

William Ward's Missionary Journal

ONE OF the most valuable manuscripts on missionary activity in early nineteenth century India, and certainly the most important single item in the archives of the Baptist Missionary Society, is the journal of William Ward. Begun on board the *Criterion*, the American ship on which Ward, Joshua Marshman, and two other missionaries travelled to India, on 25 May, 1799, the journal concludes with an entry for Wednesday, 30 October, 1811. Its use for the biographer is obviously great, especially in the absence of a substantial body of private letters. Since John Clark Marshman drew on them in preparing his *Life and Times of Carey, Marshman, and Ward*,¹ the contents have been consulted by every historian who has written in depth on any aspect of the history of the Serampore Mission.

Of all the early Baptist missionaries sent to India, it was only natural that Ward should be the one to keep a written record of the mission. Born in Derby on 20 October, 1769 and apprenticed at an early age to a printer, Ward carved out for himself a career as printer and provincial newspaper editor. Formerly a Methodist, the young editor of the *Hull Advertiser* was baptized at the George Street Chapel on 28 August, 1796. The following July he entered Ewood Hall, Halifax, where he studied under the care of Dr. John Fawcett. Rejecting a promising career in the ministry, Ward then volunteered his services to the infant Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Heathen, whose mission in India under the leadership of William Carey had been in operation since 1793.²

"Blessed be God", Ward writes in the first lines of his journal on Sunday, 26 May, 1799, "that I have seen this land and that I am now on board a vessel, which will, I trust, carry me to India, to print the New Testament."³ The remainder of the journal, which runs for 724 pages, details (sometimes day-to-day) the leading events of the trip to India and the formation and early history of the Serampore Mission. The journal takes up four small manuscript volumes: Volume I covers the period from 26 May, 1799 through 31 December, 1801; Volume II begins on 1 January, 1802 and runs through to the end of 1805; Volume III opens on 1 January, 1806 and concludes on the last day of 1807; and Volume IV covers the period from 1 January, 1808 until the journal was discontinued. According to an entry for 13 June, 1808, Ward in addition kept a more detailed daily record for several weeks in 1807 but gave this project up on "finding so much sameness in my daily labours."

Parts of the diary were copied and transmitted to England, usually to Andrew Fuller, Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society from

its foundation to his death in 1815, as a running record of the mission's activities. That this task was often done by someone else at Serampore explains why these extracts, many of which are still available in the B.M.S. Archives, are not always in Ward's hand. For instance, on 1 January, 1808 Ward mentions the impending conversion of a young European "who has been very useful to me for a long time in copying my Journal." Portions of the extracts in turn were printed in *The Periodical Accounts of the Baptist Missionary Society*. Usually, however, they omitted the more controversial of Ward's comments, partly at Ward's expressed wish. In a letter to Fuller of 1805 he wrote:

When you put the Periodical Accounts to press be careful that the freedom with which I write to you, exposing the secrets of the Mission, & the relative state of things betwixt us here as Brethren in the same work—take care that the utmost delicacy be observed.⁴

Occasionally Fuller was asked not to publish specific entries, sometimes to avoid any possible embarrassment to European supporters in India. On 13 June, 1806, to give one example, Ward wrote of a European judge having attended a Baptist worship service in Calcutta and having promised a gift of 500 Rupees towards building a permanent chapel. He followed this with the warning to Fuller: "I suppose you'll publish this, but if you do, I'll send you no more news." It was not published. Among many other entries never published were those which could prove disconcerting to friends in England. On 26 June, 1807, for instance, Ward wrote of charges being brought before the Mission Church at Serampore of Sister Mardon, wife of Richard Mardon (missionary from 1803 until his death in 1812) "drinking too freely".

Although reasonably complete regarding the major activities of the mission (in a letter of 1803 to Samuel Stennett, a friend in England, Ward writes of his journal containing "all the particulars [of news] that come into my recollection"; and in one to John Sutcliff of 1809 that "My journal & the Circular Letters contain almost all the news that we can rap and ring here"),⁵ when working on my history of the Serampore Mission I found the journal disappointing in providing rationalizations or explanations of mission activities. The key decisions are often given but usually not the factors which led to certain decisions being taken. From a biographer's viewpoint, the journal also falls down as a record of Ward's thoughts and, on close reading, in providing descriptions of the people he met and the places he visited. On his way from Serampore to consult Carey at Mudnabati in late 1799, to cite an early instance, Ward simply described his daily progress. Little comment was made concerning strange places he was seeing for the first time. For a practised journalist Ward apparently lacked judgment as to what would interest an English reader, or else reflected the insularity of an English traveller of his class. The limitations of his descriptions, and some of the reasons for

his neglect of detail—a neglect which is never corrected throughout the history of the journal—can be seen from his account of the Muslim capital of Bengal at Murshidabad:

To day [22 November, 1799] we walked thro' the city of Moorshedeabad, the capital of Bengal, & the seat of the Nabob. It is full of Moors, very populous, very dirty. In a town here there is very little to interest a traveller from Europe, who has seen the buildings, the streets, the manners, the manufactures & the shops of London. All business is done in the bazar, which exhibits little else besides coarse sweetmeats, cowries, & what you might expect to find in an Italian pedlar's pack.

In December 1807, following the expansion of the mission into other parts of India and to Rangoon, Ward began printing the monthly *Circular Letters*. These, as he later told Sutcliff, provided a means of getting more material to England on the progress of the mission than could ever be done through his journal and private correspondence. As a result, in the fourth volume the gaps between entries, only occasional in the earlier ones, become greater and occur more often. This is especially so in 1811. From 25 July to 1 September (both Sundays) there are no entries. After 1 September the only remaining entries occur on 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23 and 29 September, and on 30 October.

Fortunately for the historian, some volumes of the journal were sent to England before March 1812, when a fire at Serampore destroyed the printing-office and many of the early mission records. Writing to Fuller early in 1811, Ward, obviously aware of the historic value of his diary, said,

The printing of the *Circular Letters* leaves little for a Journal; but I have thought it might answer some end to continue it; & I send the vols. of former years, as they can be of no use here after my death; but may perhaps assist, at any future time, in compiling an Account of this Mission should such a Compilation be called for.⁶

The next year, after he had completely "dropt journalizing", Ward sent Fuller the rest of his diary.⁷

On Andrew Fuller's death the journal passed into the possession of one of his sons, W. G. Fuller. At the beginning of each volume a note appears which states that Fuller lent *five* volumes to Dr. John Leechman, a former teacher at Serampore College, prior to the latter's visit to India in 1850-1851. Leechman in turn apparently gave them to John Clark Marshman to use in his history. After Marshman's death in 1877 his widow handed the journal to W. G. Lewis, who fortunately possessed the foresight to pass the volumes on, complete with a special protective box, to Albert Henry Baynes, co-secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society. In a letter to Baynes dated Westbourne Park, 12 November, 1880 (which is inserted at the end of the second volume) Lewis commented: "They contain so much that is of the deepest interest in connection with the founders of our beloved

Mission—and so many evidences that they were men of like passions with ourselves . . . ” that they should be permanently preserved.

Confusingly Lewis talks of a missing volume being “destroyed & I suspect at Serampore by our friend J. C. Marshman”. In the note which prefaces each are the words “(*Vol. 3 missing)”. Was there another volume? Possibly, but not a fifth, or a missing third, volume of the journal itself. I have read thoroughly the four existing ones and have no doubt that the journal is complete for the period Ward admits to keeping it. There is, on the other hand, a possibility that another small manuscript volume, in the form of a letter-book, a commonplace-book, or the daily record discussed earlier, was at one time in existence and was, as Lewis suggests, destroyed or at least kept and eventually lost by John Clark Marshman.

Despite its limitations, the journal is invaluable to the church and mission historian. The constant handling, no matter how careful, of such a precious manuscript deteriorates its condition. In places the writing is faded. The B.M.S. Archives kindly allowed me to have the whole diary microfilmed but on microfilm it is even more difficult to read. My university made prints of the microfilm, and with the use of a large magnifying glass and a strong lamp I have over the past few years transcribed its entire contents so that I can more easily use them in my proposed biography of Ward. I now feel very strongly that this priceless piece of Baptist heritage should be available in printed form and am prepared to do the additional work involved. However, it would not be a commercially profitable undertaking for a publisher without substantial backing from interested parties. If there is some person or organization willing to help provide this support I should be glad to hear from them.

NOTES

¹ 2 vols., (London, 1859).

² This information is based on the writer's *British Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793-1837*, (Cambridge, 1967) and on a forthcoming biography of Ward which will accompany, possibly, an edited version of his journal.

³ Volume I, 26 May 1799.

⁴ B.M.S. Archives, William Ward to Andrew Fuller, Serampore, 6 November 1805.

⁵ Cited in Samuel Stennett, *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. William Ward*, 2nd edn., (London, 1825); B.M.S. Archives, William Ward to John Sutcliff, Serampore, 16 August 1809.

⁶ B.M.S. Archives, William Ward to Andrew Fuller, Serampore, 23 January 1811.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 21 September 1812. Later still Ward added: “I hope the interruption of my Journal is of no consequence: through the activity of my young friend John [Clark] Marshman [in editing *Circular Letters*], we give you copies of almost every thing.” (*Ibid.*, 20 November 1812).

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