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15/11/48 *Purple?*

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My Favourite Missionary.

Mary Slessor of Calabar.

"Take up the white man's burden,
Send forth the best ye breed."
Kipling.

The "opening up" of Africa has only been achieved in comparatively recent years. It is true that the Portuguese, inspired by Henry Navigator, as early as the 15th century, started sailing along the coast, southwards. In Elizabethan times John Hawkins of Great Britain, broke the Portuguese monopoly of the slave trade of West Africa. But unhealthy climate delayed extensive exploration inland, and Africa was called the "Dark Continent" up to the 19th century. The "classical age" of African discovery is usually taken to start with Bruce's journey to Abyssinia in 1768. The great explorers went there for a variety of reasons, scientific, curiosity, trade and their desire to spread the Gospel. The name of Livingstone will be linked

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forever with Africa. But there are others whose names will never die and whose works will never be forgotten.

I am attracted by the life and work of another Scot, this time a woman;—

Mary Slessor. She will always be remembered as one who helped to spread the Gospel in Calabar, in equatorial Africa, one of the most densely populated part of Native Africa. Nigeria was first explored by Clapperton and Landon. Missionaries played very little part in the exploration of Central Africa. Its climate is most uninviting. It is hot and wet there, very unhealthy and the home of many horrid diseases. The natives were the most degraded in Africa, "the shun dwellers of negro land" whom missionaries described as "devilish, savage, crafty, murderers". Some of their customs were horrifying. Belief in witch-doctors and witch-craft dominated the lives of the people. The witch-doctor's word was law, and no one dared to question if a witch-doctor ^{ordered} an offender's head to be cut off, or a slave to be buried alive. The people were cannibals. The slaves were treated with cruelty. The strong ones were

shipped abroad, the weak ones left in "Calabar to serve chiefs and witch-doctors." Murder was a great evil. When twins were born they were taken from their mother (because they thought they were monsters) their backs broken, and their bodies forced into a water pot or thrown to an ant-heap. Such was Calabar!

Mary Slessor dared to enter this forbidding world, one of a very few missionaries who went to Nigeria. She was born in Aberdeen in 1848, the second of the seven children of Robert Slessor, a poor shoemaker. Mary's mother brought her up, and the rest of the family, on Christian principles. They attended the United Presbyterian Church and although Mary worked each day in a cotton factory she found time to study her favourite Book, the Bible.

The story of Calabar, which she heard from visiting missionaries, fired her imagination and she determined to devote her life to helping the heathen there. In 1875 she offered her service to the Foreign Mission Board. She was accepted and after much study and preparation, she was ready for Calabar.

On September 11th 1876 she began her great

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mission. She landed at Duke Town and at once settled down to her new life. She taught the native children in the Day School and helped in the work of the Mission. She was very happy here and the children affectionately called her "Ma". But she wanted to work alone, right inland, and soon she set up schools and Mission stations at Ibaka and Old Town.

She taught the children and women when they were well and nursed them when they were sick. She endured much rough handling for their sakes, but bravely stood up for their rights. She rescued "twins" from terrible deaths and took them to live with her, to the mud hut she called "home". Physically, she seemed unsuited to the hard life, but her indomitable spirit overcame difficulties. She won over many of the native chiefs and witch-doctors. They sought her advice and gradually abolished many of their old heathen customs to please her. "Ma" was known and loved throughout Calabar.

In 1882, she was ordered home for a rest, her first holiday. She lectured in the big cities of Scotland, begging women, especially to join her in her work. In 1884

she asked once more if she might go to balabar. Her request was granted and with renewed vigour she again threw her whole heart into her work, establishing many churches up and down the country, which are today doing a fine job in establishing the gospel in Africa.

In 1888 she begged to be sent to the lawless people of Okajong. Her wish was granted and in no time she had built a school and a church there.

The news of the "White Stranger" spread, and whenever trouble arose, she was sent for. If she succeeded in saving the life of a sick chief she had made a friend. She persuaded neighbouring chiefs to trade with balabar and the mission launch was able to visit her regularly without fear. Her authority was unquestioned and in 1892 she was made Vice Consul of balabar. Mary Slessor lived a long, useful, life for balabar. She died there, tired and worn out with service, mourned throughout the land by native chiefs and little children, for "Ma" had been a friend to all.

A Scottish girl of 15 wrote of her:—

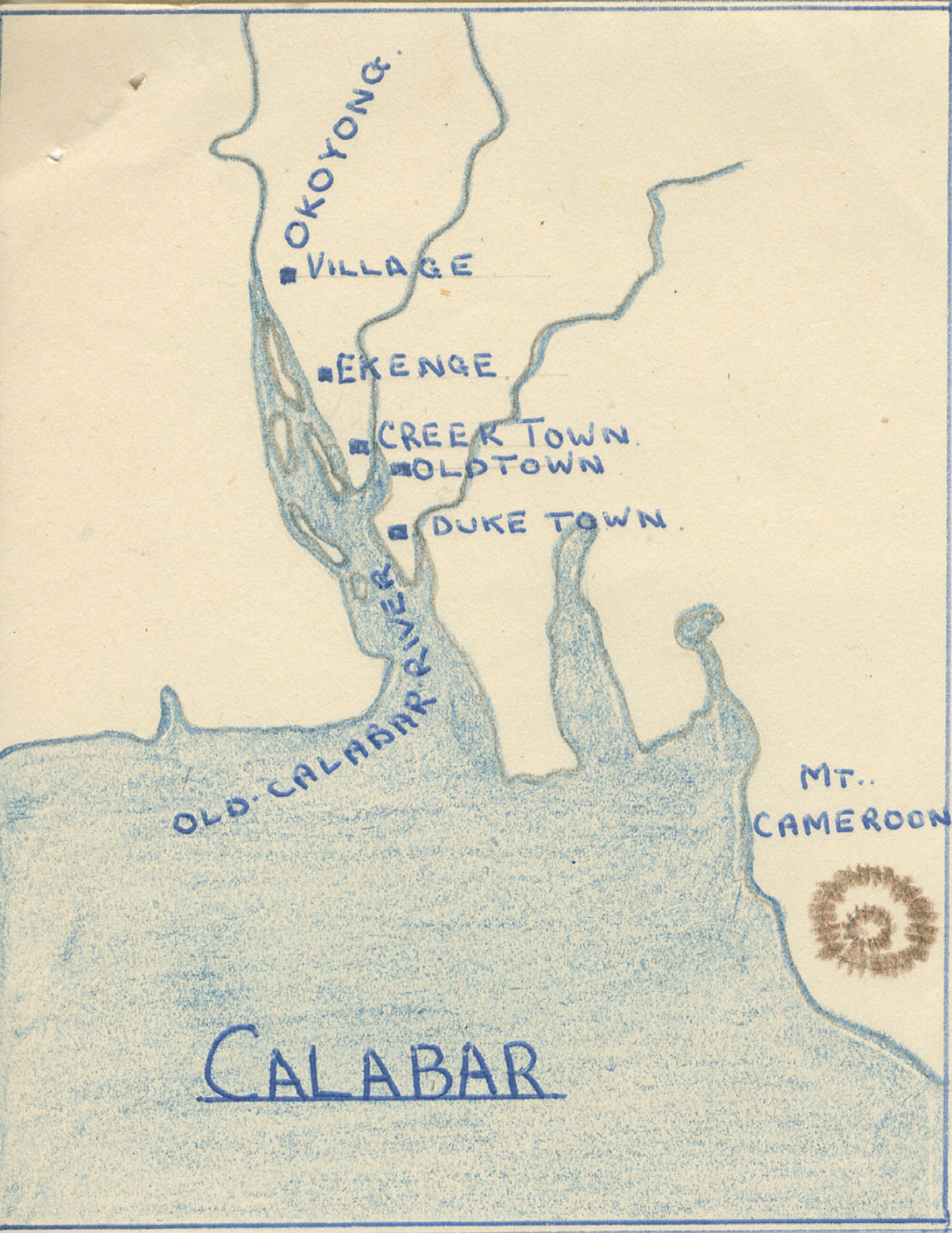
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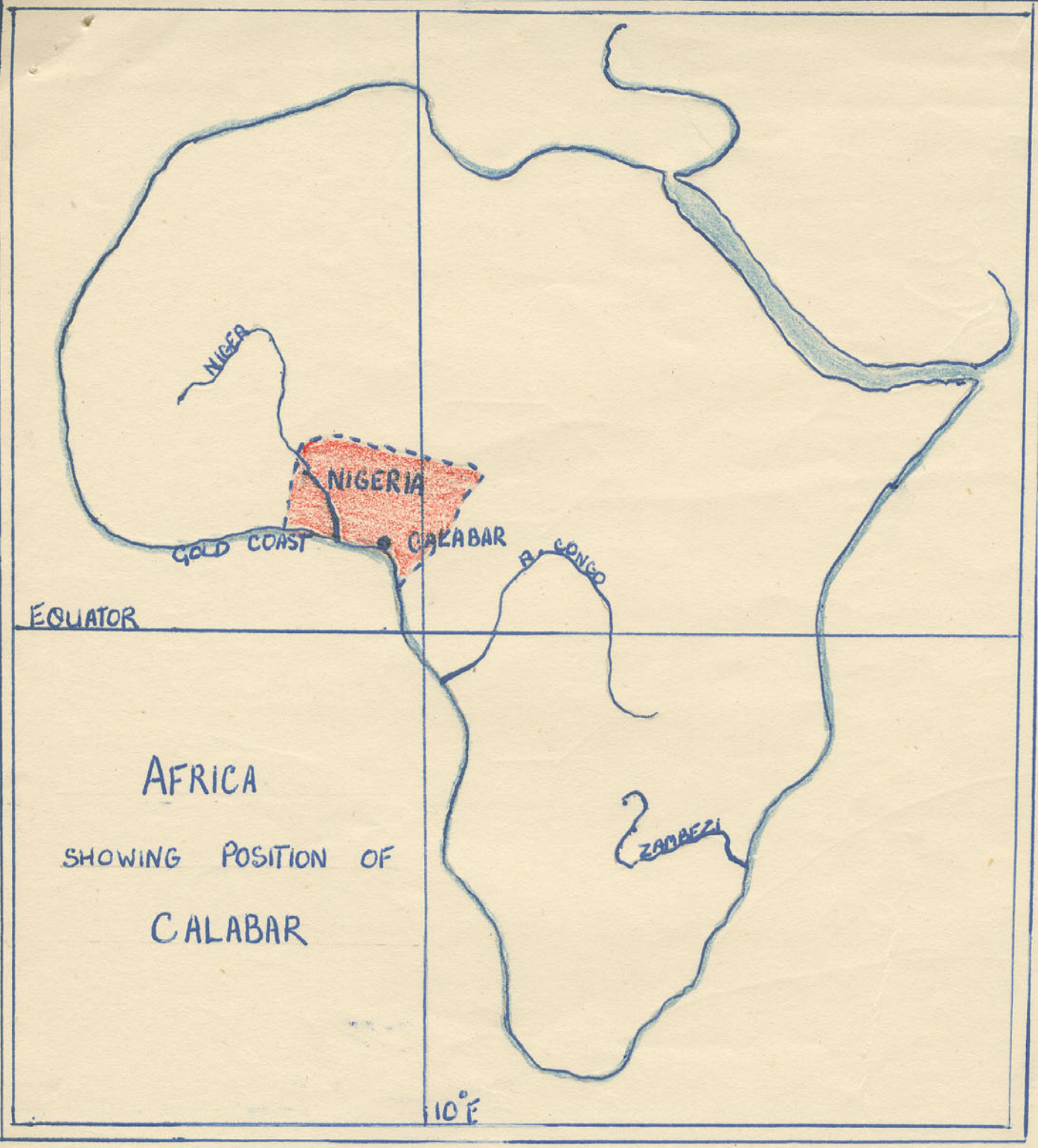
The Lament of Her African Children.

"She who loved us, she who sought us
Through the wild untrodden bushlands,
Brought us healing, brought us comfort,
Brought the sunlight to our darkness
She has gone - the dear White Mother -
Gone into the great Hereafter."

I feel that Mary Slessor deserves to be remembered for her wonderful spirit and achievements.

She prepared the path others have followed since. I admire her courage, steadfastness and devotion to her work. Without her example and inspiration one part of Africa at least would still be "dark". It would please her to think that the British Government is now building on her work and making Africa the continent of the future.





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