

Meade L. T.

**Mou-Setsé: A Negro Hero;
The Orphans' Pilgrimage: A Story
of Trust in God**



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L. T. Meade

Mou-Setsé – A Negro Hero

The Orphans' Pilgrimage

– A Story of Trust in God

Story 1 – Chapter I.

Part I – The Town of Eyeo

After all, his story began like any one else's – he came into the world. In a picturesque town in Africa he opened his eyes; and there is no doubt that his mother was as proud of her little black baby as any English mother would be of her child with fair skin. So far, his story was like any other person's story, but there, I think, the likeness came to an end. He was an African boy, and knew nothing of what we English people call civilisation. Mou-Setsé first opened his eyes on the world in a clay hut; but this fact by no means denoted that his parents were poor people; on the contrary, his father was one of the chief men of the town, and a member of the king's council.

Nor was the town a poor one. Perhaps I had better describe it a little, and also describe some of the strange actions of its inhabitants, before I really tell Mou-Setsé's story.

Though most of the houses were built of clay, the town of Eyeo was considered very beautiful. It lay in the midst of a fertile and lovely country called Yarriba. The town measured fifteen miles round, and a great deal of the ground was laid out in fields and gardens, so that, notwithstanding what we should call its want of civilisation, it looked very unlike many of the smoky, dirty towns at home, and very much pleasanter to live in.

There were walls round the town twenty feet high, built also of clay; and outside the walls there was a deep ditch. This ditch and this high wall were both necessary to protect the town from its enemies. Of course, like all African towns, it had a great many enemies, but it was supposed to be very well protected. The King of Yarriba lived in Eyeo. He had several wives, and his huts covered a whole square mile of the town. He was an idolater, and he had a council of some of the chief men to help him to rule. The king and his people had a very strange religion; each one of them had a god in his own house, and there were also two chief idols, one called Korowah and the other Terbertaru. One of these gods was for the men, and the other for the women. The women were not allowed to look at the men's god; and when the chief priest offered sacrifice to this god they dared not even glance at him. They might offer to their own god fowls, pigeons, and sometimes bullocks.

These curious idolaters had also a very strange way of burying their dead. All the dead man's riches, instead of going to his children, were buried with him. If he happened to have been a

very rich man, his dead body was carried in procession round the town to the burying-place, *which was in the floor of his own room*. After he was buried there with all his riches, his family went on living in the house and daily trampled on his grave without the least concern.

In this town, with its strange religion and its many odd customs, was born the little black baby who is to be the hero of this story. He was called Mou-Setsé, and, though he had black skin and rather round and beady eyes, and though certainly his thick, curling hair was also very woolly, yet in his own way he was as fine a little baby as any fair English child; and, as I have said before, his mother was just as proud of him. Mou-Setsé had three brothers and one sister older than himself, so he had plenty of playfellows, and was a great pet, being the youngest of the family.

The pretty little fellow used to sit on his mother's lap in the doorway of the mud hut, and play with some very precious glass beads which were hung round her neck. As he grew older he mounted on his elder brother's shoulders, and merrily would he and they laugh as they trotted up and down together. And as he grew still older, and ceased to be a baby, and was able to use his fat, strong legs, he and his brothers and sister went often outside the city walls, and walked through the maize fields beyond and over the plain till they came to the foot of the hills. Then, high up among the rocks, they would wander about in the shade and gather oranges and tamarinds and figs.

No English boys could have been happier than these little Africans on such occasions. Neither Mou-Setsé nor his brothers thought of any dark days that might come, and were, alas! only too near.

Story 1 – Chapter II.

Dark Days in the Town

I have said that sad days were not very far from poor little Mou-Setsé. They came when he was still only a little boy not more than eight years old.

The people of Eyeo had need of their high wall and their strong fortifications, for they were surrounded by enemies.

One day the news reached them that a strong neighbouring tribe, calling themselves Kakundans, were coming to attack them. The King of Eyeo had never done these people any harm, yet they wanted to conquer him, that they might take him and his subjects for slaves, and gain money by selling them to the Portuguese. This was very terrible news indeed; and great terror and great pain did it bring to the inhabitants of Eyeo. The poor mothers began to tremble as they clasped their babies in their arms and reflected on the dreadful thought that soon they and those little children so precious to them might be torn from each other. The fathers, too, brave warriors as they were, looking in the frightened faces of wives and children, felt some of those heart-pangs which make men resolute to conquer or to die. The king called a council, and it was resolved at this council that all needful preparations for war were to begin at once. Accordingly the priests offered sacrifices to Korowah, who was the men's god,

while the women hastened to gain the favour of Terbertaru, who belonged to them.

The warriors busied themselves in polishing their knives and sharpening their daggers and securing the handles of their axes. Even the little children tried to help. The elder boys cleaned and brightened the weapons, while the younger went out to pick fruit, rice, and corn, in case the enemy should shut them up and they should be short of food. Little Mou-Setsé was particularly busy in this way, and his active little feet were scarcely ever still.

These many preparations were not made a moment too soon. The captain of the war, and the chief warrior who was to defend the city gate, were only just appointed when the terrible Kakundans were seen approaching towards Eyeo. With their arms glittering in the sunbeams, on they came, nearer and nearer, trampling down the flourishing rice harvest, until the sound of their feet and the clanking of their weapons were heard just outside the city walls.

It was the intention of this cruel enemy to encamp round about the city, and to subdue it by famine. Oh, what trouble there was in Eyeo that night! What weeping and sorrow in many a hut! For though the children were ignorant, and perhaps the wives had some hope, well did the warriors know that they had little chance of escape. They were determined, however, to do what they could, and to defend their wives and children at any cost.

From the hour the Kakundans encamped round the city all was in confusion there. There was nothing thought of but the

war. Now and then bands of men used to go out and fight with the enemy, but the Eyeo men had very few successes and many failures. As the days went by they grew weaker and weaker. Alas! famine was making them weak. Famine was beginning to tell on old and young alike in the unhappy city. Little Mou-Setsé's fat legs grew thin, and his round cheeks hollow, while his bright, black eyes stared more and more out of his face every day. He was only one of many. He and his brothers and sister felt hunger, and even cried for bread, but they had not the terrible fear that pressed so heavily on the hearts of the grown people. That fear was to be realised all too soon.

The Eyeo men could bear the dreadful famine no longer, so they consulted together what they should do to get food. The siege had now lasted several months. After thinking and consulting for a long time, they decided on a very dangerous plan. It was this: the bravest of the warriors determined to leave the city for a time, and to go into the country to try and get a supply of food. This was a most bold and dangerous plan. They themselves would be exposed to the attacks of the enemy, while the city would be left defenceless. Hunger, however, had made these brave men desperate. Anything, they thought, was better than their present condition. So the warriors went out in a strong band, leaving the little children, the sick, and the aged behind them. Mou-Setsé's father and mother both went away. They bade their children good-bye cheerfully, and little Mou-Setsé, as he clasped his arms round his mother's neck, even laughed at the prospect of the good

food they all might soon have. Alas! how little they guessed the dreadful things that were about to happen.

The Kakundan camp, quickly discovering that the strongest of the inhabitants of Eyeo had left the city to seek food, determined not to lose so good an opportunity to make a final attack on the place. To make this attack, however, they must take two or three days to prepare. But well did the wretched people inside the city know what was going to happen. Poor little Mou-Setsé and his brothers and sister became at last really alive to their danger. They all cried and wept; but Mou-Setsé, though the youngest, possessed the bravest heart. He knew that crying would do no good; he wondered would it be possible to act, and so to act as to save his brothers and sister. He said nothing to them, but he ran about the town, and chatted to the old women, and finally got them to tell him a secret. This was the secret: as many as possible meant to escape from Eyeo that night. Mou-Setsé thought that he and his brothers and his sister might go too. Perhaps they might soon find their father and mother. Mou-Setsé believed that if only he had his mother's arms round him again he might be safe. He told his brothers and sister of his plan, and they all agreed to escape that very night. As soon as the night was quite dark they left their hut and went softly in the direction of the city wall. They reached the great city gate in safety, but there a sad scene of confusion met their eyes. Crowds of people were trying to get out, and, in the darkness, many of the feebler ones were killed. It was dreadful to listen to their cries and groans. Mou-

Setsé saw that little children would have no chance whatever in such a crowd. He wondered could they climb the wall, but its smooth, hard side, twenty feet high, he soon saw would be utterly impracticable.

Very sadly the children returned home, and most bitter tears did they shed in each other's arms. Poor little children! they little guessed that never again would they kiss each other, or play together, or be happy with that innocent happiness that the good and loving God gives to little children. Cruel men who followed the devil, not God, were soon to part them the one from the other. In the morning a truly fearful sight met their eyes. The huts were nearly empty; parties of the enemy walked about the streets; the gardens, that used to be so beautiful, were torn and ruined; many aged men, who had killed themselves in their dread of slavery, were lying dead in the streets. A little farther on they heard the crackling of burning wood, and soon the flames of their beloved city burst upon their sight. The enemy had set Eyeo on fire.

Story 1 – Chapter III.

What “The Right of Search” did for Mou-Setsé

No doubt, the children who read this story have heard of slaves; have heard how some little children are not free; how they are sold to any one who will give enough money for them; and that whether they have loving mothers and kind fathers who break their hearts at parting from them. The fathers are sold to one slave master, the mothers to another, the children to another. Often, very often, these children and fathers and mothers never meet again. In these days no slaves are allowed to be kept in any English territory, and even in America the slaves are at last set free. At the time, however, when Mou-Setsé was a little boy, there were numbers of slaves in America, and indeed in many other parts of the world. Mou-Setsé had heard of slaves – for what tiny African boy had not? – and now he knew that he himself was going to be a slave. When he saw the flames rising up in Eyeo, and his beloved home being burnt to ashes, he knew that this fate was before him. “Let us fly!” said his elder brother, whispering eagerly to him in his native tongue; but Mou-Setsé shook his head, for he knew he could not fly. All around was a terrible scene of confusion. Women, carrying children in their arms, were trying to escape from the burning huts; sometimes

they were entangled in a prickly bush and thrown down, or they were caught by the cruel enemy and tied together in gangs, so that they could not escape. Mou-Setsé stood quite still, and his brothers and sister, when they saw he could not fly, stayed near him. Soon the bright-looking children attracted attention, and were taken – then immediately they were separated from each other.

Poor little Mou-Setsé, as he was carried away in a gang with many other captives, though he forced the tears back from his eyes, and tried, brave little fellow that he was, to keep up a brave heart, yet could not but cast some lingering glances back at the rocky hills where he and his brothers had often played so happily. He felt in his poor little heart that his play days were over, for how often had his mother told him that there was no play for slave children.

At last, after a long, long journey, little Mou-Setsé and a long gang of other slaves found themselves at a place called Quorra. Here the Portuguese met them, and here they were to be really sold. A trader came to examine Mou-Setsé, and finding him strong and healthy, quickly bought him. He was now to be sold again. The trader, seeing that he was a fine boy and handsome, took great pains with him. He gave him good food, and washed his polished black face, and brushed his woolly locks. He did this from no spirit of kindness, but simply from the desire to get a greater price for him. At last, when he had recovered from the fatigues of his journey, and looked fresh and bright, he brought

him into the slave market. Here the traders who came to buy clustered round him and pulled off his clothes, and felt his limbs, and made him run, and leap, and throw his legs and arms about. No one cared whether he liked this treatment or not. He was treated in all respects like an animal without either soul or feeling. In about three hours he was bought by another trader and put, with many of his fellow slaves, into a canoe. They were sailing all that evening and all the next day. They passed through some very beautiful country, and Mou-Setsé might have enjoyed the lovely scenery had his heart been less full of wonder and pain. As it was, however, he could think of nothing but Eyeo and his home. Again and again he seemed to hear his beloved mother's voice, or he fancied himself looking with pride and admiration at his brave warrior father. Though he loved his mother best, yet it was the remembrance of his father that brought most strength to his poor little heart now; for his father had said to him often in his native language that a brave boy never wept – tears were for women and girls, but not for boys, who hoped to be warriors by-and-bye. Remembering these words of his father's, little Mou-Setsé pressed back the tears from his hot eyelids, and endeavoured to wear an indifferent face. He could not quite smile – his heart was too heavy for smiles – but no one saw the glistening of a tear on his dark cheek. Occupied with these bitter and sad thoughts, he could scarcely be expected to notice the beautiful scenery through which the river on which the canoe glided passed. His father, his mother, his brothers, his sister, he was torn from them

all; he did not know what had become of them; he might never hope to see them again; he might never learn their fate; their suffering might be even greater than his own. Poor little boy! and he knew of no God to comfort him, and had never heard of any hope beyond this world.

At last the canoe reached a place called Ikho. Little Mou-Setsé was again sold, and this time was sent to the fold, or the spot where purchased slaves are kept till there is an opportunity to send them off in vessels to other countries.

Mou-Setsé found life in the fold very dreadful. He had a coarse rope put around his neck, the ends of which were fastened round the necks of other slaves, so that a long row of them were secured together, and one could not move without dragging all the others with him. The boys were thus roped together, and the men chained in fifties.

In this terrible place – treated with cruelty, cold, half-naked – Mou-Setsé spent two months.

But a greater evil was to come. This poor little African boy was to pass through a black and heavy cloud into God's glorious light.

For let no one suppose that God had forgotten this little child whom He had made. Every hair of that little woolly head was numbered by God; every sigh he sighed, every groan he uttered, was heard and regarded by that great and good God, who loved him just as well with his black skin as He loved the fairest and most lovely English child.

But Mou-Setsé had a dreadful time before him, for God teaches His lessons in the storm as well as the sunshine.

This suffering was to take place on board the Portuguese slave-ship to which he was shortly removed. No one can understand who has not witnessed it the miseries of a slave vessel. The negroes are placed on their backs, or fixed in a sitting position, on ranges of shelves, one above the other, and in dark, close places, where hardly any air and no light are allowed to enter.

Here they are chained so close together that the space which each is allowed is scarcely so much as he would have in his coffin. Thus they lie for weeks and months, sometimes brought up on deck to jump about in their chains for exercise, exposed to sea-sickness, disease, and to the rubbing of the rough boards on their naked bodies. Many die, and those who live are, on landing, wretched objects. In the vessel in which Mou-Setsé was, the men were packed away below deck, but the women and children were allowed to remain above. Sad, sad were their hearts as they thought of their dear native country, and of those little children and fathers and mothers from whom they were severed. Their bodily sufferings were also very hard to bear... But God had not forgotten them. Belief was at hand.

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