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Carey and his Biographers

WILLIAM CAREY died in his seventy-third year on 9th June, 1834. Widely honoured and acclaimed as he was, and with his story the pride of Baptists in Britain and America, his death was yet something of an embarrassment to the Baptist Missionary Society. The relationship of those at home to the Serampore trio had proved difficult ever since the death in 1815 of their faithful friend, Andrew Fuller. By 1818 a group of young recruits had established the Calcutta Missionary Union and were working on their own and in a manner overtly critical of those at Serampore. The main hostility of the younger group was directed against Joshua Marshman and they tried, completely unsuccessfully to detach Carey from him. The home committee sided with the junior men and visits to England by William Ward (1818-22), Mrs. Marshman (1820-21), John Clark Marshman, her son (1822-23), and finally Marshman himself (1826-29) proved unable to overcome the widening breach. On March 27th, 1827, after a lengthy and contentious meeting of the committee, there came a parting of the ways and for the following ten years there were two societies seeking the support of British Baptists—the Baptist Missionary Society, of which John Dyer was the secretary, and the Society in aid of the Serampore Mission, of which Christopher Anderson, of Edinburgh, was secretary.

The reconciliation of the two groups was achieved after difficult and protracted negotiations in the spring of 1837 at the very time of Marshman's death. But Carey's passing had occurred in the middle of the period of separation and this presumably accounts for the otherwise surprising fact that the only memorial sermon which found its way into print (at a time when such sermons were very numerous) was one delivered by Christopher Anderson (1782-1852) in Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh.

This sermon by Anderson must be regarded as the earliest printed biographical sketch of the great missionary. First published just after delivery, it was re-issued in 1835 and again in 1837 and contains much of interest, including quotations from a letter from the young Scot, John Leechman, to Samuel Hope of Liverpool, giving a full outline of the address Marshman gave at Carey's funeral. Christopher Anderson had been Fuller's nominee as his successor both in the Kettering pastorate and the secretaryship of the B.M.S. He had first met the young man when in Scotland in 1802. Three years later Anderson spent some months in Olney, London and Bristol and made the acquaintance of the leading English Baptists. He would have made a very able B.M.S. secretary, but when Fuller died there were too many eager for

radical changes in the management of affairs, too many who were suspicious that Anderson would follow Fuller's methods. When in 1827 the breach between Serampore and the B.M.S. became an open rupture, it was Anderson who remained staunchly loyal to Carey and Marshman and organized support for them. Of his memorial sermon he wrote thus to J. C. Marshman :

“If you behave as you have done to the end of your days, whatever calumnies assail you while you live, as soon as you are gone there will be notices of you, and some of them abundantly inaccurate, though meant in your praise. So it has begun to be in regard to Dr. Carey, and more, no doubt, are forthcoming. Every man will like to tell his own tale, and what with wrong hearing and wrong rehearing, they will, I doubt not, make strange work of it.” (*Life and Letters*, p. 313).

His own hasty outline was intended, he says, “to stop the mouths of the inaccurate and unfriendly.” In putting it together he was able to draw upon letters he had received from Carey's sister, Ann.

The first biography of Carey was that written by his nephew, Eustace, and published in 1836 in both England and America. Eustace Carey (1791-1855) was the son of Carey's brother, Thomas. He had joined his uncle at Serampore in 1814, after a period of training first under John Sutcliff, at Olney, and then under Ryland at Bristol College. He was a popular young man with preaching gifts far above the average, but was soon in the group at loggerheads with Marshman, to the great concern and disappointment of Carey. In 1825 Eustace was compelled by ill-health to leave India and things he said on his return home certainly added fuel to the fires of disagreement and contributed to the final breach. It was, however, at the request of the B.M.S. committee that he undertook the life of his uncle and he was able to incorporate in it a great deal of original documentary material in the form of letters, often quoted *in extenso*; he also included an account of Carey by his youngest son, Jonathan, and a sketch of Carey's work as an oriental scholar and translator by Professor H. H. Wilson, of Oxford. Not unnaturally, perhaps, in view of the time at which he wrote and the circumstances then prevailing, Eustace Carey passed rapidly over the closing years of the great missionary's life, eschewing any detailed reference to the unhappy controversies, though making clear that he “entertained opposite convictions from my honoured relative.”

“In Dr. Carey's mind and in the habits of his life,” wrote Eustace, “there is nothing of the marvellous to describe. There was no great and original transcendancy of intellect;

no enthusiasm and impetuosity of feeling : there was nothing in his mental character to dazzle, or even to surprise. Whatever of usefulness and of consequent reputation he attained to, it was the result of an unreserved and patient devotion of a plain intelligence and a single heart to some great, yet well defined and withal practicable objects. . . . The leading characteristics of Dr. Carey were his decision, his patient, persevering constancy, and his simplicity" (American edition pp. 411-412).

Six years later, in 1842, in the jubilee history of the Baptist Missionary Society, Dr. F. A. Cox quoted with approval the remark of Fuller that "the origin of the Society will be found in the workings of our brother Carey's mind." The reunion of the Serampore Mission with the B.M.S., had by then been accomplished. Cox was conscious of the remarkable double triumvirate whose deeds he was recording—Fuller, Sutcliff and Ryland, in England; Carey, Marshman and Ward, in India. His words about Carey are far more glowing than those of Eustace. He describes him as at his death

"one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of the standard bearers in the Christian army. . . . He evidently possessed that kind of universality of mind, if it may be so called, which is generally seen to characterise genius. . . . Had he been born in the sixteenth century he might have been a Luther . . . had he turned his thought and observations merely to natural philosophy, he might have been a Newton. . . . But his humility shone ever brighter than his genius" (op. cit., I pp. 370, 379).

Carey's next biographer was Joseph Belcher (1794-1859), the one-time secretary of the Baptist Union, who after settling in the United States published a life in Philadelphia in 1853. Clearly Belcher had the books already mentioned in front of him, but he was able to add to a few fresh facts and impressions of his own.

Far more important was the substantial work *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward*, published by John Clark Marshman (1794-1877) in 1859, an abridged version of which appeared in the Bunyan Library five years later. J. C. Marshman was the gifted son of Joshua Marshman. He grew up at Serampore and became the trusted assistant not only of his father but also of Carey. His knowledge of events and personalities was unrivalled and he was an able writer. Inevitably his pages are in the nature of a defence of the Serampore Mission and in particular of his father. He had, however, no doubt as to Carey's outstanding greatness.

“He took the lead in a noble enterprise. . . . His exertions were sustained less by the impulse of enthusiasm than by a predominant sense of duty. The basis of all his excellencies was deep and unaffected piety. So great was his love of integrity that he never gave his confidence where he was not certain of the existence of moral worth. He was conspicuous for constancy, both in the pursuits of life and the associations of friendship” (Abridged edition, p. 314).

In 1873 C. B. Lewis, of the Calcutta Mission Press, published a full-length study of the eccentric but devoted Dr. John Thomas, with whom Carey sailed to India. This had not before been attempted and threw fresh light on many episodes in Carey's early years in India. An earlier volume containing many important letters to and from the Serampore missionaries was *The Life and Letters of Christopher Anderson*, by his nephew, Hugh Anderson, which appeared in Edinburgh in 1854.

This new material enabled James Culross, also an able and well-informed writer, to produce in 1881 a useful popular life of Carey. Four years later there appeared from the pen of Dr. George Smith the first full length biography of a really scholarly character. George Smith, a Presbyterian by upbringing, went out to Serampore as a young man and became editor of the *Friend of India*, a journal started by the Marshmans for Europeans and Anglo-Indians. He collected materials for his book in the office, the press and the College and among Indian Christians and Brahman pundits whom Carey had influenced. He gathered a number of formerly unpublished letters and had contact with certain of Carey's numerous descendants. Moreover, Smith was also the author of biographies of Henry Martyn, Alexander Duff and John Wilson, so that the whole background of modern missions in India was familiar to him. Victorian in size and style, with the man often lost in the movement, Smith's work yet achieved the status of a minor classic and in 1909, twenty-four years after its first appearance, was included in Everyman's Library, with reprints in 1913 and 1922.

In 1886 John Taylor, the Northamptonshire printer and antiquarian, issued an extremely valuable but now rare illustrated pamphlet entitled *Biographical and Literary Notices of William Carey, D.D. . . . comprising extracts from Church Books, Autograph MSS and other records, also a list of interesting mementoes connected with Carey*.

Smith's life and Taylor's pamphlet provided the basis for another popular and widely circulated biography that by John Brown Myers, one of the secretarial staff of the B.M.S. *William Carey, the Shoemaker* first appeared in 1887 and was often reprinted.

In 1892, the year of the B.M.S. centenary, came the first indication that further new material on the life of Carey might be discovered. Leighton and Mornay Williams edited a volume entitled *Serampore Letters*, the correspondence of Ryland, Carey, Fuller and others with John Williams, a Welshman by birth, who became in 1798 a pastor in New York.

Then, shortly before the first World War, S. Pearce Carey, Carey's own great-grandson, set himself to write a new full-length biography. Smith's life he once described as "learned but ponderous; never personal, intimate, aglow." Those last adjectives fitly characterise his own work, which first appeared in 1923 and, with a few revisions and additions, in 1934. Pearce Carey's introduction to the field of study came as a result of writing a life of another of his great-grandfathers, Samuel Pearce, of Birmingham. He was able to draw on family traditions and papers, as well as on the letters in the B.M.S. archives, many of which had been used and published by Eustace Carey. He was also able to use records in Northampton and Leicester and letters preserved in the Baptist Church House and at Regent's Park College, which do not appear to have been seen by earlier students. His energy and enthusiasm, aided by those of his brother, William, ferreted out many new facts, while two years in India provided valuable local colour for the latter part of the story. Pearce Carey's life of his great-grandfather is a notable achievement and to read it when it first appeared was a memorable experience for many still living. The book has, however, certain drawbacks.

Eustace Carey said of his uncle: "He had no help from that warmth of feeling; that sensible glow of spirits, partly animal and partly mental, that fervour and fire, to which painters and poets are so deeply indebted." (*op. cit.* p. 412).

If this be true then Pearce Carey, who was often thought to resemble his great-grandfather in physique, cannot have been like him in temperament. Both in speech and with his pen Pearce Carey was exciting and imaginative. The passage in which he describes the first meeting of Dr. John Thomas with the Northamptonshire group on 9th January, 1793, is not uncharacteristic:

"All hearts went out to him, for the courage of his coming, with his injured foot much swollen. Strange that they should make his acquaintance as one brave but limping, like a Jacob after Jabbok. He dragged a maimed self ever, game but lame, warrior but weakling." (1923 edition, p. 103).

More serious is it, however, that Pearce Carey did not hesitate to make minor changes in his quotations from letters, sometimes adding, sometimes removing a phrase, sometimes omitting a whole passage or conflating his documentary sources. It would not be

right to describe what he has done as "bowdlerising" and never did he alter facts. It remains true, however, that again and again one is not given an exact quotation. Further, as is perhaps inevitable when a descendant or relative writes a biography and is inspired by a liberal dose of hero-worship, a few facts—which at this distance of time need no longer be concealed—are withheld. A word must also be said about the indices to the two editions. That to the 1923 edition published by Hodder and Stoughton is useable, if inadequate. When in 1934 the book was transferred to the Carey Press, Pearce Carey was allowed to provide what can only be described as a fancy index of his own devising. It is worse than useless. Those who wish to find anything quickly in this volume of many hundred pages must have recourse to the index in the earlier edition and then look for the corresponding passage in the later one.

Three years after the first edition of Pearce Carey's life of Carey, another but briefer one appeared. Its author was F. Deaville Walker, a Methodist editor with a wide knowledge of the modern missionary movement. Based chiefly on Eustace Carey and J. C. Marshman, together with a number of contemporary biographies, *William Carey: Missionary Pioneer and Statesman*, 1926, provides an admirable pen-portrait and breaks new ground by drawing on the files of the *Northampton Mercury*, which was appearing twice a week in Carey's day and which clearly exercised an influence on his development.

Two brief later sketches of Carey should be mentioned: the one by Pearce Carey, published in 1936, the other and more important one by Dr. Arthur Dakin—*William Carey, Shoemaker, Linguist, Missionary*—issued for sixpence by the B.M.S. in 1942.

In 1945 there appeared a substantial academic study entitled *William Carey, especially his Missionary Principles*, by Dr. A. H. Oussoren, minister of the Reformed Church at Middelburg. Written in Holland under war-time conditions this work almost inevitably contains a number of minor errors and misunderstandings. It has, however, great value as coming from a non-Baptist and because it deals at length with the influence on Carey of Moravian missionary achievements and policy. It also gives useful details of the Auxiliary Society formed early in the nineteenth century among the Dutch Mennonites to give help to the B.M.S.

All this means that a really scholarly and definitive modern biography of Carey remains to be written. The importance of the subject would seem to demand it. The materials exist in almost bewildering profusion, but they are uncatalogued and ill-ordered, though almost all are to be found in four libraries, those of the Baptist Missionary Society, the Baptist Union, Regent's Park College

and Serampore College. More than four hundred of Fuller's letters have now been traced and copied (see *Baptist Quarterly*, XV, 1953-54). One of the first tasks for some research student might well be the preparation of a calender of Carey's letters. The numerous pamphlets relating to the Serampore controversy also require examination. In the meantime Dr. W. S. B. Davis, formerly of the B.M.S. staff in India and now of the United States, has been given facilities to write a Bengali life of Carey, while the Rev. J. B. Middlebrook has followed the example of his predecessor, J. B. Myers, in producing a popular account of Carey's life and work to mark the bicentenary of his birth.

To this review of the printed material regarding Carey and the sources on which it is based a few gleanings of a personal character may be added. The only portrait of him that has ever been reproduced is that painted in Calcutta by Robert Home in 1812, when Carey was fifty-one years old. This portrait now belongs to Regent's Park College, which also owns another painting possibly made at Olney just before he sailed for India, by one of Sutcliff's students. Edmund Carey, his father, is described as "a short, dotty man" and somewhat diminutive size seems to have been a family characteristic. Thomas Scott, the evangelical clergyman, described William as "a sensible looking lad." As early as 1804 Carey told Fuller: "I feel some decay of sight and am obliged to wear spectacles." Six years later, writing to Sutcliff he said: "My sight so fails that I cannot read small Greek with glasses of the greatest magnifying powers my eyes will bear." The spectacles in the Home portrait are thus more important than might at first appear.

In 1949 Mr. Charles Jewson sent to me a copy of a letter from Andrew Leslie to Thomas Theobald, of Norwich (the original being now in the possession of a great-grandson of the latter, Mr. Basil Cozens-Hardy). Leslie wrote in June, 1824, shortly after his arrival at Serampore, and thus describes Carey, then nearly sixty-three years old:

"Dr. Carey is a very equable and cheerful old man, in countenance very like the engraving of him with his pundit. In body he is much inferior, being rather less in size and not so robust, and he does not wear such a fine dress as is given him in the plate. His general habit is white stockings, nankeen breeches, a white waistcoat, a round white jacket and an old black hat hardly worth a shilling."

Eustace Carey was able to print a number of Carey's letters to his sisters, Ann and Mary, but did not reproduce that of 25th October, 1831, which appeared in the *Baptist Quarterly*, October,

1938, and has special interest since material of this kind for the last few years of his life is somewhat scanty.

Some information not before published about the printing and sale of the *Enquiry* will be found in the introduction to the facsimile edition which the Carey Kingsgate Press is issuing to mark the bi-centenary of Carey's birth. The first Minute Book of the B.M.S. records that the Society gave Carey £5 5s. 0d. towards the expenses of the removal of his goods in 1793 from Leicester to Hackleton. A letter sent by Fuller to John Saffery, of Salisbury, in May, 1793, shows that John Newton introduced Carey and Thomas, when they were seeking passages to India, to Wilberforce and Thornton, who later, of course, became their staunch champions. Newton in 1797 said to Ryland of Carey: "I look up to such a man with reverence. He is more to me than Bishop or Archbishop; he is an apostle."

Dr. Pearce Carey presented a number of his papers to Regent's Park College. Among them is a letter written by Carey to John Chamberlain in June, 1821. It refers to the death of Charlotte Rumohr, the frail Danish lady, who was Carey's second wife.

"The loss of a wife who lived for no earthly object but that of making me happy, who anticipated all my wants, and interpreted my very looks, who was a helper indeed in spiritual things, and a great assistance in my work; is a great loss indeed. . . . She was ready to depart. Hers was a life of prayer and delight in the word of God, so that at the time of her departure she had nothing to do but die. I with reason feel severely, but in no trial during my life had I so few reasons for regret, and so many for perfectly acquiescing in the will of God."

Fourteen months later Carey married again. Culross tells us that the day was fixed and guests invited when, only three or four days before the ceremony, Carey discovered he would need a licence and that to get it he would have to take an oath. To this he had a conscientious objection and so applied to have the banns published, which meant postponing the wedding for three weeks.

Carey had seven children, all born to his first wife, Dorothy Plackett, of Hackleton. The eldest, died in Piddington. Another girl, Lucy, died in Leicester. His third son, Peter died in India. Of his other sons, Felix (1785-1822), Jabez (1793-1862) and Jonathan (1794-1874) all had children, giving Carey at least sixteen grandchildren, the eldest of whom died in 1810 and another as recently as 1937. Of his numerous great-grandchildren several are still living, as are of course many representatives of later generations.

What would Carey say about all the attention that has been and is being given to him? He would find it embarrassing and distasteful. Of that there can be no doubt. In a letter to his son, Jabez, written in January 1824 he told of his election as President of the Agricultural Society of India in the formation of which three years earlier he had taken as leading part. "This," he said, "brings me out to public view in a manner I would have avoided, but I had no choice." His well known words to Alexander Duff and his choice of an epitaph show how deeply he distrusted publicity and praise. At Ryland's request Carey sent him in 1816 an account of his early religious development. "As it is very uncertain whether I shall not dishonour the Gospel before I die, so as to bring a public scandal thereupon, the less said about me the better." To Carey this was a real and continuing fear, and it was *Ephesians* ii. 8 that he asked Marshman to speak on at his funeral service: "By grace are ye saved."

There is here a psychological problem which demands the attention of those who would get close to Carey. How are we to reconcile his intense self-distrust with his great achievements, the range of his interests and his apparent decision of character? Of all his many biographers only his nephew Eustace seems adequately conscious of the enigma and of all his biographers only Eustace and John Clark Marshman saw him at close quarters. Yet the enigma is one that a twentieth century biographer must set himself to present, even if he cannot solve it. Did its secret lie in Carey's humble origin and lack of early educational and social advantages, in his physical inheritance or in his religious experiences and beliefs? It may well have been a combination of all three. Thomas Swann, of Birmingham, declared that Carey once said to him: "Brother Swann, I am not fitted for discipline. I never could say No. I began to preach at Moulton, because I could not say No. I went to Leicester, because I could not say No. I became a missionary because I could not say No." But even if this was an entirely serious remark (and may there not have been a twinkle in Carey's eye when he made it?) it does not account for what happened, nor for Carey's continuing inner dis-ease.

Ever since his death people have been talking not only about Dr. Carey's Saviour, but about Dr. Carey, for his story is not one that can be forgotten. His influence has been extending like the ripples on a pool into which a stone has been thrown. "A living man is certain to stop talking," wrote Kierkegaard, "but once a dead man begins calling out (instead of keeping quiet as is the custom)—who is to silence him?"

ERNEST A. PAYNE