

# William Carey: Father of Modern Missions

Reviewed by Desmond Ford

**William Carey: Father of Modern Missions.** F. Deaville Walker, Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1980, 125 pages.

Do you read biographies? If not, you've missed one of the greatest aids to successful living. Fools read only for information, but the wise read for inspiration as well.

My spiritual horizons widened a hundred fold when over a period of a decade (in the 1950's) I read biographies of Luther, Calvin, Brainerd, Hudson Taylor, Judson, Moody, Spurgeon, Whitefield, Wesley, and many other worthies. In the treasure trove of the accounts of other lives one learns how God deals with men and movements. It becomes apparent that trouble and perplexity are the norm and not the exception, and that God usually leads a man through hell first before he can use him to lead others to heaven.

Carey was born into a world of less than 800,000,000 — four times the population of Christ's day but only a sixth of our own. England itself had 8,000,000 people and Carey's own village only 800 inhabitants. It was a world in which slavery, press-gangs, toll-gates, and highwaymen were familiar. But of chief importance is the fact that it was a world where the church was asleep neglecting the command of the Great Commission. Paralyzed by extreme Calvinistic views, most Christians left the conversion of the heathen to God himself.

Carey's parents were weavers but in their home was a Bible. At six he could read, and by twelve he was on the way to becoming a linguist. At seven he contracted a skin disease which made sunshine intolerable to him and then later came a fever which left his scalp as bald as a nut. Thus instead of working outdoors he was forced to choose an indoor occupation. A fellow apprentice helped him to see that true religion was not just a profession of a creed but a heart relationship with Christ.

Soon he was preaching, even walking twenty to thirty miles of a Sunday to fulfill that privilege. Convinced of baptism by immersion he had become a Baptist.

The shoemaker-preacher never worked at his last without a book before him. Also on his bench was a leather globe indicating where the great masses of the unevangelized dwelled. While school-teaching part-time he was often known to weep during a geography lesson as he pointed to those countries where Christ was not named.

At the age of thirty Carey wrote his famous **Enquiry** challenging Christians to search their consciences as to whether they could claim the promise of Christ's perpetual presence without fulfilling the missionary command which accompanied it. When asked to preach to a gathering of Baptist preachers he chose as his text Isaiah 54:2,3. His sermon divisions were:

1. Attempt great things for God.

2. Expect great things from God.

This was appropriate for a man used to making things in pairs!

Thus the first English missionary society was formed with a tiny knot of enthusiasts contributing the equivalent of fifty dollars towards the evangelization of the world. "I will go down into the heathen pit if you will hold the ropes" said Carey to his friends. They promised to be faithful till death. And they were.

At the age of thirty-two, in the year 1793, William Carey and his wife and four children set sail for India accompanied by Dr. John Thomas and Dorothy Carey's sister. Such a bald comment does nothing to make plain the innumerable difficulties they had first to surmount. Not the least of these was the reluctance of William's wife to accompany him. A soft-hearted loving woman, she could neither read nor write. She

had never been outside the village of her birth. And the departure date found her with a newly born baby boy.

For five months the little Danish vessel (for English ships were prohibited by the East India Company to carry such missionaries) tossed on the broad waters.

Then came years of trauma — prolonged, exhausting labor, opposition, disappointment, severe illness. After seven such years the first Indian convert was baptized. Only one hundred yards or so away Dorothy Carey lay confined to a tiny room. Her illness — insanity. The strange constant trials of the foreign Indian world had proved too much for that gentle soul. Nearby, in another room, Carey's fellow missionary, Thomas, was in a similar state. Next day they took him, but not Dorothy, to the Calcutta asylum. William cared tenderly for his wife till her death seven years later.

We remember that Joseph was sent as a missionary to Egypt where after years he saved one Egyptian and then later millions in a famine stricken world. So it was also with Carey and his successors. At the famous missionary center of Serampore the Bible or large sections of it was translated into over thirty-five languages so that for the first time a large percentage of the world could read God's Word in its own tongues.

Also he set up the greatest botanical gardens in Asia. Only one talent he claimed — the ability to plod. But among many other characteristics of this great Christian was humility. As a dying man he said to one of his visitors: "Mr. Duff! You have been speaking about Dr. Carey, Dr. Carey; when I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey — speak about Dr. Carey's Saviour." The epitaph he chose to accompany the dates of his birth and death was a single line. "A wretched, poor and helpless worm, on Thy kind arms I fall." □