

FOREIGN MISSIONS ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

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The era of modern missions dates from 1792. Since then the Baptist Missionary Society was formed, followed in 1795 by the London Missionary Society, in 1799 the Church Missionary and Religious Tract Societies, in 1804 the British and Foreign Bible Society, these being the precursors of the more than two hundred societies which now represent the Protestant missionary force for the conversion of all heathendom to the Christian faith.

It will interest many to sketch the conditions of the missionary problem at the commencement of this era, when the society first named was formed, and Carey and Dr. Thomas had been accepted as its pioneer missionaries.

But the missionary idea did not originate with the last decade of last century, though then it assumed a more definite and combined form. For almost two centuries it had shown itself here and there in personal desires and efforts, or on the part of small groups of influential individuals, or in vague connection with schemes of conquest and colonization.

It was, therefore, unsystematic, intermittent, and unproductive ; much good seed was sown, but the grain grown was neither plentiful nor strong, and was subject therefore to deterioration and even destruction under adverse circumstances. Into the history of these early efforts I cannot enter. The purpose of this article is rather to describe how the missionary enterprise stood in 1792 in agency, methods, and results. There were then but four missionary societies, all very restricted in their resources and spheres, for their aggregate annual income did not reach £12,000. The oldest, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, confined its efforts almost entirely to the colonists and few aborigines in the British possessions. The Danish Society labored solely in South India.

The Moravian Society confined its operations almost exclusively to the scattered and uninfluential races of heathendom, and the Baptist Missionary Society was formed on October 22d, 1792, but with no missionaries in the field until the following year.

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel had 38 missionaries thus located : Newfoundland, 4 ; Nova Scotia, 14 ; New Brunswick, 7 ; Canada, 6 ; Cape Breton, 1 ; the Bahamas, 4, and on the Gold Coast, Africa, 1. These were assisted by about an equal number of schoolmasters.

Their joint duties were to instruct the colonists and the Indian aborigines, but apparently the former received the greater part of their attention.

The Moravians counted 137 missionaries, distributed as follows, though of this number 25 were wives and 4 widows of missionaries : St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. Jans, 29 ; Antigua, 11 ; St. Kitts, 5 ; Jamaica, 6 ; Barbadoes, 4 ; South America, 18 ; Greenland, 15 ; Labrador, 25 ; Canada, 6 ; Cape of Good Hope, 3 ; Tranquibar, 15. A small Moravian