefs. Knowing that the Government would not object, she took possession of the building. It had a doorway but no door; the windows were holes in the wall high up under the eaves; the floor was of mud, and there was no furniture of any kind. But these things were of no consequence to the gipsy-missionary. She slept on a camp-bed borrowed from Miss Peacock, the girls lay on the mud floor among the lizards, and some pots and pans were obtained from the people until she could procure her own from Ikpe. The commissariat department was run on the simplest scale. A tin of fat,

some salt and pepper, tea, and sugar, and roasted plantain for bread, formed the principal constituents of the frugal meals. Their clothes were taken off piece by piece as each could be spared, and washed in a pail from the little prison yard. "Ma's" calico gown went through the process in the forenoon, was dried on the fence in the hot sun, and donned in the afternoon, in order, as she humorously put it, to be ready for "visitors and tea." In her eyes it was a sort of glorified picnic. She did not pity the girls; she thought such an experience was better for them as African citizens and missionaries than a secondary education.

From this high centre as from a fort, she began to bombard the towns in the neighbourhood. Next day she summoned some disciples from a place called Ndot, and service was held in the yard. Then the lads pushed her chair out to Ibam, two miles distant, where she met the headman and his followers. These were an arrogant, powerful sept—not Ibibios—who had been allies of the slavers of Aros, and were disliked and suspected by all. She told them that she wanted the question of Gospel entrance settled. They looked at her indulgently. "We have no objection to you coming, Ma," said the chief.

"And the saving of twins, and the right of twin-mothers to live as women and not as unclean beasts in the bush?" she asked.

"No, no, we will not have it. Our town will spoil." After much talk they said, "Go home, Ma, and we shall discuss it and see you again"—the native way of ending a matter.

Her next discussion was with the town of Odoro Ikpe itself. The old chief was urbane, and gave her every honour. Bringing out a plate with 3s. upon it, he said, "Take that to buy food while staying here, as we have no market yet." She took the money, kissed it, put her hands on his head, and thanked him, calling him "father," but requested him to take it and buy chop for the children, and she would eat with him another day. The old man went away and returned with some yams, which he asked her to cook and eat. As they talked he gradually lost his fear, and then she asked him bluntly about his attitude to the Gospel. He and his big men told her frankly what their difficulties were, and these she demolished one by one. After two hours' fencing and arguing the tension gave way to a hearty laugh, and the old chief said, with a sweep of his hand toward the crowd:

"Well, Ma, there they are, take them and teach them what you like—and you, young men, go and build a house for book."

"No!" cried "Ma," "we don't begin or end either with a house. We begin and end with God in our hearts."

A young man came forward, and without removing a quaint hat he wore, said, "Ma, we can't take God's word if you bring twins and twin-mothers into our town."

It was out at last. Instead of arguing, "Ma" looked at him as witheringly as she could and replied: "I speak with men and people worthy of me, and not with a puny bush-boy such as you have shown by your manners you are."

Off came the hat, and then "Ma" spoke to him in such a way that the crowd were fain to cry:

"Ma, forgive! forgive! he does not know any better." There was no more after that about twins, and when she left she felt that progress had been made.

Striking while the iron was hot she sent to Ikpe for school books, and going into the highways and byways, she began to coax the lads to come and learn. They stood aloof, half-afraid and half-scornful, and would not respond.

Then she adopted a flank movement, and began to speak to them about the rubber and cocoa which the Government were planting in the district, and tried to awaken their interest and ambitions by telling them how the world was moving outside their home circle. Gradually the sullenness gave way, and they began to ask questions and to chat. She took the alphabet card, but they shied at the strange-looking thing, and would not speak. One little fellow who had been at Ikpe, and knew more than the others, began tremblingly, "A—B--," and she and Alice who was with her, joined in until one after another surrendered, and before long all were shouting the letters. By the end of the week the lads were coming every spare hour for lessons, and would scarcely give her time to eat.

The Ikpe disciples had ruefully watched this development, and at last went to her:

"Ma, we are glad you have got a footing out here, but are you forsaking us?"

Her heart ached at the words, and although now reduced to coming and going in her Cape cart, she determined to give them every alternate week when she was not at Use. Thus from now onwards she was keeping three centres going by her own efforts.

After a week at Ikpe in fulfilment of her promise, she returned to Odoro Ikpe to hold the first Sabbath service. A play was being enacted in the town, and scores of naked young men and women were dancing to the compelling throb of the drum. But some Ikpe and Ndot lads came to support the service, and their presence helped the local sympathisers to come forward. It was very simple; she said it would have seemed babyish to Europeans, but it was an epoch to the natives. Another meeting was held in the afternoon; and at night in the dark square, lit only by the light of the fires where the women were cooking their meal, she stood, and again proclaimed, with passionate earnestness, the love of

God and the power of Christ to save and uplift. It was, no doubt, a day of small things, but she knew from long experience that small things were not to be despised.

A month later, when she was at Ikpe holding the services, she was astonished to see thirty of the Odoro Ikpe lads marching into church. They had grown so interested, that they had come the five miles to hear her speak. The Ikpe people at once rose and gave the strangers their seats, finding a place for themselves on the floor. It was pathetic to see their earnest faces and their ignorance as to what they should do during the service, which was more elaborate than they had been accustomed to. Having brought some food they cooked it at the house and remained all day.

On her return to Odoro Ikpe the chiefs appeared one morning, and asked her to come out at once and survey the land, and choose a site for a station. Her heart leapt at the significance of the request. She happened to be in her night attire, but as it might have been full Court dress for all they knew, she went and tramped over the land and chose what she believed would be the best situation in the Mission. It was on the brow of a hill overlooking a magnificent stretch of country, across which a cool breeze blew all the time. She immediately planned a house—one of six rooms—three living rooms above and stores and hall and girls' rooms below, with a roof of corrugated iron for security against wind and insects, and prepared to go down to Use to buy the material.

There was one town still holding out, Ibam (Where she had been told to “go home and they would think about it”), and she prayed that it, too, might accept the new conditions. On the Sunday before she left for Use, while she was conducting service, six strange men came in and waited until all had gone. “We are from Ibam,” they said. “Come at once, Ma, and we will build a place to worship God, and will hear and obey.” She was so uplifted that she seemed to live on air for the next few days. The villagers of Ibam gave up their best yard to her, and crowds came to the meetings.

All the citadels of heathenism in the district had now been stormed. Sitting one night on the floor of the Rest House, her aching back leaning against the mud wall, a candle, stuck in its own grease, giving her light, she wrote to her friends in Scotland, telling them that she was the happiest and most grateful woman in the world.