

Baptist Missionary Society History.

THE provision of an adequate, authoritative history of the Baptist Missionary Society was agreed upon two or three years ago by the General Committee of the Society as a highly desirable object and one to which some part of the Terjubilee Fund might well be allocated. The B.M.S. is the oldest of the modern societies. It has undertaken notable pioneering work in many fields. It has extensive enterprises in India, China, Africa and the West Indies, and still plays a most important part in missionary policy at home and abroad. It has, however, been singularly behindhand in the provision of a competent record of its work, and the lack of such a record becomes more and more serious as the years pass.

Most of the larger British Societies took advantage of their centenaries to secure for themselves careful and extended accounts based upon study of the documentary material in their archives and Minute Books. Richard Lovett prepared two substantial volumes for the London Missionary Society, and in addition a valuable biographical register of all missionaries was prepared. The subsequent more popular accounts of the L.M.S. by Silvester Horne and J. C. Harris have been largely based upon Lovett. For their Terjubilee next year the L.M.S. has commissioned the Rev. Norman Goodall to prepare a volume supplementary to Lovett and carrying his story through the past half century. In 1899 Dr. Eugene Stock produced a very important three-volume history of the Church Missionary Society. It was the product of many years of study and constant sharing in missionary administration. The British & Foreign Bible Society secured a five-volume history from the gifted William Canton in the early years of this century. Last came the Methodist Missionary Society with a lengthy history in five volumes by Professor G. G. Findlay and W. W. Holdsworth. The standard histories of other societies might be mentioned, but these will suffice. Beside the works mentioned, the B.M.S. Centenary Volume seems a poor thing. It is a series of essays on the different fields—essays of very varying style and uneven worth—and those who have used the supplementary tables will know that they are by no means always accurate.

The matter of is greater importance than many realise. A carefully documented history is of value not only to the Society itself, but also to the Christian Church generally and to the independent historian. A recent and pointed illustration of this

may be found by a study of the later volumes of Professor Latourette's great *History of the Expansion of Christianity*, and in particular its matchless bibliographies. In tracing the story of the last one hundred and fifty years Dr. Latourette has inevitably to depend to a very large extent on the historical material published by the different missionary bodies and churches. The way in which a particular group or denomination can figure in the main record must depend in large measure on the way in which the story of particular enterprises has been set down. British Baptists cannot complain if they are sometimes in danger of being overlooked, since they have not taken great trouble to record what has been done by their agents, or, if there is a record, it is too slight, popular or romantic to give confidence to an historian.

What material of quality does the B.M.S. possess? In 1842 F. A. Cox produced a two-volume history of the first half century of the mission. Cox was an able man and one who shared in the founding of London University. He had the advantage not only of a limited field, but also of access to the early records of the Society. Further, as a young man, he had met many of the leading figures. His account is careful and discriminating, but he wrote much too near the time to appreciate the full significance of what he was recording. John Clark Marshman's *Life and Times of Carey, Marshman, and Ward, embracing the History of the Serampore Mission*, first appeared in a two-volume edition in 1859. Marshman was a man of wide learning and ability. He had accompanied his father to Serampore as a boy of six and shared in the life of the historic settlement. He had thus unrivalled opportunities for securing material for his work which will always remain a most important source-book for a study of the work in India up to 1837, the year of Marshman's death. Subsequent studies of importance on early B.M.S. work in India have focused attention almost exclusively on Carey and an important series of biographies has been produced, of which those by George Smith, F. D. Walker, and, above all, Pearce Carey, should be mentioned. Apart from these studies not a great deal of work on B.M.S. foundations has been attempted. The present writer included a certain amount of new and formerly unpublished material in *The First Generation*, but the B.M.S. papers and letters are not easy of access and they need the attention of a trained archivist. It might well be considered whether, in more spacious times, an edition of the letters of Carey should not be attempted. It has long been recognised that a new full-length biography of Fuller is desirable, and substantial progress has been made with a collection of his letters, more than four hundred of which can still be traced, many of them apparently not known to or used by earlier biographers.

Of B.M.S. work in India since 1837 only the most scanty

records are available—a few biographies generally of poor quality, a history of Serampore College, Pearce Carey's *Dawn on the Kond Hills*, a score or so of pamphlets, and the recent *Ye are My Witnesses: the Work of the B.M.S. in India during One Hundred and Fifty Years*, Calcutta, 1942, which contains much most valuable material but needs setting against the wider background of the developments of the last century and a half in India and elsewhere.

The work of the B.M.S. in Jamaica has been fairly adequately recorded, as may be seen from the bibliographical notes in Latourette, Vol. V. There is still, however, a good deal of research required regarding Baptist work in the West Indian islands other than Jamaica. At one time this was of considerable proportions. Some record of Baptist enterprises in the East Indies will shortly appear in *South-East from Serampore*, Carey Press, 1944. Had it been available sooner it might have supplemented both the World Dominion Survey, *The Netherlands Indies*, 1935, and the sentence in Latourette, Vol. V., p. 279. For Africa there is no adequate account of the abortive Sierra Leone episode, and the Cameroons Mission appears almost solely in the two biographies of Saker. The Congo Mission has been relatively well written up, though there is now need for an historically objective volume relating the story to the opening up of Africa and giving references to documents, etc. A beginning has been made with the recording of the China Mission, thanks to the writings of E. W. Burt, the autobiography and biography of Timothy Richard, and a few smaller books, but the story needs treating on a more generous and connected scale, and, as will be seen by a reference to Latourette, Vol. VI., what there is needs to be better known.

To supply the gaps in B.M.S. history and to make a connected authoritative narrative of the whole is a very substantial task. So much preparatory spade-work has first to be done. At the request of the B.M.S. and with the painstaking help of Miss J. A. Booth, the present writer has undertaken a threefold task: (1) the compilation of a register of all those who have served as agents of the B.M.S., with brief biographical details—already some 1,600 names have been listed, and to these must be added several hundred wives, perhaps as many as a thousand, since in the early days of the mission the serious cost in human life among women caused frequent second and even third marriages; (2) a bibliography of printed material dealing with B.M.S. history; and (3) a list, so far as it can be compiled, of MS. sources, diaries, letters, etc., many of which are in private hands. The farther these enterprises are carried the greater are seen to be the dimensions of the task, to which they are but preliminaries. Both the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the London Missionary Society

have not only employed skilled staff to deal with their records, but have had valuable grants in aid from the Pilgrim Trust and other bodies, for their documents are seen to be of the greatest historical value. It is only in the West Indies and in Congo that, apart from the early episodes of struggle with the East India Company, our B.M.S. story is of vital importance to the secular historian. But for the Christian Church at large, and the Baptist section of it in particular, all that has been accomplished in and through the B.M.S. is of significance. It is to be hoped that the matters here referred to will have the constant interest and sympathetic co-operation of all Baptists.

ERNEST A. PAYNE.