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Baptist Missionary Society Radicals

THE THREE young men who are the subject of this study strove to fulfil their missionary calling in an age of economic instability and political ferment. All three found themselves in conflict with the authorities—an experience which may recur whenever men wish “to achieve a more credible Christian presence in the world than the traditional options offer”.

Jacob Grigg was appointed a missionary by the Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society on 7th April 1795. When another former Bristol student, James Rodway, offered his services they were both sent by the Committee as the first B.M.S. missionaries to Africa. They arrived in Sierra Leone on 1st December 1795. Rodway returned to England in September 1796, because of ill health; Grigg left Sierra Leone for America about March 1797.

At a meeting of the Committee on 2nd February 1796, John Fountain was accepted for missionary service in India. He landed in India on 18th September 1796, and met up with Carey on 10th October. He died on 20th August 1800.

It was on 23rd June 1815, that Lee Compere was chosen by the Committee to become the second B.M.S. missionary to Jamaica. His valediction service was held on 18th October 1815, and he and his wife sailed from Bristol for Jamaica on Tuesday, 21st November. He left Jamaica for America about June 1817.

Grigg served as a missionary with the B.M.S. overseas for sixteen months, Fountain for three years eleven months and Compere for eighteen months. Their total combined length of service to the Society therefore of six years nine months was just one sixth of the time put in by Carey. Is it possible therefore that they could in any way influence the course of the B.M.S. or the understanding of Christian mission that is still being developed? The judgment of some would seem to discount this possibility.

In his comprehensive *History of Christian Missions*, Stephen Neill ignores the Baptist mission to Sierra Leone and refers first to the C.M.S. mission of 1804. A. F. Walls can only find enough for two short sentences. “The Baptists sent two men. One was young and feeble, and had to be sent home quickly; the other got heavily involved in Freetown politics, and was extradited.”¹ W. T. Whitley does even better, or worse, and gives only part of a sentence, “After a false start on the west coast of Africa, attention was turned to Jamaica . . .”²

John Clark Marshman obviously had no respect for John Fountain. “He was a man of small stature and small mind; he possessed no energy of character and added little to the strength of the infant cause.”³ Our Baptist historians, Whitley, Underwood, Carlile, refer to Carey and then move straight to 1799 and Marshman and Ward. For them Fountain did not exist.

Ernest Payne provides us with an assessment of Compere: "Lee Compere, the second missionary, who came to the south of the island a few months before the pioneer's death, stood the climate and other difficulties for barely a year, and then passed on to America, where he did a fine piece of work among the Creek Indians."⁴

Carey served for over forty years and his name is known, and by many he is still regarded as one of the outstanding pioneers of the modern missionary movement. His contribution as linguist, educator, translator and horticulturist is recognized. What of these three unknowns, Grigg, Fountain, Compere? By most they are forgotten or dismissed as of no importance in so far as the B.M.S. is concerned. One way in which something of their influence can be determined is by looking at various pronouncements or letters produced during the early years of the B.M.S. The members of the Home Committee, either individually or collectively, were never short of advice for the men and women they sent overseas. But before we look at some of this advice we can remind ourselves of the main emphasis of Carey's *Enquiry*. It comes in the title, *An Enquiry into the obligation of Christians to use means for the conversion of the heathen*. This is to be the purpose of the Society which Carey suggests should be set up—the conversion of the heathen: and his final paragraph refers to the joy it will be to see the many myriads of poor heathen who have been brought to the knowledge of God. At the second meeting of the Society, held on 31st October 1792, it was agreed, "That in order to promote the extension of this Society, it appears proper to print a brief narrative of its rise and plan". This was done, and the opening paragraph of the document reads, "The object of this Society is to evangelize the poor, dark, idolatrous heathen, by sending missionaries into different parts of the world where the glorious gospel of Christ is not at present published, to preach the glad tidings of salvation by the blood of the Lamb."⁵ Much more follows which reiterates the purpose as being that of gaining converts. There is a reference to "the value of one immortal soul."

John Ryland delivered the address at the farewell service to Rodway and Grigg on 16th September 1795, and there is one paragraph particularly which states, some may think exaggerates, the importance of individual salvation.

"Think of the worth of a single soul—a soul delivered from eternal death, and made an heir of eternal bliss!—Could you brethren, at the present awful period, when the continent of Europe is deluged with human blood, and the earth fattened with murdered corpses; could you still the madness of the people, and hush the insensate nations to peace; could you produce universal harmony and order, and revive trade and commerce in every country, now distracted by the wicked passions of men; and could you ensure all Europe, for a whole century, or for a thousand centuries, the inestimable blessing of peace; would not your names be recorded in history as the benefactors of

mankind? Would you not be almost idolized as the temporary saviours of the world? Yet, all the sum of happiness that could be enjoyed on earth, by all the inhabitants of Europe in a thousand centuries, wherein the whole infernal art of war should be forgotten, and the most friendly intercourse should subsist between all its nations, and temporal prosperity bless every realm;—the whole sum of this happiness will be exceeded by the bliss of a single converted African, which he shall enjoy in a boundless and blessed eternity.”⁶

The point is made, I think, that those who formed the B.M.S. understood their mission to be the saving of the souls of the heathen. No other aspect of mission appears to have been considered by them. It never occurred to them that a missionary would need any advice respecting his conduct, and relationship towards authorities overseas. All that was required of him was the simple proclamation of the gospel.

By 1799 they had second thoughts. During the spring of that year arrangements were being made to send out four more missionaries (Ward, Marshman, Brunson and Grant) and their families to India. There is “An Address from the Committee of the B.M.S.” to the missionaries dated 7th May 1799, and it contains this paragraph:

“One circumstance is of so much consequence that we must not omit it in this parting address; though you have been again and again reminded of it, individually; and we have no reason to suspect you are otherwise minded than ourselves. Beware, however, both from a principle of conscience, and from sound policy, and regard to your own interest and that of the mission, to keep at the utmost distance from intermeddling with any political concerns. Keep not only your tongues and your pens from that subject; but keep your minds, as much as possible from being at all occupied therein. Study to be quiet, and mind your own business. If in a course of years, any commotions were to arise in the country, we do not want to hear from you one word of news to gratify our curiosity, which could give the slightest umbrage to the government, if your letters were printed. We hope you will find the concerns of the country much better managed than many in England have supposed. But if it were otherwise, you do not go to enquire into civil matters, or to attempt the rectifying of political grievances, but to promote a kingdom not of this world. Set a pattern yourselves of ready obedience to human authority, in all things that are lawful in the sight of God; and inculcate this as a duty on all who listen to your instructions. There cannot be greater evils in civil government, at the present day, than there were in the days of the apostles; but you know how they acted, and what they taught in this respect; and we pray that you may never deviate from their plan. We certainly would sooner hear of any one of you sinking in the ocean, than of his becoming a busy body in political affairs, to bring dis-

honour on religion, and lay the strongest impediments in the way of the important work we have at heart."⁷

Samuel Pearce was unable to be present at the farewell to the missionaries but he sent a letter to Andrew Fuller in which he makes three points; the second is this:

"Secondly, Since that kingdom which we, as the disciples of Jesus wish to establish, is not of this world, we affectionately and seriously enjoin on each missionary under our patronage, that he do cautiously and constantly abstain from every interference with the political concerns of the country where he may be called to labour, whether by words, or deeds; that he be obedient to the laws in all civil affairs; that he respect magistrates, supreme and subordinate; and teach the same things to others: in fine, that he apply himself wholly to the all important concerns of that evangelical service to which he has so solemnly dedicated himself."⁸

John Rowe, the first B.M.S. missionary to Jamaica was farewelled at a meeting held in Broadmead, Bristol, on 8th December 1813. He was given a letter in which the final instruction was as follows:

"You are going to a British Colony, and you will doubtless have a right to avail yourself of every advantage belonging to you as an Englishman, as the Apostle Paul had of those which belonged to him as a Roman; but if any local regulations should seem not exactly answerable to your expectations, it is not for you to interfere in political matters, but to exemplify that quiet and peaceable conduct, which you will inculcate on your hearers; and to endeavour by a respectful demeanor to recommend yourself and the gospel to the white inhabitants of the Island."⁹

It would appear that the same letter of instructions was given to Lee Comper when he left for Jamaica for, when he settled at Kingston, the Home Committee reminded him of his instructions, especially paragraph four which reads,

"Fourthly, you are going amongst a people in a state of slavery, and require to beware lest your feelings for them should lead you to say or do any thing inconsistent with Christian duty. Most of the servants whom the Apostle Paul addressed in his Epistles to the churches, were slaves, and he exhorts them to be obedient to their own master, in singleness of heart, fearing God, and this not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. He furnished them with principles that would not only reconcile them to their condition, but render them regardless of their privations and hardships, though he allowed them to accept of freedom when it was offered them. 'Art thou called being a slave, care not for it; but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.' These exhortations, dear brother, must be your guide, and while you act up to them, no man can be justly offended with you."¹⁰

If the four new missionaries leaving for India in the Spring of

1799 gave opportunity for members of the Home Committee to make public and obvious their dislike of political involvement, there is no doubt that the view had been held for a number of years. It is true that there seems to be no hint of it in 1792 or even 1795, but then came Grigg, and after that politics became an oft-mentioned subject. Fuller wrote to Fountain just a few weeks after he had been accepted for service, but before he left for India, "All political concerns are only affairs of this life with which he that will please Him, who hath chosen him to be a soldier, must not entangle himself."¹¹ As we have seen, by 1799 newly appointed missionaries were given clear instructions on how to avoid the snare of politics. The danger had been revealed by the actions of Grigg and Fountain, actions which were to be repeated by Compere. This, for me, is the significance of these three young men, these three unknowns, that in Africa, India and the West Indies missionaries of the B.M.S. realized that they could not avoid political involvement if they were to be true to their own understanding of the Christian faith.

In their book *Towards a Radical Church*, Richard Jones and Anthony Wesson write: "It needs to be stated clearly that the motivating force in the life of the genuine radical is the desire to achieve a more credible Christian presence in the world than the traditional options offer."¹² If we look in more detail at the life and work of Grigg, Fountain and Compere, we shall see that they were concerned with this "credible Christian presence in the world", and it is for this reason that they may be regarded as B.M.S. radicals. As is to be expected the material regarding all of them is limited and there must necessarily be an element of conjecture in our assessment.

A. F. Walls refers to the colony of Sierra Leone as "a sort of stepchild of the Evangelical Revival. In the creation of the Sierra Leone colony the humanitarian and missionary concerns of Clapham Evangelicalism, together with their economic theory and commercial interests, met together."¹³ The colony was founded by 1,100 men and women, either Africans or of African descent, who were shipped across from Nova Scotia in 1792. Most of them had been slaves, many of them were Christian. In 1794 Zachary Macaulay was appointed governor of the colony. He was then 26 years old. Within a few months of his appointment he, and the colony, endured an invasion by the French who landed, robbed, destroyed and burnt so that there was considerable loss. Apparently, Macaulay came through the crisis well. Referring to both the Sierra Leone and an earlier Jamaican experience, John Patten writes:

"These episodes from the life of Zachary Macaulay show the manner of man he was and give us the secret of his success on behalf of the slaves to which he was to devote his life. Here, on the threshold of manhood, he exhibited those qualities which were to stand him in good stead all through his life—absolute reliability, sound judgment, coolness in critical situations, thorough understanding of human nature, complete disinterested-

ness, and a religion that permeated every part of his being."¹⁴ This was the man who insisted that Jacob Grigg leave Freetown. Jacob Grigg arrived in the colony about eighteen months after Macaulay and he was just twelve months younger than Macaulay. Two young Christian men, the one a Baptist from Cornwall, the other descended from a father and grandfather who were ministers in the Church of Scotland, found themselves in serious conflict as they endeavoured to witness to their faith in Sierra Leone.

In the Whitley Lectures, 1968, Clifford Parsons states that "the issue on which the mission was to founder was not humanitarian but ecclesiastical".¹⁵ This is a reference to the proclamation issued by Macaulay in the summer of 1796 according to which banns were to be published in the Company's church on three Sundays and the marriage ceremony was to be celebrated by the chaplain, the governor, or someone whom the governor had chosen. The nonconformists reacted vigorously. Grigg wrote a letter of protest to Macaulay. It has not been preserved but its content can be deduced from this sentence in a letter from Macaulay to Rippon: "The language of the letter of the Methodists which I received is the language of rebellion, and Mr. Grigg cannot deny, nay he avows that the letter he drew up was much worse."¹⁶

But this was not the only point of disagreement; probably it was not the main cause of the conflict. Slave traders were still active in the area and Grigg found himself at odds with at least one of them, a man called Tilley. Evidence that Grigg's views were known is found in one of his letters, in which he describes the wife of the chief man at Port Logo:

"Ariana, his wife (and headwoman) is also an amiable person. She is possessed of good sense, and very tender feelings; which I have had opportunity to discover in her treatment of the slaves who were chained and prepared for sale. She always disowned that she had any part in the trade, and whenever one was brought chained to the house she would come to me and, knowing that I was an enemy to the trade, say, 'It is none of me, Mr. Grigg, it is none of me, it is M.T. — —'s (a slave-factor's) slave'.¹⁷

That his opinion on slavery was the main cause of his becoming *persona non grata* is confirmed by an incident which occurred thirteen years later.

"Semple, writing of Grigg in 1810, speaks of him in these terms: 'At length he (Grigg) moved to Kentucky; and was pastor to one of the most prosperous churches there. But in consequence of the disturbances about hereditary slavery, he again moved to Ohio . . . His high, and perhaps in some respects untenable opinions of civil liberty, involved him in embarrassments both in Africa and Kentucky.' So it was that Grigg, again in uncompromising conflict with the same well entrenched institution which had earlier in Africa bested him, found himself again forced to yield his position, in order to retain his convictions. He moved

to Ohio, taking up his residence in the town of Lebanon."¹⁸ The high opinions of civil liberty to which Hartzell refers caused Grigg to disagree with the governor on other issues as well. Macaulay decided to introduce taxes and charge a rent to the people cultivating land. For freed slaves this was the first step back into slavery, and Grigg is said to have urged them to oppose such impositions. Why should they pay taxes if they had no part in decision making?

There were probably two other areas of disagreement. The Sierra Leone Company was having trading difficulties which were felt at Port Logo. When Macaulay suggested that Grigg should work at Port Logo, Grigg refused. Macaulay had lived through the French invasion of 1794 and when, in the spring of 1796, it seemed possible that the French were planning another attack, Macaulay took precautions by erecting defensive forts and training people in the use of weapons. Grigg preached a sermon condemning such actions. Macaulay did not appreciate his pacifist views.

Jacob Grigg tried to "achieve a more credible Christian presence in the world" as he stood for religious and civil liberty and held the pacifist position. And the consequence was, "It is with pain and grief that we inform the friends of the undertaking, that after all the encouraging appearances in Africa, a cloud has covered our affairs in that quarter, which threatens for the present, a total suspension of our labours".¹⁹ And the official judgment on Grigg was, "Should he be hereby brought to reflection, and learn the necessity of greater watchfulness, meekness, prudence, patience, and forbearance in his concerns with mankind, he may yet be an honourable and useful servant of Jesus Christ."²⁰

On 8th November 1796, John Fountain wrote from Mudnabatty, Bengal, to Fuller:

"We are often thinking and speaking about and praying for brethren Grigg and Rodway.

Whose joyful feet now tread on that free ground

Which once was known a mark of slavery!

Oh! that the Lord may work with them mightily, that shortly the millions of Africa, who for ages have groaned under the oppressions of their fellow men, and what is worse have had their minds blinded by the devil, and been captives to his will. Oh! that they may soon enjoy the Light of liberty of the Sons of God. When you write to the brethren give my Christian love to them, as our work is much the same we know how to feel for each other."²¹

By the time Fuller received that letter on 25th July 1797, Rodway was in England and Grigg in America. Just before Fountain wrote it Fuller was writing to John Sutcliff: "There is great danger of the African mission being utterly destroyed through Grigg's imprudence. I must call a small committee at Guilsborough next Thursday. Your company is absolutely necessary."²² We have seen that the three line whip and the meeting and correspondence which followed could not

quieten Grigg. As far as one can judge, Fuller had no greater success when he offered guidance to Fountain. The Committee to interview Fountain met on 29th January 1796. John Morris, of Clipstone, was unable to be present but he sent along some information about the candidate.

"I understand however that he had left Oakham some time since on account of the prevalence of tory principles and finding himself exposed to the rage of High Church bigotry. It is a circumstance which may form a little difficulty in the business, but I think it ought by no means to exclude him from the regard of the Committee. Though known at Oakham as dealing in politics yet I hope he has not been so known in London, but I am not so sure. I hint these things because I have known and much approved the caution which the Society has discovered upon this subject."²³

So the political enthusiast of Oakham was let loose on India, and it was not long before his comments were causing as much anxiety to Fuller as Grigg's had earlier.

"To me the whole appears as sinful as it is unwise. If Mr. F. be so infatuated with political folly, as not to be able to write a letter to England without sneering sarcasms upon Government, 'cursing' monopolies, expressing his hope of revolution work going on etc., etc., I must say once for all, it is my judgment that the Society, much as they esteem him in other respects, will be under the necessity of publicly disowning him as they were obliged to disown Grigg."²⁴

When writing to Carey, Fuller added a long section for Fountain, including, "Well brother Fountain, you have said that you do not trouble yourself about politics, yet in the same letter have talked of King George being a Solomon, or rather in your judgment a Rehoboam!", and later, he asked "Is it wise that you should hazard perhaps the existence of the mission for the sake of sneering at the King or 'Honourable Company'?"²⁵

But perhaps the most revealing comment by Fountain does not appear among his many references to the King and the East India Company but in the first letter he wrote to the Society after his arrival in India:

"It was certainly a high honour conferred upon you by God that you should be the first to wipe away the reproach of your ungrateful country who, in return for all the rich exports of the East, had for more than a century, imported nothing, nothing but vice and misery. It was a cutting, but too true a reflection on the English, which I heard from the lips of one of the first Indians I saw, a man of no mean abilities, of the writer cast. He came on board the ship while we lay at Diamond Harbour. The captain, as he walked the deck with him cursed the Bramins, and called the people fools for taking any notice of them, and said, 'We don't care for our priests in England, we live as we like.'

'Aye', replied the Indian, 'we know the English care for nothing but money.'²⁶

John Fountain objected to the monopoly held by the East India Company; he could see how India was being exploited and he would not keep quiet. But the Committee at home were not to be swayed, so Fuller wrote again to Sutcliff, "I tremble for the Ark. I have written him a very pointed letter, saying if he cannot desist (and I admonish him not to desist only but repent) we shall be under the painful necessity of disowning him"²⁷

Fountain's contemporaries failed to appreciate him and after almost one hundred years George Smith, the biographer of Carey, still condemned. "Mr. John Fountain had been sent out as the first reinforcement, but he proved to be almost as dangerous to the infant mission from his outspoken political radicalism as Thomas had been from his debts."²⁸ We remember that George Smith produced, as editor in succession to J. C. Marshman, *The Friend of India*. He also produced ten children, one of whom became the mother of R. A. Butler (now Lord Butler), and in his autobiography Butler writes of his grandfather that, "He came under the influence of two notable missionaries, Carey and Marshman, who had a number of interests at Serampore, near Calcutta"²⁹ Maybe it was that influence of Carey and Marshman that determined George Smith's view of Fountain; and we may now wish to regard Fountain more favourably as the man who pioneered the cause of freedom from exploitation.

John Rowe, the first B.M.S. missionary to Jamaica, landed at Montego Bay on 23rd February 1814. A few days later he wrote to Ryland, his college principal at Bristol: "The day after my arrival at Montego Bay I saw Mr. Vaughan and found he had been expecting me. He told me that if I had come out under any other name than that of a Baptist I should probably have met with more success, as people in general were more prejudiced against them than against any other sect."³⁰ Rowe followed the advice he was given and acted with great circumspection. Gradually people gained confidence in him. Lee Compere, who followed Rowe to Jamaica, does not seem to have been of the same disposition.

There are just one or two clues to Compere's activities and the consequences. He was baptized at Halstead, Essex, on 26th April 1812, and joined the church there on 3rd May. In a small booklet on Compere prepared by Halstead church in 1966, it is suggested that perhaps his family were of Huguenot extraction, and his West Indian service is summed up in the sentence, "Compere was only in Jamaica a short time preaching the gospel and fighting slavery".

Confirmation of this statement is found in two passages in the *Periodical Accounts*. The first is:

"The charges given to Mr. Compere when he was sent out, to abstain most cautiously from all interference with political concerns, and to inculcate on all his hearers, and particularly on those who are slaves, the conscientious discharge of all relative

duties, and especially to remind them of the instructions given by the apostles, to those in such a condition, have been earnestly recommended to his attention, since his removal to Kingston; and we trust he is fully aware of their importance."³¹

The second passage reads:

"Mr. Stephen Cooke, a respectable gentleman in Kingston, has also written to the Secretary, testifying the necessity of Mr. Compere's removal to America, on account of his extreme debility. The Society cannot altogether approve of every part of his conduct, but hope he will be made useful in the country to which he is now gone, though he is no longer immediately connected with them."³²

Compere suffered through being in Jamaica about fifteen years too soon. It needed the slave insurrection of 1831 and the public outcry which followed, together with the influence of Burchell, Phillippo and Knibb, before Baptists became aware of what they could do in the fight against slavery.

Africa, India, West Indies, areas where there is still political agitation, were areas in which B.M.S. missionaries became involved in politics and suffered through being too radical. Was there any one factor that influenced these three men, and what have they to say to us today?

Presumably the main influence felt by Grigg, Fountain and Compere was the spirit of the time in which they lived. Arthur Bryant has given to some of the years through which they lived the description "Years of Endurance". Details of what had to be endured may be found in Lord Rosebery's life of the younger Pitt:

"Strangely enough, the fourteen years from the outbreak of the French Revolution to the Peace of Amiens, from 1789 till 1802, formed an almost unbroken succession of bad harvests, and that of 1792 was one of the worst of the series. There was, moreover, a commercial crisis of the first magnitude. It was, then, at a moment of acute commercial and agricultural crisis that this most pacific and commercial of ministers (Pitt) found himself confronted with a war of the very first magnitude."³³

The effect of those bad harvests was felt by the Sierra Leone Company and, as we have already seen, affected Grigg when he attempted to live and work in Port Logo. Maybe one cause of the harvests was the unusually cold winters of those years. Arthur Bryant quotes Parson Woodforde to illustrate the bitterness of the winters: 1795: "The birds fell dead from the trees, and morning after morning Parson Woodforde in Norfolk found the chamber pots in his room frozen solid." Christmas Day, 1796: "In Norfolk Woodforde recorded it as a day of intense cold, and at night so bitter as to prevent him from sleeping."³⁴

But Bryant was not only interested in Parson Woodforde and cold winters. The opening paragraph of his preface to this first book of his trilogy sets the scene: "The British fight against the attempt of a

revolutionary France to dominate the world lasted twenty two years. It began in 1793 when men who had set eyes on Protector Richard Cromwell were still living, and ended in 1815 when others who were to know the youth of Adolf Hitler were already born. It saw the end of an old age and the beginning of a new."³⁵

The Hammonds extended the period to start at the Gordon Riots and run through to the mid nineteenth century, and called it "The Bleak Age". They say, "The England of this time was an England in movement, speculation was in the air, the indolent influence of habit was shaken, and the statesman could no longer hope that half his work would be done for him by custom"³⁶ As they continue to describe this period of change and man's new found power, one of their sentences has particular relevance to our theme: "In such an age the inequalities of life are apt to look less like calamities from the hand of heaven and more like injustices from the hand of man"³⁷ In similar vein they write of "the resentment of men convinced that there is something false and degrading in the arrangement and the justice of their world"³⁸ If this description seems to fit the present, as well as the past, then it will be of interest to note their judgment on the church. In referring to the Church of England, of a slightly later period, they describe "the bitter strife of Evangelical and Tractarian", and then quote F. D. Maurice: "The conviction has been brought home to some of us with terrible force that while religious men are disputing the great body of Englishmen is becoming bitterly indifferent to us all and smiles grimly and contemptuously at our controversies"³⁹

Grigg, Fountain and Compere must have been influenced by the events and controversies and spirit of the age through which they lived. They would also presumably have been influenced by what they heard and read. *The Rights of Man*, by Thomas Paine, which appeared in 1791, is usually regarded as the text book for the radicals or revolutionaries of the time. It is interesting to note that although John Fountain does not refer to Paine's book, he does write to Morris saying he has lent a copy of William Godwin's *Political Injustice* to a man at Dinagepoor.⁴⁰

It may be that the man who had the most direct influence on our missionaries was Dr. Richard Price. Paine refers to him in his *Rights of Man* as "one of the best hearted men that lives" and then records how he had preached a sermon on 4th November 1789, that had provoked Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*. Cole and Postgate describe him as "an expert on population, taxation and other economic problems, . . . a Unitarian and a leader of large influence among the middle class Dissenters who met in the Revolution Society to celebrate the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688"⁴¹ It cannot have been long before his death that he met Dr. John Rippon. Rippon had received a letter from America in which some American Baptists were complaining that they were being taxed by other denominations. Rippon forwarded the letter to Price, "conjecturing that his opinion,

if obtained, would be more likely to influence the conduct of the transatlantic persecutors than any thing that could be said by any other man in Great Britain".⁴² Price replied, expressing his concern and suggested that they should meet at Mr. Dilley's about two o'clock on Tuesday. They did, and Rippon records, "He quite entered into the subject on which we met, and gave it as his decided opinion, that for one denomination of Christians to tax another, without their consent, to support a religion of which they did not approve, was a species of the most horrid tyranny, as much reflecting on the wisdom as on the goodness of its abettors".⁴³ Did Grigg have this judgment in mind when he faced Macaulay in Sierra Leone?

Grigg, Fountain and Compere lived at a time of change; they lived in hard times, when men were challenging accepted standards and questioning the arrangement and justice of their world. These young men, at a time in many ways similar to ours, wished to make their Christian witness in the world credible. They did it by criticism and complaint; they were prepared to challenge authority and, if need be, encourage revolution. This was their way; maybe it was necessary for them to take it and we should recognize what they attempted to do and why, but the inevitable question arises as to whether there was some other way, perhaps some better way.

To answer this we turn again to the man to whom we always turn in any discussion of the B.M.S.—William Carey. His biographer Pearce Carey called him a Radical.⁴⁴ Something of Carey's radical spirit comes out in his *Enquiry*. "Many persons have of late left off the use of West India sugar on account of the iniquitous manner in which it is obtained. Those families who have done so, and have not substituted anything else in its place, have not only cleansed their hands of blood, but have made a saving . . ."⁴⁵ He suggests they give the saving to the missionary cause. From India he wrote critically of the Grigg episode, although it is difficult to find him criticizing his colleague, Fountain.

Our concern however is not with Carey's views of others, but with his own position. He was an illegal immigrant when he arrived and lived in India. He could, at any time, up to his entering the Danish Colony of Serampore in 1800, have been sent home; for by Act of Parliament it was illegal to be in India without a licence from the East India Company. Fuller was quite prepared to justify this act of disobedience: "In sending out missionaries we should certainly be glad of the concurrence of the governing powers; yet if it be not to be obtained we think ourselves warranted by the Scripture to go without it. Jesus said to the primitive ministers, Go, preach the gospel to every creature. He did not direct them to ask leave of any prince or government, but to go, and if persecuted in one city to flee to another."⁴⁶ This act of disobedience to government was accepted by Carey as necessary if he was to obey God. Having discussed the question of obedience, A. H. Oussoren sets out Carey's principles, "We conclude that William Carey did not agree with a government

when prohibiting the sending of missionaries to India. That he behaved loyally towards government even when he was treated roughly and unjustly. That he would not permit government to touch his missionary work as the spreading of the gospel according to his view is the exclusive province of the missionaries in heathen countries."⁴⁷

Jones and Wesson suggest that the radicalism of Jesus will sometimes lead to "occasions when one must choose to disobey the system so that love might be fulfilled".⁴⁸ It was this that Carey did and yet he remained sufficiently close to, and in fact worked within, the system. It was from that position that he exerted the influence that helped to change the social life of Bengal. One of the best chapters in Daniel Potts' *British Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793-1837* describes the part missionaries played in eliminating "certain dreadful practices". Potts admits that "the degree of influence that Baptists had over the many reform movements in which they were involved is impossible with any real exactitude to determine", but he goes on to quote H. L. Gupta, that missionary activities "allowed fresh air to enter the enlightened Indian minds to blow away the abominable practices harmful to human dignity and depressing to human conscience."⁴⁹

It was this that Carey was able to do, that Grigg, Fountain and Compere did not do; but is it possible for the one radicalism to exist for long without the other?

NOTES

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¹ A. F. Walls, "The early Sierra Leone colony" (*Studies in Church History, 6: The Mission of the Church and the Propagation of the Faith*, ed. G. J. Cuming (Cambridge 1970), p. 112.

² W. T. Whitley, *History of British Baptists*, 2nd edn. (London 1932), p. 255.

³ J. C. Marshman, *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward* (London 1859), vol. 1, p. 75.

⁴ E. A. Payne, *Freedom in Jamaica* (London 1933), p. 20.

⁵ *Periodical Accounts relative to the Baptist Missionary Society*, vol. 1, p. 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 515-516.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 518.

⁹ *Periodical Accounts*, vol. 5, pp. 292-293.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

¹¹ Fuller to Fountain, 25th March, 1796, B.M.S. Archives.

¹² R. G. Jones and A. J. Wesson, *Towards a Radical Church* (London 1970), p. 21.

¹³ Walls, "The early Sierra Leone colony", p. 108.

¹⁴ John A. Patten, *These Remarkable Men* (London 1945), p. 102.

¹⁵ C. J. Parsons, "Whitley Lectures 1968", unpublished manuscript, p. 6.

¹⁶ Quoted in Stiv Jakobsson; *Am I not a Man and a Brother?* p. 96. See also letter of Robert Anderson of Edinburgh, dated 9th January, 1797, to Fuller, B.M.S. Archives.

¹⁷ *Periodical Accounts*, vol. 1, p. 253.

- ¹⁸ H. G. Hartzell, "Jacob Grigg—Missionary and Minister" (*The Chronicle*, July 1943), p. 133.
- ¹⁹ *Periodical Accounts*, vol. 1, p. 257.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 261.
- ²¹ Fountain's letters, B.M.S. Archives.
- ²² Fuller to Sutcliff, 3rd October, 1796, B.M.S. Archives.
- ²³ Morris to Fuller, B.M.S. Archives.
- ²⁴ Fuller to Sutcliff, 25th April, 1799, referring to a letter from Fountain, to Read and Pullin, B.M.S. Archives.
- ²⁵ Fuller to Carey, 18th April, 1799, B.M.S. Archives.
- ²⁶ Fountain to the Particular Baptist Society, 11th November, 1796, B.M.S. Archives.
- ²⁷ Fuller to Sutcliff, 26th April, 1799, B.M.S. Archives.
- ²⁸ George Smith, *The Life of William Carey* (London 1885), p. 96.
- ²⁹ R. A. Butler, *The Art of the Possible* (London 1971), p. 4.
- ³⁰ Rowe to Ryland, 13th March, 1814, B.M.S. Archives.
- ³¹ *Periodical Accounts*, vol. 6, pp. 73-74.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 237.
- ³³ A. P. Primrose, 5th Earl of Rosebery, *Pitt* (London 1895), p. 118.
- ³⁴ Arthur Bryant, *The Years of Endurance* (London 1942), pp. 120, 170.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, preface, p. IX.
- ³⁶ J.L. and Barbara Hammond, *The Bleak Age* (Pelican edn., London 1947), p. 31.
- ³⁷ *Idem.*
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- ⁴⁰ Fuller to Sutcliff, 10th February, 1799, B.M.S. Archives.
- ⁴¹ G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, *The Common People, 1746-1946*, p. 111.
- ⁴² *The Baptist Annual Register*, 1792, p. 388.
- ⁴³ *Idem.*
- ⁴⁴ S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey* (London 1923), p. 5.
- ⁴⁵ William Carey, *Enquiry* (reprinted 1961), p. 86.
- ⁴⁶ Fuller to Rev. D. Brown of Calcutta, 24th September, 1800, B.M.S. Archives.
- ⁴⁷ A. H. Oussoren, *William Carey* (Leiden 1945), p. 181.
- ⁴⁸ Jones and Wesson, *Towards a Radical Church*, p. 34.
- ⁴⁹ E. Daniel Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793-1837* (Cambridge 1967), p. 167.

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