

MARY SLESSOR

OF CALABAR

PIONEER MISSIONARY

BY

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VII. MOVING INLAND

Ibo or Ibibio—which was it to be? Both regions were calling to her, and both attracted her. As the result of an arrangement with the Church Missionary Society the administrative districts adjoining the Cross River were recognised as the sphere of the United Free Church Mission. “Now that this is settled,” she wrote, “I shall try to take a firmer hold in Arochuku. The church there is almost finished. My heart bleeds for the people, but the Spirit has not yet suffered me to go.” The dark masses behind her at Itu drew her sympathies even more, simply because they were lower in the scale of humanity. “It is a huge country, and if I go in I can only touch an infinitesimal part of it. But it would be criminal to monopolise the rights of occupation and not be able to occupy.”

Her line of advance was practically determined by the Government. Even with military operations still going on a marvellous change was being effected in the condition of Ibibio. The country was being rapidly opened up, roads were being pushed forward, and courts established; the stir and the promise of new life was pulsating from end to end of the land. To her hut at Itu came Government and trade experts, consulting her on all manner of subjects, and obtaining information which no other one could supply. The natives, on the other hand, came to her enquiring as to the meaning of the white man’s movements, and she was able to reassure them and keep their confidence unshaken in the beneficial character of the changes.

She made rapid reconnaissances inland, and these set her planning extension. Even the officials urged her to enter. They pointed to the road. “Get a bicycle, Ma,” they said, “and come as far as you can—we will soon have a motor car service for you.” Motors in Ibibio? The idea to her was incredible, but in a few months it was realised. “Come on to Ikot Okpene,” wrote the officer at that distant centre—“the road is going right through, and you will be the first here.” She thought of these men and their privations and their enthusiasm for Empire. “Oh,” she said, “if we would do as much for Christ!” She, at any rate, would not be found lagging, and in the middle of the year 1905 she sallied forth, taking with her a boy of twelve years named Etim, who read English well, and, at a place called Ikotobong, some five and a half miles inland, she formed a school and the nucleus of a congregation. “I trust,” she said, “that it will be the first of a chain of stations stretching across the country. The old chief is pleased. He told me that the future, the mystery of things, was too much for him, and that he would welcome the light. The people are to give Etim food, and I will give him 5s. a month for his mother out of my store.”

The lad proved an excellent teacher and disciplinarian, and gathered a school of half a hundred children about him. Soon she was again in the thick of building operations, and for a time was too busy even to write. Slowly but surely Ikotobong became another centre of order and light. The officials who ran in upon her from time to time said it was like coming on a bit of Britain, and the Governor who called one day declared that the place was already too civilised for her.

Much to her joy there was a forward movement also on the part of the Church. The Mission Council had not put aside its decision to make Itu a medical base, and had been pressing the matter upon the Foreign Mission Committee in Scotland, which also recognised the value of her pioneer work and the necessity of following it up and placing it upon a proper basis. It was finally agreed to carry out the suggestion. Dr. Robertson from Creek Town was transferred to Itu to take oversight of the work on the Creek, a new mission house and a hospital were planned, and a motor launch for the Creek journeys was decided on. For the launch the students of New College, Edinburgh, made themselves responsible, and they succeeded in raising a sum of nearly £400 for the purpose. The hospital and dispensary and their equipment were provided by Mr. A. Kemp, a member of Braid United Free Church, Edinburgh, an admirer of Miss Slessor's work, and at his suggestion it was called the Mary Slessor Mission Hospital. When the news came to her she wrote: "It seems like a fairy tale. I don't know what to say. I can just look up into the blue sky and say, 'Even so, Father; in good and ill, let me live and be worthy of it all.' It is a grand gift, and I am so glad for my people."

Thus relieved of Itu she established herself at Ikotobong. But she was again eager to press forwards, and wished to plant a station some fifteen miles farther on. It was a pace faster than the Church could go. It had neither the workers nor the means to cope with all the opportunities she was creating. It is a striking picture this, of the restless little woman ever forging her way into the wilderness and dragging a great Church behind her.

She had been amused at the idea of riding a bicycle, but she would have tried to fly if she could thereby have advanced the cause of Christ, and when Mr. Charles Partridge, the District Commissioner of Ikot Ekpene, presented her with a new machine of the latest pattern, direct from England, she at once started to learn. "Fancy," she wrote, "an old woman like me on a cycle! The new road makes it easy to ride, and I'm running up and down and taking a new bit in a village two miles off. It has done me all the good in the world, and I will soon be able to overtake more work. I wonder what the Andersons and the Goldies and the Edgerleys will say when they see that we can cycle twenty miles in the

bush?" The Commissioner had also brought out a phonograph with him, and she was asked to speak into it. She recited in Efik the story of the Prodigal Son, and when the words came forth again, the natives were electrified. "Does not that open up possibilities," she said, "for carrying the Gospel messages into the bush?"

Her work of patient love and faith on the Creek saw fruit towards the end of the year (1905), when the two churches at Akani Obio and Asang were opened. A special meeting of Presbytery was held in the district, and eight members were present at the ceremonies. At Akani Obio the Rev. John Rankin accepted the key from Chief Onoyom in the name of the Presbytery, and handed it to Miss Slessor, who inserted it in the lock and opened the door. There was an atmosphere of intense devotion, and Mr. Weir preached from the text, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." The collection was over 15.

Boarding their canoe again the party proceeded to Asang, and were met by crowds of people. Flags floated everywhere, and they passed under an arch of welcome. When the new native church, larger even than that at Akani Obio, came into sight, surrounded by well-dressed men and women and children, words failed the visitors from Calabar. Again Mary opened the door, and again the building was unable to hold the audience. Mr. Rankin preached from "To you is the word of this salvation sent." The collection was watched with astonishment by the visitors. It was piled up before the minister on the table, and bundle after bundle of rods followed one another, coming from those outside as well as those inside, until the amount reached 120—a remarkable sum from a people who were still heathen, but who were eager to know and learn about God and the right way of life. The visitors looked at one another. "It is wonderful," they said. "Surely it is of God." "Ma" was pleased but not surprised; she knew how the people were crying for the light, and how willing they were to give and serve. After the meeting the people would not depart, and she and Mr. Weir addressed them outside. On the party returning to Akani Obio an evening service was held, "and," wrote one of them, "the night closed down on as happy a group of missionaries as one could imagine." "It was grand," said another; "the best apologetic for Christianity I ever saw."

Some weeks later the church at Okpo, where Jean had been teaching the women and girls, was opened in the view of hundreds of the people, who contributed a collection of £7.

Not all the natives regarded these strange doings with equanimity. At Akani Obio some of the chiefs were so alarmed that they left the town in the belief that misfortune would come upon them on account of the church. But when

they saw the people throwing away their charms and flocking to the services and no harm befalling them, they returned. They were very angry when Onoyom put away his wives—he made ample provision for them—and took back as his one consort a twin-mother whom he had discarded. By and by came a fine baby boy to be the light of his home. Akani Ohio became a prohibition town, and on Sundays a white flag was flown to indicate that no trading was allowed on God's day.

VIII. THE PROBLEM OF THE WOMEN

One of the most baffling of West African problems is the problem of the women. There is no place for them outside the harem; they are dependent on the social system of the country, and helpless when cast adrift from it; they have no proper status in the community, being simply the creatures of man to be exploited and degraded—his labourer, his drudge, the carrier of his kernels and oil, the boiler of his nuts. A girl-child, if not betrothed by her guardian, lacks the protection of the law. She can, if not attached to some man, be insulted or injured with impunity. There was no subject which had given Mary so much thought, and she had long come to the conclusion that it was the economic question which lay at the root of the evil. It seemed clear that until they were capable of supporting themselves, and subsisting independently of men, they would continue in their servility and degradation, a prey to the worst practices of the bush, and a strong conservative force against the introduction of higher and purer methods of existence. Enlightened women frankly told Miss Slessor that they despaired of ever becoming free from the toils of tradition and custom, and that there seemed no better destiny for them than the life of the harem and the ways of sin. It was a serious outlook for those who became Christians,—about whom she was most concerned,—and she could not leave the matter alone. Her active mind was always moving amongst the conditions around her, considering them, seeing beyond them, and suggesting lines of improvement and advance; and in this case she saw that she would have to show how women could be rendered independent of the ties of a House. In Calabar Christian women supported themselves by dressmaking, and much of their work was sent up-country, and she did not wish to take the bread out of their mouths. Gradually there came to her the idea of establishing a home in some populous country centre, where she could place her girls and any twin-mothers, waifs, or strays, or any Christian unable to find a livelihood outside the harem, and where they could support themselves by farm and industrial work. A girls' school could also be attached to it. Two principles were laid down as essential for such an

institution: it must be based on the land, and it must be self-supporting—she did not believe in homes maintained from without. All native women understood something of cultivation and the raising of small stock, and their efforts could be chiefly engaged in that direction, as well as in washing and laundrying, baking, basket-making, weaving, shoemaking, and so forth. Machinery of a simple character run by water-power could be added when necessary.

In view of the uncertainty of her own future, and the opening up of the country, she wisely held back from deciding on a site until she knew more about the routes of the Government roads and the possible developments of districts. She wanted virgin land and good water-power, but she also desired what was still more important—a ready and sufficient market for the products. In her journeys into the interior of Ibibio she was constantly prospecting with the home in mind, and once a chief who thought he had found a suitable site took her into a region of more utter solitude than she had ever experienced in all her wanderings, where a path had to be cut for her through the matted vegetation. Not one of her guides would open his lips; while they feared the wild beasts and reptiles, they feared still more the spirits of the forest, and they remained silent in case speech might betray them to these invisible presences.

Being a European she could not, according to the law of the land, buy ground, but she proposed to acquire it in the name of Jean and the other girls, and then give the Mission a perpetual interest in it. In a report of her work on the Creek, which Miss Adam induced her to write at this time, in the shape of a personal letter to herself, and which appeared in the Record, and was characterised by masterly breadth of outlook and clear insight into the conditions of the country, she made a reference to the project, saying: “The expenditure of money is not in question—I am guarded against that by the express command of the Committee. I shall only expend my own, or what my personal friends give me.”

IX. A CHRISTMAS PARTY

With the few white men in the district she was very friendly. They were chiefly on the Government staff, and included the surveyors on the new road. Most of them were public-school men, and some, she thought, were almost too fine for the work. “Life,” she said, “is infinitely harder for these men than for the missionary. But they never complain. They work very cheerfully in depressing surroundings, living in squalid huts, and undergoing many privations, doing their bit for civilisation and the Empire. And they are all somebody’s bairns.” She won them by her sympathy, entering into their lives, appreciating their difficulties and temptations, and acting towards them as a wise mother would. Her

age, she said, gave her a chance others in the Mission had not, and she sought in the most tactful way to lead them to a consideration of the highest things.

Christmastide as a rule came and went in the bush without notice, except for a strange tightening of the heart, and a renewal of old memories. But this year, 1905, the spirit of the day seemed to fall upon these lonely white folk, and they forgathered at Ikotobong, and spent it in something like the home fashion. In a lowly shed, which had no front wall, and where the seats were of mud, no fewer than eight men—officials, engineers, and traders from far and near—sat down to dinner. “They could have gone elsewhere,” wrote “Ma,” “but they came and held an innocently happy day with an old woman, whose day for entertaining and pleasing is over.”

There was no lack of Christmas fare. An officer of high standing had received his usual plum-pudding from home, but as he was leaving on furlough, he sent it to “Ma”; a cake had come from Miss Wright, “the dear lassie at Okoyong,” and shortbread had arrived from Scotland. But there was not a drop of intoxicating drink on the table.

After dinner the old home songs and hymns full of memories and associations were sung, often tremulously, for each had loved ones of whom he thought. Jean, who had secured a canoe and come from Okpo, and the other children, were present, and they sang an Efik hymn; and although Mary was the only Scot present the proceedings were rounded off with “Auld Lang Syne.” “I just lay back and enjoyed it all,” she wrote. “It is fifteen years since I spent a Christmas like it. Wasn’t it good of my Father to give me such a treat? I was the happiest woman in the Mission that night! If I could only win these men for Christ—that would be the best reward for their kindness.” Next day they sent her a Christmas card on a huge sheet of surveying-paper, with their names in the centre.

Miss Wright, along with Miss Amess, a new colleague, arrived on the 30th on a visit, and three of the Public Works officials spent the evening with them. Mary began to talk as if it were the last night of the year. “Oh,” said one of the men, “we have another day in which to repent, Ma.” “Have we?” she replied. “I thought it was the last night—and I’ve been confessing my sins of the past year! I’ll have to do it all over again.” These officials asked the ladies to dine with them on New Year’s night, the form of invitation being—

“The Disgraces three desire the company of the Graces three to dinner this evening at seven o’clock, Lanterns and hammocks at 10 P.M. R.S.V.P.”

In reply “Ma” wrote some humorous verses. The dinner was given in the same native shed as before. As the table-boy passed the soup, one of the men made as if to begin. “Ma,” who was sitting beside him, put her hand on his and

said, "No, you don't, my boy, until the blessing is asked," and then she said grace. After dinner the bairns, who had been sitting at the door in the light of a big fire, were brought in, and prayers were conducted by Mary. On that occasion, when Miss Amess was bidding her "Goodbye," she said to her, "Lassie, keep up your pluck."

These men were very much afraid of the least appearance of cant, but they would do anything for "Ma"; and when, a few days later, in order to give an object-lesson to the natives, she proposed an English service, they agreed, and one of them read the lessons, and another led the singing. A short time before white men were unknown to the district.

X. MUTINOUS

She was, under official ruling, to return to Akpap in April 1906, and she was now reminded of the fact. She was in great distress, and inclined to be mutinous. "There is an impelling power behind me, and I dare not look backward," she said. "Even if it cost me my connection with the Church of my heart's love, I feel I must go forward." And again, "I am not enthusiastic over Church methods. I would not mind cutting the rope and going adrift with my bairns, and I can earn our bite and something more." She had thoughts of taking a post under Government, or, with the help of her girls, opening a store. In a letter to the Rev. William Stevenson, the Secretary of the Women's Foreign Mission Committee, she pointed out how her settlement at Itu had justified itself, and referred to the rapid development of the country:—

In all this how plainly God has been leading me. I had not a thought of such things in my lifetime, nor, indeed, in the next generation, and yet my steps have been led, apart from any plan of mine, right to the line of God's planning for the country. First Itu, then the Creek, then back from Aro, where I had set my heart, to a solitary wilderness of the most forbidding description, where the silence of the bush had never been broken, and here before three months are past there are miles of road, and miles and miles more all surveyed and being worked upon by gangs of men from everywhere, and free labour is being created and accepted as quickly as even a novelist could imagine. And the minutes say, "I am to return to Akpap in April!" Okoyong and its people are very dear to me. No place on earth now is quite as dear, but to leave these hordes of untamed, unwashed, unlovely savages and withdraw the little sunlight that has begun to flicker out over its darkness! I dare not think of it. Whether the Church permits it or not, I feel I must stay here and even go on farther as the roads are made. I cannot walk now, nor dare I do anything to trifle with my health, which is very queer now and then, but if the roads are all the easy gradient of those already made I can get four wheels made and set a box on them, and the children can draw me about. . . . With such facts pressing on me at every point you will understand my saying I dare not go back. I shall rather take the risk of finding my own chop if the Mission do not see their way to go on. But if they see their way to meet the new

needs and requirements, I shall do all in my power to further them without extra expense to the Church.

"This," she characteristically added, "is not for publication; it is for digestion."

There had never, of course, been any intention on the part of the Church to draw back from the task of evangelising the new regions. But the various bodies responsible for the work were stewards of the money contributed for foreign missions, and they had to proceed in this particular part of the field according to their resources. Both men and means were limited, and had to be adjusted to the needs, not in an impulsive and haphazard way, but with the utmost care and forethought. All connected with the Mission were as eager for extension as she was, but they desired it to be undertaken on thorough and business-like lines. The difference between them and her was one of method; she, all afire with energy and enthusiasm, would have gone on in faith; they, more prudent and calculating, wished to be sure of each step before they advanced another.

To her great relief she was permitted to have her way. When it was seen that she was bent on pressing forward, it was decided to set her free from ordinary trammels and allow her to act in future as a pioneer missionary. It was a remarkable position, one not without its difficulties and dangers, and one naturally that could not become common. But Mary Slessor was an exceptional woman, and it was to the honour of the Church that it at last realised the line of her genius, and in spite of being sometimes at variance with her policy, permitted her to follow her Master in her own fashion.

Her faith in the people and their own ability to support the work was proved more than once. It was a plucky thing for these men and women to become Christians, since it meant the entire recasting of their lives. Yet this is what was now being often witnessed. One event at Akani Obio was to her a "foretaste of heaven"—the baptism of the chief and his slave-wife and baby, a score of her people, and sixteen young boys and girls, including one of the lads who had assisted to paddle the canoe on the day when the Creek was first entered. She was ill, and was carried to and from the town in sharp pain and much discomfort, but she forgot her body in the rare pleasure she experienced at the sight of so many giving themselves to Christ. She had to hide her face on the communion-table. "Over forty sat down in the afternoon to remember our Lord's death 'till He come.' It cannot go back, this work of His. Akani Obio is now linked on to Calvary." She thought of those rejoicing above. "I am sure our Lord will never keep it from my mother."

The news from Arochuku was also cheering, although the messages told of persecution of the infant Church by the chiefs, who threatened to expel the teachers if they spoiled the old fashions. “And what did you say to that?” she enquired. “We replied, ‘You can put us out of our country, but you cannot put us away from God.’” “And the women?” “They said they would die for Jesus Christ.” She was anxious to visit Arochuku again, but there had been exceptional rains, and the Creek had risen beyond its usual height and flooded the villages. Akani Obio suffered greatly, the church being inundated. The chief was downcast, and in his simplicity of faith thought God was punishing him, and searched his heart to find the cause, until “Ma” comforted him. He determined to rebuild the church on higher ground, and this intention he carried out later. About a mile further up the Creek he chose a good site, and erected a new town called Obufa Obio, the first to be laid out on a regular plan. The main street is about forty yards wide, and in the middle of it is the chief’s house, with the church close by. The side streets are about ten yards wide. All the houses have lamps hanging in front, and these are lit in the evenings. The boys have a large football field to themselves. Chief Onoyom, who is one of the elders of session, continues to exercise a powerful influence for good throughout the Creek.

One incident of the floods greatly saddened Mary. A native family were sleeping in their hut, but above the waters. The mother woke suddenly at the sound of something splashing about below. Thinking it was some wild animal, she seized a machete and hacked at it. Her husband also obtained his sword and joined in. When lights came, the mangled form of the baby, who had fallen from the bed, was seen in the red water. Distracted at having murdered her child, the mother threw herself into the Creek and was drowned.

So convinced was Mary of the importance of Arochuku, and so anxious to have a recognised station there, that she offered to build a house free of expense to the Mission, if two agents could be sent up. This brought the whole matter of extension to a definite issue, and a forward movement was unanimously agreed on by the Council—the ladies being specially anxious for this—any developments to take place by the way of the Enyong Creek. A committee was appointed to visit Arochuku and to confer with Mary. Two ladies were actually appointed by the Council, one being Miss Martha Peacock, who was afterwards to be so closely allied with her. When these matters came before the Foreign Mission Committee in Scotland, a resolution was passed, which it is well to give in full:

1. That they recognise the general principle, that, in all ordinary circumstances the Women's Foreign Mission should not make the first advance into new territory, but follow the lead of the Foreign Mission Committee, the function of the former being to supply the necessary complement to the work of the latter.

2. That, however, in view of (a) the earnest desire of the people of the district in question to receive Christian teaching, and their willingness to help in providing it; (b) the fact that the region has been claimed by the United Free Church as within the sphere of its operations, and has had that claim acknowledged by the Church Missionary Society; (c) the steps which have already been taken by Miss Slessor, and what she is further prepared to do: they regard it as not only highly desirable, but the duty of the Church to occupy the region in question as soon as it is possible.

3. That in view, on the other hand, of the present condition of their funds, which are overtaxed by the already existing work, the Committee deeply regret that it is beyond their means to add two new members to the staff, as the Council requests, and that, therefore, the sending of two new agents to Arochuku must be meantime delayed.

4. That the Committee, however, approve of the acceptance by the Mission Council of Miss Slessor's generous offer to build the house, but recommend the Council to consider whether the execution of the work should not be delayed till there is a nearer prospect of new agents being supplied.

They further return thanks to Miss Slessor for her generosity, and record their warm appreciation of her brave pioneer work; and they express the earnest hope that the Church, by larger liberality, may soon enable them to make the advance which has been so well prepared.

Meanwhile the Rev. John Rankin had been given a roving commission in order to ascertain the best location for the future station, and he came back from a tour in Ibo and Ibibio and fired the Council with the tale of what he had seen, and the wonderful possibilities of this great and populous region.

"Close to Arochuku within a circle, the diameter of which is less than three miles, there are," he said, "nineteen large towns. I visited sixteen of these, each of which is larger than Creek Town. The people are a stalwart race, far in advance of Efik. The majority are very anxious for help. A section is strongly opposed, even to the point of persecution of those who are under the influence of Miss Slessor, and others have already begun to try to live in 'God's fashion.' This opposition seems to be one of the most hopeful signs, as proving that there will be at least no indifference. The head chief of all the Aros, who was the chief formerly in control of the 'long juju,' is one of those most favourable. He has already announced to the other chiefs his intention to rule in God's ways. He has been the most keen in asking the missionary to

come. A new church will be built, and he offers to build a house for any missionary who will come.”

With something like enthusiasm the Committee set apart Mr. Rankin himself to take up the work at Arochuku, and accepted the responsibility of sending him at once. . . .

Thus Arochuku, like Itu, passed into the control of the Foreign Mission Committee, and became one of their stations and the centre of further developments, and thus Miss Slessor’s long period of anxiety regarding its position and future was at an end.

XI. ON THE BENCH

Recognising that “Ma” had an influence with the natives, which it was impossible to abrogate, the Government decided to invest her with the powers of a magistrate.

The native courts of Nigeria consist of a number of leading chiefs in each district, who take turns to try cases between native and native. The District Commissioner is ex-officio president of those within his sphere, and each court is composed of a permanent vice-president and three chiefs.

Before leaving Itu she was asked informally whether she would consent to take the superintendence of Court affairs in the district, as she had done in Okoyong, but on a recognised basis. If she agreed, the Court would be transferred to Ikotobong to suit her convenience and safeguard her strength. She was pleased that the Government thought her worthy of the position, and was favourable to the idea. Already she was by common consent the chief arbiter in all disputes, and wielded unique power, but she thought that if she were also the official agent of the Government she might increase the range of her usefulness. Her aim was to help the poor and the oppressed, and specially to protect her own downtrodden sex and secure their rights, and to educate the people up to the Christian standard of conduct; and such an appointment would give her additional advantage and authority. “It will be a good chance,” she said, “to preach the Gospel, and to create confidence and inspire hope in these poor wretches, who fear white and black man alike; while it will neither hamper my work nor restrict my liberty.” On stating that she would do the work she was told that a salary was attached to the post, but she declared that nothing would induce her to accept it. “I’m born and bred, and am in every fibre of my being a voluntary.”

The formal offer came in May 1905, in the shape of this letter:

1. I am directed by His Excellency the High Commissioner to enquire whether you would accept office as a Member of Itu Native Court with the status of permanent Vice-President. His Excellency is desirous of securing the advantage of your experience and intimate knowledge of native affairs and sympathetic interest in the welfare of the villagers, and understands that you would not be averse to place your service at the disposal of the Government.

2. It is proposed to assign you a nominal salary of one pound a year, and to hand you the balance—forty-seven pounds per annum—for use in forwarding your Mission Work.

3. It is proposed to transfer Itu Court to Ikotobong.

She thanked the Government for the honour and for the confidence reposed in her, and said she was willing to give her services for the good of the people in any way, but she declined to accept any remuneration.

She took over the books in October, acting then and often afterwards as clerk, and carrying through all the tedious clerical duties. It was strange and terrible, but to her not unfamiliar work. She came face to face with the worst side of a low-down savage people, and dealt with the queerest of queer cases. One of the first was a murder charge in which a woman was involved. Women were indeed at the bottom of almost every mischief and palaver in the country. With marriage was mixed up poisoning, sacrifice, exactions, oaths, debts, and cruelty unspeakable. Mary was often sick with the loathing of it all. “God help these poor helpless women!” she wrote. “What a crowd of people I have had to-day, and how debased! They are just like brutes in regard to women. I have had a murder, an eséré case, a suicide, a man for branding his slave-wife all over her face and body; a man with a gun who has shot four persons—it is all horrible!”

Here are three specimen charges, and the results, in her own writing:—

FOR IMPRISONMENT

O. I. Found guilty of brawling in market and taking by force 8 rods from a woman's basket. One month's hard labour.

P. B. Chasing a girl into the bush with intent to injure. One month's hard labour.

U. A. (a) Seizing a woman in the market. (b) Chaining her for 14 days by neck and wrists. Throwing *mbiam* with intent to kill should she reveal it to white man. Sentenced to six months' hard labour, and to be sent back on expiry of sentence to pay costs.

She had the right of inflicting punishment up to six months' imprisonment, but often, instead of administering the law, she administered justice by giving the prisoner a blow on the side of the head!

The oath taken was usually the heathen mbiam. For this were needed a skull and a vile concoction in a bottle, that was kept outside the Court House on account of the smell. After a witness had promised to speak the truth, one of the members of the Court would take some of the stuff and draw it across his tongue and over his face, and touch his legs and arms. It was believed that if he spoke falsely he would die. After Miss Slessor took up her duties, a heathen native, who had clearly borne false witness, dropped down dead on leaving the Court, with the result that mbiam was in high repute for a time in the district.

Although three local chiefs sat by her side on the "bench," and the jury behind her, she ruled supreme. "I have seen her get up," says a Government official of that time, "and box the ears of a chief because he continued to interrupt after being warned to be quiet. The act caused the greatest amusement to the other chiefs." They often writhed under her new edicts regarding women, but they always acquiesced in her judgment. For not providing water for twin-mothers, she fined a town £3. Miss Amess tells of a poor woman wishing a divorce from her scamp of a husband, The "Court" evidently thought she had sufficient cause, and there and then granted the request, and asked her colleague to witness the act. The woman was triumphant, feeling very important at having two white people on her side, while the man stood trembling, as "Ma" expressed her candid opinion of him. In the Government report for 1907 it was stated that a number of summonses had been issued by the District Commissioner against husbands of twin-bearing women for desertion and support, and in every case the husbands agreed to take the women back, the sequel being that other women in the same plight were also received again into their families. "The result," says the report, "is a sign of the civilising influence worked through the Court by that admirable lady, Miss Slessor."

Some of her methods were not of the accepted judicial character. She would try a batch of men for an offence, lecture them, and then impose a fine. Finding they had no money she would take them up to the house and give them work to earn the amount, and feed them well. Needless to say they went back to their homes her devoted admirers. Her excuse for such irregular procedure was, that while they were working she could talk to them, and exercise an influence that might prove abiding in their lives. This was the motive animating all her actions in the Court. "When 'Ma' Slessor presided," it was said, "her Master was beside her, and His spirit guided her."

The Court was popular, for the natives had their tales heard at first hand, and not through an interpreter. "Ma's" complete mastery of their tongue, customs, habits, and very nature, gave her, of course, an exceptional advantage. One District Commissioner spent three days in trying a single case, hearing innumerable witnesses, without coming within sight of the truth. In despair he sought her aid, and she settled the whole dispute to the satisfaction of every one by asking two simple questions. It was impossible for any native to deceive her. A Government doctor had occasion to interview a chief through an interpreter. She was standing by. As the chief spoke she suddenly broke in, and the man simply crumpled up before her. The doctor afterwards asked her what the chief had done. "He told a lie, and I reprimanded him—but I cannot understand how he could possibly expect me not to know." Again and again she reverted to the matter. "To think he could have expected to deceive me!" Another official tells how a tall, well-built, muscular chief cowered before her. "Having no knowledge of the language, I could not tell what it was all about, but plainly the man looked as if his very soul had been laid bare, and as though he wished the earth would open and swallow him. She combined most happily kindness and severity, and indeed I cannot imagine any native trying to take advantage of her kindness and of her greathearted love for the people. This is the more remarkable to any one with intimate personal acquaintance with the native, and of his readiness to regard kindness as weakness or softness, and his endeavour to exploit it to the utmost."

All this Court business added to her toil, as a constant stream of people came to her at the Mission House in connection with their cases. She did not, however, see them all. It became her practice to sit in a room writing at her desk or reading, and send the girls to obtain the salient features of the story. They knew how to question, and what facts to take to her, and she sent them back with directions as to what should be done. When she was ill and feeble she extended this practice to other palavers. People still came from great distances to secure her ruling on some knotty dispute, and having had their statements conveyed to her, she would either give the reply through the girls, or speak out of the open window, and the deputation would depart satisfied, and act on her advice. Her correspondence also increased in volume, and she received many a curious communication. The natives would sometimes be puzzled how to address her, and to make absolutely sure they would send their letters to "Madam, Mr., Miss, Slessor."

XII. A VISITOR'S NOTES

A pleasant glimpse of her at this time is given in some notes by Miss Amess. On Miss Wright going home—she shortly afterwards married Dr. Rattray of the Mission staff, both subsequently settling in England—Miss Amess was not permitted to stay alone in Okoyong, and she asked to be associated with Miss Slessor at Ikotobong. It was a happy arrangement for the latter. “What a relief it is,” she wrote, “to have some one to lean on and share the responsibility of the bairns. Miss Amess is so sane and capable and helpful, and is always on the watch to do what is to be done—a dear consecrated lassie.” Miss Amess says:

When I went to Calabar I heard a great deal about Miss Slessor, and naturally I wished to see her. She had been so courageous that I imagined she must be somewhat masculine, with a very commanding appearance, but I was pleasantly disappointed when I found she was a true woman, with a heart full of motherly affection. Her welcome was the heartiest I received. Her originality, brightness, and almost girlish spirit fascinated me. One could not be long in her company without enjoying a right hearty laugh. As her semi-native house was just finished, and she always did with the minimum of furniture and culinary articles, the Council authorised me to take a filter, dishes, and cooking utensils from Akpap, and I had also provision cases and personal luggage. I was not sure of what “Ma” would say about sixteen loads arriving, because there were no wardrobes or presses, and one had just to live in one’s boxes. When “Ma” saw the filter she said, “Ye maun a’ hae yer filters noo-a-days. Filters werna created; they were an after-thocht.” She quite approved of my having it all the same.

Mail day was always a red-letter day. We only got letters fortnightly then. She was always interested in my home news and told me hers, so that we had generally a very happy hour together. Then the papers would be read and their contents discussed. To be with her was an education. She had such a complete grasp of all that was going on in the world. One day after studying Efik for two hours she said to me, “Lassie, you have had enough of that to-day; go away and read a novel for a short time.”

She was very childlike with her bairns and dearly loved them. One night I had to share her bed, and during the night felt her clapping me on the shoulder. I think she had been so used with black babies that this was the force of habit, for she was amused when I told her of it in the morning.

There was no routine with “Ma.” One never knew what she would be doing. One hour she might be having a political discussion with a District Commissioner, the next supervising the building of a house, and later on judging native palavers. Late one evening I heard a good deal of talking and also the sound of working. I went in to see what was doing and there was “Ma” making cement and the bairns spreading it on the floor with their hands in candle light. The whole scene at so late an hour was too much for my gravity.

When at prayers with her children she would sometimes play a tambourine at the singing, and if the bairns were half asleep it struck their curly heads instead of her elbow.

Her outstanding characteristic was her great sympathy, which enabled her to get into touch with the highest and the lowest. Once while cycling together we met the Provincial Commissioner. After salutations and some conversation with him she finished up by saying, “Good-bye, and see and be a guid laddie!”

While out walking one Sabbath we came across several booths where the natives who were making the Government road were living. She began chatting with them, and then told them the

Parable of the Lost Sheep. She told everything in a graphic way, and with a perfect knowledge of the vernacular, and they followed her with reverence and intense interest all through. To most of them, if not to all, that would be the first time they had heard of a God of Love.

She had really two personalities. In the morning one would hear evildoers getting hotly lectured for their "fashions," and in the evening when all was quiet she lifted one up to the very heights regarding the things of the Kingdom. She always had a wonderful vision of what the power of the Gospel could make of the most degraded, though bound by the strongest chains of superstition and heathenism. One might enter her house feeling pessimistic, but one always left it an optimist.

XIII. A REST-HOME

A touch of romance seemed to be connected with all her work. The next idea she sought to develop was a Rest-House or week-end, holiday, or convalescent home, where the ladies of the Mission, when out of spirits, or run down in health, could reside and recuperate without the fear of being a trouble or expense to others. In a tropical country, where a change and rest is so often essential to white workers, such a quiet accessible resort would, she thought, prove a blessing. But there was no money for the purpose. One day, however, she received a cheque for £20. Years before, in Okoyong, Dr. Dutton of the Tropical School of Medicine had stayed with her for scientific study. He went on to the Congo, and there succumbed. On going over his papers, his family found her letters, and in recognition of her kindness and interest, sent her a gift of £20. Thinking of a way of spending the money which would have pleased her friend, she determined to apply it to the building of her Rest-House.

The site for such a resort required to be near the Creek, and she discovered one on high land at Use between Ikotobong and Itu, and two miles from the landing-beach. The road here winds round hills from which beautiful views are obtained. On this side one sees far into Ibo beyond Arochuku, on that the vision is of Itu and the country behind it, while on the west the palm-covered plain rises into the highlands of Ikot Ekpene. It is one of the fairest of landscapes, but is the haunt of leopards and other wild beasts, and after rain the roadway is often covered with the marks of their feet.

The ground was cleared, and building operations begun, the plan worked out being a small semi-European cottage and native yard. Other cottages would follow. Before long, however, the feeling grew that Ikotobong should be taken over by the Women's Foreign Mission Committee, and she foresaw that Use would require to be her own headquarters.

Towards the end of the year Miss E. M'Kinney, one of the lady agents, called at Use, and found her living in a single room, and sleeping on a mattress

placed upon a sheet of corrugated iron. As the visitor had to leave early in the morning, and there were no clocks in the hut, "Ma" adopted the novel device of tying a rooster to her bed. The plan succeeded; at first cock-crow the sleepers were aroused from their slumbers.

It was not so much a rest-house for others that was needed, as a rest for herself. She was gradually coming to the end of her strength. Throughout the year 1906 she suffered from diarrhoea, boils, and other weakening complaints, and the Government doctor at last frankly told her that if she wished to live and work another day, she must go home at once. Her answer to his fiat was to Tally in a wonderful way. "It looks," she said "as if God 'has forbidden my going. Does this appear as if He could not do without me? Oh, dear me, poor old lady, how little you can do! But I can at least keep a door open." It was, however, only a respite. By the beginning of 1907 she could not walk half-a-dozen steps, her limbs refused to move, and she needed to be carried about. It was obvious, even to herself, that she must go home. Home! the very word brought tears to her eyes. The passion for the old land and "kent" faces, and the graves of her beloved, grew with her failing power. A home picture made her heart leap and long. "Oh, the dear homeland," she cried, "shall I really be there and worship in its churches again! How I long for a wee look at a winter landscape, to feel the cold wind, and see the frost in the cart-ruts, to hear the ring of shoes on the hard frozen ground, to see the glare of the shops, and the hurrying scurrying crowd, to take a back seat in a church, and hear without a care of my own the congregation singing, and hear how they preach and pray and rest their souls in the hush and solemnity."

She arranged to leave in May, and set about putting her household affairs in order. The safeguarding of the children gave her much solicitude. For Jean and the older girls she trembled. "They must be left in charge of the babies, with only God to protect them." Dan, now six years old, she took with her as a help to fetch and carry. Her departure and journey were made wonderfully easy by the kindness of Government officials, who vied with each other in taking care of her and making her comfortable. One of her friends, Mr. Grey, packed for her, stored her furniture, conveyed her to Duke Town, and asked his sister in Edinburgh to meet her. Mr. Middleton, of Lagos, wrote to say he was going home, and would wait for her in order to "convoy her safely through all the foreign countries between Lagos and the other side of the Tweed." "Now there," she wrote to the Wilkies—"Doth Job serve God for nought?" Very grateful she was for all the attention. "God must repay these men," she said, "for I cannot. He will not forget they did it to a child of His, unworthy though she is." After the voyage she wrote: "Mr. Middleton has faithfully and very tenderly carried

out all his promises. Had I been his mother, he could not have been more attentive or kind."

XIV. SCOTLAND: THE LAST FAREWELL

A telegram to Mrs. M'Crindle at Joppa informed her that her friend had arrived at Liverpool and was on the way to Edinburgh. She met the train, and saw an old, wrinkled lady huddled in a corner of a carriage. Could that be Miss Slessor? With a pitying hand she helped her out and conveyed her, with Dan, to the comfort of her home.

But soon letters, postcards, invitations, parcels began flowing in. "This correspondence," she wrote, "is overwhelming. I cannot keep pace with it." There was no end to the kindness which people showered upon her. Gifts of flowers, clothes, and money for herself and her work, and toys for Dan were her daily portion. "It is a wonderful service this," she said, "which makes the heart leap to do His will, and it is all unknown to the nearest neighbour or the dearest friend, but it keeps the Kingdom of Heaven coming every day anew on the earth." One £5 was slipped into her hand for her bairns. "My bairns don't require it," she replied, "and won't get it either, but it is put aside, till I see the Board, as the nest-egg of my Home for Girls and Women in Calabar. If I can get them to give the woman or women, I shall give half of my salary to help hers, and will give the house and find the servants, and I can find the passage money from personal friends. Pray that the Board may dare to go on in faith, and take up this work."

Between spells of colds and fevers she visited friends. At Bowden again she had the exquisite experience of enjoying utter rest and happiness. A pleasant stay was at Stanley, with the family of Miss Amess, who was also at home, and with whom she rose early in the morning and went out cycling. She cycled also with Miss Logie at Newport, but was very timid on the road. If she saw a dog in front she would dismount, and remount after she had passed it. She went over to Dundee and roamed through her former haunts with an old factory companion, looking wistfully at the scenes of her girlhood.

"I have been gladdened," she wrote to an English friend, "at finding many of those I taught in young days walking in the fear and love of God, and many are heads of families who are a strength and ornament to the Church of Christ. About thirty-five or thirty-eight years ago three ladies and myself began to work in a dreadful district—one became a district nurse, one worked among the fallen women and the prisons of our cities, and one has been at home working quietly—and we all met in good health and had such a day together. We went up the old roads and

talked of all God had done for us and for the people, and again dedicated ourselves to Him. It was probably the last time we shall meet down here, but we were glad in the hope of eternity."

She had not been in Scotland since the Union of the Churches, and one of her first duties was to call upon Mr. Stevenson, the Secretary of the Women's Foreign Mission Committee, and his assistant, Miss Crawford. She had a high sense of the value of the work going on at headquarters, and always maintained that the task of organising at home was much harder than service in the field. But she had a natural aversion to officialdom, and anticipated the interviews with dread. She pictured two cold, unsympathetic individuals--a conception afterwards recalled with amusement. What the reality was may be gathered from a letter she wrote later to Mr. Stevenson: "I have never felt much at home with our new conditions, and feared the result of the Union in its detail, though I most heartily approved of it in theory and fact. No! I shall not be afraid of you. Both Miss Crawford and yourself have been a revelation to me, and I am ashamed of my former fancies and fears, and I shall ever think of, and pray for, the secretaries with a very warm and thankful heart."

There was an element of humour in her meeting with Miss Crawford. The two women, somewhat nervous, stood on opposite sides of the office door. She, without, was afraid to enter, shrinking from the task of facing the unknown personage within—a woman who had been in India and written a book, and was sure to be masculine and hard! She, within, of gentle face and soft speech, leant timidly on her desk, nerving herself for the coming shock, for the famous pioneer missionary was sure to be "difficult" and aggressive. When Mary entered they glanced at one another, looked into each other's eyes, and with a sigh of relief smiled and straightway fell in love. When Mary gave her affection she gave it with a passionate abandon, and Miss Crawford was taken into the inmost sanctuary of her heart. "You have been one of God's most precious gifts to me on this furlough," she said later. In her humility Miss Crawford spoke about not being worthy to tie her shoe. "Dear daughter of the King," exclaimed the missionary, "why do you say that? If you knew me as God does! Never say that kind of thing again!"

The ordeal of meeting the Women's Foreign Mission Committee was also a disillusionment. Her friend, Dr. Robson, was in the chair, and his opening prayer was an inspiration, and lifted the proceedings to the highest level. Nothing could have been kinder than her reception, which delighted her greatly. "There was such a sympathetic hearing for Calabar, especially from the old Free Church section, who are as eager for the Mission as the old United Presbyterians." A conference was held with her in regard to the position of Ikotobong,

and her heart was gladdened by the decision to take over the station and place two lady missionaries there, Miss Peacock and Miss Reid. At another conference with a sub-committee she discussed the matter of the Settlement, gave an outline of her plans, and intimated that already two ladies had offered £100 each to start the enterprise, while other sums were also on hand. The sub-committee was much impressed with the sense of both the necessity and promise of the scheme, and recommended the Women's Committee to express general approval of it, and earnest sympathy with the end in view, and to authorise her to take the necessary steps on her return for the selection of a suitable site, the preparation of plans, and estimates of the cost of the ground, buildings, and agents, in order that the whole scheme might be submitted through the Mission Council, at the earliest practicable date, for sanction. The general Committee unanimously and cordially adopted this recommendation.

It was expected that she would address many meetings throughout the country during her furlough to interest people in her work and projects, but she astonished every one by intimating that she was leaving for Calabar in October, although she had only been a few months at home. In her eyes friends saw a look of sorrow, and said to one another that the burden of the work was lying upon her heart. But few knew the secret of her sadness. To some who remonstrated she said, "My heart yearns for my bairns—they are more to me than myself." The truth was that a story about Jean had been set afloat by a native and had reached her in letters, and she could hardly contain herself until she had found out the meaning of it. At all costs she must get back. Even her pilgrimage to the graves of her dear ones in Devon must be given up.

Much against her will and pleading she was tied down to give at least three addresses in the great towns, but with her whole being unhinged by the shadow that overhung her, she had little mind for public speaking. Her old nervousness in the face of an audience returned with tenfold force. "I am trembling for the meetings," she wrote, "but surely God will help me. It is His own cause." And again, "I am suffering tortures of fear, and yet why is it that I cannot rest in Him? If He sends me work, surely He will help me to deliver His message, and to do it for His glory. He never failed me before. If He be glorified that is all, whether I be considered able or not."

She never prepared a set speech, and when she was going up to the Edinburgh meeting with Mrs. M'Crindle, she turned to her and said, "What am I to say?" "Just open your lips and let God speak," replied her friend. She was greatly pleased with the answer, and on that occasion she never spoke better. Dr. Robson presided, and Mrs. Duncan M'Laren, in bidding her farewell on behalf of the audience, said, "There are times when it needs God-given vision

to see the guiding hand. We feel that our friend has this heavenly vision, and that she has not been disobedient to it. We all feel humbled when we hear what she and her brave colleagues have done. In God's keeping we may safely leave her."

At the meeting in Glasgow the feeling was even more tense and emotional, and a hush came over the audience as the plain little woman made her appeal, and told them that in all probability she would never again be back. At the benediction she stood, a pathetic figure, her head drooping, her whole attitude one of utter weariness.

On the eve of her departure she was staying with friends. At night they went into her room and found her weeping quietly in bed. They tried to comfort her, and she said half-whimsically that she had been overcome by the feeling that she was homeless and without kith and kin in her own country. "I'm a poor solitary with only memories."

"But you have troops of friends—you have us all—we all love you." "Yes, I ken, and I am grateful," she replied, "but"—wistfully—"it's just that I've none of my ain folk to say good-bye to."

She was very tired when she left. "I'm hardly myself in this country," she said. "It has too many things, and it is always in such a hurry. I lose my head." Again kind hands eased her way, and settled her on the steamer. Dan was inconsolable, and wept to be taken back to Joppa.

The voyage gave her a new lease of life. The quietness and peace and meditation, the warm sunshine and the breezes, the loveliness of the sky and sea, rested and healed her. This, despite the conduct of some wild passengers bound for the gold-mines. One day she rose and left the table by way of protest, but in the end they bade her a kindly good-bye, and listened to her advice. At Lagos the Governor sent off his aide-de-camp with greetings, and a case of milk for the children. Mr. Grey also appeared and escorted her to Calabar. "Am I not a privileged and happy woman?" she wrote to his sister.

The same note of gratitude filled a letter which she wrote on board to Dr. Robson, asking him to put a few lines in the Record thanking every one for their kindness, as it was impossible to answer all the letters she had received. The letter itself was inserted, and we give the concluding paragraph:

To all who have received me into their homes, and given me a share of what are the most sacred things of earth, I give heartfelt thanks. What the Bethany house must have been to our Lord, no one can better appreciate than the missionary coming home to a strange place, homeless. I thank all those who have rested me, and nursed me back to health and strength, and who have nerved me for future service by the sweet ministries and hallowing influences of their home life. To the members of the Mission Board for their courtesy, their confidence, and sym-

pathetic helpfulness, I owe much gratitude. And not only for services which can be tabulated, but for the whole atmosphere of sympathy which has surrounded me; for the hand-clasps which have spoken volumes; for the looks of love which have beamed from eyes soft with feeling; for the prayer which has upheld and guided in days gone by, and on which I count for strength in days to come; for all I pray that God may say to each giving, sympathetic heart, "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto Me."

She was praying all the while for her bairn. On her arrival, as fast as boat would take her, she sped up to Use. The chiefs and people came crowding to welcome her, bringing lavish gifts of food—yams and salt and fish and fowl. There were even fifty yams, and a goat from the back of Okoyong. Dan with his English clothes was the centre of admiration, and grave greybeards sat and listened to the ticking of his watch, and played with his toy train. . . .

To her unspeakable relief she found the story about Jean to be a native lie. She was too grateful to be angry.