



MA'S LAST VOYAGE.

CHAPTER XI

What happened when the Great War broke out. Ma's last voyage down the Creek; how her life-long dream came true. Now she lies at rest, and dreams no more, but her work goes on.

The house at Odoro Ikpe was nearly finished. It was August 1914, and strange stories were being whispered among the natives of a great war in the world of white men beyond the seas. Ma knew how swiftly news travels in Africa, and became anxious but did not show it, and went calmly about her duties. The people grew more and more restless and excited, food became dearer, and no lamp oil could be had. She had to read at night by the light of a wood fire.

One day she was sitting in the new house when the mail boy came running up with letters. She took the packet and read of the invasion of Belgium by the Germans, with all the horrors of that terrible time, the coming of Britain into the struggle on the side of right and justice and freedom. "Thank God," she cried, "we are not to blame."

But the dreadful news shocked and hurt her so much that she became ill and could not rise. The girls carried her over to the rest-house and put her into her camp-bed, and for many days she was in a raging fever. At last, worn out, she lay in a stupor. Round her stood the house girls and some of the lads of the Mission weeping bitterly. What should they do? They felt they must not let their beloved Ma die alone so far away from her own people. They must take her to Use.

So they lifted her in the camp-bed and set out for Ikpe, carrying her gently over the streams and up and down the hills. Next morning they put the bed into the canoe and covered up the shrunken form and the thin withered face. The yellow cat was also put beside her, but the bag slipped open, and it was so frightened that it rushed into the bush and disappeared. It could not be found, and there was not time to wait, for a long journey lay ahead, and so it was lost and never seen again.

All day the lads paddled down the beautiful Creek among the water-lilies, and at night they took her ashore at the landing-beach, and she lay in the white moonlight until medicine was got and given to her, and then they carried her over the three miles to Use. Thus she came to the only home she had, never to leave it again.

She became a little better, and was able to get up and move about, but all the old fighting spirit had gone, and she was very tender and gentle and sweet. The War troubled her, and she was

always thinking of our brave soldiers in the trenches and praying for them. But she felt she could do nothing, and was content to leave everything with God. To a little boy and girl at home she said, "God will work out big things from the War, for there is no waste with Him." And to Christine she wrote, "Every blessing be yours in the year that comes. Though it opens in gloom there is Light on ahead."

Yes, for her, too, there was Light ahead. One night she lay dying in her mud-room with its cement floor and iron roof. Miss Peacock was with her and the girls, Janie, Annie, Maggie, Alice, and Whitie. Alice never left her, and slept on a mat beside her bed. Through the long hours they kept watch. Ma was restless and very, very tired, and sometimes begged God to give her rest. Just before dawn death came. God had heard Ma's prayer and given her rest. She had worked hard and faithfully for Africa, and now was to rest until Jesus comes again and on the glorious resurrection morning calls her forth to receive her eternal reward. But her place in Africa would be hard to fill, and the people wept, saying, "Adiaha Makara is dead. What shall we do? How shall we live? Our Mother is dead!"

Once more she voyaged down the Cross River to Duke Town, and there she was buried on the Mission hill, all Calabar, young and old, turning out to line the streets and show their deep sorrow. At the head of the grave sat old Mammy Fuller, a coloured woman from Jamaica, a faithful servant of the Mission, who had welcomed Ma when she first arrived, a bright-eyed happy girl, thirty-nine years before, and had loved her ever since. Ma had been fond of her too, and said it was she who ought to have had the Royal Cross.

"Do not cry," said Mammy to the women who began to wail. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

There was sadness in many a little heart when the news went across the ocean that Ma was no more. Ratcliffe missed the letters that used to flash like rays of sunshine into his quiet life. What of that wonderful secret which he had kept so closely locked up in his heart? He was told that it was all right now, and that there would be no harm in telling what it was. It turned out to be very simple, like many bigger mysteries and secrets. Ma and he had agreed to pray every day that he might get better and be able to walk, and he was to be good and always do his best.

Ratcliffe has never forgotten that compact he made with Ma. He remembers well how she loved him and prayed for him, and he believes that her prayers will be answered. He is now in Liverpool attending a school, and can go about on crutches with greater ease—sometimes for two and three hours at a time. He can also use his tricycle better, and enjoys a three or four-mile ride.

Christine, too, mourned for the loving friend she had never seen, and as she remembered the black children left motherless and alone she felt their sorrow and cried their cry, and put it all into the music of a haunting lament, a beautiful poem, which begins:

She who loved us, she who sought us
Through the wild untrodden bushlands,
Brought us healing, brought us comfort,

Brought the sunlight to our darkness,
She has gone—the dear white Mother—
Gone into the great Hereafter.

Ma's death made her famous. She, who was always hiding herself in life, was written and talked about and praised everywhere. The story of her heroism, devotion, and faith made her known and admired in many homes throughout the world, and so, although she lies in a far-off tropical land with her hands folded in rest and her lips quiet for ever, she is still helping and inspiring boys and girls and older people as she did of old.

She was a puzzling person in many ways. Perhaps her dear friend, Mr. Macgregor, describes her best when he says, "She was a whirlwind and an earthquake and a fire and a still small voice, all in one." But what girls and boys should remember is that she was, from her childhood, a dreamer of dreams. Not day-dreams which fade away into nothing. Not dreams of the night which are soon forgotten. But the kind of dreams which grown-up people sometimes call ideals, dreams that have in them the purpose of doing away with all that is evil and ugly, and making the world happier.

Many boys and girls dream dreams, but they do nothing more. Their dreams are like the clouds that drift across the summer sky and disappear. Miss Slessor would never have done anything if she had only imagined all her dreams. If a boy only longs to be a good cricketer or swimmer, he will never become one. If a girl only thinks about a prize at school, she will not gain it. If a sculptor or artist only dreams about a beautiful statue or painting, the world will never have the joy of seeing them. We have to set to work and make what we dream about a real and solid thing.

That is what the White Queen always did. Her dreams came true because she prayed hard and toiled hard and waited hard and loved hard, yes, and laughed hard, for faith and toil and patience and sympathy and humour are all needed to win success.

There was only one of her ideas which did not come to pass—her home for women and girls; and that would have come true also if she had lived a little longer, for it was taking hold of the Church, and money was coming in for it. It was like a bit of weaving which she had not time to complete. Now, young and old, who loved and admired her inside her own Church and elsewhere, have taken up the threads and are finishing it and making it a lasting memorial of her. A number of native buildings and a Mission House are being built, and there, under the clever guidance of her old comrade Miss Young (now Mrs. Arnot), young lives will be trained in all the things that make girlhood and womanhood useful and pure and happy. And there, too, will be a beautiful gateway where tired men and woman and children travelling along the hot roadway may take shelter from the sun, and rest, and find water to quench their thirst, and think, perhaps, of the Great White Mother who spent her life for their good.

The church at Ikpe built by Ma was destroyed by a falling palm tree; the house on the hill-top at Odoro Ikpe was blown down by a tornado, and part of the roof carried away into the valley; but her work goes on. Many of the young men she taught are now members of the Church; the services in all the towns are crowded; the schools are full of scholars, and others are being built.

"All around," says the Rev. John Rankin, of Arochuku, who looks after them, "there is a desire for schools, but the want of workers hinders more being done. We need a white missionary in the district."

Who is going to follow in Ma's footsteps, here and elsewhere?

She herself believed that it would be the young people of to-day. "I am glad to know," she said, "that the girls and boys are thinking of us and praying for us, and denying themselves and planning perhaps to come to our help."

Yes, the future of Africa, and, indeed, of the whole world of heathenism, lies with the young hearts who are now dreaming dreams of what they are going to do in the days to come. They will, by and by, be the pioneers and workers in the dark lands across the seas. It is to them that Jesus is looking to bring about the time when the whole earth will be filled with His light and love and peace.

Every one, of course, cannot work in the Mission field, and you do not require to go there to be a missionary. Wherever you may be, whatever you may do, you can always be a missionary and fight as valiantly as Miss Slessor did against sin and wrong-doing. You may not find your task easy. Our heroine did not find hers easy. You may meet as many difficulties as Christian did on his pilgrim way, and your dreams may be laughed at and scorned, but if you trust Jesus and persevere, you will come out all right in the end.

Dream your dreams then, boys and girls, brave ones, lovely ones, but as you grow up be sure and do your best to turn them into realities, for it is only those that come true that are making life better and sweeter and shaping the world into beauty.



DAN.