Nigerian Pioneer:

The Story of Mary Slessor

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By Ronald Syme
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(Editor's note on AGE RATING: This book summary is for JETTs and up [as it is advertised in *Xn*]. Sensitive readers and parents, please be warned that a few heavy things are briefly touched on throughout the story, because of the savagery that the tribal people were involved in, that Mary had to confront [i.e., cannibalism and murder of twin babies]. However, leaving these mentions in increases the testimony of Mary Slessor's life one hundred fold, as her pioneering efforts ended these practices after she brought the natives the Gospel. If you're a parent, please take time to pre-read and edit out anything that might negatively affect your JETTs.

(Please be sure to hear from the Lord personally before reading this. When asking the Lord for a general confirmation on posting this book summary, He gave a few words of introduction:)

(Jesus speaking:) This will be very interesting, especially for the Family in Africa. I did tell you to remember Mary Slessor, and this is a fascinating and detailed study of her life. It's unfortunate that the writer—who wrote biographies about all sorts of people—didn't highlight enough Mary's love for Me and how she relied upon My strength and help daily, how her prayer life was strong, and also that even though she appeared plucky and fearless, this was only because of her simple and pure faith in My strength and fearlessness.

The one danger with this summary is that people will think Mary Slessor was some kind of out-of-this-world person and put her on a pedestal and get discouraged that they couldn't possibly do so many wonderful, outstanding, brave things, or face the same kind of odds and challenges. But the point to keep remembering throughout the story is that she did **not** set herself up on a pedestal. She was a simple mill girl with no formal education, and she had her weaknesses and faults. But her determination and perseverance and love for a challenge are the things you should take away with you and be inspired by. Don't forget, too, that you can ask for spirit helpers like her, or even Mary Slessor herself, when you're faced with daunting challenges on the mission field.

Most of all, remind yourself that with the new weapons, your closer relationship with Me, the New Wine, and now the Word Revolution of 2003, you have all the strength and bravery and fortitude and pluck you need, right at your fingertips. It's there for the asking, for My hand is not shortened that it cannot save. So be encouraged and inspired that you have fellow Christians like Mary Slessor up here rooting you on, praying for you, and oh-so-eager to jump in and lend a hand when you might need it. (End of prophecy.)

"I owe you many thanks for that kind—far too kind—letter you sent just at the time I needed it badly to cheer me up! Never mind though all you say in it misses the mark by a long way, for that's not Mary Slessor on the pedestal you set up! It's a creation of your own; nevertheless, tho' I can't lay claim to it, I can aspire to be the sort of being it pictures…"

—Mary Slessor, February 1906 (at the age of 58), in a letter to District Commissioner and friend Charles Partridge.

Note

I first came across the name of Miss Mary Mitchell Slessor when I was in West Africa on a visit more than twenty years ago. The little pioneer woman missionary had become a famous legend by that time, and elderly natives still referred to her in voices filled with awe and amazement.

Said one Nigerian police sergeant, "It is said that she understood us better than we understand ourselves. She was the only white person who has ever lived the way we do, eating our food, living in native houses, and often going barefoot in the jungle."

He then added, apparently as a sudden after-thought, the most illuminating remark of all. "Ma Slessor didn't stand on a hilltop and preach down to us; she came and lived among our people and *showed* them what was right and what was wrong."

When it came to writing this book, I was confronted by the fact that material regarding Mary Slessor was very limited and difficult to trace. As far as I know, the only biography of her was *Mary Slessor of Calabar* by W.P. Livingstone. The book was published in London in 1915 and it took me several years to find a copy. Further information eventually came to light in the archives of the British Colonial Office (now the Commonwealth Relations Office). Other useful sources were provided by the British Museum's file copies of *The Woman's Missionary Magazine* and *The Missionary Record*, both of which contain many letters and articles written by Miss Slessor. As far as the historical and ethnographic background of West Africa, I consulted several works. [**Editor's note**: Works are listed in the original book.]

Ronald Syme

Chapter One: THE MILL GIRL

The Scottish industrial city of Dundee was a grim, cheerless place in that year of 1865. On its outskirts stood the gaunt, gray spinning mills from which the city derived much of its wealth. Life in those factories was hard and monotonous. The hours of the workers

were from six in the morning to six in the evening, with one hour off for breakfast and one for dinner, six days a week.

At the age of eleven Mary Slessor had begun to earn her livelihood in one of these factories. At fourteen she had become an expert, "well paid" worker. For sixty hours every week she stood in a vast, ill-ventilated room where steam-driven belts whirred, looms clattered, and the air was filled with a din so continuous that speech was completely impossible. Every Saturday evening she took home her week's wages. The money usually came to just under three dollars.

She was born in 1848, the second of seven children. Her father, Robert Slessor, was a shoemaker, and her mother was described by those who knew her as a sweet-faced, quiet, rather shy woman, who was a great churchgoer.

Mary had left school at eleven, knowing little more than how to read and write. However, she loved reading. Books were hard to come by, and too expensive to buy with the precious pennies that could be saved. About the only literature she could find was a battered copy of the Bible and a freely distributed church publication called *The Monthly Visitor*.

In those days the British people were ardently supporting missionary work throughout Africa. Each issue of *The Monthly Visitor* contained a whole page devoted to the work of some missionary or other in various remote corners of the African continent. The articles were generally illustrated by a very necessary map. Mary carefully collected these rough and rather clumsily printed maps, and by constant reference to them she gradually became familiar with the whole coastline of Africa and several parts of the interior as well.

In Mary's collection of flimsy newspaper maps was one of West Africa. As a child she had noticed a coastal district named Calabar. Mary knew nothing about Calabar, or how its people lived. But, even

as she grew older, the name Calabar still remained firmly fixed in her mind.

The United Presbyterian Church, to which Mary belonged, had missions in India, China, Japan, and several parts of Africa. It was pioneer work, and the missionaries always seemed to be in the midst of adventure and peril. The colorful letters they wrote home were wonderfully interesting to the simple Scots people, who crowded into mission halls to hear them read out.

The day arrived when a missionary from Calabar came to speak in Mary's own church club.

Calabar, in those days, was just about as unpleasant a spot as one could find anywhere in Africa. The native population, said the missionary, was considered to be the most degraded of any in Africa. To the north they were shut in by the more civilized and warlike tribes who inhabited the fringe of the Sahara and Sudan, and to the southern side they were hemmed in by the sea.

"While much of the coastal area with which I am acquainted is beautiful," said the missionary, "Calabar must be considered one of the most unhealthy places in the world. ... there is no law or justice as we know such things. ... Calabar remains a mysterious and terrible land, ruled by witchcraft and fanatical secret societies. Skulls are often worshipped; human sacrifices are made to debased heathen gods; guilt is decided by an ordeal of poison or boiling oil. Scores of people are murdered whenever a chief dies, and his wives are strangled so they can keep him company in the spirit world. Twin children are always killed at birth (due to superstitions), and their mother is banished to the wilds of the forest. It is a land of disease and fever and death."

The Dundee audience shook their heads with gloomy horror. They filed out into the darkness of the street, wondering dismally to one another how the little Calabar mission, supported by the modest contributions of humble Scottish workers like themselves, could ever make any progress in such a country.

Mary remained seated in the hall until the last members of the audience had departed. She had reached a sudden decision, and was determined to act on it right away. A certain Mr. Logie, who belonged to the Foreign Mission Committee, was still talking to the missionary who had delivered the lecture. Waiting until they had finished, Mary walked forward.

"Mr. Logie," she said, "I'd like to volunteer for missionary work in Calabar."

Chapter Two: THE COAST OF CALABAR

It was September in the year 1876 when Mary Slessor, now twenty-eight years old, sailed for Africa on the SS *Ethiopia*. The conditions and climate of Calabar were becoming well known among missionary workers. Few of them were willing to go to the west coast of Africa.

The voyage to Africa was a wonderful experience for anyone whose life had hitherto been spent in narrow, overcrowded streets and among the clattering belts of spinning factories. As the *Ethiopia* left the gray climate of England and entered a region of blue skies and warm breezes, Mary's enthusiasm rose. Leaning over the bow of the *Ethiopia*, she eagerly gazed at the distant African coastline, where giant surf burst on white beaches.

Out of the sunlit waters of the clean Atlantic the *Ethiopia* swung northward into the muddy, dank-smelling estuary of the Cross and Calabar Rivers. From bank to bank it was about twelve miles wide, and dotted with islands. Now the African interior began to close around the slowly moving vessel.

Some fifty miles from the sea the *Ethiopia* altered course a few points to the east and entered the narrower Calabar River. The vessel dropped anchor near Duke Town, the principal port for all Calabar, about which Mary wrote:

I don't think a worse site for a town could have been chosen along that whole reach of river. They could at least have built their mud-walled houses with the

palm-thatched roofs on top of one of the nearby cliffs. Instead, someone had planted it down in the middle of a swamp. In the rainy season much of the town was flooded, and it never seemed to dry out properly before the next flood came along. Everything was damp; blue mold grew on clothing overnight; and the whole place had an all-pervading smell of waterlogged clay blended with palm oil.

The site for the Scottish mission house had been chosen with a more cautious eye to health. It stood on a low hill, which overlooked the miserable huddle of huts and trading stores and rickety wooden wharves that comprised Duke Town.

After thirty years' work in Calabar, the mission did not have a great deal to show outwardly for all the work it had done. There were four white missionaries, one native missionary, and four women teachers. Their total congregation numbered 174.

Over a thousand people came to the Sunday services, however. They enjoyed watching the harmonium* being played and hearing hymns sung in their own language. Most of them went to sleep when the sermon began. [*type of organ: a type of organ in which a pair of bellows operated by the player's feet blow air into the reeds to produce sound.]

Mary's task was to teach the day school on Mission Hill, which was attended by some thirty native boys and girls. Before long, however, she began to realize two things very clearly. First, there was no central government in Calabar. Serious disputes were referred to the local chiefs, and a number of these chiefs were in the habit of asking the Scottish missionaries for advice and guidance. Without a single policeman or magistrate or any other paid official, the mission had managed to introduce a fair amount of law and order in and around Duke Town. Second, only a day's journey from Duke Town, bloodshed, human sacrifice, slavery, and murder flourished unchecked.

With two or three timid native companions from the mission, Mary started making long tours in these dangerous outer districts. Most of the way led through tropical bush. There were steep hillsides to be

climbed, rivers to be waded or swum, and swamps to be traversed. In the villages children ran away screaming with fright at the sight of a woman with a white face. Most of their mothers also took to the bush. A few of the braver ones crowded around Mary to touch her clothing, finger her straight brown hair, and examine the shoes she was wearing.

The shocking conditions Mary saw in these villages made her reflect that it was time the mission began to spread its teaching and influence over a greater area of Calabar. She became accustomed to sleeping in filthy huts filled with skulls, magic charms, and empty gin bottles.

Spirits were cheap, and could be obtained in unlimited quantity in exchange for palm oil or ivory or a pinch of gold dust. Not only did the men get drunk regularly, but so did the women and sometimes the children. When they were in this condition, villagers often began terrible fights in which guns, swords, and spears were used indiscriminately. There was no local hospital or even medical dresser where the people could have their wounds or other forms of illness treated.

European women in those days—even women missionaries—were not expected to paddle canoes, act as peacemakers at intertribal fights, or practice medicine and simple surgery on fierce savages. Mary was doing all these things, and even appeared to enjoy them. Moreover, soon she learned three or four of the local dialects and spoke them, so it was said, with greater fluency than the natives themselves. But what shocked the other good missionaries more than anything else was the fact that Mary had become accustomed to eating all kinds of African foods. She could sit down in a native hut to a meal that would have turned the stomach of any other European. The mission principals, although aware that Mary's salary amounted to only $200 a year, did not know that she was allocating half of this amount to her mother. The remaining children in her family had died by this time, and Mary was the last one left to support her aging and infirm parent (her father had also died

already, of alcoholism). A pittance of $100 a year was not enough to allow her to buy European food.

"I am now going to a new tribe up-country, a fierce and cruel people, and everyone tells me that they will kill me. But I don't fear any hurt—only to combat their savage customs will require courage and firmness on my part."

Thus Mary wrote triumphantly in a letter to a friend in the year 1888. She was now forty years old. For twelve years she had been pleading with the mission to be sent up-country, and her Scottish obstinacy had at last worn down the opposition. She had been given reluctant permission to establish her own mission station in Okoyong territory.

The Okoyong tribe were taller and more muscular, had bolder noses and more fearless eyes, and were of a proud and independent nature. They were also the worst heathens in the whole of West Africa. They practiced twin murder with even fiercer zeal than the people did in Calabar. Child life in Okoyong was of little value. The only articles of commerce in which people were interested were spirits, guns, and chains.

A few years before a European missionary had tried to settle in the district. He had been seized and held as a prisoner until a ransom could be paid in casks of gin. Being an enterprising man, however, he had contrived to escape and make his way back to Calabar on foot. After that a native missionary was sent to Okoyong. He lasted three months in the territory before a murderous gun battle in his village sent him hurrying back to Duke Town.

This was the area that Mary Slessor had pleaded for twelve years to be sent.

She started off from Duke Town in an imposing manner. A friendly old local chief, known as King Eyo, loaned her his royal canoe for the journey up the Calabar River. It was a vessel nearly thirty feet in length. Amidships stood a little arched cabin, consisting

of a bamboo frame covered with palm branches. Twenty natives, sitting side by side in pairs, were ready to paddle the canoe upstream.

"I wish you weren't going, Miss Slessor," said one of the English traders in Duke Town, when he came to watch her departure. "There's no power on earth that'll subdue those Okoyong madmen except a military expedition and a gunboat."

Chapter Three: THE LAND OF TERROR

Mary had decided to make her headquarters at a place called Ekenge, which lay four miles inland from the river.

"We must leave you here if you really wish to remain," the steersman said regretfully. "We dare not set foot ashore. Indeed, we will paddle downstream all night, because our lives will be safer away from here."

Mary stepped ashore. With her went several homeless native children, whom she had taken under wing at various times in the past. This forlorn little procession set off along the broad, well-defined trail that led to Ekenge.

First came a boy about eleven years of age, bearing on his head a box containing tea, sugar, and bread. Behind him walked another boy, eight years old, weeping loudly with exhaustion, bearing a kettle and some cooking pots. Close at his heels trotted a little girl of five, who was also crying. By the hand she held a still smaller boy of three. Last of all came sturdy, fearless Mary Slessor herself. She carried a bundle slung from one arm, and astride her shoulders sat a baby girl. In order to cheer up the children who walked with her, she was singing English nursery songs, which she had translated into the native language.

When they emerged from the forest into the village clearing, they found the whole place in darkness and apparently deserted. Presently, however, two slave women crept out of the shadows.

"Our chief's mother died at another village this morning," they told Mary. "All the people have gone to the funeral rites."

They led her to an empty hut. There Mary lit a little spirit stove she had brought with her and made tea. After the children had eaten, Mary changed their wet clothes and put them to sleep.

"As I went to sleep," she recalled later, "I kept remembering the verse from the Bible: 'He took a little child and set him in the midst.'"

After the funeral the men returned for a short while only, then left again on an expedition of revenge against some of the mourners, with whom they had quarreled. There was much fighting. When the war party at last returned, several men were missing and others were displaying wounds.

Meanwhile, Mary had been moving quietly around the village, making friends with the women, practicing her medical skill, and looking after the children. Several of the warriors gruffly asked her to patch up their injuries.

She spent almost a whole day sewing up great cuts and gashes and extracting bullets. The grim-faced patients courageously withstood the pain of having their injuries dressed, and went off without a word of thanks. But next morning they showed their gratitude in a surprising and unexpected way.

There had been another dispute during the night, and an unfortunate young slave was accused of practicing sorcery. The witch doctor himself—"an evil-looking old body, dressed in mostly filthy snakeskins and monkey fur," as Mary described him—had pronounced the young man guilty.

The village chieftain decreed that the slave must die. He was brought out in irons to the place of execution. At that moment Mary stepped forward and placed herself in front of the wretched man. "Let him live," she declared. "It is wrong to kill one man merely on the word of another."

There came a roar of fury from t he crowd. "You are only a guest in our village," they howled. "What right have you to interfere with our customs?"

"Your customs are very bad ones indeed," Mary replied calmly. "I have come to teach you better ones."

They fell silent and stared at her in astonishment. Some of the men she had treated began to murmur approval.

"Away with you!" said Mary, smiling broadly and making a shooing gesture with her hands. "I don't doubt some of you will want to punish this poor fellow, but there'll be no killing him."

"Very well," said the witch doctor grumpily. "We will spare his live on this one occasion. But he must be beaten very hard so that he will make no more sorcery."

Mary realized she had gone as far as she dared. "Beat him if you must," she said, "and bring him to me afterward so that I may cure his wounds."

The slave, his back lacerated by the whip, was brought to her hut. The men who carried him were those who had been her patients the day before. "You must stay with us," they said, "for we see that you are a great healer of sickness."

Six months after her arrival at Ekenge Mary opened her first little school in that village, and then a second one at nearby Ifako. The utterly wild and primitive tribesmen of Okoyong were already beginning to fall under Mary's strong influence.

The Ekenge school was open in the morning, and the Ifako school in the afternoon. This enabled Mary to walk from one school to the other in time to hold classes. She had no money to buy books or even pencils. The children sat on rough wooden logs; an alphabet card hung on one of the posts; and the youngsters used bits of charcoal and smooth wooden boards to practice writing.

The Okoyong people remained as barbaric as ever. Twin murder, warfare, and torture continued to flourish among them. Mary knew that her prestige was not yet great enough to combat these evils. But in some strange way the Ekenge and Ifako people were becoming immensely proud that a white woman had come to live with them and was teaching their children "word magic," which was what they called reading and writing.

This news carried to every corner of the vast, forested Okoyong region. Invitations began to arrive from chiefs in other parts of the country. Some of them—including a number of those who were known as "the terrors of Calabar"—came personally to ask Mary to visit their villages. These tall, intimidating, almost naked men all laid down their weapons before entering Mary's compound.

Mary herself believed she should strengthen her position in Ekenge and Ifako before entering other districts. The Ekenge chief, whom Mary had successfully treated for a badly poisoned arm, did all he could to encourage her to remain in his village. Soon, however, the decision was taken out of her hands.

The chief of a particularly fearsome village, called Okuri, which lay some eight hours' journey from Ekenge, was suddenly taken seriously ill. His case was regarded as hopeless, so all his wives and slaves, who would be slaughtered when his death actually occurred, had been made captive and chained. It was then that a woman, whose sick baby had been treated by Mary, persuaded the headman to send a messenger to beg Mary's assistance. It was a dark, wet, windy night when this messenger reached Ekenge.

"It is impossible for you to go," Edem, the Ekenge chief, said to Mary. "The journey is too long for a woman, the rivers are in flood, and deep mud covers all the paths you would have to follow."

"I'm going all the same," Mary replied. "This messenger and I will leave at dawn."

"If the sick chief dies," Edem grumbled, "you will certainly be one of the victims who will be slaughtered in Okuri."

When Mary reached the sick chief's village, soaked and mud-smeared with torn clothing, she felt as though she were walking into a lair of ferocious animals. She knew that at any moment the death signal might be given and the slaughter begin.

Although Mary had studied medical textbooks for twelve years and was familiar with the more common forms of sickness, the chief's condition puzzled her completely. In a weak whisper he declared that all his bones felt as if they were on fire and that a devil was causing much pain inside his head. His back, he added, felt as if it were broken. He had a temperature of 104 degrees, and was in such a weak condition that he was no longer able to move. The yellowish tinge in his dark skin had become more pronounced.

Mary decided to treat him with a mixture of aspirin and quinine, both of which lay in the medical bag supplied by the Calabar Mission. An hour or so later she followed this up with a strong dose of bromide. Since the illness was probably gastrointestinal influenza, Mary's treatment of the patient was correct according to the limited medical remedies of her time.

Hour after hour, while the fierce crowd stood waiting outside the hut and the chained captives continued to shiver with fear and cold, the chief lived on. When he awakened late that night, Mary dosed him with a small amount of brandy in order to stimulate the action of his heart.

The chief of Okuri village lived all through that night. When dawn came and Mary repeated the dose, he appeared to rally. When evening came again, there was no doubt that the chief had passed the crisis of his illness.

Mary chose several middle-aged women and told them to nurse the patient while she lay down to sleep. The women obeyed her directions faithfully. When Mary awoke six hours later, the chief was

visibly stronger. Three days afterward Mary was able to return to Ekenge. But before she left Okuri, she knew that never again need she fear to enter the village.

Although the Ekenge people had built Mary's school in the village, they were not making much progress with the little mission house she had asked to erect. Indeed, at the end of a year, they had not even begun to work on it. After Mary's triumphant return from Okuri, Edem at last decided that his people ought to do something about her request.

"Once you have a house in our village," he said simply, "other people will not be able to tempt you to leave us by saying that they will build you a fine new house in *their* village."

Mary became architect, foreman, and chief laborer for the building of that house. It consisted merely of two rooms, each one measuring some ten by twelve feet. The walls, three feet thick, were built of mud and coated inside and out with native plaster. In each of the four corners stood a tree trunk with a forked top. Horizontal crosspieces of timber were placed on these tops and firmly lashed in place. The sloping framework of the roof consisted of a double latticework of bamboo, interwoven for extra strength with stout native cord. On top of this framework the people laid carefully woven palm leaves, which were perfectly rainproof. These, too, were secured in place by cord lashings. Finally the people connected a shed to each of the two rooms.

At the front of the house there was a seven-foot-wide veranda, also protected with a roof of palm leaves. A number of stout posts, painted with red clay and set firmly in the ground, supported the edge of the roof.

In one of the rooms Mary installed a primitive cupboard, a number of shelves, and a day bed, which consisted of a network of leather thongs. This was covered with the skin of a deer. She cut holes in the ponderous walls for bowls, cups, and other dishes, and also decorated these recesses with red clay. At one end of the room

was a fireplace, fitted with an outside stone chimney like the ones Mary had seen in the older cottages of Dundee, and a wooden stool where the cook could sit while preparing the meals.

In the second room Mary deposited her books, boxes, and other bits and pieces. Hanging from pegs, driven into the upright wooden posts, were earthenware jugs, two cooking pots, and a spare kettle. The "bairns," as Mary called the children, lived in one of the simple but comfortable sheds, where they slept on springy sleeping mats under light coverings made of cheap native cloth.

The entire population of Ekenge watched the building of this house with the greatest interest and surprise. Never before had they seen anything so splendid. Before long the news spread throughout the Okoyong district that a great and wonderful new house, owned by the white ma, now stood in the village of Ekenge.

One chief, a particularly wild individual, journeyed south through the bush for four days to see Mary's house for himself. With him came his bodyguard of twelve rascally and well-armed warriors.

The laws of African hospitality demanded that these guests be fed and given liquor during their stay in Ekenge. Soon the visiting chief and his followers were dangerously drunk and looking for trouble. Guns were fired, swords were waved, and it seemed likely that bloodshed would take place. A number of frightened women, nearly all of them holding small babies or followed by young children, took refuge in the open space at the rear of Mary's house.

Without caring for her own safety, Mary walked across to the spot where the cannibal chieftain and his party were drinking in the shade of a red-fruited akee tree.

"Away with you, laddie," she said to the chief in her pronounced Scots accent. "You've had enough to drink and it's time you were going home." She picked up the four bottles of gin that stood in front of the chief, turned her back, and walked away.

The chief and his men roared in fury and followed her to the door of her house. When she had deposited the bottles inside one of the rooms, Mary turned to face them. "Stop yelling," she ordered them firmly. "I'll no' give you back your drink before you promise to go away from this village."

At this point Mary realized that, although her actions had been plain enough, she had been speaking English with a Scots accent to the chieftain! She repeated the message in his own language. The man, who was over six feet in height, stood peering down uncertainly at Ma.

There was a short silence. "Very well," said the chief sulkily. "Give me back the bottles now, and we will go home."

"I'll give them to you outside the village," said Mary. "Pick up your things and we'll go."

She led the procession a mile out of the village. There she handed over the liquor, made the chief promise that he and his men would not attempt to return to Ekenge or create any more trouble in the neighborhood, and returned home alone.

Before long the chief of Ifako became jealous of Mary's house at Ekenge. He sent a messenger one day, asking Mary to visit him.

When she arrived in Ifako, she was surprised to see that a section of land had been cleared of bush and weeds. Wooden posts and beams lay in readiness, clay mud had already been mixed, and a gang of workmen was waiting.

"You have built your home in Ekenge," said the Ifako chief. "It is only right that you should build your first church here in our village."

The church was built forthwith. It was only forty feet long by thirty feet wide, but it was a solid and clean-looking little building. On the first Sunday after the work was finished, Mary held a service. The chiefs, the village elders, and their wives sat inside. The rest of the population of Ifako crowded around the open door and windows. It

was mostly curiosity that brought these people, but at least they were clean, well behaved, and entirely sober. The men carefully laid aside their weapons before entering the church and listened to everything that Mary said.

Thus, a year after Mary's arrival in the Okoyong region, there was a school and a mission house in Ekenge and another school and a church at Ifako. Mary had accomplished all this single-handedly. She was managing to keep herself and the orphan children on $100 a year; the only other money she had used were the tiny sums allocated to her by the Calabar Mission. Most important of all, the cannibal people of Okoyong were learning to respect her, and a number of their children were receiving a valuable education.

Chapter Four: THE RIVER TRADERS

It had never occurred to the people in the Okoyong district to take their palm oil, copra, and other produce downriver to Calabar. By doing so, they would have a chance to buy other goods for themselves at reasonable prices. "If the native traders down there want to deal with us," they often declared in a lordly manner, "let them bring their goods to us up here."

Mary knew that the Duke Town traders lived in utter terror of the fierce people of Okoyong.

"Well," said Mary, when she learned that the native traders of Calabar were unwilling to make the upriver trip, "if they won't come up to us, we must go down to them."

She wrote a letter to her old friend King Eyo in Calabar. The letter contained a suggestion that he invite the people of the Ekenge district to come to Calabar for a conference. Eyo agreed, and the letter duly reached King Edem of Ekenge. A meeting took place in Edem's hut to discuss the matter. Mary was among those who were invited to give an opinion. Naturally she spoke in favor of the suggestion.

"Very well," said Edem. "I do not know Eyo, so naturally I do not trust him. But I do trust you, Ma, and if you say this is a good idea, then we will make the voyage."

A large river canoe was made ready. It was loaded with yams and plantains (a kind of banana) as a gift for King Eyo. Then came the cargo of sun-dried copra and old spirit casks, which were now filled with palm oil.

At this stage a number of men decided to make themselves scarce. They had decided that the voyage was too dangerous. They knew that Mary had already ordered that no guns and swords be taken on the trip.

"Ma, you make women of us!" they grumbled. "Did ever a man go to a strange place without his arms?"

Mary refused to change her mind. She sat down in one of the canoes and waited. After a palaver* lasting two hours, just enough men volunteered to go. [*a conference or meeting between different parties.]

When they arrived in Duke Town late that night, they slept, and trading began the next morning at sunrise. Long before noon the last bag of copra and cask of palm oil had been sold. The Ekenge people found themselves in possession of new knives, bales of cloth, kettles, iron cooking pots, and dozens of other useful articles. They discovered, however, that there was a scarcity of spirits and ammunition; they could procure only very limited quantities of both. King Eyo and Mary had arranged these peculiar shortages.

The canoes returned to Ekenge the following day. Before they reached shore, the excited crewmembers were yelling the news of their success to families and friends waiting for them.

Mary had at last opened the way for trade relations with Calabar. The people hurriedly began to prepare fresh quantities of copra and palm oil. Men who had refused to make the trip, or to ship any produce on the canoes, found themselves being laughed at. Their

wives were jealous of all the fine new possessions being displayed by their neighbors.

There was less opportunity now in the Ekenge district for time-wasting palavers. The people were becoming too busy for useless drinking and equally useless quarreling and fighting. However, they had still not reached the stage where they would renounce their bloodthirsty customs.

As her reputation increased in the Okoyong district, Mary's efforts to introduce some kind of law and order became more and more determined. The Calabar Mission sent a Scottish carpenter to enlarge the mission house at Ekenge two years after it had been built. This man, Mr. Ovens, was startled by the fearless manner in which Mary handled troublesome individuals in the district.

Once a drunken man, carrying a loaded gun, came to see her. Mary ordered him to leave the weapon in the corner of the veranda. He refused to do so. She went up to him, seized his gun, placed it in the corner, and forbade him to touch it. Every day for a week thereafter he returned to the mission house to ask for his gun, and every day Mary refused to give it to him. On the eighth day she handed it back to him.

"If you make any more trouble," she warned the fellow, "I shall break your gun with a hammer."

What surprised Mr. Ovens more than anything else was the fearless manner in which Mary made long journeys on foot through the Okoyong country, accompanied only by a couple of native bearers or perhaps one or two of the older boys whom she was caring for. The forest was filled with leopards of a particularly dangerous type.

"How is it," Mr. Ovens asked Mary one day, "that none of those beasts attack you? Are you a kind of Daniel in the lions' den?"

Mary chuckled. "Whether I'm traveling with bearers or paddlers," she replied, "I keep them singing all the time we're in leopard

country. You just don't know what their singing is like. It would frighten any decent, respectable leopard away into the next valley."

In that sweltering, fever-filled region of West Africa, no European could have gone on indefinitely working and living the way Mary Slessor did. In 1890 the Calabar Mission suggested that the time had come for her to go home to Scotland on leave. For a replacement while she was gone, Mary assured the mission it was quite safe for a woman to be there now. She told them that Miss Dunlop, who had taken her place as a teacher in Calabar, would be just the one.

When Miss Dunlop arrived, she was greatly impressed by the large crowd of cheerful, peaceful people who greeted her on the riverbank and escorted her through the forest to Ekenge.

It was only after the much-feared Ma left a few weeks later that the people decided it might be safe to revert for a while to their old habits. Poor Miss Dunlop soon changed her mind about them. "They are a very wild and lawless people," she wrote.

Another brave lady teacher, a Miss Hutton, was hastily sent up the Calabar River to keep Miss Dunlop company. Chief Edem did all he could to help and protect them. These two courageous women managed to hold the fort for Mary while she was absent in Scotland.

Chapter Five: VICE-CONSUL OF THE QUEEN

Mary arrived in England in January 1891, bringing with her little nine-year-old Janie, one of her adopted family. As soon as she reached Scotland, she went to the headquarters of the Foreign Mission Committee and announced to the astonished board that she wished to become engaged.

Her fiancé was a Mr. Charles Morrison, one of the teachers on the mission staff in Calabar. He was a remarkably well-read man and considerably gifted as an author and poet.

"I think Mr. Morrison would make a very good missionary, and he could certainly do a very great deal to help me in Okoyong."

While the board was considering the decision, Mary was invited to give many lectures throughout Scotland. Although she was utterly fearless when facing a savage crowd of natives, appearing in front of a European audience was always a great ordeal for her.

"I suppose it's because I was never anything but a mill girl here in Scotland," she explained to one of her friends. "Out in Africa I'm known as Ma to the whole of Okoyong. They expect me to do all kinds of things, including a few miracles now and then! In Dundee the folks are surprised only because I'm a missionary at all."

The Foreign Mission Committee was worried by Mary's engagement and proposed marriage. Mr. Morrison was a very capable teacher, but his health was poor. While he was in Calabar, he was within reach of European doctors and medicine. It seemed likely that if he went to live in Okoyong, the primitive conditions would be too much for him.

"Would you consider returning to live in Calabar if you were married?" the mission board asked Mary.

Her answer was typical. "It is out of the question. I could not leave my work for such a reason. To leave a field like Okoyong without a worker and to go to one where the people have an open Bible and plenty of privilege—it would be absurd! If Mr. Morrison can't go to Okoyong, then he must do his work and I must do mine where we have been placed."

Mary abandoned the idea of marriage. She never referred to it again. Mr. Morrison was shortly afterward compelled to return to Scotland on account of his health. A medical specialist advised him against resuming work in Calabar. He resigned. He later went to America, where it was hoped that the brisk climate and dry winters would restore his health. He died a year later while living in a little log cabin in the Brushy Mountains of North Carolina.

After a year's leave in Scotland Mary, accompanied by Janie, sailed again for Calabar. The little girl wept loudly at the idea of leaving all her new friends. Several kindly people had offered to provide a home for her, but she refused to be separated from Mary. They left England together in February 1892.

Never in all her dealings with the tribes was Mary molested in any way. Once only, in a village brawl that she tried to quell, was she struck with a club. The native who wielded the weapon hit her accidentally. The loud and wrathful cry immediately went up that Ma had been hurt. Both sides turned on the man and would have beaten him to death, had not Mary—who was only slightly hurt—rushed to his rescue.

While Mary continued, single-handed, with her efforts to stamp out twin murder, witchcraft, and the poison ordeal, events of great importance were taking place in Calabar. The British government was at long last beginning to interest itself in what was then known as the Niger Coast—of which Calabar itself was a part. Up until that time there had been only a British consul stationed in Duke Town. Having no troops or police at his disposal, the consul had no means of exerting his authority. The tribes higher up the Cross and Calabar Rivers could make war upon one another and commit murder without fear of punishment.

A brilliant colonial administrator named Sir Claude Macdonald—a fellow Scotsman of Mary's—was appointed consul general. No better man could have been chosen for the task of attempting to introduce law and order to this backward country.

Under Sir Claude's direction a strong, capable administration was created in Duke Town. The missionaries were delighted to see that this consul general was in full sympathy with their work. He assisted them in every scheme that was designed to benefit people.

Sir Claude appointed vice-consuls—officially known as district commissioners—for the various sections. It was proposed to send one of them to Okoyong. As soon as Mary heard this news, she put

on the best of her three dresses and set off down the river to interview Sir Claude.

"My people are not yet ready for the introduction of proper laws," she told him. "They have never yet been punished for murder, cannibalism, witchcraft, and all the other crimes that will have to be outlawed. If you send up an official to enforce such laws, there will be trouble—perhaps even a full-scale rebellion.

Sir Claude Macdonald smiled. "You know, I think you're quite right, Miss Slessor. I've been reading some of your reports, which the Duke Town Mission was good enough to lend me. It's perfectly clear that you're the only European who has any control over these wild Okoyong people. But my orders are to establish a vice-consul in that district, and I've got to do it."

"Then there'll be war all along the river," said Mary shortly.

Sir Claude chuckled. "Perhaps not. You see, Miss Slessor, I've already chosen my vice-consul for Okoyong. You. Moreover, I give my personal assurance that you will be left to run your district exactly as you please."

Mary, the former mill girl from the slums of Dundee, went back to Okoyong as a vice-consul of Queen Victoria. She had refused to take anything more than a nominal salary for this extra work.

The unpredictable people of her district were delighted with this news. "We will be hanged now when we commit a murder?" they were interested to know.

"That depends on why you killed the person," Mary replied shrewdly. "But you will probably be sent down the river to stand trial in front of a European judge. On twin murder especially, I will be very hard. Also witchcraft, the poison ordeal, and cannibalism."

"Then we must not tell you when we do such things," said the simple people of Okoyong. "We do not want to be sent down the

river to a prison in Duke Town. And to be hanged is a very sad way to die."

Somehow or other, in a way that was almost miraculous, Mary went on introducing law and order into the whole district without sending more than the worst criminal cases to trial in Duke Town. In such cases, the prisoner's escort was formed of complainants against him—a cheap and efficient method of ensuring that he did not escape on the way.

Mary also conducted all the public affairs of the tribe. Cases were often referred to her from Duke Town, and she would travel all over the Okoyong country, collecting statements and interviewing witnesses. Little was heard of her efforts during this period, although she continued to render great service to the newly formed Niger Coast Protectorate.

"I don't really enjoy doing this kind of work," she said to an official, who came up the Calabar River to visit her. "I do it only because it's in line with my vocation as a missionary."

The long hours in the spinning factories, the bitter climate of Scotland, and the poor food she had been accustomed to all her life, had given Mary a constitution like iron. She habitually took risks with her health that no other European would have dreamed of taking. She never slept under a mosquito net, and she never wore a hat. Her hair she kept cut close, because it was less trouble to look after. Stockings she seldom wore, and often she went barefoot along the slippery jungle trails.

A civil engineer named Mr. Lindsay stayed for a week or so in Mary's mission house in Ekenge. When he returned to Duke Town he told his friends it had been one of the most unusual experiences of his life. Miss Slessor, he reported, ate native food and was not particular when meals were served. Breakfast might be at seven one morning and at ten the next; dinner might be an hour or two late. This was mainly due to the constant calls upon her time. Mary was

often traveling back from outlying villages during the night, and her days were taken up with long palavers with the Okoyong people.

Said Mr. Lindsay:

> In a case of sudden call in the night to some distant village where twin children had been thrown out or a bloody quarrel was starting, she was literally ready to leave at a moment's notice. I remember Miss Slessor's once apologizing for resting so long in bed on Sunday mornings. On that particular day she began work at 5:30 A.M. and carried on until 7 P.M. I really couldn't say at what unearthly hour she began work for the rest of the week. Occasionally she made a mistake in the calendar and forgot what day it was. I once arrived on a Sunday at Ekenge and found her making repairs on the roof of her house. When I joked with her about working on a Sabbath, she replied, "I *thought* I'd misplaced a day somewhere! I must have lost a Sunday about two weeks ago."

As conditions throughout the Niger Protectorate became more peaceful and the upriver journey by steam launch easier to perform, Mary began to receive more frequent visitors from Duke Town. She enjoyed having Europeans call on her.

"I feel dreadfully lonely," she once wrote to a friend. "There is so much work to be done up here. I need a helper very badly. I have made up my mind to ask the committee at the next meeting for a companion."

But when Mary went to Duke Town with this request in mind, she found the overworked mission staff depleted by illness and death, and had not the heart to ask for an assistant. She returned to Ekenge, grateful that the state of her own health enabled her to carry on. She wrote instead to the Board of Foreign Mission Committee in Scotland, asking them to try to find a helper for Ekenge.

Meanwhile, the simple task of keeping the ground near the mission premises clear of weeds was becoming more difficult all the time. In the damp tropical heat, vegetation, and particularly weeds, grew at a prodigious rate. The new trade with Calabar had brought about a demand for Okoyong yams. The people were so busy

planting their farms that Mary was unable to obtain labor. Yet the bush had to be kept at a distance; otherwise, it would become a cover through which man-killing leopards would be able to sneak up to the house unobserved. Thus it became the task of the older children whom Mary was caring for to keep the jungle at a distance.

Once the perspiring youngsters got the land temporarily clear of weeds, they planted flowering trees. In time to come the deep shade provided by these trees discouraged much of the lush, useless vegetation from growing at all. The Ekenge mission house gradually became a beauty spot, surrounded by brilliant blossoms of a dozen different colors.

Chapter Six: WAR DRUMS IN THE FOREST

By 1895, seven years after Mary had first come to Ekenge, Mary could see a vast difference in the people. The change had come so gradually that it was only when she recalled what people were like in the old days that she realized how much they had improved.

In 1895 she wrote:

Only last month the man, who, for age, wealth, and general influence, exceeded all the other chiefs in Okoyong, died from the effects of cold caught three months before. Every drop of European drink that could be bought from all the villages around was procured at once. Canoes were sent with all the available produce to Duke Town in order to obtain still greater quantities. All this liquor was drunk before the people dispersed from the funeral. But the only death resulting has been that of a man who, on being blamed by the witch doctors, went and hanged himself.

With regard to infanticide and twin murder, I can speak hopefully. It has dawned on the people that life is worth saving, even at the risk of one's own. Though chiefs and subjects alike, less than two years ago, refused to hear of the saving of twins, I have their promise and the first installment of their fidelity to their promise in the person of two baby girls.

Drinking, especially among women, is on the decrease. The old bands of roving women who came to us at first are now only a memory and a name. The women still drink, but it is at home, where the husbands can keep them in check.

During the past few years there had been so much planting around Ekenge and Ifako that most of the cultivated areas had lost their fertility. By 1896 the semi-nomadic Okoyong people were drifting away from these two villages. They were beginning to clear land farther inland, at a place called Akpap near the Cross River.

Mary decided to leave Ekenge, her home for the past eight years, and follow the people to their new locality. Mr. Ovens, the sturdy Scottish carpenter, arrived in Akpap, and erected a new mission house.

Mary's fame continued to spread throughout the whole vast territory of southern Nigeria. In one week she had deputations from four different tribes, each with a tale of wrong and oppression. Innocent people fled to her to escape some cruel punishment ordered by a witch doctor. Guilty people sheltered with her, knowing that whatever their crime, they would receive justice.

Mary became interested in strangers from remote, unexplored areas of the country. She made numerous long trips up the Cross River into these unknown regions, traveling by canoe with a dozen paddlers. On one occasion they were speeding down a creek leading into the main river, when a hippopotamus suddenly attacked the canoe savagely.

The man in the bow thrust his paddle against the animal's flank and shoved the canoe violently to one side. The hippo, its enormous mouth gaping widely, then swam alongside, trying to grip the gunwale of the canoe and overturn it.

"O Ma, nyana nyin mbok O!" (O Ma, please save us!) roared the paddlers who, although heathen, had a great respect for Mary's religion.

Mary seized a large tin basin and slapped it over the gunwale at the spot where the hippo was trying to grip the canoe. The beast's great teeth closed on the basin, which crumbled with a loud clatter.

Alarmed perhaps by the sudden noise, the hippo uttered a startled grunt and dived out of sight.

Although she yearned to explore the upper reaches of the Cross River, Mary could not afford to be long away from her headquarters. In spite of new European laws, and even the advent of small river gunboats on the Calabar, twin murder continued in secret. It was only when the people came under Mary's direct influence that this particular crime decreased.

When Mary moved to Akpap, she had completed twenty years of service in West Africa. For the past eight years she had been living in a tropical climate under conditions that, most likely, no other European could have survived for half as long. She was now forty-eight years old, and at last her health was beginning to show signs of breaking down.

In early 1898, and very much against her wishes, the Calabar Mission Committee insisted that Mary go on vacation in Scotland. This time there was no one to take over the Akpap station. However, one or two motherly native women, who had become Christians, moved into Mary's house and promised that the children to whom it was home would be carefully and faithfully looked after during her absence.

By this time Mary Slessor had become famous throughout Scotland, and to a lesser extent, England.

Wrote a Scottish newspaper reporter:

Miss Slessor is a mild and gentle-looking lady. It is almost incredible to recall that for many years she has lived alone in the West African forests, surrounded only by a ferocious native tribe.

Of rather less than average height, Miss Slessor has pleasant and deeply sunburned features, the most vivid blue eyes, short brown hair, and a friendly smile. When she spoke, I thought I had never heard such a musical voice.

During the nine or ten months Mary remained in Scotland her fame continued to spread. When she stepped aboard the steamer that was to carry her back to Calabar, a crowd of pressmen was waiting for her. She talked very simply and modestly with the reporters, saying among other things that up to the present she had succeeded in saving "only fifty-one twins" from death.

"It is not likely I shall ever come home again," she added. "I hate parting with my foster children so very much. If I be spared a few years more, I shall have a bit of land and build a little house of my own near one of the (mission) stations, and just stay out my days there. The children need love and care as they grow up in that dreadful country, and I could do something to help them. When I am gone, it would be a great benefit to them to have other missionaries to look after them."

When Mary reached Akpap again, she found that the native women had kept their word and had looked after the mission house well. The children had all grown and were in the best of health.

The cares of that little household never seemed to become less. "Housekeeping in the bush," Mary wrote in a letter to a friend, "means so much more as well as so much less than in Scotland. There are no drawing room ornaments to dust, no starched dresses, but on the other hand there are no butchers or bakers or nurses or washerwomen, so I have to keep my shoulder to the wheel both indoors and out of doors. Sometimes I feel like the old woman who lived in a shoe."

The wooden war drums suddenly began to thud and rumble along the upper reaches of the Cross River. In the territory lying between that river and the more westerly waters of the Niger River, lived a powerful tribe called the Aros. For centuries they had prospered on slave raiding and trading and on looting of lesser tribes. The Aro leaders realized that the slow spread of European influence and government would put an end to some of their practices, so they revolted. For the next two months they attacked

peaceable tribes, indulged in an enormous number of human sacrifices, blocked the trade routes, and ignored peaceful requests of the government for a meeting with their leaders.

It became necessary to dispatch a small military expedition, which was organized at Duke Town. The Aros did not wait for the arrival of the troops. They began to venture southward and raided a village only fifteen miles from Akpap.

The Governor ordered Mary Slessor and her household to go downstream to Duke Town. So with great reluctance, Mary took her flock of children—they now numbered eleven—packed up some spare clothes for them and boarded the launch.

Duke Town was a very different place now from what it had been when Mary first saw it nearly twenty-five years before. It had become a flourishing seaport with many fine streets and buildings. The mosquito-haunted swamp had been drained. Europeans enjoyed most of the comforts and even the luxuries of civilization.

For the next three months, Mary and her helpless children had to live in part of the hospital where accommodations had been prepared for them.

"Having been accustomed to the cooler climate of the forests for so long," she wrote, "I find that of Duke Town terribly trying. The bright, the terribly bright sky makes me feel very tired most of the time, and the weather here does not seem to suit the children at all."

Meanwhile, the expeditionary force—consisting mostly of native soldiers led by white officers—had sailed up the Cross River. Opposite Akpap their canoes turned westward into a smaller but exquisitely beautiful river named the Enyong Creek. The stream ran through the western district, Arochuku, which was dominated by the Aro tribe.

This nation, numbering about four million, was comprised of light-colored, intelligent, subtle, and cunning people. They were a remarkable and mysterious race. It was believed that their ancestors

had originated far to the north, perhaps on the borders of the Sahara Desert, but nothing definite was known of their past history. Their ruthless, bloodthirsty religion centered around a well-guarded valley in which stood a monstrous ebony-wood idol.

The troops were soon in contact with the warriors in the swamps and bush that fringed the waterway. There were heavy casualties on both sides.

Sir Claude Macdonald had recently left the Niger Protectorate, and his successor was a tough, experienced veteran named Sir Ralph Moor. Almost before the troops had occupied the Arochuku province, Sir Ralph arrived in the district after a trip by launch and canoe. He immediately called a palaver of all the Aro chiefs.

Most of these chiefs had never seen a white man. They sat on the ground in a semicircle in the shade of a giant cotton tree, their brown faces suspicious and hostile.

"You must surrender your rifles," Sir Ralph told them. "Keep your muzzle-loading shotguns if you wish. There must be no more juju (witchcraft), no more slaving expeditions, and no more attacks on the villages of smaller tribes."

When Sir Ralph had finished speaking, there was a short silence. Then one of the chiefs, a lean and grizzled warrior clad in a leopard skin, stood up. "We have heard that there is a wise white woman who lives in the province of Okoyong across the river," he said. "She is famous for her wisdom and justice. Before we agree to your terms, we must speak with ma and listen to her advice."

As soon as Mary heard this news she acted swiftly. She reached Arochuku seven days after the chief had spoken. At another meeting of the Aro tribe with Sir Ralph Moor, she spoke her mind. "Agree to the terms," she said. "They are very fair. Allow my people to bring law and order, roads, trade, and schools to your district. These are all things that will help you prosper."

The Aro tribe promptly followed her advice. They handed over nearly 3,000 rifles and agreed to abolish slave trading. They also promised to give up witchcraft, but its dark mysteries had too great a hold on their minds. It never was utterly renounced, and even today it is still practiced to some extent in the depths of the forest.

"It was largely due to Ma Slessor," declared one official, "rather than all the force and power of the government representatives, that the final settlement of the dispute with the Aro nation was brought about."

Mary had still other ideas about Arochuku. She went to see Sir Ralph Moor. "These Aro people are going to need a missionary among them," she said. "I want to settle in their country, so I'd like your permission to go there."

Sir Ralph had a sense of humor. "From what I've heard and seen," he replied, "you've done in Okoyong what it's taken a whole mission to do in and around Calabar. The old order of heathenism seems to have been broken up pretty thoroughly in your district. People there don't spend their time fighting and killing one another nowadays, and I'm told that even the slaves are beginning to realize that they're human beings with human rights. If *you* settle in Arochuku, Ma, I'll be able to withdraw the troops!"

Chapter Seven: THE ROMANCE OF THE ENYONG RIVER

In 1903, when she was fifty-five years old, Mary Slessor moved into the unknown, largely unexplored Arochuku territory on the west side of the Cross River.

I decided to settle in the village of Itu, which stands at the junction of the Enyong River with the Cross River. It was a place with a particularly evil reputation. For several centuries past, the slave market that was situated there had supplied the New World with thousands and thousands of wretched slaves. Just before the Aro people made terms with the government, the chief of Itu died. Sixty slaves were promptly put to death and eaten. When his widow became somewhat ill a short

while later, twenty-five more slaves were set in a row, with their hands tied behind them, and beheaded. People who indulged in this sort of useless bloodshed had to be coerced and educated until they changed their ways.

A fact about the sad slave-haunted Enyong Creek is that it is one of the prettiest little waterways in all West Africa. Its narrow waters are tranquil and winding. Great tropical trees, covered with flowering creepers and vines, line both banks, and the wide spreading branches of these trees sometimes form leafy archways above the green-lit water. Wild orchids grow in crevices in the trunks of trees, and magnificent ferns flourish in the damp soil. Here and there great patches of water lilies cover the surface of the creek so that a boat often has to cut its way through their mass. Alligators bask on the sandy little beaches beside the water. The boughs of the trees swarm with small, long-tailed monkeys, brilliantly colored parrots, and yellow palm birds. Bright blue kingfishers dart above the surface, and wild ducks continually fight overhead. The Enyong River is beautiful at all times, but at dawn, when the first rays of sunshine filter down through the leaves and clusters of flowers, the scene is one of fairy enchantment.

Mary descended to Itu in a canoe with two of her older boys and an eighteen-year-old twin girl named Mana. The chief, a man who had fought in the recent rebellion, actually gave her a gruff welcome.

"I'm too old to join your God faith," he told Mary, "but the younger people of our tribe may be able to learn something useful from you. Go ahead and build your school, or whatever it is; my people will make no trouble."

Above the mud-walled huts and twisting, narrow alleys of the cannibal village towered a fine, flat-topped hill. There, helped by the youngsters she had brought with her and also by a number of the Aro people themselves, Mary built a combined church and school.

When a young British district commissioner arrived unexpectedly in Itu and came to inspect the work, he inquired, "Who taught you to mix cement, Ma?"

Mary gave him an innocent glance from her deep-set blue eyes and chuckled. "No one, laddie," she replied. "I just mix it with sand until it looks about right, and then stir it with a stick like porridge. Then I say, 'Dear Lord, if it looks right to You, please make it set.' And you know, it's an odd thing, but the cement always *does* set!"

Just how Mary found the money to build that little church and school remains a mystery. Since leaving Okoyong country she had resigned from her work as a vice-consul, thereby losing the equivalent of $143 that the government had given yearly to help her mission. Her own salary had been raised to $300, and as her mother had died five years earlier, she was now able to draw all this money for her own needs. Kindly government officials saw to it that all the building materials she needed were supplied at the lowest possible price, but even so it was a miracle of faith that Mary found the money at all.

Her fame was gradually spreading throughout many parts of the world. Every mail brought her letters from America, Canada, Scotland, England, and even far-off Australia and New Zealand. A number of the writers enclosed small remittances to help Mary with her work. One day she received from Sir Ralph Moor a letter conveying the "deep thanks of the government" and a check for $75, to be spent as she thought best. But Mary kept only a very small portion of these donations from the outside world. Every penny she could spare went into the erection of a new school or church or into food and clothing for the children she had rescued. An extract of her diary for June 14, 1903, reads:

Market morning. Have only three pence in cash in the house. Exchanged a couple of schoolbooks to buy food. Got 5 small yams, oil, and shrimps, with pepper and a few small fresh fish.

Within a year of Mary's arrival at Itu over three hundred Aro people, both men and women, were crowding into the little church every Sunday. Sixty-eight children were regularly attending the

school. Thirty-eight of them could already read easy primers printed in their own language.

The staid, rather unimaginative directors of the Calabar Mission were greatly alarmed at Mary's living in a district inhabited by such a fierce and warlike people. Okoyong, they said, had been dangerous enough; Arochuku was a great deal more so. Besides which, they added, Mary's health was again beginning to trouble her; she should return to Ekenge. Roads were being built throughout the Okoyong district, and government officials would be able to keep an eye on her and render assistance in any emergency. In Itu she was much too cut off from the outside world.

Mary, who could be extremely obstinate when she chose, resisted this suggestion firmly. "Okoyong and its people are very dear to me," she wrote in a letter to Calabar. "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. I feel I must stay here and even go on farther as the roads are made. I cannot walk (very far) now, nor dare I do anything to trifle with my health, which is very queer now and then, but if the roads are all of the easy gradient of those already made, I can get some simple form of transport. I would rather take the risk of finding a way to earn my own livelihood, if the Mission does not see its way to allow me to remain in Itu."

To a friend, Mary wrote, "I am not enthusiastic over Church methods," which were too slow and cautious for her liking. "I would not mind cutting the rope and going adrift with my children. I could earn enough to keep us and a bit on the side as well. I might take a position with the Nigerian government, or even open a small trading store."

News of Mary's threatened resignation soon reached the ears of the sympathetic governor. Knowing the invaluable work she was doing in Arochuku, he decided to give her official encouragement to remain in Itu, even though the Calabar Mission might disapprove. An

official letter reached Mary in May 1905, asking her to accept the office as a Member of Itu Native Court with the status of permanent vice-president. In return for her services, she was assigned a nominal salary of one pound a year, and a balance of 47 pounds a year for use in forwarding her mission work.

For the second time during her long life in Africa, Mary, who was now fifty-seven years old, found herself invested with the powers of a magistrate. Her directors at Calabar decided to allow her to remain where she was.

In addition to her duties as a missionary and schoolteacher, Mary now had to act as her own clerk in court, for no assistant had been provided for her. She came face-to-face with the worst side of a savage people, and dealt with some extraordinary cases.

Mary had a right to inflict punishment up to six months' imprisonment. More serious offenders were sent under escort down the river to Duke Town, accompanied by Mary's written report of the facts.

Three minor cases from her court book show very clearly what kind of people she had to deal with.

1. Found guilty of brawling in market and stealing from a woman's basket. One month's hard labor (to be served at Duke Town).

2. Striking a girl and taking food from her house. One month's hard labor (Duke Town).

3. Seizing a woman in the market. Chaining her for fourteen days by neck and wrists. Threatening her with death if she informed any white person. Six months' hard labor and to pay costs on completion of sentence (Duke Town).

A certain new official was a district commissioner, and he had been detailed for duty in the section around Itu. Although he was an important, highly trained official, the young man had the good sense

to realize that his knowledge of the country and the Aro people was nothing compared to Mary's.

When he first arrived in Itu, this official presented himself at Mary's mission house. He found her on the roof, busily fixing a leaky slat.

Mary peered down at him. "Well, young man," she said briskly, "what do you want?"

"Please ma'am," he replied humbly, "I'm your new district commissioner—but I can't help it!"

Mary's sense of humor was aroused, and she was quite delighted. She became good friends with the young man, who—years later when he had become governor—wrote of her:

I suppose that a pluckier woman never existed. Her lifework she carried out with immeasurable courage and capacity. Her strength of character was extraordinary, and her life was one of absolute unselfishness. She commanded the respect and confidence of all parties, and for years I would have personally trusted her judgment on native matters in preference to all others. Shrewd, quick-witted, and sympathetic, yet down on all who presumed, she would with wonderful patience hear all sides equally. Her judgment was prompt, sometimes severe, but always just. She would speak much of her work to those who, she knew, took an interest in it, but very rarely of herself.

Chapter Eight: LAST VACATION

In 1907, after Mary had worked for two years in Arochuku, her health became worse. The doctor who examined her expressed a terse opinion. "Overwork and not enough rest," he declared. "The only cure for you is a vacation in Scotland. If you don't promise to take it, I'll have you in hospital in Duke Town inside a couple of days."

During her last visit to Scotland in 1898 Mary had expressed her belief that she would not return again. Now, nine years later, she was still alive and ordered to make another homeward voyage.

"Oh, my dear country!" she exclaimed. "How I long for a look at the 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!"

Mary reached Scotland in May 1907. When the newspapers announced her arrival, letters, postcards, invitations, and parcels began flowing in. It was only with the help given her by volunteer ladies that she was able to deal with all this correspondence. Mary had little time to spare for the talks she was invited to give. Moreover, her health was so poor that she lacked the necessary strength to make long, tiring appearances in public.

She was saddened by the fact that she was the last of her family left alive. One evening, when they were sitting by the fireside, a woman friend noticed a couple of tears trickling down Mary's cheeks. Hastily she asked what was wrong.

"It's just that I'm a poor solitary," said Mary, trying to smile. "There's nothing left to me but memories."

"But you have troops of friends all over the world who love and admire you," her friend replied.

"Aye, that's truth enough, I suppose," said Mary, "and I'm grateful for it. But it's just that I've none of my own folk to say good-bye to."

Instead of remaining a year in Scotland as she had on previous occasions, Mary left in October 1907, after a stay of only six months.

The voyage back to Africa seemed to give Mary a new lease on life. The quietness and peace, the warm sunshine and breezes, the loveliness of the sky and sea, did a great deal to restore her health. On the day after her return to Itu, she spent eight hours in court, and then went out after dusk to bring a pair of newly born twins to her mission house. She did not return until dawn the following day.

Roads were being built all over Arochuku country by 1908. Civilization was slowly spreading along them. One day Mary was in

court, when suddenly the toot of the new government automobile—one of the famous old model-T Fords—was heard. In a moment jury, witnesses, prisoner, and policemen rushed out of the building to catch a glimpse of the new "steamer" that ran on the road. Then back they drifted and the proceedings went on.

A year after Mary had returned from Scotland, fresh trouble broke out along the upper reaches of the Enyong River. A military patrol was suddenly attacked by a war party of Aro warriors, who fled at their first experience of disciplined volley firing. The trouble began at a place called Ikpe, an old slave center. It was still a "closed" area, and no Calabar trader cared to run the risk of entering it. Occasionally government officials approached the place, but only when they were accompanied by a strong escort of native soldiers from the newly formed West African Frontier Force.

"Those people up at Ikpe need to change their ways," said Mary firmly. "I'd better go up there and talk to them."

With a party of Aro paddlers Mary began her canoe journey up the Enyong Creek.

Ikpe was a sprawling mass of mud-walled huts with conical straw roofs. Here and there Arab influence showed in high, enclosed courtyards with bigger, flat-roofed houses. Narrow lanes and side alleys of trodden earth wound crazily in and out. The whole placed smelled of palm oil, goats, wood smoke, and dirt. Most of the people wore nothing but a string of beads or a narrow strip of cloth. The men walked around with old guns or wickedly barbed, iron-tipped spears on their shoulders.

A fierce old cannibal chief, wearing a necklace of human teeth, waddled out of his hut to greet Mary as she stepped ashore. "Oh, it's you, Ma," he called. "The drums along the river told me you were heading this way. Why have you come to Ikpe?" As he finished speaking, the old man yawned loudly twice. Among the Aro people this was a sign of great deference to an important person.

"I have come to find a place to build my house," Mary replied. "Or rather, a house and a church and a school. I think your people need religion and education, O chief."

The old heathen grunted. "Please yourself, Ma. I am too old to change my ways, but if the younger people want to listen to what you have to say, I have no objection. We do not bring other white people here. We are hostile to them."

Mary found the site she wanted. It was located on the grassy, level brow of a low, but picturesque cliff that rose behind the town.

Mary was now sixty-two years old, and her health was steadily growing worse. She could no longer walk more than a mile or two without resting, and she was suffering from recurring bouts of malaria. At an age when she should have been taking life easier, she set about finding the money and materials with which to build her last mission at Ikpe. The dugout canoe bore her down the Enyong Creek, and the government-owned *Maple Leaf* steam launch conveyed her along the Cross River back to Duke Town. There she began her search for fresh funds.

The search was more difficult than ever before. Public support in Britain for missionary enterprises was beginning to wane. The Calabar Mission, besides being short of staff, was handicapped by lack of money. Mary had to spend much of her own carefully accumulated little store to buy the things she needed. Somehow or other she managed it. She went back to Ikpe with fifty sheets of corrugated iron, a box of roofing nails, a quantity of squared timber, and a half a ton of cement.

"I am committed now," she wrote. "No more idleness for me. I am entering into the dark as to how and when and where. How I am to manage I do not know, but my mind is at perfect peace about it, and I am not afraid. God will carry it through."

Mary obtained help from a quarter where it might have been least expected. The sullen, discontented, wholly primitive warriors of the

Ikpe district were becoming bored with the novel existence that prohibited their making war on surrounding tribes. They decided to lend a hand with the building of the mission. Two hundred and fifty of them started cutting bush and leveling the ground and stumps.

"We don't like white people, Ma," one of them said to Mary, "but we're sorry for you. We know that you would try to build your house by yourself if none of us offered to help you." It was a strange remark to hear from a warrior whose only real interest hitherto had been making war on his neighbors.

When the little church and school were complete, Mary realized that she had more than enough work on her hands to look after them. Six days a week she had to hold classes in the school, and on Sundays she had to have services in the crowded church. Being unable to cope with all her duties, Mary resigned from the vice-presidency of the native court.

Although Mary never forgot the happy years she spent at Ekenge and Ifako, she began to enjoy her life at Ikpe. Taming and teaching a savage people always appealed to her more than the supervision of a well-run and docile mission outpost. In the year 1911 she wrote:

> It is a real life I am living now. It is not all preaching and holding meetings, but rather a life and an atmosphere which the people can touch and live in and be made willing to believe in when the higher truths are brought before them. In many ways it is a most prosaic life, dirt and dust and noise and silliness and sin in every form, but full, too, of the kindliness and homeliness and dependence of children, who are not averse to being disciplined and taught and who understand and love just as we do. The excitements and surprises and novel situations would not, however, need to be continuous. They wear and fray the body and fret the spirit and rob one of sleep and restfulness of soul.

Into Mary's letters of this period there crept increasing references to her weakening health. Writing of a canoe trip she had made down to Cross River, she said:

I just had to take as big a dose of laudanum* as I dared and wrap myself in a blanket and lie in the bottom of the canoe all the time (thirteen hours) and I managed fine. [*opium and alcohol solution: a solution of opium in alcohol, formerly used to treat pain]

A government medical officer had taken up residence at Itu. Dr. Hitchcock was a quiet, eager, sensible man. Before long he became famous as the only European in West Africa who could be more obstinate than Mary Slessor. On hearing of her worsening health, he made a special journey up-country to Ikpe to visit her. He arrived with a crate containing a couple of plump young chickens.

"I'm putting you on a special diet," he informed Mary.

She gazed at the chickens in their cage. "Why did you bring me those?" she asked, a little sulkily.

"Because they couldn't come by themselves," said Dr. Hitchcock. "In your state of health, you'll have to cut out much of this heavy, indigestible native food and eat what I tell you from now on. Furthermore, I'm sending you down to hospital in Duke Town by the *Maple Leaf* on her next trip."

"No, no," said Mary. "I cannot leave my mission."

"Yes, yes," said Dr. Hitchcock. "It's several weeks in hospital for you at least. If you don't go, I shall submit a report on your health to the Calabar Mission Committee."

Mary looked at him with an angry glitter in her eyes. Then suddenly she began to laugh. "You're the dearest and most autocratic doctor that ever lived," she exclaimed. "I'll go and pack my kit right away."

Chapter Nine: THE VETERAN

It was actually well on toward the end of 1911 before Mary was able to return to Ikpe. The unpredictable Aro people gave her a great welcome. Two hundred of them packed into her little church on the first Sunday of her return, and several hundred others sat on the

ground outside the entrance. Some seventy children began to attend her school regularly.

About this time Mary was invited to give evidence before a government committee of inquiry, which had been set up in order to look into the import, sale, and consumption of liquor in Nigeria. Mary spoke very firmly on the subject.

"Much of the demoralization and misery and crime among the native people is caused by liquor," she told the members. "For too long now it has been used as a means of barter. You cannot expect this country to become peaceable and the people progressive until liquor is outlawed. As long as it remains freely on sale, its effects will undo all the good the government may try to do in other directions."

Reforms always take a long time, but Mary's wise advice did not pass unheeded. Restrictions on the import and sale of liquor were gradually introduced, and in later years drunkenness among the native people became a comparatively minor offense.

As the Ikpe mission prospered, Mary's need for adequate funds increased. She needed money for extension, for building, for furniture, for native teachers' wages, for medicine, and for the schooling of her children. Nothing came from her Ikpe people, for she would not accept collections at first, not wishing to give them the idea that Christianity was in any way connected with money. She was never actually in want, however. Help continued to come from friends, known and unknown, in many different parts of the world.

"It often happens," Mary said once, "that when my purse is empty, immediately comes a new installment. And then I can stop worrying for a while about schoolbooks and clothes for my children and medicines for my little dispensary. God is superbly kind in the matter of money."

But there were times when, in spite of her unfaltering faith, Mary must have begun to feel alarmed.

"I have been praying for two weeks for money to come from somewhere," Mary noted in a letter to a friend. "I have been living on seven shillings, given to the children by a (native) merchant here who is a great friend of our household. So your gift is a direct answer to a prayer."

The fact gradually dawned on the Ikpe people that Mary was far from being as wealthy as other European residents in the country. The Aros formed the habit of bringing her presents of produce. One day it was a veteran warrior, who refused to have anything to do with Christianity but who eagerly sent his children to the mission school, who arrived with fifteen large yams and half a bag of rice. A woman, whom Mary had taught to sew dresses for herself, regularly brought large, succulent river prawns. School pupils arrived clutching eggs, carefully wrapped in banana leaves. About once a month the district commissioner down at Itu sent up a messenger bearing gifts of canned butter, canned meat, tea, sugar, and condensed milk.

"Don't worry," said this official, when Mary protested about what the presents were costing him. "I'm given an entertainment allowance by the government, and I'd rather entertain you, Ma, than anyone else I know! If it wasn't for your being at Ikpe, the place would still be a trouble spot."

In September 1912, Mary had completed thirty-six years as a missionary in Nigeria. It was an utterly unheard-of achievement for any European. Any white man who survived for nine or ten years considered himself a veteran—and was usually invalided home at the end of that time as being unfit for further service. Of necessity, the salaries were high, and such officials were able to retire on adequate pensions. But Mary, living under more primitive conditions than any other European, taking only rare vacations in Scotland, and working harder than any other white person could have done, had seen generation after generation of officials come and go.

"Aye, I'm lame and feeble and foolish now," Mary said happily to her old friend Dr. Hitchcock. "My wrinkles are wonderful—better than

any concertina ever made—but I'll hold out for another winter or two yet."

Early in 1913 Mary's strength and health took a turn for the worse. She was now often compelled to visit nearby villages in a wheeled chair, pushed by some of her older foster children. Mary referred to this conveyance as a "box on wheels," or as "that traveling contraption of mine." Nevertheless, it enabled her to carry on work that would otherwise have become impossible for her. Time after time her friends urged her to go on leave, but she obstinately refused to do so.

"We were never so shorthanded before," she said. "I can do what others cannot do; indeed, medical opinion would not allow them to try. No one meddles with me, and I can slip along and do my work with less expenditure of strength than any. That thought is a precious possession to muse on during the night or in the long evening hours when I'm too tired to sleep and the light is not good enough to read or sew by, or mostly when I'm not well. I should choose this life if I had to begin again; only I should try to live it to better purpose."

Once again it was Dr. Hitchcock who forced Mary to do something against her own obstinate wish. He ordered her to take a vacation in the sunny Canary Islands off the coast of Africa. For years now these Spanish-owned islands had been increasing in popularity as a tourist health resort. There were good hotels, healthy sea breezes, and regular steamship services. It was arranged that Jean, a loyal young girl in her twenties, whom Mary had cared for since babyhood, should accompany her on the trip.

Letters from government officials were sent to the Canary Islands to smooth the way. Mary was taken down to Duke Town in the launch, and a handsome little house was loaned to her while she and Jean awaited the arrival of the steamer.

A Mr. Wilkie, who was in charge of the Calabar Mission, arranged Mary's financial affairs and handed over her cashbox to the captain

of the vessel. On board ship Mary was carried up and down to meals, and treated with the utmost kindness by officers and passengers alike. The captain said he was prouder to have shaken hands with her than if she had been King George of England.

When the ship reached the island of Las Palmas in the Canaries, Mary was carefully taken ashore and settled in a horse-drawn carriage. The tourist season had not yet begun, and there were very few visitors at the Hotel Santa Catalina. Those who were there saw a frail, wrinkled old lady with wonderfully wise blue eyes, accompanied by a charming young West African girl, who appeared very shy and nervous.

"We were certainly a frightened pair," Mary confessed in a letter to a friend. "But really, the management attended to me as if I were an old princess of some sort. Everyone was so very kind—the manager's family, the doctor and *his*family, and all the visitors. It was simply wonderful. I can't say anything else."

Mary spent her days sitting in the grounds of the hotel, enjoying the warm, scented breeze, watching the brilliant changing colors of the sea and sky. As her health and strength returned, she began taking easy walks, while Jean waited upon her with a patient, thoughtful devotion. Indeed, if Jean had not been a very sensible person, her head would have been turned by the attention she received. She was a favorite with everyone in the hotel, and was given so many ribbons, new dresses, and sashes that she had to make a larger parcel of all these new possessions when the month's stay came to an end.

A Spanish general, a colonel, and a wealthy merchant each offered to convey Mary to the ship, but the manager of the hotel would not hear of it. He saw her safely into her cabin and placed the cashbox once more in the captain's hands.

It was a fine-weather voyage all the way back to Calabar. At Accra, the capital of the Gold Coast (now called Ghana), the governor, a stranger to Mary, sent off to the steamer a splendid

bouquet of flowers and a note with his best wishes for a renewal of her health. The governor of Nigeria was waiting on the wharf at Duke Town to welcome Mary ashore. With him was Professor Leiper, an eminent medical expert on tropical medicine. Mary was given another examination at the local hospital.

"You're good for many years yet, Miss Slessor," was Professor Leiper's opinion, "if only you take care of yourself."

Laden with bottles of medicine, special diet foods, and a great deal of medical advice, Mary returned to Ikpe. There she found a letter awaiting her with the news that a longtime pen friend of hers in England, a Miss Cook, had defrayed the entire cost of the trip to the Canary Islands.

Chapter Ten: THE PASSING OF A PIONEER

The settlement at Ikpe, which Mary had founded with so much faith, was going ahead at an astonishing rate. The Aro tribe, which only four years earlier had savagely fought against the ordered government, was swiftly renouncing its centuries-old cruel traditions and customs. So many children wanted to attend school, and so many people were trying to crowd into the church on Sundays, that Mary found she would have to enlarge both buildings.

Government officials knew just how much they had to thank Mary for. Her knowledge of the customs and psychology of the natives was greater than theirs could ever be. When difficult situations arose which, if mishandled, might lead to bloodshed, worried district commissioners came to seek Mary's advice.

The government showed its gratitude in many different ways. Instructions were issued that Mary was to be allowed to use any and every official conveyance in the country, on any road or river, and that every help was to be given her. Workmen were loaned to her to make repairs on her houses. The highest officials, somewhat stiff and formal Englishmen though they were, did not think it beneath their dignity to buy feeding bottles and forward them to Mary by

express messenger. They sent her gifts of books, magazines, and papers, and every Christmas there came plum puddings, crackers, and candy.

The new governor of Nigeria, Lord Egerton—a clever, hard-working administrator—was charmed with Mary. After visiting the mission at Ikpe, he took particular delight in describing how Mary had corrected some remark of his with the words, "Nonsense, my dear laddie—I mean sir!"

It was Lord Egerton who passed on to this successor, Sir Fredrick Lugard, the suggestion that it was about time some public recognition of Mary's long and devoted service was made. Sir Fredrick arranged to have an official record compiled of her lifework, and this was transmitted to higher authorities in England. The documents eventually found their way to the plain leather-topped desk of King George V in Buckingham Palace. The king promptly directed that an award should be made.

Mary Slessor received the ancient and greatly honored decoration, the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in England. The medal, a silver Maltese cross, mounted on a black riband (ribbon), was formally presented to Mary in Duke Town. Mary was so overcome, as the handsome ribbon was pinned in the correct position on her left shoulder, that she lapsed into broad Scots dialect.

"Eh!" she exclaimed. "And for years I've been telling my bairns that it's the wee lassie who sits beside her mother at mealtimes that gets all the tasty morsels. The one who sits far away and sulks doesn't know what she misses. Even the cat gets more than she does. I thought I was the one who always had to sit a long ways off!"

There was now a general effort on the part of good-hearted Europeans in Duke Town to get Mary to spend the last years of her life in the more comfortable surroundings of civilization. She was even taken in a government car to examine a handsome little bungalow with a shady veranda, running water, and comfortable

furniture. The house stood in a half acre of trim, flower-filled garden. The place was rent-free, Mary was assured; she was more than welcome to live there for as long as she liked.

Mary walked slowly through the well-furnished rooms, admiring the attractive curtains, the well-sprung bed, and the handy layout of the kitchen. "It's a lovely wee place," she said wistfully, when her tour ended. "In my younger days I sometimes dreamed of having a house like this. But my work lies up in the Arochuku country, and there's still more to be done there than I'll ever find time to do." Mary paused, and then added with a quick smile, "Besides which, I doubt if my girls would ever consent to cook food in such a marvelous stove. An old black pot and a few logs are what we're all accustomed to, and they serve us well enough."

So Mary went back to her home at Ikpe. Now that her strength was lessening and bouts of illness were becoming more frequent, she had to spend more time resting on the thatched veranda of her house. She read extensively, and visitors always marveled at her up-to-date information on events in every corner of the world. Her correspondence was enormous, and many of her letters ran from six to twelve pages. Every day, however, she found time to read the Bible, and the actual copy she used is still carefully preserved. On many of the pages are notes in Mary's handwriting that frequently reveal her deep understanding of human nature.

"A gracious woman has gracious friendships," reads one such note. Others include: "Half the world's sorrow comes from the unwisdom of parents." "Slavery never pays: the slave is spoiled as a man, and the master not less so."

In the early days of August 1914, news came that Britain was fighting Germany. The most terrible war in history up to that time, World War I, had begun. Before it ended in 1918, this war was to involve half of the world, and destroy millions of lives.

In some way, Mary sensed that her life was now drawing to an end. Very carefully and thoughtfully she made arrangements for all

the younger children she was caring for—there were seven of them—to be taken down the river to the Calabar Mission. Four of the older girls still remained with her.

"When I go," she told them, "tidy up the house and make it look nice. Then pack your own belongings and go on down the river. There'll be a welcome and a home for all of you at the Calabar Mission. Try to remember what I've taught you. Go forward into the new ways of life; never be tempted to go back to the bad old ways."

Ten days later a doctor, Dr. Robertson, came to see Mary. As a result, she was carefully moved by canoe down the Enyong Creek to her old home at Itu.

Dr. Robertson said later:

> It was not a grand house with costly furnishings. The walls were of reddish-brown mud, very roughly built; the floor was of cement, with a rug here or there, and the roof corrugated iron. Besides the bed, washhand stand, and a chair or two, there was a chest of drawers, which had belonged to her mother. ... Miss Slessor's greatness was never in her surroundings, for she paid little attention to these, but in the hidden life of which we caught glimpses now and then when she forgot herself and revealed what was in her mind with regard to the things that count.

It was in this humble home in a lonely African outpost that Mary Slessor, the pioneer missionary, finally died on a cool January night in the year 1915. The last words she spoke were directed to the four faithful young women who had remained with her to the end.

"*Kutua oh, kutua oh,"* she said gently. "*O Abasi, sana mi yok."* (Do not weep; do not weep. The Lord is taking me home.)

The district commissioner at Itu wired to Duke Town the news of Mary's passing. A government launch took the coffin down the river. Mary was laid to rest in the peaceful, well-preserved grounds of the Calabar Mission.

Many tributes were paid to her. Among them was the formal black-bordered notice in the government *Gazette.*

It is with deepest regret that His Excellency the Governor-General has to announce the death at Itu, on 13th January, of Miss Mary Mitchell Slessor... .

For thirty-nine years, with brief and infrequent visits to England, Miss Slessor has labored among the people of the eastern provinces in the south of Nigeria. By her enthusiasm, self-sacrifice, and greatness of character she has earned the devotion of thousands of the natives among whom she worked, and the love and esteem of all Europeans, irrespective of class or creed, with whom she came in contact. She has died, as she herself wished, on the scene of her labors, but her memory will live long in the hearts of her friends, native and European, in Nigeria.

Another tribute, perhaps the one that would have pleased Mary most of all, was a poem written by a fifteen-year-old Scottish girl, Christine Orr, with whom Mary had carried on a charming correspondence. Entitled *The Lament of Her African Children,* this long poem has one verse that reads:

Oh! our mother—she who loved us,
She who lost herself in service,
She who lightened all our darkness,
She has left us, and we mourn her
With a lonely, aching sorrow.
May the great good Spirit hear us,
Hear us in our grief and save us,
Compass us with His protection
Till through suffering and shadow
We with weary feet have journeyed,
And again our mother greets us
In the Land beyond the sunrise.

The Calabar Mission felt that the most fitting memorial to Mary would be the continuation of her work. Arrangements were swiftly made for the appointment of teachers at Ikpe who could continue to care for the children.

Among the few personal possessions Mary left was a handsome little rosewood box. It contained a large packet of letters, which she had received during her last years. The writers were men in

Nigeria—government officials, missionaries, and merchants—and men and women in many distant countries. Some were from the mothers and sisters of young officials she had befriended in Nigeria, others from children. All these letters were filled with affection and admiration and love.

Mary had often called herself a "rich woman." One learned from these letters one of the reasons why.