

SERAMPORE LETTERS

BEING THE UNPUBLISHED CORRESPONDENCE OF
WILLIAM CAREY AND OTHERS WITH
JOHN WILLIAMS

1800-1816

EDITED BY

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PREFACE.

THE introduction of Mr. Wright presents very clearly the English setting of the letters included in this collection, and the notes which have been interspersed among them give sufficient explanation to form a continuous narrative. A word, however, may be premised here as to the special interest of the letters in connection with the centennial of the Baptist Missionary Society.

The letters throw a new and unexpected light on the American connection with the Serampore Mission of the English Baptists. The obstacles placed in the way of the English missionaries by the East India Company made it necessary for them to make the voyage by way of America, and they were thrown on the hospitality of their American brethren. A regular correspondence thus sprang up between the society at home and the Serampore missionaries, carried on from this country mainly by Dr. William Rogers, of Philadelphia, and the Rev. John Williams, of New York. A warm friendship seems thus to have grown up be-

tween the brethren on both sides of the sea, a friendship which, in the providence of God, proved of no little benefit to the Baptists in this country. The letters furnish also important evidence of indebtedness to the English brethren in the commencement of work in America, as will be seen by the letter from William Carey to John Williams announcing the conversion of Judson to Baptist views. The letters have a third source of interest in the evidence which they afford of the active missionary sympathies and efforts of the New York churches at this early period. The credit of the formation of the Missionary Union has hitherto been given almost exclusively to the Baptists of Massachusetts; but it will appear from these records that the earliest missionary society in this country was formed in New York City, and that of that Society John Williams was a Director and Dr. Carey a correspondent. Before the date of Judson's departure for India a Baptist Society had also been formed in this city in connection with the Baptist Association; and even before the formation of the Society the Association itself had supported the Rev. Elkanah Holmes as a missionary to the Indians. In this work of Mr. Holmes, Carey seems to have felt the deepest interest. When the Baptist Missionary Society was formed in New York, John Williams became its first president, and John Cauldwell, a deacon of his church, was elected its treasurer, and later the first treasurer of the

Missionary Union. We have thus the evidence of a share in the origin of the Missionary Union on the part of the New York brethren fully as large as that rightly claimed by those in Boston. But after all, perhaps the chief interest of the letters to the general reader will be found in the vivid portraiture which they bring before us of the man to whom, under God, the work of modern missions is most largely indebted, as his character is presented unconsciously to himself in the thoughts and feelings to which he gives expression in these letters to a friend whom he had never seen, but whom he knew to be like-minded in faith and purpose. From the example which they afford of wide, unselfish interest, and a firm, unshaken faith and determination, we may well glean lessons of the highest value to ourselves, as well as a juster appreciation of the narrow resources and deep draughts on faith out of which this great work has grown.

Our grateful acknowledgments are due to the friends who have aided in this compilation, especially to Thomas Wright, Esq., and to Sir William Thomas Lewis.

It is proper to state that the letters are given as they were written, and that in all cases the spelling of native names has been left unchanged.

President Madison's war message was sent in June 1, 1812, and on the 18th of June war was declared with Great Britain. All the efforts of those who, on both sides of the sea, had deprecated war were in vain, and the inevitable conflict came ; but even the actual existence of hostilities could not destroy the bands which knit together the hearts of those united even by a more sacred tie than that of country ; and in the very month of October, when Decatur was winning his victories on the ocean, and those who spoke the same language and sprang from the same mother-stock were waging fierce warfare, William Carey, at Serampore, was writing to John Williams in New York a letter which was to be the signal for a new campaign of peaceful but more glorious conquest, in which England and America, no longer foes, were to be generous rivals.

In June, 1810, Adoniram Judson, a young theological student at Andover Seminary, had, with a few of his associates, prepared a memorial which they presented to the Association of Congregationalist ministers meeting at Bradford, in Massachusetts. In this memorial they asked the advice of their elders in the ministry as to their own engaging in the work of foreign missions, and, as a consequence of the memorial, the Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was formed; and on the 19th of February, 1812, Messrs. Judson and Newell, with their wives, sailed from Salem, Massachusetts, for Calcutta, to be followed by Messrs. Hall and Nott, with their wives and Mr. Rice, who sailed from Philadelphia on the 24th of the same month. The story of that eventful voyage is best told in Dr. Carey's own words:

MY DEAR BROTHER:

It is a long time since I wrote to you. My numerous avocations must be my apology, and indeed this apology is the true one, for want of will is not the cause. I shall, however, now write you a short note to make amends for my long silence, and request a continuance of your correspondence.

You as well as myself are acquainted with the circumstances of five brethren having been sent from America to begin a mission in the East. They have all safely arrived at this place. Government, however,

have absolutely refused to let them stay here, and have peremptorily ordered them to leave the place, and not to settle in any country belonging to Great Britain or her allies. We have tried our interest, but have succeeded no further than to gain permission for them to go to the Isle of France, to which place Brother and Sister Newell went before the arrival of the other three. It soon appeared that the mind of Brother Judson had been much employed upon the subject of believer's baptism, and in a little time after his arrival he and Sister Judson wished to be baptized, with which we complied, and they were both baptized publicly at Calcutta in the name of the blessed Trinity. I inquired of Brother Judson what could have induced him to take this step, to which he replied that on his voyage he thought much of the prospect of meeting with us at Serampore. He knew that we were Baptists, and supposed that he might probably be called to defend infant baptism among us. This led him to examine the evidence for it; and the further he proceeded in this examination the clearer the evidence for baptizing believers only, and that by immersion, appeared. He frequently conversed with Mrs. Judson upon the subject, which was the occasion of her thinking as he did upon that ordinance. Since his baptism he preached a very excellent discourse upon the ordinance, which we intend to print, with an account of the change in his views in his own words.

Since his baptism I hear Brother Rice has been thinking closely upon the subject, and to-night I was informed that he had made up his mind to follow our Lord in his ordinance. He disputes the matter with his other brethren, and it is difficult to say what will be the effect of his conversations.

Now, what is to be done with these brethren? They expect to be discarded by the Board of Commissioners for Oriental missions. We shall advance them temporary supplies, but we are not able to invite them to become missionaries for the Baptist Mission Society without first writing to England and receiving our brethren's consent. Our brethren Judson and Rice would also be glad to be American missionaries.

Cannot our Baptist brethren in America form a missionary society, either auxiliary to our society in England or distinct from it, as may appear most eligible, and take these brethren as their missionaries? I believe they are men of the right stamp. They intend to settle eventually on the Island of Java, but must first go to the Isle of France on account of the orders of government. One of our brethren is also going thither, viz, to Java. We will give them advice and everything else within our power.

I think this circumstance opens a new scene of duty to our Baptist brethren in America; and though I am persuaded that their proper sphere of action is among the Indians of North and South America, and in the

West India Islands, yet this extraordinary call should not be lightly passed over.

The Lord is still carrying on his work, about twenty persons are now expecting to join the church at Calcutta and to be baptized in a month or two more.

I am very affectionately yours,

W. CAREY.

CALCUTTA, Oct. 20, 1812.