

CMC Missions Heritage

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REV. DR. JOHN SCUDDER

Dr. John Scudder was born in Freehold, New Jersey, in September 3rd 1792, and he was the second of the five children of Joseph and Maria Scudder but his grandfather was the first. He was educated in New York. Due to his skill and kindness and his peculiar knack of gaining the confidence of his patients, he quickly established a good practice in New York and was earning over \$20000 per year, which was a considerable sum at that point of time. As a member of the Reformed Church on Franklin Street, he stood out, even in those austere times, as one of the remarkable spiritual qualities.

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Then, "Why doesn't someone do something about this?" He asked himself, and immediately the reply flashed into his consciousness: "Why shouldn't I?" This at that moment, to him was the voice of God. He bowed his head and asked, "What wilt Thou have me do?" Again came that flash: "Go heal the sick and preach the Gospel to those who have never heard of Christ". He was 25 years old then.

He consulted his wife, Mrs. Harriet Scudder regarding his "Dilemma". They had one daughter, Maria, who was 2 years old. After weeks of prayer, she told him: "Whether thou goest, I will go". Dr. John then went on to offer himself to the Anti-Slavery Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions. He said, "I have made it a subject of serious and earnest prayer for some time, that God would direct me in the path of duty and that if I were thy daughter, he would open an effectual door for this purpose. if God should by his Holy Spirit, influence my eyes to accept me, I will go forth in his strength and proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ". The opposite Board of Commissioners as both physician and minister in a land where there were none of the former and few of the latter. It was a unique undertaking.

But his father, Joseph Scudder, was opposed to him categorically forbidding John's going as a missionary to a disease-ridden land, which lacked not only the amenities of civilization but the very necessities of life. He threatened to disinherit his son if he carried out his "mad" project and he went on to carry out his threat.

On June 8th, 1819, 26 years old Dr. John Scudder boarded the ship 'Indus' along with his wife Mrs. Harriet Scudder, daughter Maria and their maid Amy from Anson's Father's St. Dock and embarked on a journey that would significantly alter the eternal destiny of many lives in this part of the world. Like the patriarch Abraham, they went forth to a land they had not yet seen with no thought of return. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was sending forth the first American Medical Missionary on a missionary endeavor.

Dr. John Scudder was definitely a trailblazer for hundreds of his profession who have gone out to the four corners of the earth. More than that, over 40 of his descendants then went on to contribute over a thousand years (1074 years) in the Tamil mission field. Even those who supported the ventures admitted the conviction that led these men and women to sacrifice homes, security, family-even life itself-and accept permanent exile with such evident joy.

What was this conviction that inspired these people? The Gospel of the grace of God, by which the Indians and beside that of his wife, was held to be the supreme gift bestowed on man by the Redeemer who died on the cross. No community made aware of this privilege had a right to keep such a blessing to itself. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" - this was an imperative command to be disobeyed at peril. What India, like the rest of the world, needed, was a fuller knowledge and acceptance of the love of God. To declare the love of God in Christ- that was what Scudder meant by evangelism. Science and religion were not meant to be in hostile camps but combined to make the whole man. It was a consistent message of the medical missionary, Dr. John Scudder, over two centuries ago.

The journey from Boston to Calcutta took four months and Dr. John Scudder witnessed to many sailors during the journey and many were converted. After their arrival in Calcutta, they proceeded to Serampore to meet the man who is considered as the **Father of Modern Missions**, **Dr. William Carey**. From this pioneer, Dr. Scudder and his associates learned much about the start of missionary enterprises, especially what pitfalls to avoid.

While at Calcutta, little Maria was stricken with dysentery and died within 3 days. They set out to Ceylon, to reach Jaffna where Dr. John Scudder established his first dispensary. However, in Ceylon, their 2nd daughter who was born dead soon after the voyage. The words of Dr. John Scudder at this point of time display considerable faith: **"This is a severe trial, but we do not repine. We, however, must have the feeling of nature. We must say that our trials have been heart-rending. Perhaps our dear patients may be ready to say that we are sorry and repent of our coming. No, we rejoice and thank the great Head of the church for putting us here to serve our brethren. We have come and we live among this people, I would not exchange situations for a world. Blessed be God, I hope to be the unworthy instrument of bringing souls to the dear Redeemer"**.

Not did Dr. John Scudder falter in his faith, when in 1822 a little son died soon after he was born. Again the father could say, "They will be done", and could look on sorrow as opening the door to deeper spiritual life and could hope that the loss of his own children would mean a compensating increase in the size of his spiritual family: the conversion of the multitudes unto the Kingdom of Christ.

Dr. John and Harriet had thirteen children; 3 died as babies, one died by drowning while in Theological Seminary - Mr. Samuel Scudder. The rest - seven sons and two daughters - came back to India in response to the call of Christ. All of the sons were ordained ministers and five of them were physicians as well.

Not even jungle fever could stop Dr. John. As soon as he could stand he was off again to the hinterland, preaching in towns and villages and distributing tracts to those who could read them. (His colleague, Dr. Anderson, later founded the Madras Christian College)

He used to travel from Madras to the nearby regions - especially did a lot of work at Kanjapuram and Wallaja. The frequent journeys, trials and hardships took its toll on his health. Though he did take a few breaks to go to the Nilgiris, finally he was persuaded to leave for America to restore his health that he might be able on his return to labour more effectively for the 'Glorious of the Masters Kingdom'. Five of his breaks were already taken. In March 1842 he and Mrs. Scudder set out with their five-year-old son John and elapsed since they sailed from Boston on the Indus. Then neither of them expected ever to return. Going back home was to them a tremendous experience. One evidence of God's Providence marked their homeward journey. Scudder, who had vowed to have nothing more to do with his son if he went to India, who had refused to write to him and had ignored the claims of his grandchildren, soon met the exile on his return, opened his arms, and embracing him, restored him to the home he had surrendered.

In America he preached to over hundred thousand children and youth in almost every city of Atlantic sea board during his furlough. He spent much time in sensitizing the people to the mission needs of the world. They returned to India in 1860, John Scudder was 68 years old and reluctant in his old age to meet the demands on himself as he was to others. Once a cancer developed in his foot. He said nothing to his wife. Shutting himself up in a room with only a servant to help, he cut it out, with no anaesthetic and only the crudest of instruments. He nearly fainted several times in the process but he pushed the job through until he was a very thorough one for there is no record of it ever reappearing.

Among the many admirable qualities he passed on to his descendants were his consecration for Christ, his sense of guidance by revelation and the inspiration that emboldened him to act. During this time, he had the grief of losing his first grand child. Rev. Dr. Henry Scudder's son had died due to cholera which struck Wallaja.

Dr. John Scudder significantly contributed in the fight against caste system in the Church. The Madras Missionary Conference at this time took a stand that resulted in the almost complete absence of caste in the Mission churches - a remarkable achievement for the missionaries when they had caste related problems surrounding them.

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To His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales
May it please your Highness*

I take the liberty of sending to you a small volume relative to the condition of the people in India. The first thing which will present itself to your view on opening the book is a picture of the Hook Swinging, which I have repeatedly witnessed in this country. On reading the description of this ceremony, of the burning of widows with the corpses of their husbands which still prevails in some parts of the country not under British control, and of various other ceremonies, the feelings of your Highness will become painfully interested. And then I shall not regret it, even should they become painfully interested, if the descriptions should be the means of leading you to praise Your Heavenly Father for His distinguished mercies to the land over which Your illustrious Mother has been called, in the Providence of God, to reign.

*Praying that Your Royal Highness may an early life consecrate
yourself to the service which loved His and died for You.
I beg to subscribe myself
Your Royal Highness's Most Obedient Servant,
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Around this time his eldest son, Henry Scudder had finished his training from Madras Medical College and joined his father. Their skills drew considerably large number of patients. This caused lot of opposition from the traditional healers and they at times resorted to even witchcraft to harm the missionaries.

In this year 1849, Mrs. Scudder was stricken with tropical fever. As she was dying, her youngest daughter, Harriet, who had been nursing her, said "What shall I do? What shall I do?" Read the 29th Psalm and do accordingly" was the mothers reply.

On the evening of November 18th, with her husband sitting by her head and some of her children by her bedside, she opened her eyes and said with peculiar energy, "Glorious heaven! Glorious salvation!" Those were her last words and as her husband wrote, "she sweetly fell asleep in Jesus".

With his wife's death, something vital seemed to go from Dr. John Scudder. He continued to work harder than ever, preaching now twice daily instead of twice a had been preaching.

By 1854, Dr. Scudder health failed markedly and the mission board booked a passage for him and his third son Joseph, on a ship going to South Africa. He had refused to return to America and the trip was planned to improve his health. While on the ship, his health improved. After reaching South Africa - Wynburg, he immediately started preaching to the English speaking people. On January 12th 1855, he preached in the morning and came back to his lodging to lie down and rest before the evening service. Shortly before time for them to start, Joseph went to awaken him and found him apparently asleep. But it was such a quiet sleep that he soon died in his last and that his father would preach no more.

There was an impressive service in the Dutch Reformed Church in Wynberg and then accordingly to his previously expressed wish, his body was taken to Madras and laid beside that of his wife. Then from Madras the mortal remains were later shifted to Rampet. The Scudder's in India had assembled for a dedication, the interment service was read and a prayer offered. Then Aunt Jane removed the American flag, uncovering the marble slab over the final resting place of Dr. and Mrs. John Scudder.

Did Rev. Dr. John Scudder ever dream about a mission venture to India? It is interesting to note that during one of his trips to India from Ceylon (before he shifted to Madras) he did actually mention about a vision about India. He wrote in his diary on September 25th 1824, "This morning I went out to view the size of Vellore. As it is situated at the base of a mountain, I thought I would ascend it. After a half an hour's hard labour I had nearly reached the top when I came to a fortification which surrounds the peak of the mountain. The view is most charming. Vellore is an excellent place for missionary labour. It needs a dozen of labourers".

Over a hundred years later his grand daughter stood (Dr. Ida Scudder) in the same spot, putting her feet on a small climb block pointing down her face. It was still early in the morning, for she had started her walk before the sun had risen. There were a dozen doors! Wiping the sweat from her eyes, she focused them on a cluster of new buildings filling the large walled space beside the foot of the hill, glancing white block upon black of them, crowned by their majestic clock tower. "Bravo!" a voice seemed to say in her ears, "Watch waiting a hundred years or so!" So vivid was the impression that Dr. Ida could actually feel him beside her. Dr. Ida laughed aloud. Grand father John's dream fulfilled! Not long last, seeing the new hospital situated at Vellore, into the young sun's embrace, she was convinced of its reality.

Again like the patriarch Abraham, who though he did not see the land of Israel physically, but believed in the promise of God, Dr. John Scudder dreamed of a missionary venture in and around Vellore through his spiritual eyes. His descendants went on to fulfill his dream - their significant mission contributions include CMC Vellore, Scudder Memorial Hospital at Rampet, clinic at Wallaja , Aroor Mission - Aroor Seminary, Aroor Academy (later this became Vellore College), Industrial Institute at Ann , Tindivanam High School, formation of the Church of South India , publishing scriptural literature in the local languages , translation of scriptures, Ladies Seminary at Chittoor, an elaborate organization of schools etc. Above all they significantly contributed to the development and sustenance of the Aroor Church.

Dr. John Scudder, the first American Medical Missionary and his wife Mrs. Harriet Scudder, who came to India in obedience to the call of God and had spent 36 years of active service to build the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ - What shall we say of them?

Hebrew 11:13-16 "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things made it clear that they are seeking a country of their own and indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."

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