

WILLIAM CAREY



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WILLIAM CAREY

BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

ON the south side of Watling Street, our famous Roman road, about three miles from Towcester, in the county of Northampton, stands the village of Pury St. Paul, or Paulerspury. The population of this village is not now more than one thousand; towards the middle of the last century it was even smaller. In this retired spot there lived, in 1761, a worthy couple in very humble circumstances; and in their cottage, on August 17, their eldest child, William Carey, was born.

At this time Carey's father was a weaver; but about six years later he became parish-clerk and schoolmaster, a position which had been filled by his father before him; and among his earliest pupils was his son William, whom he

instructed in the rudiments of knowledge, and whose eminence he was spared to see. He was, we are told, "a great reader"; he was certainly a man of "the strictest integrity and uprightness," held "in honest repute" among his neighbours; and William was under his care for several years.

Whatever opportunities the lad possessed, it is certain that he eagerly embraced them. He early displayed a love for books, especially for those of a scientific or an historical character; he delighted likewise in voyages and travels; and even as a child his room was crowded with specimens of insects and plants which he had collected and arranged, thus forming the habit which adhered to him through life.

At the same time he was remarkable for persistence. Whatever he began he finished. It is said that if there was a tree difficult to climb, Carey was sure to attempt it, and almost sure to conquer it. On one occasion he failed and fell to the

ground, thereby sustaining very considerable injury; but when able to walk out, after prolonged confinement indoors, the first thing he did was to climb that very tree, and take the nest which had before attracted him. This determination of purpose characterised him always. Next to the grace of God in his heart, it was this determination of purpose, great as his intellectual power was, which was the secret of his ultimate success.

When rather more than fourteen years of age, being unfitted by his condition of health for agricultural occupation, he was apprenticed to a shoemaker at Hackleton, about nine miles from his native village. Here he afterwards served as a journeyman, and ultimately became a shoemaker on his own account; nor was he ever ashamed of the conditions under which this and some subsequent part of his life had been passed.

He was not deterred by the exigencies of his employment from that pursuit of

knowledge which by this time had become a passion. How he spent these early years is shown by the fact that, before he left England, he was able, notwithstanding the pressure of poverty and of almost constant labour, to read the Bible in no fewer than seven languages. Above all, during this period, he learnt to *love* his Bible. As the son of a parish-clerk, he had probably been regular enough at church, but this was all that could hitherto have been said of him ; when about eighteen years of age, he was brought under the influence of Mr. Scott, the commentator, at that time Curate of Olney, and through his instrumentality was led to a knowledge of the truth. It was about this time (in 1781) that that change in his opinions was somehow brought about which led to his joining himself to a small Nonconformist community at Hackleton.

In 1783, on October 5 in that year, he was baptised by Dr. Ryland in the river Nen, at Northampton ; and about two

years later he associated himself with the Baptist Church at Olney, of which the excellent John Sutcliffe was then the pastor. Thus he became connected with the denomination of which he was afterwards to be so bright an ornament. How little Dr. Ryland looked for such an issue when he baptised him may be gathered from an entry in the Doctor's diary. "This day baptised a poor journeyman shoemaker." The entry was perfectly correct. But the Doctor's sermon that day was founded on Matt. xix. 30: "Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first!"

PREPARATION FOR SERVICE

Scarcely had Carey joined Mr. Sutcliffe's congregation at Olney before he was asked to preach. It was by no means the first time he had done so, for he began to preach almost immediately after his conversion, and had indeed preached almost continuously at Earl's

Barton for nearly three years and a half. But it was Mr. Sutcliffe's desire and his own that he should devote himself to the ministry.

His first settlement was at Moulton, in 1786. One consideration that induced him to settle in this village was that he might there exchange shoe-making for teaching; but he had really no aptitude for teaching, and the school had to be speedily abandoned. There was another reason why he had to give up the school, besides that. As he confessed, he was unable to maintain discipline. Some time before, he had married, and the six or seven shillings a week which his school brought him was wholly insufficient to supplement the "Eleven Pounds a year from his people, and Five Pounds from a Fund in London," which constituted otherwise his sole income.

Eventually, therefore, he was compelled to resume his former occupation, which he continued during the three or four years that he remained at Moulton;

and once every fortnight he might have been seen jogging along, with a wallet filled with boots and shoes thrown over his shoulder, to the town of Northampton, nine miles away. And yet it was amid these seemingly unpropitious surroundings that the great purpose of his life was formed. *Cook's Voyages* had then lately been published, and he read the book with mingled surprise and sadness. He realised, as he had never realised before, the condition of "the dark places of the earth." As he taught his children geography, he thought of the small portion of the world in which the Gospel had even been proclaimed. As he sat at his shoemaker's stool, he gazed ever and anon upon a large map which he had drawn, and on which the spiritual conditions of the various countries was rudely represented. "While he mused, the fire burned." He read not only *Cook's Voyages*, but another book then also recently published, by the Rev. Andrew Fuller, of Kettering.

The Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation.
If it is the duty of all men, as Mr. Fuller proclaimed, to believe whenever the Gospel is presented to them, it must be the duty of all who have received the Gospel to endeavour to make it universally known.

Twenty years later, Mr. Wilberforce said in the House of Commons :

“ A sublimer thought cannot be conceived than when a poor cobbler formed the resolution to give to the millions of Hindoos the Bible in their own language.”

But Mr. Wilberforce was so far mistaken inasmuch as he limited Carey's “ thought ” to the Hindoos. For “ Hindoos ” he should have substituted “ the whole world ! ”

HINDRANCES AND HELPS

In the meantime, when Carey came to present his “ thought ” to others, he found at first very little sympathy. When, at a gathering of ministers in

Northampton, Carey suggested as a topic for discussion the duty of Christians to attempt the conversion of the heathen, Mr. Ryland, the father of Dr. Ryland, sprang to his feet and said, "Young man, sit down! When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your help or mine!"

But Carey, as we have seen, was not easily daunted, not easily even discouraged. The thoughts that he had in vain attempted to present to his brethren at the Northampton meeting he embodied in a pamphlet. With this pamphlet in his pocket, he found his way to Birmingham, and there unburdened his soul to the Rev. Samuel Pearce, who entered into his views with characteristic ardour and urged him to prepare his pamphlet for publication. Mr. Fuller, on being consulted, recommended delay. But in the following year Mr. Fuller preached a sermon at Clipstone, on "The Pernicious Influence of Delay in Matters of Religion,"

in which he actually assailed and condemned the caution he had himself exercised. So eloquent was the sermon and so profound the impression produced by his words that it is said the ministers were scarcely able to speak to one another at the close. Carey seizing the opportunity, urged the immediate formation of a Missionary Society. But further deliberation was counselled; and the brethren separated with a recommendation to Carey to publish his pamphlet, which was issued from the press a few months afterwards.

“ EXPECT GREAT THINGS : ATTEMPT
GREAT THINGS ”

Shortly after the issue of his pamphlet, Carey was appointed to preach at an association in Nottingham. His sermon on this occasion has become historical. The text on which the discourse was founded was Isaiah liv. 2, 3 : “ Enlarge

the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.” He proceeded to establish and illustrate the two great principles involved in the text, and that have since become “household words” throughout the Christian world in reference to the missionary enterprise—I. *Expect great things from God*; II. *Attempt great things for God*. In this sermon the thought and feeling of years were concentrated. The effect which it produced was electrical. But when practical steps came to be spoken of, the old feelings of hesitation and doubt began to get the upper hand, till Carey appealed to Mr. Fuller in an agony of distress, and asked if they were to separate again without anything being done. The result was that a

resolution was passed, "That a plan be prepared against the next meeting at Kettering for the establishment of a Society for propagating the Gospel among the heathen"; and, after that meeting, which was held on October 2, 1792, twelve ministers, most of them unknown to fame, met in the house (which is still standing) of a widow lady, Mrs. Beeby Wallis, and, after much consultation and prayer, formed the Baptist Missionary Society. At the same time, the first subscriptions were gathered in, "which *in all* amounted to £13 2s. 6d." Carey also offered himself as the first missionary of the Society, and Mr. Fuller was appointed its first secretary. Henceforth, the two men were to work together, till the death of the latter, nearly twenty-three years afterwards, terminated their earthly communion.

But although the final decision as to commencing the Mission had been thus at length arrived at, there were various difficulties still to be encountered. For

one thing, there was the usual difficulty about money. The only minister in the metropolis from whom Carey received any sympathy was the venerable John Newton, who “ advised him with the fidelity and tenderness of a father.” But if Christian men in London withheld their sympathy, brethren in the country were less disposed to hesitate. Fawcett of Brearley, Birt of Plymouth Dock, Steadman of Broughton, Crabtree of Bradford—all honoured names in the Baptist community—are each found expressing their satisfaction, and promising whatever assistance was in their power.

“ THE FIELD IS THE WORLD ”

The brethren set themselves earnestly to consider where the proposed Mission should be established. Carey, under the impression produced on him by *Cook's Voyages*, had thought of Otaheite as the scene of his future labours. And

there were other suggestions. "But, just at this moment," says Dr. Ryland, "Mr. John Thomas returned from Bengal, and it was found that he was endeavouring to raise a fund for a Mission to that country, and to engage a companion to go out with him. It was, therefore, resolved to make some further inquiry respecting him, and to invite him to go back under the patronage of our Society." Later Mr. Thomas was accepted as a missionary, and Carey was solicited to accompany him. Two months afterwards a farewell meeting was held at Leicester, and before the end of the year, after many and varied difficulties had been surmounted, Carey with his wife and family arrived with Mr. Thomas in Calcutta.

"GOING DOWN INTO THE MINE"

Carey was now thirty-two years of age. For seven years or more he had been longing and praying that he might be

permitted to carry the Gospel to the heathen : for upwards of forty years he was to be engaged in that work, which he did not relinquish till called to still higher service.

But familiar as he had been with difficulties and anxieties, these had been as nothing in his old home when compared with those he had to encounter in the land of his adoption. It seems to have been the idea of the founders of the Mission—at any rate, it was Carey’s own idea—that, after the first expense had been defrayed, the missionaries would be able either to maintain themselves, or to do so with very little aid from the Society. They had brought very little money with them, and all that had been granted by the Committee was the sum of £150 in goods, which were to be disposed of on their arrival. But before they had been two months in Calcutta, their resources were already exhausted. To meet this difficulty Carey accepted an appointment as superin-

tendent of an indigo factory at Mudnabatty, near Malda, to which he was introduced through the influence of Mr. Thomas. But it is singular to note, at this distance of time, how his acceptance of the appointment at Mudnabatty was received by the Committee at home. He did not, indeed, neglect his missionary work,—on the contrary, having considerable leisure from his secular duties, he set up schools, itinerated in the surrounding villages, and even, during his residence at Mudnabatty, translated the whole of the New Testament into the Bengalee dialect, through which alone it could reach the masses of the population. Still, some of the members of the Committee—and even Mr. Fuller—were alarmed lest he should “allow the spirit of the missionary to be swallowed up in the pursuits of the merchant,” and they addressed to him a letter of “serious and affectionate caution.” Their “caution” might well have been spared if they had remembered

that their own remittances to India, during three years, amounted to only about £200. Carey's reply to the Committee's "caution" was as touching as it was dignified. "I can only say," he wrote, "that, after my family's obtaining a bare subsistence, my whole income, and some months' more, goes for the purpose of the Gospel, in supporting persons to assist in the translation of the Bible, in writing out copies of it, and in teaching school. I am indeed poor, and shall always be so, until the Bible is published in Bengalee and Hindoostanee, and the people want no further instruction."

SERAMPORE AND CALCUTTA

For some reason the "business" did not prosper, and, in 1799, the indigo works at Mudnabatty were given up. Carey had now been more than five years in India. They had been years of preparation chiefly, and the spiritual results

of his labours had been small. But just when the abandonment of the factory at Mudnabatty rendered it necessary for him to consider other plans for the future, the welcome tidings reached him at Malda of the arrival of Messrs. Marshman and Ward and other missionaries at Serampore. It had been intended that they should join Carey at Mudnabatty, but the opposition of the authorities to the settlement of missionaries in Bengal was inexorable.

The Governor of Serampore was a Christian man. He received the newly arrived missionaries in all kindness, and promised them every assistance in his power. When Carey joined the brethren in January, 1800, he found them already settled; and there then began a brotherly friendship and a co-operation in labour that was terminated only by death.

They resolved among other things that "the brethren of the Mission form a community in which no one has the pre-eminence"; that "no brother shall

engage in any private trade whatever” ; and that “ whatever worldly employ the brethren, as a body, may think it expedient to pursue, no one must refuse to take the share assigned him, nor shall any part of the profits arising therefrom be accounted private property, except so appropriated by the majority.”

Carey, even when he became tutor in the college of Fort William, at Calcutta, out of his collegiate income of £600 a year had no larger sum than £40 a year for himself, his wife and his family, with a small addition of £20 a year to enable him to appear in “ decent apparel ” at the college and at Government House. The result of this self-denial was that the brethren were enabled to devote to missionary purposes many thousand pounds beyond what they received from England.¹

¹ Five years after the arrangement was made they were able to say : “ Our whole expenditure has not been less than £13,000, and we have received from England in money, goods, etc., not more

But indeed the self-denial which is indicated by the household arrangements of the brethren was only a part of a system of self-sacrifice which extended to the minutest details of their lives. Take a single day as a specimen, which Carey gives incidentally as an excuse for not writing to a friend. In June, 1806, he writes from Calcutta: "I am extremely loath to let this opportunity pass without dropping a line, and yet scarcely can find time to write to any one. I give you a short view of my engagements for the present day, which is a specimen of the way of spending one half the week. I rose this morning at a quarter before six, read a chapter in the Hebrew Bible, and spent the time till seven in private addresses to

than £5740 17s. 7d., and this sum is not sunk, but invested in premises belonging to the Mission." Up to 1826 they had expended upwards of £58,000, and had received from England only a little more than £10,000. The total sum contributed by them to the cause of religion has been estimated at little short of £80,000.

God, and then attended family prayer with the servants in Bengalee. While tea was getting ready, I read a little in Persian with the moonshi, who was waiting when I left my bedroom; read also before breakfast a portion of the Scriptures in Hindoosthance. The moment breakfast was over, sat down to the translation of Ramayun from the Sangskrit, with a pundit, who was also waiting, and continued this translation till ten o'clock, at which hour I went to college, and attended the duties there till between one and two o'clock. When I returned home, I examined a proof sheet of the Bengalee translation of Jeremiah, which took till dinner time. After dinner, translated, with the assistance of the chief pundit of the college, the greatest part of the eighth chapter of Matthew in Sangskrit. This employed me till six o'clock. After six, sat down with a Telinga pundit to learn that language. At seven I began to collect a few previous thoughts into the form

of a sermon, and preached in English at half-past seven. About forty persons present. After sermon I sat down and translated the eleventh of Ezekiel into Bengalee, and this lasted till near eleven, and now I sit down to write to you. After this, I conclude the evening by reading a chapter in the Greek Testament, and commending myself to God. I have never more time in a day than this, though the exercises vary."

That the chief work of Carey's life was the translation of the Scriptures into the languages of the East is well known. During the forty years he was permitted to labour in India he saw "more than two hundred and thirteen thousand volumes of the Divine Word, in forty different languages, issue from the Serampore press."

In 1801, as has been already stated, he was appointed teacher of the Bengalee language in the college of Fort William at Calcutta, then recently established by Lord Wellesley; in 1807 he was

raised to the more elevated rank of professor, with a doubled salary. His chief reason for accepting the appointments was that he might devote the emoluments connected with them to missionary and philanthropic enterprise.

THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

The East India Company and most of its officials had, for their own reasons, been all along opposed to aggressive action for the spread of Christianity in India. More than once the Mission was on the point of extinction, through their jealousy or timidity or both; and nothing but the firmness and prudence of the missionaries had prevented the actual suppression of their worship and the abandonment of their great enterprise. The expiry of the Company's Charter in 1813 gave an opportunity to the missionaries, through their friends at home, of bringing the whole subject

of Christian enterprise in India under review in the House of Commons.

In Parliament the missionaries found an eloquent apologist in the distinguished philanthropist, William Wilberforce.

The result of the agitation was, that a clause was added to the new charter securing full toleration to the missionaries, and, though with some restrictions long since removed, giving really free entrance for the Gospel to India.

The year 1829 is rendered memorable in the annals of India by the abolition of suttee. Thirty years before Carey had witnessed the burning of a widow for the first time in his life, and he was greatly moved by the spectacle. He more than once drew the attention of the Government to the iniquity, but hitherto the matter had been allowed to slumber. Lord William Bentinck was appointed Governor-General in 1828, and he determined that the atrocious practice should cease absolutely. The necessary edict was signed on December 4,

1829, and Carey was requested to translate the English into Bengalee, in order that it might be published at the same time in both languages.

THE END

But Carey was now an old man. During his long life, notwithstanding his manifold labours and frequent anxieties, he usually enjoyed excellent health. At three different times his life had been despaired of; but he was spared to see his last new edition of the Bengalee Bible through the press, and then he felt that his work was nearly done. Some of his utterances during these last days were very characteristic. "There is nothing remarkable," said he, one day, "in what I have done. It has only required patience and perseverance." He once remarked to a friend, "When I compare things as they now are in India with what they were when I came here, I see that a great

work has been accomplished, but *how* it has been accomplished I know not."

When increasing infirmities pressed upon him, he was carried down to his study every morning, and there sat for hours at that desk at which he had so long and so successfully translated God's Word. While in this weak condition the Bishop of Calcutta (Dr. Wilson) went to see him. The interview was affecting. There sat the venerable man at his desk, dressed in white, his silvery locks waving to the breeze made by the moving *punkah*, so feeble that he could not rise to receive his visitor—the Bishop and the brethren of the Mission family all standing around. After mutual expressions of regard, the Bishop took his Greek Testament and read some of the precious promises of our Lord. He then offered prayer. Before his departure he informed the Doctor that his last letters from Europe told him that Wilberforce, who had so nobly vindicated the cause of the Mission,

was now, like himself, awaiting his summons on high.

The last chord that vibrated in his heart was gratitude to God and to His people on behalf of the Mission. Cheering letters arrived at that time from England, telling of the sympathy, liberality, and prayers of its friends at home. On June 9, 1834, he "fell asleep." The Danish flag was, by authority, hoisted half-mast high, as at the death of a Governor of the settlement; and Lady Bentinck, wife of the Governor-General of India, watched the procession from Barrackpore, on the opposite side of the river.

RESULTS OF CAREY'S WORK

At the death of Carey in 1834, there were in connection with the Mission of which he was the founder, about thirty missionaries, forty native preachers, forty-five stations and sub-stations, and though the exact figures do not appear

anywhere on record, probably about six hundred church members.

But these facts by no means represent the value of the "thought" which Carey was enabled to present to his brethren in 1792. The formation of the Baptist Missionary Society was speedily followed by the formation of other similar societies, all having the same great object in view, and the evangelising force in India has steadily increased since that day.

Even these facts, however, are insufficient to show the magnitude of the work which Carey had so important a part in promoting on the shores of India. India, however, is only one field of missionary activity—there is no country and scarcely any most remote island where Christ has not been preached and His power has not been felt, and His love realised.

Though Carey played so important and early a part in the great modern missionary movement which has reached such an enormous development, he was

not the first labourer in India. There were great and good men, before his time, who "did not count their lives dear unto themselves," so that they might be the means of saving souls, even in India. Two years before Carey's settlement at Serampore, the German missionary, Schwartz, had died at Tanjore, after forty-eight years' devoted labour in Southern India. Even before Schwartz had landed at Tranquebar, Ziegenbalg and others had laboured and suffered in the same city, and Schultze had found many converts in Madras. None the less is it true that a new era of Christian enterprise was opened by Carey and his coadjutors. The churches received a new "baptism of the Spirit" under the influence of their teaching and example.

The work of the Lord has been carried on since their day by an ever-increasing number of agencies, and with constantly multiplying indications and proofs of success. Let us be thankful that we may all participate in that work. In

the joy of its issues we may all secure our share. "Surely," to use the words of Carey himself, "a crown of rejoicing like this is worth aspiring to. Surely it is worth while to lay ourselves out with all our might in promoting the cause and kingdom of Christ."

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