THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND
SOUTH ARABIA MISSION
1885-1978

JAMES MCLAREN RITCHIE
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A HISTORY
AND CRITICAL EVALUATION OF
THE MISSION FOUNDED BY
ION KEITH FALCONER’S VISION

by
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Stoke-on-Trent
2006
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The Subject of the Dissertation is a History of the South Arabia Mission, relating the course of events with particular emphasis upon the aims of the Founder, and the changes of policy which governed the enterprise over the course of its existence.

It is based upon the primary evidence supplied by the Scottish Foreign Mission Committees’s Minutes and the correspondence of its General Secretaries, so far as these are available, though it must be said that there are gaps in the correspondence in the period of the Second World War which are regrettable Other secondary sources have been consulted, such as a biography of Dr. Alexander Paterson, who started his missionary service in Sheikh Othman, but is better known as Paterson of Hebron, and more general works on the subject of Christian Mission, together with the records of important World Mission events, for example, the Cairo Conference on Islam in the year 1906, the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 and the subsequent Assemblies of the International Missionary Council from Jerusalem to Achimota in Ghana. There are also supplied in the Appendices information concerning the history of the Yemen and some particulars concerning the Zaydi Sect of the Shi‘a which predominates in the High Yemen, that is the mountainous part inland from the Coast.

The dissertation is divided into periods covering identifiable stages in the history of the Mission marked by events, both ecclesiastical and political, which indicate the changing situation within which the Mission worked, and help to clarify the context of its operations. This covers the first seven chapters. The last three
chapters deal with specific topics arising out of this history which are revealed by study of the records.

Chapter eight deals with the subject of “hierarchies” within the Mission organisation more particularly in the early years. We indicate three - a Social, a Professional and an Ecclesiastical hierarchy. Chapter Nine is more factual since it is an account of some of the Arabs of South Arabia who were influenced in varying degrees by their contact with the Mission and the Gospel which it testified to. In Chapter Ten we seek to evaluate the effectiveness of the Mission as an evangelical witness within the changing context of over 90 years.

There are a number of Appendices which include background information, the text of documents and personal eye-witness accounts of some individual missionaries. I also include a few photographs which it is hoped will convey something of the climate as well as of the terrain in which the members of the Mission worked.

James McL. Ritchie
Acknowledgments

I express sincere thanks to Prof. David Kerr for his help and advice in the production of this history. He has been very helpful over the past three years. I also express thanks to the Presbyterian Historical Association of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America for their helpfulness in facilitating access to the archives of their Mission in Egypt, which revealed references to the Keith Falconer Mission, which shortage of time prevented my making as full use of as I had wished.

I have especially to thank Dr. Russell Gasero, Librarian of the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, for making available material connected with the Aden and Yemen areas, and particularly the diaries of Samuel M. Zwemer, which indicated that he had visited Aden three times, and made valuable and telling comments on the work of the Keith Falconer Mission.

Pastor Martha Holst of the Danish Church also demands my thanks for her help in searching the Archives of the Danish Church South Arabia Mission, now in custody of Danmission, Hellerup, Denmark.

My thanks are also due to Miss Helen Thom and Dr. George Morris for the material which they supplied, which has been used and incorporated in this history.

I also thank Dr. Neville Suttle for reading through the text and making corrections and comments.

My thanks are also due to the Church of Scotland who provided financial aid for fees and for travel to the U.S.A. to prosecute part of my research.

Last but not least, I thank Mette, my wife for putting up with my constant pre-occupation over the last three years with remarkable charity and patience.
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Abbreviations used in the Text:

A.P.L. Aden Protectorate Levies.
F.C. Free Church of Scotland.
U.F.C. United Free Church of Scotland.
F.M.C. Foreign Mission Committee.
O.C. Overseas Council.
S.A.M.C. South Arabia Mission Council.
D.M.S. Danish Missionary Society (Det Danske Missionselskab).
S.I.M. Sudan Interior Mission.
R.S.M.T. Red Sea Mission Team.
P.R.S.Y. The People’s Republic of South Yemen.
P.D.R.Y. The People’s Democratic of Republic of Yemen.
I.M.C International Missionary Council.
W.C.C. World Council of Churches.
W.F.M. Women’s Foreign Mission
Y.A.R. Yemen Arab Republic.
Preface

The General Nature of the Keith Falconer Mission

The Keith Falconer Mission, otherwise known as the Church of Scotland South Arabia Mission, was initiated by the Hon. Ion Keith Falconer in the year 1885 in the name of the Free Church of Scotland. It operated from its main base at Sheikh Othman at the base of the Aden Peninsula, about 10 miles north of Aden Harbour, continuously until the year 1967, the year when South Arabia gained its independence as the South Arabian Federation. It started again and operated with increasing difficulty until the year 1972, when its work there ended. From 1972 till 1978 its missionaries went as a team into the Yemen Arab Republic, where they co-operated with the Government in running a hospital in the town of Rada‘, and finally withdrew in 1978 when they felt that they had fulfilled their commission.

This is all now past history. A concise and well-researched account, so far from being purely academic, is of practical value for the Church’s mission, for it will indicate clearly what is positive, effective and worth following in other situations, and what is negative, or adverse to the effectivieness of the great Commission of Christ and therefore to be avoided.

We have attempted in the conclusion to assess the value of the Mission’s work, and reflect upon the success or failure of the project as a whole in achieving its original stated aim of evangelising the Muslims of Arabia, the heartland of Islam.