

Welcome Address

W. STEWART

It is my privilege to welcome you to Serampore and its College, the home and scene of the labours of those remarkable pioneers, Carey, Marshman and Ward. The College which they founded in 1818 reminds us that, at the centre of their missionary obedience, they placed two great activities, education and the translation and dissemination of the Scriptures. These went hand in hand. They summed up the studies planned in this Institution as 'Eastern Literature and Western Science' and they exhorted their students, half of them Christian young men under preparation to serve Church and nation, to learn so well that they might 'out-Sanskrit the pandits', while the study of the Bible in the original languages, in English and in the mother tongue was central in their curriculum. Translation of the Scriptures involved labours which usually we are spared: the manufacture of paper on which to print, the making of a type-foundry to make printing possible, the actual printing itself. Again, translation meant the assembling of an impressive collection of commentaries, dictionaries and concordances, and of older versions of the Bible, most of which are here on the shelves of the Carey Library, still available for the scholar. It also involved the preparation of new grammars and dictionaries in Indian languages, including Carey's great Bengali and Sanskrit dictionaries. Here Carey kindly remarked that he hoped in this way somewhat to ease the burden of those who would succeed him in the tasks of translation. Appropriately, too, we must recall that they found it right to seek to penetrate the cultural heritage of India's people; witness Carey's great work in collecting MSS of Hindu classics and in translating and publishing the *Ramayana*; witness, too, Ward's vast industry in publishing his book on Hindu customs. So they worked, and to have increased the number of languages in which parts at least of the Bible were available by some 34 in as many years was no mean achievement for one who had left school at the age of thirteen, and his co-workers.

In bidding you welcome I extend my sincere good wishes for the success of this Conference and of the Society. There is much to be done to promote the penetrating study of the Scriptures. If in some realms of life we hear of a 'crash programme' to prepare men for the scientific age, no less urgent is the need to win more Biblical scholars and theologians in our land. This undertaking,

of course, takes us into an international field in which much is being done. Our scholars are emerging, but the vast preponderance of Western scholars in the field and the abundant resources for research which they command may leave on us one or two effects. On the one hand, we may feel that the only criterion for achievement is its recognition in the Western world. To get a book published in the West, to get a paper into a Western journal, to be noticed in a Western review—that is to have arrived! Even our Indian publishers, like the C.L.S., perpetuate this idea of success by the prominence they give to books imported from the West over even their own publications. On the other hand, we may get a sense of sheer discouragement by seeing how small are our resources compared with those of other countries, and this may distort our values by a conviction that we must copy them.

Surely we must be in this international field, profit by what is done elsewhere and contribute to it. Yet, surely also our direct responsibility is in our own territory. For there is a responsibility. Research for its own sake cannot finally satisfy anyone who is engaged in the service of Christian theology. The question, 'Whom shall the educated man serve?' is one that he at least cannot evade. And the answer to that question is surely that we have to serve the Church and to share in the Church's service of the Gospel among our fellow-men. Christians today are more than ever challenged by the secular world in which they work. Are they equipped with an understanding knowledge of their Scriptures? The Marxist knows his book; new editions of Hindu scriptures with commentary and interpretation are everywhere sold and studied. Does the ordinary Christian know his Scriptures half so well? Are we really the people of the Book? There is much to be done and, as in Carey's day, it is needed in the original languages, in English and in the mother tongue.

One thing more: many who do not share the faith want to know the Christian Scriptures. Gandhiji with his respect for the Sermon on the Mount was far from being the first to commend these writings to others as he understood them. There are many interpretations, from the devout work of Raja Ram Mohan Roy to that of J. C. Kumarappa, a baptized Christian with his own version of the precepts of Jesus. There is the interpretation of the faith commended by no less a person than the President of India and the view of Christ which men learn from Swami Vivekananda, and today there circulates a pamphlet, 'Thus Spake the Christ', published by the Ramakrishna Mission and read by multitudes.

What does this mean for us? On the one hand, here is evidence of a deep interest and a readiness to listen to what the Scriptures seem to be saying, which must be respected. It is a reminder that through the Bible men are addressed in heart and conscience, and it is for us to ponder how far the insight of these seeking souls has something relevant to say on the interpretation of the word that we might not have found from Western

commentators. On the other hand, much of this interpretation cries out to be re-thought against the background of the historical setting of the Scriptures, the coming of the Lord in the fullness of time and within Israel. To ignore all that is to be launched into a shoreless sea in which many of men's conclusions will seem strange indeed.

That is why there is so much to be done, so great a need for thorough Biblical study and for sharing the fruits of that study with the Church and with the man-in-the-street, that the word may not be obscured. If we have such purposes as these before us we shall know that the success of this Society will not be measured by the degree of recognition it gains in the international journals, but by the extent to which it really does help the Church to lay hold on its heritage and to make the word of God known to the people of the land.

The Use of the Bible by Indian Christian Theologians

M. P. JOHN

The title as formulated is both vast and vague; the vastness justifies the limitation of consideration in the first and longer part to two writers, and only to a limited selection of their writings—decided primarily by easy availability and limitations of time. The vagueness of the topic justifies the double character of the paper: the first part descriptive and the last part a brief introduction to a discussion of principles. For the first half of the paper, the only Indian Christian theologians that I will be concerned with will be the two leaders of the Madras Group, the late Mr. P. Chenchiah and the late Mr. V. Chakkarai Chettiar. Old numbers of the *Guardian* and the *Christian Patriot*, periodicals in which a great part of their writings appeared, were not at hand, and therefore I base my statements on Mr. Chakkarai's two books, *Jesus the Avatar (JA)*, C.L.S., Madras, 1926, and *The Cross and Indian Thought (CIT)*, C.L.S., Madras, 1932, and the contributions of both these gentlemen in *Rethinking Christianity in India (RCI)*, Madras, 1938. I believe that even though references and examples are taken only from these limited sources, they are representative writings and therefore capable of giving us their basic attitude to the Bible.