

Kettering 1792 and Philadelphia, 1814:

THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH BAPTISTS UPON THE FORMATION OF AMERICAN BAPTIST FOREIGN MISSIONS 1790-1814 (2)

OF all the contacts we have mentioned, none was as powerful as the presence in America from 1793 onwards of a man who knew not only Carey and Thomas, but also the committee in England. Indeed he had been elected a member of that Committee on March 20th, 1793, before he sailed to America in the autumn.¹

It was while he was preaching with a view to succeeding Dr. Ryland at College Lane, Northampton, that he went over to the ministers' meeting at Kettering in October. It was a night he never forgot, and in after years would say about his subscription to the Mission: "I rejoice over that half-guinea more than over all I have given in my life besides."²

Staughton attended the farewell meetings for Carey at Leicester on March 20th, 1793, and was there elected a member of the Committee. Andrew Fuller had written to Sutcliff, suggesting that Sutcliff and Thomas should lodge in Kettering on the Monday, and then "ride with him (Thomas) and Staughton to Leicester on Tuesday."³ The next day he wrote to Mr. Gotch at Kettering, adding as an afterthought:

"P.S. Please to tell Sally to send by Mr. Staughton Mission book wh. lies in the book case."⁴

On the Sunday following the meeting at Leicester, Staughton commended the mission at Olney. The schoolmaster, Mr. Teedon, wrote in his diary:

"Mar. 24, 1793, Sun.—I went & heard Mr. Storton at Mr. Sutcliff's Mtg. give a very affecting acct. of the progress of the gospel among the hindows under the ministry of Mr. Thomas, and he and Mr. Carey were to be here and soon embark for their mission after a collection."⁵

Though this was the last meeting that Staughton had with Carey in the flesh, he never ceased to promote the idea of foreign missions, and remained in contact with Carey over many years. Writing on Nov. 25th, 1817 to Staughton, Carey could say with sincerity:

"I have omitted writing to you till I am ashamed: yet it has not arisen from indifference to you, but from absolute inability for want of time . . . You are dear to me, and have been ever since we first met together, a little before my first sailing to this country."⁶

Staughton, having pleaded ill-health for his refusal of the College Lane Church, arrived in America in the autumn of 1793, eventually settling at Georgetown, S.C., for eighteen months. Though we know little of his activities in the South, perhaps it is not without significance that in 1794 the Charleston Association awoke to missionary needs by organising a General Concert of Prayer to be held on the first Tuesday of January, April, July and October, the object of which was to unite with men from different denominations at home and abroad for "the revival of religion among Christians; the propagation and success of the Gospel among the heathen; and the conversion of the Jews to Christianity."⁷

It was because of his dislike of the slavery in the South, that he moved to New York, and eventually to Bordenton, New Jersey, in 1795. This move was made easier by the help of his good friend Dr. William Rogers, who must have rejoiced at knowing someone who knew the missionaries intimately, and was also a member of Pearce's Church in Birmingham. At Staughton's ordination service Dr. Rogers "delivered a very suitable and able discourse from Mark 16:15. Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."⁸ In 1798 Staughton moved to Burlington Academy, just across the river from Philadelphia, and in 1805 became the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, which prospered greatly under his ministry. In 1811 he joined with 91 of his members to form the Sansom Street Baptist Church, remaining their pastor till 1822, when he became principal of the Columbian College in Washington D.C. It was during his stay in Philadelphia that Staughton's work of promoting the cause of Baptist Foreign Missions was done.⁹

In the letter dated May 2nd, 1807, Staughton thanked the Society for its "token of respect."¹⁰ What form this took it is impossible to discover, but we may perhaps assume that it was some monetary reward for his services to the Mission during his stay in America. The Society had many things for which to thank him. He had taken his membership of the Committee seriously, and from the first advocated the support of Carey by Baptist and other friends in America.

To the first missionaries who went out to India via America, Staughton was a trusted friend, whom they quickly realised was a strong advocate of missions in America. Mr. Chamberlain, writing from America on Aug. 3rd, 1802, says Staughton:

“ interests himself much in the prosperity of Zion, partakes of a missionary spirit, and stands as a witness against the negligence of many in this country who profess Christianity. At several Associations he has proposed that something should be done for the spread of the gospel among the heathen, and though hitherto it has been in vain, yet he renews his applications every year, and I hope he will finally succeed. His object is to establish a society in this place to co-operate with the Baptist Missionary Society in England, or to send missionaries among the heathen from hence.”¹¹

Writing to a very close friend in Charleston, S.C., on June 14th, 1806, Staughton says: “ We have now at our house two of the brethren from the Serampore Mission house near Calcutta. They are on their way to England. I have written Dr. Rippon on the subject who will communicate the intelligence to the missionary society.”¹² The letter from Staughton regarding Mrs. Biss, mentioned earlier shows the active concern that not only he, but also his church, had for the welfare of the missionaries. Another letter of his to Fuller shows the detailed way in which he was involved in the societies affairs.

“ Philadelphia, July 11, 1814.

My dear Bro.,

I had the pleasure of writing to you a few days ago by a vessel which sailed from New York. Another leaves these shores for England to-morrow morning.

The formation of about twenty foreign Mission Societies within the United States will afford you real pleasure. So many actually exist and many more are anticipated. The Proceedings of our General Convention will probably reach you before this can arrive.—A thousand dollars have been transmitted to Mr. Burls of London for the use of Mr. Judson and family.—All the expenditure which the brethren at Serampore have incurred in relation to our bro. and sister, will, on a bill being forwarded to our Mr. Baldwin of New York, treasurer of the Convention and Board of Commissioners, be gratefully reimbursed.

By Mr. Ralston and several members of the Presbyterian Mission Society I am charged with the service of stating to you that two worthy young men now residing in Philadelphia Mr. Richards and Mr. Walker are anxious under the patronage of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign

Missions in New England to sail for Bombay and with brethren already at that port to settle there. They are men devoted to the service of the Lord Jesus—of good education.—They have availed themselves of the delay of sailing, which the present war has occasioned, of the opportunity offered by the University of Pennsylvania for becoming Physicians and Surgeons of considerable repute.

An Address to the Court of Commissioners of the East India Company has been sent to London to the care of Mr. Roberts there, who with yourself and Mr. Burls, is requested to adopt the best means in your power for procuring liberty from that court for these young men to settle at the port they have in view. No arguments are necessary to awaken your Christian zeal to the discharge of this office of love.

I have mentioned that the young men have studied medicine.—This they have done simply with a view of increasing their capacity for general usefulness.—Both are good preachers, and the advancement of the kingdom of Jesus is with them paramount to every other consideration. The earlier the liberty of settling at Bombay, or any other part of India, can be obtained, the more agreeable as they wish to avail themselves of the first moment which suspension or termination of unhappy national conflicts may offer for embarking.

To hear from you frequently will be gratifying.—Any hints that yourself or your brethren can suggest that may be useful to the brethren here, relative to the important designs they have in view, will be received with thankfulness.—Mr. Grigg from Richmond was a deputy to the Convention. In several letters to me he has deeply deplored his want of prudence at Sierra Leone—and has thought that for this in many instances the hand of the Lord was outstretched against him. He continues however an humble zealous preacher of Christ, much esteemed and useful. Though circumstances forbid his preaching to negroes in Africa—he is intent on the everlasting welfare of negroes in America.

Mrs. S. and my whole family join me in affc. regards.

Yr. unworthy bro. in Christ,

W. Staughton."¹³

But Staughton realised that the support of the English Baptist Mission was not enough : his deep desire was for a Foreign Mission Society in America among his Baptist brethren.

The first step towards such an end, was the encouragement of all missionary activity in America, which when he arrived, was

mainly concerned with the Indians, and the settlers on the continually westward moving Frontier. In a stirring address to the Philadelphia Missionary Society in May 1798, which was afterwards published under the title *Missionary Encouragement*, Staughton concluded :

“ This Society while it is anxious that the heathen may hear the faithful saying, that Christ came into the world to save sinners, is desirous of introducing amongst the Indians some of those arts which lead the way to civilisation, ignorance of which is an indirect auxiliary to the commission of various crimes. The introduction of the loom, the forge, and the plough, of tame animals and useful metals, is contemplated; that by the increase of civil information, the wall of partition between Indians and the United States may be broken down, and the Tomahawk and the bayonet become useless.”¹⁴

This pamphlet was very quickly followed up by work in the Philadelphia Baptist Association to promote “ domestic ” missions. In 1800, when both Staughton and Rogers were present the following minute is recorded :

“ Whereas, the Church of Philadelphia have presented a query, on the propriety of forming a plan for establishing a missionary society. This Association, taking the matter into consideration, think it most adviseable to invite the General Committee of Virginia and different Associations on the continent to unite with us in laying a plan for forming a missionary society, and establishing a fund for its support, and for employing missionaries among the natives of our continent.”¹⁵

In 1801 the minute was carried on the books, but in 1802 action was taken whereby the churches each heard a sermon on the subject of missions, and a collection was taken to cover the expenses of any missionaries employed by the Society. All the money was handled by Dr. Rogers, who with William Staughton and others formed a committee to draw up the details of the plan of the Society. The Philadelphia B.M.S. was established in 1804 with Staughton as one of its very active members.¹⁶

Staughton now began working towards the creation of a Foreign Missionary Society. He had helped Dr. Rogers revise his Circular Letter on Missions which had been published in 1806. The following year this advertisement appears on the back of the Minutes of the Philadelphia Association :

“ Proposals are in circulation for publishing an original

Work entitled,
THE AREA OF MISSIONS,

By W. Staughton, D.D.

Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia.

THE WORK WILL CONTAIN,

- i* A concise view of the motives which have given rise to missionary exertions from the system of evangelical truth, from the fulfilling of prophecies, and from the concurrence of Providence.
- ii* A display of the present state of the world, in the light in which the Christian Missionary surveys it.—Drawn from the most authentic sources, a statement will be given of the numbers, the errors, the crimes and the miseries of the Jews, the Mahometans, the Heathen nations &c.
- iii* A history of the efforts which have been made and are now in operation for the enlargement of the visible empire of the Son of God, including a detail of the successes and discouragements which missionaries of different persuasions have experienced, interspersed with various affecting and interesting anecdotes.
- iv* Reflections on the whole intended to cherish the missionary spirit which has begun to pervade the Christian world, by exhibiting the honor and the duty of becoming “fellow-workers with God” for the salvation of the perishing millions.”¹⁷

Though this work is not listed among Staughton’s publications nor mentioned in connection with him, the outline serves well enough to show the way his mind was working, and his presentation of the case for Foreign Missions.

In 1811 Staughton published a work entitled *The Baptist Mission in India*. It is best described by Staughton in the preface which is dated May 9th, 1811,

“The following pages have been selected for the most part from the writings of the brethren at Serampore and those of their friends. The “brief narrative” was drawn up in England. The essays are formed chiefly from a series of interesting dialogues composed by Dr. Marshman. The other articles are selected from the *Periodical Accounts* of the Society, excepting the article “Bengal” which is a production taken from an interesting history “of the writings, religion, and manners of the Hindoos.”

The compilation is presented to the public from an anxious desire that Missionary Intelligence may be circulated and that

an holy ardour may be excited and vigorous efforts employed for the conversion of the heathen and for the consequent diffusion of the great Saviour's empire. The detail is limited to the Baptist Mission in India. Had the bounds of the publication permitted it would have been gratifying to introduce a description of other missions, both European and American in origin. The present will however, show that the moral state of the heathen calls aloud for our piety, our labors, and our prayers, that efforts in the name of the Lord, for their conversion shall not prove fruitless and that obligations to seek the spread of the Gospel rest alike on all the disciples of the Lord Jesus."

In these three works Staughton did much to encourage the thinking which lay behind the formation of the American Baptist Board for Foreign Missions.

In the regular routine of the life of the Philadelphia Association Staughton did everything he could to encourage the work of missions. As Chamberlain pointed out in his letter to England, he was continually laying the cause of Foreign Missions before the delegates. We have seen his influence at work in the creation of the domestic Missionary Society in 1804. In 1805 he read letters from Carey and Fuller to the Association concerned with the Serampore Mission.¹⁸ It is likely that it was Staughton who in 1808 gave the information ". . . that vigorous and systematic opposition has been made in England to the Missionary cause at Serampore, by persons lately returned from India . . ."¹⁹ In 1810 the Association adopted the idea of having a missionary sermon preached to the delegates of the Association during Association week, and of taking collections for the missionary funds. While we do not know if Staughton was behind this move, we can be sure he welcomed the measure which would bring the missionary interest before all the delegates of the Association.²⁰

Up till 1812 there had been no initiative taken by the American Baptists to form a Foreign Missionary Society, though individual Churches and Associations had supported the work at Serampore very generously. Many also supported the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Congregational) which in 1812 sent out Judson, Rice, Newell, and Knott, to begin American Foreign Mission work in the East. On the voyage, knowing that they would spend an initial period at Serampore with Carey and other Baptists, Judson and Rice turned to the New Testament to discover for themselves the validity of the Baptist position, and were so convinced that when they came to Serampore they requested baptism from the Serampore Church. Their connection with the mission they represented now being broken, they cast themselves upon the mercy

of American Baptists in the States, trusting to them for support. To encourage this support it was decided that Luther Rice should return to America and state the position to the Baptist brethren. In 1813 Rice wrote to Thomas Baldwin from Brazil telling him of his intention to visit the United States to solicit aid for the establishment and maintenance of an American Baptist Mission in India. Meanwhile Judson had also written to Baldwin: "Should there be formed a Baptist Society for a mission in these parts, I shall be ready to consider myself their missionary."²¹ The news of Judson's plight, and the arrival of Rice in America happened almost at the same time. Thomas Baldwin's immediate reaction to the news was the formation of the Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel in India. In the Autumn of 1813 Rice toured the South, prior to the meeting of a national convention which was to be held in Philadelphia on May 18th, 1814. During this tour it is interesting to note that a Society was formed in Richmond, Virginia, where Jacob Grigg had influence.

The Philadelphia Association responded to the news by minuting the following item for October 1813 :

"This Association has heard with pleasure of the change of sentiment in brother Rice and brother Judson and wife, relative to the ordinance of Christian Baptism and of their union with the denomination. As these worthy persons are still desirous of pursuing their missionary career, this Association feeling the obligations of the American Baptists to give them support, recommend the formation of a society of a similar kind with those already formed in New England to be denominated the *Philadelphia Baptist Society for Foreign Missions*. They moreover recommend that brethren Holcombe, Staughton, Rogers, Samuel Jones, H. G. Jones, T. B. Montayne, J. Mathias, Joseph Maylin, W. Magee and G. Ingels be a committee to devise a plan for such a society to submit said plan to the churches and the public for signatures, to give it full effect. The Association will be happy to hear of similar societies arising into existence in different parts of our vicinity and the Union at large."²²

Other societies quickly formed at the beginning of 1814, among them being the Savannah, New York, Baltimore, Fredericksburg, and Washington Societies. On May 18th, 1814, thirty-three delegates from various parts of the United States assembled in Philadelphia, and elected a permanent Board to transact the business of the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions. Thomas Baldwin of Boston was elected President, and the Corresponding Secre-

tary of the Board was William Staughton. Others on the Board included William Rogers, Richard Furman, Lucius Bolles and John Williams. Among the honorary members chosen were the two Presbyterians who had done so much for Serampore, Robert Ralston and Captain Benjamin Wickes. The Board consisted of 21 members, and the convention was comprised of delegates from the auxiliary missionary societies, and individuals and groups which contributed at least 100 dollars annually. Luther Rice was retained as the itinerating agent of the Society, and in a report he wrote for Staughton in 1815, he states that practically all the 115 Baptist Associations in existence were active in their support for the Foreign Mission enterprise.²³

The rise of Baptist Foreign Missions in America in these years is part of a very complex situation, but through it all can be seen quite clearly the influence of the men who met in Kettering in 1792. It is now 150 years since American Baptists first engaged upon the work of foreign missions: we humbly thank God for all they have achieved, and remember gratefully the part that our English Baptist fore-fathers played in the formation of American Baptist Foreign Missions.

NOTES

¹ W. Staughton, *The Baptist Mission in India*. Philadelphia, 1811, p. 21.

² S. P. Carey, *William Carey*. London, 1923, p. 93.

³ Andrew Fuller Letters, Angus Library, Oxford.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ S. P. Carey, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

⁶ *The Latter Day Luminary: by a committee of the Baptist Board for Foreign Missions*. Philadelphia, Vol. I (1818), p. 93.

⁷ Bruce G. McGraw: "William Carey and the American Mission Interest," *The Chronicle*, Vol. V (April, 1942), p. 69.

⁸ *The Baptist Annual Register*, Vol. 3 (1796), pp. 148-149.

⁹ S. W. Lynd, *A Memoir of the Rev. William Staughton, D.D.* Boston, 1834.

¹⁰ B.M.S. Archives.

¹¹ Lynd, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-174.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

¹³ B.M.S. Archives.

¹⁴ William Staughton, *Missionary Encouragement*. Philadelphia, 1798, pp. 42-43.

¹⁵ A. D. Gillette, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707-1807*. Philadelphia, 1851, pp. 348-351.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 369-372.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 437-449.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 409-417.

¹⁹ *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association 1808*, Article 12.

²⁰ *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association 1810*, Article 30.

²¹ O. W. Ellsbree, *The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America: 1790-1815*. Williamsport, U.S.A., 1928, pp. 114-115.

²² *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association 1813*, Article 18.

²³ Ellsbree, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.