

Liberty University

At the Edge of Two Worlds: Mary Slessor and Gender Roles in Scottish African  
Missions

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## Introduction

Mary Mitchell Slessor, born in 1848 in Aberdeen and raised in the textile city of Dundee, Scotland after 1859, was shaped by the influence of Victorian standards of conduct and gender for Britain's working class. Slessor spent much of her childhood on the streets of Dundee, an industrial city which relied heavily on the textile industry.<sup>1</sup> Her father, Robert Slessor, a shoemaker in Aberdeen, lost his job due to his unreliability and drinking habits, so the family had moved to Dundee where Mr. Slessor likely hoped to find employment for himself and his family in the mills. While Mrs. Slessor and Mary began working in the mills right away, for the next eleven years until his death in 1870, Mr. Slessor had trouble keeping a job, and drank what little the family made, forcing his wife and daughter to find ways to make the finances stretch. More than once Mary hurried through dark alleys to sell belongings at the pawn shop and then pay bills before her father got home at night.<sup>2</sup> Until she turned fourteen, Slessor worked half days at the mills, alternating mornings and afternoons with school attendance, after which she began working full twelve hour shifts, but continued to attend school at night when she could.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jane McDermid, *The Schooling of Working-Class Girls in Victorian Scotland* (Routledge, 2005), 70-71.

<sup>2</sup> W. P. Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar: Pioneer Missionary*, 5th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), 1-2, and 6. Dundee had a high unemployment rate for men, and men and women often competed for the same jobs because the textile industry, which preferred women and children, provided the majority of jobs in Dundee. See K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 523.

<sup>3</sup> Carol Christian and Gladys Plummer, *God and One Redhead: Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 1st ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton Religious, 1970), 11 and 14-16; Jeanette Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody's Mother: The Era and Impact of a Victorian Missionary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2008), 5. Child labor was common in the nineteenth century, and while the most common form of child labor was in the home helping with housework, the textile industry offered another form of child labor that could contribute to the family finances. Compulsory education laws begun in the 1860s limited the hours children could work, but every family needed and expected their children to work in one form or another. see E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Peter Smith Pub Inc, 1999), 332-

In 1875, Slessor expressed her desire to travel to Calabar as a missionary. Her interest in missions began as a young child when her mother would read of the exploits of missionaries and Mary would play with her brother Robert at preaching and missionary games. The mission at Calabar in West Africa soon became a favorite with Mrs. Slessor and her children, and when William Anderson arrived in Dundee to speak about the Calabar Mission in 1866, Mrs. Slessor took Mary and her brother John to hear him.<sup>4</sup> Though Mrs. Slessor had hoped that her oldest son Robert might become a missionary, his death in 1870 dashed that hope, and she turned her attention to John. However, John contracted tuberculosis and died in 1873 despite his attempt to recover in New Zealand.<sup>5</sup>

It was John's death, and Slessor's own interest in missions, which spurred her to take action and apply to the Foreign Mission Board of the United Presbyterian Church.<sup>6</sup> Though most mission boards expected the approval of a father before accepting a single woman for mission work, Slessor had no father to grant approval. The support of her mother and James Logie, a friend and supervisor at the Victoria Street Mission, probably helped to smooth the way for her missions venture.<sup>7</sup> Later in life, Slessor refers to a male

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33 and 338-39; Jutta Schwarzkopf, "The Social Condition of the Working Class," *A Companion to Nineteenth Century Europe 1789-1914*, Stefan Berger, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 113.

<sup>4</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 17; Christian and Plummer, *God and One Redhead*, 12; Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody's Mother*, 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Brian O'Brien, *She Had a Magic* (New York: Dutton, 1959), 19 and 21-22; Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody's Mother*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Rhonda Anne Semple, *Missionary Women: Gender, Professionalism, and the Victorian Idea of Christian Mission* (Rochester, NY : Boydell Press, 2003), 39; Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody's Mother*, 10.

friend, possibly this same Logie, or another, who supported her interest in missionary work and who was, according to Slessor, “my first confidant regarding my desire to be a missionary.”<sup>8</sup> After her acceptance, Slessor spent a year finishing her education at the Normal School in Edinburgh, where she completed her teacher’s training. On August 5, 1876, Slessor boarded the *Ethiopia* in Liverpool and arrived in Duke Town, Calabar on September 11, 1879 to begin work as a female agent for the Calabar Mission.<sup>9</sup>

Most biographies written about Mary Slessor over the years have been works of literature meant to inspire readers. W.P. Livingstone’s first biography of Slessor, penned in 1916, portrays Slessor as a martyr, an unusual woman, filled with “courage” and an “indomitable spirit,” who served her God faithfully.<sup>10</sup> Though Livingstone does not entirely agree with Slessor’s methods, arguing that she departed “from the normal order of procedure... follow[ed] ideals rather than rules, and [her] methods [were] irregular,” he nevertheless concludes that Slessor was “one of the most heroic figures of the age,” and encouraged his readers to “follow aims as noble” when living their own lives.<sup>11</sup>

Brian O’Brien’s account, *She Had A Magic*, also portrays Slessor as a heroine, a “little barefoot missionary”<sup>12</sup> who managed to open an entire region to British trade and

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge Sr., 10 Jan. 1910, “Books and Letters,” Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4) (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 20.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, iv-vi.

<sup>11</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, iii, v-vi.

<sup>12</sup> O’Brien, *She Had a Magic*, 11.

civilization. His book, written as a novel, incorporates the author's own knowledge of Nigeria and added dialogue to the sparse records and oral accounts of Slessor's life. Arguing that Slessor rose out of "Britain's most brutal child labour system," to "[save] the souls of some of the bloodiest cannibals on the Cross River...by bangin' them over their heads with her umbrella,"<sup>13</sup> O'Brien seeks to use the legendary stories of Slessor's life in West Africa to inspire his readers to rise above their own difficult circumstances and become great.

James Buchan and A.R. Evans present Slessor as a soldier, a woman who willingly gave her life to the service of God in order to reach others with the gospel. Evans, writing in 1953, portrays Slessor "destined to lead a revolution in a part of Africa where the powers of evil had held sway without interference for many centuries."<sup>14</sup> Evans focuses on Slessor's evangelistic efforts and portrays her as a heroine who braved dangers and rescued children for God. Though he acknowledges that Slessor did not always follow "conventions," he makes little attempt to place Slessor in a Victorian context, a point made clear by the illustration that depicts Slessor in 1950s clothing, looking like a young housewife who stepped out of "Leave it to Beaver."

Buchan, comparing Slessor to the assault troops of World War II, portrays Slessor as an innocent and self-sacrificial woman who lived among tribes that "could have given

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> A.R. Evans, *Mary Slessor the White Queen of Calabar* (London: Oliphants, Ltd., 1953), 7.

lessons in terror tactics to the Nazi Gestapo.”<sup>15</sup> Claiming that Slessor entered the deadly region of West Africa knowing that her health would be ruined and that she might even die, Buchan praises her courage and stamina. Buchan calls her a “builder of bridges between conflicting sections of the human race,” and focuses on her legacy of peace to the warring tribes.<sup>16</sup>

Jeanette Hardage, unlike most literary authors before her, sought to present an account of Slessor’s life using Slessor’s own writings and the writings of her contemporaries. Hardage’s account, which focuses on the details of what Slessor actually did, is a well documented biography that “show[s] Slessor’s interaction with the people.”<sup>17</sup> Hardage’s account presents Slessor as “an anomaly” among missionaries and government agents, and she makes it clear that Slessor’s life and methods differed greatly from the majority of other missionary women in Calabar.<sup>18</sup>

Even Lesley MacDonald, who uses Slessor as an example in her book, *A Unique and Glorious Mission*, highlights Slessor’s unusual behavior, using her as an example of the exception to the nineteenth-century missionary woman.<sup>19</sup> While there is no doubt that many of Slessor’s activities did not fully conform to Victorian gender standards, missionary women before her performed many of the same tasks in a less official

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<sup>15</sup> James Buchan, *The Expendable Mary Slessor* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1980), xi.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>17</sup> Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody’s Mother*, xii.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>19</sup> Lesley Orr MacDonald, *A Unique and Glorious Mission: Women and Presbyterianism in Scotland 1830 to 1930* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 2000), 140-42.



capacity. Slessor held a transitional role in missionary work, furthering what many women before her had done unofficially and extending the boundaries placed on missionary women, creating new opportunities for the women who followed her.

Mary Slessor, born in 1847, only ten years after Queen Victoria ascended the throne of Britain, lived the majority of her life during the long reign of Victoria. It is important to understand the background in which Slessor grew up, and the circumstances under which she spent her formative years in order to better understand her position as a transitional figure in Victorian missionary society. Though influenced by the issues of the early nineteenth century and extending into the first decade of the twentieth, Victorian society was formed during the reign of Victoria, from 1837 until 1901.

### **Historiography of Separate Spheres in Nineteenth-century Britain**

Women's history and the study of gender roles in the nineteenth century is a subject which has received wide coverage. The most common interpretation of nineteenth-century gender roles is that of "separate spheres," which suggests that men and women exerted their influence over specific spheres of life. The term separate spheres comes from the prescriptive literature of the period, and many historians have argued the contradictions that come from various interpretations of what is meant by "separate spheres."

Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, authors of *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, are two historians who define separate

spheres in a literal, spatial sense, arguing that the evangelical revivals of the 1780s and 1790s reformed “family, home, masculinity and femininity,” influencing the rising middle class and creating a domestic sphere which confined women to the home and family.<sup>20</sup> Davidoff and Hall place men in the world acting as “citizens and entrepreneurs,” and women in the home as “dependent...wives and mothers,” but this definition creates contradictions for them as they study families living in Birmingham, Essex and Suffolk.<sup>21</sup> Thus, though they define the spheres spatially, they concede that women did not literally remain in their homes, but the roles which women had outside the home were constrained by domestic patterns, family connections, and their subordination to men.

Davidoff and Hall argue that middle class women of the early nineteenth century were frustrated individuals who embraced a “dream of domestic felicity,” but had to wait for their daughters and granddaughters for liberation and the realization of true happiness and equality. Davidoff and Hall claimed that women in the later nineteenth century, “battl[ed] as a proselytizing minority for their place in the world and the rightness of their view of that world.”<sup>22</sup> They further argue that “the feminism of the mid to late-nineteenth century was built on a sense of grievance and it was women’s sense of their exclusion from the public sphere and its consequences which led to their demand for entry into

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<sup>20</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xvi.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>22</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes* 454.

education, the professions and citizenship rights.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, in Davidoff and Hall’s interpretation, until women gained the right to vote and seek professional employment outside the home and independent of male relatives, they had no real place in the public sphere.

Amanda Vickery, in *The Gentleman’s Daughter*, disagrees with the creation of a “rise of separate spheres” during the period from 1780-1850. She argues instead that “if ‘separate spheres’ boils down to the observation that women are obliged to spend more time at home with children while men appropriated greater institutional recognition and reward, then separate spheres is an ancient phenomenon, which is certainly still with us,” rather than a new social order that began in 1780.<sup>24</sup> While she does not deny that men and women both were constrained by “propriety,” Vickery argues that “the promulgation of domesticity” through prescriptive literature is not “cast-iron proof that women were domesticated.” In fact, she points out that the opposite could equally be indicated.<sup>25</sup> She concludes that even where domestic management was a duty fulfilled by women, seclusion in the home was not a necessary component of fulfilling this duty.<sup>26</sup>

Catherine Hall, in her work on British colonization in Jamaica from 1830-1867, sees a continuity of evangelical prescriptions on gender standards crossing into the

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<sup>23</sup> Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (Great Britain: Yale University Press, 2003), xvii.

<sup>24</sup> Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 3-4 and 7.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-13 and 288-90.

colonies. In *Civilising Subjects*, Hall argues that the Baptist missionary activity in Jamaica followed a proper gender order which required that “men worked for money and women stayed at home, caring for children and household.”<sup>27</sup> Hall argues that Baptist missionaries taught this gender order to slaves and freedmen, and then continued to model this pattern to the emancipated slaves in Jamaica, hoping to break the pattern of the plantations that required women and children to labor in the fields. Instead, they encouraged the men to continue in their labor, allowing their wives to stay home and focus on the domestic activities of childcare and housework.<sup>28</sup>

Looking particularly at the early Victorian period, Alex Tyrell in his essay, “Samuel Smiles and the Woman Question in Early Victorian Britain,” argues for both a constraining separate spheres ideology that relegated women to a domestic sphere, and the creation of a “quasi-public” sphere that allowed women to move outside of the domestic sphere into the public realm. He argues that through their influence over men, their philanthropic work, and their interest in moral reforms such as abolition, women who did not participate in parliament could still influence politics.<sup>29</sup>

*Public Lives*, a study of middle class women in nineteenth-century Glasgow, Scotland, presents a definitive and determined view of gender roles. Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair argue that the static definition of separate spheres which limited women to

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<sup>27</sup> Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 122.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Alex Tyrell, “Samuel Smiles and the Woman Question in Early Victorian Britain,” *The Journal of British Studies* 39, no. 2 (April 2000): 186-87, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/175938>.

a purely domestic role and men to a public role of politics and business is too confining to accurately explain a full century of society.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, they broaden their definition of public to include those realms outside the home which women visited, places such as “shops, churches and concert halls,” and argue that women, single or married, not only felt every right to move about in public, but were even required to do so by Victorian middle-class ideology which expected women to exert a civilizing influence on society through their presence.<sup>31</sup>

Cynthia Curran, in her study of middle class widows of the Victorian period, “Private Women, Public Needs,” argues that middle class women were in fact constrained by a strict “domestic ideology” which arose in the 1830s and 1840s, influenced by the evangelicals and industrialization of British society. This demarcation of gender roles to specific spheres became so popular by the mid-century, that Curran argues most middle class men and women adopted it to prove their respectability.<sup>32</sup> She further argues that the separate spheres ideology, and the interest in “isolat[ing] women in the home,” made it more difficult for middle class widows in their struggle for survival.<sup>33</sup>

Theodore Hoppen and Pamela Pilbeam, in their studies on Victorian society, also point to a separate spheres ideology which idealized the role of women in the domestic

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<sup>30</sup> Gordon, *Public Lives*, 234-35.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-201 and 230-231.

<sup>32</sup> Cynthia Curran, “Private Women, Public Needs: Middle-Class Widows in Victorian England,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 228, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4051453>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 218 and 228.

sphere. In *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, Hoppen argues that women of the upper and middle classes protected the domestic sphere, providing their men with a comfortable environment to return to after their long day at work.<sup>34</sup> Pilbeam, in “Bourgeois Society,” looks at the middle class of Europe, defining it as the group in society “between the nobles and workers, peasants and the very poor,” and argues that this group prided itself on being able to sustain a comfortable lifestyle that would allow the women of the family to remain in the home.<sup>35</sup> Pilbeam goes on to argue that middle class men generally had “a clean hands occupation,” and women carried out a “comparatively leisured domestic existence.”<sup>36</sup> This division of domestic and public labor created respectability for the middle class that differentiated them from the working class and poor.

Lilian Shiman, in *Women and Leadership in the Nineteenth Century*, argues that a new social order coming out of the nineteenth-century economic and political order created a new liberty for men, but a continued dependence for women. This new society opened opportunities of new stations and purpose in life for men, but limited women to a continued dependence on men for a decent life. In her study of women and nineteenth-century politics, Shiman concludes that women held a subordinate position to men, and it was the realization of this position, coming in the Victorian period, which caused women to rise up in protest and demand a political voice. Shiman focuses on particular women

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<sup>34</sup> Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, 316-24.

<sup>35</sup> Pamela Pilbeam, “Bourgeois Society,” *A Companion to Nineteenth Century Europe 1789-1914*, Stefan Berger, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 86 and 91.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

who, she claims, “broke away from their allotted domestic sphere” by preaching and speaking as reformers throughout the nineteenth century. Because of their unorthodox displays, women gained a greater voice in the public sphere of political office.<sup>37</sup>

While F.K. Prochaska, in *Women and Philanthropy*, agrees that limitations existed for women of the Victorian period, she also criticizes those historians who would “see limitations where the women of the past saw possibilities.”<sup>38</sup> Prochaska argues that Victorian women worked around social constraints for the good of society. Prochaska argues that philanthropy granted women the ability to “[apply] their domestic experience and education...to the world outside the home.”<sup>39</sup> As women did this, they were able to use their philanthropic endeavors “as a lever” to open opportunities in public spheres generally denied them, for example, women who did administrative work in charitable organizations gained experience in government, administration and law. Prochaska is careful to argue against the idea that these opening opportunities made philanthropic work and moral reform mere preludes to the feminist goals of the twentieth century.<sup>40</sup> Rather, most nineteenth-century women found philanthropic work to be a means in itself

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<sup>37</sup> Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Women and Leadership in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 5-7 and 205.

<sup>38</sup> F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press US, 1980), 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 224 and 230.

and saw the issue of enfranchisement as secondary, even “utopian,” in comparison to their work for moral reform.<sup>41</sup>

Victorian society did have standards of conduct for men and women, defining gender roles by the areas where men and women spent the majority of their time. This did not mean that women were confined to a purely domestic sphere, but it does mean that as they moved about in the public sphere, domestic guidelines were used to determine what they could and could not do in that public sphere. Opportunities for entertainment and employment existed for married and single women of all classes, though such options may have been more limited in the earlier portion of the century. Through their presence in public places like the park, stores, and theater, as well as participation in philanthropic endeavors, and travel within the Empire, women, particularly those of the middle and upper classes, were expected to influence the public sphere, introducing Christian charity, nurture and care to those in their community who were less fortunate than themselves, as well as promoting British culture and civilization in the Empire. Thus women in Victorian Britain were not confined to a specific place, or even a particular duty; instead, they were able to work within the boundaries of gender roles to produce a better society.

### **Victorian Society**

While “separate spheres” can have many interpretations, and historians often disagree on the advent of this type of society, it is clear that Victorian Britain had clear

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<sup>41</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, 230.



definitions and standards of conduct for men and women. Victorian society placed great emphasis on class structure, defining men and women not only by their gender roles, but also by their class position. Gender roles differed slightly for the middle and working classes based on circumstances. Because most of the working class existed at subsistence levels, they could ill afford to keep their wives and daughters at home.<sup>42</sup> While middle class standards of conduct for women tended to stress a domestic pattern and lifestyle, many activities and occupations came to be considered acceptably feminine by the end of the Victorian period.

Throughout the Victorian period, the family, not only the immediate family of husband, wife and children, but also the extended family, formed a central point in society. Hoppen argues that marriage was the “ideal” form of life for Victorians.<sup>43</sup> According to Vickery, Davidoff and Hall, a “good marriage” could be key to a woman’s future, and Vickery goes further to argue that a bad marriage could prove detrimental to her overall happiness.<sup>44</sup> This, Vickery argues, actually caused some women to either postpone the final commitment, or to put it off altogether, preferring to live as a relative housekeeper in the home of a widowed father or bachelor brother.<sup>45</sup> The family remained important throughout the nineteenth century, and women were expected to give their first attention to the upkeep of the home and the welfare of family members.

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<sup>42</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 194. See also Schwarzkopf, “The Social Condition of the Working Class,” 116-17.

<sup>43</sup> Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, 316-324.

<sup>44</sup> Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter*, 39-40; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 325.

<sup>45</sup> Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter*, 53 and 128.

While the expectation that a woman should be first and foremost a wife and mother did not change much over the course of the nineteenth century, the role that women should play in public society, and their place outside the home fluctuated and was greatly debated throughout the period, particularly during the Victorian era. As middle class women gained more leisure time through the employment of servants and household innovations, or because of circumstances that kept them from having their own household to manage, they looked for ways to employ those leisure hours. While entertainment in the form of opera, theater, parties or social visits existed, many middle class women began to look for more productive ways to employ themselves.<sup>46</sup>

Opportunities for paid employment outside the home were slim during the first half of the nineteenth century due to an expectation that “middle-class women should not be gainfully employed.”<sup>47</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, women often helped with family businesses keeping shop or helping with the bookkeeping, labor which contributed to the overall comfort of the family but did not bring in actual wages. By the mid-nineteenth century, single women interested in gainful employment outside the home could become governesses or teachers, take in dress-making and plain sewing, write, or keep lodgers.<sup>48</sup> Most of the professions open to middle class women in the early

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<sup>46</sup> Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 227-28, 250 and 257-59.

<sup>47</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, xiv.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-118, 200-201 and 284-85.

Victorian period were occupations which emphasized their feminine qualities such as teaching, sewing, or hospitality.

For the upper middle classes, the issue of what was appropriate for women was more an issue of the type of labor and its purpose rather than the labor itself. Women of leisure, according to Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, might be the "chief menial of the household," but were dependent upon a husband for livelihood.<sup>49</sup> Thus, labor that took place in a woman's home was perfectly acceptable, but work that declared her independence from her husband was inappropriate. As Veblen put it, "[i]t grates painfully on our nerves to contemplate the necessity of any well-bred woman's earning a livelihood by useful work. It is not 'woman's sphere.'"<sup>50</sup> While women of the middle classes did seek employment outside the home which brought in wages, this work was often controversial or shameful for it indicated an inability on the part of the husband or father to properly provide for them.

Middle and upper class women who had greater leisure time but did not necessarily desire or need to seek employment, found other purposeful ways to spend their free time apart from household duties and childcare. Many middle class women participated in their churches, attending services on Sundays and becoming involved in church activities and charitable organizations throughout the week. One of the earliest charitable associations run by women was the Bedale Ladies Amicable Society founded

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<sup>49</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (B.W. Huebsch, 1912), 72-73, Google Books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=t7QJAAAIAAJ> (accessed March 19, 2010), 73.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

in 1783.<sup>51</sup> According to Isabelle Beeton's *Book of Household Management*, written in 1863, "[c]harity and [b]enevolence are duties which a mistress owes to herself as well as to her fellow creatures."<sup>52</sup> The influence of Christianity and the Bible, "a common theme in the hundreds of...memoirs, diaries and autobiographies" of Victorian women, stressed the importance of charitable work, and Victorian society recognized that such work was a natural outpouring of the feminine nature.<sup>53</sup> Middle class women took opportunities to work with children in churches, Sunday schools, and orphanages; made home visitations to the poor and sick; visited women in prisons, workhouses, hospitals, and asylums; and even organized groups to speak out about the evils of society and call attention to those in need.<sup>54</sup>

As middle class women worked toward moral and social reform through their philanthropic endeavors, many began to participate to a greater extent in local and national politics, making their voices heard on matters such as abolition, education, and the Contagious Diseases Acts.<sup>55</sup> Though prescriptive literature, particularly during the

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<sup>51</sup> Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 255-56.

<sup>52</sup> Isabelle Beeton, *Book of Household Management* (London: S.O. Beeton, 1863), 5, Google Books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=d9QBAAAAQAAJ> (accessed March 24, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, 13 and 17.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, chapters 3-5.

<sup>55</sup> Hall argues that women made the consumption of sugar a political and moral question, voicing their opinion in public and at home about the immorality of slavery. See Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 284. Tyrell too argues that women participated in pressuring the political sphere through their participation in and contribution towards the antislavery movement, the Anti-Corn Law League and other reforms. See Tyrell, "Samuel Smiles and the Woman Question," 186. Canning discusses the public speeches, petitions and meetings led by Josephine Butler in 1860 to convince Parliament to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, laws meant to regulate and sanction prostitution in England. See Kathleen Canning, "The 'Woman

first half of the nineteenth century, discouraged women from speaking in public or even attending general meetings, declaring that publicity was particularly “degrading...akin to vanity or self-assertion,”<sup>56</sup> women did speak in public and had a limited political voice throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, participating in parish meetings, serving in various church offices, and even acting as jailers.<sup>57</sup> By the mid and late nineteenth century, middle class women had become increasingly vocal in public, speaking in ladies’ meetings and general meetings, and even participating in petitions for enfranchisement in 1866. By 1869 single or widowed rate-paying women in England and Wales gained the right to vote in local institutions, and by 1882 Scottish women were also participating in municipal enfranchisement.<sup>58</sup>

One area where women began to have an increasing voice was in the realm of education. Increasingly throughout the Victorian period, the middle class emphasized the importance of providing a proper education to girls that would prepare them for life as a wife and mother. In the realm of education, academic standards varied across Britain,

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Question’,” *A Companion to Nineteenth Century Europe 1789-1914*, Stefan Berger, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 203.

<sup>56</sup> Margaret Hewitt Watt, *The History of the Parson's Wife* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1943), 79-80.

<sup>57</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, 2; Amanda Vickery, *Women, Privilege, and Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 5-7. Note that jails were private businesses at this time, so women jailers usually inherited the position at the death of a husband. Vickery is careful to define politics outside of Parliament since, even though the English allowed women to rule as monarchs after 1553, women were not allowed to serve in public office as Members of Parliament, they were not allowed to carry out any direct role in county government and were not even allowed to participate in criminal justice until 1919 when women became jurors.

<sup>58</sup> Jane Rendall, “The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867,” *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867*, Catherine Hall, et al. eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 122, 127-129, and 158-159.

particularly between Scottish and English schools before the 1870s. In England, boys received rigorous academic training while emphasis was placed on domestic training for girls of all classes and some religious training to enable a girl to adequately supervise the early education of her own children.<sup>59</sup> In Scotland, however, the educational system was, in theory, “a complete structure: a national system of education for all classes and both sexes.”<sup>60</sup> From the Reformation until the late nineteenth century, most of the public schools in Scotland offered mixed-sex and mixed-class instruction with the exception of schools in Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh which placed an emphasis on single-sex schools during the Victorian period.<sup>61</sup>

While the middle class English girls generally learned from governesses at home, or attended private single-sex schools, middle class Scottish girls could be found in a variety of schools from the public day schools to private ladies’ finishing schools in Edinburgh and other large cities. Some English girls’ schools did offer rigorous academic training, such as the Cheltenham Ladies’ College, founded in 1854, but the focus tended to be on religious training, indoor activities and domestic skills.<sup>62</sup> Scottish girls, on the other hand, attended school alongside their brothers and received the same academic training which included such subjects as Latin, Greek, modern languages, mathematics, and natural science in the higher level schools. By 1892, Scottish universities began

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<sup>59</sup> McDermid, *Schooling of Working Class Girls*, 10; Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, 3-4.

<sup>60</sup> McDermid, *Schooling of Working Class Girls*, 27.

<sup>61</sup> Anderson, “Secondary Schools,” 179 and 194-95.

<sup>62</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, 3-4.

accepting female students, and private girls' schools in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen began to offer university preparatory courses.<sup>63</sup> Though the Scottish school system remained different from that of the English throughout much of the Victorian period, English influences could be seen in some areas of education as early as 1860, and by the turn of the century the academic subjects and material being taught boys and girls began to converge.<sup>64</sup>

In the early part of the nineteenth century, Scottish schools in the parishes and industrial towns offered a variety of academic subjects to both boys and girls, but by the 1840s an increasing emphasis upon domestic subjects such as sewing, knitting, laundering and housecleaning for girls began to creep into these schools.<sup>65</sup> While English parents assumed that such skills were necessary for their girls, Scottish parents resisted the introduction of domestic skills into the schools, viewing the parish school as a place for "book learning," and the home as the place for domestic training.<sup>66</sup> This emphasis on domestic education mimicked the English system, and by the turn of the twentieth century, education for working class children had become quite gender distinctive in Scotland.

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<sup>63</sup> Anderson, "Secondary Schools," 194.

<sup>64</sup> McDermid, *Schooling of Working Class Girls*, 37; Anderson, "Secondary Schools," 201.

<sup>65</sup> Lindy Moore, "Educating for the 'Women's Sphere': Domestic Training versus Intellectual Discipline," *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society, 1800-1945*, Esther Breitenbach and Eleanor Gordon, eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 10-12 and 31.

<sup>66</sup> McDermid, *The Schooling of Working Class Girls*, 10, 29-30 and 33.

Middle class expectations that women focus their attention on domestic duties and family did not differ greatly for working class women of the Victorian period, but for them, greater liberty existed for seeking employment outside the home since their circumstances rarely allowed for them to stay home in leisure. Working class women not only managed the care of their households, doing most of the manual labor themselves, or delegating chores and teaching tasks to daughters, but also looked for ways to contribute to the family finances through employment in mills or other activities.<sup>67</sup>

Before the rise of the industrial cities and the formulation of a laboring class, peasant women, and others of the lower social orders worked in manual labor helping in fields and on family farms, contributing labor to the livelihood of the family.<sup>68</sup> With the rise of industry, a new form of employment became available to women. Cities like London, Aberdeen, Glasgow and Dundee employed women and children in their factories, and mill towns like Dundee preferred women and children to men, both for their dexterity and skill at the loom, and because they could be employed at half the wages of men.<sup>69</sup> Most working class women spent much of their life employed outside the home, first as daughters contributing to their parents' household, and then as wives.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 332-33, 338-39; Schwarzkopf, "The Social Condition of the Working Class," 113; Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil* (New York: Oxford University Press US, 1993), 9.

<sup>68</sup> Louise A. Tilley and Joan Wallach Scott, *Women, Work, and Family* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 64.

<sup>69</sup> Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, 523; Thompson, *The Making of the Working Class in England*, 312.

<sup>70</sup> Tilley and Scott, *Women, Work, and Family*, 124 and 133-34.



Even after marriage and during their childbearing years, women worked in factories, bringing in wages until their children were old enough to earn what the mother would lose in quitting. Once freed from factory labor, she often took in piece work from the mills, cleaned extra laundry or provided room and board to lodgers.<sup>71</sup>

### **Colonial Society**

Gender standards placed on women traveling and living in the colonies differed little from those placed on women living in the metropole. Women who chose to travel with their husbands to the colonies were expected to transmit their British culture and the Victorian standards for women to the native women that they encountered. Alison Blunt's study of British women in India after 1886 reveals that gender roles were virtually the same for these women as for their counterparts in Britain, and they were expected to live out these roles as an example of "imperial domesticity." According to Blunt, household guides instructed British women on how to attain "imperial domesticity," explaining the importance of household management, childcare and travel to the British wife establishing a home in colonial India. British women were encouraged to learn household management and often employed between ten and thirty Indian servants, men and women they were encouraged to treat "like children" and who lived apart from the family's bungalow in separated buildings on the compound. Blunt concludes that the imperial domesticity portrayed by British women and advocated in

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<sup>71</sup> Schwarzkopf, "The Social Condition of the Working Classes," 113; Tilley and Scott, *Women, Work, and Family*, 133-134.

household guides emphasized both a domestic and maternal role for women as household managers and mothers, but also an imperial role as rulers over their servants depicting the British rule over Indian subjects.<sup>72</sup>

Officer's wives and family members of imperial agents were not the only women traveling in the British colonies. Missionary women also traveled in the colonies, at first as wives and daughters, and later as independent single women. These women carried with them a two-fold mission, similar to the one described by Blunt. As missionary wives, they were expected to participate in proselytizing efforts among women and children, but as British women, they were also expected to exemplify the proper, civilized role model to the women with whom they had contact, by advancing a "mission of domesticity" through the fulfillment of their duties as wives, mothers and homemakers.<sup>73</sup>

This "mission of domesticity" led mission boards to expect women to bear witness to the superiority of their station in Britain as juxtaposed against that of Hindu women and women of African cultures, while their husbands preached, planted churches,

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<sup>72</sup> Alison Blunt, "Imperial Geographies of Home: British Domesticity in India, 1886-1925," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24, no. 4, New Series (1999): 422, 425-30 and 437, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/stable/623233>.

<sup>73</sup> Deborah Kirkwood, "Protestant Missionary Women: Wives and Spinsters," *Women and Missions: Past and Present: Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, Fiona Bowie and Deborah Kirkwood, eds. (Providence, RI: Berg), 27; T.O. Beidelman, "Altruism and Domesticity: Images of Missionizing Women Among the Church Missionary Society in Nineteenth Century East Africa," *Gendered Missions: Men and Women in Missionary Discourse and Practice*, Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy Lutkehaus (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 113-114 and 136; Jane Haggis, "Ironies of Emancipation: Changing Configurations of 'Women's Work' in the 'Mission of Sisterhood' to Indian Women," *Feminist Review*, no. 65 (Summer 2000): 108, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1395852>. Not only did missionary wives help to model monogamous relationships to polygamous peoples, and a 'civilized' home, they also helped to portray the peaceful intentions of the mission to the people they came into contact with, and taught women and children in schools. See Kirkwood, "Protestant Missionary Women," 25-27.

and gained converts among the natives of the mission field.<sup>74</sup> As it became clear that family duties kept missionary wives from fulfilling this calling of imperial domestication, societies began to recruit single women in the 1830s, offering them opportunities to learn foreign languages, use professional skills such as teaching, medical training, and Bible translation, and set up schools and clinics.<sup>75</sup> Even in such expanding roles, missionary women were still expected to be first and foremost the teachers of women and children, transmitting a civilizing influence into the native community.

### **Background of Scottish Missions**

The earliest foreign missionary efforts made by the Scottish occurred in 1717 when the Church of Scotland participated in sending missionaries into the New England colonies of North America to evangelize the Indian tribes.<sup>76</sup> While early Scottish missionary efforts in the eighteenth century focused on home missions, North American colonies and Africa, in the nineteenth century, missionary societies began to extend their interest and influence so that by the late nineteenth century, mission societies representing every Protestant church in Scotland had missionaries at the furthest extent of the British Empire. Because of their higher education and the greater ability they had to

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<sup>74</sup> Catherine Hall, "Of Gender and Empire: Reflections on the Nineteenth Century," in *Gender and Empire*, Philippa Levine, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 60; MacDonald, *A Unique and Glorious Mission*, 106 and 129.

<sup>75</sup> Semple, *Women in Missions*, 201; Fiona Bowie and Deborah Kirkwood, *Women and Missions: Past and Present: Anthropological and Historical Perceptions* (Providence, RI: Berg, 1993), 6.

<sup>76</sup> James S. Dennis et al., *World Atlas of Christian Missions on Microfiche* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1911), [http://www.archive.org/details/MN41422ucmf\\_2](http://www.archive.org/details/MN41422ucmf_2), 33.

be financially independent, middle class men and women made up the majority of the missionaries employed in Scottish foreign missions. This does not mean that only middle class made up the missionary group, but because the middle class were a majority, those working class men and women who did become missionaries, like David Livingstone and Mary Slessor, were held to a middle class standard. Scottish mission societies put a high value on education, and believed that through education and civilization, they could spread Christianity throughout the world. This focus on education did not supersede evangelism, but it did play a part in the applicants chosen for mission work.<sup>77</sup> Those who applied without the academic qualifications preferred generally went through training before leaving. Women attended schools like the Normal School in Edinburgh for teacher training while many of the men who applied attended seminary or were already ordained ministers.

Among the earliest foreign mission boards formed by the Presbyterian Church in Scotland was the Church of Scotland Foreign Mission Committee. In 1829, Alexander Duff became its first missionary to Calcutta. The Church of Scotland Foreign Mission Committee eventually had missionaries in China, India, South Central Africa, and British East Africa. In 1837 the Church of Scotland Women's Association for Foreign Missions and the Ladies' Society for Female Education in India and Africa were formed, sending single women to China, India and South Central Africa. By 1900 Scottish missions covered the globe, sending missionaries to Manchuria, Melanesia, India, South Arabia,

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<sup>77</sup> Breitenbach, *Empire and Scottish Society: The Impact of Foreign Missions at Home, c.1790 to c. 1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2009), 20, 59 and 74.

African regions in Southern Nigeria, Cape Colony, Natal, Livingstonia, Northern Rhodesia, and the Caribbean islands of Jamaica and Trinidad.<sup>78</sup>

### **Background of the Calabar Mission**

Interest in Africa as a mission field began primarily in the early nineteenth century with the victory of the abolition movement to end the British slave trade in 1807. By 1833, renewed interest in sending missionaries to the Slave Coast of Africa led to the planting of several mission stations in West and South Africa.<sup>79</sup> According to MacDonald in *A Unique and Glorious Mission*, it was a sense of moral responsibility that caused many in Britain to look to Africa as a mission field, both before emancipation and after, providing a way to “[atone] for national guilt.”<sup>80</sup> In Jamaica, where Hope Masterton Waddell served as a missionary with the Scottish Missionary Society from 1829, this interest was made evident by a desire to send missionaries to Calabar, one of the largest slave ports before the end of the slave trade.<sup>81</sup> In 1834, Waddell came across a copy of T.

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<sup>78</sup> Dennis et al., *World Atlas of Christian Missions*, 43.

<sup>79</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 24; Brietenbach, *Empire and Scottish Society*, 57.

<sup>80</sup> MacDonald, *A Unique and Glorious Mission*, 104-05.

<sup>81</sup> Hope Masterton Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa* (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1970), 1; Hugh Goldie and John Taylor Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1901), 76-77, . Google Books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=h8EMAAAAIAAJ> (accessed December 9, 2010); Geoffrey Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1988), 13; Elizabeth Glendinning Kirkwood Hewat, *Vision and Achievement, 1796-1956* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1960), 194-95. The slave trade in Calabar began in the late seventeenth century and lasted until 1842, and the effects of the slave trade on the Calabar region lasted long after that. See also Randy J. Sparks, *Two Princes of Calabar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) for more information regarding the slave trade in this region.

F. Buxton's book, *The Slave Trade and its Remedies*, and found in it a source of practical advice on how to bring the gospel to Africa.<sup>82</sup> Buxton's text advocated introducing civilization, Christianity, and legitimate commerce into Africa in order to end the lingering effects of the slave trade.<sup>83</sup> To this he also added the suggestion of using emancipated slaves as missionaries, an idea which the missionaries of Jamaica had already considered.<sup>84</sup> Backed by the support of the Jamaican churches, who desired "above all" to send missionaries to "their father-land of Africa, that Gospel which they have found to be 'the power of God unto salvation,'"<sup>85</sup> Waddell petitioned both the Scottish Missionary Society and the United Secession Church to fund a new mission to Africa.<sup>86</sup>

In 1842 the missionaries interested in the new venture began looking for an acceptable place to settle, and found that place in Old Calabar, after receiving a letter from King Eyamba V, and other chiefs of the Calabar region, promising welcome and land in Old Calabar.<sup>87</sup> In 1844, King Eyamba V extended his welcome again, this time

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<sup>82</sup> Waddell, *Twenty Nine Years*, 206.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas F. Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1968), 282 and 511.

<sup>84</sup> Hewat, *Vision and Achievement*, 193-94; Waddell, *Twenty Nine Years*, 206.

<sup>85</sup> Elijah Hoole, *The Year-Book of Missions* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1847), 342, Google Books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=22csAAAAYAAJ> (accessed January 8, 2010).

<sup>86</sup> Waddell, *Twenty Nine Years*, 207.

<sup>87</sup> Letter from Calabar chiefs transcribed in John M'Kerrow, *History of the Foreign Missions of the Secession and United Presbyterian Church* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1867), 372, Google Books, [http://books.google.com/books?id=V\\_3OAAAAMAAJ](http://books.google.com/books?id=V_3OAAAAMAAJ) (accessed January 18, 2010); Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years*, 211; Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 76.

wondering why they had not already arrived. After this second message, Waddell traveled to Scotland in 1845 to raise support among the churches, “[drawing] forth warm hopes and aid of many who had not formerly given their sympathy to mission effort.”<sup>88</sup> On January 6, 1846, Waddell, joined by his adopted son George, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Edgerley, Andrew Chisholm, and Edward Millar,<sup>89</sup> set sail from Liverpool on the *Warree* and arrived in Duke Town, fifty miles from the mouth of the Calabar River on April 10, 1846.<sup>90</sup>

### **Calabar Society**

The society which early missionaries encountered in the 1840s and 1850s was vastly different from the Victorian society which they had left. Family structure, education, and religious beliefs were so vastly different from their own that the missionaries were prone to believe that the natives were without any civilization at all. Thus, their mission was one that not only involved the presentation of the Christian gospel, but also the introduction of British and Victorian customs.

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<sup>88</sup> Waddell, *Twenty Nine Years*, 210-211 and 228, also in the Minutes of the United Secession Church included in the Appendix of Waddell, *Twenty Nine Years*; Goldie and Dean, *Calabar Mission*, 76-77.

<sup>89</sup> George Waddell was a rescued slave whom Mr. and Mrs. Waddell raised as their own, and Chisolm and Millar were Jamaican natives, Chisholm a Creole carpenter and Millar a free African living in Jamaica and trained as a doctor’s assistant. Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and its Mission*, 78 and M’Kerrow, *History of the Foreign Missions*, 373-74.

<sup>90</sup> Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years*, 230; Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and its Mission*, 80. European traders gave the honorary title “king” to chiefs who engaged in trade with them. Kings did not necessarily hold power over other chiefs through most of the nineteenth century. See Rosalind I. J. Hackett, *Religion in Calabar* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 23-24.

One of the most controversial customs in Calabar was the family structure and practice of polygamy. African men could add to their harems for as long as they lived, and the number of women living under a man's care indicated his wealth so that the greater the power or importance of an individual the larger his harem.<sup>91</sup> Though the Africans classed all their wives in one group as their "women," Waddell classed these women as wives and concubines, differing between the free women of the compound promised to men in exchange for a dowry, and those slave women who were granted as presents to earn favor from powerful individuals or inherited at the death of a father.<sup>92</sup> While missionary Hugh Goldie points out that the women of Calabar had greater freedom than their sisters in Eastern harems, their freedom was still limited.<sup>93</sup> Until a woman proved her worth through childbirth she was little valued, and even as a free wife, her ability to move about depended on the whim of a capricious husband.<sup>94</sup>

The religious beliefs of the people of Calabar, called by Waddell, "the basest and bloodiest...in the world,"<sup>95</sup> focused chiefly on spirits and superstitions. While the people recognized a supreme being called *Abasi*, the people of Calabar had discontinued worship of this god by the time the missionaries arrived in Calabar.<sup>96</sup> Though they had no

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<sup>91</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 20.

<sup>92</sup> Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years*, 667.

<sup>93</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 20-21.

<sup>94</sup> Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody's Mother*, 76.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>96</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 42-44.



particular objects of worship for *Abasi*, the people had many objects of worship in nature, and each home displayed two distinct objects of worship outside its doors. The larger one consisted of a sacred wooden stake with a human skull attached on top and chicken blood smeared on the sides, and the smaller object was a diminutive wooden statuette in human form which served as a type of good luck charm to ward off evil spirits.<sup>97</sup> The people took the spirit world seriously, they feared evil spirits and witches, and believed that any unexplained event or bad thing that happened was a result of witchcraft. Charges of witchcraft laid on individuals and villages led to trials, wars, raids, and death.<sup>98</sup>

Two common practices linked to the religious beliefs of the people included the murder of twins and human sacrifice. Twins, feared because the people believed one contained an evil spirit, were killed to keep the spirit from harming the village. The mother was banished, and in some areas killed with her babies. Some villages, like Duke Town, provided land for twin-mothers and allowed them to live in seclusion at the edge of the village.<sup>99</sup> The Efik used human sacrifice to show honor to the dead and provide them with company on their journey to the “country of spirits.” The number of sacrifices

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<sup>97</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 42-44.

<sup>98</sup> Hackett, *Religion in Calabar*, 36-38.

<sup>99</sup> Mary Henrietta Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1897), 324-326, Google Books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=sEcaAAAAYAAJ> (accessed November 14, 2009); Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 23-24.

at a funeral reflected the importance of the one who died, and the most common victims were widows, children and personal attendants.<sup>100</sup>

Mary Mitchell Slessor, serving as a missionary with the United Free Church of Scotland to Calabar, West Africa from 1876 until 1915, is one woman who exemplifies the ways in which British women outside the metropole combined the domestic sphere with public work, laboring among the African people to promote Christian piety, British civilization, justice and mercy. In Africa, Slessor combined the accepted roles of domestication, nurture, care and gentle civilizing with more masculine roles of exploration, church planting, and British agent. Slessor stood on the edge of two worlds, a world which constricted the activities of missionary women to the teaching and evangelizing of women and children, and a later world that allowed women a broader sphere of influence, opening the traditionally masculine roles of exploration and preaching to others. Through her circumstances, Slessor joined many other women in transforming the accepted gender roles of missionaries.

In examining the life of Mary Slessor and her work in Africa, this study focuses on the transitional nature of several particular aspects of that work. Chapter one focuses on the exploration of the interior and the permanent mission stations that Slessor founded. Slessor was not the first missionary woman to join exploratory expeditions, or even to strike out on her own, yet her work in the West African interior broadened the opportunities of women after her to become explorers rather than mere followers in the

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<sup>100</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 45. For more information regarding Nigerian traditions and cultural customs see Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

work of opening new territory for mission stations. Chapter two focuses on Slessor's work in the feminine role of teacher and the more masculine role of preacher, examining how her work as an evangelist and church planter broadened the boundaries placed on the missionary women of Calabar and opened wider opportunities for the next generation of women who followed Slessor into the interior. The third and final chapter examines Slessor's role as a defender and protector of the weak and powerless. By continuing the tradition of caring for unwanted children, and by speaking out against other superstitious practices, Slessor gained authority among the natives, and as a British agent, Slessor extended the boundaries of what work women could do, opening opportunities for those who followed her if they chose to take them.

## Chapter One

### Travel and Exploration

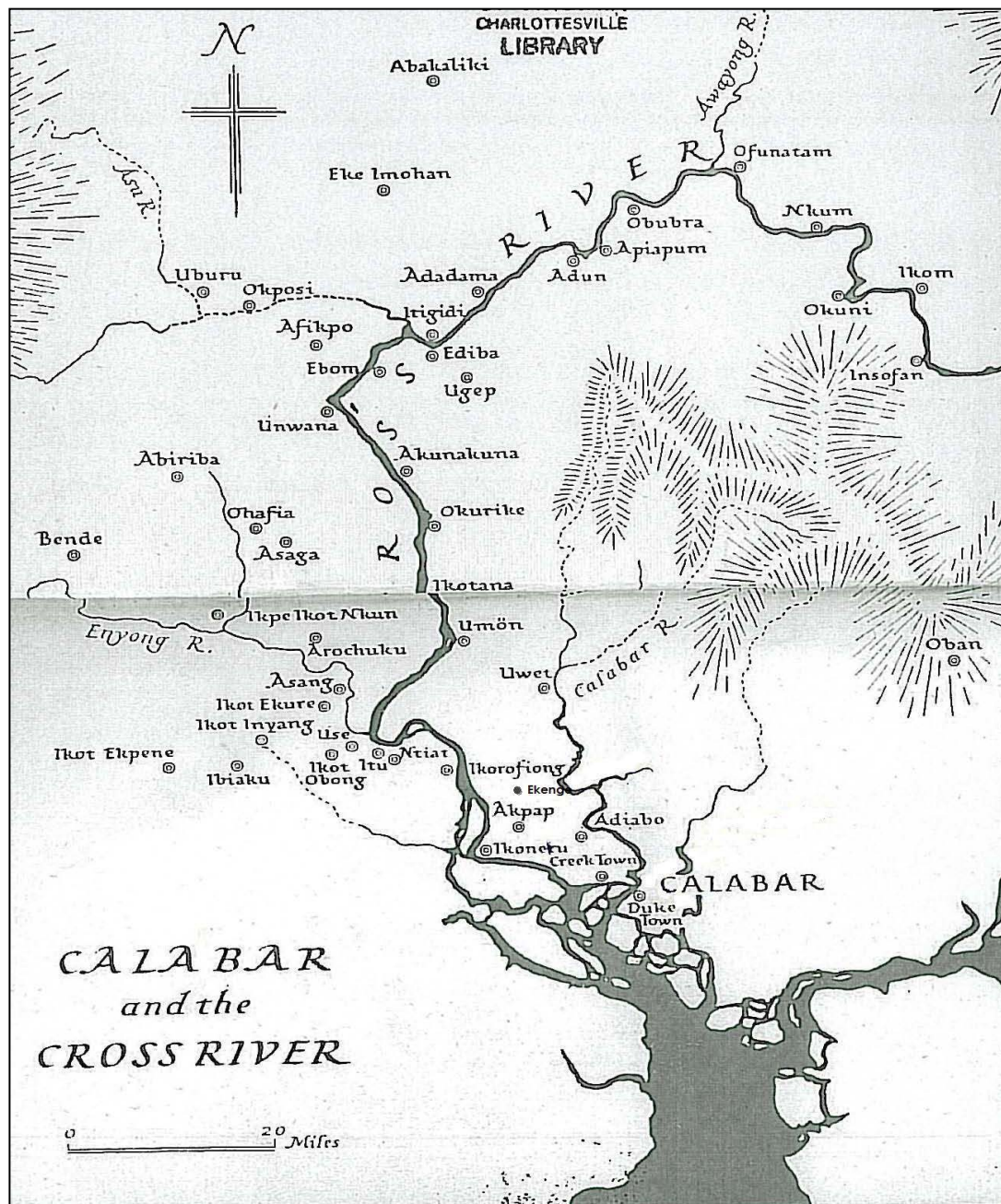


Figure 1. Donald M. McFarlan, "Calabar Map," *Calabar, the Church of Scotland Mission, 1846-1946* (London and New York: T. Nelson and Sons, 1946), front flap.

The darkness pressed down as Mary Slessor trudged along the jungle path. Rain drizzled from tree branches and leaves, soaking her to the skin and creating mud at her feet. In front of her, helping to forge a path, an eleven year old boy carried the food box on his head, followed by two more young boys, a five year old girl, and Slessor, carrying a bundle in her arms and a baby on her shoulders.<sup>1</sup> This unusual party pushed forward into the African wilderness, headed for an unfamiliar home that would one day become dearer to Slessor than any other.

From the first few weeks of 1876 that she spent in Duke Town, Slessor found a love for the land and people of Calabar. She described Calabar as a “delightful land” in her first month as a missionary, and later declared that the jungle was full of color and mystery, casting a spell with its “myriad voices” and beautiful sunsets and sunrises.<sup>2</sup> By 1911, Slessor could write that she had found her home in Africa, telling a friend that “[n]o place on earth now is quite as dear.”<sup>3</sup> This home, which started on the banks of the Calabar River, extended into the jungles of the interior.

Even before Slessor stepped onto the *Ethiopia* in Liverpool to begin a new life in Africa, she showed an interest in adventure and courage in the face of the unknown. When she began participating in the Sunday school classes and Bible meetings as a teenager and young woman, Slessor showed a willingness to enter little known areas,

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<sup>1</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 65-66.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Slessor, “Miss Slessor’s First Impressions of Calabar,” *Extracts from a letter dated Duke Town 11 October 1876*, not paginated, Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, “Letters and Articles,” [http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010); Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 4 May 1905.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Slessor to Mr. Stevenson 28 February 1906, “Letters and Articles,” Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

distributing the *Monthly Visitor* door to door and traversing the alleys and back streets of Dundee, rounding up children for her meetings.<sup>4</sup> Slessor's journey to Edinburgh for further schooling in 1876 and her sea voyage that year along the prime meridian to reach Duke Town, Calabar illustrate that rather than shrinking from the unknown, she embraced the adventure it afforded.

In the twelve years that Slessor spent on the Calabar coast, serving with the mission in Duke Town, Old Town, and Creek Town, she exhibited an interest in traveling about, teaching at the schools and even superintending the Old Town station, but also visiting other stations and venturing into the bush to visit plantations and farms. Such visiting was not unusual for women of the mission who often traveled with their husbands into neighboring villages, joined husbands at new stations, and even occasionally ventured into little known regions to visit with the natives.

Missionary women who traveled to mission fields in the early nineteenth century, generally did so with family members, usually following husbands in their work as colonial officials, officers, and missionaries.<sup>5</sup> According to Victorian standards of conduct, men were the explorers, traveling and conquering while women followed behind, introducing a civilizing influence into known regions.<sup>6</sup> While some women, like Mary Livingstone or Mrs. Samuel Edgerley, Jr., did join in exploratory expeditions, often to show the peaceful intent of the mission, few went into truly unknown regions, and

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<sup>4</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 7 and 9.

<sup>5</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 73.

<sup>6</sup> Catherine Hall, "Of Gender and Empire," 47.

even fewer struck out on their own. Through her efforts to reach interior tribes with the gospel, Slessor broadened the boundaries placed on missionary women regarding travel, opening the interior to the Calabar Mission and to women interested in following in her footsteps.

From Slessor's first weeks in Calabar until her death, she showed a penchant for traveling and visiting new places. In 1876, after first arriving in Duke Town, Slessor spent two weeks visiting the mission stations and learning about the mission and the native people of Calabar. Writing of her first impressions of the mission, Slessor told friends that "I have not overtaken much of the language yet, consequently I have not been of much use, and during the last fortnight I have been visiting all our stations."<sup>7</sup> After spending a week at Creek Town where she "saw how the School there was conducted and how the ordinary work was carried on," she traveled to Adiabo with Samuel Edgerley, Jr. where "women and children crowded round to see the white 'Ma.'"<sup>8</sup> From Adiabo they traveled to two other stations, the last of which was Ikorofiong where Slessor told of the attention she brought as a white woman. She told her friends, "Of course all eyes were fixed on me. It is a rare thing for a white person to visit them, and especially so to have a white lady visitor."<sup>9</sup> Slessor spent three years working in Duke and Old Towns before leaving on furlough due to an illness.

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<sup>7</sup> Slessor, "Miss Slessor's First Impressions of Calabar," not paginated.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

On her return to Calabar in 1880, Slessor moved to Old Town where she superintended the station for five years before moving again, this time further upriver to Creek Town, several miles from the mission headquarters in Duke Town.<sup>10</sup> During her time of service in Old and Creek Towns, Slessor traveled to neighboring farms and villages visiting among the people, teaching them and caring for their needs.<sup>11</sup> It was while stationed at Creek Town, that Slessor developed an interest in reaching out to the Okoyong tribes that lived in the interior between the Calabar and Cross Rivers. By 1886, she had begun looking for ways to move into the interior and live among them.<sup>12</sup>

Slessor was not the only missionary to show interest in the Okoyong people and other interior regions.<sup>13</sup> In 1856, Hugh Goldie took possession of a new mission at Ikunetu on the river bordering Okoyong territory, and this station passed through the hands of many missionaries before Asuqua Ekanem, a native missionary, took over and won the respect of the people around him. This same Ekanem, in 1881, attempted to set up a mission in a nearby Okoyong village, but was forced to flee for his life when a quarrel broke out between the Okoyong chief and Creek Town.<sup>14</sup> This abortive attempt by Asuquo Ekanem, along with the descriptions of the Okoyong as “fierce and war loving, setting little value upon human life...[and] sunk in superstitions that make them a

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<sup>10</sup> William Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1897), 532-33; Waddell, *Twenty Nine Years*, 56-58 and 72; Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody's Mother*, 308-309.

<sup>11</sup> Christian and Plummer, *God and One Redhead*, 45; Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 40.

<sup>12</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 56 and 61; Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 342.

<sup>13</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 341-42.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 256-58; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 22-23.



terror to themselves and a constant source of dread to their neighbors,” added to the fears that the same tragedy, or worse, might befall Slessor if she attempted to live among them.<sup>15</sup>

Though discouraged by fellow missionaries and residents of Creek Town, Slessor persisted in seeking opportunity to set up a permanent mission. When Chief Edem of Ekenge invited Slessor to visit his village in 1886 and requested a mission school for his people, she took the opportunity to press her request before the mission board again. After two years spent visiting Ekenge and persisting in her requests, the mission board gave her permission to attempt a permanent settlement among the Okoyong.<sup>16</sup> Slessor traveled by river for the first portion of her journey, and arrived in Ekenge late at night to find the village deserted by all but a few women and children.<sup>17</sup> Though not the greeting Slessor had likely expected, she quickly settled into the house provided for her in the chief’s yard and eventually built a proper mission house on her own land.<sup>18</sup>

Slessor continued to travel, even after her settlement in Ekenge with the Okoyong. She continued to visit neighboring villages and plantations, and showed a willingness to drop what she was doing and rush to help whenever she learned of a need, no matter what the time, or how far away she had to travel.<sup>19</sup> Slessor traveled from Ekenge frequently, visiting various neighboring villages and plantations from 1888 to 1895. In 1895 Slessor

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<sup>15</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 342.

<sup>16</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 56 and 61; Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 342.

<sup>17</sup> Hardage, *Everybody’s Mother*, 65-66.

<sup>18</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 67.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-78.

moved with the Okoyong to Akpap, further upriver, after a small pox epidemic nearly decimated the population. It is from Akpap that Slessor began to venture into Ibibio territory, exploring Enyong Creek, a tributary of the Cross River.<sup>20</sup>

After her move to Ekenge and her work among the Okoyong villages and houses, Slessor began to form very solid opinions regarding the role of women as missionary explorers in Calabar. Slessor's first impressions of the native women in 1876 as "a great drawback to our success" led her to declare that "[h]ere is work for our women at home who are constantly complaining of having nothing to do."<sup>21</sup> Though Slessor continued to advocate missionary women coming to teach women and children, after the British punitive expeditions during the 1880s, Slessor's opinion of the importance of missionary women changed from that of teacher and mentor to that of explorer of the interior.

The creation of the Nigerian Protectorate brought British imperial agents into the West African region. High Commissioner Claude MacDonald and his agents began exploring the interior along the Calabar and Cross Rivers during the 1880s, burning some villages and conciliating with others as they saw fit.<sup>22</sup> Such tactics led to a fear of white men among the interior tribes, particularly among the Ibibio and Igbo after the Aro Expedition of 1901. This expedition, meant to defeat the trading power of the Aro people in Ibibio territory led to the burning of many villages that refused to disarm or cooperate with British soldiers under the direction of High Commissioner Ralph Moor.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody's Mother*, 309.

<sup>21</sup> Slessor, "Miss Slessor's First Impressions of Calabar," not paginated.

<sup>22</sup> Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 32-33.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

Punitive expeditions did not end in 1901, but continued, carried out for various reasons by different British agents. Slessor wrote of one to Charles Partridge, the district commissioner for Itu, describing one of these expeditions in 1908 and her own apprehension regarding the use of force, in which “800 soldiers and hosts of white men” passed through Ikot Okpene “full of this Expedition to what’s the name of the place...I do hope there will be no casualties to either side, I can’t bear those dreadful Expeditions. The very sight of the force raises their – the natives – apprehension, and goes to make Trouble.”<sup>24</sup> Because of the fear which these punitive expeditions had instilled in the native peoples, Slessor advocated that missionary women precede men, calming fears and preparing the way for further missionary advances. Slessor believed that this distrust of white men made it difficult for the missionary message to reach into the interior, and in letters to friends, she claimed that the Ibibio, “will not believe in men, they plead for women,”<sup>25</sup> and pointed out that women were just as interested and capable of going into the world and “shar[ing] in all [its] work and sacrifice.”<sup>26</sup> Letters and magazine articles were not the only places where Slessor found opportunity to present her unconventional opinions regarding work for missionary women.

In speeches to various ladies’ and general meetings in Scotland, Slessor often spoke of the need for and importance of women in the interior. In 1898 she told her audience,

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<sup>24</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 20 January 1908.

<sup>25</sup> “Miss Slessor’s Return to Darkest Africa,” *Women’s Missionary Magazine* [Nov 1907], not paginated, “Letters and Articles,” Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 30 April 1906.

We keep calling for money...and we get money...but not the men and women. Where are they?...Where are the soldiers of the Cross? In a recent war in Africa in a region with the same climate and the same malarial swamp as Calabar there were hundreds of officers and men offering their services...But the banner of the Cross goes a-begging. Why should the Queen have good soldiers and not the King of Kings?<sup>27</sup>

While Slessor encouraged all to volunteer for missionary work, more often, she called specifically on women to respond.<sup>28</sup> In Aberdeen in 1907, she pleaded, “Oh that the scores of unattached women at home would come for six months at a time! Our girls could attend them as interpreters.”<sup>29</sup> Slessor not only believed that women would be helpful as pioneer missionaries in the interior, but set an example by pushing into the interior and extending the boundaries of the Calabar Mission.

Slessor continued to travel to interior villages, following the expanding British roads through Ibibio territory after the Aro Expedition of 1901. In 1903, when the Calabar Mission Committee considered which new regions to open to mission work, Slessor advocated for a station at Itu, an Ibibio village only a day’s journey from Calabar and placed in a position that would allow missionaries to work in Ibibio as well as to push further up the Enyong Creek to Arochuku. Slessor even offered to spend her six month furlough exploring the Enyong Creek and discovering the options that were

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<sup>27</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 167-68.

<sup>28</sup> “Miss Slessor’s Return to Darkest Africa,” not paginated.

<sup>29</sup> Deas Cromarty, “Mary Mitchell Slessor,” *British Weekly*, [1913], not paginated, “Letters and Articles,” Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

available for mission stations.<sup>30</sup> The Calabar Mission Council agreed to Slessor's plan to open Itu as a medical station, but referred the rest of the project to the Women's Foreign Missionary Committee to handle. Short of funds, the Women's Foreign Missionary Committee were unwilling to open the Arochuku territory, but agreed to allow Slessor to explore the region, provided she supply her own provisions.<sup>31</sup>

In 1904 Slessor set out, journeying along the Enyong Creek in a steel canoe and visiting various villages along the way. In the six months that she traveled, Slessor entered many villages and found native people eager to invite white missionaries to teach them. In a letter, she described the journey back down the creek, stopping at various villages along the way. At one, slightly inland, she found "a young man who had gone across to the Niger overland...had heard the gospel and is craving for teaching and light."<sup>32</sup> At another village, she found the people holding church services though they could "only meet and say the Lord's Prayer, and sing a hymn, and repeat short passages...but there they were, collection plate and all!"<sup>33</sup> Slessor's trip proved a success, and in 1906, due in part to her interest in the area, the Women's Foreign Mission committee agreed to open the territory of Arochuku.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 36-37.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 37; Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 206.

<sup>32</sup> Slessor, "Pioneering. The Following is a Private Letter from Miss Slessor," *Women's Missionary Magazine* [December 1904], not paginated, "Letters and Articles," Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> "The Situation in Calabar and Elsewhere," *The Women's Missionary Magazine of the United Free Church of Scotland* 74 (1907): 31, Google Books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=SOIZAAAAYAAJ> (accessed February 22, 2010).

Slessor's interest in the Ibibio peoples and her desire to continue to travel in their territory can be seen in her letter to the Women's Foreign Mission Committee Secretary, William Stevenson, in which she told her friend,

And the Minutes say "I am to return to Akpap in April." It would be going home...but to leave these hordes of untamed, unwashed, unlovely Savages, and withdraw the little rushlight begun to flicker out over its darkness!! I dare not think of it! Whether the Church permits it or not, I feel I must stay here, and even go on farther, as the roads are made. I cannot walk now, nor dare I do any thing to trifle with my health, which is very queer now and then, but, if the roads are all the easy gradients of those already made, I can get 4 wheels made, and set a box on them and the children can draw me about...if the Church can see its way to go on in some such way to meet the new needs and requirements, I shall do all in my power to further them without extra expense to the Church.<sup>35</sup>

Though she did not intend her letter for publication, the sentiments she expressed likely found voice in more formal arenas, and her comments, meant for thought and consideration, were directed to a leader of the Mission Committee, even if they were addressed in a friendly rather than formal capacity.

Slessor's request to open the territory and use women to extend the mission was an unusual request, as the minutes reveal. Generally, women were sent into a region only after men had opened it, but the mission board saw reason for exception to this principal when they recognized the "earnest desire" the people expressed in having a missionary among them, and Slessor's own willingness and persistence in requesting the position. They further added that, because "the region has been claimed by the United Free Church as within the sphere of its operations," they would not technically be opening new territory. Though the committee agreed to open the territory and accepted Slessor's offer

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<sup>35</sup> Slessor to Stevenson, 28 February 1906.

to build the mission house, they claimed to be unable to send the two agents necessary due to a continued shortage of funds.<sup>36</sup>

The 1906 opening of Arochuku coincided with Slessor's grant of a roving commission from the Calabar Mission Committee. Slessor's excitement over the opportunity to push farther into Ibibio territory is expressed in two letters during this period, one, written in 1905 after giving up the Itu station to Dr. Robinson of Creek Town, in which she claimed, "I am at liberty to run up the creek or into Ibibio, just as God may lead,"<sup>37</sup> and the other, written after hearing news of the commission in 1906, when she told her friend, "I have not only got a Roving Commission from the Home Church and Presbytery here, but have got a helper for the school and for the women in Miss Amess," indicating that she was now truly free to leave the station and explore other options.<sup>38</sup> Slessor spent the remaining years of her life, from 1906 until her death in 1915 dividing her time between Use, Ikpe and the surrounding villages. During the last fifteen years of Slessor's work among the interior tribes she had help and companionship, no longer the only missionary for miles around. Missionary families, men and young women followed in Slessor's footsteps, taking over her stations, visiting her, and providing help when she needed extra assistance.

Slessor was not the first female to travel in the African wilderness, or even the first to explore little known territories, but she was the first to open stations in the interior

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>37</sup> Slessor, "Our Missionary Mailbag. Old Calabar. From Miss Slessor, Itu, 7th October 1905," *Women's Missionary Magazine* [January 1906], not paginated, "Letters and Articles," Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>38</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 30 April 1906.

and live among the native people alone and without white male protection. Her efforts in the interior changed the perception of what women were capable of as missionaries. Many women traveled the African wilderness, including Mary Smith Moffat, Mary Livingstone, and Christina Coillard in South Africa between 1819 and the late 1870s. Mary Smith, interested in missionary work in South Africa, parted with her family in order to “enter into [the Lord’s] work,” and offer help to Robert Moffat, already laboring in Cape Town. In 1819 the two were married at Cape Town and spent the first year of their marriage caravanning along the borders of Cape Colony looking for a place to settle and eventually planting a station near the Kuruman and Orange Rivers in Griqua Town.<sup>39</sup> After the birth of their first son, Mrs. Moffat often stayed home when her husband traveled on evangelistic expeditions.<sup>40</sup>

Mary Livingstone and Christina Coillard both joined husbands on exploratory expeditions. In 1846, Livingstone joined her husband on his expedition into the South African interior to Chonuane along the Kolobeng River, and later, on two other expeditions.<sup>41</sup> Coillard, the Scottish wife of a French missionary to South Africa, traveled into the South African interior in 1877, in search of a mission field to the Banyai. Because the region was not completely unknown, it was considered safe enough for families, and five other women also joined the expedition.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> John Smith Moffat, *The Lives of Robert and Mary Moffat* (New York: Armstrong, 1886), 25, 50-51, 53-54, 69, 89.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>41</sup> Ross, *David Livingstone*, 53-57, 59-62.

<sup>42</sup> Catharine Winkworth Mackintosh, *Coillard of the Zambesi* (Kessinger Publishing, 2009), 227-228.



In Calabar too, women traveled between known villages and even joined exploratory expeditions upriver. Euphemia Miller Sutherland, who joined the Calabar Mission at age twenty-nine in 1849 as an assistant to Jessie Waddell, showed an inclination for exploring, which her biographer Agnes Waddell compared to the exploratory nature of David Livingstone. A teacher for a time at Duke Town, and later settling at Old Town, Sutherland took many opportunities to travel among the villages and plantations near the mission stations, even going on exploratory journeys into Ibibio territory in 1858 and into Cameroon in 1877.<sup>43</sup> According to Waddell, Sutherland “push[ed] into the interior in order to carry the Word of God amongst tribes that had never before seen a white woman,” traveling to villages and plantations, and exploring along the Qua River. In one such exploratory venture, Sutherland struck out on her own after futilely attempting to find a native guide to journey with her to Osuk, a village whose inhabitants, the people of Old Town feared. She arrived in the village in the late afternoon with her alphabet boards and books. Though many of the villagers ran in fright when they saw her, she described being “kindly received,” and was well-pleased with what she found there.<sup>44</sup>

Jane Goldie, Elizabeth Johnston and Mrs. Samuel Edgerley, Jr. also traveled to various stations in Calabar, sometimes entering into secluded regions where the natives had not seen white men or women before. In 1856, Jane Goldie and her sister Elizabeth

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<sup>43</sup> Agnes Waddell, *Memorials of Mrs. Sutherland, Missionary, Old Calabar* (Paisley, Scotland: J. and R. Parlane, 1883), 24, 62 and 122-24, Google Books, [http://books.google.com/books?id=p\\_BDAAAAYAAJ](http://books.google.com/books?id=p_BDAAAAYAAJ) (accessed January 8, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Waddell, *Memorials of Mrs. Sutherland*, 11-12, 60-62.

Johnston followed Hugh Goldie in setting up a mission station at Ikunetu located on the eastern bank of the Cross River about twenty-five miles above Creek Town. Hugh Goldie described the village as “secluded” from white travelers and the river void of any transportation other than the “native canoe.”<sup>45</sup> The station at Ikunetu had many missionaries come and go, including a Mrs. Timson, who joined her husband in 1858 but died later that year in childbirth.<sup>46</sup> Finally, in the 1880s, Mrs. Samuel Edgerley, Jr. joined her husband on expeditions into the interior north of Okoyong territory and on at least one of his expeditions up the Calabar and Cross Rivers. In the jungle, Mrs. Edgerley encountered many of the dangers of interior travel, including wild animals such as elephants, and getting caught in a tornado just outside a native village.<sup>47</sup>

Even during and directly after Slessor’s own excursions into the jungle interior, other Victorian women were exploring the world, making use of new and better methods of transportation. Though Victorian sentiments regarding empire claimed that men traveled, explored and conquered, while women reproduced the British race, raised strong men, and guarded the principles of true civilization, the reality is that men were not the only Victorians exploring uncharted territories.<sup>48</sup> Women also explored and traveled, learning more about the world around them and returning home to write of their exploits.

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<sup>45</sup> M’Kerrow, *History of the Foreign Missions*, 405-06; Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 255.

<sup>46</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 256-258; M’Kerrow, *History of the Foreign Missions*, 410.

<sup>47</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 270-75. See also Hugh Goldie, “Notes of a Voyage up the Calabar or Cross River in November 1884,” *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 1885, Google Books. [http://books.google.com/books?id=q7cBAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_v2\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=Calabar%20&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=q7cBAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_v2_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=Calabar%20&f=false) (accessed February 22, 2010) for further information regarding the expedition along the rivers.

<sup>48</sup> Catherine Hall, “Of Gender and Empire: Reflections on the Nineteenth Century,” in *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 47.

Two women in the earlier part of the Victorian period, Harriet Martineau in the late 1840s, and Isabella Bird Bishop in the 1850s, both spent time touring various portions of the Empire, writing of their experiences for other women. Martineau spent two years travelling with friends through Egypt, Palestine and Syria and in 1848 published *Eastern Life, Present and Past* in which she described the interesting sites of Egypt and the Holy Land.<sup>49</sup> Bishop spent the majority of her life traveling the empire, visiting the United States and Hawaii in the 1850s and then spending quite a bit of time in the 1890s in various regions of Asia from Japan to Persia and Turkey.<sup>50</sup>

Martineau and Bird were not the only women who became famous for their travels in the Empire. Other women too traveled, sometimes into dangerous or little known regions, such as Kate Marsden, a Tottenham nurse who traveled to the Yakutsk Province of Siberia to find and test a cure for leprosy in 1890 and spending two years in the frozen wasteland.<sup>51</sup> American May French Sheldon, entered the dangerous Masai territory with only native guides as company and became the first to circumnavigate Lake Chala in the area of modern Kenya in 1891 while on safari in East Africa.<sup>52</sup> Mary Kingsley, a naturalist interested in the tropics, took six months in 1893 to tour the deadly region of West Africa in 1893, a place so filled with death and disease that only

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<sup>49</sup>Harriet Martineau, *Eastern Life, Present and Past* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1876), viii-xii.

<sup>50</sup> Dorothy Middleton, "Some Victorian Lady Travelers," *The Geographical Journal* 139, no. 1 (February 1973): 65-75., 69-70; Geo. G. Chisholm, "Review: Mrs. Bishop on Korea and the Koreans," *The Geographical Journal* 11, no. 3 (March 1898): 288-289., 288.

<sup>51</sup> Kate Marsden, *On Sledge and Horseback to the Outcast Siberian Lepers* (New York: Cassell Publishing Company, 1892), ix, 1-3, 15, 18.

<sup>52</sup> Middleton, "Lady Travelers," 74.

missionaries showed any real interest in attempting to settle or study it. During her trip she sought out Mary Slessor and stayed with her among the Okoyong for a time, learning much about native customs.<sup>53</sup>

By 1901 many young women had begun to serve in the Calabar interior alongside Slessor, superintending stations alone or with help from other single women. Slessor refers to these missionary women often in her letters, calling them collectively “the ladies,” and showing appreciation for their work and help to her. In 1906, Slessor praised a Miss Wright, whom she told a friend, had “proved herself abundantly able to superintend a station, and the Okoyon people like her, and respect her, and she can both hear and speak to them in their own tongue.”<sup>54</sup> In other letters, Slessor refers to the ladies and their movements, pointing out in 1908 her concern for Miss Peacock and her attempts to run the Ikot Obon station alone. Slessor feared for her health because, “though she puts her soul into what she does... the school and congregation and Dispensary and family are too much for any woman.”<sup>55</sup> By the following year, Peacock had a young woman to help with the school, a Miss Turner who worked with a native teacher and provided a female presence at the school so that more girls would attend.<sup>56</sup> By the time of Slessor’s death, missionary women abounded in the interior, superintending their own stations and traveling into the bush to visit nearby villages and plantations.

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<sup>53</sup> Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, xi-xiii, 1, 5-6, 8, 74

<sup>54</sup> Slessor to Stevenson, 28 February 1906.

<sup>55</sup> Slessor to Crawford, 27 December 1908.

<sup>56</sup> Slessor to Crawford, 19 November 1909.

While many women before Slessor traveled into the African interior with husbands and other missionaries, most were visiting well-known or previously explored areas. Slessor traveled into regions that were supposed to be too dangerous for white women, and at times, even for white men. Though women like Sutherland had shown an interest in exploring nearby towns and villages and joining exploratory expeditions, Slessor was the first in Calabar to permanently settle among the unknown tribes in the West African interior. In her explorations of the Okoyong and Ibibio territories, she provided a way for other young women to follow in her footsteps, traveling and evangelizing in the villages of the Ibibio.

## Chapter Two

### Teacher and Preacher

Twenty or thirty children stood or sat on the dusty ground, some of them using pieces of firewood as seats, others sitting cross-legged in the dirt. They formed a semi-circle around Mary Slessor, listening intently to her voice and repeating the lesson that she was giving. The sun shone down brightly causing sweat to bead on their foreheads. This was the best part of the lesson though, and they all listened intently as “Ma” Slessor recounted a story from the Bible and helped them to learn the words by heart. After the story there would be singing. The children were learning a new song this week, and they loved to sing it with Ma, especially when she brought out her tambourine and let one of the girls shake it to set the beat.<sup>1</sup>

The Scottish Presbyterian missions placed a great deal of emphasis on education, both for their recruits and for the natives on the mission field. The African people in Calabar were no exception. Recognizing a need among the people of Calabar for education, not only in academic matters but also in spiritual and religious matters, the missionaries of Calabar recruited teachers and built schools at their stations in order to teach children and adults regarding the things of God. Women were important to the work of evangelizing native women and children, especially to those women whose husbands forbade them from attending the church and had no other way to hear the gospel message.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 74-75; Hardage, *Everybody's Mother*, 90-91. Mary Slessor to Mr. Stevenson 28 February 1906.

<sup>2</sup> Breitenbach, *Empire and Scottish Society*, 59-60; Hewat, *Vision and Achievement*, 197-98.

Slessor began teaching at the Duke Town school in 1876 and spent three years assisting the other missionary women with teaching duties between Duke and Old Towns. By the end of her first three years, Slessor was teaching children in the schools and visiting women in their yards, teaching them various religious and secular subjects.<sup>3</sup> Such duties were considered an acceptable outpouring of feminine character consistent with both Victorian standards and past duties of female agents and missionary wives.<sup>4</sup> The subjects which Slessor taught, and her teaching style, were also consistent with many of the things she herself likely learned in the industrial schools of Scotland. Her practice of teaching boys and girls together in open air classrooms in the jungle shows not only her practicality when beginning a school, but also her consideration that all students should and could learn the same subjects. In the classroom, Slessor taught a variety of subjects to her students, including reading and writing, domestic skills, hygiene, and Christian religion. Each of her classes ended with a Bible lesson, scripture reading, short prayer and the singing of a hymn.<sup>5</sup>

Slessor never stopped teaching throughout her career, and even in 1914 she carried her ABC cards into the interior, planting mission schools and sharing the gospel with children. One example of her eagerness to teach is exhibited in Odoro-Ikpe, a village where she had spent several visits requesting permission from the chiefs to set up a

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<sup>3</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 25; Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson*, 571.

<sup>4</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, 13 and 17.

<sup>5</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 74-75; Hardage, *Everybody's Mother*, 90-91; Knox, *Lives of Scottish Women*, 127-28.

mission station in their town. After much debate, they agreed, and Slessor told in her report that

the battle was won by our side. Needless to say, I struck while the iron was hot, and went at once with my A.B.C. card to try and win the boys and girls to my campaign. They were slow a bit at first, but I did not dose them with Theology, but pointed out the Rubber and Cocoa the government had planted all over the grounds and tried to awaken their ambitions and interest, and told them how the world was moving outside their bush circle, and how the future was likely to treat ignorance, and etc. and it really is wonderful how soon they saw the point, and their sullenness gave way, and they began to ask questions and to chat, till before the end of the week we were chums, and they came every spare hour to get a lesson.<sup>6</sup>

Slessor's emphasis on education was not academic or even practical only, but really focused on the importance of educating children and others regarding the Christian message of sin and salvation, an emphasis which resounded in the Scottish Presbyterian Church and most of the Scottish schools during the early Victorian period when she attended school.

Slessor placed great emphasis on education and evangelism, believing that true change would only come from believing the Gospel message.<sup>7</sup> Slessor believed that in order for the Okoyong and Ibibio to get past their fears and superstitions, they had to be educated to know that those were wrong.<sup>8</sup> In a letter to Charles Partridge, she claimed that the Ibibio were "troublesome," "ignorant," "cowardly," and "deceitful," but that this was due largely to fear and superstition as well as "a history of oppression from all around," and that education, particularly evangelistic education, would greatly help these

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Slessor to Mr. Stevenson 2 December 1914.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 7 July 1909.

<sup>8</sup> Christian and Plummer, *God and One Redhead*, 65.



faults.<sup>9</sup> Slessor's work as a teacher with the mission evidences her transitional role as she followed the traditional pattern of teaching women and children and then set a new standard, pushing back the boundaries and widening the audience of her evangelistic message.

While Slessor conformed in some ways to the expected role of missionary women, in teaching and training children and evangelizing women, her evangelistic message did not remain confined to school houses and women's yards, but seeped out and found an audience in anyone willing to listen, and even some who were not. Even as a young girl on the Dundee streets, Slessor had no qualms about standing her ground and sharing the gospel with those she felt had a need. One incident which illustrates this point, occurred when she was working with the Wishart Pend mission, in the alley outside the meeting room. There a group of boys stood to torment any and all who attempted to enter into the building, hoping to scare children away from the Bible meeting. Slessor however, stood her ground as the boys taunted her, swinging a leaden weight closer and closer to her head. Satisfied that she would not be intimidated, the boys ceased their tormenting and agreed to go in with her.<sup>10</sup> In Calabar as well Slessor took opportunities to share the gospel, even when that opportunity came in the shape of a speech from the church pulpit as in the case of her visit to Ikorofiong in her first fortnight in Calabar. Writing of the incident later, Slessor told how John Baillie, the minister and missionary of Ikorofiong, invited Slessor to speak after his sermon. With "all eyes fixed"

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 28 June 1905.

<sup>10</sup> MacGregor, "Miss Mary M. Slessor. The Story of Her Romantic Career," not paginated; Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 9.

on her, Slessor stood and “for once in [her] life...felt it difficult to tell the ‘Old, Old Story.’”<sup>11</sup> Just a few years later, while superintending the Old Town station, she would find herself again telling the gospel message to crowds of women and children.

Slessor followed the established pattern for missionary women in her work with women and children, but her inclusion of men in her evangelistic message, particularly on the Sabbath, did go against the grain, and opened up new ways of thinking for the missionaries of Calabar and the Calabar Presbytery. For Presbyterian women in Scotland, speaking in church, especially from the pulpit was very uncommon, particularly before 1870. This was due partly to the Victorian propriety which found public speaking to be degrading for women, but even more so to the subordinate role of women in the Scottish Presbyterian Church.<sup>12</sup> Generally, only men held leadership positions in the church until 1929 when the Congregational Union allowed women to be ordained as clergy. Until then, only men preached from the pulpit.<sup>13</sup> In 1888, the Church of Scotland did open the diaconal position to women, allowing them to serve in that role, but as deaconesses they did not hold teaching positions in the church.<sup>14</sup> Other leadership roles also became available for women in the 1880s as women began running missionary organizations such as the Ladies’ Auxiliary Committees and Missions Committees in charge of the single

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<sup>11</sup> Slessor, “Miss Slessor’s First Impressions of Calabar,” not paginated.

<sup>12</sup> Watt, *The History of the Parson's Wife*, 79-80.

<sup>13</sup> Lois Boyd and Douglas Brackenridge, “Questions of Power and Status: American Presbyterian Women, 1870-1980,” in *Triumph Over Silence* (Greenwood Press, 1985), 203. (This held true in both the American Presbyterian Church, and the Scottish Presbyterian churches.)

<sup>14</sup> Esther Breitenbach and Eleanor Gordon, *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society 1800-1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 98; Breitenbach, *Empire and Scottish Society*, 79.

females employed by the church Mission Boards.<sup>15</sup> One such example is the Women's Foreign Mission Committee of the United Free Church in Scotland which opened Arochuku for the Calabar Mission and sent Slessor and other women into Aro territory in 1906.

Because Slessor was not an ordained minister, she never administered the Protestant sacraments of Baptism or the Lord's Supper, but she did hold many Sabbath services, and in 1899 she officiated the wedding of her oldest adopted daughter Jane Annan Slessor to Akiba Eyo.<sup>16</sup> In the jungle, often a minimum of a day's journey from the closest mission station, Slessor continued to hold Sabbath services, teach Sabbath school to children, and educate the people in the proper way to observe the Sabbath. Like the men who had pushed upriver before her, Slessor planted churches, built church buildings, spoke from the pulpit, and held outdoor meetings when no church building was available.<sup>17</sup>

Without clocks or calendars in the jungle, Slessor sometimes forgot the day of the week and discovered that she had missed the Sabbath or been a day early. Rather than waiting until the following Sunday to make up for the loss, Slessor often found herself

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<sup>15</sup> Semple, *Women in Missions*, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Christian and Plummer, *God and One Redhead*, 112-114.

<sup>17</sup> M'Kerrow, *History of Foreign Missions*, 406-409; Slessor, "The Awakening Up the Cross River," *Women's Missionary Magazine*, [July 1908], "Letters and Articles," Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010); Slessor, "Old Calabar from Miss Slessor," "Ikot Obon, 28 February 1906, *Women's Missionary Magazine*, [June 1906], "Letters and Articles," Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010); Mary Slessor to Mr. Stevenson 28 Feb 1906; "The Public Meeting," *Women's Missionary Magazine* 79, (1907): 165; Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 85-86.

keeping Sabbath<sup>18</sup> with her congregations on a Saturday or Monday. One time, Slessor wrote of keeping the Sabbath on a Saturday because “I lost it a fortnight ago....Never mind, God would hear all the prayers and answer them the same.”<sup>19</sup> Another time, Charles Oven, the mission carpenter from Creek Town, found Slessor preaching a sermon in her yard on Monday morning when he arrived to help with roof repairs. Though he could little afford to keep Sabbath two days in a row, she convinced him to hold off working on the house for one more day to help her save face in front of the people.<sup>20</sup>

As early as 1881 Slessor was holding Sabbath services and Bible meetings. Once she took charge of the Old Town station, she often visited the nearby villages to hold services, and one group of visitors followed Slessor on these rounds observing her as she led a service for men, women and children with hymns, prayer, and the teaching of a verse of Scripture.<sup>21</sup> In 1902, one woman who had visited Slessor described her typical Sabbath filled with preaching duties. Beginning at six in the morning, Slessor traveled from Akpap to hold two services in distant villages, then returned to hold two more regular services at Akpap and a children’s service in the evening.<sup>22</sup> Rev. J.K. MacGregor, who served in the interior for a time helping at Slessor’s stations, in 1908 described his chagrin at being tired after only one service at Ikotobong, while Slessor spent the day

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<sup>18</sup>Keeping the Sabbath in the Scotch Presbyterian manner meant more than simply holding church services, it also allowed for no common labor to be done on “the Lord’s Day.”

<sup>19</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 132-33.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Hardage, *Everybody’s Mother*, 32-33.

<sup>22</sup> Private Letter 16 August 1902, presumed published in *Women’s Missionary Magazine* [December 1902], Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

preaching in ten meetings around the area with only two cobs of roasted corn to eat for the entire day. MacGregor marveled at her stamina, particularly after discovering that for Slessor, this was a “shorter” circuit than usual.<sup>23</sup> In addition to conducting official Sabbath services, Slessor also took opportunities on her Sabbath trips to stop at homes along the road and witness, as she did on one occasion when accompanied by Mina Amess, to tell several natives the story of the Parable of the Lost Sheep.<sup>24</sup>

Slessor considered herself to be more than just a teacher in the interior, and though never ordained, referred to her position, in letters and articles, as that of a minister or pastor. In 1905, during the time when she desired to travel farther upriver and into Ibibio territory, she wrote to the *Women’s Missionary Magazine* describing her excitement over the progress being made by Dr. Robertson in his preparations to take over the Itu medical station. In anticipation of his arrival she declares, “after the services of tomorrow and the services of the following week, when I would be here to introduce him to the routine...my work as direct pastor in Itu is finished, and I am at liberty now to run up the Creek or into Ibibio just as God may lead.”<sup>25</sup> In 1910 she expressed her delight at being able to minister to the Ibibio people, comparing herself to “ministers at home” and telling her readers:

I feel too grateful to God for His wonderful condescension in letting me have the privilege of ministering to those around me here, who otherwise would have no one to guide their worship or teach them....I tell you, dear friends, I would not,

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<sup>23</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 248.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>25</sup> Slessor, “Our Missionary Mailbag,” Old Calabar. From Miss Slessor, Itu 7 October 1905. *Women’s Missionary Magazine* [Jan 1906], “Letters and Articles,” Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

for all the weight of responsibility, and the feeling of my unfitness, change places with the happiest and mightiest on earth.<sup>26</sup>

Slessor clearly saw herself as more than just a teacher to the interior tribes, but she also recognized the leadership of missionary men and gladly turned over her pulpit when an ordained minister was available to preach, as she did in Use for a Christmas service that Alexander Cruikshank, visiting from his station at Ikorofiong, preached.<sup>27</sup>

The women who entered the interior after Slessor at the turn of the century followed in her footsteps, preaching and conducting Sabbath services to the Okoyong and Ibibio people. By 1907 these women were visiting nearby houses and villages to hold Sabbath services, conducting the services in their own stations, and holding impromptu Bible meetings during the week when traveling or visiting in other regions.<sup>28</sup> For example, Jane Reid, a nurse stationed in Ikot Obon, helped conduct services in the early months of her stay, while visiting at Akpap for a week.<sup>29</sup> Martha Peacock, also at Ikot Obon traveled regularly past Ikot Iso, a neighboring village, to preach farther out, and though she often requested permission to preach at Ikot Iso as well, the chief had refused to allow it. In 1908, Peacock expressed her excitement to readers that after much

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<sup>26</sup> Slessor, "A Missionary's Testimony: Extract from a letter to Friends from Miss Slessor," presumed published in *Women's Missionary Magazine* [March 1910], "Letters and Articles," Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Slessor, "From Miss Slessor, Use, Ikot Obon," *Women's Missionary Magazine*, [April 1914], "Letters and Articles," Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> *Women's Missionary Magazine*, no. 94, 1908, 241; *Women's Missionary Magazine* no. 76 April 1907, 95; *Women's Missionary Magazine* no. 77 May 1907, 118.

<sup>29</sup> *Women's Missionary Magazine*, no. 80, [August 1907], 200; "Our Missionary Mailbag," *Women's Missionary Magazine*, no. 77, [May 1907], 118.

persuasion, she had finally been permitted to “speak a message to his people,” and had begun holding services in his yard as well.<sup>30</sup> Mina Amess participated in conducting services, sometimes filling in for Slessor when she was away, and on at least one occasion conducting a funeral service for one of the church members at Ikot Obon. She described the service as “most orderly, quiet and solemn,” a direct contrast to the early burials that Slessor witnessed in Ekenge and Ifako when she first entered the interior.<sup>31</sup>

Slessor showed much appreciation for the work of these women, and often spoke of their helpfulness to her. In a letter in 1908, she expressed her happiness to have “a sister like Miss Peacock so close, for I can see her at least once a week, and often twice, and she is so good and so kind to me, and because of just what she is in her character, she is a tower of strength to me.”<sup>32</sup> Slessor also called Mina Amess, “a dear sister,” and told a friend “how well off I am with them,” when speaking of the work of Rosie McMinn, Mina Amess and Martha Peacock working at Ikot Obon.<sup>33</sup>

Preaching and evangelizing native congregations, though not completely unheard of before Slessor’s time, was not a typical duty for a missionary woman and actually pushed at the boundaries of traditional women’s work. Before Slessor opened the Okoyong territory and began holding regular services in the interior, most Calabar

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<sup>30</sup> *Women’s Missionary Magazine*, no. 94 [1908] 241.

<sup>31</sup> Mary Slessor to Miss Crawford 25 December 1910.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Slessor to Miss Crawford 27 December 1908.

<sup>33</sup> Mary Slessor to Miss Crawford 25 December 1910; Mary Slessor to Miss Crawford 19 November 1909.

Mission women assisted husbands by reaching out to native women and children, teaching in the schools, and visiting women in their homes.

School teaching was one of the main concerns of missionary women. In 1849 upon her first arrival in Duke Town, Louisa Anderson who taught a sewing class for girls at the Mission House, and showed disappointment that the girls seemed interested only in getting clothes, and stopped coming once they had achieved that goal.<sup>34</sup> Euphemia Miller Sutherland also taught in the schools and proved to be a competent teacher who focused on giving practical lessons to her students, encouraging them to learn by giving them a reason to do so. She taught sewing and knitting, reading and writing, but the lessons the children remembered most were the religious lessons that she gave. When asked to recount their memories of Sutherland, students told of the love and kindness that she showed to them inside and outside the classroom. One student recalled a lesson in courage, learning not to fear the sick and dying after sitting by the side of a dying man who needed his care. Another young man told of saying his first prayers at her knee. Sutherland was well loved by her students, many of whom she treated as her own children.<sup>35</sup>

Not only did the early missionary women teach children, but they also took time to evangelize women, visiting them in their yards and holding various educational classes for them at the mission. Jane Goldie, called “the mother of the Calabar Mission,” began the work of visiting women in their yards and teaching them the Christian gospel,

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<sup>34</sup> Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson*, 202; Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 135.

<sup>35</sup> Waddell, *Memorials of Mrs. Sutherland*, 20, 39, 55, 60, 78 and 170-171; Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson*, 402.



assisted by Mrs. Samuel Edgerley, Sr. and Jessie Waddell who had organized female prayer meetings and mother's meetings in Jamaica in 1840.<sup>36</sup> Women also took the opportunity to share the gospel with native women who visited the mission house, as Anderson did in her first few weeks at Duke Town. Though she was not yet familiar with the language, Anderson had the washer woman's daughter translate for her as she described to the women "the happiness of heaven and the misery of hell."<sup>37</sup> The work of visiting native women in their yards was vital to the mission, for many women, such as the twin mothers and widows living in seclusion, were not able to visit the mission house or the market and were inaccessible to the men of the mission.<sup>38</sup>

Sutherland was the first missionary woman in Calabar who extended her evangelism into a broader sphere, preaching to native men, women and children on the Sabbath. In 1856, William Anderson recorded that Sutherland was holding Sabbath services in Old Town. She began doing so after the death of her husband that year, and had even begun holding meetings in Qua and Akim nearby.<sup>39</sup> It is unclear from her biography whether these were duties that Sutherland continued because of the death of her husband, or if she had been assisting him before, but Anderson shows no dissatisfaction or disappointment in her conducting Sabbath meetings. Sutherland also visited plantations and found opportunities to present the gospel in several homes,

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<sup>36</sup> Waddell, *Memorials of Mrs. Sutherland*, 33; Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years*, 169-70; M'Kerrow, *History of the Home and Foreign Missions*, 422.

<sup>37</sup> Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson*, 202.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 403 and 498; Waddell, *Memorials of Mrs. Sutherland*, 81-83.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-58.

including the home of a witch doctor. Sitting and talking with him through the afternoon, she explained the “hope of salvation through Christ.” She found him to be a pleasant old man who listened with respect, and who offered to let her teach two of the girls in his house the things that she spoke to him about.<sup>40</sup> In her later life, Sutherland also took opportunities to share the gospel with European traders who docked at Duke Town to trade with the Calabar people. She took pity on these men, who were far from home and the influence of their mothers, and so offered them motherly affection and invited them to tea one evening each week. She opened her tea table to any of the men interested in taking advantage of a “real Scotch tea,” and required only that they listen to her admonishments and attend a prayer meeting with her afterwards.<sup>41</sup>

Slessor, in her role as itinerant preacher and church planter transformed and expanded the roles of women on the mission field from mere teachers of women and children to evangelists and ministers to the natives. Though not the first woman to conduct Sabbath services, the practice was not typical among the early missionary women of Calabar. The women who followed in Slessor’s footsteps after 1900 took on the roles of leading Sabbath services and witnessing to men, helping to pave the way for further expansion of the Calabar Mission. Letters and reports written in 1907 by missionaries such as Mina Amess and Martha Peacock indicate that preaching Sabbath services was as normal a part of their weekly life as teaching school or working in the dispensary. Because Slessor’s own desire and interest was to serve God and bring the

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<sup>40</sup> Waddell, *Memorials of Mrs. Sutherland*, 63-66.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-129; Goldie, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 246.

gospel to a people who had not yet heard it, she pushed against boundaries, convincing the mission board and others in authority to send her as a gospel light since no others showed interest and the need was great.

## Chapter Three

### Defender and Protector

For one moment, the shouting ceased as the chiefs surrounding Mary Slessor stood in astonished silence, and then it renewed, louder, this time born out of frustration and indignation. What did this little, sick, bedraggled white woman think she was doing, claiming, in Egbo fashion,<sup>1</sup> possession of the rum casks which had been clearly agreed upon as a settlement fee? Indeed, if the situation was outrageous to the chiefs, it would have seemed ludicrous to Slessor's European friends, had they seen her at this moment, stripped of all but the barest clothing, her outer articles draped haphazardly across the casks of rum, herself standing, pale and sick, surrounded by African warriors who towered above her diminutive height, yelling in protestation that she must allow them to at least taste the liquor to be sure it was pure.<sup>2</sup>

Slessor's knowledge of Efik and Okoyong customs gained her much respect among the people, and they listened to her advice, bringing her their disputes and asking her to mediate for them. By 1913, Slessor had gained a reputation as "the good white Ma who lives alone" which spread even into the northern reaches of Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> Slessor's knowledge of the African customs and laws came from a conscious decision to adopt aspects of the African lifestyle, to live among the people, and to learn their customs and language. Slessor's extensive knowledge and understanding of African customs helped

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<sup>1</sup> Slessor here following an Okoyong tradition that the mediator of a quarrel, should he lay his garments on an object, possesses that object for a time, and the quarrelers cannot touch it because to do so is to attack the mediator. See Buchan, *Expendable Slessor*, 133.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> MacGregor, "Miss Mary M. Slessor. The Story of her Romantic Career," not paginated.

her to gain the respect of the interior tribes and gave her a voice among them that she was able to use to defend and protect those who had no voice of their own. While her position as a mediator was not unique among missionaries, her adoption of aspects of the African lifestyle was.

Missionary women, and really all British women in the colonies, had a duty to teach and exhibit the superiority of British culture. Through a mission of domesticity, British women were expected to teach native women the finer aspects of British civilization, modeling every aspect of British life from family structure to modest clothing.<sup>4</sup> Slessor's choice to adopt a simpler lifestyle than most of her co-workers, and her eventual immersion into much of African culture, set her apart from the other missionary women and other ex-patriots living along the coast. However, just because Slessor did not choose to emulate all aspects of British culture did not mean that she did not serve, like others, to instill in the interior a sense of British civilization and culture.

When Slessor first arrived in Duke Town she lived in the Mission House and benefitted from the middle class lifestyle that most missionaries and ex-patriots held. Not only did this new station provide Slessor with a few extra comforts, but it also placed on her all the responsibilities and expectations that middle class women were held to regarding work and domestic roles. Thus, her decision in 1881 to adopt a simpler lifestyle, living in a native mud and wattle hut at the Old Town station and eating fewer imported foods, was a decision that showed her working class upbringing and rejected several of the Victorian standards for women in the colonies. Initially this decision had more to do with finances and the amount of her salary that she could send home to her

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<sup>4</sup> Blunt, "Imperial Geographies of Home," 422-437.

mother and sisters, but as time wore on, Slessor came to pick up many other aspects of the African culture, learning their language, traditions, and even their family connections, which in a polygamous society were rather tortuous.<sup>5</sup>

Slessor's mastery of the Efik language became a subject of awe among her contemporaries. Mina Amess described Slessor's ability to chat with several native men along the side of the road, and to graphically describe the Parable of the Lost Sheep "with a perfect knowledge of the vernacular" which caused them to listen attentively.<sup>6</sup> James Luke, another missionary that spent time in the interior as well, declared that

she excelled even the natives themselves in their own tongue...she could play with it and make the people smile, she could cut with it and make them wince, she could pour spates of indignation until they cried out, 'Ekem! Enough Ma!' and she could croon with it and make the twins she saved happy, and she could sing with it softly to comfort and cheer.<sup>7</sup>

Even Mary Kingsley, a traveler who visited Slessor in Okoyong, praised Slessor for her knowledge of the Efik language as well as the grasp that she had regarding native customs.<sup>8</sup>

Slessor also began simplifying her wardrobe, so that by the 1890s, her costume consisted of simple, cotton shift dresses which reached just past her knees, and revealed bare legs, feet and arms. She also cut her hair short against her head in a boyish style. In contrast to the "stockings, neckerchiefs, handkerchiefs, collars, hats...linen and cotton

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<sup>5</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 33-34; Christian and Plummer, *God and One Redhead*, 38-39; MacGregor, "Miss Mary M. Slessor. The Story of her Romantic Career," not paginated.

<sup>6</sup> Mina Amess quoted in Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 237.

<sup>7</sup> James Luke quoted in Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 181.

<sup>8</sup> Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 143.

shirts,... flannel and calico” that Baptist missionaries in the 1840s found necessary, or even the long sleeved, high-collared shirts and ankle length skirts of the later Victorian period, her clothes seemed scanty.<sup>9</sup> In an 1890 photograph, Slessor’s dress looks more like a nightgown than a dress, which may be why one British gentleman, visiting with a group of government agents, complained, claiming that “her thin dress clung to her sweating body,” and refused to walk behind her during a tour of the village.<sup>10</sup>

A glance through the illustrations of such magazines as *Godey’s Magazine*, or book studies of Victorian fashions such as JoAnne Olian’s *Full Color Victorian Fashions* will show that Victorian modesty generally required floor-length gowns, long sleeves, high necklines and elaborate hair styles, particularly for the middle and upper classes. While ball gowns and some evening gowns allowed for bare arms, daily clothing worn in public covered every bit of skin.<sup>11</sup>

Slessor’s choice of dress had more to do with practicality than anything else. Her life and travel in the jungles made Victorian-style high heeled boots, long skirts and layers of petticoats impractical and impeded her ability to move quickly through the undergrowth. Slessor did conform to Victorian standards of dress when propriety or necessity called for such conformity. Photos of Slessor show her modestly attired in

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<sup>9</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 92; J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891; the Making of a New Elite* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 15.

<sup>10</sup> Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody’s Mother*, sixth photograph, not paginated; Buchan, *Expendable Slessor*, 145.

<sup>11</sup> Louis Antoine Godey and Sarah Josepha Buell Hale, *Godey’s Magazine* (The Godey company, 1897); JoAnne Olian, *Full-Color Victorian Fashions, 1870-1893* (Courier Dover Publications, 1999). For other fashion plates see Stella Blum, *Victorian Fashions and Costumes from Harper’s Bazar, 1867-1898* (Courier Dover Publications, 1974) and JoAnne Olian, *Eighty Godey’s Full-Color Fashion Plates, 1838-1880* (Courier Dover Publications, 1998).

typical Victorian-style clothing, and during her last furlough home, in 1907, she exhibited a typical womanly interest in pretty clothes, telling a friend,

I have been reveling in frocks and furbelows. It is simply lovely to see the shop windows and to examine and very nearly envy the beautiful creations the girls wear... I am trying to take the plainest and cheapest of frocks out with me. Only fancy them telling me that my costume is like a bride's rigout!...I confess to feeling ashamed to be in grey and silk when they [missionary ladies -Bencock, Reid, and Aimes] were so modestly and consistently garbed in Navy Blue and I could be the mother of the lot!<sup>12</sup>

Slessor did not choose to set aside the Victorian standards of modesty that followed the dress styles, nor did she necessarily dislike Victorian clothing or seek to set a new fashion trend. Rather, she wore what circumstances required, and dressed in a practical fashion for the work that she performed. When moving in the middle and upper class society of Scotland, speaking to ladies' meetings and visiting friends, Slessor wore the appropriate attire, as she did when traveling by foot through jungle paths, teaching school, visiting native women, or holding court.

In living among the natives, Slessor often literally lived in their houses. In Ekenge, when she first arrived among the Okoyong, she lived for about a year in a hut in Chief Edem's yard, a high honor for a guest, but an honor which meant that Slessor had little privacy or opportunity for quiet.<sup>13</sup> This was not the only time that she lived in a mud and wattle hut, for throughout her time in the interior she often arrived in a village before a mission house had been built, and in many cases, while itinerating, she spent her time in the homes of the natives as she was only a visitor and had no land of her own there. In

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<sup>12</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 21 Sept and 3 Oct. 1907.

<sup>13</sup> Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody's Mother*, 70.



1914 she gives an example of this, pointing out that as the harvest was still being gathered, the natives offered her the District Commissioner's Rest House as a temporary lodging until a mission house could be set up. To this suggestion, Slessor

agreed, and made my confession to the D.C. [District Commissioner] later on by letter. There are still two apartments for him on the other side, but they are open to the road, and are meant I suppose for Interpreters and upper servants. There are no doors or windows, but there are good walls and a good roof, & my girls are accustomed to sleeping on the ground and as the grounds are beautifully kept by the prisoners, there is little fear of Reptiles or beasts. So we are Royally housed, and have clean and pleasant surroundings, and we are the happiest of mortals I think.... The house is always in wonderfully good order. I am surprised each time at a mud house being so, after such long absences and no fires ever put on.<sup>14</sup>

Slessor did not always live in native huts, but even when she had a European style mission house, the furnishings remained sparse, and were made from native materials or conformed to native patterns, such as the hammocks which Slessor and her children slept in.<sup>15</sup>

One contemporary, when visiting her in Itu, commented that her "native hut" had such sparse furniture that she had "five [babies]...quietly sleeping wrapped up in bits of brown paper and newspapers" across the room.<sup>16</sup> Miss Amess too commented on the lack of typical Victorian furnishings, commenting that "the Council authorized me to take a filter, dishes, and cooking utensils from Akpap...there were no wardrobes or presses, and one had just to live in one's boxes." Amess arrived to assist Slessor in Ikot Obong in

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<sup>14</sup> Mary Slessor to Mr. Stevenson 20 February 1914.

<sup>15</sup> Christian and Plummer, *God and One Redhead*, 75-76.

<sup>16</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 211-12.

1906, bringing with her sixteen loads filled with such items as the ones mentioned and others that she had found necessary in Akpap.<sup>17</sup>

In describing Slessor's work among the Okoyong, Hugh Goldie recognized the respect that the people had for her, declaring that "twelve years of self-forgetful labor" had made Slessor "their trusted advisor and friend." Kingsley also recognized the respect that Slessor had among the Okoyong, and pointed out that "[h]er great abilities, both physical and intellectual, have given her among the savage tribe a unique position, and won her, from white and black who know her, a profound esteem."<sup>18</sup> A contemporary also recognized Slessor's influence among the Okoyong, saying that "she commanded the respect and confidence of all parties" and called her "shrewd, quick-witted, sympathetic."<sup>19</sup>

In choosing to emulate aspects of the African culture, Slessor proved to be a little ahead of her time, as most Victorian missionaries chose to model British customs in their homes, clothing, and food.<sup>20</sup> The traditional layout of mission houses modeled a Victorian pattern which provided dwelling space for the missionary family, office and parlor for entertaining and conducting business, and detached buildings that offered storage and a kitchen. Many of the mission houses in Calabar served also for boarding students that attended the mission school, providing another classroom where native

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 235-36.

<sup>18</sup> Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 74.

<sup>19</sup> J. H. Proctor, "Serving God and the Empire: Mary Slessor in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1876-1915," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 30, no. 1 (February 2000): 48, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/stable/1581622>.

<sup>20</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 284.

children learned British customs such as table manners, etiquette, and cooking skills, both native cooking and British.<sup>21</sup> In 1907, Mina Amess described teaching native children at the mission house table manners, laughing good-naturedly over one of the boys who “put down tea-cups for soup-plates.”<sup>22</sup> In Okoyong, Elizabeth McKinney described weekly chores including “washing...ironing ...and scrubbing,” all chores that they performed in British, rather than African, fashion.<sup>23</sup> Though Slessor was not the only missionary woman to adopt the lifestyle of a foreign culture, she was the first and only one in her lifetime in Calabar to do so; even those women like Mina Amess, Martha Peacock and Beatrice Webb who worked alongside her in the interior continued to model a British lifestyle even as they learned the native language and customs.<sup>24</sup>

Living in the interior, Slessor confronted many of the superstitious practices that the earlier missionaries had found in Duke Town and along the coast in the 1850s. In the interior, human sacrifice, trials by ordeal and twin murders were still practiced by almost every tribe when Slessor entered the it in 1888. One of the practices that Slessor worked the hardest to eradicate was that of twin murders. Slessor rescued her first twin while serving at Old Town in 1882, a little girl that she named Janie. By 1888 when she moved

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<sup>21</sup> Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 224; Moffat, *Lives of Robert and Mary Moffat*, 90.

<sup>22</sup> Mina Amess, “Our Missionary Mailbag,” *Women’s Missionary Magazine* 73 (1907): 23.

<sup>23</sup> “Our Missionary Mailbag,” *Women’s Missionary Magazine* 76 (1907): 95.

<sup>24</sup> Amy Carmichael began doing this around 1893 after working with Japanese women and being frustrated at their attention to her clothing rather than her message. See Elisabeth Elliot, *A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael* (Old Tappan, N.J: F.H. Revell Co, 1987), 73. Lottie Moon, an American Southern Baptist missionary began serving in China in 1873 and also began adopting the Chinese dress as she found it less expensive than Western clothing and more practical. See Lottie Moon, *Send the Light* (Mercer University Press, 2002), xi and 404, Google Books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=0-KB7NBuvekC> (accessed April 2, 2010). Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody’s Mother*, 157.

to Ekenge, she had a household of five children, twins and orphans alike.<sup>25</sup> During her service in Africa, hundreds of babies passed through Slessor's arms, gaining her the nickname "*eka kpukpru owo...everybody's mother.*"<sup>26</sup> Though Slessor carried on a tradition started by Mrs. Samuel Edgerley, Sr. of providing refuge to unwanted children, she added to that tradition by being the first to legally adopt the children she rescued, despite the fact that she never married.

Slessor's household of adopted African children and refugees, protected and provided for by a single white woman was certainly an unusual picture from any standard or typical family in either Scotland or Calabar. Victorian society placed great emphasis on marriage and a central family of husband, wife, and dependents, stressing that the husband and father be responsible to provide for the needs of his family.<sup>27</sup> Calabar society also placed stress on the provision of a husband or a father, though their view of the family was a polygamous structure and in Calabar society, women were helpless and open to rebuke if they had no man to provide for them.<sup>28</sup> Slessor's choice to care of orphans and twins in her own home and to raise nine of them as her own flesh and blood set a different example of the worth, and value of women in Calabar society.

In total, Slessor had nine children, seven girls and two boys that she claimed as her own and that carried her family name. Jane, her oldest proved to be a valuable help, learning to manage Slessor's household and relieving Slessor of much of the burden of

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<sup>25</sup> Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody's Mother*, 39 and 313; Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 65-66.

<sup>26</sup> Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody's Mother*, 157.

<sup>27</sup> Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, 316-324; Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 73.

<sup>28</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 20; Mary Slessor to Mr. Stevenson 28 February 1906.

her work in her old age. Jane taught children in the schools, helped with Bible studies for women, rescued twins, curtailed visitors, listened to palavers<sup>29</sup> in Slessor's stead, nursed Slessor in her illnesses, and served as an overall assistant.<sup>30</sup> Daniel MacArthur Slessor became Slessor's first son in 1900. Called Daniel MacArthur for a friend in Scotland, and named "Akpan Ma" which means "Ma's oldest son," by Okoyong villagers, Daniel also proved a great help to Slessor.<sup>31</sup>

Called "the White Ma who lives alone," Slessor's position as the protector and provider of her family made her different from both her own Victorian society and the African polygamous society. The model which Slessor's own mother provided in juggling domestic responsibilities with financial provision for the family before and after Mr. Slessor's death likely formed Slessor's views regarding her ability to work and provide for her African family.<sup>32</sup> Slessor's work with the mission and the salary that she earned later as a British magistrate provided the livelihood for her little family and other refugees in her care. It is important to note that Slessor's single life was not due to an inability or lack of desire toward marriage, but rather was a choice that Slessor made,

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<sup>29</sup> Native term for discussions or disputes, sometimes legal disputes, but not always. "Editorial Notes," *The Letters to Charles Partridge*, Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection. [http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Mary Slessor to Miss Crawford, 19 November 1909; Mary Slessor to Mr. Stevenson 28 Feb 1906; Slessor, "Triumphing over Superstition," *Women's Missionary Magazine*, [May 1901], not paginated, "Letters and Articles," Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Christian and Plummer, *God and One Redhead*, 115.

<sup>32</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 1-2, and 6; Plummer, *God and One Redhead*, 11 and 14-16; Hardage, *Mary Slessor Everybody's Mother*, 5.

giving up the happiness of a marriage partner in order to work among the people that she believed God had called her to serve.<sup>33</sup>

In 1891 Slessor was engaged for a year to twenty-five year old Charles Morrison, a fellow missionary teacher in Duke Town, but the circumstances did not lend themselves to the marriage, and the engagement was broken off.<sup>34</sup> As she had no husband, Slessor took over many of the roles that a man would have performed in her family, not only in providing for the needs of those under her roof, but also approving the marriages of several of her daughters. In 1899, her oldest daughter Jane married Akiba Eyo, a young man that Slessor approved of.<sup>35</sup> By 1905, Slessor tells a friend of other marriages in the family, her daughter Annie, married with a baby and living in “a decent home,” and her daughter Mary. In the letter, Slessor commented, “He is a steady lad...so I am pleased, and it is her own choice though two other men, one Ibibio and one Okoyong man were waiting for her consent.”<sup>36</sup> Several years later, in 1912, Slessor related, “I have two proposals for Alice, of marriage, last month....Neither are to my mind.”<sup>37</sup> Though she allowed her daughters to make the final decision for themselves, Slessor clearly exerted influence over their choices, particularly those that she did not approve of. A letter in

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<sup>33</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 114.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-15; Buchan, *Expendable Slessor*, 133-34.

<sup>35</sup> Christian and Plummer, *God and One Redhead*, 112-114.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 17 Feb 1909.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 1 January 1912.

1911 indicates that Slessor also arranged for both of her adopted sons to attend school at the Waddell Training Institute in Duke Town.<sup>38</sup>

In 1893, Slessor saved the first twin in Okoyong territory, when her mother sought refuge with Slessor after being kicked out of her own home. The mother was a slave woman, well loved by her mistress until the birth of her babies. Upon the arrival of the unfortunate offspring, the woman piled the mother's few belongings in a gin case with the babies on top and hounded the woman out of town. Slessor heard of the woman's plight and hastened to meet her, coming upon her halfway to Ekenge. Slessor led her back to her own home and lifted the babies carefully out of the case. The little girl, on top, survived, but her sibling had died from the trauma and Slessor buried the twin in her yard.<sup>39</sup>

In 1906, Slessor made mention of another first set of twins rescued, this time "tiny, sickly things" that lived only two days after she received them. In the same week that she saved these twins from murder, she also rescued an orphan boy who had been left in a brick field after his mother died. Slessor gave the boy to the twin mother who had lost her own babies and the woman cared for it, staying in Slessor's home for a time since her own family refused to allow her to return.<sup>40</sup> In 1908 Slessor described her house filled with sick children, a twenty-three week old baby whose mother had died and

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<sup>38</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 4 September 1911.

<sup>39</sup> Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 323-26.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge, 24 Feb. 1906.

needed constant care, and “a wild flock of bush children” whom she had brought home with her earlier in the week.<sup>41</sup>

By the 1900s Slessor was beginning to see the fruit of her labor in trying to rid the interior of the fear of twins. Though progress was being made toward a better lot for twin mothers, and Itu laws encouraged the Ibibio to protect their twin mothers and allow them access to the markets, many still feared the evil spirits that they believed resided in the helpless babies.<sup>42</sup> Thus Slessor found great joy in recounting for readers in Scotland, of an unusually happy outcome when a baby boy from a village which still clung to the superstitions surrounding twins was saved. In “Triumphing Over Superstition,” Slessor tells her readers,

Three weeks ago a messenger came from a place where I have not worked much, because it so far off, to tell me that twins had been born there, and to ask me to go and take them away.... I sent Mana and Janie to try and help the mother and save the bairns; when they came back with a bonnie baby boy, and the news that the other twin, who had died, had been decently buried by the father, that the latter was sitting near the mother, and had made a comfortable place for her, and that when she was stronger, she might come to see her baby, we were all cheered.....My surprise, almost consternation, can be imagined, when I heard that he was at the back door with his wife... the husband said, “Ma, I have come with Arigi to see our child, Efik Idiom, will you bring him to us?” When he was brought, the mother held out her arms, and the father rose and bent over him. I put the child into his arms, and he held him. It was not a scene for words!...When I called for the heads of the houses to which Etok and his wife belong, we had a most interesting meeting. I spoke to them not as a white woman, but as a mother, and said that they ought to take my advice and keep their twin mothers and children, without the use of force from the Consul.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Mary Slessor to Miss Crawford, 27 December 1908.

<sup>42</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 30 April 1906.

<sup>43</sup> Slessor, “Triumphing over Superstition,” not paginated. Note that the publication date for the magazine is marked as 1901, but in transcribers notes the date is given as either 1901 or 1907.



In the end, the chief agreed to let the family return home unharassed, and the household heads agreed that they would not harm the twin baby or his mother.

The nature of Slessor's work in the interior often required her to combine private and public duties. Though Victorian standards generally separated family life and private duties from public duties of work and society, Slessor often had no choice but to combine her family duties of childcare with other occupations. For example, while living in Ekenge, a Scottish visitor found her washing four babies at once in four separate pots of warm water over the stove in the kitchen. In order to make sure that her guest retained her attention without neglecting the children, Slessor washed, dried, and put all four babies to sleep while carrying on a conversation with the surprised guest.<sup>44</sup>

Another time, a visiting British agent, T.D. Maxwell, discovered Slessor rocking a baby on the veranda while holding court. The picture she presented became even more surprising when this "frail old woman...suddenly jumped up with an angry growl," hastily handed the baby to another woman nearby, marched off the veranda, and confronted a native man who had just entered the yard. Though he towered over her, he seemed to shrink as the biting sound of her words struck his ears, and she took him "by the scruff of his neck" and bodily marched him off her property in front of the crowd of litigants, witnesses and onlookers that had arrived to be heard in court. Then she turned and "the tornado subsided...she was again gently swaying in her chair," with the baby in her lap.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Christian and Plummer, *God and One Redhead*, 118-119.

<sup>45</sup> Report by T.D. Maxwell quoted in Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 129-30.

Slessor was not the first missionary woman to save unwanted children. In South Africa, Mary Moffat described in her letters and journals several unwanted babies that she and her husband had rescued from certain death. Robert came across the first two, a young boy and girl, as they were about to be buried alive with their mother in her grave. At another time, the Moffat children found a tiny baby abandoned on their woodpile and brought it in for their mother. She took the baby and cared for it as her own for many years.<sup>46</sup>

In Calabar too, missionary women rescued orphans and twins. Mrs. Samuel Edgerley, Sr. rescued the first set of twins in 1852, causing quite a stir among the natives of Old Town. A few weeks later, King Eyo of Creek Town alerted the mission of another set in danger, and sent several of his own wives to save the babies. Sutherland joined them and together they were able to rescue the twins and bring them back to the mission house.<sup>47</sup>

Jane Goldie, who had lost all of her own babies in infancy, found a special purpose in rescuing and providing a home for the twins and orphans brought to her house, and spent many years caring for unwanted children. Louisa Anderson also rescued and cared for twins and their mothers, providing refuge for those in need, and becoming a sure help to the authorities attempting to ban the practice of twin murder in Duke Town.<sup>48</sup> In 1880, the authorities often presented Anderson with a present of a twin they had found, knowing that at the mission station the child would be cared for and protected. As the

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<sup>46</sup> Moffat, *The Lives of Robert and Mary Moffat*, 106 and 133-135.

<sup>47</sup> Waddell, *Memorials of Mrs. Sutherland*, 34 and 40-41.

<sup>48</sup> Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson*, 400.

missionary women raised these babies and through their care proved to the people that twins were normal, human children, slowly the practice began to die out along the coast. By 1888, when Slessor entered Okoyong territory, the practice had all but died out along the coast due in great part to the influence of the missionaries in those towns.<sup>49</sup>

Along with twins, Slessor and others also worked to help twin mothers and provide refuge to them and other women in need of protection. They also worked to better the status of women in Calabar, recognizing that one of the biggest problems that they faced was the polygamous system. Polygamy was a hotly debated topic among the missionaries, with some taking the side that converts should be allowed to keep their wives, while others required that converts give up all but the first when becoming church members.<sup>50</sup>

Though Slessor disagreed with the polygamous system, she suggested that something needed to replace it for those women who left polygamous marriages and had no other recourse available to them. She recognized that in Calabar, particularly in the interior, women who lived without the protection of a husband had no respect, no house and no land on which to grow food. She believed “[w]e must have something at which a decent Christian woman who wishes to earn her living, can do so, apart from native

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<sup>49</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 355; Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson*, 400 and 574-575.

<sup>50</sup> Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years*, 667-668; Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 325-27.

marriage.”<sup>51</sup> To that end, she attempted to convince the Calabar Presbytery to help support her efforts in building and maintaining industrial schools for women.<sup>52</sup>

Slessor advocated schools that would teach women some form of industry and homes that would provide land for them to farm and raise crops. These women already knew how to grow crops and tend animals, but they needed a place to do that, and if they could learn a vocation such as dress making, basket making, washing, or baking, they could be put on the road to economic independence.<sup>53</sup> This, Slessor believed, would give Christian women a suitable substitute for native marriage.<sup>54</sup> In 1907, Slessor established a settlement in Use for abused women, and in 1908 the mission established the Home for Women and Girls at Ikot Obon, a step in the direction which Slessor’s vision had led.<sup>55</sup>

Slessor not only rescued twins and orphans and looked for ways to provide refuge and mercy to women, she also stood up for justice, speaking out against the practices of human sacrifice, trials by ordeal, and the accusation of witchcraft. In 1888, after first arriving in Ekenge, she prevented the deaths of twelve prisoners captured and held guilty for the accidental death of Edem’s son, Etim, who suffered an accident with his machete while clearing land. The chief believed that witchcraft had caused the death and planned to use the most common trial by ordeal, the swallowing of the esere bean, to determine

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<sup>51</sup> Mary Slessor to Mr. Stevenson 28 February 1906.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 15 February 1908.

<sup>53</sup> Slessor, “Concerning Advance Work in West Africa,” *Women’s Missionary Magazine* 85 (1908): 4-5, Google Books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=SOIZAAAAIAAJ> (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> Slessor, Old Calabar. From Miss Slessor, Ikot Obon, 28 Feb 1906. Published in *Women’s Missionary Magazine* [June 1906], “Letters and Articles,” Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundeeccity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundeeccity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>55</sup> Knox, *The Lives of Scottish Women*, 127; Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 14 July 1908.

the guilty party.<sup>56</sup> The poisonous bean was supposed to react against an evil spirit, killing the guilty but allowing the innocent to live. Because of the potency of the bean, the reality was that innocent and guilty died together.<sup>57</sup> Slessor, recognizing the futility of such a test, first convinced the chief to forgo the poison bean trial, and then stood guard, dressing Etim's body in fine clothes and giving many European articles such as an umbrella to dress the body, hoping to convince the chief to accept these possessions in exchange for the lives of his prisoners. Though it took two weeks of constant vigil, which she shared with a visiting missionary, Slessor prevailed, and the chief eventually released every prisoner.<sup>58</sup>

In 1890, just before leaving on furlough due to illness, Slessor received a messenger who had come to beg for her help in preventing a war between two houses. To get to the houses would require a six hour trek through the jungle, but Slessor, after hearing the messenger and assuring herself that the danger was real, agreed to go, and in the dead of night made the journey, arriving at the first of the houses exhausted and unable to go further. Assured that the warriors would not depart in the morning before consulting with her, she lay down to sleep. The morning dawned to reveal that she had been deceived. Still exhausted from her exertion of the night before, Slessor set out after the warriors, reaching them just as they arrived at their destination. Recognized by one chief and given permission to speak to the assembled group, Slessor managed to convince them to allow her to mediate their dispute and after a long palaver, the dispute was settled

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<sup>56</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 91-98; MacGregor, "Miss Mary M. Slessor," not paginated.

<sup>57</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 45-46; Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 319.

<sup>58</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 91-98; MacGregor, "Miss Mary M. Slessor," not paginated.

and a fine of gin agreed upon. Waiting until the gin had been safely stowed in the big house, she returned to Ekenge and then on to the coast where she would meet the ship that would take her home to recover.<sup>59</sup>

This was not the only time that Slessor went into a danger zone in order to settle a dispute. Several times she put herself in the line of fire, refusing to move until the warriors around her settled their dispute, put down their weapons and separated in peace.<sup>60</sup> In one instance, Slessor confronted a man in her yard who was drunk and had his sword drawn. She deftly came up from behind, tripped him, and took the sword away.<sup>61</sup>

Slessor's efforts to educate the Okoyong regarding their superstitious practices and the need for true justice and mercy, based on individual actions rather than trials by ordeal and supposed witchcraft, gained her a reputation as a leader among the Okoyong. The people respected her and her wisdom, and listened to her judgments, bringing their palavers to her door and asking her to mediate for them.<sup>62</sup> This respect was not unusual for missionaries, though it was for women, and thus Slessor's position as a missionary probably superseded her status as a woman in the eyes of those who came to her for help. Slessor's unofficial capacity as judge and mediator soon led to an official capacity with the British government when the Imperial Government, in 1889, began to divide up the territories and arrange for the establishment of a Protectorate in the region. In 1891 the

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<sup>59</sup> Entire anecdote from Buchan, *The Expendable Mary Slessor*, 131-33.

<sup>60</sup> MacGregor. "Miss Mary M. Slessor," not paginated.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Hardage, *Everybody's Mother*, 163; Buchan, *The Expendable Slessor*, 130, 141, 145; Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge, 22 Dec 1910.

plans for the creation of a Protectorate had become a reality, and Consul-General Claude MacDonald began appointing vice consuls for the regions under his direction.<sup>63</sup>

Slessor was concerned that the appointment of a British officer unfamiliar with the region or the people, would cause trouble among the Okoyong and would hinder the advances that she had been able to make among them. MacDonald, after hearing of her concern and enquiring into her character and reputation, found that Slessor herself would make the most qualified vice consul for the Okoyong territory, and so offered her the position of consular agent in 1892. As a consular agent, Slessor supervised a native court and conducted the public affairs of the tribe.<sup>64</sup> While it was not unusual for women to hold various public governmental positions on a local level during the earlier portion of the nineteenth century, such a masculine role of judge and mediator, particularly at this period of the Victorian era, was unusual.<sup>65</sup>

Slessor accepted the post and became the first British woman to serve as a British imperial agent. When Slessor first accepted the post, the Calabar Mission Committee met with her, concerned that her position as a judge would compromise her missionary work. Slessor disagreed, arguing that she could perform both tasks equally, and planned to serve only temporarily for one term. Her one term stretched into many, and it was not until 1909 that she resigned her position.<sup>66</sup> Though she disliked the work, she recognized it as complementary to her missionary endeavors because it created a civilized place

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<sup>63</sup> Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 128-29.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, 2; Amanda Vickery, *Women, Privilege, and Power*, 5-7.

<sup>66</sup> Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 257-58; Hardage, *Everybody's Mother*, 216-17.

where the Christian gospel could be heard.<sup>67</sup> Slessor believed that the gospel was necessary for Africa, particularly in the ability of Britain to rule the African people. In a letter to Charles Partridge, another British Consul, she expressed this belief, telling him,

I know this more and more from all I see, and hear, that without the Gospel, the White Man<sup>68</sup> will never keep or rule what he is trying to snatch. The very men you are educating with gun and motor and Telegraph will turn you all out and keep Africa for the Africans. Only Christianity will give them a motive for loyalty, and good living, and obedience to law...I know the Gospel would hold them, and all Christians are not of the evil order. We have loads and loads of good Christian people, who are the producers and real citizens of Calabar and neighboring districts.<sup>69</sup>

Thus a pairing of preaching the gospel with her work as a British agent would not only teach British customs of law and order, but would also give the native peoples a motivation to follow this foreign government.

Slessor did believe that her work as a British agent held “possibilities for good,” as she commented in a 1906 letter after explaining that the court took up much of her time but she felt she could not give it up.<sup>70</sup> From 1892 until her resignation in 1909 she combined her work as a missionary with that of imperial agent, continuing to spread both civilization and Christianity in the regions she settled.<sup>71</sup> Throughout her service as a vice

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<sup>67</sup> Proctor, “Serving God and the Empire,” 46-48.

<sup>68</sup> “White Man” refers in general to the British magistrates and consuls ruling over the African provinces. This is a term which Slessor uses often to refer to the British government in general and it is a term used by the Okoyong to refer to British government as well.

<sup>69</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 7 July 1909.

<sup>70</sup> Mary Slessor to Miss Crawford 25 December 1910; Miss Slessor, Ikot Obon, 17 January 1906. Published in *Women’s Missionary Magazine* [April 1906], “Letters and Articles,” Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Hardage, *Everybody’s Mother*, 216-17; Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 231; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 23-24.



consul and British magistrate, Slessor maintained that she disliked the work, but she continued at it because it was “a most important work, creating public opinion, and establishing just laws, and protecting the poor, and getting a hold on the people.”<sup>72</sup>

Slessor successfully worked with the people in her district to keep the peace and spread British law, never having to call in punitive expeditions into her territory to put down rebellions or conflict.<sup>73</sup>

Slessor’s work as a British agent kept her on the move, traveling to settle disputes, and settling disputes as they arrived at her door. This, combined with her other duties of saving twins and orphans, teaching in day schools, occasionally practicing rudimentary medicine, preaching Sabbath services in her town and the outlying plantations and villages, kept Slessor busy. Indeed, in more than one letter, she describes the difficulty of even finding time to sit and write, and duties interrupt the flow of many of her letters. In 1902, a typical day for Slessor in Akpap began at six in the morning with Slessor off to a village three miles away to teach morning school. On her return in the afternoon, Slessor presided over palavers, held afternoon school classes in her home, and tended to the sick. On market days she dealt with a larger number of palavers than usual as more people came into town on market days. On the Sabbath she held services throughout the day in a minimum of four villages as well as her service in Akpap. Slessor accomplished all of these tasks while also caring for the children living in her home at this time.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Mary Slessor to Miss Crawford 25 Dec 1910.

<sup>73</sup> MacGregor. “Miss Mary M. Slessor,” not paginated.

<sup>74</sup> Knox, *Lives of Scottish Women*, 124; Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 24 February 1906, 14 December 1911, 23 April 1905; “Private letter of 16th August Gives a Glimpse of Miss Slessor's Work,” *Women's Missionary Magazine* [December 1902], Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection.

Slessor proved to be a good judge and leader for the Okoyong in both her official and unofficial capacity. Slessor preferred to use British measures sparingly, recognizing that the British were outsiders, and depended more on native customs, such as the swearing of the mbiam oath in legal matters.<sup>75</sup> The mbiam oath could be used to rebut a charge, but more frequently native courts used it to confirm a contract or other legal arrangement. The oath involved a “dirty-looking liquid,” which Kingsley discovered was made by combining several noxious materials, including the bark of a sacred tree. The one giving the oath, dipped his finger in the bottle containing the liquid and touched the tongue of the one taking the oath. In some cases the liquid was smeared on the skin of the person taking the oath. The people believed that if the person broke his oath, or lied, the liquid would make him swell and die.<sup>76</sup> Slessor found the oath useful because the natives accepted and trusted it as an acceptable substitute for the poison bean, and because it never fatally harmed the innocent. Slessor not only used mbiam oath in her court, she also advocated its use by other British agents as well.<sup>77</sup>

Slessor was not the only woman missionary in Calabar to look for ways to better the lives of men and women, nor was she the only woman who stood up against chiefs in her fight for justice. Many other missionary women in Calabar also gained a reputation for standing up to chiefs in attempts to stop injustice, human sacrifice and cruelty. By Slessor’s death, and due largely to her constant fight against lawlessness and superstition, much of the interior had been introduced to justice so that the women who continued to

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<sup>75</sup> Christian and Plummer, *God and One Redhead*, 119.

<sup>76</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 41; Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 317-18.

<sup>77</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge 17 January 1905.

serve in Arochuku and surrounding interior territories could focus more on the gospel message. Slessor stands apart as a British agent, but the work she did in her official capacity merely added to the work women before her had accomplished.

For example, one missionary wife, Mrs. Robb, defied Egbo law in the 1850s when she helped several women attend a church service one Sabbath morning. The Egbo law in Creek Town declared that women could not wear European clothing in public, which meant that even those women free to leave their yard to attend church could not do so without disobeying the mission's request that they arrive for church clothed in modest apparel. Mrs. Robb, one of the missionaries at Creek Town, found about a dozen women in the king's yard, holding a Bible study on Sunday morning, afraid to break the edict, but desirous of having some form of worship service. Mrs. Robb, hearing of their desire to attend, provided dresses for the women and convinced them to conquer their fear and attend church. In walking to the church, the group, led by Mrs. Robb, passed the house of the king's brother, who stopped them, demanding to know why the women had disobeyed the edict. Mrs. Robb told him that the edict was a bad law and that the women had chosen to follow God's law and attend church. She also argued that the women did no harm to the king or the town in desiring to dress in "fine gowns," and that the men were wrong and stingy to refuse to buy their wives clothing. She refused to turn the women around and though the man disliked her reply, he did not stop them from passing by and entering the church.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Entire anecdote from Waddell, *Memorials of Mrs. Sutherland*, 44.

In 1862, Euphemia Sutherland found herself in the middle of a crisis involving a man who arrived at the mission house begging refuge from the Egbo runners. The Egbo runner represented the supernatural creature, Egbo who supposedly resided in the jungle and dictated laws. The messengers of Egbo, or Egbo runners, enforced the laws and spoke for Egbo to the people.<sup>79</sup> In this case the runners were rounding up slaves and other villagers to sacrifice for the death of a neighboring chief's son. When an Egbo runner dragged the man off the mission property and began to flog him, Sutherland sprang into action. She rushed between the man and the Egbo runner, laid her umbrella on the back of the man being flogged, and commanded that the flogging stop. Perhaps because of the unexpectedness of her action, the Egbo runner turned and fled and the man was taken to safety inside the mission house.<sup>80</sup>

This was not the only time that Sutherland took an opportunity to help the helpless. In Duke Town she convinced a chief to unchain a slave boy who had been hung in a tree for stealing. Another time she rescued a slave boy from certain death when she found him starving and exposed by the side of the road. She took him into her home, nursed him back to health and refused to return the boy to his owner until she had been paid for his care. Because the owner was not willing to go to the extra expense, the boy stayed in her care and attended the mission school.<sup>81</sup>

Louisa Anderson was another who gained a reputation for her efforts to bring justice and mercy into the region surrounding Duke Town. In 1865, William Anderson

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<sup>79</sup> Goldie and Dean, *Calabar and Its Mission*, 30-31; Waddell, *Twenty Nine Years*, 265.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-71.

<sup>81</sup> Waddell, *Memorials of Mrs. Sutherland*, 83-86 and 156-58.

admitted that his wife had more influence over Chief Henry Cobham of Cobham Town than any other missionary. Though she was not always successful in her attempts to prevail upon him, Cobham declared that she was “good past twenty Calabar women...[and the] best man for Mission.”<sup>82</sup> After her death in 1881, Samuel Edgerley, Jr. praised her merciful attitude, for standing up to stubborn, native chiefs. He described her as making “men quail under her reproof for wrong-doing,” and declared that “she has saved many a head from being cut off,” as stubborn chiefs yielded unable to tell her no.<sup>83</sup>

Slessor’s interest in providing women an alternative lifestyle to polygamy led to the founding of several women’s schools such as the Home for Women and Girls that she saw begun at Itu in 1908. Though the missionary women who came after Slessor may not have stood against chiefs in an overt power struggle, or had many opportunities to go out and rescue twin babies and orphans, they did continue the legacy of Slessor and the women before her to defend the rights of native women and children and work to better their social position. Slessor’s protégés, Martha Peacock, Beatrice Welsh, Mina Amess and Agnes Arnot continued Slessor’s work in the interior, founding schools and stations and helping to staff the new Slessor Memorial Centre in Arochuku which sought to educate women and girls in various marketable skills.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Letter from William Anderson written Nov. 9, 1865 in Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson*, 410.

<sup>83</sup> Letter from Samuel Edgerley regarding the death and burial of Louisa Anderson, Marwick, *William and Louisa Anderson*, 588.

<sup>84</sup> Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly, *Women, Religion, and Social Change* (SUNY Press, 1985), 257, Google Books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=KrA940p31mgC> (accessed June 9, 2010); William H. Taylor, *Mission to Educate: a History of the Educational Work of the Scottish Presbyterian Mission in East Nigeria, 1846-1960* (BRILL, 1996), 131, Google Books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=vjqzE4ByhMC> (accessed June 9, 2010).

Slessor and the other women of the Calabar mission, in their concern and mercy shown to the people of Calabar, became defenders of the weak and protectors of the powerless. In Calabar they rescued and raised unwanted children and provided refuge for women, eventually bringing about many positive changes in their treatment. In 1906, the Calabar women along the coast recognized many of these changes in a letter to the women of the United Free Church of Scotland. In their letter, they expressed their gratefulness to God for the missionaries who brought the gospel into their region, and credited the gospel for the changes that “some of us have seen with our eyes.”<sup>85</sup> Slessor also saw positive changes in the interior, commenting in 1910 that there were many Christians worshipping regularly and “living Christian lives.” She also commented on the cemetery at Ikot and the prevalence of Christian burials rather than the human sacrifices and long funeral revelries that were once so common in the region.<sup>86</sup> Slessor’s work as a British agent extended the traditional civilizing aspect that missionary women had been exerting in the Calabar culture, and broadened the boundaries for future generations of missionary women.

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<sup>85</sup> Princess Eyo VIII, Louisa Egbo Uwan, “Letter to the Women of United Free Church of Scotland,” *Women’s Missionary Magazine*, 73 (1907): 6, Google Books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=SOIZAAAAYAAJ> (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>86</sup> Mary Slessor to Charles Partridge, Sr. 10 January 1910.

## Conclusion

An examination of Mary Slessor's life and work in Africa reveals that she presented Calabar Mission with a transitional figure. Standing at the edge of two worlds, Slessor broadened the traditional roles of missionary women to include the exploration of unknown regions and evangelism, opening the interior to larger missionary efforts. The women who followed Slessor into the Calabar interior also followed in her footsteps, not only teaching in the schools, but also conducting Sabbath services and visiting surrounding plantations to spread the Christian message.

The younger generation of missionary women, many of whom responded to her plea for missionaries while on furlough, entered into Slessor's jungle and worked by her side, sometimes taking over a station, and at other times providing help for a few weeks or months as it was needed. Many of these women formed positive opinions of Slessor and considered her a role model. Mina Amess discovered in Slessor, not the "masculine...commanding appearance" that she expected, but rather a "girlish spirit" with "a heart full of motherly affection."<sup>1</sup> As she got to know Slessor, Amess clearly admired her, not only for her kindness, but also for her stamina and courage, saying in a letter home that after listening to Slessor recount her experiences, Amess felt "inspired and encouraged to go bravely forward."<sup>2</sup> Amess also admired Slessor for her attitude towards the Okoyong and Ibibio, recognizing in Slessor not only an amazing ability to

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<sup>1</sup> Mina Amess from Ikotobong, Letter reproduced in Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 235-36.

<sup>2</sup> Mina Amess, "Our Missionary Mailbag," Akpap 27 October 1906, *Women's Missionary Magazine* 73 (1907): 23.

speak the language “just like them,” but also a heart that sought after their “highest welfare,” a trait that Amess clearly admired.<sup>3</sup>

Others who admired Slessor included missionaries Martha Peacock, Beatrice Welsh and J.K. MacGregor. Peacock admired Slessor’s stamina, commenting upon finding Slessor “riding about on her bicycle” though still suffering from illness and “put[ting] us all to shame in the way she overcomes every obstacle.”<sup>4</sup> Welsh enjoyed Slessor’s ability to tell stories vividly and with “wild indignations,” and admired Slessor’s “God-given power to draw one nearer to the Lord she loved so well.”<sup>5</sup> MacGregor also enjoyed Slessor’s stories, and found her “fascinating,” but he particularly admired her ability to remember details regarding the mission’s history and the customs of the Efik people.<sup>6</sup>

Missionaries who worked with Slessor were not the only ones who admired her. Writers for the *Women’s Missionary Magazine*, praised Slessor’s “dauntless spirit,” and used the story of her influence among the Okoyong to encourage woman readers to support missionary work and volunteer to go to Africa themselves.<sup>7</sup> Upon hearing of Slessor’s death in January 1915, Sir Frederick Lugard, Governor-General of Nigeria

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<sup>3</sup> Mina Amess, Akpap 10 June 1906, “Letters and Articles,” Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Martha Peacock, “Our Missionary Mail Bag,” 10 January 1907, *Women’s Missionary Magazine* 77 (1907): 117.

<sup>5</sup> Beatrice Welsh, quoted in Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 183.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. J.K. MacGregor, quoted in Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 237.

<sup>7</sup> “Impressions of the Summer School,” *Women’s Missionary Magazine*, 82 (1907): 256; “The Situation in Calabar and Elsewhere,” 32.



described his regret at hearing the news, declaring, “Her death is a great loss to Nigeria.”<sup>8</sup> The obituary printed in the *Government Gazette* gave further evidence of this loss, explaining that due to her “enthusiasm” and “self-sacrifice,” Slessor “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,” laboring for thirty-nine years with few breaks.<sup>9</sup>

Slessor, a working class girl from Dundee, spent the majority of her life under the reign of Queen Victoria, growing up under the influence of Victorian social standards in Scotland and practically living out the aspects of a civilizing influence in the Empire. In Africa, Slessor combined the traditional, civilizing influence that British women were supposed to infuse into the colonies with the Christian gospel message and a desire to spread this message to those who had not yet heard it. Because of her interest in pioneer mission work, Slessor herself became something of a pioneer, standing between traditional female roles and a broadening horizon that created an expanded opportunity for missionary women.

Through her exploratory travels into the interior along the Calabar and Cross Rivers, as well as her success in permanently settling among the fierce Okoyong and Ibibio tribes, Slessor opened the possibility for other women to also participate in expanding missionary territory and bringing the gospel message to people who had not yet heard it. As the only missionary in the jungles, Slessor shared the gospel with

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<sup>8</sup> Telegraph by Frederick Lugard, Governor-General of Nigeria, reproduced in Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 340.

<sup>9</sup> Notice in the *Government Gazette*, reproduced in Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar*, 340.

everyone she came into contact with, women, men, and children. Through her evangelistic work, Slessor pushed boundaries that gave women greater freedom to preach, though official leadership roles in mission churches were still filled by men. Finally, in her continuation of the efforts of other women to rescue unwanted children and create better conditions for the women of Calabar, Slessor became the first female government agent in Nigeria and proved that women could be as influential among the natives as men, and even more so given the circumstances of fear that white men had instilled in the interior tribes through their punitive expeditions.

Slessor spent almost half her life in Africa, and as she worked among the people, she did not do it just to be a British ambassador of true civilization, or to show others what women were capable of. In fact, while she sees certain aspects of civilization lacking among the interior tribes, and she clearly believes that women were the best missionaries for the interior, neither of these subjects come up in Slessor's writings when she is explaining her purpose in Africa.

Slessor chose to spend so much of her life among a people who did not always understand her or her message, because she believed that what she did served the God that she loved. Slessor believed that the Okoyong people needed to hear the Christian gospel, and she believed that in her evangelism, preaching, and living among them, she could help to bring that message to them. In a letter in 1905, written to the *Women's Missionary Magazine*, Slessor stated, "What an awful thing heathenism is!...It is only in the face of such darkness as this that one realizes the safety and enlightenment and

general comforts of life that flow from the presence of God's Word.”<sup>10</sup> This “safety and enlightenment” was something that Slessor desired to share with those who did not already know it.

Slessor proved to be a transitional figure in the Calabar Mission. Arriving in 1876 as a female agent to teach women and children, Slessor slowly extended the boundaries that these jobs placed, opening the doors for women after her to take a more active role in exploration and evangelism. Though not all the women who came in contact with Slessor necessarily chose to emulate her methods and lifestyle, many of them did appreciate her godliness and interest in others, and though they may have found her eccentric, many did follow in her footsteps, serving the mission as teachers and preachers, and serving the people as defenders and protectors.

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<sup>10</sup> Slessor, “Our Missionary Mailbag.” Old Calabar, Itu 7 October 1905, *Women's Missionary Magazine*, [Jan 1906], “Letters and Articles,” Dundee Central Library, Mary Slessor Collection, [http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1\\_4](http://www.dundee.gov.uk/slessor/#p7EPMc1_4), (accessed February 25, 2010).

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