

Missionary William Carey remembered

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In Calcutta, India, a tired pedestrian turns aside from the heat and bustle of the city to enjoy the serenity of the botanical garden. Resting in the shade of an ancient vine whose branches form an umbrella overhead, his gaze falls upon the bust of a little-known Englishman who planted this, the first such park in all of India. Little does he know that the Botanical Garden of Calcutta is but one of William Carey's contributions to India and the world.

Born 225 years ago, on August 17, 1761, to a weaver in Paulerspury, a little English village in the agricultural county of Northamptonshire, Carey had little prospect of making much of his life. But he had the providential good fortune of being born into the right time and place to mold him for the work that he was to do.

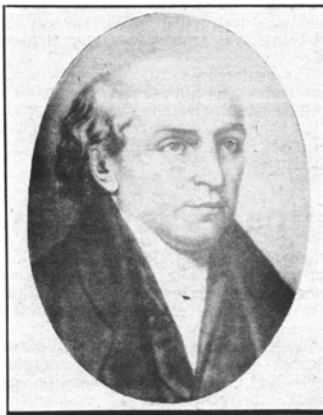
A love for learning

When Carey was 6, his family moved from their small cottage to the village school, where his father had been appointed schoolmaster. The family lived in one part of the building and his father taught the village children in the other. It was here that Carey's love for learning had its birth. He loved to read all the books that he could get his hands on.

His love for adventure was shown in his constant talk of the explorer of the new world, so much so that the village boys gave him the nickname "Columbus." He was also apt in arithmetic and could often be heard "cashing accounts" late at night after the family had retired. He was so well versed in the Bible that the village children often said to him, "Well if you won't play with us, preach us a sermon," whereupon he would mount a stump and whail away.

Carey was also a lover of nature. He spent long hours in the nearby Royal Whitebury Forest where he became well acquainted with the plants and animals. His little room in the family cottage was filled with plants, insects and birds.

At the age of 12, Carey left school in the custom of his day and became a gardener in order to earn at least a part of his living.



William Carey
Father of modern missions

But due to a severe allergy to sunlight which left him with a painful rash, he had to give up that pursuit. In later years Carey wrote that he learned a valuable lesson from his farming years which was a help to him throughout his life. He learned that if one wants a straight furrow when plowing, "he must set his eyes on a definite mark."

Becoming a Baptist

After leaving farming Carey became apprentice to a shoemaker, and he eventually became a cobbler. He was first introduced to the thinking of English dissenters by a fellow apprentice. The little house at Hackleton where the shop was located has been called "Carey's College," for, in common with many other cobblers' workshops, it was a meeting place for scholars and ready debaters. In such debates with dissenters, Carey was exposed for the first time to "experimental" religion. He had been born into a Church of England home and had been confirmed without much thought about it. But not until he met the dissenters had it

occurred to him that religion was to have a practical influence on a person's life.

At the age of 17, Carey made a break with the established church. His identification with the Baptists did not come until age 22 when he read a pamphlet by Robert Hall. After reading the pamphlet, Carey applied to John Ryland and was baptized in the River Nen. He was "recommended" by the Baptist church at Olney and was pastor of several churches in the area, constantly reminding his hearers of their missionary obligations.

When he became pastor at Moulton, the pay was such a pittance that Carey had to once again become a shoemaker in order to support his growing family. It was in the cobbler's shop at Moulton that Carey's missionary passion grew into an obsession. He had a huge handmade map of the world on the wall over his cobbler's bench. It was at that bench that he worked late at night, after the labor of the day was completed, to sketch a pattern for world missions. In his famous little book, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, Carey declared the Great Commission, which had never yet been fulfilled, to be as binding on the Church in all succeeding generations as it was upon the first disciples.

It was at the meeting of the Northamptonshire Baptist Association in 1792 that the seeds were planted for the formation of a missionary society to promote missions among the heathen, but it was four months later before the idea reached fruition. Carey was the chosen preacher at Northamptonshire and in his famous "Deathless Sermon" he summarized his feelings in the tremendous couplet that became the motto of his life: "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."

A group of like-minded pastors agreed to attend a future meeting to discuss Carey's proposal and four months later, in the Widow Wallis' parlor at Kettering, the Baptist Missionary Society was formed. William Carey and John Thomas were appointed as the first missionaries of the society and their field of service was to be India. (Next week: Carey in India.)