

MARY SLESSOR
OF CALABAR

PIONEER MISSIONARY

BY

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POPULAR EDITION

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

Twenty-ninth edition printed May 1927

FOURTH PHASE

1902-1910. Age 54-62.

THE ROMANCE OF THE ENYONG CREEK

“I feel drawn on and on by the magnetism of this land of dense darkness and mysterious weird forest.”

I. THE REIGN OF THE LONG JUJU

AGAIN had come the fulness of the time, and again Mary Slessor, at an age when most women begin to think of taking their ease, went forward to a new and great work for Christ and civilisation. Kind eyes and loving hands beckoned to her from Scotland to come and rest, but she gazed into the interior, towards vast regions as yet unentered, and saw there the gleam of the Divine light leading her on, and she turned with a happy sigh to follow it.

In this case there was no sharp division between the old and new spheres of service. For ten years she had been brooding over the conditions in the territory on the west side of the Cross River, so near at hand, so constantly skirted by missionaries, traders, and officials as they sailed up-river, and yet so unknown, and so full of the worst abominations of heathenism.

Just above Calabar the Cross River bends back upon itself, and here at the point of the elbow the Enyong Creek runs inland into the heart of the territory towards the Niger. At its mouth on high ground stands the township of Itu, of sinister reputation in the history of the West Coast. For there on the broad beach at the foot of the cliff was held a market which for centuries supplied Calabar and the New World with slaves. Down through the forest paths, down the quiet waters of the Creek, countless victims of man's cupidity had poured, had been huddled together there, had been inspected, appraised, and sold, and then had been scattered to compounds throughout the co Li-try or shipped across the sea. And there still a market was held, and along the upper borders of the Creek human sacrifice and cannibalism were practised. Only recently a chief had died, and sixty slave people had been killed and eaten. One day twenty-five were set in a row with their hands tied behind them, and a man came and with a knife chopped off their heads.

It is a strange irony that this old slave creek, the scene of so much misery and anguish, is one of the prettiest waterways in West Africa. It is narrow and still and winding, and great tropical trees covered with the delicate tracery of

creepers line the banks, their branches sometimes interlacing above, while the undergrowth is rich in foliage and blossom. Lovely orchids and ferns grow in the hollows of the boughs and old trunks that have fallen; but the glory of the Creek is its water-lilies, which cover the surface everywhere, so that a boat has often to cut its way through their mass. On either hand, side-creeks can be seen twisting among the trees and running deeper into the heart of the forest. The silence of the primeval solitude is unbroken save when a canoe passes, and then a startled alligator will slip into the water, monkeys will scurry chattering from branch to branch, parrots will fly screaming away, blue kingfishers and wild ducks will disappear from their perch, and yellow palm birds will gleam for a moment as they flit through the sunlight. The Creek is beautiful at all times, but in the early morning when the air is cool and the light is misty and the vistas are veiled in dimness, the scene is one of fairylike enchantment.

Above the Creek all the country between the Cross River and the Niger up to near Lokoja in Northern Nigeria, was occupied by the Ibo tribe, numbering about four millions, of a fairly high racial type, who were dominated by the Aros clan dwelling in some twenty or thirty towns situated close together in the district of Arochuku ("God of the Aros"). A remarkable and mysterious people, the Aros were light-coloured, intelligent, subtle, and cunning. More intellectual and commercial than warlike, they developed two lines of activity—trade and religion—and made each serve the other. Their chief commodity was slaves. Each town controlled certain slave routes, and each had a definite sphere of influence which extended over a wide tract of territory. When slaves were scarce they engaged mercenaries to raid villages and capture them. But they had usually a supply from the Long Juju situated in a secret, well-guarded gorge. The fame of this fetish was like that of the Delphic oracle of old; it spread over the country, and people came far distances to make sacrifices at its shrine, and consult the priests on all possible subjects. These priests were men chosen by the various towns, who were raised to a semi-sacred status in the eyes of the people. Enormous fees and fines were imposed, but the majority who entered the spot never left it alive; they were either sacrificed and eaten, or sold into slavery. The shrine was built in the middle of a stream, which was alive with ugly fish with glaring eyes that were regarded as sacred. When the friends of the man who had entered saw the water running red, they believed that the Juju had devoured him. In reality some red material had been cast in, and the man would be sent as a slave to a remote part of the country.

The priests despatched their emissaries far and wide; they settled in townships, swore blood brotherhood with the chiefs, and took part in local affairs. They planted farms, and traded and acquired enormous power. When disputes

arose they got the matter sent for adjustment to the town in Aro within whose sphere of influence they lived, or to the Long Juju. In this way they acted as agents of the slave system. Other men took round the slaves on definite routes. Their usual plan was to leave one on approval, obtaining on their own part so much on each, or a slave of lower value. When the trader returned the bargain would be completed. The usual price of a new slave was 200 or 300 rods and a bad slave. So widespread was the net cast by the Aros, and so powerful their influence, that if a chief living a full week's journey to the north were asked, "What road is that?" he would say, "The road to Aro." All roads in the country led to Aro.

A few years before this a party of eight hundred natives had proceeded from the territories about the Niger to consult the Long Juju on various matters. They were led by a circuitous route to Arochuku, and housed in a village. Batches of from ten to twenty were regularly taken away, ostensibly to the Juju, but were either sacrificed or sold into servitude, only a miserable remnant of 136 succeeding in reaching the hands of Government officials.

Of a totally different type were the people living to the south of the Creek, called the Ibibios. They were one of the poorest races in Africa, both morally and physically, a result largely due to centuries of fear and oppression. Ibibio was the chief raiding-ground of the head-hunters, and the people lived in small isolated huts and villages deep in the forest, in order to lessen the risk of capture. In demeanour they were cowed and sullen, gliding past one furtively and swiftly, as if afraid; in language and life they were untruthful and filthy. The women, who wore no clothing save a small piece of native cloth made of palm fibre, were mere beasts of burden. All the young people went naked. Most unpromising material they seemed. Yet they never ceased to draw out the sympathy and hope of the White Mother of Okoyong; there was no people, she believed, who could not be recreated.

She knew a great deal about the Aros and their slave system, more, probably, than any other white person in the country. Indeed few had any knowledge of them. "What is sad about the Aro Expedition," wrote Mr. Luke, one of the Cross River pioneers, "is that nearly all the town names in connection with it are unknown to those of us who thought we had a passable knowledge of Old Calabar. I never heard of the Aros, of Bende, or of Arochuku. It is somewhat humiliating that after over fifty years' work as a mission, the district on the right bank should be so little known to us." Mary had first-hand acquaintance with the people. Refugees came to her from both Ibo and Ibibio with stories of cruelty and wrong and oppression; chiefs from both regions sought her out for advice and guidance; slave-dealers from Arochuku and Bende, with their hu-

man wares, called at Ekenge and Akpap, and with many of these she was friendly, and learned from them the secrets of their trade. She told them frankly that she was coming some day to their country, and they gave her a cordial invitation, but hinted that it might not be quite safe. It was not the danger that prevented her. She would have gone before, but the difficulty was providing for Okoyong when she was absent. She would not leave her people unless they were cared for by competent hands. She asked for two ladies to be sent in order that she might be free to carry out her idea of visiting the Aro country, but none could be spared, and so she had, perforce, to wait. It was not easy, but she loyally submitted. "The test of a real good missionary," she wrote, "is this waiting, silent, seemingly useless time. So many who can distinguish themselves at home, missing the excitement and the results, get discontented, morose, cynical, and depreciate everything. Everything, however seemingly secular and small, is God's work for the moment, and worthy of our very best endeavour. To such, a mission house, even in its humdrum days, is a magnificent opportunity of service. In a home like mine a woman can find infinite happiness and satisfaction. It is an exhilaration of constant joy—I cannot fancy anything to surpass it on earth."

Then came the military expedition to break up the slave system and the false gods of Aro. The troops were moved into Arochuku by way of the Creek, and the forces of civilisation encountered the warriors of barbarism in the swamps and bush that edge the waterway. When the troops entered the towns they found juju-houses everywhere, and in almost every home were rude images smeared with the blood of sacrifice. The dreaded Long Juju was discovered in a gloomy defile about a mile from Arochuku. The path to it wound a tortuous way through dense bush, with others constantly leading off on both sides, evidently intended to puzzle the uninitiated. A watch-tower was passed where sentinels had been posted. At the bottom of the valley, between high rocky banks clothed with ferns and creepers, ran a stream which widened out into a pool covered with water-lilies. In the dim light was seen a small island, and upon it a rude shelter surrounded by a fence of gun-barrels. Lying about were gin-bottles, cooking-pots, and human skulls, the witness of past orgies. At the entrance was a white goat starving to death.

Most of the chiefs had never seen a white man, and when Sir Ralph Moor went up to hold a palaver, their interest was intense. They sat on the ground in a semicircle in the shade of a giant cotton tree, suspicious and hostile, listening to the terms of the Government, which included disarmament, the suppression of the juju-worship, and the prohibition of the buying, pawning, and selling of slaves. After much palaver these were agreed to. Over two thousand five hun-

dred war-guns were surrendered, but sacrifices continued—and still to some extent go on in secret in the depths of the forest. Much work also had still to be done before Government rule was generally accepted. Throughout the whole time occupied by the expedition, but more particularly in the later stages, the important chiefs kept continually in touch with “Ma” Slessor, and one official states that it was to her influence more than all the force and power of the Government emissaries that the final settlement of the country was due. . . .

It is interesting to speculate what might have been the course of events had she been able to carry out her plan before the punitive expedition was called for. Mr. Wilkie goes so far as to say that “had she been settled in the Aro country it is doubtful whether an armed expedition would have been necessary, and it is at least possible that the suppression of the slave-trade would have been achieved by the peaceable means of the Gospel.” Primitive peoples often bend more quickly before Christ than break before might of arms.

II. PLANTING A BASE

A large tract of new territory was now open to outside influences. Who was to be the first to settle in it—official, trader, or missionary? Mary studied the situation again in the light of the new conditions, obtaining information first-hand from officials and natives. There were two stations on the west of the Cross River—Ikorofiong, which, however, was really an Efik trading town, and higher up, Unwana, which was a back-water and unfit for a base for inland work. Tentative efforts had been made from time to time to secure a footing elsewhere, but had come to nothing, and the policy of the Mission had been to continue up-river as being the line of least resistance. Her conviction was that extension, for the present at least, should take place not up the river, where the stations were cut off from the base during the dry season, but laterally across the country between the Cross River and the Niger. There were, she saw, three strategic factors which dominated the situation—the Enyong Creek giving admission to the new territory, Itu at its mouth, and Arochuku, the religious and political centre of the Ibos. The central position of Itu impressed her; it commanded the three contiguous regions and peoples—the Ibo, Ibibio, and Efik, and her plan was to seize and hold it as a base, then one of the towns of Arochuku as the threshold of Iboland, and, if possible, Bende. Her views did not commend themselves to all her colleagues in Calabar, but how wise, how far-seeing, how statesmanlike was her policy the later history of the Mission proves.

She felt she could do nothing until help was obtained for Akpap. Fortunately there was one lady missionary in Calabar who had the courage to prefer Okoyong to quieter stations—Miss Wright of the Girls' Institute, who asked the local Committee to send her there as assistant to Miss Slessor; and although the Committee approved, the matter was referred to the Women's Committee at home. As there seemed no prospect of anything being done, she began to move quietly along her own lines. Her school lads were now old enough and educated enough to be used as advance agents, and her hope lay in these. In January 1903 she left Akpap with two boys, Esien and Effiom, and one of her girls, Mana, and canoed to Itu, and planted them there to teach school and hold services. Esien took the chief part in the latter, whilst Effiom led the singing. Mana's work was the teaching of the girls. A few weeks later she found that the results had exceeded all her dreams. The chief said he was too old to change his ways, but the younger ones could learn the new ideas—anyway God had made him, and so was bound to look after him whatever sins he committed. But the children were eager to learn, and made apt scholars, and the people crowded to the services until there was no more room for them. She went up again and selected a site on the top of the hill with a magnificent view and built a school, speeding the work with her own hands, and set the willing people to construct a church, with two rooms for herself at the end. When one of her fellow-missionaries, Dr. Rattray, heard of this he wrote: "Bravo! Uganda was evangelised by this means, and the teachers there could only read the gospels and could not write or count; the Mission understood its business to be to spread the Gospel, and all who could read taught others and spread the news. Perhaps we educate the people too much, and make them think that education is religion."

When in February she heard that the Roman Catholics were intending to settle at Bende her heart was heavy. "The thought that all that is holiest in the Church should have been shed to create an opening for that corrupt body makes me ill. And not even a station opened or the hope of one! Oh, if I were able to go or send even a few of my bairns just to take hold. The country is far from being at rest, but if the Roman Catholics can go so can I. . . . There is a great future for Nigeria; if only I were young again and had money!"

She wrote to Dr. Adam, a Government friend in Bende, a soldier of the Church as well as a servant of the King, and he supplied her with all the information she needed. Bende, he said, was not the place it was supposed to be; the population numbered from two to four thousand; it was not likely to become a trading centre; whilst the overland transport was a disadvantage. The journey was by launch to Itu, by steel canoe up the Enyong Creek, thence by foot or

hammock to Arochuku and Bende. He stated that Bishop Johnston of the Church Missionary Society was already in Bende prospecting.

When she received his letter she said to herself, "Shall I go?" She did not wish to compromise the mission in any way, and proposed to go about the matter quietly, at her own expense. She would travel if necessary in a hammock, as she was not so sure of herself as of old, and would find rest at wayside huts, and she would take lye to act as interpreter where the women did not know Efik. "I would do what I like, and would come back to my work rested and refreshed. But—I want God to send me."

What was influencing her also was the conviction that the end had come for her at Akpap. Again she had the consciousness that it was time for the station to be taken over by an ordained missionary, who would build up a congregation. "I shall not say that I shall leave my home without a pang, but I know that I can do work which new folk cannot do, and my days of service are closing in, and I cannot build up a church in the way a minister can." She believed that in the special conditions of West Africa women were better than men for beginning work in the interior. And she still retained her faith in the home-trained domesticated type—girls who had brothers and sisters and had learned to give and take and find duty in doing common things, rather than those turned out by the training schools, who were, she thought, apt to be too artificial and full of theories. Her ideal of a man missionary was Dr. Rattray, who was a good carpenter and shoemaker and general handy-man,—"far better accomplishments than a college education for the African field." She did not, of course, depreciate culture, so long as practical qualities of heart and hand went with it.

The proposal regarding Miss Wright going to Akpap having been agreed to, she began to look forward to her advent as an event that would determine the future. Seldom has one been so eagerly watched for; for months it was nothing but "When Miss Wright comes," "Wait till Miss Wright comes," and so on. For days before she appeared the household were in excited mood, every morning fresh flowers were placed in her bedroom, the boys and girls kept themselves dressed and ready to receive her. When she did arrive it made all the difference that was hoped. She was a capable, unselfish, plucky girl; she knew the language, and was experienced in the ways of the people. Very quietly she slipped into the method of the house, taking the school and dispensary off "Ma's" hands, and looking after the babies with the same pitying sympathy. The girls became quite at home with her, and in the long nights she would sing to them, recalling the times in the bush when Mr. Ovens used to entertain them. "She is a right sisterly helpmate," wrote Mary, "and a real help and comfort in every

way. Things go as smoothly as on a summer's day, and I don't know how I ever got on alone. It seems too good to be true."

III. ON TO AROCHUKU

On a morning of June 1903 she left Akpap for Itu, tramping the forest path to Ikunetu in order to pick up the Government launch on its weekly journey to the garrisons up-river. The Government, as usual, gave her every facility for carrying on her new work, granted her free passages, took charge of her packages and letters, placed their Rest Houses at her disposal, and told her to ask for whatever she wanted. She did not care to trouble them unduly, but was very grateful for their consideration. On arriving at Ikunetu she went into the teacher's house to rest, charging the boys to call her as soon as they sighted the launch. They did not notice it until it was too late for her to signal, and it passed onwards and out of sight. But she was not put out; her faith was always strong in the guiding hand of God; and she turned and tramped back the same long road. When she reached the Mission House tired and weary, she assured Miss Wright that all was well—God had not meant her to travel that day, and she must have been kept back for some purpose.

Next week she set out again, and when she joined the launch at Ikunetu, Colonel Montanaro, the Commander of the Forces, was on board on his way up to Arochuku. In the course of their conversation he gave her a pressing invitation to go there, and to accept his escort. She was almost startled by what seemed so direct a leading. But she was not prepared for a longer journey; she had no change of clothing or supply of food. She thought and prayed over the matter all the way. "Here is the challenge to enter that region of unbroken gloom and despair," she mused. "If it is not entered now, the Roman Catholics will come in, and the key position to the whole territory will be taken out of our hands, and only the coast tribes be left to the Mission. If I go now we shall be the first in the field, and it will not be discourteous to the Roman Catholics—as it would be if we came in afterwards." Before the end of the journey she consented to go.

When she arrived at Arochuku she found herself in the old slave centre of the Aros, a densely populated district, some 30,000 people living within a radius of a few square miles. It was a strange experience to walk over these roads that had been trodden for centuries by countless feet on their way to the pens of the coast and the horrors of the "middle passage," and latterly to the Efik slave-market, and to gaze on the spot where the secret iniquities of the Long Juju had taken place; stranger still to receive a welcome from the men who had been re-

sponsible for these evils. The chiefs and traders, many of whom she knew, were delighted with her courage and touched by her self-sacrifice, and promised to do all they could to assist her work. Making arrangements to come up later and start a school, she left, profoundly thankful for the privilege she had been granted, and praying that the Church at home would have a vision of the grand opportunity opening up before it.

The officials of the Church, of course, knew of the opportunity, but the members at large were not interested. Dr. Robson, as Convener of the Calabar Sub-Committee, pointed out how the situation was practically a crisis—no ground had been broken west of the Cross River, no teachers had been sent to the east. For a quarter of a century the supply of men had not sufficed for the existing needs of the Mission, and extension had been impossible. The givings of the Church for foreign missions had been far below the urgent requirements. Either, he said, the staff and income must be largely increased, or they would have to step aside and invite others to divide the field with them. No adequate response was made to this and similar appeals, and the lonely pioneer was forced onwards upon her solitary path.

A short time afterwards she went back to Arochuku, taking two lads, and a school was opened in the palaver shed of Amasu, one of the towns nearest the Creek. A hundred children crowded into the building along with women and men, and not a few of the old slavers, and the scholars were soon well on in the first book. In one village which she visited she found a young trader who had brought news of the Christ religion from the Niger, and was anxious to introduce a church and teacher. When she left the district again, the people came to the landing-beach and cried after her, “Don’t be long in coming back, Ma! If you don’t care for us, who will care for us?”

As her canoe was paddled down the creek, she lay back enjoying the beauty of the scene. The water was as smooth as a mirror, and like a mirror reflected the delicate tracery of the overhanging foliage; bright birds sailed hither and thither, gorgeous butterflies flitted about, and brilliant blossoms coloured the banks. She had passed in succession two snakes attempting to cross the stream, and was watching the efforts of a third when a small canoe shot out from behind a clump of bushes and bumped into her craft. She apologised to the man in it, but standing cap in hand he said, “I meant it, Ma; I have been waiting for you; my master at Akani Obio sent me to waylay you and bring you to his house.” Taking a letter from his cap he handed it to her.

The canoe was turned and entered a still creek, a picture of delicate loveliness, with multitudes of lilies and other aquatic plants, which made her feel as if she were moving through an exquisite dream. A shingly beach, evidently a

busy trading-place, was reached, and there stood a young man and young woman, handsome and well-dressed, who assisted her to land. They led her into a good house and into a pretty room with concrete floor, a European bedstead, clean and dainty, with mosquito curtains and all the appointments that indicated people of taste. The man was Onoyom Iya Nya, a born statesman, the only one in the district who had not been disarmed by the Government, and the one who had been chosen President of the Native Court, and was shaping well as a wise and enlightened ruler.

It was a moving story that Mary heard from his lips, while his wife stood by and listened. It went back to 1875 when he was a boy. One day a white man appeared in the Creek, and all the people decamped and hid. He, alone, stayed on the beach, and in response to a request from the white man, offered to lead him to the chief's house. During the palaver that ensued he lingered by, an absorbed listener. When the white man left he was tried by the heads of the town and severely punished for having acted as guide. The stranger was the Rev. Dr. Robb, one of the ablest missionaries in the Mission, then stationed at Ikorofiong.

The boy never forgot the incident. But he grew up a heathen, and went to the cannibal feasts at Arochuku. When his father died, ten little girls were slaughtered, and five of the bodies were placed beneath the corpse, and five above, that they might occupy the position of wives in the spirit world. He married, but misfortune seemed to dog him. His house was burned down, and then his child died. Seeking for the man who had wrought these things by witchcraft, in order to murder him, he met a native who had once been a Mission teacher in Calabar, but who had fallen into evil ways and was now homeless and a drunkard.

"How do you know," the latter said, "that it is not the God of the white man that is angry with you? He is all-powerful."

"Where can I find this God?" the chief queried.

"I am not worthy to say, but go to the white Ma at Itu, and she will tell you."

"I will go," was the reply.

He took a canoe and watched for Mary on the Creek, but missed her. In his impatience he engaged the old teacher, who had still his Bible, to come and read *Iko Abasi* to him. Again he sent for "Ma," but she had gone on to Arochuku. Then he kept a man on the look-out in the Creek, and it was he who had intercepted her.

"And now," he said, "will you show me what to do?"

As he told the story several big, fattened ladies had come in, and a number of children and dependents. She prayed with them, sent for the teacher's Bible, and talked with them long and earnestly. The chief's wife made her a cup of

tea, and she left, promising to come later and see what she could do to develop a station.

The detour had made her late, and the canoe ran into a sudden storm of wind and rain, but her heart was jubilant, and kept singing and praying all the way to Itu. For God was good, and He was leading her, and that was perfect happiness.

IV. A SLAVE-GIRL'S TRIUMPH

The problem was how to follow up so promising a beginning. It occupied her thoughts day and night, but she came to the conclusion that she could not conscientiously leave Miss Wright alone at Akpap. The station was too isolated for her, and if she became ill it might be weeks before any one knew. An alternative was to remain herself at Akpap, and allow Miss Wright to go to Itu, where she would be in touch with the Mission, and could canoe down to Calabar if anything went wrong. The plan she liked best was to hand the station over to a minister, so

that both she and Miss Wright could establish themselves at Itu and work the Creek between them. As the months went by and she paid flying visits to the infant causes at Itu and Amasu, she became more and more convinced of the magnificent opportunity lying to the Church's hand in these regions. At Itu the congregation had grown to one of over three hundred intelligent and well-dressed people meeting in a church built by themselves. In August at Amasu she found a school of sixty-eight on a wet day, and of these thirty-eight could read the first book. That they had been brought under discipline was shown by the fact that as she entered all rose silently and simultaneously, as if they had been years instead of weeks at school.

The same month witnessed an event which gave her unbounded happiness. Jean, and Mama the slave-girl, Iye the twin-mother of Susie, Akom the first-fruit of Ekenge, and Esien the teacher at Itu, were baptized, and sat down at the communion-table. Many others were there, and joined in spirit in the celebration, but owing to difficult native complications could not take the step, and Mary never cared to force matters. Esien's mother had been very unwilling for her son to come under Christian influence, and now she was not only present, but actually sat beside two twin-mothers. Akom's face was transfigured. Jean's adopted child, Dan, was also baptized on the occasion, and it was a great and solemn joy to Mary to see her oldest bairn give him to God, and promise to bring him up in His fear.

In October she was at Itu watching the building of the house for herself and teacher, and nothing delighted her more than the way in which the women

worked along with the men. “I wish Crockett had been here to gather the shafts and sparks of wit and satire that flew with as much zest as ever obtained in a Galloway byre or market fairin’. It is such a treat to me, for no intercourse is permitted between the sexes in Okoyong, except that of the family, and then it is strained and unnatural, but here they were daffin’ and lauchin’ as in Scotland. How wholesome are God’s own laws of freedom and simplicity.” The house was to have six rooms—three for herself, one for Miss Wright or other lady missionary, one for Mana, and one for Esien and Effiom. “I’m afraid that is too much for you,” she said, thinking of the mats which were not easy to obtain. “It’s not too much, Ma; nothing can be too much. We will do it.” One woman came and insisted on washing her feet in hot water. She had to give in, and as she sat down the woman said, “Ma, I’ve been so frightened you would take our teacher away because we are so unworthy. I think I could not live again in darkness. I pray all the time. I lay my basket down and just pray on the road.”

This woman sometimes prayed in the meetings, and electrified the audience, and she had begun to have devotions in her own home, though her husband laughed at her. There were many others of the same type, and it was a black slave-girl who had been the one behind it all. Mana taught and nursed and trained them, quietly and modestly, as a mother might. It was an inspiration to Mary to see her; as she looked upon such results she cried, “Oh! if only the Church knew. If only it would back us up.” To her friends she wrote, “Prayer can do anything; let us try its power.”

Returning to Akpap with two of the girls and some small children, she was caught in a tornado and made her way over the six miles of bush-road through pelting rain. The darkness was lit up by almost continuous lightning, but they lost their way, and she had at last to commandeer an old native to lead them. Such experiences were now part of her ordinary life again. On her trips up and down the Creek she was constantly drifting into strange situations, and being reduced to sleeping on mud floors, or on straw in the open, drinking tea made in empty milk tins, and subsisting for days on yam and oranges. And always she was treated by the natives with as much gallantry and courtesy as if she were a queen, and always she was singing in her heart psalms of thanksgiving and gratitude.

But she was not able as formerly to resist the effects of such exposure, and was often weary, and her weariness brought nervousness and lack of sleep. At times she was afraid of the unknown future opening out before her, and appalled when she thought of all the details of labour, supplies, and management that were coming upon her shoulders. In the dark she would rise and cry, “Calm me, O God, and keep me calm.” Then she would go and look at the sleeping

children and comfort herself with the sight. “Surely,” she would say, “I have more reason to trust God than childhood has after all the way He has led me.”

V. A BUSH FURLOUGH

She at last determined to give up her furlough in Scotland, now drawing near, and spend the time instead in prospecting in the new country. All her hopes and aims were expressed in a definite and formal way in the following document, which she sent to be read at the November meeting of the Committee—now the Mission Council—at Calabar:

I think it is an open secret that for many years the workers here have felt that our methods and modes were very far from adequate to overtake the needs of our immense field, and, as the opportunities multiply and the needs grow more clamant, the question grows in importance and gravity. The fact that only by stated consecutive work can a church be evolved and built up, and a pagan nation be moulded into a Christian people, cannot be gainsaid, and yet there is an essential need for something between, something more mobile and flexible than ordinary congregational work and methods. The scattered broken units into which our African populations are divided, their various jujus and mbiains and superstitions which segregate even the houses of any common village, make it necessary for us to do more than merely pay an occasional visit, even if that visit results in a church or a school being built.

Many plans suggest themselves. Church members organised into bands of two or three or four to itinerate for a week over local neighbourhoods; native teachers spending a given number of days in each month in the outlying parts of their districts; trading members of the church undertaking service in any humble capacity on up-river trading stations—in these and many other ways the gaps might be bridged and a chain of personal interest and living sympathy link on the raw heathen to the church centres, and the first rays of gospel light be conveyed and communication be opened without the material expense which the opening of new stations involves. For instance, I have spent a Sabbath at Umon, and ever so many Efik traders, men and women, joined in the congregational worship, reading from Bibles and hymn-books which had been locked in their boxes; but either timidity or some other cause kept them silent when there was no one to lead. Could not a beginning be made for those, either by initiating such a service or organising those who were trading at any place so that evening worship or some such simple way of bringing gospel truth before the minds of the heathen could go on continuously? The same holds good of Itu and other places.

For the last decade the nearer reaches of the river on which we ply have occupied a great deal of my thoughts, but from various causes no sort of supervision at all adequate suggested itself. So there has been little definite work accomplished. A few readers at Odot, desultory teaching at Eki and the back of Itu, and Umon, covers it all, I fear.

With Miss Wright’s coming, opportunities, not of our personal seeking, have forced themselves on us, and though we have done the best we could with the materials at hand, all seems so little and incomplete that the following proposal or petition or request or whatever you may term it, has been prepared, and that from no mere impulse of the moment but after careful, prayerful consideration. I may say here that Miss Wright is fully in sympathy with it, and it is from both of us.

By the and January 1904 I shall have been out five years, and so my furlough would then be due, but as I have not the slightest intention of going to Britain—I am thankful to say I do not feel any necessity for so doing—I propose to ask leave from the station for six months, during which time I should, in a very easy way, try to keep up an informal system of itinerating between Okoyong and Amasu. Already I have seen a church and a dwelling-house built at Itu, and a school and a couple of rooms at Amasu. I have visited several towns of Enyong in the Creek, and have found good enough accommodation, as there are semi-European houses available and open for a lodging. I shall find my own canoe and crew, and shall stay at any given place any length of time which the circumstances suggest, so as not to tax my own strength, and members of my own family shall help in the elementary teaching in the schools. From our home here we should thus superintend the small school at Idot, and start in a small way work at Eki, and reside mostly at Itu as the base, working the Creek where the Enyon towns are on the way to the farther base at Amasu, reside there or itinerate from there among the Aro people in an easy way, and back again by Creek and Itu home.

What I have to ask of you is that in order to do this a lady be sent out to be with Miss Wright. The latter is perfectly capable of attending to the station; the school and dispensary work are already in her hands, and with some one to help her I have not the slightest hesitation in leaving her in charge. Both ladies could co-operate in the travelling as choice or circumstances pointed, and as Miss Wright has had a large share in the formation and equipment of the Itu and Aro stations it would be very natural that she should take such a part in developing them as might suggest itself to her. The three of us, I have no doubt, could dovetail the details of the work so that no part should suffer, nor should any special strain be put on our health. We should like this to take shape by the end of the year, as the people will be more get-at-able in their villages in such a visitation kind of way than in the ordinary church methods during the dry season. All work in towns is slack then, and village and visitation work have their proper value.

In proposing this I know I am going in the very face of what seems to be the only possible way of dividing our stations. My own desire is to have a missionary with his wife and a native teacher take over Okoyong, congregate the educated, and at least nominal Christian, part of our community, and build up a church in the ordinary way. He has more than he can undertake to work upon in Okoyong alone, and he has endless scope for extension up between the rivers toward Ugep and Edi-Iba.

It may be out of my province to speak of anything outside my own station, but in as far as I know I am voicing the opinion of the missionaries who are now working up Higher. I may say that if we are to compass the peoples that lie at our hands, such as Itu, Enyong, Umon, and those who may be reached all the year round, we ought to have Itu manned as a proper European station. All and each of these peoples can be reached and worked from Itu. Then as a natural and strategic point in the business conduct of our Mission, Itu is incomparable. It was not without reason that it was the slave mart, and that it became the Government base for all work both for north and flank. The gateway to the Aros and the Ibibios, holding the Enyong, and being just a day's journey from what must ever be our base, namely the seaport of the ocean steamers, having waterway all the year round and a good beach front, it is the natural point, I think, at which our up and down river work should converge.

But I am willing to change, and Miss Wright is willing to change, any plan of ours in order to let any larger undertaking make way if it should be proposed.

This communication was considered, and various proposals made, but the finding of the Council was that they were unable to accept the whole responsibility of the scheme, and that the matter should be forwarded to the Women's Committee in Scotland, and Miss Slessor asked to wait their decision. The question of further development was, however, discussed, and the unanimous opinion was that Itu should be adopted as a medical station in view of extension into the Aro country.

Miss Slessor was not discouraged. She next asked Mr. Wilkie to come and see the nature of the ground for himself, and the possibilities it held; and the result was a New Year trip up the Creek, the party consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Wilkie, Miss Wright, and herself. She was far from well—far more unwell than even Miss Wright was aware of—but she, nevertheless, resolved to go, and was conveyed to Ikunetu in a hammock. At Itu they camped at the church and house, neither of which was yet finished, the doors being temporary erections, and the windows being screened by grass mats. Mrs. Wilkie's camp-bed occupied one end of the church, Miss Wright's the centre, whilst at the other end Miss Slessor's native sofa was placed with mats round it for the children. Mr. Wilkie found a resting-place in one of the native houses in the town. Military operations were still progressing, and there was a camp of soldiers at the foot of the hill, whose presence terrified the people, and they besought the missionaries to remain for their protection until the men moved on, and this they did. Colonel Montanaro, who arrived later, called on the ladies, and had a long talk with Mary, to whom he expressed his delight at the result of his invitation to Arochuku. "These men," she wrote, "are held by invisible but strong bands to what is good, though outsiders do not see it."

On the way up the Creek they were obliged to pass the night at Akani Obio, where Chief Onoyom came down to the beach and escorted them to his house, and gave them all the room they required, two courts lit up by European lamps, and new mats. His fine face and courteous manners made the same impression on the strangers as they had done on Miss Slessor. It was found that the native teacher had been doing his best, but the chief was keen for all the advantages of a station, and was relying upon "Ma's" word to assist him. Next morning they again took to the canoe, but the water became so shallow that they had to land and tramp six miles to Amasu, passing the trenches where the natives sought to ambush the punitive force. New roads were being constructed everywhere, and barracks had been erected on a wind-swept hill in the neighbourhood.

The church was built near the Creek, and was still incomplete. As there was no house they camped in the church as best they could, Mrs. Wilkie sleeping on a mud seat. The district, including the scene of the Long Juju, was inspected,

and the people interviewed, and the party returned as they had come. They stopped at several villages, in one of which an old chief brought out a box containing Bibles and a Pilgrim's Progress and reading-books. "I had a son," he said, "I was fond of him, and he was anxious to learn book and God palavers, and I bought these books and got some one to teach him, and was looking forward to my boy becoming a great man and teaching the people good ways, but two moons ago he died, and I have no more heart for anything. . . . I want God," he continued fiercely, "and you won't leave me till I find Him." "Oh, father," replied Mary, "God is here. He is waiting for you." The chief found God, and became a Christian.

VI. BEGINNINGS

Miss Slessor's indomitable spirit never gave in, but her body sometimes did. She had been suffering much these past months from weakening ailments brought on as the result of exposure and lack of nourishing food, and she finally collapsed and was again far down in the dark valley. But kind hands ministered to her and nursed her back to health. "I rose," she said, "a mere wreck of what I was, and that was not much at the best. My hair is silvered enough to please any one now, and I am nervous and easily knocked up, and so rheumatic that I cannot get up or down without pain." She was gladdened by the news that the Mission Council had given her permission to make her proposed tour, and was not troubled by the condition that she must not commit the Mission to extension. The Council thought that in view of her illness she ought rather to go home, and offered to provide for the work at Akpap and care for her children until she returned. But the burden of the Creek lay sore on her mind, and as Miss Wright's furlough was also due, she wished to be near Akpap in case of need. She informed the Council that if she could be relieved she would begin her tour at once. When Miss Wright left she gave more into the hands of Jean, who, she said, was as good as any white servant; her right hand and her left.

When the matter once more came up at the Council it was decided to send up two ladies to Akpap, and she was at last free to carry out her desire. She looked forward to the enterprise with mingled feelings. "It seems strange," she said, "to be starting with a family on a gipsy life in a canoe, but God will take care of us. Whether I shall find His place for me up-river or whether I shall come back to my own people again, I do not know. He knows, and that is enough."

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this new forward movement was that she was going at her own expense, backed by the private liberality of friends in Scotland, and assisted by native girls and boys, who received nothing from her

but their board. She never asked the Mission to defray any of the expenditure which she incurred, and the building was accomplished by herself and household, with the free labour of the people. All that the opening up of the Enyong Creek to the Gospel cost the Mission was her salary—which was now Imo per annum. She spent scarcely anything of this on her own personal wants. “I have no object on earth,” she wrote at this time, “but to get my food and raiment, which are of the plainest, and to bring up my bairns.” A certain amount was reserved at home by Mr. Logie, who all these years had managed her affairs, and even this she was always encroaching upon. Whenever she saw an appeal in the Press for any good object she would write to him and request him to send a contribution.

There were many matters to be attended to before she left Akpap, and she went down to Duke Town to hand over the business of the native Court, and buy material for the buildings in the Creek. It was the first time for many years that she had been on Mission Hill, and she greatly enjoyed her stay with the Wilkies, in whose home she was able to find quietness and comfort. The old people who knew the early pioneers of the Mission flocked to see her, and her sojourn was one long reception. A “command” invitation also came from the Commissioner, but this she had the temerity to decline, saying that she was not visiting. It is doubtful whether she had the attire fit for the occasion. He, however, came to see her, and was charmed with her personality.

It was on this visit that she brought another of the younger missionaries under her spell—the Rev. J. K. Macgregor, B.D., Principal of the Hope Waddell Institute. After his first meeting he wrote: “A slim figure, of middle height, fine eyes full of power, she is no ordinary woman. It was wonderful to sit and listen to her talking, for she is most fascinating, and besides being a humorist is a mine of information on mission history and Efik custom.” Mr. and Mrs. Macgregor grew into intimate friends, and their home, like that of the Wilkies’, thereafter became a haven of healing and rest.

She reached her base, Itu, with her family, in July, her health still enfeebled, but her spirit burning like a pure fire, and established herself in a house that was still unfinished. “What a picture it presented,” writes a Government doctor who visited her then. “A native hut with a few of the barest necessities of furniture. She was sitting on a chair rocking a tiny baby, while five others were quietly sleeping wrapped up in bits of brown paper and newspapers in other parts of the room. How she managed to look after all these children, and to do the colossal work she did passes my comprehension.” The joy of the people at her advent was boundless. Her bairns had done wonders; the congregation numbered 350, all devout, intelligent people. “To-day,” she wrote, “as the custom is after the

lesson, the bairns each took a part in prayer, and before we rose a boy started 'Come, Holy Spirit, come.' We sang it through on our knees."

But calls came every day from other regions, A deputation from the interior of Ibibio pled, "Give us even a boy!" Another brought a message from a chief in the Creek: "It is not book that I want; it is God!" The chief of Akani Obio again came. "Ma," he said, "we have 13 in hand for a teacher, and some of the boys are finished with the books Mr. Wilkie gave us and are at a standstill." And, most pathetic of all, one night, late, while she was reading by the light of a candle, a blaze of light shone through the cracks of the house, and fifteen young men from Okoyong appeared before her to say that the young ladies who had come to Akpap had already gone, and they were left without a "Ma." She sent them to a shelter for the night, and spent the hours in prayer. "Oh Britain," she exclaimed, "surfeited with privilege! tired of Sabbath and Church, would that you could send over to us what you are throwing away!"

Invited to the Mission Council in November 1904, she went, this being her first attendance for six years, and gave what the minutes call a "graphic and interesting account" of what had been accomplished. In Itu a church and teacher's house had been built; and there were regular Sabbath services and a catechumens' class, with forty candidates, and a day-school was conducted. At Amasu, Arochuku, a good school was built, and ground had been given by the chiefs. There were also the beginnings of congregations and buildings at four points in the Creek, at Okpo, Akani Obio, Odot, and Asang. The work, she said, had not yet reached a stage when she could conscientiously leave it; but she hoped before departing to see established such a native, self-supporting agency under the control of the Mission as would guarantee a continuance of the enterprise. The Council received her report with thankfulness, and gave her permission to continue for other six months on the same condition as before—that no expense to the Mission should be involved in what she undertook.

Many months of strenuous upbuilding followed, constantly interrupted by petty illnesses of a depressing kind. The house at Itu was completed, she herself laying down a cement floor, and Jean whitewashing the walls. Cement underfoot for many reasons was preferred, one being that it was impervious to ants. If these pests obtained hold of a house it was difficult to drive them out, and many a night her entire family was up waging battle with them. In connection with her supplies of cement she was once picked up at Ikunetu by some of her colleagues, who remarked on the number of trunks which accompanied her. "You are surely richer than usual in household gear," they said. "Household gear!" she echoed; "these are filled with cement—I had nothing else to bring it in!" Once in Scotland a lady asked her if she had had any lessons in making cement.

“No,” she replied; “I just stir it like porridge; turn it out, smooth it with a stick, and all the time keep praying, ‘Lord, here’s the cement; if to Thy glory, set it,’ and it has never once gone wrong.”

A picture of the days at this time is supplied by Miss Welsh: “We visited the women in their homes—we had evening prayers in such yards as the owners were willing to allow them. From morning till night ‘Ma’ was busy—often far into the night. One brought a story of an unjust divorce, another was sick; one brought a primer for a reading-lesson, another was accused of debt and wished ‘Ma’ to vouch for his innocence; another had, he declared, been cheated in a land case. All found a ready listener, a friendly adviser and helper, though not all found their protestations of innocence believed in, and none went away without hearing of the salvation God had prepared for them.”

The Okoyong people continued to come to her with their troubles. “They seem to think,” she says, “that no one can settle their affairs but this old lady.” Rescues of twin-children were also going on all this time. She could not now rush off, as she used to do, when the news arrived, but she sent Jean flying to the spot, and the infants would be seized and the excited people held in check until she came on the scene. “One more woman spoilt,” she would say, “and another home broken up.”

Nothing gave her greater joy than the rapid development going on at Akani Obio. Chief Onoyom had never swerved from his determination to Christianise his people, and, although knowing practically nothing of the white man’s religion, had already started to build a church, using for the purpose £300 which he had saved. At first he planned a native building, but reflecting that if he were constructing a house for himself it would be of iron, he felt he could not do less for God. He therefore decided to put up as fine a structure as he could, with walls of iron and cement floor and a bell-tower. To make the seats and pulpit he had the courage to use a magnificent tree which was regarded as the principal juju of the town. The story goes that the people declared the juju would never permit it to be cut down. “God is stronger than juju,” said Onoyom, and went out with a following to attack it. They did not succeed the first day, and the people were jubilant. Next morning they returned and knelt down and prayed that God would show Himself stronger than juju, and then, hacking at the trunk with increased vigour, they soon brought it to earth. That the people might have no excuse for absenting themselves from the services during the wet season, Onoyom also erected a bridge over the Creek for their use.

To the dedication of the building came a reverent, well-dressed assembly. The chief himself was attired in a black suit, with black silk necktie and soft felt hat. He provided food for the entire gathering, but would not allow anything

stronger than palm wine to be drunk. Very shyly he came up to “Ma” and offered her a handful of money, asking her to buy provisions for herself, as he did not know what kind she liked.

Two short years before, the place and people had been known only to traders.

Up in Arochuku similar progress was being made. Her first long stay there, spent in a hut without furniture—with not even a chair to sit on—was a happy and strenuous one. She was busily engaged in erecting a schoolhouse with two rooms at the back. “Little did I dream,” she wrote, “that I would mud walls and hang doors again. But the Creek is at the back door, and we have bathing in the sunshine, and it is a delightful holiday.” The earlier meetings were held in the open; the chiefs sat on improvised seats, the principal women, clothed and unclothed, squatted on skins or mats on the ground, lads and children stood about, the townspeople kept well back amongst the protecting foliage. In the centre, in the shade of a giant tree, was a table covered with a fine white cloth, and upon it a Bible and a native primer. Here she stood to conduct the service, so strange to the savage people. As she began, there was a stir at the side and a big chief, one of the principal traders to Okoyong in former days, moved into the circle, along with his head wife. He was followed by another and his children, and then others appeared, until she had a great audience. She could scarcely command her voice. To gain time she asked a chief to begin with prayer in the Ibo tongue. All knelt. A hymn followed; there was not the least semblance of a tune, all joining in anyhow, but sweeter music she never heard. The ten commandments were translated, sentence by sentence, by a chief, as were also the lessons and the address. Another hymn was sung, then came a prayer by an old man, and another by a woman, and the meeting closed with all repeating the Lord’s Prayer.

It was the same at other towns and villages along the Creek. Churches or schools were going up and congregations being formed. The notable thing was that women were taking a prominent part in the meetings; this, no doubt, was due to the fact that the pioneer missionary was a woman. And the cry from all the districts was for women and not men—“A White Ma to teach our women book and washing and machine.”

In July Mr. Macgregor was able to visit the infant stations, and was greatly impressed. To him the journey up Creek was a new experience. As the canoe pushed its way through the water-lilies the Institute boys sang Scottish Psalms to the tunes Invocation and St. George’s, much to Mary’s delight. “It’s a long time since I heard these,” she exclaimed. “It puts me in a fine key for Sabbath.” At Asang she translated Mr. Macgregor’s sermon to a gathering of 300 people.

“Her interpretation,” he says, “was most dramatic; she gave the address far more force in Efik than it had in English. It was magnificent. And how the people listened!” He had the opportunity here of seeing how deftly she handled a “bad” native. “Don’t come to God’s house,” she ended; “God has no need of the likes of you with your deceit and craft. He can get on quite well without you—though you can’t get on without God. Ay, you have that lesson to learn yet.”

At Arochuku it happened to be Egbo day, and the place was astir with naked people, who came and stared at them as they ate. One man, who was dressed in a hat, a loincloth, and a walking-stick, sat in a corner and received a lecture from “Ma,” which lasted the whole meal. They explored the district, saw the tree where criminals were hanged after terrible torture, the old juju-house with its quaint carving and relics of sacrifices, the new palaver-shed of beaten mud, and the great slave-road into the interior. At one spot she stopped and exclaimed, “That was the road to the devil.” It was the path to the Long Juju of bloody memory. They returned by the new road through the *Ikot Mbiam*, the accursed bush into which the sick and dying slaves were flung when their days of useful service were over. At first the people would not use this road; but now the land was laid out in farms and cultivations, a tribute to the influence of British rule.

On the voyage down there were frequent showers in the Creek, and Mary sat with a waterproof over her head and shoulders, a strange figure, but with a face glowing with spirit. When the end was in sight she proposed that they should sing the Doxology, and, none offering to accompany her, she sang it herself--twice. . . .

In the quiet of the tropic nights she read the books and magazines and papers which friends sent her, and in this way kept abreast of world affairs. Her favourite journals were *The British Weekly*, *The Christian*, *The Life of Faith*, and *The Westminster Gazette*. Her *Record* she read from cover to cover. It was with painful interest that she followed at this time the developments of the great Church crisis in the homeland. “It tears my heart,” she wrote, “to see our beloved Church dragged in and through the mire of public opinion.” But she had faith that good would issue out of it all. A keen politician, she thirsted for election telegrams during periods of parliamentary transition. But in all times of public unrest and excitement she fell back on the thought that God was on His throne and all was well.