



I

A FIRM FOUNDATION: THE CALABAR MISSION ESTABLISHED

The relation of our West Indian to our West African Mission is peculiarly intimate, for our churches in Calabar are in some sense the offspring of our churches in Jamaica. It is an indication of healthful life when one Christian enterprise thus gives being to another; and one of the debts which we owe to the Jamaican Mission is, that it gave birth, by irresistible suggestion, to our undertaking in West Africa, and sent forth such labourers as Waddell, and Jameson, and Anderson, and Goldie and Robb.

Dr H.M. MacGill

Missionary Record of the United Presbyterian Church, June 1870¹

I borrow a sentiment from a Jamaican brother, greatly beloved: 'Crowns, immortal crowns, are to be gained here' – in Old Calabar. Let not those who might be – who should be – candidates for the golden honours throw their opportunity lightly away.

William Anderson
writing in 1870²

- 1 William Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1897), p. 545.
- 2 William Marwick, *Ibid.*, p. 474.

II

MARY SLESSOR: A LIFE ON THE ALTAR FOR GOD

... [T]he Christian nations do more, much more, by pushing, in their traffic, the diffusion of intoxicants throughout the world, for the support of Satan's kingdom, than they do by all their evangelistic efforts for the establishment of Christ's kingdom. ... As to my own field of labour, I can bear witness that the use of strong drink is as great a hindrance to the evangelisation of these tribes as the heathenism of the country; and this strong drink is almost entirely supplied by European traders, by far the greater part of our own countrymen. The importation of strong drink is as effectually working against our efforts, and as effectually serving the cause of the kingdom of darkness, as the idol priest, or the juju man with his dark and bloody superstitions.

When the rum cask and the Bible are presented to a heathen people, which is the more likely to be accepted? ... I feel keenly on this matter, and we have a right to remonstrate strongly. We are sent here to bring these tribes to the knowledge and obedience of the truth, and we have given our lives to the undertaking; but we find our efforts strongly and strangely counteracted by the strong drink imported by professedly Christian men ...

Hugh Goldie

writing in his journal, Thursday 6 May 1869³

The Scots Confession of Faith of 1560 bore on its front as motto and legend the words of Christ which contain the charter of the Church's missionary endeavour: 'And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come' (Matt. 24: 14), and ended with the prayer... 'Let all the nations come to thy true knowledge.' Many generations were to pass, however, before the Scottish Church took any measures to fulfil its missionary obligations. This is not surprising when we note that in the Book of Common Order, while there were many prayers for divine protection from Rome and its power, and for its overthrow, only one petition concerned itself with the conversion of the heathen. For at least a century

³ William Marwick, *Ibid.*, pp. 447-8.



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and a half after the Reformation, the heathen world was a mere 'geographical expression' to the people of Scotland.⁴

Through the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge,⁵ some support was given to David Brainerd (1718–47), whom the Society had appointed missionary to the Indians in Eastern Pennsylvania. In the years 1745–6, towards the end of his life, Brainerd saw, in his own words, 'a remarkable work of grace' among the Indians.⁶ It was not until the very late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, however, that missionary societies were formed in England and Scotland. The first Scottish Society for Foreign Missions was set up in Glasgow in February 1796. About the same time the Scottish Missionary Society was founded in Edinburgh. This spread to other towns, including Dundee. At first, money was sent to London, then the Scottish societies decided to sponsor their own missionaries. They sent missionaries to Sierra Leone, but this ended in failure by 1800.

The initial impetus for a mission in West Africa, to what came to be known as Old Calabar, started not from Scotland itself, but from Jamaica. A name forever associated with the emancipation by Act of Parliament of slavery in that island (the slave trade itself having been abolished in 1807) is that of William Knibb. He took a lead in fighting for the abolition of slavery there, which was achieved in August 1838, complete freedom being granted throughout the British West Indies. In the aftermath of this, there was a period of seven years of astonishing spiritual harvest, when

4 Dugald Mackichan, *The Missionary Ideal in the Scottish Churches*, Chalmers Lectures (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927), pp. 64–5.

5 Founded 1709.


6 For example, in the 'General Remarks on the preceding narrative', after 19 June 1746, Brainerd wrote: 'It is remarkable that God has so continued and renewed the showers of His grace here; so quickly set up His visible kingdom among these people. ... It is now nearly a year since the beginning of the outpouring of the Divine spirit among them.... He has with uncommon quickness set up His visible kingdom, and gathered Himself a church in the midst of them.' (*Life and Diary of David Brainerd, with a Preface by Jonathan Edwards*, Delaware: Cornerstone Publishing Company, n.d., p. 103.)



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the main denominations all saw a mighty ingathering of souls, though it was greatest among the Baptists.⁷

In July 1841, in the midst of that awakening, a group of ministers and elders met in the Goshen Presbytery in Jamaica, with a burden to evangelise Africa. They were given copies of T.F. Buxton's book *The Slave Trade and its Remedy*. Buxton detailed the extent of the slave traffic to the New World, and the horrors of the 'Middle Passage' across the Atlantic during which loss of life was great. He also went on to state how Africa 'possesses within herself the means of obtaining, by fair trade, a greater quantity of our goods than she now receives from the Slave Trade ...'⁸ More importantly, for those meeting in Presbytery, was the way Buxton reminded them of what they must have known:



An important feature of the present time is this, that the exertions of the missionaries in the West Indies are beginning to tell on their converts in the missionary spirit which they have imparted. There is a feeling in the hearts of our emancipated negroes towards the land of their origin, which seems to have arisen spontaneously in various congregations.⁹

- 7 His principal biographer, John Howard Hinton, sums up Knibb's contribution in these words: 'Practically he stood alone, and he needed for his support all the firmness and constancy of his character. So far as Jamaica is concerned, consequently, the blacks may well be excused for reckoning him the father of freedom. No one had they seen struggle and suffer for it as he had done. It is not possible that in that island, freedom should ever be so intimately or so passionately associated with the name of any man, as with that of William Knibb.' (J.H. Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb, Missionary in Jamaica*, London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1847, p. 554.) There is a suggestion, from the correspondence of the time, that Knibb would have been more involved in the creation of the Old Calabar mission, had he been able to devote more time to it. (J.J. Smith, *William Knibb: Missionary in Jamaica, a Memoir*, London: Alexander and Shepherd, 1896, p. 112.)
- 8 T.F. Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy* (London: John Murray, 1840), p. 305.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 492. In June 1840, following the publication of Buxton's book, the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and the Civilisation of Africa was formed, under the presidency of Queen Victoria's consort Prince Albert. See Michael Marioghae and John Ferguson, *Nigeria under the Cross* (London: The Highway Press: 1965), p. 31.

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Indeed, the Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society in Jamaica wrote home of thousands of ex-slaves who were zealous for the spiritual good of their homeland, and wished a mission established to the interior of West Africa. This letter was included in Buxton's volume.¹⁰

At that meeting, Hope Masterton Waddell, an Irish minister of the United Secession Church from Mt Zion in the parish of St. James, Jamaica, spoke on the subject of a Christianised Africa. The result was that eight Scottish ministers of the Presbytery there offered themselves for Africa, if God should call. Christie, in his *Annals of the Calabar Mission*, records:

Rev. Messrs Blyth, Waddell, Cowan, Simpson, W. Niven, P. Anderson, Jameson, and Scott – gave his (sic) opinion in favour of the mission, and expressed his (sic) readiness to go forth on it, if called thereto by his (sic) brethren, and approved by the church at home.

The Jamaican Mission Presbytery adopted resolutions in favour of the mission to Africa, and earnestly entreated the Scottish Missionary Society and the United Secession Church to undertake this work. (The proposal was chillingly received by the authorities of these bodies, who frowned upon the project as premature and presumptuous'.¹¹

Two years later, a letter arrived in Jamaica, signed by King Eyamba V of Calabar and seven of his chiefs, inviting missionaries to come, promising a spot of land between the two towns of Old Calabar and Henshaw at the mouth of the Cross River, on the eastern edge of the southern coast of what is now known as Nigeria. A welcome and protection were also promised.¹² Correspondence continued between Jamaica and West Africa. Meanwhile, two of the Jamaican ministers, Blyth and Anderson, home in Scotland on

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 492-3.

¹¹ W.M. Christie, comp., *Annals of the Calabar Mission 1846-1945. A Skeleton for the Historian*. Unpublished handwritten record, n.d. (c. 1946), p. 6.

¹² H.M. Waddell, *Twenty-nine years in the West Indies and Central Africa, 1829-1858* (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1863), p. 209.



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furlough, pleaded the cause and sought to awaken the interest of Scots in the possibility of a mission there.

While, however, Scotland discussed and considered, Jamaica acted. At a presbytery meeting in September 1844, they decided to go ahead with the mission, appointing Waddell as their representative to Scotland, and its first agent in Old Calabar. (The Jamaica Mission itself had been founded as recently as 1835.) In 1845, the Original Secession Church of Scotland adopted the mission, until taken over by the newly formed United Presbyterian Church in 1847. This church was to take a firm stand against slavery, to the extent of breaking off communion with Presbyterian churches in America which tolerated slave owners.¹³

On 6 January 1846, the small band of pioneers set out in a brigantine named the *Warree*, given to them by a Liverpool merchant named Jamieson. They were also given £100 per annum towards sailing expenses for as long as required. The company reflected the changed situation in Jamaica: the Rev. Hope Waddell; Mr Samuel Edgerley, printer and catechist of the Jamaican Mission, with his wife, who was an experienced teacher; and three non-Europeans – Andrew Chisholm, a carpenter, Edward Miller, a teacher and a negro of African descent, and an ex-slave boy called George, who acted as a servant to Waddell. These six arrived at Duke Town, Calabar on 10 April.¹⁴

They had come to an area known as the ‘White Man’s Grave’. MacGregor Laird, Scottish explorer, shipbuilder and merchant pioneer of British trade on the River Niger, described Old Calabar before a Parliamentary Committee in 1833 as the ‘most uncivilised part of Africa ever I was in’.¹⁵ In his book, *Twenty-nine years in the West Indies and Central Africa*, Hope Waddell wrote: ‘To the European

13 William Dickie, *Story of the Mission in Old Calabar* (Edinburgh: Offices of the United Presbyterian Church, 1894), pp. 9-10.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

15 Quoted in E.G.K. Hewat, *Vision and Achievement, 1796-1956. A History of the Foreign Missions of the Churches United in the Church of Scotland* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1960), p. 196.



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constitution the climate is most exhausting and debilitating. It sucks out the vital energy ... Five years there brings one down like ten or fifteen in Jamaica ...'¹⁶

Waddell also wrote, with reference to the year 1852: 'In the three years which formed the period of my second sojourn in Calabar, my health had suffered more than during all my previous missionary life'.¹⁷ Indeed there is little reason to doubt the description of the West African coast as 'The White Man's Grave'. The Lyons Society for African Missions was started in 1856. In its first sixty-five years' service, it lost prematurely, in West Africa alone, no fewer than 283 missionaries.¹⁸

Six years later Waddell was forced to withdraw from the mission due to ill health. At that time malarial fever took a heavy toll of lives, new recruits to the mission field dying sometimes only weeks or months after arrival. Things did not improve much until 1880, when French physician Alphonse Laveran identified a parasite as the cause. That was the first step. Then, in August 1897, the groundbreaking discovery was made that the female *Anopheles* mosquito caused the malaria.

The year was split into distinct seasons. The dry extended from December to March. This was known as the 'smokes', when the atmosphere was filled with a dry haze, which loads the air, dulls the eyes, parches the skin, withers the vegetation, and obscures everything. In April and May, and also in October and November, it was the time of the tornado. Then from June to September it was the rainy season, when everything felt damp and chilly, clothes could not dry, and books became blue with mould.

This area of southern Nigeria may have acquired its name from the fifteenth-century Portuguese explorers. They called the tribes in the Bight (or Bay) of Biafra 'Calabaros' and 'Calapongas'. In the mid-nineteenth century, this part of Africa was owned or controlled by no European power, though the British did look

16 Waddell, *Twenty-nine years in the West Indies and Central Africa, 1829-1858*, p. 335.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 520-1.

18 C.P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, Vol. III, 1878-1914 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964), p. 195.




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upon it as a 'sphere of influence', without, however, having any foothold there or control over the people.

The people of the Calabar area were a mixture of several tribes. There were more Ibibio than Efik in the Calabar area. First missionary contacts, however, were with the Efik community, who had moved into Old Calabar from Ibibio territory in the seventeenth century. They were mainly fishermen. Groves gives us this in more detail:

The Efik people of Old Calabar are a branch of the Ibibio tribe which lies to the west of the Cross River. The Efik section seems to have split off and migrated early in the seventeenth century, and by the end of the eighteenth to have been settled in four towns on the Calabar River, an eastern tributary of the Cross: Creek Town, Duke Town, Henshaw Town and Old Town, to give the names by which they were known to Europeans. They lay some forty to fifty miles from the sea.¹⁹



As the settlement of the New World developed, however, the Atlantic Slave Trade, or Triangular Trade, also increased its momentum. Fortunes were to be made in the buying and selling of human lives like property. Between 1720 and 1830, around one million slaves were shipped out of Calabar, not to mention the thousands who died in the anchorage or were butchered on the coast. In this the Efik chiefs were quite complicit. Indeed the main above-mentioned towns of Old Calabar were built up from the profits of the slave trade. It made the petty 'kings', or chiefs, quite rich. (European traders gave the honorary title of 'King' to chiefs who engaged in trade with them). As slavery gradually died out, the growing traffic in palm oil, which was used to oil the machinery of the Industrial Revolution, took its place. Indeed it was the only respectable commodity traded.

In coming to Calabar, the missionaries were entering a part of Africa which, with its tribal warfare, savage customs and slave

19 C.P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, vol. II, p. 36.

trading, was in steep moral decline. MacGregor Laird, briefly referred to earlier, described Calabar thus:

I was much struck by the demoralisation and barbarism of the inhabitants in comparison with the natives of the interior. The human skulls seen in every direction and that are actually kicking about the streets attest the depravity of feeling among the people.²⁰

What the missionaries were to find, as they sought to establish a presence there, and bring the gospel to the people, was a society and culture with several evil customs and practices that were obviously in direct conflict with their Christian teaching.

Central to an understanding of Efik and neighbouring society were two very powerful, authoritative systems:

...the 'house' (*ufok*), and a secret society, Ekpe. The *ufok* represented a patriarchal system that adapted to meet changing economic and social conditions. Composed of a group of related families, it dealt mainly with lineage and property, while the powerful Ekpe made and enforced laws governing the social, political and religious life of the people. ...

When writers refer to kings and chiefs, they have in mind the leaders of various houses, though such leaders were also in positions of authority within Ekpe. An *ufok* included everything a chief owned – not only land and personal property but also family, servants and slaves, and some who simply chose to align themselves with a particular house leader. ...

Each village had a clearing for community gatherings. Here Ekpe staged colourful ceremonial masquerades, with dancing, plays, and beating of drums. But 'Egbo runners', enforcers of Ekpe laws, were feared when they ran through villages with whips, assaulting those who had the audacity to remain outside of their homes.... Ekpe could arrest, fine or execute those judged guilty of wrongdoing.²¹

20 Quoted in James Buchan, *The Expendable Mary Slessor*, p. 37.

21 Jeanette Hardage, *Mary Slessor, Everybody's Mother* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2010), p. xix, and fn. 18.



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It is not surprising, therefore, that missionaries and others were struck by the fear in which the Calabar people were kept. Mission historian and former Calabar missionary McFarlan put it like this:

Magic was the keynote to which native life was tuned. Ekpo (or Egbo), the Lord of mysteries, was more powerful than any individual king or chief. ... To the common people Ekpo was a dread being who lived in the forest. Every now and then he descended on the town concealed in a small tent and hid himself in the Ekpo shed. A throbbing stringed instrument and the deep tones of the Ekpo drum, gave forth his orders in tones like those of an angry leopard. ... Ekpo laws were inviolate. ... To defy Ekpo was a capital crime. Specially designed to keep women and slaves in subjection, it rendered the authority of the masters absolute. ...²²

The *Missionary Record of the United Presbyterian Church*, in an article written in 1847 entitled 'The Reign of the Devil at Calabar', summed up the influence of the Ekpe Order in these words: 'It is truly astonishing to what an extent the agent of darkness has secured possession of such territories as Calabar. By the devil in the form of Egbo is the universal population kept in awe.'²³

The Ekpe Order, then, was the supreme political power in Old Calabar, exercising legislative, executive and judicial functions. Justice was carried out like a medieval trial by ordeal. If some disaster occurred, the witch doctor would put suspects through the poison bean trial. Ground dried *esere* beans were added to water, and given to the suspects to drink. If they vomited up the mixture, they were innocent and life was spared. Failure to vomit meant guilt and execution, or dying in fearful agony.

Another savage custom which showed the cheapness of life there was the sacrifice of slaves at the death of a chief. Scores of slaves would be killed to keep the chief company on his dark voyage. Not only did the natives have no concept of substitutionary

22 Donald M. McFarlan, *Calabar, The Church of Scotland Mission, 1846-1946*, (London: Nelson, 1946), pp. 23-4.

23 *Missionary Record of The United Presbyterian Church*, Vol. II (October 1847), p. 170.



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atonement; they believed rather in substitutionary punishment. A chief could have a slave killed in his place if Ekpo law had been broken.

Yet another practice, the prevention of which was very dear to the heart of Mary Slessor, though its prevention did not begin with her, was twin murder. The belief was that the father of one of the infants was an evil spirit, and the mother was guilty of some great sin. One of the infants, which one they knew not, was thought to be demon-possessed. After birth, the backs of the infants were broken, and they were stuck in a calabash or water-pot. They were then taken out through a hole in the wall of their hut, not the doorway, and left in the bush (all land outside the towns, whether forest or scrub, was bush), to be eaten by insects or wild animals. The mother was disowned and became an outcast. The earliest missionaries did their best to intervene when they heard of such cases, trying to rescue the infants and take them to the security and care of their mission house. For example, Waddell records how, in 1852, Mrs Edgerley saved the twins of a woman in the mission house at Old Town. Then a few weeks later, twins born at Creek Town were saved and moved to a farm in the neighbourhood.²⁴

Charles Partridge, a future confidant of Mary Slessor, wrote of the practice graphically in his *Cross River Natives*: 'The mother of twins was seen as no better than a she-goat or dog. It is considered one of the children is due to her intercourse with a man, and the other to her intercourse with some evil spirit. Her husband repudiates her, and she is driven away from the community'.²⁵

It was a practice so deeply ingrained in the native people that missionaries found that the women did not want any change in the custom, and resented missionary interference:

Preparatory to public measures, we tried to press on the women their duty in the matter, expecting their cooperation; but, you will be surprised to learn, instead of favouring our object, they cried out against any change. They think it disgraceful to be

²⁴ Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years*, pp. 511-13.

²⁵ Charles Partridge, *Cross River Natives* (London: Hutchison & Co, 1905), pp. 257-8.





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the mother of twins, and brush down their arms, as if sweeping off a defilement, crying *ifanke*. Instead of being horrified at the idea of infants being destroyed, they are displeased at our alluding to the subject. Some of them laugh at our expressions of distress, but others do begin to think about it. ...²⁶

Indeed, the status of women generally in Efik society was deplorable. First of all, marriage in the Christian sense did not exist. Free wives, like the concubines and slave women, had to support themselves and their children by farm work. A wife could be put away by her husband at any time and for any reason. Slave women could be taken as concubines, passed around, or taken by any man. To elevate the status of women, enabling them to have an independent livelihood and freedom from abuse, was to become a major effort on Mary Slessor's part. Indeed, as we shall see in chapter three, she saw the problem with regard to the native women right from the start.

The situation with regard to native customs was well summed up in the *Missionary Record* for 1850, which commented on



the multitudinous heathen customs of the country. ... These may be said to be a web woven with the threads of iron, which binds together all the relationships of life and all the parts of society, and holds the wretched natives in a thralldom which they cannot burst. The sacrifices for the dead, funeral rites and lamentations, trials for witchcraft, marriage rites, juju superstitions, and ceremonies for given days, all control the people, and form a spiritual despotism, marked by deceit, cruelty and blood.²⁷

Forty years later, in 1890, James Luke, commended to the work of the Calabar Mission in 1885, wrote to the *Record* an article entitled 'Up the Cross River: Beyond the Rapids':

Not infrequently did discussions arise over the words, 'Thou shalt not kill!' Not one of you at home has the faintest idea

²⁶ Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years*, p. 442.

²⁷ *Missionary Record*, Vol. V (1850), p. 91.



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of the horrible practices in this vast habitation of cruelty, or, of the wholesale murder carried on day by day. ... Abortion, beheading in the bush, cold-blooded murder under the supposed influence of Ifot (i.e. witchcraft or magic), binding the limbs and casting into the water, putting poison in the food, and the dreaded Calabar bean – all this, and more, is daily carried on around and beyond us in this land of awful gloom.²⁸

It was inevitable, therefore, with Calabar society in the condition it was, that there would be a head-on clash between the missionaries and the Efik chiefs. They clashed over the frequent, sometimes daily, slave beatings and killings. They clashed over the teaching of the missionaries that God was no respecter of persons. When they taught that all are equal in God's sight, and should therefore be treated with respect and love, this appalled the chiefs. For the very thought that a slave might be equal to a chief or king in the spirit world, struck at the very basis of a society in which the exploitation of others was the key.

In spite of the obvious uphill task the mission had set itself, some little progress was made. Hope Waddell opened schools in Duke Town and Creek Town. The attitude of the chiefs or kings to the missionary presence varied. In Creek Town the missionaries had the support of King Eyo VII of Old Calabar. He translated for them in the early days at their church services. Hugh Goldie wrote of him, after his death in 1892: 'To the end of his life he maintained his character as a sincere Christian, and was ever ready to take part in any scheme to promote the welfare of the community. He believed God should be brought into every area of life'.²⁹ Goldie saw him as being raised up 'in the midst of densest heathenism, showing what the gospel, by the grace of God can do, in lifting him above the pagan customs of his country'³⁰

28 Ibid., New Series, Vol. XI (1890), p. 160.

29 Hugh Goldie, *Memoir of King Eyo VII of Old Calabar. A Christian King in Africa* (Old Calabar: U.P. Mission Press, 1894), p. 48.

30 Ibid., p. 52.



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Duke Town was less promising than Old Town, the chiefs there being less favourable to Christianity. King Eyamba of Duke Town, however, did have a 'commercial' interest in the gospel, hoping to benefit from agricultural development and a sugar industry, as well as schools. Most hostile of all in the early years of the mission was Chief Willy Tom Robins of Old Town. He clung to the old practices, and the year before he died had a nephew and two nieces put to death on suspicion of causing his illness. When he died in 1853 there was 'wholesale butchery', as several of his wives, sons and other natives were all killed. Christie, in his *Annals*, wrote of the massacre that ensued on his death. This led to the town being bombarded and flattened by the guns of HMS *Antelope*. The rebuilding of it began the next year.³¹

After six months of pioneering, Waddell set sail back to Jamaica to report on the work and also to recruit new staff for the mission. There returned with him, among others, Hugh Goldie and his wife. Goldie was to become the scholar of the mission.

About this time there began what became a sad refrain running through the history of the Calabar mission, the death of staff members after a relatively short period of service. Edward Miller and William Jamieson, who had kept things going while Waddell was away, succumbed to the climate and died. In 1849, however, William and Louisa Anderson arrived, and one Mr Sutherland. They were now able to open a school in Old Town. In 1854, a few more recruits arrived, to replace those invalided home. Goldie was now able to open a station on the east bank of the Cross River at Ikonetu, about twenty miles above Creek Town. Once again, however, the health of the Europeans proved too fragile for the climate: Waddell was invalided home to Dublin with his family, and several others died of fever, all in 1857. This was to be the pattern of things to come, so that for the next thirty years there was never more than fifteen Scots or Irish on the mission staff at Calabar at any one time. Twenty-nine of them would die during those years, and about the same number would be invalided home. Only a handful of mission members served for



³¹ Christie, op. cit., 8 February 1854; Agnes Waddell, *Memorials of Mrs Sutherland, Missionary, Old Calabar* (Paisley: J. & R. Parlane, 1883), p. 49; Dickie, op. cit., p. 47.



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any length of time, which left the Goldies, the Andersons, Mrs Sutherland and Mammy Fuller holding the fort.³² One who did survive to write about mission work there was James Luke. He commented on this state of things: 'For years, as each new worker arrived, he was absorbed at the base, played out, and sent home or fell; and the passing days were marked by new graves in old ground.'³³

Indeed, the recently formed United Presbyterian Church, which already had missions in Kaffraria, Jamaica, and India, as well as Calabar, was beginning to seriously doubt whether the latter station was worthwhile, so great were the casualties, so meagre the fruit from their early labours. What decided the continuance of the mission was its strategic importance:



The Old Calabar Mission is a stupendous enterprise, as it may be said to be the first station in a heathen country peopled by numerous millions. It is the door of entrance to the vast, fertile, and thickly-inhabited regions drained by the waters of the Niger, the Tsadda, and the Cross Rivers.

To the regions beyond Old Calabar is the natural entrance. We have taken possession of the entrance – the key to the interior, and we must be prepared for the results. Vast multitudes are waiting beyond Old Calabar for the gospel. Already an urgent cry, thrice repeated, has come to us from Bonny, asking for teachers and missionaries; and there can be no doubt that the calls from other places, will ere long, be many, earnest, and imploring. The mission is great in itself; but in its consequences it is immense'.³⁴

The mission was set, therefore, to persevere. The concentration of effort in those early years was mainly on Duke Town and Creek Town. Even then, there was in their midst one with a pioneering spirit: N. B. Newhall, who was one of the second group of pioneers

³² Buchan, *The Expendable Mary Slessor*, pp. 43-5.

³³ James Luke, *Pioneering in Mary Slessor's Country* (London: Epworth Press, 1929), p. 33.

³⁴ *Missionary Record*, Vol. IV (1849), p. 90.



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Waddell brought out, and an assistant in Duke Town. Newhall wanted to venture up the Cross River and plant a station at Umon. From his furlough at home, Waddell wrote a paper discouraging such rash expansionist ideas, only to be partly rebuked by the Foreign Mission Committee, which showed some of Newhall's impatience. The missionaries should not consider themselves 'only as messengers of Christ to the inhabitants of Old Calabar, but as the harbingers of mercy to the millions that occupy the vast regions of Central Africa drained by the Tsadda (i.e. Benue) and the Cross River'.³⁵

Apart from a visit to Bonny along the coast, where King Pepple informed them that while schooling was welcome, the destruction of their Juju house (their place of worship) was out of the question, the missionaries consolidated their hold on the coastal fringe. There was no question, in these early years, of going far inland at this point. In Duke Town and Creek Town they maintained two or three European missionaries, a few West Indian teachers, a medical officer and some other lay agents. The *Missionary Record* lists their main work in mid century as preaching the gospel with the help of an interpreter, school instruction (seen as a most important section of the work), acquiring the language (which had never been written), and obtaining provisions and premises. They also introduced vaccinations to the native people.³⁶

Waddell and his small band were very cautious, in those early years, of baptising those who professed faith in Christ. In fact, it was seven years on, in 1853 at Creek Town, before the first baptism took place; that of Esien Esien Ikpabio. He was later to become the first native teacher and minister in Calabar.³⁷ Two years later, the first chapel was built. The missionaries saw as

35 Somerville to Anderson, 26 Oct. 1848, *U.P. Letter Book*, Vol. I, p. 416, quoted in J.F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891. The Making of a New Elite*. (London: Longmans, 1965), p. 93.

36 *Missionary Record*, Vol. VIII (Jan. 1854), pp. 24, 26.

37 *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII (Jan. 1854), pp. 24, 26; Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson*, p. 501. 'The first ordination, therefore, (1872) of an African negro to read and to expound that Efik Bible which our Mission has given them, in language having not one scrap of literature when that negro first saw our missionaries, is an epoch in the history of Calabar which calls for devout thanks to God.'



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of first importance in those early years the need to educate the Efik people. This was done by setting up schools within the compounds of the various mission houses.

As Waddell left Creek Town in 1858, there were twenty-one native communicants and twenty-four catechumens (i.e. Christian converts under instruction) preparing for baptism. To those who wondered why Waddell and the others did not go further inland, he wrote:

Surprise has been expressed that the Calabar missionaries did not push their way far inland, to explore the central interior of the continent, as Dr Livingstone had done so well in the southern. In reply it may be stated, that some of us would have liked that service well, had it seemed our primary duty. But having gone to Calabar, not as geographical explorers, but Christian teachers, and finding there as much as we could do in that way, we could not leave our work behind and go further to seek it. Yet, in order to prepare for new missionaries passing us inwards, we did penetrate and open the country, as far as we could, without neglecting our proper work.³⁸

The penetrating and opening amounted, according to the *Record's* annual report for 1857, to four stations, and Ikunetu, a station on the Cross River twenty-five miles above Creek Town. Shortly after, outstations were set up at Ikorofiong, a few miles above Ikunetu, and Adiabo. After a quarter of a century, the mission could count forty-seven communicant members, and a total of 174 in all the congregations by the mid-1870s.

Establishing the mission had not been accomplished easily. William Anderson wrote in 1870 of three missionaries falling in the front rank of the mission field, and went on to say:

God tries and tests the Churches as well as the nations; and when He has smitten our most difficult mission once and again and a third time ... we are called to humiliation, but not to cowardice. ... We may take occasion from these sad events to inquire whether they be not rebukes, and whether


³⁸ Waddell, *Twenty-nine years*, p. 30.



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the very number we send, or fail to send, to Old Calabar, is not an index of the lack of zeal in the heart of the Church, and of the restraint of prayer. ... The Church does not yield to these untoward events, but must meet them with increased prayer and courage, as well as wise precaution.³⁹

Dr MacGill, in his general introduction to the *Report of the Old Calabar Mission* for 1871 echoed the uphill struggle the mission was having, but also their determination to continue in spite of so few responding to the call to join them:



Our Mission in West Africa has proved a trying one. It has cost life as well as labour and funds; but with all our regrets over these graves, to which no less than three were added during the year before last, yet no labourer in that insalubrious and depressing climate has ever hinted at abandonment. On the contrary, all our brethren in the field unite in urging its claim, and in asking additional labourers; and from their near and vivid view of the obduracy of the field, and of the inadequate numbers who labour in it, repeat words which have an awful pathos there, however coldly they may be uttered here: 'The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.' After many earnest appeals repeated for years, we have succeeded in obtaining the services of one missionary, the Rev. Dugald Campbell....⁴⁰

Recognition of what had been achieved in that first generation or so came from natives of Sierra Leone, Cape Coast and elsewhere who were resident in Old Calabar. In a letter to William Anderson in 1873 entitled 'Spontaneous testimony to the Christian influence of the Mission at Duke Town', they wrote as follows:

God has blessed your labour in a degree the extent to which you are little aware. We in the town have seen, and testify, how in former days one could hardly know the Sabbath from any other day in the week; for nearly at every turn of



³⁹ Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson*, p. 476.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 476, writing in the year of losses, 1870.



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the streets you saw drums beating, songs singing, dancing going on, market-keeping etc. But now how great is the change! A stop has been put to all these things, through your unwearied efforts in representing matters to the king and the chiefs, and showing them how it is against God's law for all these things to be done on the Sabbath Day. More also, there is now a surprising fondness in the whole town, among male and female, to attend divine service on Sunday; and as we see them marching up the hill in single file, and sending their servants to hurry up others who were not ready in time, we cannot but wonder with open mouths, and say, 'What God hath wrought!' And as we go to the service, we are also greatly surprised to see that the once neglected church of Duke Town, and the unoccupied seats (together with the school room) can hardly be sufficient to contain all that go to the worship of the Lord.⁴¹



Outward signs of changed behaviour, but not necessarily a work of grace in the hearts. Anderson, in fact, had a more realistic view of matters in Calabar than the previous quote would suggest. As he reviewed the work of the mission in a paper entitled 'Retrospect of a Quarter of a Century', Anderson referred to polygamy and slave-owning as barriers to church membership, and went on to comment:

For a long time the work was of a very 'uphill' kind indeed. ... During the period under review, seventy-nine adults have been baptised here. Of these, fifteen are dead, twelve have drawn back, and several have gone to other localities. Forty-one persons, including several of our own countrymen, baptised elsewhere, have been received into full communion here. ... The work of the gospel is little more than begun. ...

A few hundreds have been brought, more or less, under the influence of the sacred word; but the thousands still remain unimpressed, uninterested, and uninstructed.⁴²

41 Ibid. (1873), p. 499.

42 Ibid., pp. 516-17, 521-4.



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Anderson's preaching emphasis reflected the state of the society he was seeking to win for Christ. He insisted that there could be no conviction of sin where the moral law was not known, but he always closed his message with reference to Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The problem, however, was that the people did not have a word in their vocabulary for the biblical concept of sin. They did have a word for 'bad thing', which they applied mainly to the violation of proper social relations, but not to the offending of a holy God.⁴³ These early pioneers, Waddell, Anderson and Goldie, focused on the Ten Commandments and themes such as death, judgment, the sacredness of human life, the evil of some native customs and the need for conversion.⁴⁴ They also made a thorough use of the Efik vernacular in preaching, using the Efik New Testament (available in 1862) and the Old Testament (available in 1868) as they worked systematically through the Scriptures.⁴⁵ This led James Luke to assert some time later that no congregation in all of Africa was better schooled in the Bible.⁴⁶

The second generation of missionaries to Calabar, not least Mary Slessor herself, owed much to the strong foundations laid for the future work of expansion. Some names, in particular, deserve special mention. Although he had to pull out of Calabar by 1858, Hope Masterton Waddell, the original leader of the expedition, gained the friendship and support of King Eyo of Creek Town, and helped to shape the future course of the mission.

Years later, for he lived on until 1895, tribute was paid to Waddell in the *Missionary Record* in these words: 'A man of strong will, of ready resource, of great decision, of indomitable courage; active, kindly, courteous, dignified, quick to rebuke as a friend, ever loyal to the call of duty; large-souled, with great depths of

43 W. Harrison Daniel, 'Patterns in Mission Preaching in the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland Mission to Calabar, 1846-95', in *Bulletin of the Scottish Institute of Missionary Studies*, New Series, nos. 8-9, 1992-93, p. 31.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

46 Luke, *Pioneering in Mary Slessor's Country*, p. 19.

tenderness in his heart, and charitable in all his views. ... He was the missionary hero of a former generation in our Church ...⁴⁷ This is a generous, retrospective appraisal of the original leader. All was not, however, always harmonious. There were personality clashes, notably between Waddell and Anderson.⁴⁸

One of the most remarkable couples, in these early years of the Mission, was William and Louisa Anderson. At the age of eighteen, Mary Slessor first heard the man who was to earn the reputation of being the warrior of the mission, when he spoke at a missionary meeting in Dundee during one of his brief visits home. For forty years Anderson laboured in Calabar, in the words of McFarlan, a faithful preacher who constantly thundered against the evils of Duke Town.⁴⁹ He also translated the first New Testament portions to be printed in Efik.

His wife Louisa, together with Euphemia Sutherland who was widowed after a year's marriage, proved how effective women could be on the mission field. One of the chiefs of Duke Town summed up the impact 'Mammy' Anderson had made in these words: 'I tell you true, them women be the best man for Mission.' Of her the *Record* gave testimony in October 1871: 'Few have done or continue to do more self-denying and efficient service for Old Calabar than Mrs Anderson.'⁵⁰

Of Euphemia Sutherland, who took Mary Slessor under her wing when she first arrived, it is recorded by Agnes Waddel: 'She was readily welcomed into the harems of chiefs. She read and prayed with the women, gave them elementary instruction in knowledge, both secular and sacred; taught them to pray, and to read the Word of God for themselves.'⁵¹ She was also a most formidable character, being prepared on occasion to challenge

47 *Missionary Record*, Vol. XVI, (Feb. 1895), 'An Appreciation of Waddell (1804-95)', pp. 156-9.

48 Hardage, *Mary Slessor, Everybody's Mother*, pp. 205-6.

49 McFarlan, *Calabar, The Church of Scotland Mission*, p. 59.; Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson*, p. 484.

50 W.P. Livingstone, *Mary Slessor*, p. 37; Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson*, p. 484.

51 Waddel, *Memorials of Mrs Sutherland*, pp. 81-2.



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decisions of the judicial Egbo body. Once she rushed between an Egbo man and his victim, then

laid her umbrella on the poor man who was being flogged, and, raising her hand, commanded the executioner to stop. He was just in the act of coming down with another lash of his terrible whip, which was partly broken by the umbrella. The Egbo man then ran off, and she had the man taken to the mission house. While this was being done, the Egbo began flogging another man; but he also was given up when Mrs Sutherland was seen approaching. ... Mrs Sutherland was short in stature, and always of a slight figure, so that her power over these men, excited as they were, and in the midst of their Egbo observances, was something really marvellous.⁵²

Waddel comments that the combination of kindness and firmness in dealing with the natives accounted for her great influence with them. Buchan relates how she was one of few white women honoured with the title of Ma Akamba – Great Mother, a title of which Mary Slessor was later to be deemed worthy.⁵³ She was also a tireless worker. McFarlan wrote of her as a marvel of energy: teaching school on weekdays all morning, travelling to neighbouring villages in the afternoons to visit, prescribe simple medicines, and then meetings all day on Sunday.⁵⁴ Tribute was paid to her in the *Missionary Record* in 1895, which referred to her brief six months as the wife of a missionary, after which she

was for a quarter of a century married to the mission itself, mothering not only poor twin-children, who else had been cast out to die, but every needy and helpless soul, till she became known in the annals of the mission only by the new name the mission gave her of Mammy Sutherland; and her life grew into a living comment on the gracious promise ‘As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you’

52 Waddel, *Memorials of Mrs Sutherland*, pp. 70-1.

53 Buchan, *The Expendable Mary Slessor*, p. 29.

54 McFarlan, *Calabar, The Church of Scotland Mission*, p. 91.



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(Isa. 66:13), hearing which these poor untutored souls may still call up the memory of Mammy Sutherland, and say, 'If God love like her, He is indeed the God of love.'⁵⁵

The impact of these two women, and their fearlessness, was not lost on the young Slessor, and to an extent it can be said that she patterned herself on them.

Then there was the Edgerley family. Samuel Edgerley, printer and catechist, formed with his wife two of the original party who sailed with Waddell. Together with his experienced teacher wife, he began almost immediately a school in King Eyamba's yard in Duke Town. He also set up a lithographic printing press, pouring out literature that was to prove of great value in years to come. He died in post in 1857. His son, Samuel Howell Edgerley, earned a name as the explorer of the mission. He was described by James Luke – who was commended to the work of the mission in 1885, and appointed to replace Edgerley – as 'the first and foremost pioneer of the Calabar Mission', who 'made the shady inland forest his special pioneering area'.⁵⁶ The *Missionary Record* paid tribute to him in these words in 1893:

One man will long be remembered in this connection (going into the interior) – Samuel Edgerley the younger. We cannot overestimate this man's influence on the progress of the mission. He was the first to bring the healing balm to the wounded and weary tribes of the interior. He journeyed hither and thither all over the basins of the Cross and Calabar Rivers, and was the great instrument in breaking down the barrier that separated Efik from the tribes of the interior. True communication began to be carried on after his day.⁵⁷

By his last venture inland in 1883 he had penetrated 160 miles above Calabar by canoe. What he had started in the way of exploring and setting up stations at Umon and Ikolana, others continued after

55 *Missionary Record*, New Series, vol. XVI (1895), p. 73.

56 Luke, *Pioneering in Mary Slessor's Country*, p. 26.

57 *Missionary Record*, New Series, Vol. XIV (1893), p. 286.

him.⁵⁸ The pioneering spirit of the man can be seen in the conclusion to a report in 1881:

Do not let this mission stick down here among these mangrove swamps. Send us men expressly for the interior. They will have difficulties to fight, but these difficulties must be fought, and conquered too, as they have been, and are being, elsewhere. Don't send missionaries any more to Calabar, send them to Biafra, and as far beyond as they can get ...⁵⁹

This no doubt would not have gone unnoticed by Mary Slessor! A few years after her arrival in Calabar, however, in reference to Edgerley's successful voyaging into hitherto unknown regions, the following appeared in the *Missionary Record*:

When are the labourers coming out to enter on the great work of the interior? To what purpose is God filling our Hall with students? Surely the door opened so widely on the one hand, and the numbers seeking to put their hand to the work on the other, very obviously point the duty of the church.⁶⁰

In 1847, the Rev. Hugh and Mrs Jane Goldie arrived with others, all from the Jamaican mission field. Together they gave tireless

58 *Missionary Record*, New Series, Vol. II, p.154 (Nov. 1881). In June of that same year the *Record* carried this article on the work, which also featured Samuel Edgerley: 'The Calabar Mission, which seemed so long fruitless, is now one of the most fruitful in the whole earth. The increasing number and activity of the communicants, the increasing number of students in training as teachers and evangelists, and the manifestations of a Christian liberality not yet reached in our own land, tell of the changes which the gospel has wrought. We ploughed in hope: we sowed in tears: and now already we reap in joy. The most recent tidings are the most heart-stirring. A new tribe which had long resisted our approach, has been visited. They had never seen among them a white man till they looked on the face of the devoted Samuel Edgerley. They invite teachers to settle among them. They offer us suitable sites. The country is far beyond the swamps; it is high and healthy. This favourable entrance was greatly aided by the wise and good King Eyo, who sent a prince to accompany Mr Edgerley beyond Umon to Akunakuna.' (*Missionary Record*, New series, June 1881, p. 205.)

59 *Ibid.*, New Series, Vol. II (1881), p. 373.

60 *Ibid.*, New series, Vol. III (1882), p. 16, 'A Word to our Students', from the journal of Hugh Goldie, January 1882.



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service to the mission. Called by McFarlan ‘the scholar of the mission, an unpretentious, quiet man of God’,⁶¹ Hugh Goldie worked on a translation of the New Testament. Let Goldie, the linguist, explain his work himself:

The Efik very much resembling in idiom, as I have noted, that of the Semitic languages, can frequently more clearly express the import of the sacred writers than can the English. ... While providing selected passages of Scripture and other books at once for the people as soon as they could use them sufficiently to reveal the great scheme of mercy in Christ, and instruct in the way of life, we thought it well to secure the great body of the language before undertaking the work of strict translation.⁶²

Nevertheless, by 1862, the Efik New Testament and a two-volume Efik dictionary were complete. The New Testament in Efik was the first missionary publication of the National Bible Society of Scotland. Goldie reduced the Efik language to order by the publication of his Efik grammar. He wrote school books, catechisms, hymns and psalms. His hymn book of 300 hymns in the Efik language is still the basis of the Efik hymn book today.⁶³ It was from Goldie that Mary Slessor learned the importance of studying the factors which affected the outlook of the native people. Another colleague, Alexander Robb, who joined the Mission in 1858, completed the Old Testament in 1868, and a translation of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, hailed by the native people as the best-written book in their language. A good literary groundwork, and something of a pioneering spirit, was therefore laid by the first generation of the mission.

61 McFarlan, *Calabar, The Church of Scotland Mission*, pp. 57-8.

62 Hugh Goldie, *Calabar and its Mission*, (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1901) p. 304.

63 Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, II, 240. The Minute of the Presbytery of Biafra for 4 February 1863 has this note: ‘The Presbytery recorded with great interest the completion of the printing of the translation of the New Testament in Efik, made by Mr Goldie, the whole expense of which has been borne by the National Bible Society of Scotland.’





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Such men and women may have grabbed the limelight, but Goldie himself was not slow to recognise the essential work that went on behind the scenes without which the work of the mission could not have been carried forward:

The immense amount of routine work, teaching, translating, compiling school books, superintending schools and native teachers, which is not of such a nature as to captivate the imaginations of the supporters of missions, has been in no small degree the secret of the success which has attended the work in Calabar. And the men who gave their days, and often their nights, to this work ... have laid the foundations of a self-sustaining native church.⁶⁴

A solid foundation had, therefore, been laid in terms of literary groundwork, pioneering spirit and a firmness combined with compassion in dealing with the natives. On this the next generation of Calabar mission workers could build.



⁶⁴ Goldie, *Calabar and its Mission*, p. 372.