

John E. Clough and the Ongole Mission

By Emma Rauschenbusch Clough, Ph.D.

In 1836 the first Baptist missionary was sent to the Telugus of South India, and in that same year, July 16th, a boy was born near Frewsburg, in Western New York, whose destiny became deeply interwoven with that of the Mission. John Everett Clough was to render special service and God prepared him for it.

At the outset he was given by inheritance the instincts of the pioneer. Of Welsh-Puritan descent on his father's side, of Scotch-English on his mother's, a typical Yankee, he inherited the practical ability of his race. To settle in a new country and go forward in the face of obstacles, came to him naturally.

Prosperous when he was born, his parents, soon after, by a deed of friendship, lost their property at a stroke. Seeking to better their fortunes, they immigrated to Iowa. Where the Indians had recently withdrawn to tracts still more remote, the Cloughs staked off 1,600 acres of wild prairie land. Thrift prevailed; but it was a grinding experience, necessary perhaps for one who was to become a missionary to the outcaste in India. Often when those destitute people, whole villages, complained to him that they had only porridge to eat, one meal a day, he told them, "You cannot tell me anything about poverty. I too have lived by the week on little else than cornmeal mush." Those people knew that they were understood.

The Telugu Mission also was enduring poverty during those years, scarcely able to continue its one Mission Station at Nellore. Three times during its first thirty years American Baptists discussed the advisability of abandoning it. A crucial time came in 1853 at the Annual Meeting of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society. Men arose to speak for or against abandonment. One of them pointed to the map of Missions above the platform and referred to Nellore as a "Lone Star." At the following morning session the vote was to be taken. Over night, Dr.

S. F. Smith, author of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," wrote six stanzas. The fifth contains the following prophetic lines:

"Shine on, 'Lone Star!' The day draws near

When none shall shine more fair than thou;

Thou, born and nursed in doubt and fear, Wilt glitter on Immanuel's brow."

Dr. Smith handed the slip of paper on which he had written this poem to Judge Harris, who was to preside. He read it to the audience with remarkable effect. Many wept. The Baptists could not have endured it, if their Telugu Mission had been abandoned. It was saved.

At the end of that year Dr. Lyman Jewett, with his wife and a group of Telugu assistants, had gone on a preaching tour to Ongole, an outstation of Nellore, 70 miles to the north. Early the first morning of the new year, 1854, they went to a nearby hilltop to pray. As the sun was rising, they stood and counted the hamlets in sight, perhaps fifty of them. Dr. Jewett said: "May the Sun of Righteousness arise quickly and shine upon this dark land." The burden on his heart was the man for Ongole. By the time he left the hilltop, he felt strongly convinced within himself that the man was coming.

Dr. Jewett was not mistaken. The man for Ongole was on his way. Early in that decisive year, 1853, young Clough was invited by a party of United States surveyors to go with them into the Wilds of Minnesota as chain and hatchet carrier. He went. He often later said: "I started for Ongole by way of Minnesota when I was seventeen years old." This was at the time of the decisive "Lone Star" meeting. At the time of the hilltop prayer-meeting, he was taking the first definite steps toward an education. During four summers he went with the surveyors. Courage and resourcefulness grew apace in him, as he penetrated into that uninhabited country. Not yet twenty-one years old,