

MARY SLESSOR
OF CALABAR

PIONEER MISSIONARY

BY

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XIII. THE GREATEST BATTLE AND VICTORY

One morning, when nature was as lovely as a dream, Mr. Ovens was working at the new house, and Miss Slessor was sitting on the verandah watching him. Suddenly, from far away in the forest, there came a strange, eerie sound. Ever on the alert for danger, Mary rose and listened.

“There is something wrong,” she exclaimed.

For a moment she stood in the tense attitude of a hunter seeking to locate the quarry, and then, swiftly moving into the forest, vanished from sight. Mr. Ovens sent Tom, his boy, off after her to find out what was the matter. He returned with a message that there had been an accident, and that Mr. Ovens was to come at once and bring restoratives. As the ominous news became known to the natives standing around a look of fear came into their faces.

Mr. Ovens found her sitting beside the unconscious body of a young man. “It is Etim, the eldest son of our chief, Edem,” she explained. “He was about to be married, and had been building a house. He came here to lift and bring a tree; when handling the log it slipped and struck him on the back of the neck, and paralysis has ensued.”

He glanced at her face as if surprised at its gravity. She divined what he thought, and speaking out of her intimate knowledge of the people and their ways she said, “There’s going to be trouble; no death of a violent character comes apart from witchcraft. . . . Can you make some sort of a litter to carry him?”

Divesting himself of part of his clothing, and obtaining some strong sticks, he made a rough stretcher, on which the inert form was laid and conveyed to Ekenge.

For a fortnight Mary tended the patient in his mother’s house, hoping against hope that he would recover, and that the crisis she dreaded would be averted, but he was beyond human help. One Sunday morning he lay dying, and the news sent a spasm of terror throughout the district. Hearing the sound of wailing Mary rushed to the yard and found the lad being held up, some natives blowing smoke into his nostrils, some rubbing ground pepper into his eyes, others pressing his mouth open, and his uncle, Ekpenyong, shouting into his ears. Such treatment naturally hastened the end. When life was fled, the chief dropped the body into her arms and shouted, “Sorcerers have killed him and they must die. Bring the witch-doctor.”

At the words every man and woman disappeared, leaving only the mother, who, in an agony of grief, cast herself down beside the body. When the medicine-man arrived he laid the blame of the tragedy upon a certain village, to which the armed freemen at once marched. They seized over a doz-

en men and women, the others escaping into the forest, and after sacking all the houses returned with the prisoners loaded with chains, and fastened them to posts in the yard, which had only one entrance.

Anxious to pacify the rage of the chiefs, father and uncle, Mary undertook to do honour to the dead lad by dressing him in the style befitting his rank. Fine silk cloth was wound round his body, shirts and vests were put on, over these went a suit of clothes which she had made for his father, the head was shaved into patterns and painted yellow, and round it was wound a silk turban, all being crowned with a tall black and scarlet hat with plumes of brilliant feathers. Thus attired the body was carried out into a booth in the women's yard, where it was fastened, seated in an arm-chair, under a large umbrella. To the hands were tied the whip and silver-headed stick that denoted his position, while a mirror was arranged in front of him, in order that he might enjoy the reflection of his grandeur. Beside him was a table, upon which were set out all the treasures of the house, including the skulls taken in war, and a few candles begged from Mary.

When the people were admitted and saw the weird spectacle they became frenzied with delight, danced and capered, and started on a course of drinking and wantonness.

"You'll have to stop all work," Mary said to Mr. Ovens, who felt as if he were moving in some grotesque fantasy of sleep; "this is going to be a serious business. We can't leave these prisoners for a moment. I'll watch beside them all night and you'll take the day."

And time and time about in that filthy yard, through the heat of the day and the chill of the night, these two brave souls kept guard opposite the wretched band of prisoners, with the half-naked people, armed with guns and machetes, dancing and drinking about them. As one barrel of rum was finished another was brought in, and the supply seemed endless. The days went by, and Mr. Ovens lost patience, and declared he would go and get a chisel and hammer and free the prisoners at all costs. "Na, na," replied Mary wisely, "we'll have a little more patience."

One day she went to Mr. Ovens and said, "They want a coffin."

"They'll have to make one," he retorted.

"I think you'd better do it," she rejoined; "the boy's father has some wood of his own, of which he was going to make a door like mine, and he is willing to use it for the purpose."

They proceeded to the yard to obtain measurements, and as they entered Mary caught sight of some esere beans lying on the pounding stone. She shivered. What could she do? She returned to her hut. Prayer had been her solace and strength during all these days and nights, and now with passionate entreaty she beseeched God for guidance and help in the struggle that

was to come. When she rose from her knees her fear had vanished, and she was tranquil and confident. Reaching the yard she took the two brother chiefs aside, and told them that there must be no sacrifice of life. They did not deny that the poison ordeal was about to take place, but they argued that only those guilty of causing the death would suffer. She did not reply, but went to the door of the compound and sat down: from there she was determined not to move until the issue was decided. The chiefs were angry. To have a white woman—and such a woman—amongst them was good, but she must not interfere with their customs and laws. The mother of the dead lad became violent. Even the slaves were openly hostile and threatening. The crowd, maddened by drink, ran wildly about, flourishing their guns and swords. “Raise our master from the dead,” they cried, “and you shall have the prisoners.”

Night fell. Mr. Ovens gathered up the children and put them to bed. Mary scribbled a note to Duke Town and gave it to the two native assistant carpenters, and directed them in English to steal in the darkness to the beach and make their way down the river. There was distraction within the yard as well as without. Three of the women were mothers with babies, who were crying incessantly from hunger and fear. Another, who had chains round her neck and bare limbs, had an only daughter about fifteen years of age, who was a cousin of the dead lad, and the betrothed wife of his father. The girl clung to her mother, weeping piteously. Sometimes she would come and clasp “Ma’s” feet, beseeching her to help her, or waylay the chiefs, and offer herself in servitude for life in exchange for her mother’s freedom.

Mr. Ovens had gone to the hut, and Mary was keeping vigil when a stir warned her of danger. Several men came and unlocked the chains on one of the women—a mother—and ordered her to the front of the corpse to take the bean. Mary was in a dilemma. Was it a ruse to get her out of the yard? If she followed, would they bar the entrance and wreak their vengeance on the others who remained?

“Do not go,” they cried, and gazed at her pleadingly. But she could not see a woman walk straight to death.

One swift appeal to God and she was after the woman. The table was covered with a white cloth, and upon it stood a glass of water containing the poison. As the victim was in the act of lifting the glass she touched her on the shoulder and whispered, “Ifehe!” (run). She gave a quick glance of intelligence into the compelling eyes and off both bounded, and were in the bush before any one realised they were gone. They reached the hut. “Quick,” Mary cried to Mr. Ovens, “take the woman and hide her.” In a moment he had drawn her in and locked the door, and Mary flew back to the yard. “Where is she?” the prisoners cried. “Safe in my house,” she an-

swered. They were amazed. She herself wondered at her immunity from harm. It might be that the natives were stupefied with drink—but she thought of her prayer.

Finding that she was not to be moved, the chiefs endeavoured to cajole and deceive her. “God will not let anybody die of the bean if they are not guilty,” they said. They released two of the prisoners, substituting imbiam, the native oath, for the poison ordeal, and later, five others. She still stood firm, and two more obtained their freedom. There they stopped. “We have done more for you than we have ever done for any one, and we will die before we go further.” Three remained. One woman, with a baby, they would not release. “Akpo, the chief of her house, escaped into the bush, and the fact of his flight proves his guilt,” they argued; “we cannot ransom her.” The other two, a freeman and the woman named Inyam with the daughter, were relatives of the bereaved mother, and also specially implicated, and they were seized and led away. Mary hesitated to follow, but hoping that the girl might be able to keep her informed of what was going on she decided to remain with the woman with the infant.

Another dawn brought visitors from a distance, who only added to the rioting and her perplexity. They told her that Egbo was coming, and advised her to fly to Calabar. She replied that he could come and play the fool as much as she pleased, but she would not desert her post. The father stormed and threatened, and declared he would burn down the house. “You are welcome,” she said; “it is not mine.” In a blazing passion he cried that the woman would die. So terrified and exhausted was the victim that she begged “Ma” to give in. At this point Ma Eme came to the rescue: kneeling to her brother she besought him to allow Mary to have the prisoner in the meantime—she could be chained to the verandah of the hut, and could not possibly escape with such a weight of irons. Mary caught at the plan, and declared that she would give a fair hearing to the charges against the house which she represented.

To her infinite surprise the chiefs gave in. “But,” said they, “if she is sent out of the way to Calabar, you pay a heavy fine, and leave here for ever.” Fearing they would repent, she hastily called for the keys to unlock the chain, but the slaves pretended ignorance, said they could not find them, and denounced the liberation of the murderers. Patience and firmness again succeeded, the keys were produced, the locks were opened. Mary gathered up the long folds of chain, and Ma Eme, also trembling with eagerness, pushed them out in order that they might escape the crowd. They ran through the scrub to the hut, and here the mother and child were housed in a large packing-case, while a barricade was put up to make the position more secure.

During the afternoon two of the Calabar missionaries arrived, and added the weight of their influence to Mary's, giving a magic-lantern exhibition in the open, and in other ways endeavouring to lend prestige to the funeral, in order to compensate for the lack of human sacrifice. A quieter night followed, though the vigil was unbroken. In the morning the father of the dead lad called her aside, and in a long harangue justified his desire to do his son honour by giving him a retinue in the spirit-land. Then calling to his retainers he ordered them to bring the freeman. Dragging him forward, limping and dazed, he presented him formally to "Ma," saying, "This further act of clemency must satisfy you. The woman who is left must take the poison: you cannot object—she will recover if she is innocent."

She thanked him warmly, but renewed her entreaties for the release of the woman also. The chief turned away in anger and disgust, and the battle went on. As the missionaries were obliged to return to Calabar she and Mr. Ovens were again left alone. All day she followed the chief, coaxing and pleading. Sometimes he ignored her; sometimes he brusquely showed his annoyance; sometimes he looked at her in pity, as if he thought she were crazed. But he gave her no hope. When a whisper came to her ears that the burial would take place that night in the house of the chief she was heart-sick with dread.

Late in the evening, as she was busy with her household, she heard a faint cry at the barricade:

"Ma, Ma, make haste, let me in."

Noiselessly she pulled aside the planks, and Inyam, heavily ironed, crawled on her hands and knees into the room. Her story was that she had managed by friction to cut one of the links of the chain which bound her, and had escaped by climbing the roof. Mary looked at the thick chain hanging about her, and guessed whose were the kindly black hands that had given her aid, but she kept her thought to herself. The last of the prisoners was now safe, the funeral in the house of the chief had taken place, and only a cow had been placed in the coffin, and her joy was great. But her troubles were not over.

A party of natives coming to the funeral met another party returning drunk with excitement and rum. Recalling some old quarrel the latter killed one of the men they met, cut off his head, and carried it away as a trophy. Fighting became general between the factions, and many were seriously wounded.

One afternoon the village went suddenly mad with panic. All the women and children and all the men without arms rushed frantically about. Mothers clutched their babies, wives and slaves seized what belongings they could carry, children screamed and held on to the first person they met. They had heard sounds that heralded the advance of the dreaded Egbo. Then, by a

common impulse, all rushed for the protection of the white woman's yard. She pulled down the barricade, packed as many children and women into her room as it could hold, and ordered the others into the bush at the back. The women were almost insane with terror, and the manacled prisoner begged to be killed. As the beating of the drum and the shouting of the mob drew near Mary trembled, but again prayer restored her to calm. Even when the village was invaded and shouting began, she was without fear. And, strange to say, the mob remained but a short time, and not a shot went home. They had set fire to every house in the village from which the prisoners had been taken, and wrecked another and burned the stock alive. As no powerful chief submitted to Egbo sent out by another House, Edem's village also ran amok, and for over a week the population haunted the forest, shooting down indiscriminately every man and woman who passed. It was not until much blood had been shed that the various bands became tired of the struggle and returned to their dwellings.

For three weeks the prisoners were kept in the hut, and then "Ma's" pressure on the chiefs succeeded, and the chained woman was released on condition that if her chief Akpo were caught he would take the poison ordeal, whilst Inyam, taking advantage of all the people being drunk one night, stole out into the forest and escaped. What became of her Mary never knew, until one day, months after, when travelling, she passed a number of huts in the bush, and was accosted by name and found herself face to face with the refugee.

This was the longest and severest strain to which she was subjected; it was her worst encounter with the passions of the natives, her greatest conflict with the most terrible of their customs, and she came out of it victorious. For the first time in the dark history of the tribe the death and funeral of one of the rank of a chief had occurred without the sacrifice of life. In some mysterious way she had been able to subdue these wild people and bend them to her will. Her fame went far and wide throughout Okoyong and beyond into regions still unexplored, and many thought of her with a kind of awe as one possessing superhuman power. There were, indeed, some amongst those who knew her who had a lurking suspicion that she was more than woman.

XIV. THE AFTERMATH

Various incidents came as an aftermath to these happenings. One afternoon the women came running to "Ma" saying that the elder chief, Ekpenyong, was bent on taking the poison ordeal. When she reached his yard she found him in a fury, shouting and threatening, the women remonstrating, the

slaves weeping. It was some time ere she could learn the cause of the uproar. A man from a neighbouring village had been about whispering that Ekpenyong had slain his nephew, in order that his own son might absorb the inheritance. Ekpenyong was determined to undergo the test, and in accordance with native law, which gave the right to a freeman to call others of equal rank to share the trial with him, he demanded that his brother Edem—who it was alleged had instigated the man to make the accusation—should also take the poison.

When Mary had grasped the situation she ridiculed the attitude of the chief, scolded him unmercifully, and at last secured his promise not to carry out his threat. As a guarantee of his good faith she claimed possession of the esere beans. He denied that he had any. With the help of his women-kind she made a secret search, and found eleven beans at the bottom of a basket, which she conveyed in the darkness to her hut. As more beans could not be obtained until the morning she felt that all was well for the night. Shouting, however, made her run back. Mad with drink the chief was clinging to a bag which the women were endeavouring to seize. He was hitting out at them with his heavy hand, and most of them were bleeding. "There is poison in that bag," they cried. "No, Ma, only my palm-nuts and cartridges." Quietly, firmly, persistently, she demanded the bag. He threw it at her. Opening it she found palm-nuts and cartridges. For a moment she looked foolish, but diving deeper she pulled out no fewer than forty of the deadly beans. "I'll take the liberty of keeping these," she said coolly, but with a swiftly beating heart. "No, no," he shouted, and his followers joined him in protest. Outwardly calm she walked between the lines of armed men, ironically bidding them take the bag from her. But their hands were held, and she passed safely through, reached her hut, handed the beans to Mr. Ovens, and returned to the scene to pacify the crowd.

Next morning she learnt to her consternation that Ekpenyong had risen stealthily during the night and gone off on his errand of death. Fortunately a chief some miles off detained him by force until she arrived. She stuck resolutely to him, and as all the more powerful chiefs came over to her side from sheer admiration of her pluck, he had eventually to abandon his purpose. After taking the native oath he betook himself to another part of the forest, where he built up a new settlement.

One more episode remained to round off the sequence of events. The murderer of the young man in the funeral party was the oldest son of a House noted for bloody deeds, and the act roused the slumbering fury of its neighbours. War was declared and fighting began. Mary interfered and pressed for arbitration, and both sides at last acceded to her request, and asked her to conduct the palaver. Aware that the man was a triple murderer

and the penalty death, she shrank from the duty, and begged them to put the matter into the hands of a Calabar chief. This they did, and went to Ikunetu on the Cross River, where "blood for blood" was the verdict. Fines and death by substitution of slaves were offered and refused; the youngest son, a mere baby, was sent in atonement and rejected; then the second son, a lad of twenty, was despatched, and it was agreed that his death would redeem his brother. Mary's distress was acute, especially as she had declined to act as judge, but she was relieved on learning that the prisoner had escaped, and was being sheltered by one of the slave-traders across the river. She wished to get him into her own yard, but the weeping mother said it was too dangerously near home.

One morning, early, she heard the sound of rapid firing, and in alarm she sent messengers to enquire the cause. The lad had been betrayed, brought back, filled with gin, and amidst discharge of guns, beating of drums, singing and dancing, had been strangled and hung in the presence of his mother and sister. These two alone mourned the dead, the others were glad that the matter had been so easily settled, and for a week the loafers and drunkards in the district held high carnival.

As time passed and the heat of the persecution cooled, Mary made tentative proposals that Akpo, the escaped chief, and his family, should be allowed to return. "I will go and fetch them myself if their safety be guaranteed," she said. Edem, the father of the dead lad, replied, "Very well, Ma, you can say that all thought of vengeance is gone from our heart, and if he wishes to come to his own village or live in your home or go anywhere in Okoyong he is at liberty to do so." But trust is rare in Africa, and suspicion dies hard, and Akpo could not bring himself to believe that Edem wished him well, and he elected to remain where he was. Again she paid the exile a visit, taking with her an elderly man, who was betrothed to his daughter, but he could not overcome his fears. In his heart he and his friends were incredulous that the chiefs of Okoyong would listen to a woman. A third time the patient Mary went to him, and succeeded in bringing him and his son back with her, the women remaining behind until a new house could be built.

The home-coming was full of pathos. House, farm, clothing, seed-corn, yams, goats, fowls, all had vanished. But as the chief stood amidst the familiar surroundings his gloom and silence fell away, and he knelt and clasped "Ma's" feet, and with eyes filled with tears vowed that he and his house would be under yoke to her for ever, and that they would never rebel against any commands she gave or do anything contrary to her wishes. Most people, white and black, occasionally felt disposed to dispute her rulings, and more than once her will and that of the chief clashed, but he stood to his word,

and there was no family in the district who gave her message a more loyal hearing.

Edem acted nobly. He not only arranged for the housing of the two men, but gave them a piece of ground and seed for food plants. When she went to tell him all had been done, he simply said, "Thank you, Ma." But in the evening he came alone to her, knelt and held her feet, and thanked her again and again for her wonderful love and courage, for her action in forbidding them to take life at his son's death, and for all the peaceful ways which she was introducing. "We are all weary of the old customs," he said, "but no single person or House among us has power to break them off, because they are part of the Egbo system."

And one by one, secretly and unknown to each other, the free people came to her and thanked her gratefully for the state of safety she was bringing about, and charged her to keep a stout heart and to go forward and do away with all the old fashions, the end of which was always death.

XV. THE SWEET AND THE STRONG

Meanwhile the Mission House had evolved into what was in her eyes a thing of beauty. She could at any rate boast that it was the finest dwelling in Okoyong, and it was a happy day when she removed "upstairs." Nor was the house all that was accomplished during these troublous times. Mr. Goldie had made her a gift of a canoe; but without a boathouse it was exposed to rain and ants and thieves, and she planned a shelter at the beach that would do both for it and for herself. Ma Eme brought her people to the spot, the men cut down trees and erected the framework, and the women dug the mud and filled in the walls, and Mr. Ovens made a door and provided a padlock.

Thus, in the course of a short time, she had built a hut; a good house with accommodation for children, servants, and visitors; a dispensary; a church; and a double-roomed boathouse. All the native labour had been given cheerfully and without idea of money, but from time to time she distributed amongst the workers a few gifts from the Mission boxes, or a goat or a bag of rice. In addition to her house at Ekenge she had a room in several of the villages, where she put up on her journeys; and it was characteristic of her that she secured these not for her own convenience but for the sake of the people, in order that they might feel that they were being looked after.

It was, indeed, for the people she lived. Mr. Ovens states that she was at their beck and call day and night; she taught in the schools, preached in the church, and, as he puts it, "washed the wee bairnies herself," and dressed the most loathsome diseases, all with tenderness and gay humour. "I never saw a frown on her face," he says. She was always ready for anything and equal

to any emergency. "One morning," he recalls, "she came to me. 'Twins,' she said, 'and we have to go.' When we arrived at the spot we found that the bairns had been murdered by the grandmother, and the mother was lying on the bare ground in a but some distance away. Miss Slessor sent her a bed and pillow, and told her husband to be kind to her. The man took her back into the house—such a thing had never been known before."

It was at this time that the plump and pretty infant referred to by Miss Kingsley in her *Travels in West Africa* was saved. The mother died a few days after the birth, and as there was a quarrel between her family and that of the father the child was thrown into the bush by the side of the road leading to the market, and lay there for five days and six nights.

This particular market is held every ninth day, and on the succeeding market-day, some women from the village by the side of Miss Slessor's house happened to pass along the path and heard the child feebly crying: they came into Miss Slessor's yard in the evening, and sat chatting over the day's shopping, and casually mentioned in the way of conversation that they had heard the child crying, and that it was rather remarkable that it should be still alive. Needless to say, Miss Slessor was off, and had that waif home. It was truly in an awful state, but just alive. In a marvellous way it had been left by leopards and snakes, with which this bit of forest abounds, and, more marvellous still, the driver ants had not scented it. Other ants had considerably eaten into it one way and another; nose, eyes, etc., were swarming with them and flies; the cartilage of the nose and part of the upper lip had been absolutely eaten into, but in spite of this she is now one of the prettiest black children I have ever seen, which is saying a good deal, for negro children are very pretty with their round faces, their large mouths not yet coarsened by heavy lips, their beautifully-shaped flat little ears, and their immense melancholy deer-like eyes, and above these charms they possess that of being fairly quiet. This child is not an object of terror, like the twin children; it was just thrown away because no one would be bothered to rear it—but when Miss Slessor had had all the trouble of it the natives had no objection to pet and play with it, calling it "the child of wonder," because of its survival.

This child was named Mary after the house mother, and completed the number of those who for long constituted the inner circle of the family. The others were Janie, Alice—a rescued twin of "royal" blood, and Annie—the child of the woman who took a native oath to prove that she did not help her husband to eat a stolen dog. These four were to grow up and become a comfort to their white "Mother," and will reappear from time to time in the course of the story. Another helper in the house at this time was Mana, a faithful girl, who had been caught by two men when going home from a

spring, and brought to Okoyong and sold to Ma Eme. Other children there were, all with more or less tragic histories, and all were looked after and trained and loved.

But Mary could be as stern and strong as her native granite when combating evil. Mr. Ovens saw her repeatedly thrust brawny negroes away from the drink, taking them round the neck, and throwing them back to the ground. An intoxicated man, carrying a loaded gun, once came to see her. She ordered him to put the weapon in a corner of the verandah. He declined. She went up, wrested the gun from him, placed it in a corner, and defied him to touch it. He went away, and came back every day for a week before keep them singing; “And, Etubom” (Sir, Chief, or White Man), she would say, when telling her experiences, “ye ken what like their singing is—it would frighten any decent respectable leopard.” And yet in some things she was as timid as a child. When travelling in the Mission steam-launch she would bury her head in her hands and cry out in fear if the engine gave a screech or if the vessel bumped on a sandbank. She was in terror all the time she was on board.

It was not possible for her to go on expending so much nervous force without a breakdown, and as attacks of fever were coming with increasing frequency she began to think of her furlough. The difficulty was to fill her place. In 1890 Mr. Goldie reported that only she or a man could fill it; no native agent could go from Calabar on account of tribal unfriendliness. But she thought otherwise. “No person connected with me need fear to come to Okoyong, or suffer from lack of hospitality.” Okoyong was a very different place from what it had been in 1888. There was greater order and security, and much less drinking among the younger people, many of whom were at school; none dared to use the slightest freedom with her; they might come as far as the verandah but no farther. The people were becoming ashamed of their superstition, and were ready to inform her secretly when palavers and sacrifices were in contemplation. Chiefs came voluntarily and requested her to sit in the seat of judgment and adjudge their disputes. The tribe, as a whole, was also working better, and developing a regular trade with the Europeans. The problem was solved by another woman with a stout heart, who voluntarily agreed to occupy the station during her absence. This was Miss Dunlop. The Home Board were anxious as to her safety, and recommended frequent communications with her; and later, Miss Hutton, who had just arrived from Scotland, was appointed to keep her company. When Miss Dunlop went up before “Ma” left, she was met by what she thought was a crowd of peaceful, cheerful people, eager only to greet her and to help her. She modified her opinion later: a “wild and lawless class,” she called them, “boasting of their wildness,” and who came to the services drunk. When she

spoke of God's love they would say, "Yes, Ma Slessor tell us that plenty times." But she bravely held the fort.

XVI. WAR IN THE GATES

At the last moment she was busy packing when messengers arrived from a far-off township with intelligence that a young freeman had accidentally shot his hand while hunting, and a request that she would come to him with medicine. She was weak and ill: she was expecting tidings of the steamer; she was beset with visitors from all parts who had come to bid her farewell. Telling them what to do, and asking them to let her know only if serious symptoms set in, she gave them what was needed. Almost immediately came secret news that the man had died, that his brother had wounded one of the chiefs, and that all the warriors of the latter had been ordered to prepare for fighting on the morrow. She never knew how this message had come or who had brought it. She made up her mind to proceed to the spot, but the chief people about her opposed the idea. They pointed to her weakness, and the probability of her missing the steamer. They enlarged on the savage character of those concerned. "They own no authority"; "They will insult you in their drunken rage"; "The bush will be full of armed men, and they will fire indiscriminately;" "The darkness will prevent them recognising you." But they could not prevail upon her to relinquish what she thought was a duty to those who had sought her aid. She, however, compromised by consenting to take two armed attendants with lanterns, and to call at a chief's place some eight miles distant, and secure a freeman to beat the Egbo drum before her, thus letting the people in the fighting area know that a free protected person was coming.

She reached their village about midnight. The chief was reported to be at his farm, and she was urged to lie down until the morning. She suspected that he was not many yards away, and she persuaded a messenger to carry an urgent request to him for an escort and drum. The reply was in the language of diplomacy all the world over:

"I have heard of no war, but will enquire regarding it in the morning. If, in the event of there being war, you persist in going on you prove your ignorance of the people, who from all time have been a war-loving people, and who are not likely to be helped by a woman."

This put her on her mettle.

"In measuring the woman's power," she responded, "you have evidently forgotten to take into account the woman's God."

She decided to go on. The people were astonished, not so much at her folly in risking her life as in daring to disobey the despot, who held their

fate in the hollow of his hand. Somewhat chilled by her unsympathetic reception she started, without much enthusiasm, on her journey, but with her faith in God as strong as ever.

Reaching the first town belonging to the belligerents she found it so silent and dark that she began to imagine the chief was right, and she had come on a wild-goose chase. She crept quietly up to the house of an old freewoman whose granddaughter had once lived with her: there was a cautious movement within and a whispered, "Who's there?" She had barely answered, when she was surrounded by a band of armed men, whose dark bodies were like shadows in the night. In a few moments they were joined by scores of others, and the greatest confusion prevailed. She was asked what her business was and who were her informants, but ultimately the chiefs permitted her to remain, and the women saw to her comfort. -

After conferring together the chiefs thanked her for coming at such discomfort to herself, and promised that no fighting, so far as they were concerned, would take place until she heard the whole story.

"All the same," they averred, "we must fight to wipe out the disgrace that has been put on us—see here are men badly wounded. Now, Ma, go to bed, and we shall wake you at cock-crow, and you can accompany us."

This meant an hour's rest, which she urgently needed. At second cock-crow she was called, but before she was steady on her feet they were off and away down the steep hillside and through the stream at the foot like a herd of wild goats. The women were at every house.

"Run, Ma!" they cried.

Run! Was she not running as fast as her weak and breathless state allowed her? But she soon lost sight of the warriors, and could only fall back upon prayer.

A hundred yards from the village of the enemy she came upon the band in the bush making preparations for attack: the war-fever was at its height, and the air resounded with wild yells. Walking quietly forward she addressed them as one would speak to schoolboys, telling them to hold their peace and behave like men and not like fools. Passing on to the village she encountered a solid wall of armed men. Giving them greeting, she got no reply. The silence was ominous. Twitting them on their perfect manners she went up to them, and was about to force a passage. Then a strange thing happened.

From out of the sullen line of dark-skinned warriors there stepped an old man, who came and knelt at her feet.

"Ma, we thank you for coming. We admit the wounding of the chief, but it was the act of one man and not the fault of the town. We beg you to use your influence with the injured party in the interests of peace."

It was the chief whom she had travelled in the rain to see and heal when she first came to Okoyong. Her act of self-sacrifice and courage had borne fruit after many days.

She was so thankful that her impulse was to run back to their opponents in the forest and arrange matters there and then; but she restrained herself, and, instead, purposely told the men with an air of authority to remain where they were while her wants were attended to.

“I am not going to starve while you fight,” she said, “and meanwhile you can find a comfortable seat in the bush where I can confer with the two sides; choose two or three men of good address and good judgment for the purpose.”

They obeyed her like children.

When the two deputies from the other side came forward, two chiefs laid down their arms and went and knelt before them and held their feet saying it was foolish and unjust to punish the whole district for the action of a drunken boy, begging them to place the matter before the White Ma, and expressing their willingness to pay whatever fine might be imposed. She, too, knelt and begged that magnanimity might be shown, and that arbitration might be substituted for war. So novel a proposal was not agreed to at once. The next few hours witnessed scenes of wild excitement, rising sometimes to frenzy. Bands of men kept advancing from both sides and joining in the palaver, and every arrival increased the indignation and the resolution to abide by the old, manlier way of war. She was well-nigh worn out, but her wonderful patience and tact, coupled with her knowledge of all the outs and ins of their character, again won her the victory. It was agreed that a fine should settle the quarrel, and one was imposed which she thought exorbitant in the extreme, but the delinquents accepted it, and promptly paid part in trade gin.

Here was another peril. As the boxes and demijohns were brought forward and put down the mob began to grow excited at the thought of the drink. She foresaw trouble and disaster, but though her voice was now too feeble to be heard in the babel of sound, she was not yet at the end of her resources. Divesting herself of as many of her garments as was possible, she threw them over the stuff, thus giving it the protection of her own body, according to Egbo law.

It was a custom for providers of spirits which might have been tampered with on the way from the boat, to taste the liquor in order to prove that neither sorcery nor poison had been placed in it, and every man wanted to be the taster on this occasion. As soon as the test had been applied, every man on the other side likewise demanded the gin, and for a time it seemed as if all had gone mad.

Mary seized the one glass which they held, and as each bottle was opened she dealt out to the older and chief men one glass only, resolutely refusing to give more, and placed the bottle under the cover of her garments. No one dared to touch the stuff. There was some jostling around her, but a few of the men constituted themselves into a bodyguard, and by whip and drum kept the mob off. Amidst much tumult and grumbling and laughter at her sallies she got them to agree to leave the spirit in her charge on her declaring that she would be surety for it arriving in their several villages in good time, and untampered with.

She made them promise to go straight home and remain at peace during her furlough (a promise that was loyally kept); but there was one party she was obliged to accompany for a mile or two. They had declared that they were ashamed to return "like women," without having fought. They begged her to allow them to have a "small scrap," in order to prove they were not cowards. Not till they were safely past the danger zone did she leave them. She remained till night at the village. The feeling was still too disturbed to permit of a regular service, but she spoke to them quietly of Christ as a Saviour: and then ordering all to their rest she set out, tired as she was, on her lonely tramp through the long miles of forest path.

She found her baggage had gone, and that messengers had arrived to take her down to Duke Town.

XVII. AMONG THE CHURCHES

Arriving in England in January 1891 with Janie, who proved a great comfort and help, she went straight to Topsham to view the graves of her mother and sister. She was anxious to spend as much of her furlough as possible amongst the scenes and with the friends associated with her loved ones, and she secured and furnished a house. It possessed a fine garden, and there, with the little black girl, she passed a quiet and restful time until the autumn, when she went to Scotland, making her headquarters at the home of her friend, Mrs. M'Crindle, now at Joppa. For many months she was engaged on the deputation work which missionaries on furlough undertake for the stimulation of the home congregations. She had less liking than ever for addressing meetings, but she did not shirk may be sure of meeting you in the Father's house when the shadows flee away and the everlasting glory has dawned.

The recipient kept the photograph and letter and still treasures them as mementoes of one of whom she never ceased to think and for whom she always prayed. It was in such ways that she knit hearts to her.

She made many friends in the manses and in the homes of the members of the Church, and greatly increased the interest in her work in Calabar, with the result that after she returned a larger stream of correspondence and Mission boxes began to flow to Okoyong.

XVIII. LOVE OF LOVER

Aware of her singleness of mind and aim in the service of Christ, and her whole-hearted devotion to the interests of the people of Okoyong, it came as a surprise to her friends to learn that she was engaged to be married. The hidden romance was disclosed at a meeting of the Mission Board in September.

The suitor for her hand was Mr. Charles W. Morrison, one of the teachers on the Mission staff, a young man from Kirkintilloch, Scotland, then in his twenty-fifth year. His career at home had been a successful one; he had been an active Christian worker, and when he applied to the Board for an appointment in Calabar he was accepted at once and sent out to Duke Town. He was a man of fine feeling, with a distinct literary gift. On the few occasions that he had seen Mary he was attracted by the brilliant, unconventional little woman, and when she was ill was very attentive and kind to her. Before she left on furlough they had become engaged on the understanding that he would come and live at Okoyong.

She made it clear to the Board that she had pledged her word to her people not to leave them, and that she would not, even for her personal happiness, break her promise. Mr. Morrison, she believed, would make a very good missionary, and they would be able to relieve each other, as she would remain at Okoyong when he was at home. The Board took time to consider the proposal, and meanwhile Mary received the congratulations of her friends. Her replies indicate that there was no uncertainty in her own mind on the subject:

I lay it all in God's hands, and will take from Him whatever He sees best for His work in Okoyong. My life was laid on His altar for that people long ago, and I would not take one jot or tittle of it back. If it be for His glory and the advantage of His cause there to let another join in it I will be grateful. If not I will still try to be grateful, as He knows best.

Both were a little doubtful as to the action of the Board, and Mr. Morrison asked her whether, in the event of a refusal, she would consent to return to Duke Town. Such a project, however, she would not entertain:

"It is out of the question," she explained to a friend. "I would never take the idea into consideration. I could not leave my work for such a reason. To leave a field like Okoyong without a worker and go to one of ten or a dozen

where the people have an open Bible and plenty of privilege! It is absurd. If God does not send him up here then he must do his work and I must do mine where we have been placed. If he does not come I must ask the Committee to give me some one, for it is impossible for me to work the station alone.”

The Board, seemingly, were not sure of the wisdom of the arrangement, and their decision was a qualified refusal. The work which Mr. Morrison was doing at Duke Town, they said, was important, and they could not sanction his transference to Okoyong until full provision was made for carrying it on effectively and to the satisfaction of the Calabar Committee.

When Mary was told the result she merely said, “What the Lord ordains is right,” and, apparently, dismissed the subject from her mind.

Mr. Morrison was, shortly afterwards, compelled to return to Scotland on account of his health. A medical specialist advised him against resuming work in Calabar, artisan missionaries—”not to teach the trades; we haven’t sufficient men for that, even were Calabar ripe for such instruction.” As the result of her own observation and experience she had often felt that something ought to be done to develop the industrial capabilities of the natives. The subject had not been lost sight of by the missionaries and the Mission Board, and the latter had sought, by sending out competent artisans, to attend not only to the work required in connection with the Mission but to train some of the native youths in the various departments of labour. There had, however, been no attempt to establish the work on organised lines, and the remark which Mr. Luke made induced her to place the whole matter before the Church. She penned a long letter, the writing of which so exhausted her that she scarcely knew whether or not the words were rightly spelled. It went to Dr. George Robson, then beginning his long and honourable editorship of the Record, and appeared in the next issue under the signature of “One of the Zenana Staff.”

It was a letter which displayed all the qualities of missionary statesmanship, was clear, logical, and vigorous in style, and glowed with restrained enthusiasm. She pointed out that it was necessary to help the natives to become an industrial people as well as to Christianise them, and she combated the idea that they were not capable of being taught trades; their weak point no doubt was their want of staying power, their lack of persistence in the face of difficulties, but this could be accounted for by their history, their only rule and mode of life hitherto having been “force of circumstance.” The question of training them, however, was too large a problem for the unaided missionary, too large even for the Mission Board; it was a matter for the whole Church to take up. “Let the science of the evangelisation of the nations occupy the attention of our sermons, our congregations, our confer-

ences, and our Church literature, and we will soon have more workers, more wealth, more life, as well as new methods.”

So earnest an appeal caused some stir in official circles. The Mission Committee took up the subject, and after interviewing the missionaries who were at home at the time, including herself, referred to Calabar for information. As she had no further connection with the matter the outcome may be briefly noted here. The Calabar Committee were favourable to any scheme of industrial training, and the local Government also expressed their willingness to assist. After the Rev. Dr. Laws, of Livingstonia, and the Rev. W. Risk Thomson, had gone out and reported on the situation and outlook, the proposal rapidly took shape, and the Hope Waddell Training Institute—thus called after the founder of the Mission—came into being, and was soon performing for West Africa the same valuable service that Lovedale and Blythwood were doing for South Africa. She never took any credit for her part in promoting the undertaking, and never made a single reference to it in her letters. She was content to see it realised. . . .

Medical advice sent her down to Devon to recruit. She did not complain or worry about the readjustment of her plans. “We alter things for the good of our children,” she said, “and God does the same to us.” With Janie she left for Calabar in February 1892, the Congregational Church at Topsham bidding her farewell at a public meeting convened in her honour.

XX. THE BLOOD COVENANT

It was strange, even for her, to pass from the trim, well-ordered life of Britain into the midst of West African heathenism,—to find waiting for her in her yard two refugees who, being charged with witchcraft, had been condemned to be sold and killed and preserved as food,—to be interviewed by a slave woman who had been bought by an Okoyong chief as one of his many wives, after having been the wife of two other men, one of whom had been disposed of to the cannibal tribe, whilst her boy had been carried to Calabar in bondage. Such were the conditions into which she was once more plunged.

The majority of the people admired and trusted her and gave her implicit obedience, but there were some who avoided and feared her, and sought to undermine her authority and perpetuate the old customs. Her own chiefs remained staunch, and Ma Eme, although a heathen, continued to be her truest friend and best ally. It was to her that Mary was still mainly indebted for news of what was going on. If there was any devilry afoot she would send a certain bottle to the Mission House with a request for medicine. It was a secret warning that she was to be ready to act at a moment’s notice. As a result

of these hints she was able to prevent many a terrible crime. On one occasion, when the natives were seeking to compass man's death, she lay down without undressing for a month of nights, ready to set out, and the first night she took off her clothes and endeavoured to obtain a good sleep she was called. And just as she was she set out for the scene. The chiefs began to think it was useless to hoodwink or browbeat the wonderful woman who seemed to know their inmost thoughts and all their hidden plans.

Sometimes, when she received the intimation that a palaver was beginning, and that a fight was imminent, she would not be ready, and would resort to stratagem: she would seize a large sheet of paper and scribble some words—any words—upon it and add some splashes of sealing-wax to make it look important. This she would despatch by a swift runner to the chiefs, and by the time they had discussed the mysterious official-looking document, which none of them could read, she would come on the scene and allay the excitement and settle the dispute.

One of her favourite devices during palavers was to knit. She fancied that the act kept her from being nervous, as well as from showing fear, while the sight of the knitting going quietly and steadily on, in the midst of uproar, helped to calm the excitement. She used to say that it was only during these long palavers that she could get some knitting done. We can well believe this when we are told by an official that on one occasion she stayed knitting and listening the whole of one day and night, until the opposing powers became hungry, and retired without a fight.

The story of one of these knitting palavers must suffice. Shortly after she returned she wished to settle an important dispute that had been going on for a time between two sections of the Okoyong people. Three years before, a gathering such as she summoned would have been impossible—they would have laid down "medicine" and fought. She trembled to go, and longed for some of the Calabar missionaries to come up and accompany her. But God gave her peace. After a sleepless night she started with her knitting material, and reaching the clearing in the forest passed along through the guards of armed men. Every chief was there, dressed in all the colours of the rainbow,—thanks chiefly to Mission boxes,—each sitting under a huge umbrella of blue and red and yellow silk, with from twenty to fifty of his men forming a cordon about him, all with guns loaded and swords hanging from their sides.

The sky was sober and grey, and the magnificent foliage overhead made the atmosphere cool and sweet. A chair was placed for her beside the oldest chief, in the centre, with the one party on the right and the other on the left. But first she moved from one group to the other, drawing laughter as she went with her jokes and by-play, and trying to lessen the tension that all ex-

perienced. Then she took her seat, started her knitting, and the business began. A word from her was sufficient to check any outburst of feeling, but she only spoke now and then, in order to elicit information or to make clear a bit of evidence.

Time was nothing to these men, and, accustomed to one square meal a day, they did not mind a long sitting; but Mary knew what backache and chill and hunger were, and she was often tempted to tell them to keep to the point, but it would have been of no avail.

Night fell, torches were lit, the voices waxed louder, the excitement spread, until Mary felt that matters were getting out of hand, and brought the issue to a head. An old chief summed up, and did so with rare tact and patience and good humour. She gathered up the main points and gave her verdict, which was unanimously adopted with ringing cheers. A native oath had now to be taken to ratify the agreement, and the necessary materials were sent for a razor, corn, salt, pepper, and rum. A freeman from each side was called forward, and after divesting themselves of all superfluous clothing they knelt at her feet and clasped each other's fingers. Another made an incision with the razor on the back of their hands, and when the blood had flowed a little salt, pepper, and corn were laid upon the wounds. Then out of courtesy to "Ma," they asked her to say a prayer. But she always witnessed the oath under protest, recognising that they knew no better way, and she would not comply with their request, though she offered no objection to one of the chiefs praying. After the terrible oath formula had been repeated, the two men sucked up the blood-saturated ingredients and swallowed them, and the covenant was ratified. Relieved from the strain, the whole assemblage became suddenly smitten with the spirit of fun. The proceedings were over before midnight, and after a ten hours' sitting Mary began her homeward journey of four miles, tired and hungry, but happy.

XXI. "RUN, MA! RUN!"

Her letters at this time bear witness to the strenuous character of the life she led. They often begin with a description of household events: then a break will occur: the next entry starts with "It is many days since I had to leave off here," and then follows an account of some sudden journey and adventure. Another interruption will take place, caused by some long palaver or rescue: and the end will be a remark such as this: "So, you see, life here, as at home, is just a record of small duties which occupy the time, and task the strength without much to show for it."

Here are some incidents which reveal to us the nature of what she deemed her "commonplace" work:

1. A Forest Vigil

“Run, run, Ma! there is something going on!” was the significant message. “Where?” She was told, and went straight off. A chief had died, and the people were administering the poison ordeal at a spot deep in the forest, in order to avoid her interference. She arrived before the proceedings began, and for four days and four nights she remained there constantly on the watch. Her clothes were never off—and only those who have lived in tropical lands know what this means. All the rest she allowed herself was a short half-slumber, as she lay upon some plantain fronds. The men would not leave the spot, hoping to tire her out, and at night they lit fires to keep off the wild beasts of prey, and slept about her. In these long hours she was often afraid, not of the armed men, but of the wild creatures of the bush that came creeping up, and with sombre eyes stared at her for a moment ere they slunk away from the flames. Such courage and endurance could not be withstood,—in the end the people gave in and life was saved.

2. Egbo

She was sitting quietly in the house, thinking she was alone, when a stealthy step behind made her look round: it was a woman, followed by others all crowding in as smoothly as tigers. “Run, Ma! run!” they said. The words were no sooner spoken than Mary was down the stair and out in the open “square,” where she found a number of men pulling about and frightening the slaves and women. She seized hold of one fellow and locked him in her yard. and the act brought quiet. The mob turned out to be Egbo from a far-off town, come to sue for a debt due by a widow, who had already given up everything to liquidate it. She knew the people, had been kind to them, and had induced them to trade with Calabar. She at once ordered them out of the place, and made them restore the property they had seized, and in a short time the matter was settled.

3. Robbers

One day she was busy standing on a box plastering a wall when the warning cry came, “Run, Ma! run!” The villagers had gone off with their arms and were fighting a band of plunderers, who had stolen two slave-girls and two slave-men from Ma Eme’s farm. Washing the mud off her hands and face she ran to the scene, and all next day, Sunday, she was sitting in the midst of a drinking mob trying to keep down their passions, and succeeded at last in finding a pacific solution.

4. Twins

Again the cry, “Run, Ma! run!” this time from two boys. It was a case of twins born of a Calabar mother, who had come to Okoyong after trade began. The father and his women-kind were furious, and the mother lay deserted and alone. Mary took the two babies into her lap, and as they were

Calabar twins sent word to the elder chief. The answer she received was "Ahem!" But the messenger added, "A big lady said, 'Why don't you take the twins to Calabar?'" "

She next sent to the younger chief, and asked him to come and confer with her at a distance.

After two hours' waiting the reply was, "I am not coming, what should I come for? Should I tell my Mother what to do? Let her do what she sees fit."

"Well," said Mary, "as one chief says, 'Ahem' and the other gives no command, I shall take the children by a back road to my own house, and during the night the mother can follow, and we will see how things turn round."

On being told that she had brought twins to the house Edem groaned and said, "Then I cannot go to my Mother's house any more. Are they upstairs?"

"Yes," said the messenger, "and they are in her own bed."

He groaned again, "No, no, I cannot ever go any more."

Mary went to his yard to see a sick baby, whom she had nursed back from death's door after the witch-doctors had done their best with their charms and medicine, but the mother held the child tightly in her arms and said, "Ma, you shall not touch her!" She turned away, her heart sore.

On the Sunday rain fell all day, and she could not leave one of the children who was ill, but in the late evening she took two lanterns and went to the roadside and held a short service with the few prepared to come, and who huddled together in the rain. But none of them guessed how near to tears the speaker was. She felt the alienation from her people keenly; it was the greatest trial that had come to her, but she was resolved not to give in.

One of the twins died, and some days later Edem offered her a present of yams, but she declined the gift, as it might be mistaken for a bribe to her conscience. He remonstrated, but she remained firm, although it cost her much. Gradually, however, he and his House showed contrition, and the shadow passed away.

Then a chief from another village came, also with a present of yams. Going on his knees he held her feet and begged her not to give up the child. "You are our Mother; and a woman has proved stronger than all the men of the tribe: we will be able to believe in all you ask us by and by, but have patience with us."

When he was gone a message came: "A chief from a distance wants to see you; come for a little."

This man was from a turbulent part of Okoyong and given to fighting and plundering.

“I live in my house as ever I did,” was her spirited reply; “and if any one wishes to see me I am here.” She felt pretty sure of her ground, though she could not help trembling for the result.

The strangers arrived, and Edem with them, and chairs and mats were placed for them in the court. To her surprise she was asked for her advice, and the visitor went away convinced that the new ways were better than the old.

The elder chief, Ekpenyong, next sent and begged for forgiveness. “The Mother cannot keep a strong heart against her son. Are you not the hope and strength and counsellor of my life? Forgive me, for it was foolishness, I have not been taught from my youth, and have never seen a twin.”

Thus good came out of the trial, and the bonds that bound her to the people were strengthened. What was still more remarkable than the attitude of the chiefs was the fact that the husband took the twin-mother and the surviving child home.

5. The Poison Bean

A slave woman of importance who occupied a position of trust died suddenly. When her master was told he flew into a passion and despatched a messenger to Mary with the rude intimation that “somebody hereabouts knew how to kill people.” She returned a curt reply, and he sent an apology. The next development was the appearance of some chiefs and a crowd of armed men in her yard. With them was a young man, not a favourite of hers, to whom they attributed the woman’s death. She questioned him, and he asserted that he had not seen the woman for months, and knew nothing of the supposed witchcraft; but he would take the poison bean, and, he added vindictively, if he did not die he would see that they paid for the outrage. She sent a message by the chiefs to the owner of the woman to dissuade him from inflicting the extreme test. There was the usual period of uproar, and on her part the usual recourse to prayer, and then back came the chiefs with the astonishing reply:

“I have heard. I understand that the Mother- is determined in her way. What can I do but submit?”

Instead of death the sequel was a feast, a goat was killed, drink procured, and dancing was indulged in all night. The next day the young man went home to his aged mother.

6. Runaway Slaves

One day when she was baking, a man and his wife, slaves of a chief in the neighbourhood, came to the door of the Mission House, and after giving compliments squatted down with the air of people who had come to stay.

“Well, what is the matter?” she asked. She knew the woman had a child, which could not have been left at home.

A long tale was told. The woman had been in the field all morning hoeing grass: as the sun rose she and her child grew hungry and she went home to cook some food. As she was doing so her master, who was not a favourite either with bond or free, unexpectedly appeared, and angrily ordered her back to her work. She protested that she needed food, but, brandishing a sword, he frightened her into flight. Her husband, a palm-oil worker, heard the noise, and came on the scene, stopped her, and told her to return and take the food. "What does it matter?" he remarked, "we are his; he can kill us if he likes; we have nothing to live for." The master, enraged, seized a gun and fired at the man, but missed. Taking hold of the screaming child he declared he would kill it and went off.

It was a simple case, but required delicate handling. She sent one of her girls to the chief with the message that his slaves were in her yard, and that as they were householders and elderly people and parents, she hoped there would be no palaver, and that he would take them back.

"I will come tomorrow," was the reply.

The runaways slept in the yard and held something of the nature of a reception, the other slaves coming and condoling with them as the poor do with each other all the world over. It was like a scene from Uncle Tom's Cabin. One moment the company would encourage them cheerily, urging them to have patience, then came a string of doleful tales, then a gush of warm sympathy, and next a burst of laughter, followed by a shower of tears.

Next day their master did not appear, and they went to work on the station grounds. The woman was fretting for her child, and Mana, one of the girls, was sent with another message, to the effect that if he could not come himself he must, for the woman's sake, send on the babe. The messenger brought back the news that he was on his way, but was tipsy, and breathing out dire threats against everybody. When Mary heard that three of his wives were with him, and that her own chief had joined the party, her mind was at ease.

His first act was to lie down at her feet. "Ma," he said, "you are the owner not only of my head but of all my house and my possessions. These wretched slaves did well to come to you"—and so forth.

She sent for a chair and a palaver of several hours began. The master sometimes lost control of himself and charged the slave with being full of sorcery and responsible for all the deaths of recent years. Shaking his fist in the man's face he cried:

"If it wasn't for the reign of the white woman I would cut you in two! The white woman is your salvation."

The slave blazed with passion, but Mary entreated him to be calm. She set the matter in the best light. Both had been angry and behaved as angry

people usually do, saying and doing things which in their saner moods they would have avoided. Alternately scolding and beseeching, and throwing in a few jokes occasionally, she at last said both must go home, the master to restrain himself, and the slaves to work faithfully and not to provoke him, as he had troubles of which they were unaware.

Thus with wise words she pacified them, and when she had given them a few presents they went off in great good humour. The slaves found that during their absence thieves had stolen their goats and fowls, but the return of the child compensated for the loss, and in their gratitude they sent "Ma" a gift of food.

7. Spoilt Fashions

A woman was seized on the assumption that she was concerned in the death of a girl, and Mary watched day and night until the burial was over. A goat was killed and placed in the grave, along with cloth, dishes, pots, salt, a lamp, a lantern, and a tin case of cooked food. But her presence prevented any one being murdered to bear the dead company. "Ma!" said a freeman reproachfully, "you have spoiled our fashions. Before you came, a person took his people with him: now one must go alone like this poor girl; you have confused Okoyong too much." The woman who was seized was allowed to take the native oath, praying that if she had a hand in the girl's death mbiam her and corrupt her body until she died.

8. The Cost

Mr. W. T. Weir, who had joined the Mission staff, paid her a visit one day, and they were enjoying a cup of tea when she suddenly became alert and said, "There's something wrong, they will be here in a moment." The words were hardly spoken when they heard the pit-pat of bare feet running towards the house. A number of natives appeared, and placing their hands on the floor shouted, "Ma! come! come! come!"

She said to her guest, "Come on." They reached a large compound filled with people excitedly shouting and gesticulating. On one side of the yard lay a girl on a mud slab who seemed to be ill, and opposite was her mother, in appearance a fiend incarnate. It appeared that the girl, the daughter of an old chief, had taken a fainting fit, and the mother, who had once been a refugee in "Ma's" yard, was blaming people for taking her life.

Mr. Weir examined the girl, and said there was nothing much wrong, but she was terribly excited with the noise. Mary at once said, "I'll get quietness," and springing into the middle of the compound she seemed to exert her utmost will-power, and, crying in the native manner, "Soi, wara do" (Shoo, go out there!), pointed to the door. In a moment, men, women, and children, including the staid old chief of the village, and the girl's mother, struggled with each other to get out of the compound. The scene reminded

Mr. Weir of nothing so much as a lot of sheep being hurried through a gate by a dog. She then came to where he stood. She was trembling from head to foot, and as she sat down she remarked, "I am done for this day." The girl was taken over to the Mission House, and under her care made a quick recovery. . . .

Never in all her dealings with the tribes was she molested in any way. Once only, in a compound brawl, in which she intervened, was she struck, but the native who wielded the stick had touched her accidentally. The cry immediately went up that "Ma" was hurt, and both sides fell on the wretched man, and would have killed him had she not gone to the rescue.