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SAMUEL EDGERLEY: PRINTER IN CALABAR, 1846-1857

by
R. H. Carnie

The *pros* and *cons* of the impact of the missionary movement on the cultures of West Africa is still a matter of vigorous historical controversy.¹ One side-effect of the attempts to Christianise West Africa was the introduction of the art of printing by the missionaries in order to make the Gospel available to their converts. This short article attempts an objective account of the introduction of printing to that part of Africa now known as Eastern Nigeria, by the Presbyterian mission set up at Calabar in 1846.² It is, as far as I know, the first attempt by a booktrade historian to re-create the circumstances by which printing was brought to Eastern Nigeria. The data has been derived from both printed and manuscript records of the mission which are to be found in Scottish archives.³ These relate to the missionary activities of the Presbyterian Church known from 1847 to 1900 as the United Presbyterian Church. This church had been formed in 1847 by the uniting of the Relief Church with the United Associate Synod of the Secession Church -- two evangelical groups outside the Church of Scotland, particularly interested in missionary work. The United Presbyterian Church became part of the United Free Church in 1900. The United Free Church itself re-amalgamated with the Church of Scotland in 1929. The official Church of Scotland, therefore, is now the custodian of the records of the U. P. Church, 1847-1900.

Presbyterian Christianity came to Eastern Nigeria *via* Jamaica. In 1834 the United Associate Synod resolved to send two missionaries to that island. By 1836 the Jamaican Missionary Presbytery was set up. Several congregations were established by the time of the union of 1847, a union which put all the Jamaican missions under the control of the U. P. Church,

including the mission of the Scottish Missionary Society started in 1824. The missionary in charge at Mount Zion station, H. M. Waddell,⁴ was one of those who strongly urged at a meeting of the Jamaica Presbytery in 1841 that a mission be sent to the homeland of so many of the Jamaican negroes -- West Africa -- and Waddell returned to Scotland to propagate the idea in the home church. He was successful, and in May, 1844 the United Associate Synod agreed to send a mission to the long established trading post at Old Calabar, on the West African coast. Waddell toured Scotland and England raising funds (£4,000) for this new venture. In Waddell's group on this tour were Samuel Edgerley and his wife. Edgerley had been trained as a printer, probably in his home town, Shrewsbury, and had spent eighteen years in Jamaica. He had latterly been stationed at Mount Horeb as a catechist. The mission reached Calabar 10 April, 1846 and set up stations at Old Town, Duke Town and Creek Town in the Calabar area. Amongst their equipment was a lithographic press

and a conventional press for letterpress printing. Waddell returned to Jamaica to recruit further missionaries and teachers, and, amongst others, the scholarly Scot, Hugh Goldie, joined the Calabar mission in 1847. Goldie's history *Calabar and its Mission*, (Edinburgh and London, 1890) is one of the most reliable sources of information about the infant press. Goldie says of Samuel Edgerley: 'Having acquired the art of printing, it was judged that this would make him of special service to the mission.'⁵ Goldie also tells us that the lithographic press was under Waddell's care. Waddell had attempted to learn the lithographic art and his own account makes it clear that the first fruits of the Calabar Press were produced lithographically by him and *not* by Edgerley on his conventional press.

A lithographic press was attached to the mission and the time had come to use it. The first use was to print off a series of 'Bible Lessons' in plain writing and very simple language, for the use of the 'gentlemen' of the country who had learned to read writings. It was a common fact that while not one could peruse a printed book, a certain number had learned to use the pen by way of trade. A series of twelve historical lessons was thus prepared and circulated. It was not without much trouble that the press was put into good working order, owing partly to the climate, and greatly doubtless to my inexperience in the art.⁶

Various chiefs were presented with copies of the 'first book printed in their country' and Goldie records one comment in pidgin English: 'I see stone make book in one minute.'

Waddell's published and unpublished writings also give us the fullest

picture of Samuel Edgerley. After Edgerley died 28 May, 1857, Waddell wrote:

Mr. Edgerley, a native of England, had gone to Jamaica as a printer, and afterwards entered the planting 'line' in which he advanced through the various stages of bookkeeper to be an overseer. The Mercy of God having arrested and converted him, he became a teacher in the Mico Charity, Montego Bay, and afterwards in connection with myself taught Mount Zion school first, and then got charge of Mount Horeb station. While he was there he was appointed by his own desire to be my assistant in Africa. Having known him, and been associated with him so long, and knowing so well his many valuable qualities, I could not but deeply feel his unexpected and premature demise.⁷

Waddell had also recorded in 1855:

The affairs of the Old Town claim our first attention this year, for they reached a crisis and ended in destruction. Mr. and Mrs. Edgerley taught the school there, and kept meetings on the Lord's Day in the town, and at other times in their own house, besides visiting several villages of the Qua people, the aborigines of that part of the country. . . . He was also much engaged in printing, and produced some of the best specimens of typography to be seen on the coast, whereby he greatly aided the cultivation of the native tongue of his brethren, and the progress of the schools.⁸

Waddell's unpublished journal reveals, despite the tone of the above, that there was often trouble between him and Edgerley who complained directly to Waddell, and to the Mission Board of the home church, that Waddell was parsimonious and overbearing. Waddell clearly thought that Edgerley was of a hasty and suspicious temper, and that he had acted very rashly on a number of occasions as far as the natives of Old Town, Calabar were concerned. On one occasion he was reprimanded for breaking an 'Egbo' drum venerated

by the Efik people.⁹ There is some evidence, too, that Edgerley, who had been left in charge in Calabar, when Waddell went on his staffing journey to Jamaica, resented the fact that newcomers to the mission had been placed in authority over him. Edgerley's complaints to the home board reveal his distaste for restraint and control, and his suggestion that he order his own supplies may indicate that he thought Waddell was hampering the printing operations. Edgerley returned to Scotland in 1850, ostensibly because of the health of his wife, and gave an account of the progress of the mission at Calabar. On this trip, he was ordained minister of the U. P. Church by the Glasgow Presbytery. The unpublished material reveals that Waddell was unhappy about this, believing that Edgerley was spiritually unprepared despite his piety and fervour.¹⁰ When

Edgerley returned to his duties at Old Town, his troubles continued, culminating in the withdrawal of the mission there and the bombardment of the town by a British Navy frigate, 'The Antelope.' Edgerley's vigorous reaction to discoveries of poisonings and charnelhouses in Old Town had made him unpopular with the Old Town people, and it is clear that Waddell thought him imprudent and partly responsible for the crisis and the destruction of the village. Waddell also puts on record his admiration for Mrs. Edgerley and her daughter, Mary¹¹ who were popular with the inhabitants of Old Town, Mrs. Edgerley being the first white woman to pass through Calabar streets. When attempts were made to rebuild Old Town, it was reported from Calabar to the home Board that the people in Old Town, who blamed Edgerley for the bombardment, would not permit him to return there and the question of sending him again to Britain was discussed. It was finally agreed that he should remain at Calabar, at the station at Duke Town, to give attention 'to putting the types in order and to the erection of a house.' The home Board concurred in the view that Edgerley's usefulness as a missionary was now doubtful but they were anxious that he should continue as the Printer to the mission and they agreed to his staying in Calabar to carry on the work of the press 'on the distinct promise that he was to abstain from all active teaching.'¹² Edgerley was still in Calabar, and engaged in printing a dictionary of the Efik language, when he died of fever 28 May, 1857. He was buried at the missionary station at Creek Town.

The activities of Edgerley's press at first Old Town and then at Duke Town can be partially reconstructed from the letterbooks and minutes of the Board of Missions of the U .P. Church. Edgerley's earlier output is listed at the end of this article. In September, 1848, Waddell, who had collected a brief vocabulary of the Efik language, asked that 250 copies of it be printed in Scotland as the work could not be undertaken in Calabar. The Board agreed to have it printed by Grant and Taylor in Edinburgh, and in 1849 Goldie made inquiries about having a small catechism printed. By 1851, after Edgerley's return from Scotland, the Calabar press was once more in action. Andrew Somerville, the secretary to the home Board wrote to Edgerley, 12 Feb. 1852:

Mr. Goldie mentions in a letter which I had from him, dated 26 November, that you are busy with the Press. This is a valuable agency. What would Luther have done without the art of printing? He might have done good in a few towns in Germany but he would not have reformed Europe, nor stamped his influence upon the world. When knowledge is committed to printing and when persons can read it, they have very easy access to it -- can peruse it again and again, and

impress it fully on the mind. I attach, therefore, much importance to the Press department at Calabar, and I am happy to hear that it is, in your hands, going on favourably.¹³

Somerville reported in January, 1853 that he had received copies of the *New Testament*, and said, 'They are a credit to the Calabar Press.' In April 1853, Edgerley and Goldie requested from the home Board that a fount

of brevier type, a specified number of accented vowel letters, twelve reams of good strong printing paper and certain other articles of printing paper be sent out. In July, 1853 the home Board acknowledged receipt of copies of *Elijah* and *Jonah* and the 1852 *Annual Report*, Mr. Waddell's *History of Joseph*, and the *Calabar Hymn Book*.¹⁴ In October, 1853, Gibb, an Edinburgh printer who did work for the U. P. Church, was asked to fill further (unspecified) requests of Edgerley for paper and types, and in February, 1854, Somerville writes: 'You are usefully employed at the Printing Press. The books which you are sending out will be effective teachers and will very greatly aid in helping forward the reformation of Calabar.'¹⁵ I have no record of further work done in 1854, in which year Edgerley visited Sierra Leone, and in 1855 the work of the press came to an abrupt stop with the expulsion of Edgerley from Old Town. He was at work again in Duke Town in 1856. Somerville writes, 18 July, 1856: 'I had a visit from Mr. Armour about rollers for printings. He is to send out a pair and some glair¹⁶ -- but he spoke of a kind of balls -- used in printing in olden times -- which he says climate does not affect and which he thinks will be suitable for you if you can make them. I asked him to find out from some old printer the way of making them and give you a description of the method.'¹⁷ The inactivity of the press at the end of 1856 is indicated by a request by Waddell that his short course of lectures in Efik on the Ten Commandments be printed in Britain and by the fact that W. Anderson's Efik translation of the *Epistle to the Romans* was being printed in Glasgow in March, 1857. The Press was working well enough for Edgerley to have made some progress with the Efik Dictionary before his four-month illness and death, in May, 1857.

An agreeable footnote to the short and stormy career of Samuel Edgerley, printer at Calabar, is the fact that he was succeeded both as printer and missionary by his son, Samuel Edgerley, junior. The boy had been brought to Britain in 1845. From 1852 to 1855, he had been apprenticed to an

Edinburgh printer, J. Armour, 54 South Bridge. Armour reported in Dec. 1855 that the boy was ready to assist as a printer at the Mission. It was also suggested that he spend a few months learning bookbinding, which he did at the shop of Alexander Banks of Edinburgh, and that he attend normal school for six months to equip himself as a teacher. Banks reported that Samuel had been a good pupil, and could now do 'plain school-binding.' He sailed to Nigeria in May, 1856 to join with his father in running the printing-house at a salary of £60 per year. According to the Edinburgh Almanack for 1857 the Old Calabar mission now had an additional station at Ikunetu and that the two printers, the Rev. S. Edgerley and S. Edgerley were stationed there. In 1858, Samuel Edgerley, Jnr. was officially appointed printer, presumably at his father's salary of £120 per year, and a year later he was building a new printing-office. He trained in Scotland for the ministry from 1861 to 1863, and was in receipt of a special grant to keep his printing skills alive. After being ordained by the Presbytery of Edinburgh, he returned to Calabar, where, in a long and honourable career, he ran the Mission Press until his death in 1883.¹⁸

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS OF THE CALABAR MISSION PRESS, 1846-1857.

1. H. M. Waddell, *Twelve Bible Lessons*, Lithographed. 1846. No copy traced.
2. H. M. Waddell, *Efik vocabulary*, Lithographed. 30pp. 1846. No copy traced.
3. H. M. Waddell, *Efik vocabulary*. Letterpress. 1847. No copy traced.
4. H. M. Waddell, *Primer*. Letterpress, 3 impressions, 800 copies. 1848. No copy traced.

5. H. M. Waddell, *Bible Lessons*. 2 impressions, 500 copies. 1848. No copy traced.
6. Anon., *Arithmetical Examples*. 150 copies. 1848. No copy traced. Reprinted 1851.
7. Anon., *Elementary Arithmetic*. 300 copies. 1848. No copy traced. Reprinted 1851.
8. H. Goldie, *Catechism*. Efik and English. 400 copies. 1848. No copy traced.
9. H. Goldie, *Ikau Ngpooru emi ewetdke ke Akani Testament*. 1849. No copy traced.
10. H. Goldie, *Hymn Book*. 1851. No copy traced.
11. H. M. Waddell, *History of Joseph*. Completed by January 9, 1852. No copy traced.
12. H. Goldie, *Mbuk mkpo emi ekewetde ke obufa Testament*. 1852. Copy. B. M. 124 pp.
13. *Annual Report, 1852*. No copy traced.
14. H. Goldie, *Catechism*. Efik. Second edition. 64 pp. 1853. No copy traced.
15. H. Goldie, *History of the prophets, Elisha and Jonah*. Efik. 1853. No copy traced.
16. H. Goldie, *Principles of Efik Grammar*. 1857. Copies B.M.; E.U.L.
17. H. Goldie, *Dictionary of the Efik Language*. 1857. (Appeared with Glasgow imprint, 1874).

A large amount of job printing, broadsheets, almanacks, Ten Commandments &c. was also carried out in the period 1846-1857.

C. P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa* (1954) II, *passim*, presents one view of the work of the missions. J. F. A. Ayayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891*, (1965) presents another.

The standard account is that by Donald MacFarlan, *Calabar: and the Church of Scotland Mission, 1846-1946* (1946). The printing activities of the mission are only fleetingly glanced at. J.

McKerrow, *Missions of the Secession and United Presbyterian Church* (1867) pp. 368-430, gives additional information.

H. M. Waddell's unpublished and incomplete journal is in the MS collections of the National Library of Scotland, MS 7741. Mission correspondence for the period is to be found at the Church of Scotland offices, George Street, Edinburgh. The printed records of the U. P. Mission Board are to be found in the *Mission Record of the United Presbyterian Church*, 1847-68. I am grateful to the National Library, the Church of Scotland, and New College Library for their help.

H. M. Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure* (1863).

Hugh Goldie, *Calabar and its Mission* (1890) p. 78.

Waddell, p. 280. Daryll Forde, *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* (1956) p. vii, gives evidence of the ability of the Efik people engaged in trade to read and write English.

Waddell, p. 602.

Waddell, p. 549.

The fullest account of the significance of the 'Egbo' society amongst the Efik people is to be found in Forde, *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* (1956) pp. 27-65.

Waddell's unpublished journal, NLS MS 7741. Volumes Q, 11, 1, 2 & 3.

Mary Edgerley was later (1857) a teacher at the Creek Town station of the Mission. *Oliver and Boyd's New Edinburgh Almanack* (1857), p. 567.

Minutes of the Mission Board. 29 May, 1855.

MS vol. 7638. Church of Scotland. Letter, Andrew Somerville to Samuel Edgerley.

Minutes of the Mission Board, 5 July, 1853; MS vol. 7638, Church of Scotland: Letters, Somerville to Anderson 20 Jan. 1853, 21 July 1853; Letter, Somerville to Edgerley 13 July, 1853.

MS vol. 7638, Church of Scotland. Letter, Somerville to Edgerley, 21 Feb. 1854.

Glair: a technical term for a preparation made from the whites of eggs, used in bookbinding.

MS vol. 7639. Church of Scotland.

This short biographical note has been constructed from the references to Samuel Edgerley, Jnr. in the Mission Correspondence. MS vols. 7638-40. Church of Scotland.