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SERVICE TO GOD AND HUMANITY, REVEREND HOPE MASTERTON WADDELL IN CALABAR, (1846 - 1858): A BIOGRAPHICAL AND PROSOPOGRAPHICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This paper highlights the role of Reverend Hope Waddell in the history of Calabar. Given the view that the history of a people, place or era could be understood through a close study of the lives of some of the men who lived in the place and era, and who played important roles in the shaping of the events of their time, the paper argues that the arrival of Hope Waddell in Calabar provided the pivot around which momentous and far-reaching historical developments revolved. True, the fame of Calabar as the first site of Christian missionary activities on the Bight of Biafra and a major educational centre since the turn of the nineteenth century is a tribute to Waddell who braved most hurdles in Calabar's path to development. It ends with a challenge for present day Christians and Clergymen to live the Christian ideals which emphasise sacrificial service to God and humanity.

Introduction

Few topics have evoked as much controversy in the reconstruction of history as the subject of biography. This debate notwithstanding, it is argued in some quarters that an account of a person's life and times which is not contemporaneous "... is the most universally pleasant, the most universally profitable, of all reading" (Wood 30). Elsewhere, Thomas Carlyle had argued that "History is the essence of innumerable biographies".

This agrees with Disraeli's (Prime Minister of Great Britain during the Balkan crisis of the 1870s) assertion that the best form of history to be read is biography, for it is life without theory (Sturley, 122).

The need to investigate some great men in history becomes important when we take into consideration Akinyele's claim that "common sense and our daily experience have shown that events, especially those that are historical, often result from the interplay of forces embracing the great men of history as well as the several factors that surround them" (27). In his own assertion, famous Nigerian historian, E. A. Ayandele, points out that the "*dramatis personae* are representatives of some of the spirit, values and aspirations of the different times they lived" (9-11). This is particularly so in Calabar where indigenous and expatriate individuals had played relatively very decisive role in the shaping of the course of history. What we intend to do here is an overview of the activities of a hero of Calabar history who, apart from immortalisation in street and school names, we know nothing about. We do this in support of Crookall's assertion that "it is particularly through the biographical approach that history teaching can influence a child's mind and character" (17).

It should be mentioned however that our study of Hope Waddell in this paper shall be more prosopographical than biographical. Prosopography describes a situation in which the history of a people, place or era could be understood through a close study of the lives of some of the men who lived in the place and era, and who played important roles in the shaping of the events of their time and place. As Karl Ferdinand Werner has written, socio-prosopographical analysis concerns itself with the person, his environment and his social status, that is, a person within the context of family and other social groups, the place or places in which he was active and the function he performed within his society. Prosopography does not seek nations but examines the whole of a past society, its structure and the

individuals who made it up (<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~proso/proso/definition.htm>.)

There is a paucity of materials on Rev. Hope Waddell who is among the lesser – studied expatriates in Calabar. By looking at the contributions this relatively unstudied man has made, we will find qualities and characteristics we can value and incorporate into our everyday living. The arrival of Hope Waddell in Calabar partly provided the pivot around which momentous and far-reaching historical developments revolved. With knowledge and skills gained from his original homeland, Waddell gallantly braved most hurdles in Calabar's path to development. The fame of Calabar as the first site of Christian Missionary activities on the Bight of Biafra and a major educational centre since the turn of the nineteenth century (Uya, 195) is a roaring tribute to Hope Waddell who, among other missionaries, arrived in Calabar on 10th of April, 1846.

The Missionary Antecedents and the Presbyterian Mission in Calabar

Though the owners and managers of plantations in the New World did not welcome missionary effort among the slaves, some Scottish missionaries went to work among the plantation slaves in Jamaica, and all that followed that humble beginning forms a heroic endeavour and a tireless devotion which has few parallels even in the annals of missionary enterprise. The Scottish Missionary Society had sent three pioneer missionaries to Jamaica in 1800, two of whom died shortly while the third was stopped in his work by the government (<http://www.pcusa.org/Mission/yearbook/feb/22.html>). The situation changed positively following the abolition of the trans-Atlantic trade in 1807, and especially the complete emancipation of all the slaves in 1838, which brought in its wake the spirit of toleration of missionary activities. It was this development that led to the formation in 1824 of the Scottish Mission in Jamaica which later developed

into a synod with twenty-six congregations (Nyon 1). Most of the liberated slaves in Jamaica became zealous members of the Church of Scotland Mission and it was through them that the mission to Calabar was organised (Crowder, 146).

Even in the horrible days of slavery, the slaves had never forgotten the homeland from which they or their fathers had been so cruelly torn. As O. E. Uya has argued, at death they hoped to return to their ancestors, and when they bade farewell to the dying they would wish them a good journey and send messages to their friends in Africa. When they were granted freedom and turned by the Gospel and education into assets, they were fired with a noble desire to carry the glad tidings to their kinsfolk, and they appealed to the missionaries to lead the way ((<http://www.pcusa.org/missionyearbook/feb/22.html>)).

The presbytery which met at Goshen in July 1841 expressed support for the scheme and each participant offered to join in the crusade, if called upon. It resolved and made a strong case to the Missionary Society in Scotland that the time was ripe for concerted attempts to be made to send missionaries to West Africa; Waddell felt that the "best agents for the purpose might be found in West Indian churches, among missionaries already acclimated and experienced; that our congregations and ourselves felt the deepest interest in it; and that we offered ourselves to the mother churches of our native land to undertake the service" (207).

When this was reported to the Home Church, it was described as "premature" and "presumptuous" (208) on the grounds that the earlier attempts to explore Africa had resulted in disastrous failures, according to (3). The unfavourable reply from Scotland disappointed, though did not discourage the Jamaica congregations who regrouped their ranks and strengthened their commitment to their cherished project. Undaunted by the seemingly frustrating responses from

Scotland, the Presbytery met again in 1842 at Stirring Park, Westmoreland, Jamaica. Their resolution reads;

...agreed to record that the desire of members to aid in introducing the gospel into central Africa is unabated, that they view the proposed mission with increasing interest, and entertain the same sense of their duty in relation to it as at the first, willing TO GO FORTH TO THE HELP OF THE LORD IN THE CONVERSION OF ETHIOPIA (208).

In spite of the negative reaction from Scotland, certain factors were at work for the good of the Jamaican Presbytery. For instance, off-shore expatriates were spreading stories in Britain that the Efik of Old Calabar treated their slaves with scant consideration; human sacrifices and twin murder were reported to be on a large and ostentatious scale; widows were forced to remain in total seclusion without washing or changing their clothes for years to borrow from (146). Again, Macgregor Laird's observation about Calabar also gained sympathy and attention in Britain. He recorded that

Much struck with the extreme demoralisation and barbarism of the inhabitants... The human skulls that are seen in every direction, and are actually kicking about the streets, attest to the depravity of feeling among the people (Aguomba, 4).

Above all, the willingness of Old Calabar kings, who were faced with serious economic problems following the abolition of the slave trade, to receive and accommodate Britons who can "... teach book proper, and make all men sayh God like Whiteman,

and then we go on for some fashion" (Waddell 206) compelled the native church in Scotland to revisit its decision on the Jamaican project. Opposition to the West African Mission soon wore off and Scotland became convinced that the idea was not only practicable, but was also desirable (3). Nyon asserts further that Dr. Fergusson of Liverpool, who had himself visited West Africa, lent strong support to the project. He brought Revs. Blyth and Anderson in touch with captains of ships who gave

"favourable accounts of the willingness of the rulers of Old Calabar to engage in commerce and to receive education and Christianity. These factors turned the tide in Scotland and the new mission was adopted with great enthusiasm".

Encouraged by the above favourable developments, the Presbytery met at Hampden, Jamaica in September 1844 and resolved to implement their Christian commitment of sending "those who love the Lord Jesus Christ and desire the extension of His Blessed Kingdom upon the earth" to Old Calabar. In 1845, the Presbytery presented its case again to the parent mission in Scotland. Rev. Hope Waddell's Mount Zion congregation bade farewell to him in January 1845 as the leader of the projected Old Calabar Mission. Others in the team were Samuel Edgerley and his; two Jamaican Blacks, Andrew Chisholm, a carpenter, Edward Miller, a teacher and George, an ex-slave boy. Using the *Warree*, a vessel given to them by a Liverpool merchant, Jamieson, the group sailed from Liverpool on January 6, 1846 and arrived at Fernando Po in April. From there, they were escorted by John Beecroft who introduced them to king Eyamba of Duke Town on 10th of April 1846 when the *Warree* anchored at the mouth of the Calabar River (Noah 106). Thenceforth, Waddell devoted his life to the service of God and humanity in Old Calabar.

The remaining part of this study examines the activities of Waddell who can undoubtedly be called the father of the Calabar mission.

Reverend Hope Masterton Waddell In Calabar

Of all the pioneer missionaries in Old Calabar, perhaps with the exception of Mary Slessor, no one was so shrewd and so understanding in his dealings with the people over whom he ministered as Rev. Hope Waddell, an Irish clergy man, who led the missionary team to Calabar in 1846.

Hope Masterton Waddell was born in Dublin in 1804 and was at the age of 18 apprenticed to a Mercantile House in Dublin, Messrs Andrew Pollock and Co. (Druggist and General Merchants). In 1825 he was accepted by the Scottish Missionary society for training leading to the Ministry he was, in 1829, ordained by the Edinburgh Presbytery in the United Secession Church (Nyon 1). In the same year, he was sent by the Scottish Missionary Society to Jamaica as a Missionary; he arrived there in December, 1829 (Waddell 15). In February 1830, he established a station in Cornwall (or Mount Zion Estate), North West of the Island. His congregation at Cornwall at the time of his departure had grown to an estimated number of 1200 persons made up of 270 communicants; about 80 candidates; some 450 inquiries; and about 400 children (Waddell 203). This was the congregation he left behind to plant the seed of what became known as the Presbyterian Church in Old Calabar which was at the time yet to benefit from the Christian religion.

Almost immediately after his arrival, Waddell and his colleagues began missionary work systematically. Efik interpreters including the famous Young, described as "Sharp and Clever", Archibong Duke, Henry Cobham, Basse Offiong, and Adam Duke (Aye 119) were employed and through them, Waddell learnt Efik, the knowledge which he was going to put into the writing of his *A Vocabulary of the Efik of Old Calabar Language with Prayers and Lessons* (1849). Slowly and by degrees the powers of superstition

were broken down and the people of Calabar against all opposition surrendered to the new religion. Most ideas introduced by Waddell fell on fertile soil, especially among the commoners (Noah 118).

Waddell's messages and those of his colleagues found receptive ears and hearts among the oppressed classes, notably slaves and women suffering political, social and matrimonial disabilities. Slaves welcomed mission doctrine of equality of people before God and condemnation of Efik practices like immolation and burial of slaves with their masters. It is argued in some quarters that it was through the effort of Waddell, among other members of his party, that Calabar came to be religiously famous, a trend which has continued to the present time in which Calabar is known as a city where the "main industry is churches" (Hackett VI).

Waddell equally played a vital role in the educational development of Calabar which he strove to establish against the wishes of the people. Western education was officially planted in Calabar in 1846 when Presbyterian missionaries established a school each at Duke Town and Creek Town (Abasiattai 215). Rev. Hope Waddell was in-charge of the school at Creek Town which had about 120 students in daily attendance (McFarland 34). He was particularly keen to encourage the sending of girls to school against the traditional belief that girls were only meant for marriage and/or reproduction. Also typical of Waddell were the inducements given to pupils. He gave out bits of cotton cloth to nearly all school children and reserved the garments for pupils who attended school regularly, and satisfactorily. Attendance in school was doubled whenever youngsters danced home in great glee to show their finery (Nyon 14). Hand in hand with teaching and preaching, he lived a good life and this proved that he was serious about making the world of Old Calabar a better place.

Of even greater historical significance about Waddell's presence in Calabar is his contribution to the scholarly study of the area. Among the most important of his works is *Twenty-Nine Years in West Indies and Central Africa* which is widely quoted by

researchers as an invaluable material in mirroring the goings-on in Old Calabar before and during the missionary era. He also wrote *A Vocabulary of the Efik of Old Calabar Language with Prayers and lessons*, which was published at Edinburgh by Grant and Taylor in 1849. Hope Waddell kept very useful journals. O. E. Uya has commented appropriately that the Hope Waddell journals, covering the period 1846 – 1856 are indispensable because they provide

In a most invaluable manner, a treasure chest of information on the social, political, economic and other major developments in Old Calabar. Trade rivalries between the city states, attitude towards expansion of missionary influences, the hierarchical structure of Efik society and the place of slavery within it, Ekpe society and other social institutions and their roles in Old Calabar are minutely, though not always sympathetically, detailed for the period (198).

Waddell's valedictory speech in Calabar before he left in 1858 indicated the mind of the man and his prophetic insight.

Now we are off, farewell Calabar, we leave you without shame for the past and without fear for the future. We thank God that He counted us worthy to send us with His Gospel here, and that He sent us not in vain. To His name be the glory. The people that sat in darkness have seen a great light; and to them who sat in the region and shadow of death, a Heavenly light has sprung up. The work of God begun in Calabar will go on increasing, widening, deepening, and strengthening from year to year, and from age to age till the consummation of all things, when the Redeemer shall thence have gathered thousands and millions of gems into His mediatorial crown (*Duke Town School Record* of April 5).

History speaks eloquently of Hope Waddell as a rare man, a rare Christian, a rare teacher, who did not only challenge the foundation of injustice in all its ramifications but was unarguably driven by capacity for empathy and an inclination to fair play. He expressed dissatisfaction and frowned at the unholy attitudes of his contemporary profit-conscious European traders in Calabar. On one occasion, a supercargo whom he took time to explain the consequences of injustice in trade to, confessed to him (Waddell) that he thought it hypocrisy for any man engaged in the palm oil trade to profess religion. He could not carry it on and keep God's commandments (Waddell 261). This was considered a faulty explanation by Waddell who insisted that commerce must be conducted on moral principles. Indeed Waddell had many gratifying attributes in his character which are worthy of emulation.

Owing to his commitment and dedication to service in Calabar, Waddell was still fondly remembered in Calabar several years after his departure. One example easily comes to mind. When the second church building at Creek Town was dedicated and commissioned for use on July 9, 1879, King Eyo VII wrote to retired Hope Waddell, noting the changes that had occurred in Calabar following the coming of the missions. He concluded with, "may we all meet in Heaven to part no more from each other" (<http://www.pcusa.org/missionyearbook/feb/22.html>).

Memories of Hope Waddell are those of a man who worked obediently with God and for God. More than this, he was driven by the passion for serving man with compassion and true love. The combination of these streams of his service took him to Jamaica and later brought him to Calabar. Though conscious of the challenges of his mission, he trusted the Lord who called him and was able to tread where lions feared. He believed rather strongly that the strength of God would compensate his weakness and God's wisdom would reduce the extent of his shortcomings.

After his service in Calabar, Hope Waddell had the following words to say:

We were a small company...we were weak also, but believed that God had sent us, that He would open our way, and make darkness light and crooked things straight before us, and not forsake us, till He had enabled us to accomplish the work for which we were sent, to his own glory (229).

The life and times of Rev. Hope Waddell should inspire our present day Christians and Clergymen to live Christian ideals. The first challenge is for them to make themselves a model of what they want the world to become. A Christ-like life as we found in Waddell should be caring, compassionate, loving, empathetic and sacrificial. We need to revitalise these concepts because one with these qualities would work actively for the sake of God and humanity. Besides teaching and preaching, Waddell did substantial good work, such as painting (Nyon 9), in attempt to make the people more comfortable. He knew that the people whom he had come to evangelise had an enormous need for the basic necessities of life, which he strove to satisfy. He knew that the overall purpose of Christianity is to mobilise resources to serve the spiritual, emotional, and material needs of the poor and the needy. We say that our society is in dire need of men with the mind and character of Waddell to restore the seemingly lost glory of Christianity. This would bring credibility to God and hope to human life.

All in all, Waddell must be remembered as a remarkable missionary who served God and humanity with great commitment and dedication. We conclude that a discussion of missionary and educational activities in Calabar without the part played by this remarkable Irish clergy man would amount to a rather seemingly elaborate discussion of Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark.

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