

Carey and Serampore — Then and Now

IT is not without trepidation that I rise to address this assembly of Baptist historians today.¹ In this year in which we, and when I say we, I mean not Baptists alone, celebrate the bi-centenary of the birth of William Carey, it would be surprising if the subject of our paper were unconnected with his life and labours. That I have been asked to speak about him is no doubt due to my having returned comparatively recently from the place in which he spent the last thirty-four years of his life, so that I have the responsibility of linking your thoughts not simply with what Carey himself achieved and planned 150 years ago, but more particularly with the way in which his achievements have borne fruit in the 20th century, and his plans are still being carried out, though adapted to changing circumstances, in the India of our own day. I take it that I can assume a fairly detailed knowledge of the main events in the life of William Carey on the part of most members of the audience, especially as you will have been refreshing your memories during this year when so much has been written about him. I shall therefore consider it my first duty, as far as possible, to emphasize the way in which Serampore is still maintaining the ideals of the missionary pioneer who first made its name familiar throughout the Christian world.

One of the outstanding events in the calendar of Serampore College is the annual celebration on August 17th of the anniversary of the birth of the founder of the College. This year, of course, there will be a very special celebration to mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of Carey, but even in other years it is remarkable how many people, both Christian and non-Christian, take an interest in the events of the day. Every year a distinguished visitor, generally an authority on Bengali literature, is invited to address the students, who in this way are constantly reminded of the debt which the language of Bengal owes to the Englishman who made such an intensive study of it throughout most of his life, and yet who, as we shall see, found time to study deeply so many other Indian languages as well.

I said just now that there will be special celebrations this year at Serampore, since the bi-centenary of the birth of a College's founder is, in the nature of things, an event which does not occur very frequently. But August, 1961 will mark the culmination of a

series of celebrations at Serampore, reaching back to October of last year. The significance of October, 1960 is one which would appeal, I am sure, to Carey himself, even though it marks the jubilee of an event which occurred long after his own lifetime. For in October, 1910 there came into existence at Serampore what is still known as the H.T.D.—the Higher Theological Department. This title is perhaps as unfortunate as the expression “Higher Criticism” used by Biblical scholars, though there is no connection between the two. It evidently arose at a time when a distinction needed to be drawn between the new course of instruction leading to the B.D. degree, in which the medium of teaching was to be English, and, on the other hand, the Vernacular Theological Department, which had long been functioning in Serampore in order to supply the Baptist churches of Bengal with pastors and evangelists. The 1910 revival of learning at Serampore came about through the vision and energy of George Howells, who had been appointed Principal of Serampore in 1907, and who had been using the interval between his appointment and the inception of the department to arouse interest in the college both here and in America.

The charter granted by the King of Denmark in 1827 had never been used for the conferring of degrees, since the fortunes of both Serampore itself and of the college had declined during the last years of William Carey’s life, and his successors were not in a position to make good use of it, even had they been so inclined. The provisions of the charter had been perpetuated in the deed of transfer of the Danish colony of Fredericksnagore or Serampore to the East India Company in 1845, and were still in force in 1910.

In the interval, Calcutta University had been founded in 1857, and Serampore was one of the first colleges to become affiliated to it, along with Bishop’s College, which had been founded within a couple of years of Serampore, mainly as an Anglican theological seminary, though by the middle of the century it was also a centre for the teaching of the arts. Bishop Middleton, its founder, and the first Bishop of Calcutta, expressed his point of view in these words: “The time appears to have arrived when it is desirable that some missionary endeavours, at least, should have some connection with the Church establishment. The natives have a preference, all other things being equal, for that which is countenanced by authority; and this seems to point out the propriety of placing this establishment—Bishop’s College—within the bishop’s reach (I speak for myself and my successors), that they may in some measure superintend its proceedings, and make it apparent that the propagation of our religion is not a matter of so little interest with us as to be left entirely to persons whom none of the constituted authorities avow.”²

Serampore's affiliation to Calcutta University ceased in 1883, and was not renewed until 1911, under the leadership of Dr. Howells. It has been maintained from that time until the middle of last year, when the connection with Calcutta ceased, and Serampore became affiliated to the new University of Burdwan. By 1911, Dr. Howells had gathered a distinguished staff around him, consisting mainly of theological lecturers from this country, of whom Dr. Theodore Robinson still remains with us to remember Serampore's fresh start. But Howells was not satisfied with a purely Baptist staff. Ever since 1910, Serampore has sought to serve the whole Christian community in India, with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church. And even there, Serampore has unintentionally provided a leader, in that an early member of the staff of the re-constituted college eventually left the Syrian Orthodox Church and submitted to the Roman allegiance, under which he was consecrated as Bishop Mar Ivanios!

This rather full reference to the events of 1910 and 1911 perhaps requires the excuse that it serves to link together the period of Serampore's foundation under William Carey, and that of its present expansion and development, a development which would have been impossible without the fresh infusion of life which took place fifty years ago. In so far as Serampore is now able in some measure to fulfill the ideals of its founder, it is doing so under the impetus, not so much of the original charter, which so long remained a dead letter, as of the Serampore College Act of the Bengal Legislature, passed in 1918, when Dr. Howells was for a time co-opted as a special member of the Legislative Assembly.

I

As we go on from here to consider the way in which Serampore is still reflecting the spirit of its founder, we may first of all think of its all-India range of influence. Carey refused to allow his horizons to be limited by the flat swamps of the Ganges Delta in which he lived. He was constantly pressing outwards from Serampore into remote parts of India, and even beyond the confines of that country. As far back as 1803 Carey and his colleagues were thinking in terms of the provision of the Bible for the people of all parts of northern India. Writing to Dr. Ryland on 14th December of that year, Carey says: "We have it in our power, if our means would do for it, in the space of about fifteen years to have the word of God translated and printed in all the languages of the East. . . . The languages are the Hindostanee, Maharastia, Oreea, Telingua, Bhotan, Burmah, Chinese, Corkin Chinese, Tonquinese and Malay."³ In a letter written to the Society at home in April of the following year, the missionaries mention the seven major languages

spoken in India in their day, namely (to use the more familiar modern names), Bengali, Hindi, Oriya, Marathi, Telugu, Kannada and Tamil.⁴ On a map which was later published to accompany No. XXII of the Periodical Accounts, there are shown, in addition to the languages already mentioned, Malayalam, Gujerati, Sikh (i.e. Gurmukhi), Persian, Kashmiri and Sinhalese. Long before this, before he had been five years in India, Carey was already taking an interest in this last-named language, despite the distance of Ceylon from Bengal, observing that "even the language of Ceylon has so much affinity with that of Bengal, that out of twelve words, with the little Shanscrit that I know, I can understand five or six."⁵ If we turn our attention for a moment a few hundred miles beyond Ceylon, we can see from a letter which Carey wrote to his sisters on July 23rd, 1812, how he turned the most unlikely circumstances into opportunities for the furtherance of his translation work: "A particular providence has put it into our power to get a version of the Gospels, at least, in the language of the Maldiva Isles, by means of a native of them who is in Calcutta jail." In the previous year we find him planning to sum up the fruits of his linguistic labours in these words taken from the Periodical Accounts for 1811: "To secure the gradual perfection of the translations, I have also in mind, and indeed have long been collecting material for 'An Universal Dictionary of the Oriental Languages derived from the Sungskrit.' I mean to take the Sungskrit of course, as the groundwork, and to give the different acceptations of every word, with examples of their application in the manner of Johnson, and then to give the synonyms in the different languages derived from the Sungskrit, with the Hebrew and Greek terms answering thereto." This was an ambition which was never realized by Carey, and which has apparently never been emulated by any of his successors.

The interest of Carey's colleagues, Joshua Marshman, in the Chinese language is well known, and it was one in which he was encouraged by Carey himself, who had, even before Marshman began studying Chinese in 1806, seriously considered sending his son Felix, together with another missionary, by the overland route to China. "It is not improbable," he wrote to Fuller, "that Mr. Mardon and my son Felix may go; their way would be to Dacca, then up the Brahmapootra, through Assam, and thus to China." Marshman's son and biographer expressed regret that his father spent so much time in the study of Chinese. His regret may perhaps have been coloured to some extent by memories of his own early wrestlings with that language. Those who have spent any time in studying Chinese will sympathise with young John, who at the tender age of thirteen was already able to recite five books of the Analects of Confucius by heart, and at the same public examination in which he performed this feat he also "held a disputation in the

Chinese language on the following thesis : ' The Chinese language is not more difficult of acquisition than other languages ' ."⁶

While we may deplore the methods used by the early missionaries in educating their children (Felix Carey was also reasonably proficient in Chinese at the time of the aforementioned examination), we must acknowledge that their motive—the dissemination of Christianity throughout eastern Asia—was a laudable one. Leaving China aside, we may note how Serampore in so many cases was the centre from which missionaries were sent out, not only to mission stations whose names are familiar to us as Baptists—Jessore, Gaya, Monghyr, Delhi, but to many parts of India which have long since been occupied by missionaries of other denominations who were able to build upon the foundations laid by Carey's men. In 1819 a map was printed to accompany the Periodical Accounts, and on it were shown 25 stations occupied by members of the Serampore Mission—ten of them in Bengal, seven in northern India, as well as Colombo and Galle Point in Ceylon and three places in the East Indies.

From Surat on the west coast, now occupied by Irish Presbyterians, to Cherrapunji near the eastern border of India, in which Welsh Presbyterians have long been at work, the map of India may be said to be dotted with places to which men were sent in those early days from Serampore. Cherrapunji was, in fact, the last of the Serampore mission-stations to be opened in Carey's life-time, only about two years before his death, at a time when the British conquest of the Khasi Hills brought it within convenient reach of Serampore, for which it served as a hill-station.

The headquarters of the National Christian Council of India are at present at Nagpur, a city whose political importance has declined in recent years with the re-organization of the Indian states, but which retains its prominence as a centre of communications for the whole country. This city, too, appears to have been first evangelised from Serampore. A brief account of the circumstances will serve to illustrate how Carey's influence reached out into remote parts of India. An officer of the East India Company, Lt. William Moxon, was stationed at Barrackpore, opposite Serampore, in 1805, and was shortly afterwards transferred to Nagpur, where he combined his military duties with evangelistic work, offering his services to the Serampore missionaries. He studied Marathi and distributed copies of the first Marathi Bible translation made by Carey, who had never visited the Mahratta area, but who was nevertheless appointed Professor of Marathi at the Government college at Fort William, Calcutta, and the author, in 1805, of a grammar of that language. Moxon was able to visit Serampore in 1812, taking two months over the journey, and before returning he was baptized by Carey, along with Phoebe Hobson, Carey's niece, whom he married shortly afterwards. . . . It is significant of the attitude of these early missionaries

towards Indian Christians that Moxon applied for an Indian helper who became the first pastor of the newly-formed Church at Nagpur. Ram Mohan, whom Carey sent from Serampore, is described as "a converted Brahmin of the highest caste, who, when a heathen, had set fire to the funeral pyre on which his living mother was consumed to ashes."⁷ There must have been many evangelically-minded army officers who were able, like Moxon, to evangelize hitherto untouched areas of India in the course of their military service.

How, it may be asked, is Serampore fulfilling a similar function in the 20th century? There is no longer the same need for a group of missionaries, based on one single station, as in those early pioneering days, but Serampore is once again the 'mother' of a large family, though at present it is a family of twenty colleges affiliated to the theological university instituted by Dr. Howells.

Corresponding to the map issued by the early Serampore missionaries is the map produced more recently by the Senate of Serampore to show how these affiliated colleges are distributed throughout India. They stretch from Ahmedabad and Poona in the west to Cherrapunji and Calcutta in the east, from Saharanpur and Bareilly in the north to Trivandrum and Nagercoil in the south. More than half of them are situated in south India, taking south India to be the area in which the C.S.I. has its churches. So here again we see the extensive range of Serampore's influence, in a form which could not have been foreseen by William Carey. It may not, however, be too fanciful to see the influence of the early Serampore missionaries indirectly at work even here. The modern university functions of Serampore as an institution which maintains high standards of academic training in theology by means of its L.Th., B.D., and M.Th. examinations, spring from the Serampore College Act of 1918. Prior to that, the Serampore B.D. was granted only to students who were actually studying at Serampore. With the formation of the Senate, however, came the principle of affiliation, though, strangely enough, this is not actually provided for in the Serampore College Act. The first colleges to take advantage of this arrangement, in 1919, were the United Theological College, Bangalore, Pasumalai Theological Seminary in S. India and Bishop's College, Calcutta. The system of affiliation was a natural enough one to follow in India, where it had been in existence ever since the three senior modern universities of India were founded in 1857. In that year, as we have seen, Serampore was one of the first colleges to be affiliated to Calcutta University, whose jurisdiction in those days extended to the north-western extremity of British rule in India, so that St. John's College, Agra, was also one of the first colleges to be affiliated to Calcutta. This system, which was so alien to the tradition of the ancient British universities, was no doubt borrowed from the pattern of the newly-established London

University. In any event, one of those who had most to do with the pattern on which the universities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay were founded was John Clark Marshman, one of the original members of the Council of Serampore College.

II

A second way in which Serampore is today reflecting the spirit of its founders is through the ecumenical spirit which it displays—ecumenical not only in the far-ranging extent of its influence throughout India and even beyond, but also in the sense in which the word is now more generally used. In addressing a gathering of Baptist historians, it is of course quite unnecessary for me to remind you that those who founded Serampore were sent out by the Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel amongst the Heathen. Just as Baptists of the 20th century are not all cast in the same mould, but hold differing views on such matters as Church Union, so was it also with those early missionaries. The matter on which they held the most pronounced diversity of views, and on which they altered their stand more than once, was the issue of closed or open communion. On this question the views of Carey, in accordance with those of his Midland fellow-ministers, were less liberal than those of his colleagues who, it must be remembered, preceded him to Serampore. When, on his joining them there, the Serampore Church was constituted, it was on the basis of closed communion. In 1805 Carey was persuaded to relax the earlier regulation, and even the wife of the senior Anglican chaplain in Bengal, Mrs. Brown, used to partake of communion at the Mission Church, at the hands of one or other of the Serampore brethren. Ward characteristically writes in his journal: "I rejoice that the first Baptist church in Bengal has shaken off that apparent moroseness of temper which has so long made us appear unlovely in the sight of the Christian world. I am glad that this church considers *real religion* alone as the ground of admission to the Lord's table. With regard to a church state, a stricter union may be required; but to partake of the Lord's Supper worthily, it requires only that a man's heart be right towards God."⁸

This position was not, however, maintained for long. In 1811, Marshman, influenced by Fuller, pressed for a return to the former practice, much to Ward's disappointment. Ward gave way to what was now the majority opinion, and records in his journal: "Mr. Pritchett preached in the morning; after which Brother Marshman interdicted him the Lord's Table." I need hardly say that open communion is now the practice at the Mission Church in Serampore, but I have no idea when the change came about.

As has already been remarked, for the last fifty years the theo-

logical staff at Serampore has been recruited from a wide variety of denominations. At present the Principal is a Presbyterian, and of the other members of the staff, four are Baptists, two of them B.M.S. missionaries, two are members of the Syrian Orthodox Church, one a member of the Mar-Thoma Church, one a member of the Church of South India, and one an English Methodist. Incidentally, it may be of interest to note that at the meeting of the Negotiating Committee for Church Union in North India held in Jabalpur in December, 1959, four of the negotiators were members of the Serampore teaching staff.

When the Senate of Serampore was formed, it was laid down in the Serampore College Act that it should contain, in addition to the President (i.e., the Principal of the College), not more than three and not less than one member of each of the following Christian denominations: Anglican, Baptist, Congregationalist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and Syrian. Since that time Church Union, especially in South India, has made it difficult to follow this rule with exactness.

The students who receive their training at Serampore come from all the non-Roman communions in India, including Anglicans, though there is still a tendency for Baptists to predominate. This is at the present time due not so much to a preponderance of candidates from churches connected with the B.M.S. as to the proximity of large numbers of Baptists in the hill-areas of Assam, where American Baptist missionaries are at work. During the last session, apart from post-graduate students, there were 11 Baptists, of whom only two were from our B.M.S. areas, one from Ceylon and one from Pakistan (none, it will be observed, from India), four members of the C.S.I., three members of the U.C.N.I. (Presbyterian), two Lutherans, one Methodist, and one each from the Orthodox and Mar-Thoma Syrian churches. It is unusual to have so few students from the south, and I believe it would be unfortunate if Serampore continues to cater, as it has for the last year or two, so greatly for the north-eastern corner of India.

The great variety of languages represented in the college—15 among the 23 students just mentioned—necessitates the use of English as the one common language understood by all. This has its drawbacks, as it means that far less practical work can be done by the students during their period of training than would be possible in a multi-lingual area such as Bangalore, where the students can almost all be in touch with congregations speaking their own mother-tongue. It must also be recognized that the college at Serampore is situated in a part of India where the Church is very weak, and where, despite a long history of missionary endeavour, the proportion of Christians in the population is far smaller than in the south. At the last (1951) census, the Christians, Protestant and Roman

combined, formed 7% of the population of West Bengal, and in Hooghly district, in which Serampore is situated, the proportion was smaller still, being 8 per 10,000 of the population.

Despite the apparent narrowness of their outlook with regard to the practice of open communion, a narrowness which was to a great extent a reflection of the viewpoint of those in England whom they were representing, the early Serampore missionaries were desirous of co-operating as fully as possible with those who were engaged like them in Christian activity in India. Their relations with Anglicans, such as Brown, Buchanan and Martyn, all of whom were their neighbours in Serampore, were very friendly, and the first two Bishops of Calcutta were on good terms with Carey and his colleagues. Middleton, the first of these, was sympathetic with the aims and activities of the Serampore trio, and Bishop's College was founded by him on the model of Serampore.

Middleton was succeeded in 1823 by Reginald Heber who, unfortunately, survived a mere two-and-a-half years, dying on a pastoral visit to south India. Writing to Carey and Marshman in 1824, Heber said: "Would to God, my honoured brethren, the time were arrived, when not only in heart and hope, but visibly, we shall be one fold, as well as under one shepherd! . . . If we are spared to have any future intercourse, it is my desire, if you permit, to discuss with both of you, in the spirit of meekness and conciliation, the points which now divide us, convinced, that if a re-union of our churches could be effected, the harvest of the heathen would ere long be reaped, and the work of the Lord would advance among them with a celerity of which we have now no experience."⁹

The cordial relations with Christians of other denominations extended even to missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church. Marshman received much help in his Chinese studies from a Roman missionary who had spent ten years in Peking. As the latter spoke no English, they communicated with each other in Latin! In fact, Marshman suggested to Ryland that prospective missionaries should be prepared to speak and write Latin in order to communicate with Roman Catholic missionaries.

It is, of course, in connection with their plans for the founding of the college that we see the clearest evidence of the broadmindedness of the early missionaries, who from the beginning wished it to be an institution mainly for training young men for the ministry, not simply of the Baptist churches, but of all Christian denominations. Although in recent years great stress has been laid on Carey's determination to throw the colleges open to Indians of every caste and creed, a determination expressed in the words: "But while this college secures to Christian youth instructions capable of drawing forth all the powers of the mind, it should by no means stop here; it should afford instruction to Native Youths from any part of

India. If none but Christian youth are admitted on the foundation of the College, still its exercises and lectures should be accessible to all," yet a perusal of the prospectus issued in July 1818 shows that the primary intention was to provide training for those who were to become the future ministers and missionaries of the Gospel in India. The main objects there stated may be summarized as follows :

1. The instruction of all students in Sanskrit, and of some in Arabic, Persian and Chinese;
2. The expounding of the Hindu religious texts;
3. Biblical instruction for all students;
4. Training in arts and science, particularly in history, geography, astronomy and natural history;
5. Training in school management.
6. The instruction of some better-qualified students in English, and of some of these in Latin and Greek;
7. The training of certain students for the ministry;
8. The translation of English works into Sanskrit.

All the above objects appear to have in view the instruction of Indian, Anglo-Indian or European Christians, mainly in languages, partly with a view to the translation of the Scriptures and partly in order to bring about a fuller understanding on the part of Christians in India and elsewhere of the religious beliefs of the Indians themselves. It is surely in line with this primary missionary function of the college rather than from purely secular motives, that the prospectus states : "The College shall admit such Hindoo and Mussulman Youth as wish to enlarge their minds, to its various lectures without restriction." At the present time, under the pressure of forces which were not at work in Carey's day, there is no longer the same proportionate emphasis on the training for the ministry and the enlargement of mind of Hindu and Mussulman youth. The latest college report states that in the 1959-60 session there were 991 arts and science students, of whom 40 were Christians, as against 24 theological students.

III

It is arising out of this point that mention must be made of another feature of the pioneer work of Carey and his colleagues, namely, their progressive views on the role of the Indian Christians in the evangelization of their own country, a viewpoint which has been characteristic of Serampore throughout its history.

Within three years of his arrival in Serampore, Ward was emphasizing this principle in his letters home : "It will be vain to

expect that the Gospel will ever spread widely in this country, till God so blesses the means as that *native men* shall be raised up, who will carry the despised doctrine . . . into the very teeth of the brahmins . . . I have constantly made it a point of recommending the making of native preachers as soon as possible; and I hope we may soon see two or three, who are at least more able and eloquent than some good men who are employed in England.”¹⁰ John Clark Marshman, writing half a century later deplored the fact that no systematic effort had been made by missionary societies in his own day to carry out these principles. Again, in 1805, the missionaries reiterate the same point in their basic statement of missionary principles: “It is only by means of native preachers we can hope for the universal spread of the Gospel through this immense continent. Europeans are too few, and their subsistence costs too much, for us ever to hope that they can possibly be the instruments of the universal diffusion of the Word among so many millions.”¹¹ In their review of the Mission in the Periodical Accounts, December, 1817, the same point is made, and a parallel drawn with the situation facing the Early Church: “European brethren, indeed, while absolutely necessary to planting the Gospel in India, far more resemble, in their work and their value, the great Evangelists who went forth from Judea—Mark, Silas, Timothy, Titus and others; whose business it was to publish the word, plant churches, set things in order, and from among the native converts, ordain elders in every city. True, they are not, like them, endued with miraculous gifts; but their superior knowledge of the gospel, their steadiness and energy of mind, supply precisely what is lacking in native converts. . . . And whether one brother thus acting as the directing intelligence to twenty native brethren, accustomed to the climate, and thoroughly acquainted with the idiom, habits and ideas of their countrymen, would not be likely to do more than two European brethren alone, it is easy to judge. Twenty European brethren, placed in as many different provinces of India, and thus encircled with native brethren, would go far, in a course of years, towards diffusing that general light throughout the whole of the continent, which might prepare the way for the coming of the Redeemer’s kingdom in its fulness and glory.”¹²

In the prospectus for the new college, issued in 1818, this same emphasis occurs, as we should expect: “If ever the gospel stands in India, it must be by native being opposed to native in demonstrating its excellence above all other systems.” Yet long before that prospectus was issued, as far back as 1811, three days after Carey’s 50th birthday, we find the missionaries already planning, and indeed putting into practice, precisely the same pattern of training up native Indian leadership as was set forth in detail in their plans

for the college : " It has long, therefore, occurred to some of us, that the training up of a number of youths to the study of the Greek and Hebrew languages, and of the languages of India, almost from their infancy, would be an auxiliary in the work, the value of which time alone can fully demonstrate . . . A Seminary for training up youths so as to fit them for the work of translations in the various languages of Asia has therefore been for some time in our contemplation . . . We have therefore laid the foundation of such a seminary at Serampore, where youths are instructed in the Greek, Hebrew and Latin languages, while they are acquiring and perhaps conversing in the languages in which they may probably have to examine the translation of the word of God . . . The number of youths in this course of tuition, is at present ten, of whom, six belong to the family at Serampore. The eldest of these is eighteen and the youngest nine. All of them have commenced the study of Latin; five of them are studying Greek, and four Hebrew. One of the latter has also been reading Syriac these three years past." ¹³

Carey would no doubt be shocked to find, if he were able to return to Serampore, how sadly the emphasis on ancient languages has declined. By his emphasis on the Indian vernacular and on Sanskrit, as against English, Carey was thought to have misjudged the temper of 19th century India. Certainly at the present time there is a swinging of the pendulum away from the former emphasis on English, and the vernaculars are coming into their own again. But in the new (1960) B.D. syllabus, what will seem to many to be a retrograde step has been taken, in that candidates may now obtain the B.D. Degree without being required to pass in a Greek paper in the examination. Fifty years ago, when the B.D. course was introduced, Syriac was regularly offered, and both Hebrew and Greek were required. Hebrew fell by the way some years ago, and now Greek is beginning to lose its grip. It is some compensation to know that one of the B.D. candidates who has just completed his course took Sanskrit—the first at Serampore for a number of years.

The high standards of linguistic attainment which Carey and his colleagues set before them in planning Serampore College were a reflection of the exacting demands which they made upon themselves whenever it was a question of translating the Scriptures into the various languages of India.

Among the ancient and valuable printed books which are preserved in the library at Serampore, now at last provided with an air-conditioning plant, are many volumes of the Bible in various Indian and other Eastern languages, monuments to the industry of Carey and his colleagues. But there are volumes which antedate those early translations and which are, so to speak, the tools which enabled the translators to do their work. One of the most fascinating of these is

a worn and annotated copy of Walton's *Polyglott* (the annotations are mainly in the neat and meticulous hand of W. H. Denham, Principal of Serampore just over 100 years ago). Is this perhaps the copy which Carey himself used? In a letter to the Society written only a fortnight after landing in India, Carey wrote: "It will be of very great service to us if the society can send out a Polyglott Bible by the next conveyance. Ram Boshoo is a good Persian scholar, and it will certainly help us much."¹⁴ The Committee replied as promptly as one might expect in those days, on August 4th, 1794: "We wish to send this off if possible, with the Polyglott Bible (price seven guineas)—the Malayan Testament, Lowth's Isaiah, etc."¹⁵ More than two years later Carey acknowledged the receipt of Parkhurst's Greek and Hebrew Lexicons (Marshman's copy of Parkhurst's Hebrew Lexicon is still in the college library), but feared that the Polyglott must now be lost. Fortunately his fears proved ungrounded, for on June 22nd, 1797, nearly three years after it had been sent from England, Carey wrote to say that the Polyglott had arrived, together with Lowth's Isaiah. The latter may not now be considered the last word on Isaiah, but at that time it must have embodied some of the latest Old Testament scholarship by one who is still noted for his pioneer work on the nature of Hebrew poetic literature.

In December of the same year as the Polyglott arrived, while Carey was still in the jungles of Mudnabatty, two years before Marshman and Ward arrived at Serampore, we find him directing a number of questions regarding the correct translation of the Old Testament to Dr. Ryland, and referring not simply to the Hebrew text, but to that of the ancient versions. How many of his successors in Biblical translation work in India have been as conscientious as he was in determining the original form of the text and the true rendering of it? The wonder is not that Carey failed to anticipate the views of the later revisers of the Old Testament, but that he made so conscientious an attempt to employ the best scholarship of his day in the service of the Church in Bengal, which by the end of the 18th century could scarcely be said to exist at all, except in the purpose of God.

Was it perhaps this lack of any visible result of his labours in these early days that drew forth from Carey those frequent cries of despair which we encounter in his letters, a despair and depression of spirit seemingly so unjustified on our view of his achievements as we look back across the past 150 years? One example from many that might be chosen may suffice—an extract from a letter written by Carey to his sisters on November 23rd, 1801: "Indeed I have been often so much depressed that I have concluded myself to be the real cause why this Mission has not been more successful, because it would be inconsistent with the character of God to give

a blessing to the labours of one who lives so distant from Himself and would appear to the world to be a sanctioning of indolence and disregard to His honour and his most holy commandments."

In the letter to Ryland already referred to, containing his enquiries about the translation of the Old Testament, he goes on to say: "I have been thus particular because I consider the importance of having the translation as just as possible. If an individual draws wrong conclusions, or false doctrines from Scripture, they may be refuted or corrected by recurring to the words of Scripture itself and even a false translation in a country like England could not be productive of lasting mischief, because the Hebrew Scriptures may be consulted and the error detected: but here a mistake would be like poison at the fountain head."¹⁶ A few years later, Marshman records in his journal the way in which the Serampore missionaries sought to ensure as much accuracy in their translation as could humanly be expected: "We are now beginning a new edition of the Testament. . . . We have agreed that a proof sheet shall be given to each brother in the mission a week before it be worked off, that we may collect all the advantages which may arise from any one's reading and observation into one focus. Brother Carey and I also intend, if the Lord permit, to go through every verse as carefully as we are able, one reading greek and the other bengalee."¹⁷

Serampore is no longer a centre of Bible translation in the same way as it was 150 years ago, but evidence that a contribution towards such translations is still being made there may be seen in the presence at Serampore during this last session of two young men taking an intensive course of Hebrew in order better to fit themselves for the work of Old Testament translation in Nepali and Santali.

The men of Serampore were ahead of their day where Biblical translation and careful scholarship were concerned, but there were also other ways in which the stand they took was more progressive than that of their contemporaries. An early problem which they had to face was that of naming their converts. In August, 1801 they decided not to alter the names of Indian Christians on baptism, partly because they were Baptists and therefore repudiated the idea of "christening," but mainly on the Biblical ground that names of heathen origin were retained in the New Testament Church. Whether under Carey's influence or not, it still appears to be the practice in Bengal for Christians to have non-Biblical names, whereas in the south the opposite practice is observed.

On the question of caste-distinctions among Christians the Serampore missionaries were uncompromising from the beginning. To quote John Clark Marshman: "On the baptism of the first brahmin, Mr. Carey and his colleagues were called to fix the rule of practice on this point at the celebration of the Lord's Supper,

and they resolved to exterminate every vestige of caste from the Christian community they were rearing up, and the brahmin received the bread and wine after the carpenter Krishnu."¹⁸ Some years earlier, before coming to Serampore, Carey had already been in correspondence on this subject with the Lutheran missionaries in the neighbourhood of Madras, and had been told by Gericke, one of their number, "With respect to cast, the converts conform to the customs of their cast in not eating with those, or of what has been prepared by those who are of no cast."¹⁹

The opposition of the missionaries to the practice of sati or widow-burning is too well known to need emphasizing here. What now seems so hard to believe is that there were those, even in 1829, who sought to defend the practice, one to which Carey had drawn the attention of Lord Wellesley as far back as 1805. Seldom could Carey have been happier in the exercise of his position as official Government translator than on that Sunday in December, 1829 when he wrote out the translation of the regulation prohibiting sati. And yet, even now, 130 years later, one still comes across authentic eye-witness accounts of sati being practised in remote parts of India, so firm a hold has Hinduism on the minds of the Indian masses.

Carey's scientific interests were wide enough to embrace not only agriculture and horticulture, as might be expected of one with his country upbringing, an interest which led to his founding the Agri-Horticultural Society of India in 1820, and to his being elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society in 1823, but also included geology and astronomy. A few years ago there was discovered at Serampore a collection of what at first appeared to be some odd pieces of stone, covered with earth and apparently worthless. But an American missionary with a scientific turn of mind cleaned up the stones, which were then seen to be geological specimens, possibly those which were mentioned in Carey's will as a bequest to the college. There is, however, another possible explanation for the presence of this collection, since the annual report of the college for 1822 mentions that a "cabinet of minerals" had been purchased on behalf of the college for the sum of £45. In any case, the collection of stones still stands in the museum at Serampore as evidence of the wide scientific interests of those earlier missionary pioneers exiled to the stoneless alluvial plains of Bengal. That Carey was keen to take advantage of opportunities of widening his own scientific knowledge is evident from a letter which he wrote to his father (December 1st, 1802) in which he mentions that he was in the habit of attending "the Philosophical and Chymical lecture" given by his colleague Dr. Dinwiddie on the Thursday evenings when he was on his weekly visits to Calcutta to teach at the Fort William College.

A more ambitious scientific interest which is also mentioned in the 1822 college report is the plan to establish a medical school at

Serampore: "The Committee in November last addressed a petition on this subject to the Most Noble the Governor-General in Council, mentioning their design of establishing a European Professor of Medicine in Serampore College and respectfully requesting the assistance of Government in meeting the expense. To this petition Government were pleased to reply that they thought the establishment of a European Medical Professor in the College might be productive of great good to the country, and that when a suitable man was procured, they would take their request for assistance in meeting the request into favourable consideration. Encouraged by this generous assurance, the Committee have written home for a man who shall unite sound medical knowledge to sterling piety and a regard for the welfare of India." The plan did not succeed, though the project appears to have been revived in the earlier years of Dr. Howells' principalship. With the existence of Vellore and Ludhiana there is no longer a need for yet another Christian medical college on the same scale in Bengal, and in any case, there is inadequate land available at Serampore for any such expansion.

The first missionaries were men of wider vision than their successors who, in 1875, sold much of the college land to the India Jute Mill. Those who are now planning for the future of the college, however, are concerned to see that the best possible use is made of the land still remaining, and of the buildings erected by Carey together with those of a later date. It is planned that the main building shall in the near future be adapted to house not only the library, with its ancient and modern books, but also the theological department, with perhaps the office of the Senate of Serampore in addition, while the main arts and science classrooms will be in a separate block, though remaining a part of the one college under the one Principal and Council.

The present generation at Serampore can certainly not be said to have forgotten the rock from whence it was hewed, but it is also conscious that regard must be paid to the needs of future generations as well as to the traditions of those who have gone before. We, together with them, might well conclude with the words of William Ward in the year in which the College was founded: "That still Serampore may be Thine, that from thence for centuries to come the word of God may go forth, and 'run and be glorified.' Oh, let it be a house for God as long as a single wall shall be left standing, essentially contributing year by year to the grand result—the conversion of India."²⁰

NOTES

¹ Address given to the Annual Meeting of the Baptist Historical Society on May 1st, 1961.

² *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward*, by J. C. Marshman, 1859, Vol. II, p. 235.

³ *Periodical Accounts*, Vol. II, p. 457.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 536.

⁵ *Periodical Accounts*, Vol. I, p. 348.

⁶ *Periodical Accounts*, Vol. III, p. 459.

⁷ *Oriental Baptist*, March, 1855.

⁸ Marshman, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 215.

⁹ Marshman, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 293.

¹⁰ Marshman, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 182f.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 229.

¹² *Periodical Accounts*, Vol. VI, p. 298.

¹³ *Periodical Accounts*, Vol. IV, p. 379.

¹⁴ *Periodical Accounts*, Vol. I, p. 66.

¹⁵ *Periodical Accounts*, Vol. I, p. 81.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 396.

¹⁷ *Periodical Accounts*, Vol. II, p. 413.

¹⁸ Marshman, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 177.

¹⁹ *Periodical Accounts*, Vol. I, p. 432.

²⁰ Marshman, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 191.

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