

“So long dependent upon myself”:  
Mary E. Kidder and the Beginnings of Unmarried  
Women’s Missionary Work In Japan

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The first unmarried woman specifically commissioned as a Protestant missionary to Japan was Mary Eddy Kidder, who arrived in Yokohama on the morning of the twenty seventh of August, 1869. She was on the vanguard of Protestant women who, in the years after the Civil War, travelled to such distant lands as China, India, Persia, and Japan, as workers of the woman’s foreign mission movement.<sup>1</sup> Mary Kidder, and those who followed after her to Japan, and other countries, sought to spread the tenets and practices of evangelical Christianity, directing their efforts toward Japanese women and children through the gender-specific type of work known as “Woman’s Work for Woman”. Although married women had long been on the field, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it was the unmarried woman worker, exempt from the most onerous domestic duties of wife and mother, who would lead the way in teaching Japanese girls not only about Christianity, but also in the ways of western knowledge. Unmarried women would also join in, and often excell at, the more purely religious task of itinerant evangelism.

Mary Kidder is perhaps best known as the founder of the Ferris Seminary in Yokohama, the school for girls that became the showpiece of the Reformed Church Mission in Japan. Miss Kidder’s vision, forcefulness, and tenacity, coupled with her ability to cultivate friendship with influential

Japanese who could help her project along, oversaw the literal building of Ferris Seminary, in years when her own Board was in dire financial straits, and facing retrenchment. As Mrs. E. Rothesay Miller, (she married in 1873), Mary Kidder followed her ten years at Ferris Seminary, with thirty more years in the country as an evangelist. In later years, indeed, she laid greater stress on her role as the editor of a children's evangelistic newspaper, or pamphlet, *Glad Tidings*, than on her role as the founder of Ferris.

However, in this paper, I would like to focus on an even earlier period in Miss Kidder's forty year missionary career. It was a period which she recalled as a time of great frustration and loneliness, but one which was nonetheless significant for the future of Reformed women's missionary work in Japan. I refer to the very first months that Miss Kidder spent in Japan, in Niigata, and later back in Yokohama. The problems she encountered in those days, and the manner in which she overcame them, illustrate how strong individual women set the stage for later women missionaries to be treated as professional, fully-independent actors in the mission enterprise in Japan, even in a socially conservative denomination like that of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Indeed, I would like to range even further back in the story to reveal how Miss Kidder's very appointment to work in Japan was the result of gendered conflict within the Reformed Church over women's independent emergence from their domestic sphere in to the more public sphere of mission work. In appointing the thirty-five year old Miss Kidder to Japan, under the quasi-familial control of long experienced missionary, Samuel Robbins Brown, Secretary John Ferris, of the Reformed Board of Foreign Missions hoped to pre-empt Reformed churchwomen's support for the more independent mission being planned by the Woman's Union Missionary Society, led by the redoubtable Reformed churchwoman, Sarah Doremus.

However, while Ferris was able to swing some female support to the

Reformed mission through the sending of Miss Kidder to Japan, he did not bank upon the fact that an experienced woman, who had long been financially dependent upon her own skills, and with the strength of character, determination, and physical stamina of Mary Kidder, would not long remain in a subordinate position in the Japan Mission.

In the years before the Civil War, American mission boards were extremely reluctant to appoint unmarried women as missionaries to foreign countries. The general rule in those years was that if a woman wished to be a missionary, she had to settle for marrying one, and then hope to share in his work. This certainly was the case with the Reformed Church Board of Foreign Missions.<sup>2</sup>

Until 1854, the Reformed Church carried out its mission work the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, through the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), whose Foreign Secretary between the years from 1832 until 1866, was Rufus Anderson. Anderson, whose influence on the conduct of pre-war foreign missions was inestimable,<sup>3</sup> believed that unmarried women should be sent only to stations where they had family or close friends who would act as family to them. Although the Reformed Board withdrew from cooperation with the ABCFM in 1854, John Ferris, the Secretary of the Reformed Church in America Board of Foreign Missions (RCABFM), apparently agreed with Anderson's views on the subject of independent women missionaries. From 1854 until 1869, the Reformed Church sent only three unmarried women to the mission field. Harriet and Louisa Scudder were allowed to return to their home in their father's station in Arcot, India. Caroline Adriance, of independent means, had joined Samuel Brown and his wife on their initial trip to Japan in 1859, hoping to work with them, but after only a brief stopover, she left for China, convinced that Japan was not yet a feasible workplace for a woman missionary.

Despite restrictions on their employment in the mission field, Reformed

Church women were quite active in the foreign mission movement from its earliest days. The most prominent, and powerful, of these women was Sarah Doremus, wife of a wealthy New York merchant, Thomas C. Doremus. A member of the South Reformed Church of New York City, Mrs. Doremus, belonged to numerous benevolent societies in New York City, and epitomized the well-to-do or middle-class woman so active in American benevolence during the 1840's. She belonged to

societies to aid the Greeks, missions to help the French Canadians, schools to educate the Sandwich Islanders... she gave up articles of personal adornment and bestowed the price upon schools and hospitals. She furthered missionary interests by inviting large gatherings of influential men and women to her home to hear of what was being done in foreign lands by missionaries who were home on furlough... on her own feet she walked to hospitals, to city missions, to homes for aged women, to schools for Italo-Americans... She held services in jails and inspired released prisoners to better living... She gave herself to brain work and to organization while to others she gave the outward honor.<sup>4</sup>

Lest anyone fear, however, that executive ability had interfered with her domestic duties, her admirer, a church historian writing in 1925, went on to assure readers that her household and nine children were never neglected. That they were not overlooked in her various activities was no doubt because of the unmentioned, but large staff of servants who ran her house. Freed from the more onerous chores of housekeeping, Sarah Doremus, like so many other middle-class women with immigrant domestic help, had the time to assert woman's moral mission to reform and perfect the society in which she lived. Using the rhetoric of woman's superior moral authority, she, and other women who shared her religious and societal concerns, fash-

ioned public roles for themselves.

Sarah Doremus had been involved in the foreign mission cause as early as 1829, when she arranged the ship-board farewell for the first Reformed missionary to China, David Abeel. By 1834, she was organizing numerous meetings for New York City women to hear Dr. Abeel urge the Reformed Church and the American Board to send out unmarried women to foreign missions. That same year, similar appeals by Dr. Abeel had led London women to organize the "Society for Promoting Female Education in China and the East" — the first women's missionary association specifically founded for missionary work in foreign countries. Sarah Doremus hoped to form a similar organization in the United States. Her efforts were blocked by Secretary Anderson, however, who urged "the ladies to defer."<sup>5</sup>

For a quarter of a century, the women of the Reformed Church acceded to Anderson's request, even after the Reformed Church left the ABCFM. Eventually, however, they took matters into their own hands. In February, 1861, at a time when they might have been expected to be preoccupied with domestic issues such as the secession of seven southern states and an approaching civil war,<sup>6</sup> Sarah Doremus and other like-minded women, followed the earlier example of the American Board itself, and founded an interdenominational mission association — the Woman's Union Missionary Society of America for Heathen Lands, hereinafter referred to as the Woman's Union.

Mrs. Doremus was president of the Woman's Union until her death in 1877. The organization, staffed entirely by volunteers, had organized auxiliaries in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, and other cities, and work continued even in the midst of Civil War. Women missionaries were soon posted to Burma, India, China, Syria, and Greece. During its first two decades, the Woman's Union grew until it could support one hundred and one women as missionaries. In addition, the society also provided funds for one hundred seventy four Bible readers (indigenous

lay women evangelists), and maintained two hundred and seventy eight children in schools. During those two decades, it received \$741,939 in offerings to support this work. Most of this money came from separate women's mission societies established in individual churches. A great many of these were women's mission societies of churches in the Reformed Synod.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, in 1868, the Tokugawa shogunate, which had earlier capitulated to the demands of the West, and reversed its two hundred year policy of seclusion, was overthrown. A restoration of imperial rule under the Meiji emperor was proclaimed. The Meiji government was still in a state of flux, and uncertain of its priorities. Nonetheless, the leaders of the restoration movement, who had originally been violently anti-foreign, now advocated both foreign learning and foreign ways — albeit for the purpose of ridding the country of the humiliating unequal treaties Japan had been forced to sign with the west. Thus, the new leaders, some of whom had already studied Western knowledge with Guido Verbeck in Nagasaki, called for revolutionary change, at least as it pertained to knowledge and education. The Charter Oath of 1868, for instance demanded the abandonment of “evil customs of the past”, and the “search for knowledge throughout the world.”<sup>8</sup> The time seemed ripe for reinforcements, both male and female, in Japan, although teaching Christianity continued to be banned.

In the midst of the momentous changes taking place in Japan, however, the Reformed Church was little equipped to do very much. Their strength was at an all-time low: Samuel Brown and his family had returned to New York after the destruction of all their property, including Brown's work on his translation of the Bible, in the 1867 Yokohama fire. They were uncertain whether they would return to Japan. By February, 1868, James Ballagh believed that his wife and family needed a return trip to America, in order to settle the children in school, and to give his wife a change.<sup>9</sup> Guido Verbeck was in Nagasaki, and was thinking of returning on furlough

as well. His wife was busy with their five children, under the age of seven, and in fact, would take the children back to America that year to put the elder children in school.<sup>10</sup> Verbeck remained in Nagasaki, where he spend much of his time penning letters to his former students such as Ito Hirobumi, Okuma Shigenobu, and Okubo Toshimichi, all powerful figures in the new restoration government. In early January, 1869, he was joined by a new missionary couple, Henry and Elizabeth Stout. In Yokohama, however, there was no Reformed woman willing or able to undertake the type of work Mrs. Hepburn of the Presbyterian Mission had started in 1867: English classes for Japanese women and girls. It looked like the initiative would be taken by the Woman's Union, which was busily making plans to send Mrs. Mary Pruyn to Yokohama to open a school.<sup>11</sup>

Over time, Secretary Ferris would become increasingly vexed over the independent stance taken by Woman's Union representatives on the mission field. In 1868, however, he was most concerned with the women's successful fund-raising. The majority of the Woman's Union operating funds came from the systematized collection of small offerings from ordinary women — offerings they had squeezed out of household and personal budgets. Many of the women contributing to the Woman's Union were members of Reformed Churches, and Ferris, no advocate of interdenominationalism, wanted that money to support Reformed missionaries and their work.

Other denominations acknowledged the aspirations of their women members by establishing separate or auxiliary women's missionary societies. The ABCFM, for instance, sanctioned the incorporation of a Woman's Board of Missions in March of 1869. The conservative Reformed Board was not yet willing to follow this course. Indeed, it would be the last of the mainline denominations to authorize a woman's mission auxiliary, in 1875, and even then, it would be placed firmly in a position of definite subordination to the Synodical Board. Nonetheless,

Secretary Ferris was mindful of the fact that unless the Board did something, Reformed missionaries such as James Ballagh, who had strong interdenominational leanings to begin with, would work with the Woman's Union, and divert even more attention, and money, from the Reformed Board's activities in Japan.

Then, in March, 1869, Ferris received a letter from Mary Eddy Kidder. A member of the Reformed Church of Oswaco Outlet, the home church of at least four missionaries,<sup>12</sup> Miss Kidder volunteered to go to Japan:

I believe unreservedly in the work, feeling strong but knowing I am weak, yet believing in trying to help others I may be really strengthened and fitted for duty.<sup>13</sup>

Her letter of application is an interesting exception to the general tendency of most applicants to stress their weakness and inadequacies, and to trust to God to give them strength to persevere. Her words reveal much of Miss Kidder's character. While most candidates stressed how weak and inadequate they felt for the work, Miss Kidder was aware of her strengths, although she realized that properly she ought to acknowledge weakness.

Mary Kidder had been born on January 31, 1834, in the village of Wardsboro, Vermont, where her grandfather had settled in late 1787 after leaving Massachusetts. Miss Kidder was named after his wife, grandmother Polly Eddy, who had raised fifteen children on the family's 125 acre hill-farm. The family valued education and religion. Four of Mary Kidder's uncles had become ministers — three after attending college, and one after finishing seminary. John M. Kidder, Mary's father, was the only one of Polly's children to remain in Wardsboro, where he had married the village blacksmith's daughter, Catherine Turner. Mary was the fourth of their seven children. By the time Mary Kidder left for Japan, Catherine had



died, and her father apparently had a house in Amherst, Massachusetts. John Kidder seemed to actively support his daughter's missionary aspirations, and on the night before she left his home for missionary service, he had invited Niijima Jo (Joseph Niishima) for tea.<sup>14</sup>

Secretary Ferris was certainly delighted with her offer. He wrote Henry Stout that

Miss Kidder, in our judgment, is better qualified to promote female education in Japan than Mrs. Pruyn & her party if combined in one person. Please bear this in mind.<sup>15</sup>

Stout's response, however, was discouraging:

"I wish I knew a place for Miss Kidder, but under the present circumstances... [it] does not seem advisable for a single lady to come out" [to Nagasaki].<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, only six months from her initial contact with the Board, Mary Kidder was in Japan, for Samuel Brown had consented to return to Japan, under contract to a government school in Niigata, where his son-in-law was stationed with the British consulate. Mary Kidder had once worked in Samuel Brown's private academy in New York,<sup>17</sup> and thus, knew the family already. Ferris accepted Brown's suggestion that "Miss Kidder could just as well go with us to Niigata, and probably have a fairer field of open action than at Yokohama."<sup>18</sup> This quasi-familial arrangement seemed an ideal solution to the Board's concern with independent and autonomous women missionaries.

Mary Kidder was the type of woman missionary for which the Board would search in subsequent years. To begin with, she was, at thirty five, unlikely to marry and leave the work. Her health was enviable; she attrib-

uted her robust constitution to a childhood spent “out of doors” in her native Vermont.<sup>19</sup> Samuel Brown stressed her amiability, tact, and quick insight into human nature as the qualities which had contributed the most to her effectiveness as a teacher.<sup>20</sup> She was a member of the middle-class, and decidedly “lady-like”, but, like many Vermont women of her generation, she was nonetheless accustomed both to hard work and to supporting herself as a teacher. Her own education had begun in the one-room schoolhouse of Wardsboro, but she had moved on. By 1869, she had over fifteen years of teaching experience, and was working in Brooklyn in a private academy. She was also tutoring the daughters of a district attorney in nearby New Jersey. In her years as a teacher, she had stressed character-formation, such an important component of missionary education, as much as, or more than, academic prowess. She was an active participant in the activities of the institutional church, and had taught in a New York City Sunday school. Highly motivated, certain of her call to missionary service, and well acquainted with the mission cause and Samuel Brown, Miss Mary Eddy Kidder was appointed an “assistant missionary”.<sup>21</sup> Less than six months from the date of her first letter to John Ferris, Mary Kidder was in Japan, under the care of the Browns.

Miss Kidder did indeed fulfill the Board’s great expectations of her, although usually in unexpected ways. As the Reformed Board was to discover, women strong and independent enough to succeed in pioneering work as “assistant” missionaries were generally unsuited to working under the supervision or guidance of others, particularly the older missionaries who were initially charged with their care. Such was certainly the case with Mary Kidder.

Although she was appointed an “assistant” missionary, Miss Kidder, was not an assistant. Few of the pioneers were. Pearl Buck once characterized the pioneering missionaries of China as “proud and quarrelsome and brave and intolerant and passionate. There was not a meek man among them.”<sup>22</sup>

Nor, might one add, among the pioneering women either. James Amerman, a secretary of the Japan Mission, put it more succinctly, when he once informed the Board that Mary Kidder (Miller) “does not assist, she directs” the work of others.<sup>23</sup>

From her first year in Japan, Mary Kidder had her differences with many of the western missionaries, particularly those with whom she worked. New to missionary work, and new to Japan, her first difficulties — with Dr. Brown — arose over the practical and mundane issues of financial matters. Later, more certain of herself, and what she wanted to do, she ran into conflict with the women who were sent to help in her school. Mary Kidder’s special talent as a missionary was not in working with other westerners, but in her friendships with, and personal influence upon, her Japanese co-workers. Nonetheless, it is instructive to look at Miss Kidder’s first disagreement, for through its resolution she established for herself, and for those women who followed after her, a place for independent unmarried women in the Reformed Church mission.

At first, however, all went well between Miss Kidder and the Brown family, especially on the trip to Niigata, where Brown had been offered a teaching position as an *o-yatoi* in a government school.<sup>24</sup> Niigata was another port city open to foreigners under the Ansei (Harris) Treaties of 1858. Brown had been offered the job through the offices of his son-in-law, John Frederic Lowder, British consul in that city. By the time the Browns arrived, however, their hopes of being near their daughter Julia had been dashed by Lowder’s transfer. It was unclear what Miss Kidder was to do in Niigata, since she had not been hired for a teaching job. Despite the uncertainties, however, they had enjoyed the trip to Niigata.

Like many foreigners, Mary Kidder was favorably impressed with the scenery in the mountains. Many first letters from the missionaries to Japan read like travelogs, as they detail the women’s first reactions to the country around them. Missionaries were impressed with the physical beauty of

Japan, in marked contrast to the initial impressions many missionaries gave when they first encountered China, for instance. In China, many were discouraged by the poverty, ignorance, and filth surrounding them, as well as the general disdain of the Chinese for the foreigner. For the Browns and Miss Kidder, on the other hand, there was an official escort: fifty retainers and luggage bearers, provided by the government of Niigata. And as for the scenery, at one point, overwhelmed by the beauty of the autumnal mountains around her, Mary Kidder jumped out of her palanquin and ran back to Mrs. Brown, to share their "exclamations of delight."<sup>25</sup>

Despite the favorable start, Niigata was a difficult assignment for the two American women. Although the city had been open to foreigners for more than ten years, Mary Kidder and Elizabeth Brown were the only foreign women resident in the city when they arrived, and perforce, would spend much of their time together. Samuel Brown spent most of his non-teaching time at home at his desk, working on a Japanese translation of the Gospel. There was not much escaping of each other's company by going outside: Niigata is in the midst of "snow country", and they had arrived just in time for winter. Soon after their arrival they were surrounded by ten feet of snow.<sup>26</sup>

Mary Kidder spent most of her time studying Japanese. Unlike later missionary women, who were so soon engulfed into the myriad teaching duties of already established schools, Miss Kidder's difficulty was not in finding time to study, but in finding a regular instructor. She was one of the few women missionaries in Japan in the nineteenth century who was able to spend her first year in country in fairly concentrated language study. Mary Kidder's eight months in Niigata, and the subsequent summer months of 1870, before she started teaching school, gave her a head start toward proficiency in at least the spoken, colloquial form of Japanese, for in her later evangelistic work as a married woman, she did not use a Japanese assistant, or "Bible woman" to help with the language part of the

work. Of course, during the first five years she was in Japan, most foreigners did not attempt to teach in Japanese: their students were first taught English, and then their education was supposed to be imparted to them in that second language.

In addition to her studies, Miss Kidder held a few English classes for young Japanese girls. She solved her language teacher problems by exchanging language lessons with one young girl. This young woman was Ueda Sadako, also known as Teiko, who would later be the eldest of the five girls who went to America in 1872 as part of the Iwakura mission.<sup>27</sup> The girl's brothers were in Brown's school and Miss Kidder was pleased that the children's mother was "greatly interested in the progress of her children. Their father has travelled in Europe and is now in some high office in Yedo."<sup>28</sup> Already, Miss Kidder was beginning to connect with Japanese people of some influence.

Miss Kidder also spent some of her time writing letters to the Board at the behest of the busy Dr. Brown, who had, she told Ferris, told her that she "must write [him] a letter and tell [him] something of our trip across Japan and other things which he has not time for..."<sup>29</sup> Despite these activities, however, Mary Kidder found life in Niigata a "trial hard to bear", since she, like many women in the coming years, had "in no way accomplished what [she] had desired to do" in her first year in country.<sup>30</sup>

More frustrating than the unmet desire to be useful during those months in Niigata were the challenges to her independence and autonomy. In that snow-bound city, Mary Kidder found herself in the midst of a difficult boarding situation. As in China, the common arrangement of lodging single women with married couples was convenient for the Board, but often caused problems among the missionaries. Missionaries did not choose their housemates, and even those amiable souls who were noted for being able to get along with others, sometimes found themselves in awkward circumstances. In China, many of the single women apparently dealt with the

friction by accepting an isolated existence within the household, keeping to themselves in their own rooms.<sup>31</sup> There were fewer opportunities for privacy in a Japanese house with sliding doors and paper windows, but Mary Kidder later confessed, that in Niigata she had felt “shut up” to herself, with no “friends for advice and sympathy.”<sup>32</sup>

The difficulties in Niigata were less with Elizabeth Brown, it appears, than with Dr. Brown, and arose over her financial arrangements for boarding with the Brown's. When Mary Kidder arrived in Japan, her salary was as yet unfixed, and in addition, she faced nearly a year of uncertainty over her boarding charges. Soon after they had arrived in Niigata, she had asked Dr. Brown how much her expenses for board would be, and he had replied that he wanted average out their expenses for several months, and then give her a figure. She was hesitant about this arrangement, but agreed, and waited several months before asking again. At that point, Dr. Brown replied that “it was a difficult thing to come at but [she] should lose nothing.” As it turned out, during the entire eight months of her stay at Niigata, Mary Kidder had no idea what her living expenses were, a circumstance quite difficult for a woman who had, in her words, “been so long dependent upon myself.”<sup>33</sup>

By the spring of 1870, the Browns and Miss Kidder had returned to Yokohama, and lodging in a hotel. Brown was convinced that he had been made to leave Niigata because of his Christian beliefs, and held out little hope for the city as a place of work for other Christian missionaries. By September, Miss Kidder, finding it “very annoying to know nothing of my accounts or what I have to spend,” was wondering whether she ought to find cheaper living arrangements, and move out of the hotel where the Brown's awaited a vacant house in crowded Yokohama. Finally, more than a year after her arrival in Japan, Mary Kidder dispensed with the pretence of familial arrangements. Unsure of her financial status, she requested, formally and in writing, a bill from Dr. Brown.<sup>34</sup>

Dr. Brown replied to her letter, also in writing, giving a charge for the previous year of \$195, exclusive of the hotel bill. Despite the earlier proposal to average out expenses, he named only a rough charge for the foreign staples consumed while in Niigata, since he found it “next to impossible for me to arrive at anything like an accurate estimate of the amount and value of these things consumed at Niigata and it would not pay me to attempt it.”<sup>35</sup> As for consumables, he listed such items as flour, sugar, syrup, molasses, butter, cheese, tea, coffee, spices and condiments, starch, soap, vermicelli, canned fruits, jams, jellies, and milk — all of which give an indication of the western style eating habits maintained in 1870 by the missionaries, even when they lived far from the foreign concessions. These supplies were generally ordered through provisioners in Yokohama, and help explain the necessity for the more than fifty load bearers who accompanied the Brown’s and Miss Kidder on their journey over the mountains to Niigata in October, 1869. He was unable to find the bill for the charcoal they had used to heat their house during the long winter in Niigata, nor, he added, did he have the time to hunt up such items. He added that “a good many actual expenses incurred on your account I shall never charge you... I trust therefore that you will be satisfied that I have not sought to defraud you in anyway but rather to lessen your expenses in many particulars.”<sup>36</sup>

To his credit, no doubt this was true. Samuel Brown’s talents were not administrative. In the years after the Civil War, America would undergo a corporate revolution, and the missionary enterprise itself would be caught up in the professionalization. In an era and in a field that was becoming increasingly business-oriented, he was an exemplar of the older generation of missionaries who proceeded in a much more piece-meal and *ad hoc* fashion.

Moreover, part of his silence on the matter of Miss Kidder’s board had to do with the uncertainty over her salary, which she thought, but was not cer-

tain, was four hundred dollars a year. Brown thought that too small a figure. It was less than half of a married man's salary of one thousand dollars a year, and a married couple also received allowances for children and house-rent.<sup>37</sup> Brown had written Dr. Ferris in March for clarification on the matter, suggesting a salary of five hundred dollars a year, and one upon which he thought he and Dr. Ferris had already agreed upon. Brown had written on his own initiative, and had suggested the higher figure, perhaps fearful that the Board would deny a request for a higher salary if it came from the lady herself.

It is certainly little enough, it seems to me. She ought to be able to pay \$25 per month for her entire living, except clothes and books, and if she had \$500 she will have but \$189.92 above her ordinary and current expenses for board, washing, fuel, light and use of furniture. I pay \$600 per annum for house rent alone, and if Miss Kidder pays me \$25, I consider it a very modest charge for what she gets. But please let me know whether she is to have \$400 or \$500 and I shall make my charges such as to leave her a surplus for other purposes at all events.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, while Mary Kidder was pleased to finally have some idea of where she stood financially, and perhaps still under the perception that her salary was \$400 a year, she found that a figure of \$195

seems to lay me under a great obligation which is not true though the bill is small there was no extra fire or lights for me, for we lived very simply. Inexpensive servants, eggs, fruit & cake were entirely give us by Japanese visitors. My travelling expenses were always paid by the Japanese government and though the amount is I believe it covered expenses.<sup>39</sup>



Mary Kidder found the "tone of the transaction" most irksome. The averaging of expenses had been Dr. Brown's idea in the first place, and she found the figures rather high. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, she had been denied autonomy in the most basic matter of personal finance.

After much thought and prayer Mary Kidder had finally decided to tell the Board about the situation in September, when she had formally approached Dr. Brown. She told no one else of the matter, trying, as most missionaries did in inter-station disputes, to keep differences among the mission from the knowledge of the Japanese, and from other missionaries and westerners, both in Japan and at home. The rationale for such a course of action was, as Mary Kidder put it in this instance, "for the sake of Christ's cause which I try to serve."<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, numerous disagreements arose in a Mission, over matters both great and petty, and usually the missionary in the minority position appealed back to the Board to intervene on his or her behalf. The Mission itself usually resented such interference on the part of the Board in what they felt was a local problem. Improvements in communications, such as mail posted via steamship, and the telegraph, increased the involvement of the Board in Mission affairs that had been resolved on the field in earlier days.

In October, the well-intentioned, fatherly Dr. Brown finally told the younger Miss Kidder about the problems he had been having over his own payments from the Japanese government. The two eventually resolved the matter on their own, but despite Dr. Brown's disclosure of his own difficulties, Miss Kidder remained unhappy over the way in which he had handled the situation. She regretted that he had not told "her this nor in anyway explain [ed] his conduct before...". She had been protected from knowledge of his difficulties, but did not appreciate such protection. She finally concluded that although he had intended "nothing wrong", this revered

missionary had “failings like all poor mortals”. Reality, in the form of financial wrangling, had pierced through the romance of missions for Mary Kidder.<sup>41</sup>

The ever practical Miss Kidder, although reconciled to Dr. Brown, took the opportunity to establish herself as an independent member of the Japan Mission. She asked that her salary remitted through some other person, since Dr. Brown’s “management of money matters diminishes my respect too much and it is this more than anything else I regret in the transaction mentioned.” She wished to accept her own salary, and then “pay my board regularly monthly and that will be the end of finances.”<sup>42</sup> In the end, her requests were honored. She received her salary, six hundred dollars a year, from the Secretary of the Mission,<sup>43</sup> just like the other missionaries on the field. In doing so, she became less a protégé of Dr. Brown, with all her financial arrangements arranged by him, and more an autonomous worker in her own right. The women who came after her would profit from her experience, for thereafter, they too would receive their salaries from the Mission Secretary, without supervision from any intermediary, paternal figure.

Mary Kidder set many of the patterns for missionary women in the Reformed Church. Healthy, energetic, experienced, and motivated, during her first, frustrating year in Japan, a year she counted for naught, she had yet managed to attain the status of an individual and independent missionary. Miss Kidder’s rejection of Samuel Brown’s well-intentioned, but paternalistic, protection of a younger woman, and her insistence upon being treated as a full-fledged, working member of the Japan Mission would benefit future women missionaries. Her business-like sense and desire for financial order would stand her in good stead over the next few years, as, in the fall of 1870, she more fully turned her attention to the real work she had come to Japan to do — establishing a Christian school for Japanese girls. After Miss Kidder’s first steps into Japan, more than thirty

unmarried Reformed women, and scores of unmarried women from other denominations would journey to Japan. Their primary work would be the education of young Japanese women. That work, often to the chagrin of many male Protestant missionaries and their supporters at home, became the most visible, best supported, and most successful component of missionary work in Japan. It is ironic to think that it all grew, initially, from Secretary Ferris' opposition to the idea of independent, unmarried women on the mission field.

#### Footnotes

- 1 Most of the Protestant women arrived after 1872, when the ban on Christianity was finally lifted. The women from the larger, and better known Women's Board of Missions of the ABCFM, who would eventually send the largest number of women missionaries to Japan (one hundred women by 1912) would not arrive until 1873. The first Catholic sisters, Marie Justine Raclot (Mere St. Mathilde) and Adelaide Levesque (Mere St. Norbert) arrived in Yokohama in 1872. Very little scholarly work has been published in English about the work of the Catholic women in Japan.
- 2 The story of three missionary wives women who went to Japan in the years between 1859 and 1868, and the conflicts that at least one of them faced with the dual role of wife/mother and missionary can be found in Novick, "Good Wives and Wise Mothers: Some Missionary Wives in Nineteenth Century Japan", in *Akita Minoru Sensei Kinen Ronshu*, November, 1995, pp. 189-221.
- 3 see for example, R. Pierce Beaver, ed., *To Advance the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Rufus Anderson*, (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1967).
- 4 Mrs. W. I. Chamberlain, *Fifty Years in Foreign Fields*, (New York: Woman's Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America, 1925), p. 6.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8

- 6 The Civil War was deemed to have started with the firing on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. Two weeks later, women began forming some of the more than twenty thousand aid societies in the north and south to support the war effort. In the north, these organizations would be coordinated by a centralized Sanitary Commission, which has been suggested as the genesis of the explosion of post-war women's organizations. cf. Sara M. Evans, *Born For Liberty*, (New York: The Free Press, 1989), p. 114. As can be seen, the Woman's Union, however, was formed BEFORE the Civil War actually began.
- 7 R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: History of the First Feminist Movement in North America*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), pp. 90-92.
- 8 The Charter Oath announced on 6 April, 1868 was a statement of the goals of the Restoration government. According to its provisions: 1) all classes were to unite in promoting the nation's economy and welfare, 2) an assembly would be established and matters of state would be decided by public discussion, 3) all classes were to be allowed to fulfill their just aspirations to avoid societal discontent, 4) former base customs were to be discontinued and all actions were to conform to the principles of international justice, and 5) knowledge was to be sought throughout the world to strength the foundations of the imperial rule. cf. Janet E. Hunter, *Concise Dictionary of Modern Japanese History*. A fuller discussion of the subject can be found in W. G. Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*.
- 9 Guido Verbeck to John M. Ferris, 26 February 1868, Yokohama Archives of History (hereinafter YAH), vol. 1. The documents on file at the Yokohama Archives are printed and bound copies of material received on microfiche from the Gardner-Sage Archives at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, in the U.S.A.
- 10 *Ibid.*, see further Verbeck correspondence, especially letter to Ferris, dated 27 May 1868, 22 January 1868, and 16 February, 1869, YAH, vol. 1.
- 11 The former American consul in Yokohama was Robert Hewson Pruyn, who served in Japan from 1861 until 1865.

- 12 Caroline Adriance, former pastor Samuel R. Brown, his wife Elizabeth Brown, and Marion Manion Verbeck, Guido Verbeck's wife, who was a convert from Catholicism.
- 13 Mary E. Kidder to John M. Ferris, 1 March, 1869, YAN, Vol. 4.
- 14 Candidate Files, Gardner-Sage Archives: Mary Kidder. The information about the history of Miss Kidder's family can be found in a letter from a Kidder descendant, Mrs. Margaret Knight. The letter is currently in the possession of the Ferris archives.
- 15 John M. Ferris to Henry Stout, March, 1869, YAH, vol. 120, p. 9.
- 16 Henry Stout to John M. Ferris, 31 March 1869, YAH, vol. 1.
- 17 Samuel Brown to John M. Ferris, 28 February, 1869, recommending Mary Kidder for missionary work. He stated that he had known her for more than fifteen years, since she had been employed by him during the years when he ran a school for boys in Springside and Auburn, New York. YAH, Vol. 42.
- 18 Samuel Brown to John M. Ferris, 15 June 1869, YAH, vol. 42, pp. 37-39.
- 19 Candidate Files, Mary E. Kidder, Letter from Mary E. Kidder to John M. Ferris, 28 February 1869.
- 20 Samuel Brown to John M. Ferris, 28 February, 1869, YAH, vol. 42
- 21 "Regularly ordained ministers of the Gospels, licensed preachers, physicians, teachers, etc., under regular appointment and not under a special contract, are called Missionaries, and all ladies, whether married or single, Assistant Missionaries." *Manual of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America*, (New York: Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America, 1895), Section II, pp. 4-5. The 1901 Edition of the *Manual*, which was adopted on 27 November 1900, finally grants the full title of Missionary to unmarried women, while married women are granted the title of Associate Missionary. *Manual of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America*, (New York: Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America, 1901), Part III, p. 12
- 22 Pearl S. Buck, *Fighting Angel*, (London: Methuen & Company, Ltd., Fifth edi-

tion, Reprinted in 1956) pp. 63–64

- 23 Amerman's letter to the Board, dtd December 10, 1886, YAH, Vol 60, p. 140, was in response to the distant Board's offer that Mary Miller help out, and her own offer to travel daily from Tokyo to Yokohama to assist at the school, during the Booth's furlough in 1887.
- 24 For a fuller discussion of the *oyatoi gaikokujin* in Meiji Japan, see Daniel A. Metraux, "Lay Proselytization of Christianity in Japan in the Meiji Period: The Career of E. Warren Clark", in *Undercurrents: The Japan Scene Past and Present*, No. 12, Autumn, 1985, pp. 33-48. The first *yatoi* were hired for their knowledge of western languages and were not supposed to teach their religion, which continued to be banned for Japanese until 1873. Nonetheless, some of the men hired were religious laymen, or in the earliest years, missionaries. Most refused positions unless they were free to mention, and later teach about, Christianity. One of the most famous foreigners in the pay of the Japanese government was Guido Verbeck. Others included William E. Griffis, Captain L.L. Janes, and William S. Clark. Janes was instrumental in the conversion of the thirty-five young men later known as the Kumamoto Band of Christians, and Clark, who was professor of agriculture at the Hokkaido College in Sapporo is remembered even today for his parting words to his students in 1877, "Boys, be ambitious."
- 25 Mary E. Kidder to J.M. Ferris, letter dtd January 15, 1870
- 26 Letter of Samuel Brown to J. M. Ferris, dtd March 5, 1870, YAH, vol. 42, p. 74.
- 27 In the Candidate Files of the Gardner-Sage Archives, for Mary Eddy Kidder (Miller), there is a letter from Mary Kidder to John Ferris, dated January 5, 1870, which mentions the girl Teiko, from Niigata, who is to go to America with the Iwakura Mission. Teiko returned to Japan after only six months, married a doctor, and only met once more with the other women, in 1916. See also, Yoshiko Furuki, *The White Plum: A Biography of Ume Tsuda, Pioneer in the Higher Education of Japanese Women*, (New York: Weatherhill, 1991) Chapter One, "The Seedling"

- 28 Barbara Rose, in *Tsuda Umeko and Women's Education in Japan*, suggests that acquiring a western education for their children was "one way in which a family could ensure their survival in a politically uncertain world", and goes on to present the examples of Tsuda, Yamakawa Sutematsu, and Nagai Shigeko. [pp. 12-13] Assuredly, uncertainty was no doubt preevalent in Niigata, which was in an old fudai han, whose daimyo had been related to the Tokugawa. The collapse of the Tokugawa bakufu preceding the Meiji restoration had led to the demoralization of many of the retainers of the Tokugawan forces. Irwin Shreiner suggested that this collapse of their hopes led some of the disinherited young samurai to embrace the foreign religion of Christianity.
- 29 Correspondence Files, Mary E. Kidder to J.M. Ferris, January 15, 1870. In turn, Mary Kidder was later to delegate much letter writing to Stella Hequemborg, her assistant.
- 30 YAH, Vol. 42, pp. 94-103 (Letters are bound out of order, with those of 9 and 10 September, originally included in that of 22 September bound first). Mary E. Kidder to J.M. Ferris, letter dtd 22 September, 1870. This letter to the Correspondence Secretary includes handwritten copies (by Mary Kidder) of the correspondence between herself and Dr. Brown from the preceding months, and details her side of the events of the year.
- 31 Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn of the Century China*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 63-64.
- 32 Mary E. Kidder to J. M. Ferris, ltr dtd 22 September 1870, *ibid*.
- 33 *Ibid*.
- 34 Samuel Brown's original letter to Mary Kidder was dated 10 September, 1870, in answer to hers of 9 September, 1870.
- 35 *Ibid*.
- 36 *Ibid*.
- 37 For example, in 1871, J. H. Ballagh drew \$1000 a year for himself and his wife, plus \$200 a year extra for the two of his children living in Japan. cf. YAH, Vol.

43, PP. 7-12, letter dtd March 14, 1871. Earlier, in 1868, he had drawn \$1182.50 for eight and a half months house rent, which would have made his yearly allowance for rent approximately \$258. (cf. YAH, Vol. 42, p. 24, letter dtd 15 December, 1868)

38 Samuel Brown to John M. Ferris, March 5, 1870, YAH, Vol. 42, p. 74

39 Mary E. Kidder to John M. Ferris, September 22, 1870, YAH, Vol 42. pp. 94-103

40 *Ibid.*

41 Mary E. Kidder to J. M. Ferris, letter dtd October 22, 1870, YAH, Vol. 42

42 *Ibid.*

43 cf. James Ballagh's estimates for salaries for the year 1873, in YAH, Vol. 44, p. 99, Estimates for 1873, dated in 1872. This salary was approximately 48% of a married couple such as the Ballaghs, who had children, and half of what a married couple with no children received. This was actually better than that of women school teachers in the United States, whose salaries averaged one-third of their male counterparts, married or unmarried, cf. Barbara Miller Solomon, In *the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America*, (Yale University Press, 1985), p.33. The \$500 Brown sought was more in line with teacher's salary differentials in America, and the \$400 Miss Kidder initially assumed she would received was actually below the one-third level. Perhaps she had conceived of women's missionary salaries in a more sacrificial light than that of regular teachers.