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978-1-108-00826-6 - The Life and Labours of Carey, Marshman, and Ward: The Serampore Missionaries

John Clark Marshman

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER I.

WILLIAM CAREY, to whose energy the Protestant missions of the nineteenth century owe their origin, was born on the 17th of August 1761, in the village of Pury, or Paulerspury, in Northamptonshire, where his father and grandfather occupied in succession the position of parish clerk and schoolmaster. His education was limited to the instruction to be obtained in the village school, which was exceedingly scanty. Of his younger days there are few recollections; but it was remarked that he read with avidity books of a scientific and historical character, and more particularly all the records of voyages and travels he was able to obtain. But the bent of his mind lay towards subjects of natural history, and at an early age his room was stored with the insects he had collected and reared, to mark their development. To assist these observations he endeavoured to acquire some knowledge of drawing. His fondness for botanical research became more apparent as he grew up. He was likewise remarkable, at an early period of life, for that spirit of indomitable perseverance which distinguished his subsequent career. He took an active share in the boyish sports of the village, and was a great favourite with children of his own age. His manners were necessarily rustic, but his appearance was prepossessing, and some of his more discerning friends are said to have predicted his future eminence. At the age of twelve, he obtained

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a copy of Dyche's Latin vocabulary, and committed the greater part of it to memory, carefully studying the grammar prefixed to it. But his parents were too poor to assist him in the pursuit of knowledge, and a scorbutic disorder, which his constitution eventually surmounted, unfitted him for out-door labour. At the age of fourteen, therefore, he was bound apprentice to Charles Nickolls, a shoemaker at Hackleton.

This event appeared to crush every prospect of intellectual improvement, but his thirst for knowledge was not quenched. In a little collection of books in the shop, he found a commentary on the New Testament, interspersed with Greek words, which were to him unintelligible. But in his father's village there was one Thomas Jones, who had received a liberal education at Kidderminster, but had been driven, by the irregularity of his habits, to seek a livelihood as a journeyman weaver. When young Carey was permitted to visit his father he took the Greek words he had traced to Jones for an explanation, and by his assistance was enabled to make some progress in Greek. His master died in the second year of his apprenticeship, and he transferred his services as a journeyman to Mr Old. The Rev. Thomas Scott, the well-known author of the Commentary on the Bible, was sometimes led, in the course of his pastoral visits, to the house of Mr Old, who is recorded on one occasion to have entered the room with a sensible-looking lad in his working apron. The youth's attention was riveted on the address which Mr Scott gave to the villagers, and he exhibited tokens of great intelligence. He said little, but occasionally asked questions so much to the point, that Mr Scott was led to remark that he would prove no ordinary character. When this anticipation was subse-

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quently verified by the position which Mr Carey attained in India, Mr Scott, one day passing by Old's house with a friend, remarked, "That was Mr Carey's college;" and seldom has so humble a college turned out so distinguished a graduate.

Mr Carey, as became the son and grandson of the parish-clerk, was trained up as a strict churchman, and was in due time confirmed. He had read, as he observed, the greater part of Jeremy Taylor's works, and Spinker's "Sick Man Visited," and entertained a very cordial hatred of all dissent. Soon after he had entered the service of Mr Old, he was brought under strong religious impressions, through the instrumentality of a fellow-servant. Though he had rarely been chargeable with an act of open immorality, he describes his course of life as having been not merely irregular, but vicious. Like John Bunyan, he formed his estimate of his own conduct by comparing it, not with that of others, but with the high standard of Christian excellence which he had set before himself. He now began to realise his danger as a sinner, and the need of conversion, and these convictions led him to a more careful perusal of the Scriptures. He attended divine service three times on a Sunday, and even a prayer meeting at a dissenting chapel in the week. It was at this period that he appears to have experienced that vital change of heart which laid the foundation of his Christian character. It was chiefly to the ministrations of Mr Scott that he was indebted for the progress he made in his religious career, and he never omitted through life to acknowledge the deep obligation under which he had been laid by his instructions. He described the dawn of Divine truth on his mind as very gradual, but all his doubts and difficulties

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appear to have been at length removed by the perusal of a work which had then recently appeared from the pen of Mr Hall, entitled "Help to Zion's Travellers," which is still held in high estimation by all who can appreciate the value of Gospel truth.

Mr Carey's first appearance in the pulpit was at the unripe age of nineteen, when he was persuaded to deliver his thoughts on a passage of Scripture, which, as he afterwards remarked, the people, being ignorant, applauded to his great injury. To this, his earliest effort, he never alluded without a feeling of humiliation. Some time after he was solicited to preach at the village of Earl's Barton, and yielded to the request, more from his unwillingness to give pain by a refusal than from any confidence in his own qualifications. There, as well as in his own village, he preached for three years and a half. It was during these ministerial engagements that his views on the subject of baptism were altered, and he embraced the opinion that baptism by immersion, after a confession of faith, was in accordance with the injunctions of Divine Writ, and the practice of the apostolic age. He was accordingly baptized by Dr John Ryland, his future associate in the cause of missions, who subsequently stated at a public meeting that, on the 7th of October 1783, he baptized a poor journeyman shoemaker in the river Nen, a little beyond Dr Doddridge's chapel, in Northampton. Soon after, he joined the church under the pastoral care of the Rev. John Sutcliffe, but when the question of his receiving a call to the ministry came under discussion, the members expressed a doubt whether he possessed sufficient ability to make a useful minister, and the point was carried chiefly through the personal influence of the pastor. The sermon which he preached on this occa-

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sion, he described "as having been as crude and weak as anything could be, which is called, or has been called, a sermon." These engagements necessarily enlarged the circle of his studies, and he laid the libraries of all the friends around him under contribution. Among other methods which he pursued of improving his knowledge of languages, was that of reading the portion of Scripture selected for devotional exercises in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

Mr Old died, and Mr Carey took over his stock and business, and married his sister before he had attained the age of twenty. This imprudent union proved a severe clog on his exertions for more than twenty-five years. His illiterate wife, who possessed no feeling in unison with his own, was altogether unsuited for his companionship, and the great tenderness which always marked his conduct towards her, places the meekness and nobleness of his character in a strong light. On his marriage, he rented a neat cottage at Hakleton, the chief recommendation of which was the little garden attached to it, which he cultivated with great assiduity, and which flourished more vigorously than his business. Trade became dull, and though suffering from fever, which hung on him for eighteen months, he was obliged to travel from place to place to dispose of his stock and procure bread. His church and congregation at Barton were not able to raise enough to pay for the clothes worn out in their service. But he was rescued from actual destitution by the contributions of an affectionate brother, and a small collection made for him in his native village. With this aid he removed to the village of Piddington, where he selected a cottage with a garden, but it was situated in a swamp, and he was again attacked with ague

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and fever, which rendered him bald for the rest of his life.

In the beginning of 1786 he removed to Moulton, and took the charge of a small Dissenting interest. To this place he was attracted by the prospect of a school which had recently been relinquished. Few men have ever had less natural aptitude for this profession than Mr Carey. "When I kept school," he facetiously remarked, "it was the boys who kept me." He had no notion of management, and was never able to exercise any control over his pupils, who took personal liberties with him, which subverted all discipline. The unexpected return of the old master reduced his receipts to seven and sixpence a-week, and extinguished all hope of a livelihood from this source. The church at Moulton could only raise eleven pounds a-year, to which an addition of five pounds was made from some fund in London. For a minister of religion this was simple starvation, and he was obliged to betake himself to his former trade for a subsistence. "Once a fortnight," remarks his associate, Mr Morris, "Carey might be seen walking eight or ten miles to Northampton, with his wallet full of shoes on his shoulder, and then returning home with a fresh supply of leather." But he was a very indifferent shoemaker, and always entertained a most humble opinion of his own abilities in the craft. Some thirty years after this period, dining one day with the Governor-General, Lord Hastings, at Barrackpore, a general officer made an impertinent inquiry of one of the aide-de-camps, whether Dr Carey had not once been a shoemaker. He happened to overhear the conversation, and immediately stepped forward and said, "No, Sir; only a cobbler."

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Mr Carey's residence at Moulton, notwithstanding his pecuniary difficulties, was rendered agreeable by opportunities of mental cultivation, to which he had hitherto been a stranger. He engaged in a regular course of biblical study, and commenced that systematic distribution and rigid economy of time to which he adhered through life, and which enabled him to accomplish labours which appeared almost incredible. He enjoyed the advantage of the critical remarks on his pulpit exercises of the venerable Mr Hall, whose name is still fragrant in the churches, partly from the treatise we have alluded to, but chiefly through the incomparable genius of his son, Robert Hall. Mr Carey also improved his acquaintance with Dr Ryland, but the most important acquisition of this period was the friendship of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, the Baptist minister at Kettering, and subsequently the great champion of the mission. Mr Carey was unexpectedly requested to preach at a meeting of ministers. On descending from the pulpit, Mr Fuller grasped his hand, and expressed the delight he felt in finding so close a coincidence of their views, and his hope that they would become better acquainted with each other. Thus was commenced a cordial friendship between two great and congenial spirits, which was subsequently strengthened by their union in a noble enterprise, and the difficulties connected with it, and which became extinct only with the life of Mr Fuller twenty years after.

It was from the perusal of Cook's voyages, while instructing his pupils in geography, that Mr Carey was first led to contemplate the moral and spiritual degradation of the heathen, and to form the design of communicating the gospel to them. The idea took complete possession of his mind, and absorbed his thoughts. It was

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still uppermost when he was obliged to relinquish his school and fall back upon manual labour. Mr Fuller has related, that on going into his little workshop, he saw a large map suspended on the wall, consisting of several sheets of paper pasted together, on which he had noted down, in their respective places, all the information he had been able to gather regarding the national characteristics, the population, and the religion of the various countries then known. While engaged in making or mending shoes, his eye was frequently raised to the map, and his mind was employed in traversing the different regions of the globe, and devising plans for communicating the truths of Christianity to them. It was to this circumstance Mr Wilberforce alluded in the House of Commons, twenty years after, when urging Parliament to grant missionaries free access to India, he said,—“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 these views met with little encouragement from his own ministerial brethren. At a meeting of ministers held at this time at Northampton, Mr Carey proposed, as the topic of discussion, The duty of Christians to attempt the spread of the Gospel among heathen nations; when Mr Ryland, senior, sprung to his feet and denounced the proposition. “Young man,” said he, “sit down: when God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine.” Mr Fuller himself was startled by the novelty and the magnitude of the proposal, and described his feelings as resembling those of the infidel courtier in Israel, “If the Lord should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be?”

Nothing daunted by these repulses, Mr Carey em-



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bodied his views on the missionary enterprise in a pamphlet, which he shewed to Mr Fuller, Dr Ryland, and Mr Sutcliffe, and they advised him to revise it, more, however, with the hope of escaping from his importunities than with any serious desire of encouraging a project which appeared to them perfectly utopian. This pamphlet, which may be considered the germ of those missionary efforts which have now grown to the dimensions of a national undertaking, exhibited the extraordinary knowledge which Mr Carey had acquired of the history, geography, statistics, and creed of the various countries of the world. It exhibited not less the indomitable energy of his character; for while he was engaged in compiling it, his family was in a state bordering on starvation, and passed many weeks without animal food, and with but a scanty supply of bread.

In 1789, Mr Carey accepted an invitation from the church of Leicester, and removed to that town in his twenty-eighth year. But the poverty of the church obliged him again to have recourse to secular employment, and he made a second attempt to get up a school, but without success. At Leicester he was introduced to Dr Arnold, said to have been a "great lover of polite literature," and obtained free access to his library, which was rich in scientific works. Mr Carey was now in his element, in the full enjoyment of opportunities for cultivating his natural tastes, and prosecuting those researches, which he continued with great ardour in India. He also made the acquaintance of the Rev. Thomas Robinson, the pious and exemplary rector of St Mary's, and the author of "Scripture Characters." With him Mr Carey maintained an uninterrupted and cordial intercourse while he resided in Leicester, and a friendly correspondence when he re-

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moved to India. Mr Robinson one day asked him whether he approved of Dissenting ministers enlarging their congregations at the expense of the Established Church. Mr Carey replied, You are a Churchman, and I am a Dissenter; we must each endeavour to do good according to our light. At the same time, you may be assured that I had rather be the means of converting a scavenger that sweeps the streets than of proselytising the richest and best character in your denomination. Mr Carey considered the union of Church and State, and the establishment of religion by secular power, without warrant from Scripture, but his views, when in comparative obscurity, were always broad and liberal, and they became still more so when placed in a more conspicuous sphere of action. Of his labours at Leicester, Mr Fuller has left the following record:—"His zeal and unremitting labour in preaching the Word, not only in Leicester, but in the villages near it, endeared him to the friends of religion, and his thirst for learning rendered him respected by others. He has sometimes regretted to me his want of early education. 'I was so rusticated,' he would say, 'when a lad, that I am as if I could never recover myself.' Yet the natural energies of his mind, accompanied as they were with a generous, manly, and open disposition, together with an ingratiating behaviour towards men of every degree, soon rendered him respected, not only by those who attended his ministry, but by many other persons of learning and opulence."

These pastoral labours, however, did not relax Mr Carey's ardour in the cause of missions. The more he mused on it, the more the fire burned. For four years he had omitted no opportunity of urging it on his ministerial brethren. The aged and more influential con-