

MARY SLESSOR

OF CALABAR

PIONEER MISSIONARY

BY

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WORK AND ADVENTURE AT THE BASE

“I am passing through the lights and shadows of life.”

I. THE BREATH OF THE TROPICS

THERE is a glamour like the glamour of the dawn about one's first voyage to the tropics; and as the Ethiopia passed out of the grey atmosphere of England into the spring belt of the world, and then into a region where the days were a glory of sunshine and colour and the nights balmy and serene, Miss Slessor, so long confined within the bare walls of a factory, found the experience a pure delight in spite of a sense of loneliness that sometimes stole over her. Her chief grievance was that Sunday was kept like other days. Trained in the habits of a religious Scottish home it seemed to her extraordinary that no service should be held. “My very heart and flesh cried out for the courts of God's house,” she wrote. Some of the crew comforted her by saying that there was always a Sabbath in Calabar.

It was not until the headland of Cape Verde was sighted and passed, and she saw in succession stretches of green banks, white sands upon which the surf beat, and long grey levels of mangrove, that she began to realise the presence of Africa. From the shore came hot whiffs of that indescribable smell so subtly suggestive of a tropical land; while the names of the districts—the Ivory Coast, the Gold Coast, the Slave Coast—conjured up the old days of adventure, blood-red with deeds of cruelty and shame. This Gulf of Guinea was the heart of the slave trade: more vessels loaded up here with their black cargo than at another port of the continent, and the Bight of Biafra, on which Calabar is situated, was ever the busiest spot. Man-grove forests, unequalled anywhere for immensity and gloom, fringe the entire sweep of the Gulf. Rooted in slime, malodorous and malarious, they form a putrescent paradise for all manner of loathly creatures,

Out of the blue waters of the Atlantic the Ethiopia ran, on Saturday, September 11, into the mud-coloured estuary of the Cross and Calabar Rivers. On the left lay the flat - delta of the Niger, ahead stretched the landscape of man-grove as far as the eye could range: to the south-east rose the vast bulk of the Cameroon Mountains. With what interest Mary gazed on the scene one can imagine. Some-where at the back of these swamps was the spot where she was to settle and work. That it was near the coast she knew, for all that more distant land was unexplored and unknown: most of what was within sight, indeed, was still outside the pale of civilisation; through the

bush and along the creeks and lagoons moved nude people, most of whom had never seen a white face. It might well seem an amazing thing to her, in view of the fact that there had been commerce with the coast for centuries. Vessels had plied to it for slaves, spices, gold dust, ivory, and palm oil; traders mingled with the people, and spoke their tongue; and yet it remained a land of mystery.

There were many reasons for this. The country was, owned by no European Power. Britain regarded it—somewhat unwillingly at first—as a sphere of influence, but had no footing in it, and no control over the people. These were divided into many tribes and sections of tribes, each speaking a different tongue, and each perpetually at war with its neighbour. The necessities of trade fostered a certain intercourse; there was neutral ground where transactions took place, and products for the traders filtered down to the people at the coast who acted as middle-men. These, for obvious reasons, objected to the white men going inland—they would get into touch with the tribes, their authority would be undermined and their business ruined, and as they controlled the avenues of approach and were masters in their own house their veto could not be disregarded. In any case a journey up-river was full of peril. Every bend brought one to a new tribe, alert, suspicious, threatening. For Europeans it was a foodless country, in which they had to face hunger, fever, and death. Even the missionaries had only been feeling their way very slowly: they explored and planted out stations here and there, as permission was obtained from the chiefs, but their main efforts were directed to the task of establishing a strong base at the coast.

The estuary is about twelve miles in breadth, its banks are lined by mangrove, and here and there its surface is broken by islands. From these, as the steamer passed, parrots flew in flocks. From the sandbanks and mudbanks alligators slid into the water with a splash. Occasionally a shrimp-fisher in his canoe was seen. Higher up were the ruins of the barracoons, where the slaves were penned while waiting for shipment. Some fifty miles from the sea the steamer swung round to the east and entered the Calabar River; the swamps gave place to clay cliffs thick with undergrowth and trees, and far ahead a cluster of houses came into view—this, Mary knew, was Old Town. Then the hulks in the stream, used as stores and homes by the traders, appeared, and the steamer anchored opposite Duke Town. It lay on the right among swamps in a receding hollow of the cliff: a collection of mud-dwellings thatched with palm leaf, slovenly and sordid, and broiling in the hot rays of a brilliant sun.

It was the scene she had often endeavoured to picture in her mind. There was the hill where into the bush the dead bodies of natives used to be cast to become the food of wild beasts, now crowned with the Mission buildings. What memories had already gathered about these! What experiences lay be-

hind the men and women who lived there? What a land was this she had chosen to make her dwelling-place—a land formless, mysterious, terrible, ruled by witchcraft and the terrorism of secret societies; where the skull was worshipped and blood-sacrifices were offered to jujus; where guilt was decided by ordeal of poison and boiling oil; where scores of people were murdered when a chief died, and his wives decked themselves in finery and were strangled to keep him company in the spirit-land; where men and women were bound and left to perish by the water-side to placate the god of shrimps; where the alligators were satiated with feeding on human flesh; where twins were done to death, and the mother banished to the bush; where semi-nakedness was compulsory, and girls were sent to farms to be fattened for marriage. A land, also, of disease and fever and white graves.

There, too, lay her own future, as dark and unknown as the land, full of hard work, she knew, full, it might be, of danger and trial and sorrow.

But the boats of the traders and the missionaries came off, the canoes of the natives swarmed around, the whole town seemed to be on the water. With eyes that were bright and expectant Mary stepped from the Mission boat and set foot on African soil.

II. FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The young missionary-teacher was delighted with the novelty and wonders of her surroundings. She revelled in the sunshine, the warmth, the luxuriant beauty, and began to doubt whether the climate was so deadly after all: some of the missionaries told her that much of the illness was due to the lack of proper care, and there was even one who said he preferred Calabar to Scotland.

She was impressed with the Mission. The organisation of church and school, the regular routine of life, the large attendance at the services, the demeanour of the Christians, the quiet and persistent aggressive work going on, satisfied her sense of the fitness of things and made her glad and hopeful. To hear the chime of Sabbath bells; to listen to the natives singing, in their own tongue, the hymns associated with her home life, the Sabbath school and the social meeting; and to watch one of them give an address with eloquence and power, was a revelation. She went to a congregational meeting at Creek Town and heard King Eyo Honesty VII. speaking, and so many were present, and the feeling was so hearty and united that it might have served as a model for the home churches. She was attracted by the King; a sincere kindly Christian man, she found him to be. When she told him that her mother was much interested in him, he was so pleased that he wrote Mrs. Slessor, and the two corresponded—he a negro King in Africa and

she an obscure woman in Scotland, drawn to each other across 4000 miles of sea by the influence of the Gospel.

It was true that the results of thirty years' work in Calabar did not seem large. The number of members in all the congregations was 174, though the attendances at the services each Sunday was over a thousand. The staff, however, had never been very large; of Europeans at this time there were four ordained missionaries, four men teachers, and four women teachers, and of natives one ordained missionary and eighteen agents; and efforts were confined to Duke Town, Old Town, Creek Town, Ikunetu, and Ikor- ofiong-all on the banks of the rivers or creeks with several out-stations.

Her work at first was simple: it was to teach in the day-school on Mission Hill and visit in the yards, both on week-days and Sundays. Not until the strangeness of things had worn off a little did she begin to see below the surface and discover the difficulties of the situation. What assisted the process was a tour of the stations, which it was thought well she should make in order to become acquainted with the conditions. In the out-districts she came into contact with the raw heathen, and felt herself down at the very foundations of humanity. Most of the journeying was through the bush: there were long and fatiguing marches, and much climbing and jumping and wading to do, in which she had the help of three Kroo boys, but being active in body and buoyant in spirit, she enjoyed it thoroughly. A white "Ma" was so curious a sight in some of the districts that the children would run away, screaming with fright, and the women would crowd round her talking, gesticulating, and fingering, so that the chiefs had to drive them off with a whip. She was a little startled by these demonstrations, but was told the people were merely wishing to make friends with her, and she soon overcame her nervousness.

Her first meeting was held while she was with one of the native agents, John Baillie, and took place in the shade of a large tree beside a devil-house built for a dead man's spirit, and stocked with food. After the agent had spoken in Efik he turned to her and said, "Have you anything to say to them?" She looked at the dark throng, degraded, ignorant, superstitious. All eyes were fixed on her. For once she found it difficult to speak. Asking Mr. Baillie to read John v. 1-24, she tried to arrange her thoughts, but seemed to grow more helpless. When she began, the words came, and very simply, very earnestly-the agent interpreting-she spoke of their need of healing and saving, of which they must be conscious through their dissatisfaction with this life, the promptings of their higher natures, the experience of suffering and sorrow, and the dark future beyond death, and, asking the question, "Wilt thou be made whole?" pointed the way to peace.

As she observed and assimilated, she came to hold a clearer view of the people and the problems confronting the missionaries. She realised that the

raw negroes, though savage enough, were not destitute of religious beliefs: their "theology," indeed, seemed somewhat too complicated for comprehension. Nor were their lives unregulated by principles and laws; they were ruled by canons and conventions as powerful as those of Europe, as merciless as the caste code of India; their social life was rooted in a tangle of relationships and customs as intricate as any in the world. The basis of the community was the House, at the head of which was a Master or Chief, independent and autocratic within his own limited domain, which consisted merely of a cluster of mud-huts in the bush. In this compound or yard, or "town" as it was sometimes called, lived connected families. Each chief had numerous wives and slaves, over whom he exercised absolute control. The slaves enjoyed considerable freedom, many occupying good positions and paying tribute, but they could be sold or killed at the will of their master. All belonging to a House were under its protection, and once outside that protection they were pariahs, subject to no law, and at the mercy of Egbo. This secret society was composed of select and graded classes initiated according to certain rites. Its agents were Egbo-runners, supposed to represent a supernatural being in the bush, who came suddenly out, masked and dressed in fantastic garb, and with a long whip rushed about and committed excesses. At these times all women were obliged to hide, for if found they would be flogged and stripped of their clothing. Egbo, however, had a certain power for good, and was often evoked in aid of law and order. Naturally it was the divorcing of superfluous wives, and the freeing of slaves that formed the greatest difficulty for the missionaries-it meant nothing less than breaking up a social system developed and fortified by long centuries of custom. Thus early Miss Slessor came to see that it was the duty of the missionary to bring about a new set of conditions in which it would be possible for the converts to live, and the thought influenced her whole after-career.

The district of Calabar afforded a striking object-lesson of what could be achieved. There was no central native government, and the British consular jurisdiction was of the most shadowy character. So far there had been but the quiet pressure of a moral and spiritual agency at work, but under its influence the people had become habituated to the orderly ways of civilisation, and were living in peace and amity. It was admitted by the officials that the agreements which they concluded with the chiefs had only been rendered possible by the teaching of the missionaries: and later it was largely upon the same sure and solid foundations that British authority was to build.

So, she realised, it was not a case where one could say, "Let there be light," and light would shine. The work of the Mission was like building a lighthouse stone by stone, layer by layer, with infinite toil and infinite patience. Yet she often found it hard to restrain her eagerness. "It is difficult to

wait," she said. One text, however, kept repeating itself—"Learn of Me." "Christ never was in a hurry," she wrote. "There was no rushing forward, no anticipating, no fretting over what might be. Every day's duties were done as every day brought them, and the rest was left with God. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.'" And in that spirit she worked.

Her better knowledge of the position made her resolve to acquire a thorough mastery of the language in order to enter completely into the life and thought of the natives. Interpretation she had already found to be untrustworthy, and she was told the tale of a native who, translating an address on the rich man and Lazarus, remarked, in an aside to the audience, that for himself he would prefer to be the rich man! Efik was the tongue of Calabar and of trade and commerce, and was understood more or less over a wide tract of country. She learnt it by ear, and from the people, rather than from the book, and soon picked up enough to take a larger share in the varied work of the Mission.

Life had a piquancy in these days when she lived with the Andersons on Mission Hill. "Daddy" Anderson was a veteran of the Mission, but it was "Mammy" Anderson with whom she came into closest relation. Of strong individuality, she ruled the town from the Mission House, and the chiefs were fain to do her bidding. At first Mary stood somewhat in awe of her. One of the duties assigned to her was to ring, before dawn, the first bell for the day to call the faithful to morning prayer. There were no alarm clocks then, and occasionally she overslept, and the rebuke she received from Mrs. Anderson made her cheeks burn. Sometimes she would wake with a start to find her room flooded with light. Half-dazed with sleep and shamed at her remissness she would hurry out to ring the bell, only to discover that it was not dawn but the light of the moon that was making the world so bright.

At one time when doing duty in Old Town she had to walk along a narrow native track through the bush. To let off the high spirits that had been bottled up in the Mission House she would climb any tree that took her fancy. She affirmed that she had climbed every tree worthy of the name between Duke Town and Old Town. Sometimes her fun made her late for meals, and Mrs. Anderson would warn her that if she offended again she would go without food. She did offend, and then Mr. Anderson would smuggle biscuits and bananas to her, with, she was confident, the connivance of his wife. She had a warm affection for all the members of the Mission staff, but for none more than for "Mammy" Anderson.

There was one of the humbler inmates of the Mission who watched with affectionate interest the young missionary with the soft voice and dancing eyes. This was Mrs. Fuller, a coloured woman who had come over from Jamaica in 1858 with the Rev. Mr. Robb and Mrs. Robb as a nurse, and married and remained after they left to be a help and comfort to many. She re-

membered the day when the slaves were emancipated in the West Indies. A kindly, happy, unselfish soul, she never spoke ill of any one. Some-body said to her, "Mammy, I believe you would say a good word about the devil himself." "Well," she replied, "at any rate he minds his own business." "Dear old Mammy Fuller," Miss Slessor called her, little dreaming that Mammy would live to throw flowers into her grave.

III. IN THE UNDERWORLD

In the hush of a beautiful Sunday morning the new missionary begins what she calls the commonplace work of the day. Looking out some illustrated texts, she sends a few with a kindly message to all the big men, reminding them that Mr. Anderson expects them at service. Then she sets out for the town, and few people escape her keen eye and persuasive words.

"Why are you not going to God's House?" she asks a man who is sitting at the door of his hut. Close by are the remains of a devil-house.

He rocks himself and replies, "If your heart was vexed would you go any place? Would you not rather sit at home and nurse your sorrow?"

Mary learns that his only child has died and has been buried in the house, and according to custom the family is sitting in filth, squalor, and drunkenness. She talks to him of the resurrection, and he becomes interested, and takes her into a room where the mother is sitting with bowed head over the grave, the form of which can be seen distinctly under a blue cloth that covers the ground. A bunch of dirty muslin is hanging from the ceiling. It is a dismal scene. She reads part of John xi., and speaks about life and death and the beyond.

"Well," remarked the man, "if God took the child I don't care so much—but to think an enemy bewitched it!"

To the mother she says, "Do you not find comfort in these words?"

"No," is the sullen reply. "Why should I find comfort when my child is gone?"

Mary pats her on the head, and tells her how her own mother has found comfort in the thought of the reunion hereafter. The woman is touched and weeps: the mother-heart is much the same all the world over.

A few slave-girls are all she finds in the next yard, the other inmates having gone to work at the farms; but she speaks to them and they listen respectfully. Another yard is crowded with women, some eating, some sleeping, some dressing each other's hair, some lounging half-naked on the ground gossiping—a picture of sheer animalism. Her advent creates a welcome diversion, and they are willing to listen: it helps to pass the time. They take her into an inner yard where a fine-looking young woman is being fattened for her future husband. She flouts the message, and is spoken to stern-

ly and left half-crestfallen, half-defiant. It is scenes like this which convince Mary that the women are the greatest problem in the Mission Field. She does not wonder that the men are as they are. If they are to be reached more must be done for the women, and a prayer goes up that the Church at home may realize the situation.

Farther on is a heathen house. The master is dead: the mistress is an old woman, hardened and repulsive, the embodiment of all that is evil, who is counting coppers in a room filled with bush, skulls, sacrifices, and charms. A number of half-starved cowed women and girls covered with dirt and sores are quarrelling over a pipe. The shrill voice and long arms of the mistress settle the matter, and make them fly helter-skelter. They call on Mary to speak, and after many interruptions she subdues and controls them, and leaves them, for the moment, impressed.

She arrives at a district which the lady agents have long worked. The women are cleanly, pleasant, and industrious, but polished hypocrites, always ready to protest with smooth tongue and honeyed words that they are eager to be "god-women," but never taking the first step forwards. Mary, who is learning to be sarcastic, on occasion, gives them a bit of her mind and goes away heart-sick. But she is cheered at the next yard, where she has a large and attentive audience.

In the poorest part she comes upon a group of men selling rum. At the sight of the "white Ma" they put the stuff away and beg her to stay. They are quiet until she denounces the sale of the liquor; then one interrupts: "What for white man bring them rum suppose them rum no be good? He be god-man bring the rum-then what for god-man talk so?"

What can she answer?

It is a vile fluid this trade spirit, yet the country is deluged with it, and it leaves behind it disaster and de-moralisation and ruined homes. Mary feels bitter against the civilised countries that seek profit from the moral devastation of humanity.

She cannot answer the man.

A husband brings his woebegone wife who has lost five children. Can "Ida" not give her some medicine? She again speaks of the resurrection. A crowd gathers and listens breathlessly. When she says that even the twin-children are safe with God, and that they will vet confront their murderers, the people start, shrug their shoulders, and with looks of terror slink one by one away.

She visits many of the hovels, which are little better than ruins. Pools of filth send out pestilential odours. There is starvation in every pinched face and misery in every sunken eye. Covered with sores the inmates lie huddled together and clamour only for food. One old woman says: "I have prayed

and prayed till there is no breath left in me. God does not answer. He does not care.”

“To whom do you pray?”

“I don’t know, but I call Him God. I tell Him I have no friend. I say `You see me. I am sick. I am hungry. I am good. I don’t steal. I don’t keep bread from any one. I don’t kill. I don’t speak with my mouth when my heart is far away. Have mercy upon me.”

Mary talks to her lovingly and earnestly, and when she leaves, the heart of the wretched woman is quietened and grateful.

It is afternoon, and time for the Efik service at four o’clock, and Mary, a little tired with the heat and the strain, turns and makes for Mission Hill.

IV. THE PULL OF HOME

It was not long before she had to revise her opinion of the climate. Nature was beautiful, but beneath its fair appearance lurked influences that were cruel and pitiless. “Calabar needs a brave heart and a stout body,” she wrote; “not that I have very much of the former, but I have felt the need for it often when sick and lonely.” Both the dry and rainy seasons had their drawbacks, but she especially disliked the former-which lasted from December to March because of the “smokes” or harmattan, a haze composed of fine dust blown from the great African desert, that withered her up and sucked out all the energy she possessed. She was frequently attacked by fever, and laid aside, and on one occasion was at the point of death. But she never lost her confidence in God. Once she thought she had. It was during an illness when she was only semi-conscious, but on recovering the clearness of her mind she realised that she had given herself into His keeping and need not fear, and a sense of comfort and peace stole over her. So many attacks weakened her constitution and made her think oftener of home. She began to have a longing to look again upon loved faces, to have grey skies overhead, and to feel the tang of the clean cool air on her cheek. “I want my home and my mother,” she confessed. It was home-sickness, and there is only one cure for that. It comes, however, to pass. It is not so overpowering after the first home-going, and it grows less importunate after each visit. One finds after a short absence that things in the old environment are, somehow, not the same; that there has ceased to be a niche which one can fill; that one has a fresh point of view; and as time goes on and the roots of life go deeper into the soil of the new country, the realisation comes that it is in the homeland where one is homeless, and in the land of exile where one is at home. But at first the pull of the old associations is irresistible; and so when her furlough was due, Mary flew to Scotland as a wandered bird flies wing-weary back to its nest.

She left Calabar in June 1879 and proceeded straight to Dundee. During her stay she removed her mother and sisters to Downfield, a village on the outskirts of the city, and was happy in the knowledge that all was well with them. Friends who listened to her graphic account of Calabar tell that even then she spoke of her desire to go up country into the unworked fields, and especially to the Okoyong district, but "Daddy" Anderson was opposed to the idea. Before returning, she wrote the Foreign Mission Committee and begged to be sent to a station other than Duke Town, though she loyally added that she would do what-ever was thought best. She sailed with the Rev. Hugh Goldie, one of the veteran pioneers of the Mission, and Mrs. Goldie, and on arrival at Calabar, in October 1880, found to her joy that she was to be in charge of Old Town, and that she was a real missionary at last.

V. AT THE SEAT OF SATAN

The first sight she saw on entering her new sphere was a human skull hung on a pole at the entrance to the town. In Old Town and the smaller stations of Qua, Akim, and Ikot Ansa, lying back in the tribal district of Ekoi, the people were amongst the most degraded in Calabar. It was a difficult field, but she entered upon it with zest. Although under the supervision of Duke Town, she was practically her own mistress, and could carry out her own ideas and methods. This was important for her, for, to her chagrin, she had found that boarding was expensive in Calabar, and as she had to leave a large portion of her salary at home for the support of her mother and sisters, she could not afford to live as the other lady agents did. She had to economise in every direction, and took to subsisting wholly on native food. It was in this way she acquired those simple, Spartan-like habits which accompanied her through life. Her colleagues attributed her desire for isolation and native ways to natural inclination, not dreaming that they were a matter of compulsion, for she was too loyal to her home and too proud of spirit to reveal the reason for her action.

One drawback of the situation was the dilapidated state of the house. It was built of wattle and mud, had a mat roof and a whitewashed interior. She did not, however, mind its condition; she was so absorbed in the work that personal comfort was a matter of indifference to her. Her household consisted of a young woman and several boys and girls, with whose training she took endless pains, and who helped her and accompanied her to her meetings. School work made large drafts on her time at Old Town, Qua, and Akim. Young and old came as scholars. At Qua the chief man of the place after the king sat on a bench with little children, and along with them repeated the Sunday School lessons. He set them an example, for he was never absent.

But to preach the love of Christ was her passion. With every visitor who called to give compliments, with every passer-by who came out of curiosity to see what the white woman and her house were like, with all who brought a dispute to settle, she had talk about the Saviour of the world. Sunday was a day of special effort in this direction. She would set out early for Qua, where two boys carrying a bell slung on a pole summoned the people to service. One of the chiefs would fix the benches and arrange the audience, which usually numbered from 80 to 100. She would go on to Akim or Ikot Ansa, where a similar meeting was held. On the way she would visit sick folk, or call in at farms, have friendly conversation with master and dependants, and give a brief address and prayer. By mid-day she would be back at Old Town, where she conducted a large Sunday School. In the evening a regular church service was held, attended by almost the entire community. This, to her, was the meeting of the week. It took place in the yard of the chief. At one side stood a table, covered with a white cloth, on which were a primitive lamp and a Bible. The darkness, the rows of dusky faces just revealed by the flickering light, the strained attention, the visible emotion made up a strange picture. At the end came hearty "good-nights," and she would be escorted home by a pro-cession of lantern-bearers.

Such service, incessant and loving, began to tell. The behaviour of the people improved; the god of the town was banished; the chiefs went the length of saying that their laws and customs were clearly at variance with God's fashions. Mr. Anderson reported to the Church at home that she was "doing nobly." When two deputies went out and inspected the Mission in 1881-82, they were much impressed by her energy and devotion. "Her labours are manifold," they stated, "but she sustains them cheerfully-she enjoys the unreserved friendship and confidence of the people, and has much influence over them." This they attributed partly to the singular ease with which she spoke the language. Learning that she preferred her present manner of life to being associated with another white person-they were unaware, like others, of the real reason which governed her-they recommended that she should be allowed to continue her solitary course.

It was at Old Town that she came first into close contact with the more sinister aspects of mission work, and obtained that training and experience in dealing with the natives and native problems which led her into the larger responsibilities of the future. Despite the influence of the missionaries and the British Consul, many of the worst heathen iniquities were being practised. A short time previously the Consul had made a strong effort to get the chiefs to enforce the laws regarding twin-murder, human sacrifice, the stripping and flogging of women by Egbo-runners, and other offences, and an agreement had been reached; but no treaty, no Egbo proclamation could root

out the customs of centuries, and they continued to be followed, in secret in the towns and openly in the country districts.

The evil of twin-murder had a terrible fascination for her. A woman who gave birth to twins was regarded with horror. The belief was that the father of one of the infants was an evil spirit, and that the mother had been guilty of a great sin; one at least of the children was believed to be a monster, and as they were never seen by outsiders or allowed to live, no one could disprove the fact. They were seized, their backs were broken, and they were crushed into a calabash or water-pot and taken out-not by the doorway, but by a hole broken in the back wall, which was at once built up-and thrown into the bush, where they were left to be eaten by insects and wild beasts. Sometimes they would be placed alive into the pots. As for the mother, she was driven outside the bounds of decent society and compelled to live alone in the bush. In such circumstances there was only one thing for the missionaries to do. As soon as twins were born they sought to obtain possession of them, and gave them the security and care of the Mission House. Some of the Mission compounds were alive with babies. It was no use taking the mother along with them. She believed she must be accursed, for otherwise she would never be in such a position. First one and then the other child would die, and she would make her escape and fly to the bush.

Mary realised that the system was the outcome of superstition and fear, and she could even see how, from the native point of view, it was essential for the safety of the House, but her heart was hot against it; nothing, indeed, roused her so fiercely as the senseless cruelty of putting these innocent babes to death, and she joined in the campaign with fearless energy.

She could also understand why the natives threw away infants whose slave-mother died. No slave had time to bring up another woman's child. If she did undertake the task, it would only be hers during childhood; after that it became the property of the master. The chances of a slave-child surviving were not good enough for a free woman to try the experiment, and as life in any case was of little value, it was considered best that the infant should be put out of the way.

The need of special service in these directions made her suggest to the Foreign Mission Committee that one of the woman agents should be set apart to take care of the children that were rescued. It was impossible, she said, for one to do school or other work, and attend to them as well. "If such a crowd of twins should come to her as I have to manage, she would require to devote her whole time to them." More and more also she was convinced of the necessity of women's work among the women in the farming districts, and she pressed the matter upon the Committee. She was in line with the old chief who remarked that "them women he the best man for the Mission."

Another evil which violated her sense of justice and right, and against which she took tip arms, was the trade attitude of the Calabar people. Although they had settled on the coast only by grace of the Ekois, they endeavoured to monopolise all dealings with the Europeans and prevent the inland tribes from doing business direct with the factories. Often the up-river men would make their way down stealthily, but if caught they were slain or mutilated, and a bitter vendetta would ensue. She recognised that it would only be by the tribes coming to know and respect each other, and by the adoption of unrestricted trade with the stores that the full reward of industry could be secured. She accordingly took up the cause of the inland tribes. When Efik was at war with Qua, sentries were posted at all the paths to the factories, but the people came to her by night, and she would lead them down the track running through the Mission property. At the factory next to the Mission beach they would deliver their palm oil or kernels, and take back the goods for which they had bartered them. In this way she helped to open up the country. It was not, perhaps, mission work in the ordinary sense any more than much of Dr. Livingstone's work was missionary work, but it was an effort to break down the conditions that perpetuated wrong and dispeace, and to introduce the forces of righteousness and goodwill. In all this work she had the sympathy of the traders, who showed her much kindness. She was a missionary after their own heart.

VI. IN ELEPHANT COUNTRY

The spirit of the pioneer would not allow her to be content with the routine of village work. She began to go afield, and made trips of exploration along the river. The people found her different from other missionaries; she would enter their townships as one of themselves, show them in a moment that she was mistress of their thought and ways, and get right into their confidence. Always carrying medicine, she attended the sick, and so many maimed and diseased crowded to her that often she would lose the tide twice over. In her opinion no preaching surpassed these patient, intimate interviews on the banks of the river and by the wayside, when she listened to tales of suffering and sorrow and gave sympathy and practical help. Sometimes she remained away for nights at a time, and on these occasions her only accommodation was a mud hut and her only bed a bundle of filthy rags.

A larger venture was made at the instance of a chief named Okon, a political refugee whom she knew. He had settled at a spot on the western bank of the estuary, then called Ibaka, now James Town, and had long urged her to pay the place a visit. It was only some thirty miles away, but thirty miles to the African is more than two hundred to a European, and Old Town was in a

state of excitement for days before she left. Nine A.M. was the hour fixed for departure, but Mary knew local ways, and forenoon found her calmly cooking the dinner. The house was crowded with visitors begging her to be careful, and threatening vengeance if anything happened to their "Ma." At 6 P. M. came word that all was ready, and, followed by a retinue comprising half the population, she made her way to the beach. Women who were not ordinarily permitted to be viewed by the public eye waited at every yard to embrace her, and to charge all concerned to look well after her safety and comfort.

A State canoe sent by the King lay at the water-side. It had been repainted for the occasion in the gayest of colours, while thoughtful hands had erected a little arch of matting to seclude her from the paddlers and afford protection from the dew, and had arranged some rice-bags as a couch. The pathos of the tribute touched her, and with a smile and a word of thanks she stepped into her place and settled the four house-children about the feet of the paddlers. More hours were lost in one way or another_ Darkness fell, and only the red gleam of the torches lit up the scene. Alligators and snakes haunted the spot, but she had no fear so long as the clamour of the crowd continued.

At last, "Sio uden!" the command was answered by the "dip-dip" of thirty-three paddles, and the canoe glided into the middle of the river and sped onwards. In her crib she tried to read by the light of a candle, while the paddlers extemporised songs in her honour, assigning to her all the virtues under the sun—

*Ma, our beautiful, beloved mother, is on board,
Ho! Ho! Ho!*

The gentle movement, the monotonous "tom-tom-tum" of the drummer, and the voice of the steersman, be mingled in a dreamy jumble, and she slept through the night as soundly as on a bed of down. Ten hours' paddling brought the craft to its destination, and at dawn she was carried ashore over golden sand and under great trees, and de-positd in the chief's compound amongst goats, dogs, and fowls. She and the children were given the master's room -which always opens out into the women's yard-and as it possessed no door a piece of calico was hung up as a screen. The days were tolerable, but the nights were such as even she, inured to African conditions, found almost unbearable. It was the etiquette of the country that all the wives should sit as close to the white woman as was compatible with her idea of comfort, and as the aim of each was to be fatter than the other, and they all perspired freely, and there was no ventilation, it required all her courage to outlast the ordeal. Lizards, too, played among the matting of the

roof, and sent down showers of dust, while rats performed hop, skip, and jump over the sleepers.

Crowds began to pour in from a wide area. Many of the people had never looked upon a white woman, and she had to submit to being handled and examined in order to prove that she was flesh and blood like themselves. Doubtful men and women were forcibly dragged to her by laughing companions and made to touch her skin. At meal times she was on exhibition to a favoured few, who watched how she ate and drank, and then described the operations to the others outside.

Day by day she prescribed and bandaged, cut out garments, superintended washing, and initiated women into the secrets of starching and ironing. Day by day she held a morning and evening service, and it was with difficulty that she prevented the one from merging into the other. On Sabbath the yard became strangely quiet: all connected with it were clothed and clean, and in a corner stood a table with a white cloth and upon it a Bible and hymn-book. As the fierce-looking, noisy men from a distance entered they stopped involuntarily and a hush fell upon them. Many heard the story of Christ for the first time, and never had she a more appreciative audience. In the evening the throng was so great that her voice could barely reach them all, and at the end they came up to her and with deep feeling wished her good-night and then vanished quietly into the darkness.

The people would not allow her to walk out much on account of the presence of wild beasts. Elephants were numerous-it was because of the destruction they had wrought on the farms that fishing had become the main support of the township. Early one morning a commotion broke out: a boa constrictor had been seen during the night, and bands of men armed with clubs, cutlasses, and muskets set off, yelling, to hunt the monster. Whenever she moved out she was followed by all the men, women, and children. On every side she saw skulls, rudely carved images, peace-offerings of food to hungry spirits, and other evidences of debased fetishism, while cases of witchcraft and poisoning were frequent.

One day she noticed a tornado brewing on the Cameroon heights, and kept indoors. While sitting sewing the storm burst. The wind seized the village, lifting fences, canoes, trees, and buildings; lightning played and crackled about the hut; the thunder pealed overhead; and rain fell in floods. Then a column of flame leapt from the sky to earth, and a terrific crash deafened the cowering people. Accustomed as she was to tornadoes Mary was afraid. The slaves came rushing into the yard, shrieking, and at the same moment the roof of her hut was swept away, and she was beaten to the ground by the violence of the rain. In the light of the vivid flashes she groped her way through the water, now up to her ankles, and from her boxes obtained all the wraps she possessed. To keep up the spirits of the children she started a

hymn, "Oh, come let us sing." Amidst the roar of the elements they caught the tune, and gradually their terror was subdued. When the torrent ceased she was in a high fever. She dosed herself with quinine, and as the shadow of death is never very far away in Africa she made all arrangements in case the end should come. But her temperature fell, and in two days she was herself again.

There was a morning when her greetings were responded to with such gravity that she knew something serious had occurred. During the night two of the young wives of a chief had broken the strictest law in Efik, had left the women's yard and entered one where a boy was sleeping, and as nothing can be hidden in a slave community their husband knew at once. The culprits were called out, and with them two other girls, who were aware of the escapade, but did not tell. The chief, and the men of position in his compound and district, sat in judgment upon them, and decided that each must receive one hundred stripes.

Mary sought out Okon and talked the matter over. "Ma," he said, "it be proper big palaver, but if you say we must not flog we must listen to you as our mother and our guest. But they will say that God's word be no good if it destroy the power of the law to punish evildoers."

He agreed, however, to delay the punishment, and to bring the judges and the people together in a palaver at mid-day. When all were assembled she addressed the girls: "You have brought much shame on us by your folly and by abusing your master's confidence while the yard is in our possession. Though God's word teaches men to be merciful, it does not countenance or pass over sin, and I cannot shelter you from punishment. You have knowingly and deliberately brought it on yourselves. Ask God to keep you in the future so that your conduct may not be a reproach to yourselves and the word of God which you know."

Many were the grunts of satisfaction from the people, and the faces of the big men cleared as they heard their verdict being endorsed, while darker and more defiant grew the looks of the girls.

With a swift movement Mary turned to the gathering: "Ay, but you are really to blame. It is your system of polygamy which is a disgrace to you and a cruel injustice to these helpless women. Girls like these, sixteen years old, are not beyond the age of fun and frolic. To confine them as you do is a shame and a blot on your manhood: obedience such as you command is not worth the having."

Frowns greeted this denunciation, and the old men muttered: "When the punishment is severe, neither slave nor wife dare disobey: the old fashions are better than the new."

Much heated discussion followed, but at last she succeeded in getting the punishment reduced to the infliction of ten stripes and nothing more. She

had gone as far as she dared. Under ordinary circumstances salt would have been rubbed into the wounds, and mutilation or dismemberment would have followed. She thanked the men, enjoined the wives and slaves to show their gratitude by a willing and true service, and went to prepare alleviations for the victims.

Through the shouting and laughing of the operators and onlookers she heard piercing screams, as strong arms plied the alligator hide, and one by one the girls came running in to her, bleeding and quivering in the agony of pain. By and by the opiate did its work and all sank into uneasy slumber.

Fourteen days went by, and it was time for the return journey. The same noise and excitement and delay occurred, and it was afternoon ere the canoe left the beach. The evening meal, a mess of yam and herbs, cooked in palm oil, which had been carried on board smoking hot from the fire and was served in the pot, had scarcely been disposed of when the splendour of the sunset and afterglow was swept aside by a mass of angry cloud, and the moaning of the wind fell threateningly on the ear. "A stormy night ahead," said Mary apprehensively to Okon, who gave a long look upward and steered for the lee of an island. The sky blackened, thunder growled, and the water began to lift. The first rush of wind gripped the canoe and whirled it round, while the crew, hissing through their set teeth, pulled their hardest. In vain. They got out of hand, and there was uproar and craven fear. Sharing in the panic, the master was powerless. At the sight of others in peril Mary threw aside her own nervousness and anxiety and took command. In a few moments order was restored and the boat was brought close to the tangle of bush, and the men, springing up like monkeys into the branches, held on to the canoe, which was now being dashed up and down like a straw. Mary sat with the water up to her knees, the children lashed to her by a waterproof, their heads hidden in her lap. Lightning, thunder, rain, and wave combined to make one of the grandest displays of the earth's forces she had ever witnessed.

As quickly as it came the storm passed, and to the strains of a hymn which she started the journey was resumed. She was shaking with ague, and in order to put some heat into her the chief came and sat down on one side, while his big wife sat on the other. As her temperature rose, the paddlers grew alarmed, and pulled as they had never done in their lives. Dawn was stealing over the land when Old Town was reached, and as "Ma" was hardly a fit sight for critical eyes, she was carried up by a bush path to the Mission House.

Ill as she was, her first care was to make a fire to obtain hot tea for the children and to tuck them away comfortably for the night. Then she tottered to her bed, to rise some days later, a wreck of her former self, but smiling and cheerful as usual. . . .

Towards the close of the year 1882 a tornado swept over Old Town and damaged the house to such an extent that she had to make a hasty escape and take refuge in a factory. The Presbytery brought her to Duke Town, but she became so ill as a result of her strenuous life and her experience in the storm, that she was ordered home, and left in April 1883. She was so frail that she was carried on board, and it was considered doubtful whether she would outlive the voyage. With her was a girl-twin she had rescued. She had saved both, a boy and girl, but whilst she was absent from the house for a little, the relatives came, and, by false pretences, obtained possession of the boy, and killed him. She was determined that the girl should live and grow up to confute their fears, and she would not incur the risk of leaving her behind.

VII. WITH BACK TO THE WALL

Many strange experiences came to Mary Slessor in her life, but it is doubtful whether any adventure equalled that which she was now to go through in the quiet places of home, or whether any period of her career was so crowded with emotion and called for higher courage and resource.

She remained for the greater part of the time with her mother and sisters at Downfield, seeing few people, and nursing the little black twin, who was baptized in Wishart Sunday School, and called Janie, after her sister.

One of her earliest visits was to her friends the Doigs in the south side of Edinburgh, and here again her life touched and influenced another life. There was in connection with Bristol Street Church a girl named Jessie F. Hogg, who worked in the mission at Cowan's Close where the "two Marys" had formerly taught. She had heard much about Mary Slessor, and when, one Sunday, a lady friend remarked that she was going to visit the missionary, Miss Hogg declared she would give much to meet her. "Then come with me," said the lady. "I will leave you at the foot of the stair, and if you are to come up I will call you." She was invited up, and was not five minutes in Mary's presence before the latter said, "And what are you doing at home? What is hindering you from going to the mission field?" "There is nothing to hinder me," was the reply. "Then come; there is a good work waiting for you to do." Miss Hogg applied to the Foreign Mission Committee and was accepted, received some medical training, and was in Calabar before Mary herself returned. The anticipations of the latter were fulfilled. For thirteen years, with quiet hero-ism, Miss Hogg did a great work as one of the "Mothers of the Mission": her name was a household word, both in Calabar and at home: and when, through ill-health, she retired, she left a memory that is still cherished by the natives. There were few of the mis-

sionaries then who loved and understood Mary better, and whom Mary loved so well.

Mary's ideas of the qualities needed for work among the ignorant and degraded may be gathered from a letter which she wrote at this time to a friend in Dundee:

Nothing, I believe, will ever touch or raise fallen ones except sympathy. They shrink from self-righteousness which would stoop to them, and they hate patronage and pity. Of sympathy and patience they stand in need. They also need refinement, for the humble classes respect it, and they are sharper at detecting the want of it than many of those above them in the social scale. I am not a believer in the craze for "ticket-of-leave men" and "converted prize-fighters" to preach to the poor and the outcast. I think the more of real refinement and beauty and education that enter into all Christian work, the more real success and lasting, wide-reaching results of a Christian and elevating nature will follow. Vulgarity and ignorance can never in themselves lay hold on the uneducated classes, or on any class, though God often shows us how He can dispense with man's help altogether. Then there is need for knowledge in such a work, knowledge of the Bible as a whole, not merely of the special passages which are adapted for evangelistic services. They know all the set phrases belonging to special services and open-air meetings. They want teaching, and they will respect nothing else. I am pained often at home that there is so little of depth, and of God's word, in the speeches and addresses I hear. It seems as if they thought anything will do for children, and that any kind of talk about coming to Christ, and believing on Christ, will feed and nourish immortal souls.

In January 1884 she informed the Foreign Mission Committee that her health was re-established and that she was ready to return, and in accordance with her own desire it was arranged to make the house habitable at Old Town and send her back there. Meanwhile she had begun to address meetings in connection with the missionary organisations of congregations, and at these her simple but vivid style, the human interest of her story, and the living illustration she presented in the shape of Janie, made so great an impression that the ladies of Glasgow besought the Committee to retain her for a time in order that she might go through the country and give her account of the work to quiet gatherings of women, young and old. The suggestion was acted upon, and for some months she was engaged in itinerating. It was not in the line of her inclination. She was very shy, and had a humbling consciousness of her defects, and to appear in public was an ordeal. It was often a sheer impossibility for her to open her lips when men were present, and she would make it a condition that none should be in her audience. When some distinguished minister or Church leader had been requisitioned to preside, a situation was created as embarrassing to him as to her. She did not, however, seem to mind if the disturbing factor was out of sight, and the difficulty was usually overcome by placing the chairman somewhere behind. These meetings taxed her strength more than the work in Africa, and she began to long for release. In December the Committee gave her permission

to return, but, as conditions in the field had changed, decided to send her in the meantime to Creek Town to assist Miss Johnstone, who was not in good health.

Within a few weeks a situation developed which altered her plans. The severe weather had told on the delicate constitution of her youngest sister Janie, a quiet, timid girl, but bright and intelligent, and somewhat akin to herself in mind and manner; and it was made clear that only a change to a milder climate would save her life. Mary was torn with apprehension. She had a heart that was bigger than her body, and she loved her own people with passionate intensity, and was ready for any further sacrifice for their sake. Never bold on her own behalf, she would dare any-thing for others. Thinking out the problem how best she could reconcile her affection for her sister and her duty to the Mission, she fell upon a plan which she would have shrunk from proposing had she alone been concerned. If she could take the invalid out with her to Creek Town, and if they were allowed to dwell by themselves, the life of her sister would not only be prolonged, but she herself would be able to continue, by living native fashion, to pay her share of the expenses at home. To the Committee, accordingly, she wrote early in 1885, stating that she would not feel free to go to Creek Town unless she were permitted to take her sister with her, and unless she were allowed, instead of boarding with any of the Mission agents, to build a small mud house for their accommodation.

The Committee received the proposal with a certain mild astonishment. It had many a problem to solve in its administration of the affairs of the Missions, but its difficulties were always increased when it came into contact with that incalculable element, human nature. It could not be supposed to know all the personal and private circumstances that influenced the attitude of the missionaries: it could only judge from the surface facts placed before it; and as a rule it decided wisely, and was never lacking in the spirit of kindness and generosity. But even if the members had known of that fluttering heart in Dundee, they could not, in the best interests of the Mission, have acquiesced in her scheme, and it was probably well, also, for Mary that it was gently but firmly put aside.

For her the way out was found in the recommendation of an Exeter lady whom she had met, who advised her to take her sister to Devonshire. She seized on the idea, and forth-with wrote a letter stating that she felt it to be her duty to remove the invalid to the South of England, where she hoped her health would be restored, and asking whether in the event of her own way being cleared she would be allowed to return to Calabar, or whether she was to consider herself finally separated from the Mission. Nothing could have been more sympathetic than the reply of the Board. It regretted her family afflictions, said it would be glad to have the offer of her services again in

the future, and in consideration of her work continued her home allowance till the end of April.

Meanwhile Mary had, in her swift fashion, carried off her sister, and her answer came from Devonshire. She thanked the Committee for its consideration, but, with the independence which always characterised her, accepted the allowance only up to the end of February. Thus voluntarily, and from a sense of duty, but with a sore heart, she cut herself adrift, for the time being, from the service of the Church.

As the climate of Devonshire seemed to suit her sister, they went to Topsham, where a house was secured with the help of a Mr. Ellis, a deacon in the Congregational Church, to whom she was introduced. It was soon furnished, and then her mother was brought down, and for all her toil and self-sacrifice she was rewarded by seeing a steady improvement in the condition of the invalid, and the quiet happiness of both. The place proved too relaxing for her own health, and she was never free from headaches, but she was not one to allow indisposition to interfere with her service for the Master. In the Congregational Church her winning ways made many friends, and she was soon taking an active part in the meetings and addressing large gatherings on her work in Calabar.

And then another event occurred which further complicated the situation. Her sister Susan in Scotland went to pay a visit to Mrs. M'Crindle, and died suddenly on entering her house. Mary had now the full responsibility for the home and its upkeep: she was earning nothing, and she had her mother and sister and the African baby to provide and care for. Happily the invalid continued to improve, and as it was imperative for Mary to be back at work, it was decided that she should apply for reinstatement. She told her mother of her desire to go up-country, and asked whether she would allow her to do so if the opportunity came. "You are my child, given to me by God," was the reply, "and I have given you back to Him. When He needs you and where He sends you, there I would have you be." Mary never forgot these brave words, which were a comfort to her throughout her life. On applying to the Foreign Mission Committee stating that she was willing, if it saw fit, to go back at once, she was gladly reinstated, and Calabar was consulted regarding her location. As there was some talk of a forward movement it was resolved to leave the matter over, and send her in the meantime to Creek Town.

Her friends in Topsham assured her that they would look well after her mother and sister, but all the arrangements she had made for the smooth working of the household collapsed a month before she was booked to sail. Her mother suddenly failed and took to her bed. Mary grew desperate with strain and anxiety, and like a wild creature at bay turned this way and that for an avenue of escape. In her agony of mind she went to Him who had

never failed her yet, and He gave her guidance. Next day a letter was on its way to Dundee to an old factory friend, asking if she would come and take charge of the household. A strange mingling of pathos and dignity, a passionate love and solicitude, marked the appeal, which, happily, evoked a ready assent. Not less moving in its way was the practical letter she sent to her friend, with long and minute directions as to travelling; there was not a detail forgotten, the mention of which might contribute to her ease and comfort. Her friend arrived a few days before her departure. On Guy Fawkes' Day Mary wished to take her to a church meeting to introduce her to some acquaintances, but was too afraid to venture out among the roughs-she who was soon to face alone some of the most savage crowds in Africa!

On the sea the past months receded and became like an uneasy dream. She was content simply to lie in her chair on deck and rest her tired mind and body. On arriving it was pleasant to receive a warm welcome from all the Mission friends, and still more pleasant to find that there had been talk of her going to Ikunetu to attempt to obtain a footing among the wild people of Okoyong.

VIII. BEREFT

Despite her happiness in being back at the work she loved, there was an underlying current of anxiety in her life. Her thoughts dwelt on the invalids at home; she wearied for letters; she trembled before the arrival of the mails; even her dreams influenced her. But she would not allow herself to grow morbid. Every morning she went to the houses in the Mission before breakfast to have a chat and cheer up the inmates. On New Year's Eve, fearing the adoption of European customs by the natives, and wishing to forestall them, she invited all the young men who were Christians to a prayer-meeting from eleven o'clock till midnight. They then went up and serenaded Mr. and Mrs. Luke, two new missionaries, whose subsequent pioneer work up-river was a record of toil and heroism. Mr. Luke entered into the spirit of the innovation. He gave out the and Paraphrase and read the 90th Psalm. Prayer was uttered, and the company separated, singing the evening hymn in Efik.

Next morning, the first of the year 1886, she arose early and wrote a letter, overflowing with love and tenderness and cheer, to her mother and sister. It was finished on the third, on the arrival of the home mail. She was at tea with Mrs. Luke before going to a meeting in the church, when the letters came. "I was hardly able to wait for mine," she wrote; "and then I rushed to my room and behaved like a silly body, as if it had been had news. It brought you all so clearly before me. At church I sat beside the King and cried quietly into my wrap all the evening." The last words in her letter

were, "Tell me all your troubles, and be sure you take care of yourselves." She never received a reply. Mrs. Slessor had died suddenly and peacefully at the turn of the year. She had been nursed by loving hands, whilst her medical attendant and the minister of the Congregational Church, and his wife, showed her much kindness. Three months later Janie also passed away, and was laid beside her mother in Topsham cemetery, the deacons and members of the church and many friends attending and showing honour to one whom they had learned to love for her own sake as well as for her sister's.

Mary was inconsolable. "I, who all my life have been caring and planning and living for them, am left, as it were, stranded and alone." A sense of desolation and loneliness unsupportable swept over her. After all the sorrow that had crowded upon her she felt no desire to do anything. "There is no one to write and tell all my stories and troubles and nonsense to." One solace remained. "Heaven is now nearer to me than Britain, and no one will be anxious about me if I go up-country." It was characteristic of her that the same night she heard of her mother's death she conducted her regular prayer-meeting: she felt that her mother would have wished her to do so, and she went through the service with a breaking heart, none knowing what had happened.

She wrote hungrily for all details of the last hours, and specified the keepsakes she wished to have. "I would like something to look at," was her repeated cry. To her friend who had taken charge of the home she was for ever grateful. In the midst of her grief she was thoughtful for her welfare and attended to the minutest details, even repaying the sixpences expended for the postage of her letters to Calabar. All admirers of Mary Slessor will honour this lowly Scotswoman who came to her help in the day of her greatest need, and who quietly and efficiently fulfilled her task. . . .

So the home life, the source of warmth and sweetness and sympathy, was closed down, and she turned to face the future alone.

IX. THE SORROWS OF CREEK TOWN

Again three Marys were in close association-Miss Mary Edgerley, Miss Mary Johnstone, and Miss Mary Slessor. During the year, however, the two former proceeded home on furlough, and the last was left in entire charge of the women's side of the work at Creek Town. It was the final stage of her training for the larger responsibilities that awaited her. There was at first little in the situation to beguile her spirits. It was a bad season of rain and want, and she was seldom out of the abodes of sickness and death. So great was the destitution that she lived on rice and sauce, in order to feed the hun-

gry. And never had she suffered so much from fever as she did now in Creek Town.

Her duties lay in the Day School, Sunday School, Bible Class, and Infant Class, but, as usual, the more personal aspect of the work engaged her chief energies. The training of her household, which, as she was occupying a part of Mr. Goldie's house and had less accommodation, was a small one then, took much of her time and thought and wit. First in her affections came Janie, now a big and strong girl of four years, and as wild as a boy, who kept her in constant hot-water. She was a link with the home that had been, and Mary regarded her as specially her own: she shared her bed and her meals, and even her thoughts, for she would talk to her about those who had gone. The child's memory of Britain soon faded, but she never ceased to pray for "all in Scotland who remember us." She was made more of than was good for her, but was always brought to her level outside of Creek Town. Mary had heard that both her parents were dead, but one day the father appeared at the Mission House. She asked him to come and look at his child. He shrugged his shoulders, and said, "Let me look from a distance." Mary seized him and drew him towards the child, who was trembling with terror. In response to a command in Efik the girl threw her arms around his neck, and his face relaxed and became almost beautiful. When he looked into her eyes, and she hid her head on his breast, the victory was complete. He set her upon his knee and would scarcely give her up. Although he lived a long way off he returned every other day with his new wife and a gift of food.

Next came a girl of six years, whose father was a Christian. She also was full of tricks, and, with Janie, was enough for one house. But there was also Okin, a boy of about eight, whose mother was a slave with no voice in his upbringing, but whose mistress wished him to be trained up for God, a mischievous fellow whose new clothes lasted usually about a week, but willing and affectionate and, on the whole, good; and another boy of ten called Ekim, a son of the King of Old Town, whose mother gave him to Mary when she first went out. On her departure for Scotland he had gone back to his heathen home and its fashions, but returned to her when she settled in Creek Town. He was truthful, warm-hearted, and clever, and as a free boy and heir to a responsible position the moulding of his character gave her much thought and care. The last was Inyang, a girl of thirteen, but bigger than Mary herself, possessing no brains, but for faithfulness, truthfulness, honesty, and industry without a peer. She hated to dress or to leave the kitchen, but she washed, baked, and did the housework without assistance, and was kind to the children.

These constituted her inner circle, but she was always taking in and caring for derelict children. At this time there were several in the house or yard.

Two were twins five months old, whom she had found lying on the ground discarded and forlorn, and who had developed into beautiful children. Their father was a drunken parasite, with a number of wives, whom he battered and beat in turn. An-other castaway came to her in a wretched state. The father had stolen a dog, and the mother had helped him to eat it. The owner threw down a native charm at their door, and the woman sickened and died, and as all believed that the medicine had killed her no one would touch the child. The woman's mistress was a daughter of old King Eyo, and a friend of Mary, and she sent the infant, dirty and starved, to the Mission House with her compliments. Mary washed and fed it and nursed it back to decent life, but on sending to the mistress a request that one of the slave women might care for it, she got the reply, "Let it die." She let it live.

In the mornings, while busy with her household, there were perpetual interruptions. Sick folk came to have their ailments diagnosed and prescribed for. Some of the diseases she attended to were of the most loathsome type, but that made no difference in her compassionate care. Hungry people came to her to be fed, those in trouble visited her to obtain advice and help, disputes were referred to her to be settled. When all these cases had been dealt with she would go her round of the yards, the inmates of which had come to look upon her as a mother. She would sit down and chat with them and discuss their homes, children, marketing, illness, or whatever subject interested them, sometimes scolding them, but always leading them to the only things that mattered. "If I told you what I have seen and known of human sorrow during the past months you would weep till your heart ached," she wrote to a friend. Some of her experiences she could not tell; they revealed such depths of depravity and horror that the actions of the wild beasts of the bush were tame in comparison.

At Creek Town, as elsewhere, it was not easy to tabulate what had been achieved, as the fact that women could not make open confession without incurring the gravest penalties kept the missionaries ignorant of the effect of their work. But Mary saw behind the veil; she knew quiet women whose souls looked out of their eyes, and who were more in touch with the unseen than they dared tell; women who prayed and communed with God even while condemned to heathen practices. There was one blind woman whom she placed far before herself in the Christian race:

She is so poor that she has not one farthing in the world but what she gets from us-not a creature to do a thing for her, her house all open to rain and sun, and into which the cows rush at times-but blind Mary is our one living, bright, clear light. Her voice is ever set to music, a miracle to the people here, who only know how to groan and grumble at the best. She is ever praising the Lord for some wonderful manifestation of mercy and love, and her testimony to her Saviour is not a shabby one. The other day I heard the

King say that she was the only visible witness among the Church members in the town, but he added, "She is a proper one." Far advanced in spiritual knowledge and experience, she knows the deep things of God. That old hut is like a heaven here to more than me.

"Pray for us here" was the appeal in all her letters to Scotland at this time. "Pray in a business-like fashion, earnestly, definitely, statedly."

For herself she found a friend in King Eyo, to whom she could go at any time and relate her troubles and receive sympathy and support. She, in turn, was often in his State room advising him regarding the private and complicated affairs of his little kingdom and his relations with the British Government. He honoured her in various ways, but to her the dumb affection of a slave woman whom she had saved was more than all the favours which others, high in the social scale, sought to show her.

X. THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME

The question of her future location received much consideration. The needs of the stations on the Cross River, the highway into the interior, were urgent, and it was thought by some that the interests of the Mission called for her presence there, but her mind could not be turned from the direction in which she relieved she could do the best work. She was essentially a pioneer. Her thoughts were for ever going forward, looking past the limitations and the hopes of others, into the fields beyond teeming with populations as yet unreached. She was of the order of spirits to which Dr. Livingstone belonged. Like him she said, "I am ready to go anywhere, provided it be forward." From the districts inland came reports of atrocity and wrong: accusations of witchcraft, the ordeal of the poison bean, the shooting of slaves, and the destruction of infants; and she felt the impelling call to go and attack these evils. It was not that she did not recognise the value of base-work, of order and organisation and routine. The fact that she spent twelve years in patient and loyal service at Duke Town, Old Town, and Creek Town demonstrates how important she considered these to be. But they had been years of training meant to perfect her powers before she went forward on her own path to realise the vision given her from above, and they were now ended. For her the fullness of the time had come, and with it the way opened tip. The local Mission Committee decided, in October 1886, to send her into the district of Okoyong, and informed the authorities in Scotland of the fact, carefully adding that this was in line with her own desire.

A change had just been made in the relation of the women on the staff of the Mission to the administration at home. The Zenana Scheme of the Church had been constituted as a distinct department of the Foreign Mission operations in 1881, and having appealed to the women of the congregations,

had proved a success. It was now thought expedient that the Calabar lady agents should be brought into the scheme, and accordingly, in May 1886, they became responsible to the Zenana Committee, and through them to the Foreign Mission Board. The Zenana Committee recommended that the arrangement regarding Mary should be carried out, and the Foreign Mission Board agreed.