

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bq\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php)

## William Carey.

THE eighth edition of Pearce Carey's *Life of William Carey* ought to prove an outstanding contribution to the literature of this centenary year. The book has been slightly enlarged and greatly enriched by material which has recently come to light through the researches of F. G. Hastings, Deaville Walker, the author himself, and others. The years since the first edition have yielded several treasures of knowledge about the great missionary. Pearce Carey, with the assimilation and sifting of these new discoveries has amplified and etched more sharply in places the portrait he has given us. The Carey Press is responsible for the new edition, which they have issued in an attractive style at a cost of 6s., making it available for many for whom the price of the original volume was prohibitive. The book is also to be commended for its greatly improved illustrations.

There are some minor criticisms which might be made. Historians will regret the absence of any reference notes to indicate sources of the quotations, which is the more to be deplored in a book of such importance. The lack of a map on which to trace Carey's lines of action, as distinct from the very admirable map illustrating his translation work, is a drawback. And one wonders whether it is legitimate to have altered in any way the reprinted "Preface to the first edition."

But these are matters relatively insignificant. There is no doubt this is the life of a great man, greatly written. It is a book that does justice to the real Carey, to the man he was and to the place he has in history. The marvel of Carey's immense range of interests and the herculean industry that made him "the most versatile missionary in modern times" are here revealed. Yet we are never allowed to forget that his life burned with the passion of the man who had one thing to do. Carey the shoemaker, the teacher, the preacher, the translator, the statesman, the botanist, is yet always a man with a one track mind. Everything is brought into captivity to his passion for evangelising the world.

\* \* \* \*

Carey pioneered the missionary enterprise in two directions. He dared to challenge the sin of insularity in the home Church and awakened it to a sense of responsibility for the world. And he blazed a trail by the vision he had and the

foundations he laid for bringing India to the feet of Christ. The measure in which he was unique is revealed against the background of previous missionary work in India. Such predecessors as Xavier and Schwartz had set themselves to diffuse as widely as possible a superficial knowledge of the Gospel. Much of their work therefore had no permanent result. Carey set himself to translate the Bible into as many languages and dialects as possible, to train native leadership and to undertake concentrated work in strategic positions, and so enabled the Gospel to be channelled in the life and culture of the Indian people. Apart from anything else this insured the permanence and stability of what he accomplished.

The recently published letters of Joseph Collet give us some sidelights on missionary work in the early years of the century which saw Carey's arrival in India. Collet, who was Governor of Madras in 1717, and a Baptist, had at first no great opinion of what little he had seen of missionary work. He regarded its progress as dependent on the material inducements offered by the missionaries. Later on he proffered the further criticism that the instruction they gave lacked simplicity. But he commended the work that was being done in the training of children, and gave it his practical support. It is evident that he had little expectation from what he had seen that any others than children would be converted. The work of which he writes was sponsored by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, but no English missionary seems to have had any share in it, and the assistance that Collet gave in regard to the schools for natives, represents the only direct support from this country. It is evident, therefore, that what we know of Carey's predecessors throws into relief the originality and daring of the vision he had. Further, Carey, when he moved to Serampore, was planting his flag where any other man might well have hesitated about going. Already it had been the base of operations for Moravian missionaries from Tranquebar. They had laboured for fifteen years without seeing any assured result of their work. The people seemed too firmly held in the grip of their own faith ever to be moved (a judgment which Collet would have endorsed so far as adults were concerned) so at last they retired from the scene. Yet not even so unpropitious an omen could daunt the indomitable spirit of Carey.

\*                     \*                     \*                     \*

On Carey's tombstone, by his own expressed directions, were inscribed the lines from Watts' hymn:—

A wretched, poor and helpless worm,  
On Thy kind arms I fall.

Most of us would agree with Deaville Walker that such a sentiment, familiar and approved by the nineteenth century, falls strangely upon twentieth century ears. Nevertheless there is something in Carey's choice of that couplet that gives us one clue at least to his greatness, and that reveals that his greatness, like his Master's, was entirely unselfconscious. There was no false humility in his thought of the insignificance of Carey. The immensities of his life were all of God. He had that sense of vocation possessed by all those who call St. Paul their spiritual father. Like Paul he is always gratefully aware that God redeems a man's life from failure, futility, or the incompleteness of a good that is less than the best, and makes it His instrument. It is because of what God can do with a surrendered life that such strength or weakness as he possesses is amazingly used for God's kingdom and purpose. "If God uses me," said Carey, "none need despair." And again, "The God who can do for and through a poor shoemaker that which He has done for and through me, can bless and use any." Through all the greatness that was thrust upon Carey, he remained a humble, simple Christian, a true brother to the poorest and most outcast of India's sons.

The sense of values that grew out of such a faith lies behind the utter selflessness so marked in Carey's work. He was a man who cared nothing for himself, his own enrichment or comfort, and who sought nothing for himself. He gave himself to India so utterly that on setting out he never expected to return. And so India was his home and country for the major portion of his life. His story cannot be told without the constant intrusion of his colleagues Ward and Marshman. His life and work were intertwined with theirs. They were a notable example of a team at work for the kingdom of God, and it is characteristic of the greatness of Carey that he so readily fitted into such a team and that he gave his leadership as an integral part of its life. When Carey planned the structure of the Mission at Serampore, he not only adopted the Moravian method of communal settlements, but he went further and created a collective fellowship in which no one took pre-eminence or headship, but where all were united under one Master, even Christ. The position of House Father was an office that went round in a monthly rotation. It is not always given to genius to be so willing to share responsibility and leadership with others. Never could it be said through the long years, even when later events brought division, that Carey interrupted or disturbed the harmony of that fellowship; rather he was first in creating it and removing anything that seemed likely to threaten it. His own spirit is revealed in the advice he gave to

his son William who had, in perfect innocence, acted in a way that disturbed his senior: "I would rather see you stoop as low as you can to effect a reconciliation than avoid it through any little punctilio of honour or feeling of pride. You will never repent of having humbled yourself to the dust that peace may be restored."

And it was with the same selflessness that he used his money. His own needs were meagre and the large sums that he received as earnings, both in the first years of toil and struggle and later in his service to the Government, were spent in helping needy relatives and furthering his beloved work.

Carey had the Christian strategy that turns all things to account to win men for the kingdom. His preaching and his conversations with the people thrust home his message through vivid pictures culled from his observations of the men and things around him. He saw the ballad singer of the day scraping a pittance by singing his ballad in the street; so Carey, Marshman and Ward, took their stand where four roads met and sang *their* ballad. And with the same instinct for using every opportunity he sees in the men whom he trains in Government College key men for the advance of the kingdom. When in later years Byam Martin as "Resident" of the Moluccas begged for a missionary, he was reaping the fruit of his far-sighted policy. So, too, he uses the Indian scholars with whom he is brought in contact "to develop and multiply his own powers indefinitely and translate the word of God into all the chief tongues of the land."

In all his planning there is breadth of vision, keen insight and far-seeing strategy. He with his colleagues mapped out a scheme for Mission stations in key positions to be staffed as soon as recruits were forthcoming. He saw the wisdom of giving their joint responsibility to the charge of a missionary and a native Christian. He found his way to India's heart through knowing and appreciating the best in India's life and literature. His own catholicity of heart made him anxious "to know no man after his sect, as an Independent, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist or Baptist. Everyone who wears the image of Christ is his brother and sister and mother." "If you should be introduced to Roman Catholic priests," he says to one of his colleagues, "show towards them every degree of frankness."

The constitution of Serampore College reveals his breadth of vision. He made it an institution in India's life, whereas in the hands of lesser men it might only have been a sectarian seminary. Surely he was ahead of his time—perhaps even ahead of some of the thinking of our time—in his decision that there should be no recognition of caste in the Bengal Christian Church;

and equally wise in giving freedom of choice to Brahmin converts on the issue of retaining or discarding the symbol of caste. In all these ways, Carey was building solid and sound foundations for the development of his vision in India. Time has justified his methods.

The arduous life that Carey lived was not without its hours of recreation. Some of the most important material that enriches the second edition of Mr. Pearce Carey's book relates to Carey's botanical interests and to the contacts that he kept with British botanists, sending them treasures from his garden and begging in return species from England. Even in his hobby, Carey is mastered by his one passion, and thinks out the possibilities of India's agricultural development, giving expert advice on the subject. One is grateful, too, to discover that William Carey was not without a sense of humour, as evidenced by this note regarding one of his students: "Duntze has so completely absented himself from lectures as to put it out of my power to admonish him without requiring his special attendance for this purpose."

\* \* \* \*

The world into which Carey was born would seem a shrunken place to the citizen of this age. That Carey in India should have expressed astonishment at the rapidity with which he had received news in April when it had only left London in February, reveals the gulf between his world and ours. Countries did not then live on each other's door-steps, and news travelled at a very leisurely pace. England was a land of villages, and the newspaper was the possession of the few. But the times were stirring. The European stage was set for the drama of the French Revolution and the thoughts of men had been far flung by events that cradled Britain's empire. Carey's eager boyhood spirit thirsted for such news as his emigrant uncle brought from Canada, or as Captain Cook recounted concerning his discoveries. There were happenings enough to engage the spirit of the rebel in him. He identified himself with Baptist folk when to be under their banner involved real handicaps. He discerned beneath the barbarities of the French Revolution the struggle for the New Testament assessment of a man's worth. He was the sworn enemy of the slave trade, and indeed ready in his response to every movement that outworked God's loving purpose for men, in the abolition of cruel, inhuman, stupid conditions, and the substitution of righteousness and love.

In this same world where in science and the traffic of business, doors were opening and revealing new vistas of possibilities, a fresh stream of life was beginning in the Christian Church. "Whitfield and the Wesleys were publishing the

vitalising evangel." The hard crust that lay upon the religious life of the country was beginning to crack, the dawn of a new day had begun. Carey looked out on this world, expansive and expanding, and dreamed the dream of claiming it for Christ. When he preached the sermon that gave a new turn to history, he uttered words of which his own life was the constant underlining: "Catch wider visions. Dare bolder programmes. Dwell in an ampler world."

Among the new facts which have enriched the picture of his boyhood, is the information we owe to Deaville Walker concerning the influence exercised on Carey's mind by the *Northampton Mercury*. This hand-printed newspaper reached his village every week and became the window through which he gained familiarity with the events that focussed the currents of life in the wider world. The books advertised in its columns were the books that pushed back the horizons for him, just as at a later date the Railway Guides of North America were to John R. Mott the trickling stream that grew into a mighty river of world vision. The newspaper, the travel stories he heard, and his home-made map and globe were the beginnings for William Carey of vaster thoughts concerning the empire of Jesus Christ than the great majority of his fellows had learned to think. Pearce Carey says "He loved the world from Kamtschatka to Kaffraria, from Nova Zembla to New Zealand." He had a deep intimacy with it. Once in a gathering of ministers a small East Indian Island became the subject of conversation, and the giants of the gathering had to admit their ignorance. Carey with diffidence revealed an intimate knowledge of the facts about it, its location and characteristics. That casual disclosure illustrates his tireless accumulation of information that would be of practical value for the vision he cherished. In his advice to Jabez on embarkation he includes an exhortation to the same sort of knowledge: "Learn correctly the number, size and geography of your islands; the number and character of their inhabitants, their manners and customs, etc." The world was in his heart, and he coveted it for Christ. In India his mind continually leaped ahead to some new station, some new language, some new province or country that might become a highway of the Lord. In the midst of his work in India he is bold enough to make plans for China. When the Government prevents the advance of their work in India, he conceives that this might be an opportunity to make trial of Burmah. And it is of great interest to discover that Carey conceived the idea of a decennial world mission conference, which might have become an actuality but for the lack of enthusiasm with which Fuller received the idea. In this Carey was again ahead of his time.

There is a spurious sort of world vision, vague and general, that ignores practical realities, that misses the immediate duty and that fails to crystallise in the detailed plodding work by which it may be brought about. Such a world vision may be in fact the emergency exit of the soul that is irked by the task of building at its own doorstep. Carey's greatness is nowhere more revealed than in his power to combine the vision with the actualities and plod through the drudgery by which it might come to life. Take his translation work alone. He plans in 1803 to translate and print the Scriptures into all the chief languages of Hindustan in fifteen years. Of the translation of his Bengali New Testament he writes: "The labour is ten-fold what it would be in England—printing, writing, and spelling in Bengali being all such a new thing; we have in a manner to fix the orthography, and my pundit changes his opinion so frequently." We gain a glimpse of the oft-repeated examination and correction of passages, the necessary and constant attention to detail, the acquiring of new languages and the improving of the knowledge of the old which went to make such work possible. And all this was but one part of a many-sided life. Carey kept through the drudgery of all his work and through the long years of sowing, the freshness and the vastness of the vision embodied in the enquiry.

It may be that our world, so different in appearance from Carey's, is yet not unlike the world of his day. We know in a wider way the nationalisms that were beginning to assert themselves then. The events that reveal the currents of the world's life to us in a bewildering fashion, leave us perplexed and rather more depressed than the liveliness of events in Carey's time seems to have done to his contemporaries; but it may yet be that the historian will see in what bewilders us the same story of new beginnings. In things religious we are higher up the stream than Carey was, yet a breath of life begins to break the winter of a certain spiritual inertia and defeatism. The very instability of the things that seemed established certainties in life, has begun to open a door of opportunity to bring all things subject again to the rule of Christ. The war that was to make Europe safe for democracy, has paved the way for Dictatorships. And in a world where we can overhear one another thinking, all the nations are wrestling with the problems of political and economic life that seem beyond the wit of man to solve. It is idle to speculate as to what William Carey would do were he formulating his vision in these turbulent years, but his vision of a world with its movements, forces, culture, understood and captured for Christ, still stands. The strategy his work reveals, points out for us the necessity that our personal faith should be



deep enough and big enough to give us world horizons. The problems and needs of Germany, of America and of the individual soul of man, are one and the same, and are all alike answered by Christ. And the answer is in that fulness of an individual response to Christ that thinks out and lives out every situation in terms of His kingdom.

W. TAYLOR BOWIE.

CHICHESTER had a Baptist church which existed for more than a century and a half, even in a cathedral city. A few fragments of its story were gathered by Josiah Thompson in 1770, and can be woven with contemporary allusions. James Sickelmore, once incumbent of Singleton, attended in 1654 the meeting of 'General Baptists which disavowed Fifth-Monarchy sentiments. By 1671 the Elder was George Smith, and a meeting-house had arisen. Next year a licence was secured for the house of William Fletcher in the parish of St. Pancras; he and George Upton were licensed as teachers. When Matthew Caffin met Smith in jail, his doctrines were introduced here; Thomas Croucher adopted them, Abraham Mulliner opposed. This led to Mulliner being called away to London as Elder of White's Alley, while John Court and James Austen became Elders at Chichester. In 1696 the church appealed to the Assembly for help, and Ichabod Chatfield came from Ditchling, then William Smith. After Caffin's supporters had been expelled the Assembly, they formed a rival group, and this met in 1721 at Chichester, when four Elders appear; Richard Drinkwater, Matthew Randall, John Smith, Matthew Austen. Randall was soon sent to Virginia, while Drinkwater was chosen Messenger for Kent and Sussex. The meeting-house was re-built in 1728, and five years later the two Assemblies united. Chichester sent representatives very regularly, James Sparshot, James Dearling, James Austen, John Angel; yet only in 1760 was an Elder chosen, Isaac or Israel Mott, with James Sparshot in 1767, when Mott went to Ditchling; both in 1773 petitioned for the repeal of the penal laws. An endowment was given 1768, but the palmy days were over. Attendance ceased, letters of 1801 told of only forty members, and in 1815 the Eastgate premises were closed, the members going to worship with the Presbyterians. About 1849 the building was re-opened, but only one member was returned: for practical purposes the place is not Baptist.