Chapter 11
Scottish Missionaries in Ghana
The Forgotten Tribe

Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo

Introduction

Although Presbyterianism in Ghana today is most associated with the Basel and Bremen endeavours, the role of Scottish missionaries in the country is generally overlooked, forgotten and buried. This chapter seeks to establish the reason for that oversight, to unearth their legacy to Presbyterianism in Ghana. This is a necessary undertaking, given the fact that Scottish missionaries rescued the Presbyterian mission at critical periods of Protestant missionary activity in the Gold Coast (now Ghana). Those critical periods occurred during World War I and World War II, when Basel and Bremen missionaries were obliged by the British to leave the Gold Coast. It was the Africans whom the Basel and Bremen missionaries had trained who took over the reins of leadership, with “assistance from the United Free Church of Scotland” (Clarke 1986: 97). Besides, Scottish missionaries engaged in pastoral ministry, as well as the provision and management of schools. These schools would serve as bedrock to Ghana’s human resource and socio-economic development. Specifically, the overarching goal of Scottish missionaries in the Gold Coast was the training of teachers. Aburi Training College (now Aburi Girls’ Senior High School), Akropong Training College, Krobo Training College (now Krobo Girls’ Senior High School), and Agogo Training College were all established by Scottish missionaries. Why, then, does their vital intervention receive hardly any prominence in the Ghanaian public memory?

The Ghanaian historian, Kofi Agbeti (1986: 73–79), documents, at great length, the works of Scottish missionaries in Nigeria without making an appreciably equal reference to their presence in Ghana. Although W.H. Taylor (1996) gives a detailed account of the educational work of Scottish missionaries in Eastern Nigeria, where Mary Mitchell Slessor was the mission’s maverick (Taylor 1996: 115), he notes that “their contribution to education in Africa went far beyond eastern Nigeria.” Taylor’s observation does not, however, specifically mention Ghana. In any case, this Scottish contribution to education lies particularly in the Scottish Presbyterians’ influence on the “Phelps-Strokes commission in the 1920s,” whose “Reports helped to shape subsequent British colonial educational policy” (Taylor 1996: 5) in colonies such as the Gold Coast.
In contemporary Ghana, however, the mark left by Scottish missionaries in the public mind is like footprints in the sand.

My curiosity about investigating the lacunae in Presbyterian mission history’s view of the Scottish presence in Ghana was aroused when I met Mrs. Phyllis Harrison in 2000 at Ugley Green, near Bishops Stortford, United Kingdom. Mrs. Harrison gave me a photograph of her father, the Rev. George Douglas Reith, wishing that it be presented to the Presbyterian Church at Abetifi, Ghana, where he had worked as a missionary. In 1969 a member of the Abetifi church had asked Mrs. Harrison for a photograph of her father, to be published in the Golden Jubilee celebration brochure of the Abetifi Seminary/Ramseyer Training Centre. She never received a copy of the brochure. She said she would, therefore, be delighted to receive some more information from me regarding her father’s work at Abetifi.

According to his family, in 1919 Rev. Reith, of the United Free Church of Scotland, answered an appeal for missionaries to take over the work of the Basel Mission at Abetifi. Records on the Abetifi Seminary/Ramseyer Training Centre, where he served, indicate he was appointed to the station in 1918 (Centenary Brochure 1999: 18). The German staff previously stationed there had been interned and repatriated, making it necessary for replacements to be found and sent. Overtaken by fever, however, Reith had to return home that same year. His contribution, like that of many other Scottish missionaries who went to Ghana, is unsung, causing the tale of their historic rescue of Presbyterianism in Ghana to fall into oblivion.

**Methods of Data Collection**

Three methods were employed in gathering information for the study. First, there was a reassessment of secondary published material and examination of church documents such as the baptismal register of the Ramseyer Presbyterian Church at Abetifi. In this regard, some scholarly works were reviewed, with the intention of giving a foundational basis to mission historiography regarding the region being studied. Historical records, such as the baptismal register at the Ramseyer Presbyterian church at Abetifi, provide hard evidence on the veracity of facts sought. Second, clergy and scholars who are knowledgeable in Presbyterian missionary work in Ghana were interviewed. Frequent meetings were held with the interviewees in Accra and Abetifi between February and March 2009. The information each gave was crosschecked with that supplied by the others. Third, a focus group discussion was held at Abetifi with some members of the Presbyterian community who had encountered some