

# The Latter-day Saint Mission to India: 1851-1856

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A number of years ago, Brigham H. Roberts, noted Latter-day Saint Church official and historian, said concerning the LDS missionaries to India that "there is nothing more heroic in our Church annals than the labors and sufferings of these brethren of the mission to India."<sup>1</sup> Considering the times in which Roberts lived and the knowledge he had of the trials and sufferings of the early members of the Church, this statement takes on great proportions. And yet, a few years ago Kenneth Scott Latourette devoted only one sentence of his multivolume work, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, to the same LDS mission. He wrote in passing, "We hear of the Mormon missionaries, but they seem not to have attracted an extensive following."<sup>2</sup> The difference in emphasis between what Roberts and Latourette wrote is not one of sympathy alone, but of knowledge of the subject. Roberts was familiar with some of the missionaries through personal acquaintance. Latourette probably did not have materials available to him that could give him more information than he revealed. Nearly all of the records that tell the full story of the LDS Indian endeavor are printed in early Mormon periodicals or are contained in old journals that only recently have been made available to the public.

The mission to India began, not in Utah, where Brigham

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<sup>1</sup>Brigham H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News Press, 1930), Vol. IV, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1944), Vol. VI.

Young had established the saints, but in England. The need for a mission was recognized when two persons in India, Private Thomas Metcalf of the British army and William A. Sheppard of Calcutta, wrote asking for tracts, literature, and other information about the Church. Concurrent with these requests came word concerning missionary efforts of two sailors who, after being baptized in England on 27 January 1849, had sailed on a voyage that terminated at Calcutta, India. There they found it necessary to wait while their ship received needed repairs. These men, George Barber and Benjamin Richey, were the first known members of the Church to set foot on Indian soil. They were also the first missionaries. While they were in Calcutta, they became acquainted with a religious group who called themselves the Plymouth Brethren. Barber and Richey did their best to explain Mormonism and received a warm response from several members of the group. These sailors were not well informed as to the doctrine of the Church nor did they hold priesthood authority; and, for this reason, when they arrived back in England, they asked the Church authorities there to send someone to baptize several of the Plymouth Brethren.<sup>3</sup>

Because of these requests, Elder Joseph Richards was sent to Calcutta by G.B. Wallace, a Church authority in England. Richards arrived at Calcutta in June 1851. He did not stay there long on this first visit, however, because he had obtained passage under contract as a sailmaker and could not find a replacement when the ship sailed back to England. But while there he baptized the first converts of India, ordained several men to the priesthood, and established the "Wanderer's Branch."<sup>4</sup>

It was not until 25 December 1851 that Elder William Willes, Richards's replacement, arrived in Calcutta. He had been called by Lorenzo Snow, who was president of the Swiss and Italian missions and who felt it his prerogative to include India in his area of authority.<sup>5</sup> Willes was called especially to

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<sup>3</sup>Letter from Benjamin Richey to George A. Smith, Nephi, Utah, 2 December 1865. Record on file in the LDS Church Historian's Office and in the Manuscript History of the East India Mission.

<sup>4</sup>*Journal History of the East India Mission*, Branch Record, p. 1. Friday, 26 December 1851; Daily record kept by the LDS Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>5</sup>*Millennial Star* (London, England), Vol. XIII, p. 348 and Vol. XIV, p. 91. The *Millennial Star* was a weekly publication of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The missionaries of the India Mission wrote frequent letters to the president of the European Mission. Many of the letters were published under the heading "Foreign Correspondence." Hereafter, these references will be cited as M.S.

go to Calcutta. Another elder, Hugh Findlay, was sent to Bombay by Snow at the same time.

Willes found only six members of the Church, and they were essentially without leadership. Richards had returned to London; and Maurice White, who had been ordained an elder and set apart as branch president only a week after his baptism, had also departed for England with the intention of learning more about the operation of the Church. Willes soon organized the group and gave the male members such responsibilities as secretary, treasurer, and book agent. Plans were drawn for the publication of a tract in the Bengali, Hindi, and Hindustani languages.<sup>6</sup> Within a few days after his arrival, Willes was informed by James Patric Meik, one of the first converts, that he intended to build a lecture hall on land that he had leased for the Church. By the time Willes had been in India for two weeks, he had lectured several times concerning the gospel, and he was sure that he would have success. He was elated by a report from a native Indian woman named Anna, who had been baptized by Elder White, to the effect that a whole church of native Episcopalian Christians would desire baptism just as soon as matters could "be arranged in relation to their social position, etc."<sup>7</sup> In his first letter home, Willes wrote:

Although I am writing in this cool, businesslike strain, my heart is bounding with grateful emotions of thanksgiving that he has made me and my brethren the instruments in His hands for spreading such glorious tidings in a land filled with "darkness, selfishness and cruel habitations."<sup>8</sup>

January, February, and March 1852 brought continued success. Willes had obtained the services of an Indian who had set to work translating *Ancient Gospel Restored*, a tract by Lorenzo Snow. Willes was also presenting a series of twenty lectures that were well attended. The number of people baptized continued to mount, and opposition to his message was minimal. By 24 March, there were twelve European and twenty native members. On 6 April, Willes baptized eleven native men who came from a distant village. Three of these men were soon given the Aaronic Priesthood.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>*Journal History*, Branch Record, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>M.S., Vol. XIV, p. 90.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>M.S., Vol. XIV, p. 315.

During April, some opposition began to arise from the Protestant ministers in Calcutta. These men told the new members of the Church that they would become Muslims and "be obliged to have many wives, etc., and that Joe Smith bought three hundred thousand Mormons with the Gold that he found in California." But, even with such rumors,

by the beginning of May 1852, the membership to the Church in and around Calcutta had increased to one hundred and fifty, of whom three were Elders, eight Priests, nine teachers, eight Deacons, and one hundred and twenty-two lay members. By including children belonging to the baptized families, there were more than three hundred Indian Saints of all sizes, colors and languages. On the previous Christmas (1851) there were only six members.<sup>10</sup>

By mid-May the Church had grown another 39 members. The total membership amounted to 189, of whom 170 were *ryots*, or native farmers.<sup>11</sup>

Spreading the message was difficult. Willes reported that when he left the confines of Calcutta, the people were "scattered over an immense district of ploughed fields and very bad or no regular roads."<sup>12</sup> He had no knowledge of Indian social patterns. He had no missionary plan to follow, and the climate was very difficult for him to adjust to.

In August 1852, Joseph Richards arrived once again in Calcutta. A few days later, Richards baptized William Sheppard and his son. Sheppard, it will be remembered, had been one of those who originally inquired for information regarding Mormonism. Following these baptisms, there was little activity for the next two months. The rains continued heavy until early November; and, by that time, even though attendance at meetings was picking up, Willes and Richards had decided to set out for the Punjab, a distance of about one thousand miles northwest of Calcutta. They sustained Elder James Patric Meik as branch president and set out.<sup>13</sup>

What followed over the next number of months was one of the great missionary journeys of LDS history. Willes and Richards traveled over 620 miles on foot before they became convinced that it would be more economical to travel by ox-

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<sup>10</sup>M.S., Vol. XIV, p. 413.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>M.S., Vol. XV, p. 332.

drawn wagon. During their travels, they visited many of the sacred places of the Hindu religion, as well as the famed Taj Mahal. As they made their way up the Ganges River Basin, they preached as they traveled and baptized a number of people on their way. Perhaps the most interesting description they wrote concerning the places they visited was that of Banaras. Few Hindus, however, would share their appraisal of this holy city:

Banaras is the sacred city of the Hindus, of great antiquity, swarming with devotees from all parts of India, having innumerable shrines, temples, idols, sacrifices, Brahmin bulls, painted and besmeared pilgrims, maimed, halt, and blind—in many cases wantonly effected in sacrifice to their idols. The shrines and idols, where they offer small portions of rice, flowers, and other matters mingling and forming a decoction which the strong stomach of a Hindu God, or a sectarian God “without parts,” alone could entertain with any degree of comfort—these are certainly choice quarters for the residence of Gods.<sup>14</sup>

By the time they had traveled to Agra (800 miles from Calcutta), they had baptized sixteen people. At this point, however, Richards's health began to fail him, and he decided that he should not continue on to the Punjab. Accordingly, he made his way back toward Calcutta; but Willes decided to go on alone. From Agra he went to a village called Dugshai and from there to Simla, which is directly north of New Delhi. (Dugshai and Simla are what the British call “hill towns,” high in the Himalayan foothills.) Willes also traveled in the Punjab, but his success there was very limited. He reported that the military establishments were almost all “closed-up” against him; he believed that the chaplains had carefully written to one another warning of his coming.<sup>15</sup>

Willes and Richards were not the only LDS missionaries working in India. Hugh Findlay had by this time been in Bombay for more than a year. He did not have the success that Willes enjoyed, for he had been met almost from the day of his arrival by opposition from the established Protestant sects, the press, and military officers and chaplains.<sup>16</sup> Thus it was neces-

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>M.S., Vol. XV, p. 686 and Amos Milton Musser, “Diary,” Journal III, pp. 16-17. Mss. in possession of Burton Musser, Salt Lake City, and copy in the possession of Brigham Young University Special Collections Library, Provo, Utah, and Gertrude Musser Richards, Pleasant Grove, Utah. Hereafter cited as Musser.

<sup>16</sup>M.S., Vol. XIV, p. 463.

sary from the beginning that Findlay publicly defend his position in Bombay.

It took Findlay almost six months to baptize his first six converts. He was not allowed in any military areas in Bombay and was forbidden to preach to military personnel. Because he was not making much headway in Bombay, he decided to move to what he hoped would be a more fruitful location. He selected Poona, about ninety miles from Bombay, and went there. He was again greeted by a hostile press and by military officials who were at first not willing to let him preach. Permission to proselyte was finally given because the officer in charge felt that "the less these people are opposed the less harm they would do."<sup>17</sup>

Several kinds of trouble occurred, mostly because of a rumor that the Mormons would buy the "drafts" of the British soldiers and send them to California; another problem had to do with an anti-Mormon tract that was widely distributed. Notwithstanding these difficulties, Elder Findlay was successful in organizing a branch of twelve members in Poona by mid-September 1852. They were a "little company . . . of a mixed birth, European, Eurasian, and native. . . ."<sup>18</sup>

In October, Findlay was directed to leave the military cantonment. By that time it was evident to the officer in charge that Findlay was not a temporary visitor. Findlay found new quarters, which he described in these words:

This house is a little uncouth to the eye, bearing a resemblance to an English store-room, or a Bombay go-down, having a door, six feet by six feet at each end, and two windows, four by six feet, on each side, with iron bars, and the light of day is an apology for glass, indeed having such an ediface for bedroom, parlour, and sanctuary, it required considerable faith to convince one's self that imprisonment is not added to banishment. But we "stoop to conquer," and are thankful to the Lord for it.<sup>19</sup>

Findlay held Church meetings in this place in addition to living there. He did have plans to build a chapel directly across the street, though, and saw its completion several months later.

After his "extermination" from the cantonments, Findlay turned more and more to the native population. He studied the

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<sup>17</sup>M.S., Vol. XIV, pp. 635-36.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>M.S., Vol. XIV, pp. 654-55.

Maratha language and spent a great deal of time with a group of Brahmin intellectuals who made it a practice to discuss religion with missionaries.

During the time when Willes and Richards were preaching in northern India and Findlay was working in Bombay and Poona, events were taking place in Utah that were of great importance to the India Mission. In late August 1852, a conference was held in Salt Lake City in which 108 missionaries were called to serve in various parts of the world. Of that number, 9 were assigned to India and 4 were sent to Siam (present-day Thailand).<sup>20</sup> These 13 men, in company with a number of others who were assigned to the Pacific area, traveled by wagon to San Pedro and sailed to San Francisco. There the men going to India and Siam embarked on a clipper ship called the *Monsoon*, bound for Calcutta. They sailed on 29 January 1853 and arrived at Calcutta on 25 April. The voyage had taken eighty-six days and had covered 10,976 miles from San Francisco.<sup>21</sup>

The elders were very excited about their arrival and were in good health and spirits. For a number of days, they had intensified their study of the gospel and missionary techniques. Every day they held classes in which Richard Ballantyne and Chauncey W. West lectured on English grammar. They gave practice sermons to each other and freely criticized what they heard.

As they traveled up the Hooghly River, they were struck by the beauty of the scenery. Amos Milton Musser recorded these words:

Apr. 25 [which should have read 26] a.m. We arrived opposite Ft. William about 6 o'clock the beauty of scenery surpasses anything I ever before beheld on both sides of the river as we passed along its shores, about noon we took a customs house officer aboard, the tide has been in our favor . . . my feelings while beholding the beautiful scenes as we passed along the muddy channel of the Hoogly, which presented themselves as I stated before is undecipherable.<sup>22</sup>

When the elders contacted the members of the Church in Calcutta, they were somewhat disappointed to find that Matthew McCune, the husband of their hostess, was in Burma

<sup>20</sup>Roberts, *A Comprehensive History*, Vol. IV, pp. 55-56.

<sup>21</sup>Musser, Jour. II, p. 51.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

on a military assignment, that Willes and Richards were still up-country, and that "of about 180 members, 170 natives, there were but 6 or 8 left."<sup>23</sup> They were pleased, however, to discover that James Patric Meik had built a chapel. At least they had a place to preach.

On 29 April a conference was held that was intended for all the members in Calcutta, but there were only four people present who were not missionaries. The pertinent business at hand was to decide who would lead the mission and who would be assigned to the various parts of India. Nataniel Vary Jones was selected as president of the mission and president of the Calcutta Branch. The remaining elders were assigned as follows: Amos Milton Musser was to remain in Calcutta; Truman Leonard and Samuel Amos Woolley were to go to Chinsura, a city thirty miles north from Calcutta; William Fotheringham and William F. Carter were assigned to Dinapore, 290 miles northwest from Calcutta; and Richard Ballantyne, Robert Skelton, and Robert Owens were to sail south to the city of Madras. The four brethren who had been sent to Siam found that they could not obtain passage during the next few months and as a result agreed that Elam Luddington and Levi Savage should stay in Calcutta and look for a way to Burma and then to Siam; and Chauncey Walker West and Benjamin F. Dewey were to go to Ceylon until fall, when they expected to obtain passage. They had originally planned to go by way of Burma, but that way was not open because of the second Anglo-Burmese War.<sup>24</sup>

The days and weeks that followed were filled with a great deal of activity. The elders bound for Madras, Ceylon, and Burma all found passage and sailed by 20 June. All three of these pairs of elders had experiences at sea that involved considerable danger. Because of a severe storm, the first attempted voyage of Elders Luddington and Savage to Burma nearly took the lives of all the persons on board. Musser described the return of the elders to Calcutta in this way:

While at dinner Brother Luddington came in in an awful predicament, close [*sic*] dirty, hat reduced to 2/3 the size, etc., etc. The ship they started to Rangoon in, three days after they left here she sprung a leak and they have been bailing and pumping water night and day ever since. They threw all

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<sup>23</sup>Musser, Jour. II, p. 55.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

their cargo overboard and gave themselves up to the Lord and resigned themselves for a watery grave. They threw all of the stores overboard, but the Lord delivered them safe.<sup>25</sup>

Ballantyne and Skelton, who had found it necessary to go to Madras without Robert Owens, were caught in the same storm, and their ship nearly sank. In all, the elders experienced six storms and other mishaps at sea that were severe enough to cause them fear for their lives. Fortunately, however, no missionaries were lost at sea.

When the missionaries separated and went to their various areas of labor, the East India Mission actually became several missions. Communications between missionaries were very inadequate. Travel was slow and relatively expensive. Because of these problems, India, Burma, and Siam were not a well-integrated mission in the sense that England and other LDS missions were at that time.

Truman Leonard and Samuel A. Woolley established themselves at Chinsura, where they found Joseph Richards. He had assumed the leadership of the Chinsura saints when he returned from his journey toward the Punjab. He was by this time in good health and had decided to go to Calcutta and from there to the Salt Lake Valley. He sailed from Calcutta, bound for California and Utah, on 18 June 1853.<sup>26</sup> Leonard and Woolley worked in Chinsura for three months but did not baptize anyone.

William Fotheringham and William F. Carter traveled to Dinapore and worked there and round about for a short time. Then on 5 June they returned to Calcutta. Carter became very ill, and it was decided that in order to preserve his life he should be released from his call and sent home. On 7 July he boarded the *John Gilpin* and sailed for Boston. After Carter left, Fotheringham worked in Calcutta with Elders Jones, Musser, and Owens for the next month and a half.

During July and August, several letters arrived in Calcutta which had been sent from William Willes, who was working near Delhi. In each letter he asked for a companion and finally sent twenty-five rupees to assist with any travel expenses of another elder. By 19 August 1853, Elders Fotheringham and Woolley had both decided to join Willes. A few days later, they took places on a "Government Bullock Train" and

<sup>25</sup>Musser, Jour. II, p. 71.

<sup>26</sup>Deseret News, Vol. V, 20 June 1853, p. 350.

traveled day and night for almost a month. When they arrived at Secundrabad, they left the train and traveled to meet Willes at Belespore, not far from there. By this time, he was quite discouraged but felt that there was still some hope for the people of this region. However, he decided, after spending only a brief time with Woolley and Fotheringham, that he would return to Calcutta. After discussing the work in this area with Willes, the two men went to Meerut (thirty-eight miles north-east of Delhi), and Willes returned to Calcutta.<sup>27</sup>

Meerut had the largest number of Europeans in the area of the Upper Provinces, with 250 civilians, many officers, and two or three regiments.<sup>28</sup> But, even though there seemed to be a large number of potential converts, the elders met with poor success. The major cause of their failure was the attitude of the commanding officer of the military in that cantonment. His treatment of the elders was typical of what they received in nearly every part of India. When Woolley and Fotheringham called upon Brigadier General Scott and asked for permission to teach, he told them that he had been informed of their work by the bishop of Calcutta and that he would not consider it fair to his own chaplains to have Mormons preaching in the area. Fotheringham reported their interview in this way:

We then asked him if we could lodge in the cantonments. He replied not without his permission and if he granted us two weeks stay in this place, as soon as the time was expired, we would be under necessity of having it renewed again and many other restrictions he laid upon us which would be too numerous to mention. Among some of the restrictions was if we should get a place outside of the boundary lines to preach in we were not allowed to send a circular amongst the soldiers to notify our meetings. If we did we should be marched out of the cantonments without a moment's notice. Or if we should be found preaching to the soldiers on the streets we should be marched out. This is like tying a man's hands and feet and throwing him into a river and making him swim.<sup>29</sup>

They then turned to the civilian population but had no success. After five more weeks they moved to Delhi.<sup>30</sup> Then seven weeks later they moved seventy miles north to the city of Kur-

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<sup>27</sup>M.S., Vol. XV, p. 686; Musser, Jour. III, pp. 16-17, 21, 34.

<sup>28</sup>M.S., Vol. XVI, pp. 124-26. This city was one of the most active points of fighting during the mutiny or rebellion that arose during 1857.

<sup>29</sup>Letter from William Fotheringham to A.M. Musser, 19 October 1853, in the Gurtrude Musser Richards collection.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 November 1853.

naul; and, after that area proved unsuccessful, they moved back to Agra. They arrived there at Christmas time. But once again they were not allowed to teach any military personnel; the civilian population was their only hope. They obtained a hall and held meetings for several nights, but the crowds dwindled from twenty-four down to one investigator on the fourth night, and the meetings were discontinued.<sup>31</sup> The elders were tired and discouraged by this time; one wrote:

It makes me almost sick at heart to read of the Elders in other countries doing such great works. . . . I hope the Lord will be pleased to let us go before long to some other place where we can do some good for the cause. But God's will be done, not mine, unless mine is His. It was necessary for somebody to come here, and it might as well be us as any others.<sup>32</sup>

Woolley and Fotheringham left Agra and worked their way toward Calcutta. They preached the gospel at Cawnpore, Allahabad, and other towns along the way and then returned to Calcutta on 6 March 1854. Their long journey had not produced any success, for not a baptism was performed on the entire expedition.<sup>33</sup>

The months that marked their absence from Calcutta brought little more success there. Jones, Musser, Owens, and later Leonard, who had been at Chinsura until he thought his labors there to be useless, worked diligently at spreading their message. They printed several tracts, handed them to people in the streets and in their homes, and held many meetings at which they delivered lectures; but none of their approaches seemed to succeed.

By that date the major problems of preaching in India had become quite evident. N.V. Jones wrote a long letter to the editor of the *Millennial Star* in England. In it he summarized the problems they were having as missionaries.

Concerning the types of people and the clergy who lived in the area where Willes and Richards and Woolley and Fotheringham had worked, Jones wrote:

The settlements in the upper provinces are chiefly composed of invalids from the lower provinces and soldiers, who have,

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<sup>31</sup>M.S., Vol. XVI, pp. 189-90.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>Andrew Jenson, *Church Chronology* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News Press, 1899), p. 50.

in a manner, worn themselves out in the service and have settled down upon small pensions. Besides these there are a few public officers who are engaged in business for the government of the company (East India), or some military station. The inhabitants range generally from ten to one hundred in a place, except Agra, and one or two other places, which have about two hundred each, and as to soldiers, it is a hard matter to get access to them, although the law does not rule over the consciences of men, but the discretionary power of the officers does effectually accomplish it, to the great satisfaction of the clergy. There are two kinds of priests who are allowed to be with the soldiers, viz., the Church of England and Catholic, and all others are excluded, and the most rigid measures are taken to prevent their introduction.<sup>34</sup>

Jones then wrote about the aristocratic nature of the Englishmen the missionaries were working with:

The Europeans of India are generally of the aristocracy at home, and entertain such an exalted opinion of themselves, and of human greatness, that it is impossible for a common man to speak to them. There is scarcely a man in this country whose fate is not linked with either the company or the government, and to come to our meetings, or independently investigate our principles, would jeopardize his office and salary. In fact, that class of people, amongst which the Gospel has been preached with such good success is not in this country.<sup>35</sup>

Concerning this same problem, that of the social consciousness of the Europeans, Amos M. Musser wrote:

In going to preach to the inhabitants of India (Europeans), is like going to England and America and selecting none but the aristocracy or upper ten to preach to; as all the European inhabitants of this country are living in the greatest ease, having many servants to wait on them. They care nothing for the servants of God.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps Elder Jones did not feel that he had put his point across well enough, because he went on to explain:

If Gabriel from the region of bliss, the presence of God, should come, I do not believe that he would attract any curiosity or create any excitement whatever. They would not stop their carriages or look out of their windows to see him.

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<sup>34</sup>M.S., Vol. XV, p. 811.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Musser, Jour. II, p. 72. Scholars such as Percival Spear have written fully on the topic of the English elite in India. See his book titled *The Nabobs*.

They are so lost in their own folly that the Holy Ghost and the Bible, is of so little consequence that they have not got time to spend with them.<sup>37</sup>

The aristocracy of India was not receptive to the LDS missionaries. This was a very great problem, but it would have been accepted by the elders more easily if there had been an alternative group that they could turn to. Unfortunately, the elders were as disappointed with the native peoples as they were with the Europeans. Consider what Jones had to say about the natives:

It appears that they have a great disregard to all principles of honesty and honor, from the highest Rajahs to the meanest Ryot. And the greatest breaches of fidelity and trust are looked upon by the injured party with a degree of complacency, as thought it was expected. And in the same light, they look upon all schemes of deliberate, systematic fraud, perjury and all violations of truth, honor, honesty; these things are indeed not matters of conscience with them. And they are fully competent to do the meanest possible amount, and are not capable of forming any friendship or attachments that can be valued over one *pice* (which is equivalent to one quarter of a cent). There are many in government and individual employ, who have been for years carrying on a well-regulated system of fraud, and who are known to be such characters by their employers; and to exchange them or turn them off would be only making a bad matter worse. To all human appearance, there is scarcely a redeeming quality in the nation.<sup>38</sup>

Jones was not generous in his assessment of India, but it must be recognized that he was conscious of the fact that many members of the Church in England, Europe, and America were watching and expecting great success in India. He wanted to make sure they knew what problems the missionaries were having.

The attitude Jones had developed toward the people of India was typical of that held by the other LDS missionaries. The treatment they received in every part of India was similar to what Jones described. Circumstances differed to a certain extent in each locality, but as a whole affairs were quite uniform.

The experiences of the other elders showed considerable personal stamina and courage. In addition to the rather long

<sup>37</sup>M.S., Vol. XV, p. 211-12.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

journeys that have been mentioned, missionaries worked and traveled in and around Madras; Colombo, Ceylon; Bombay and its environs; Karachi (in modern Pakistan) and the area near there; Rangoon, Burma, and some areas inland from Rangoon. Elder Luddington, who was sent to Siam, eventually spent several months in Bangkok, but with the same lack of success that troubled the rest of the mission.

Several points concerning the mission work deserve mention. There were in total nineteen missionaries who served in India, Burma, and Siam. Of that number, two were converted in India. The mission was most fully staffed from April 1853, to July 1854, when the elders started to become very discouraged and thought more and more of going home.

It is almost impossible to determine the total number of converts made in the mission. Elder Skelton, who was the last man to leave India (2 May 1856), stated that he thought there were around sixty-one members in India and Burma at the time of his departure.<sup>39</sup> There were also eleven Church members who had emigrated to Salt Lake Valley. This small number of converts was a great disappointment to the missionaries. Willes had baptized many more people than this during his first four months in India. The problem was that most of the natives who were baptized during that time left the Church when it became evident to them that they were not going to receive any worldly gain. This phenomenon was caused by the missionary techniques of the Catholics and Protestants. Elder West interpreted the situation this way:

The English and American missionaries who have gone to that country have been furnished with plenty of money by missionary societies at home, and when they found that they could not win the natives with their principles, they have hired them to join their churches, and have written back what great things they are doing in converting the poor heathen.

I have had numbers of them come to me and offer to leave the churches whose names they were then acknowledging and come to ours, if I would only give them a few more cents than they were getting. At the same time they knew no more about the principles and faith of the Church to which they professed to belong, than the brute-beast, and these same people will bow down and worship sticks and stones, gods of their own make, when they think there is no Christian seeing them.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>M.S., Vol. XVIII, p. 523 and Jenson, *Church Chronology*, p. 56.

<sup>40</sup>*Deseret News*, Vol. V, 5 September 1855, p. 206.

West was not entirely fair. The procedure of paying natives had started when the early Protestant missionaries had learned what happened to Indians who left their castes and became Christians. These people were removed from their castes and in the eyes of their people they were dead. Therefore, the missionaries gave them employment as custodians, teachers, etc., and in that way preserved their lives. As the numbers of native converts grew, the problem got out of control, and hence in some cases natives did play one sect off against another when seeking better wages. This was a problem to the LDS missionaries, and it discouraged them on a number of occasions. The problem of apostasy was also common among the European converts.

As has been mentioned, the missionaries had some serious problems with the clergy of other denominations. Seemingly all of the Christian churches in India were against the Mormon movement. This prejudice grew out of the fact that Joseph Smith claimed to have restored the gospel of Jesus Christ, but even more out of their dislike for the practice of polygamy. This was the major point of contention in all the cities of India where the elders preached.

Although some effort was made to work with the native peoples, it must be recognized that the elders did not consider themselves "called" to preach to these people. In their estimation, they had been sent to India to convert the European population. Only after they failed with those people did they turn to the natives. But teaching the natives had several inherent problems. The first difficulty was that of communication. The missionaries attempted to learn some of the native languages—Burmese, Hindustani, Tamil, Telegoo, and Maratha—but were not able to gain a useful mastery in any case.

Closely related to the problem of speaking with the people was that of having almost no religious concepts in common. Whereas the elders carried a message having to do with one God who was described as an anthropomorphic being, most of the natives of India believed in a great number of deities of all types and forms. Those few Hindus (generally Brahmins) who were capable of understanding the nondualistic concept of Brahman were not accessible to the missionaries. Even if they had been, they would have shared few points in common. The missionaries did not understand Hindu, Parsee, or Buddhist concepts any better than natives believing in these religions un-

derstood Mormonism. In addition to even the most general concepts of God, the Mormons differed greatly with the people of India on the subject of the application of religion. Hinduism, particularly, is not only capable of all-inclusiveness in religious matters, but exalts the principle. Hinduism has had as its greatest asset for survival the ability to accept many levels and ideas of truth. But, although the Mormons believed that truth existed to some degree in most religions, they were and are exclusivists. To them only one religion was capable of bringing salvation to man, and that was, of course, that gospel preached in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

It could be supposed that the Mormons and the Muslims would have found some common ground for discussion, but there is no evidence that this was so. A more nearly similar concept of God; a more nearly similar concept of exclusive salvation; a "true believer" psychology among the adherents; and even the common concept of polygamy could have brought some feelings of common trust between the two groups, but they did not. No Muslims were converted to the Church by these early missionaries to India.

Another matter that deserves mention is that of the actual methods the missionaries used. There was no clear-cut program or approach to teaching the gospel. The missionaries distributed tracts, pamphlets (some of which were translated), and other literature (particularly the Book of Mormon), held lecture meetings, and visited homes; but these approaches were not well organized. Although the LDS missionaries did construct chapels at Calcutta, Poona, and Karachi, they did not sponsor any schools, medical centers, or other institutions that would be classed as part of the social gospel movement. Such programs were not part of the general missionary approach of the Church. The missionaries themselves had traveled to India without "purse or scrip," i.e., without any financial support from the Church or from missionary societies, and were completely dependent upon the kindness of the people of India for their daily sustenance while they were there. (Two exceptions occurred when Willes and Musser, at different times and in different parts of India, decided that they should take employment in order to stay alive.) The point is that the elders were more dependent upon India than India was dependent upon the elders. After a year or so, they were free to change their stations and go to work anywhere they felt they could convert

more people. This tended to eliminate any possibility of success that could have come from long acquaintance with a specific area or group of people. However, when the situation in which the missionaries found themselves is considered, their lack of patience can be understood.

The overall impression the LDS missionaries had upon India was certainly not significant. "They seem not to have attracted an extensive following," but they were there, and they deserve a great deal of respect for the courage and fortitude they exhibited, and perhaps even for their "heroic . . . labors and sufferings."

## An Old Woman Clipping Her Nails: An Etching by Rembrandt

Wayne Guymon\*

Golden light streams in upon a woman.  
A careless gesture it is, clipping one's nails.  
We see her hands;  
Hands that have known tenderness  
And given tenderness in silent moments,  
Hands that have held close the paraphernalia of her life  
And grown old and wrinkled, but not weary.  
Now, they remain forever stopped,  
In the simple motion of a simple life.

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