

Devotional Excerpts  
from the Biography of  
**Anthony Norris  
Groves**

**“Father of Faith Missions” by  
Robert Bernard Dann**

*Groves is an inspiring example of complete devotion to Christ and entire obedience to His Word. His self-sacrificing ways challenge us to imitate his life of faith.*

***His life urges living by faith and establishing simple New Testament churches that also depend on a real God.***

*While his brother-in-law George Mueller is better known, God used Groves to inspire Mueller to live and serve by faith, and Groves own story is full of challenge and encouragement.*

*Excerpts are assembled with permission of the biography author.  
Reading of the full biography is highly recommended.*

## 1: Trained from Scripture to trust in God alone

Groves was born in 1795. In 1816 at age 21 Groves was saved, and also married to Mary. He set up a successful dentistry practice in Exeter, England. Mary did not share Norris' desire for missions. She wanted conventional religion. Regarding this time of tension with his wife, Groves wrote, **"We were greatly prospering in the world, her family was delighted and happy, and these things embraced all she ever knew or thought of happiness; but it was not so with me; I had given myself to the Lord into a work I had to fulfill...** By six years opposition her mind had settled down into a fixed resistance... often did I, with every earthly thing that a man could desire, feel most miserable. **I had a wife who loved me, dear little children, and a most lucrative profession, yet I had not the Lord's presence as in days past, and therefore I was miserable."**

In 1825 Groves published a small booklet. Its title was *Christian Devotedness*, and it bore the subtitle "The consideration of our Savior's precept: lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." Though only 28 pages in length, and published privately by a layman with no theological training, it made an astonishing impact... To the time-honored system of sporadic and seasonal benevolence, Norris Groves suggested a radical alternative. He proposed that the wealthy Christian actually become poor. **The disciple of Christ will place in his Lord's hands all he possesses, to be used from then on for the benefit of others. Groves determined not merely to quote the teaching of Jesus on this subject, but to obey it.**

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His wife Mary was not on board with him. However she eventually agreed to give one 10th of their income. She also began to visit the poor and this "shifted her thoughts from herself to others." Finally Mary came to faith in Christ and Norris was thrilled to see the change in her - depending no longer on what she must do for her Savior but on what he had done for her.

They eventually increased giving to 25%. Yet Groves admitted, "we had only yet gone a certain way; some might think it was far enough, others too far; but **my heart, which had been so blessed that it could not contain its blessing, felt**

**that, so long as anything was kept back from so gracious a Lord who had dealt so bountifully by us, it was as though nothing were given."** And this, he tells us, "led me to propose one day to my dearest Mary that as the Lord had blessed us more and more, in all that we had given up for him, perhaps he would accept all from our loving grateful hearts. Tears came to her eyes. "My dear," she said, "I think it would be most wicked; consider the dear little children." Norris did not press the point: "I saw the time was not come."

But, knowing he had set his heart on it, Mary suggests that they ask their lodger, John Kitto to "search out the mind of the Lord from the New Testament and say what he thought." Kitto, profoundly impressed by the sincerity of Groves' commitment to Christ, considered the matter and gave his opinion that they were "more than free" to give everything away; it would be a wonderful testimony of their "sense of the value of the true riches". Then "after the deepest thought and most earnest prayer Mary without reserve gave it all up," and never, we are told, regretted the step. Husband and wife felt free at last of a "great burden". **"We had no object now in life," he confided, "but living to the Lord and the church." And this, they believed, would be far better for the children than leaving them a great inheritance.**

## **2: Redirected steps by conviction and circumstances**

In July 1825 they offered themselves to the Church Missionary Society (CMS) of the Church of England "ready to go anywhere". Groves had to train for ordination in the Anglican Church. During this time the Lord stretched Groves in his understanding of the church and of missions. He traveled to Ireland as part of his studies and came across people there that were having fellowship with one another across denominational boundaries. In the spring of 1827, he traveled to Dublin. Afterwards John Bellett confided that **"it appeared to [Groves] from Scriptures that believers, meeting together as disciples of Christ, were free to break bread together as their Lord had admonished them; and that in as far as the practice of the apostles could be a guide, every Lord's day should be set apart for thus remembering the Lord's death and obeying his parting command."**

The Lord arranged that Groves was challenged by another missionary who asked him, "Why are you wasting your time in going through college if you intend going to the east?" Ordination, Groves replied, would provide a degree of security. If forced to return from overseas sick or disabled, he could obtain a living as a clergyman somewhere in England. But in the back of his mind arose a

nagging doubt. **The kind of security to be found in ordination in a clerical appointment rode uncomfortably on the back of a call to forsake all and go to the uttermost parts, as though faith in God's faithfulness would not be sufficient.** Groves was troubled: "As we walked home, Mary said, 'don't you think there is great force in Mr. Townley's question?'" Yes there was great force in it, but not sufficient he thought, to abandon his imminent trip for an exam. He had prepared thoroughly for the next examination; the cost of the ferry to Dublin was already provided, the money put aside in a safe place. If he gave up his studies now, his previous years' work would be wasted, people would say he was fickle, and Mary's family would have further cause to doubt his sense and character. The trip to Dublin must go ahead, and then 9 months would pass before the next examination - ample time to review the matter. Mary was not convinced; these seemed worldly reasons rather than spiritual ones. But Norris dismissed her doubts: on Monday he would go.

In the early hours of Sunday morning, they were wakened by a loud crash. Groves raced downstairs. In the drawing room he found paper scattered about the floor, the little drawers of his writing desk broken open, the money gone. Investigating more carefully, he discovered that the 40 pounds reserved for his trip to Dublin had been taken; the 16 pounds in a different drawer, set aside for taxes, remained untouched. Then, he tells us, "as I was returning upstairs, I met dearest Mary in the hall and said, 'well my love: the thieves have been here and taken all the money.' 'And now' she said, 'you won't go to Dublin.' 'No,' I replied, 'that I won't.' And **we spent one of the happiest Sundays I ever recollect, in thinking on the Lord's goodness in so caring for us as to stop our way up when he does not wish us to go.** Some thought it right; others thought it foolish; it mattered not to us - we had not a doubt it was of the Lord." In the summer of 1827, at the age of 32, Norris Groves finally abandoned his plans for ordination.

### **3: Had thoughts simplified about church gatherings**

He still, however, considered himself an Anglican, and he still had his heart set on missionary service. He went up to London to ask the committee of the CMS if they might allow him to go overseas as a layman. They replied that he certainly could do so but would not be permitted to celebrate the Lord's Supper without the presence of an ordained minister. This, to his mind, was a formidable stumbling block. Where in Persia would he find a clergyman to officiate a communion? If the Church of England could offer no more than this, perhaps he should think of becoming a non-conformist minister. In his own words, "I felt some ordination to be necessary, but hated the thought of being made a

sectarian." Then suddenly, "the thought was brought to my mind that ordination of any kind to preach the gospel is no requirement of Scripture. To me it was the removal of a mountain." He hastened to find his wife: "I told dearest Mary my discovery and my joy." To her, it was already quite obvious; she could not think what all the fuss was about." **From then on, without the authorization or support of any denomination, he would preach wherever the Lord led him, and take the Lord's Supper with any who loved Christ.**

Returning for a farewell visit to Dublin toward the end of 1828, Groves found his friend Bellett still hesitant to do anything that would offend his friends and relations in the Church of Ireland. Christians of every denomination, thought Bellett, might pray and study the scriptures together, but surely an ordained minister was required to shepherd the flock and minister the sacraments. Yet there was a certain logic to Groves' argument, and an evident blessing when Groves himself preached by invitation in some of the non-conformist chapels of the city. Then, as they walked together, Groves turned to his friend and said, **"This, I doubt not, is the mind of God concerning us, that we should come together in all simplicity as disciples, not waiting on any pulpit or minister, but trusting that the Lord would edify us together, by ministering as he pleased and saw good from the midst of ourselves."** This was a turning point for Bellett. They would meet simply as a company of disciples, to share together in the apostles teaching, fellowship, prayer and breaking of bread, without ministers, sacraments or rules of any kind.

#### **4: Saw family resistance overcome by God**

As the prospect of Persia opened up before Norris and Mary Groves, the time had come to share their plans with their wider family, and especially with Mary's parents. So far, the sacrifices had been all their own. Now they would be asking others to sacrifice - to let their children and grandchildren sail into the unknown without any sure prospect of seeing them again. Mary's parents were distraught at the news. Their "wounded affections and disappointed hopes" were hard for their daughter and her husband to bear. But harsher means were then tried; relations became quite strained. Mary's father declared that she would inherit nothing from him. He then wrote alluding to the thousand pounds still owed by Norris's father (\$183,000 US in 2026). This hurt Norris deeply. It was not his debt, but he wrote back saying he would not leave until he paid every penny.

This put them in a great predicament, having given away so much. Indeed they could take several years to accumulate that amount... Where was God in all

that? Long years had already passed since the first call to missionary service, and faced by yet another unforeseen frustration Norris lost all his appetite for food. It "set me almost as far as ever from the hope of leaving," he said, "except... that dear Mary was on my side. And by so much as she had hindered me in the first years of our marriage, by so much the more did she now encourage me, and kept up my heart which was almost bowed down."

The first hundred pounds were scraped together and sent to Mary's father. A few weeks after this, however, news came to the Groves household which suddenly changed the whole picture: Mary's father had died quite unexpectedly. It was April 1827. They learned that Mr. Thompson had drawn up a new will two or three days before his death. Mary was to receive her share of the inheritance after all, amounting probably to more than 10,000 pounds (\$1.8M US in 2026), and the thousand pounds that was owed was signed over to Norris as a gift. Even the hundred pounds he had sent was returned to him. There was now no financial constraint, nothing to hold them back: they could go to Persia!

## **5: Learned to practice the truth of the one body**

It was time to loosen their last remaining home ties. Norris sold Northernhay House and in January 1828 gave the dental practice to his young relative... The family went to live with Bessie and Charlotte Paget. However little Mary, now 5 years old, became sick which resulted in their staying in England for another year. For just over a year, Norris and Mary Groves, with young Henry and Frank, stayed in Exeter with the Paget sisters. Here Groves had much time to pray and read the Bible and prepare himself for work overseas... Poring over the pages of his Bible, **Groves grew increasingly convinced that the key to all blessing lay simply in discerning the will of God and following it.**

In the New Testament Groves saw adult believers baptized by immersion as an expression of their personal faith in Christ. And so the realization came that he must, as an adult believer, be baptized by immersion. This was a radical step for a public figure who had already been baptized as an infant; it was reported in the local newspaper and became a topic of widespread comment. He told how a Baptist minister, the following day, crossed the street to greet him as a brother Baptist. **A brother he agreed to be, but not a Baptist. Another friend inquired, "of course, you must be a Baptist now that you are baptized." Not at all! He replied. "I desire to follow all in those things in which they follow Christ, but I would not, by joining one party, cut myself off from others."** His baptism, he insisted, was not into a denomination or into a church, but into Christ. "Then

taking up the ring on which his keys hung, he said, "if these keys were to hold [to] one another, all would go if one fell. But as each of them is attached to this strong ring, so should we each take hold of Christ, not of any of the systems of men, and then we shall be safe and united. "

His friends were perplexed. He was no longer an Anglican, and he refused to be considered a Baptist; what denomination, then, did he belong to? **He was content, as he was throughout his life, to be known simply as a Christian:**

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"My full persuasion is that, in as much as anyone glories either in being of the Church of England, Scotland, Baptist, Independent, Wesleyan etc, his glory is in a shame.... The only legitimate ground for glorying is that we are among the ransomed of the Lord by his grace." One of his closest friends reproached him for leaving the established church and thus causing further division in the body of Christ. "You say I quitted *your* communion," replied Groves. "If you mean, by that, that I do not break bread with the Church of England, this is not true. But **if you mean that I do not *exclusively* join you, it is quite true, feeling this spirit of exclusiveness to be of the very essence of schism, which the apostle so strongly reproved in the Corinthians.**"

But how could someone aspire to be a missionary, asked his friend, without belonging to any denomination? How could he preach if not ordained or authorized by any church?... Groves had searched the scriptures on this very point. **He could see no separation there between clergy and laity, no trace of a system whereby one man would be the "minister" and the others pay for his services. The practice of "ordination" at the hands of a bishop seemed both unscriptural and unhealthy, a distortion of God's original design.** It perpetrated the notion that the incumbent received his authority from men rather than from the Holy Spirit, that he would be bound by the requirements of a human institution rather than of God, that he represented and served the denomination rather than the whole church of Christ.

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## 6: Influenced others by example of living by faith

In London George Mueller had heard about a prosperous Exeter dentist, a man who had given up his 1,500 pounds a year (\$275,000 US in 2026) practice in order to go as a missionary to Persia. "This made such an impression on me," Mueller declared, "and delighted me so, that I not only marked it down in my journal, but also wrote about it to my German friends."

**About this time a small booklet with the unusual title of *Christian Devotedness* came into Mueller's hands, and what he read moved him deeply. In fact it changed the course of his life. He experienced something, he said, "like a second conversion". He later described it as "an entire and full surrender of heart. I gave myself fully to the Lord. Honor, pleasure, money, my physical powers, my mental powers, all were laid down at the feet of Jesus, and I became a great lover of the Word of God."**

Mueller was impressed especially by the thought that God does not lie, that Christ does not deceive, and that therefore the words spoken in the Bible are the literal truth; a Christian can trust and obey, with the assurance that God will never fail him.

## 7: Enabled to obey God by sovereign providing

Groves laid plans for the first stage of their journey. While having breakfast in London with a friend, he found at the table none other than John Parnell, whom he had known in Dublin. **Parnell had just made one of those fortunate mistakes which in the purposes of God turn out to be a blessing in disguise.** That morning he was supposed to be in Portsmouth to meet a wealthy Christian friend, but he had mistaken the day. His friend was about to sell a large ocean going yacht. Impressed by the turn of events, Parnell set off for Portsmouth immediately, where he found his friend quite willing to undertake a final cruise before parting with the boat. There and then, a passage to St Petersburg was offered to the missionary party free of charge.

In June 1829 the party set off. They sailed to St Petersburg and then journeyed over land. They left St Petersburg in two large horse-drawn carriages. They journeyed slowly and precariously from St Petersburg towards Baghdad. Sometimes they had to wait 3 or 4 days for horses. At one point they had 13 days and nights without a change of clothes.

Groves was delighted with the dedicated spirit of some German workers in Shushi, so he was privately praying that one or other might even be led to join

him. That evening after tea, two of them walked across town with him to help negotiate places for his party in a caravan to Tabriz, and on the way he told them of his prayer. To his surprise, this “created a great emotion in both their minds.” In fact news of his plans had reached them before he did, and they had sensed God's leading to send one of their own group with him. The one they had in mind was Karl Gottlieb Pflander. Having already written the first draft of an evangelistic book for Muslims, Pflander wished to study Persian and Arabic for a couple of years in a location where these languages were spoken. **Groves was overwhelmed. “Thus the Lord has most graciously answered my prayer and given me a dear brother who has the same views and the same objects with myself and who also understands Turkish, one who will be a great comfort and a medium of communication with the people around us.”**

## **8: Preserved by God in perilous travels**

The next stage of their journey took them on horseback through the mountains of Georgia and Armenia to Tabriz... The ladies, riding side-saddle, suffered “much fatigue”. Kitto was thrown four times... Horses were twice stolen from their encampment before they finally crossed into Persian territory.

The Lord provided financially for them along the way. Norris calculated the money they had brought with them from England would not have provided for all the expenses of their journey, yet the unforeseen provision made for them repeatedly along the way had covered all their needs. **“I cannot help being overwhelmed with the Lord's goodness in this respect. Instead of being in want, we have always had more than enough.”**

The caravan moved through the mountains of Kurdistan. There followed a nightmare of torrential rain, frightful roads, robbers, agitation, fierce dogs, and “daggers being drawn on the slightest provocation”. They finally entered Baghdad. **“We can now say,” Groves wrote, “having finished our long and perilous journey, that from St Petersburg to Baghdad we have not lost from a thread to a shoe latchet, but have all, with all our goods, been brought hither in safety.”** It was December 1829. Groves was 34 years old. **Six months had passed since they sailed from England; they had traveled almost 5,000 miles, half of that on unmade tracks through sand, rocks and mud.**

## **9: Faced very real fears around**

Four months after arriving, they opened a school with forty-three boys and two girls. Groves wrote regarding the school: “When I think of the doubts expressed,

before we commenced, of our being allowed to work at all, and consider the quietness and peace the Lord has permitted us to enjoy in the prosecution of our work, **I desire more earnestly to cast my whole soul, with all its purposes and plans, on the Lord, and not to move but as he guides.**"

By mid-August the temperatures had reached 118° F in the shade and 158° F in the sun. The inhabitants of Baghdad observed with growing apprehension twenty or thirty thousand Arabs with weapons assembling outside the city... In September, definite news came of a severe outbreak of cholera in Tabriz in the Persian highlands, 330 mi to the north, where eight or nine thousand had died out of 60,000.... Six days later messengers brought news of the plague in Tabriz! Cholera was fearsome enough, but plague was a word that struck terror into all who heard it. The intense pain of the smooth red oval swellings in the groin, armpits and neck would be followed inexorably by delirium and death.

On February 14, 1831, Groves wrote, "I have this day settled all our accounts and find after everything is paid... that our little stock will last us with the Lord's blessing two months longer, and then we know not [from where] we are to be supplied, but the Lord does not allow us to be anxious. He has so wonderfully provided for us [so far] that it would be most ungrateful to have an anxious thought." For almost 6 months they had received no letters or gifts... News came of further outbreaks of plague to the north, and of political maneuverings and fresh armed forces threatening to attack the city... On February 28th a bundle arrived containing 26 letters "from most of our dearest friends in England." Their kindness meant that "the Lord had provided us with supplies for at least 4 months to come." The family met together that evening "to bless the Lord for the past and supplicate his continued blessing for the future - that he would accomplish what he had begun and that our hearts may never cease to praise and bless him." Fully justified now was their determination to give all that they had to the Lord and, in their poverty, trust him to provide: **"Oh how hard it is to persuade the rebellious will and proud heart that to depend on our Father's love for our constant support is more for the soul's health than to be clothed in purple and fair sumptuously every day from what we call our own resources; and yet how plain it is to spiritual vision."** The letters also brought the news that their friends had arrived in Aleppo, just 500 miles away.

## **10: Decided to stay in danger trusting God's care**

Groves spoke of his wife Mary as "my dearest, dearest wife... The joy, the help, and companion of all in which I was engaged." They discussed every aspect of

the work and committed it to the Lord: "On any essential point, for some years, we have never had divided judgment... In every work of faith or labor of love her desire was to animate, not to hinder...She has been to me in the relation of Christian wife and missionary wife just what I felt I so much, so very much needed." ... Outside their home, however, things were looking grim. The city was surrounded now by not just one army but two. On the night of March 19 the family was kept awake by the sound of shouting and gunfire.

On March 28, 1831, Groves wrote, "The plague has now... entered this unhappy city." Most expatriate families were planning to leave. However, Groves chose to stay. "There are considerations that outweigh these [concerns]. In the first place, we feel that while we have the Lord's work on our hands we ought not to fly and leave it. Again if we go it is likely that for many months we cannot return to our work, whereas the plague may cease in a month. Opportunities of usefulness may arise during the plague which a more unembarrassed time may not present. And our dear friends from Aleppo may come and find no refuge. The Lord gives us great peace and quietness of mind in resting under his most gracious and loving care, and as the great object of our lives is to illustrate his love to us, we believe that in the midst of these awful circumstances he will fill our tongues with praise, as he now fills our hearts with peace." Kitto wrote of Groves, **"He thinks it would be a very poor return for the protection we received from Almighty Providence during our long and perilous journey, particularly in the mountains of Kurdistan, were we, in the prospect of new dangers, to distrust that care by which we have [until now] been preserved."**

The pestilence continued. During the first two weeks, from a total population of some 75,000, seven thousand perished. **Groves records that Mary would say to him, "I never enjoyed such spiritual peace as since I have been in Baghdad - such an unvarying sense of nearness to Christ and the assurance of his love and care. We came out trusting only under his wing, and he will never forsake us."** Groves thought the place of danger was exactly the place where they should be, as a testimony to the church and to the world that faith in the care of the heavenly Father was not a vain or foolish thing.

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## 11: Experienced God's mysterious ways in trials

Fifteen hundred were now dying everyday within Baghdad alone. Parties were out burying the dead, otherwise the city was deserted... The river continued to rise. By now the plains surrounding Baghdad were completely underwater... Everyday they watch the bodies carried out from the houses along the little alleyway on the other side of the street... **Mary viewed all these things calmly. "I never in England enjoyed that sweet sense of my Lord's loving care that I have enjoyed in Baghdad,"** she said.... Groves wrote, **"Missionaries in these countries have need of a very simple faith, which can glory in God's will being done through all their plans coming to nothing...yet it requires great confidence in God's love, and much experience of it, for the soul to remain in peace, stayed on him."**

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On the night of April 27th the river Tigris rose again, to a level far higher than ever before in living memory...The following day they heard that 7,000 houses had collapsed... 15,000 people perished beneath the falling masonry... Their basement was flooded... "There seems now every prospect [that] at the moment the waters decrease, the surrounding Arabs will come in and plunder the city. Yet even this is in the Lord's hands. Our wisdom has ever been to sit still and see the salvation of our God." A week later reports confirmed that more than half the city had collapsed into the floodwaters. There was floating rubbish everywhere in a stench of rotting flesh and sewage. On May 1, "today as I passed along the street I saw numbers of dead bodies lying unburied, and the dogs eating with avidity the loathsome food."... Throughout that week the flood water continued to go down. When Groves ventured out again there was "many recovering from the plague, walking about, leaning on sticks and sitting by the wayside."

On May 7 he wrote, "This is an anxious evening. Dear Mary is taking ill - nothing that would at any other time alarm me, but now a very little creates anxiety. Yet her heart is reposing on her Lord with perfect peace and waiting his will."... **"I marvel at the Lord's dealings," said Mary herself, "but not more than at my own peace in such circumstances."** With a severe headache and difficulty opening her eyes, she did her best to comfort her husband. Death is something

that comes to all, she reminded him: "The difference between a child of God and the world and is not in death, but in the hope the one has in Jesus while the other is without hope and without God in the world."... A little later Groves wrote, "We did feel assured that the Lord would spare our dear little united happy family, but His ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts." "Doubtless He will reveal in His own good time the reason why He has acted so contrary, not only to our mind, but especially my dear wife's strongest convictions which were that He would preserve us all safe through this calamity."

**"How hard for the soul to see the object of its longest and best grounded earthly affection suffering, without the power of affording relief, knowing too that a heavenly Father who has sent it can relieve it and yet seems to turn a deaf ear to one's cries...The Lord has shown me in the 22nd Psalm the most wonderful cry apparently unheeded, and the Holy Ghost has...enabled me to acquiesce in my Father's will though I now see not the end of his holy and blessed ways." It was barely 7 days after the appearance of the first symptoms that Mary Groves passed away quietly, "without a sigh and without a groan." That very day, May 14, 1831, the shops reopened and vegetables were seen on the streets.** The price of drinking water came down to its normal level. The plague was passed. Groves wrote, **"To think that so near the end we should have been thus visited, how mysterious!"**

## **12: Experienced turmoil in spirit**

On May 20 Groves called the boys and Harnie to help move everything out of his bedroom due to noticing dust falling. Barely 10 minutes after the final items were moved, the arch beneath the floor gave way, and the floor collapsed into the flooded basement. "Blessed be the hand," declared Kitto, "that supported the arch till such precious lives were withdrawn from the danger." A few days later, the wall of the same room collapsed, and with it a great portion of the roof or terrace of the house. Once again, Harnie "with the baby in her arms" had escaped the fall by only a few minutes. Groves, struggling with physical weakness and personal grief, was comforted to see his "dear and loving Father" protecting them from further harm. "This has been a day of mercies at the hand of the most high," he wrote briefly. **He regretted learning so slowly and painfully "to kiss the hand that wounds, to bless the hand that pours out sorrow, and to submit with all my soul although I see not a ray of light."**

During this time Groves wrote, **“Oh my heart longs for Christian communion, someone to whom I can talk of Jesus and his ways, and with whom I may take counsel.”** He hoped his friends in England were praying for him. Never had he felt so much in need of prayer as at this time when his own heavy heart found prayer so difficult. Groves wrote, “Notwithstanding, however, all difficulties and all discouragements... my soul was never more assured of the value of missionary labors among any people, it matters not whom, then now.”

**Groves at this time sank into periods of profound introspection, depressed at his inability to rejoice in the Lord.** He thought how easy it had been to appear an outstanding Christian when blessed with a loving wife, a comfortable home, a rewarding profession and a stimulating circle of godly friends; and how hard to maintain any Christian spirit at all when stripped bare and exposed to a thousand weaknesses. “My heart is very sad to think how profitless a servant I have been.” Mercifully, the black moods were interspersed with more hopeful thoughts: “The sense of my Father's love and Savior's sympathy has never been taken from me amidst all my trials. Nay, I do feel that the Lord is fitting me, by suffering and separation, for the work to which He has called me.”

On August 24 their baby died. Again Groves was thankful that Mary had not lived to see those toilsome anxious days and nights, or suffer the final grief and loss... Without the baby to care for, Norris Groves was now free to think about the future. Four days after her death, he could write almost cheerfully, “Today I feel the Lord has given me a victory by turning my thoughts off my miserable self and temporary circumstances to the contemplation of the happiness of those who are gone before me, and by enabling me to feel set off on my journey to meet them and drawing every day one day's journey nearer.”

### **13: Knew divine providing, preventing, and refreshing**

By October 1831, more than a year had passed since Groves had received a letter or any financial support from England.... In fact Groves had a remarkable testimony to God's provision: “He has supplied me, I know not how, in the midst of famine, pestilence and war. And though I have heard from none in England for more than a year, especially from those that supply my wants, the Lord has not suffered me to want, or to be in debt. And though the necessities of life have mounted to almost 20 times their value during our recent trials, he has not suffered me personally to be much affected by it. His loving kindness and care have been wonderful.” Then at last the letters came and, among them, gifts for the support of the school which started up again.

Groves thought perhaps he should go to his friends in Aleppo for consultation and prayer. However, he was prevented from going by circumstances.... **If Groves had gone to Aleppo at this point of time, he would have arrived to find his friends had gone. Looking back on this later, it was possible to see the hand of Providence working through the unhappy turn of events. Looking further back, if Parnell, Cronin and their party had continued directly to Baghdad on arriving in Aleppo, they would have got there exactly the same time as the plague. Again, the delay would seem providential.**

His friends from Aleppo at last arrived in Baghdad in 1832. **For Norris Groves, the presence of his friends was medicine to a wounded soul. Hours passed in conversation and prayer, and in long discussions as they read the scriptures together.** His spirits began to revive... **It was a time when godly men, drawn together by sympathy and love, and by sorrow shared, experienced much “close, holy and earnest walking before God and of direct dealing with God.”**... They possessed all things in common, meeting for prayer every morning, and on Fridays for extended prayer with fasting. As Henry recalled, these prayer times were “rendered fragrant with the presence of Jesus... It was felt that every word was heard, and that every word brought its answer.” The power of the Holy Spirit was a living reality, and their Bible study was intensely practical.

#### **14: Lived out loving hospitality and earnest prayer**

Living with them now was an Armenian boy, Serkies, who was the nephew of their old schoolmaster. Attempting to escape from Baghdad at the time of the plague, they had been trapped by the flood waters. Surrounded for several weeks by harrowing scenes of misery and starvation, Serkies had watched his uncle die before returning to the city. Knowing his family were all dead, Groves had offered him a home, and Serkies soon became a firm friend of Henry, Groves' son. Profoundly affected by his recent experiences and by the love he found in the Groves household, he was pleased when Henry suggested reading the Bible and praying together. To the great joy of everyone, they were both moved to declare a personal faith in Christ.

In January 1833, Henry contracted Rheumatic fever. With his lungs severely affected, he seemed to be sinking fast... Though Henry longed to see England again, he had no assurance that he and his father should leave. On the contrary, he became more certain that the enemy was intent on using his illness to disrupt the work of God. He determined to remain, for life or for death, so the work could

go on. A day was set apart for prayer that Henry would be healed. "It was late in the evening of a suffering day that all assembled around my bed. We felt we were in the presence of the Lord and confident that He would send an answer of peace. **There are times when prayer is seen to ascend with much incense before the throne - not doubtful uncertain breathings but living prayers, living words to a living Lord** - and such did those prayers offered up in my sick chamber on that evening appear to be. The Lord heard; I slept as I had not done for weeks, and from that day I rapidly recovered."

## **15: Led to a new field of labor through others**

In April 1833, a British Colonel named Arthur Cotton arrived from Damascus. Sometime previously the booklet *Christian Devotedness* had come into his hands and, ever since, he had wished to meet its author. Hearing from Groves how the work in Baghdad was hindered by the hardened resistance of the Muslim majority, he wondered whether India might not offer better prospects. He said unrestricted missionary work was allowed. Here was a matter for much thought and prayer. Groves set off with Cotton to see for himself. **There was no doubt that India had long held a special interest for him: his earliest missionary thoughts had been directed to India rather than Persia. This was no flight from the path of duty. He had every intention of returning... Having suffered an appalling sense of isolation throughout his time in Baghdad, he was determined that future workers would have friends nearer than England, friends able to offer fellowship and support in time of need.**

An American missionary had a few years earlier commended Groves' booklet *Christian Devotedness* and passed along a copy to Colonel Cotton. It was through Cotton's desire to meet the author in Baghdad that Groves had been brought to India. **"On surveying the way in which the Lord has led me," he mused, "I am often struck with the apparently trivial events on which the most important events in our history hang."**

In May 1833 Groves left Baghdad, boarding a boat down the Tigris with Colonel Cotton... During the next 14 months he would travel in India almost 3,000 miles. In Cannanore district he found more than a million Indians "and not a soul to teach them - surely the Lord will have pity on their destitution and move the hearts of some to come and help." Fifteen miles further on, in Tillicherry, there were "forty converts without a shepherd." In Nayoor, almost four thousand had recently turned to Christ, but they needed missionaries to settle in their villages

and instruct them in the basics of the Christian faith. “O that there were willing helpers!” lamented Groves. “Never did I feel so deep an interest in missions.”

## 16: Helped other faithful servants to trust God alone

Arriving in Tinnevely near the southern end of the state of Tamil Nadu in south India,... Groves met Karl Rhenius who was a remarkable man, a natural linguist and an outstanding Christian leader... Based initially in Madras farther north in Tamil Nadu along the eastern coast, Rhenius had expressed to the Anglican missions committee (CMS) his opinion that the Anglican prayer book was unsuited to Indian meetings, that English bishops should not expect to exercise authority over Indian churches, that Indian evangelists should not be obligated to travel hundreds of miles to receive ordination, and that no restriction should prevent fellowship with the Dissenters in public acts of worship. The result was his relocation to this remote region in the south.

Groves was hugely impressed with the opportunities for outreach and with the Christian groups he saw under the care of Rhenius... **He visited a number of the congregations in various villages and found the meetings to be lively and interesting, with extempore prayer, discussion of Bible passages and the opportunity for “all to give an answer or to say what they feel.” “My heart was truly delighted at the sweet simplicity which prevailed in their religious exercises. Daily my desire is strengthened to see the Church free in the use of God's word and in its modes of ministry, everyone being free to exercise the gift the Spirit has given.”** Rhenius might be working as the agent of an Anglican society, but it would be hard to identify these as Anglican churches.

“Daily my desire is strengthened to see the church free in the use of God’s word and in its modes of ministry, everyone being free to exercise the gift the Spirit has given.”

Rhenius and his Lutheran colleagues had long enjoyed the privilege of ordaining catechists to assist in this ministry, but shortly before Groves arrival in India, a bishop had been appointed in Calcutta. The CMS informed Rhenius that henceforth ordinations would be the Bishop's prerogative and that if he wished to dispute this he should go to consult a higher authority in England. Groves listened to the story with interest and a degree of indignation. On no account should he go to England, Groves advised, lest his converts be led astray in his absence, and lest by doing so he lend credence to the idea that Indian churches must be subject to English authority. “There is a deeply interesting work going

on here,” he confided to his journal, “One that I would strain my last nerve to prevent falling to the ground.” Why not write up a paper, he suggested to Rhenius, stating the position from his point of view so that supporters of the CMS might understand the facts of the matter. Eventually Rhenius wrote two, which Groves thought “are calculated to do much good... written in a nice spirit, exposing many objectionable things in the Church in England...”

The CMS, however, was adamant that if Rhenius would not submit, he and his three colleagues must go. Under intense pressure he yielded to the authority of the committee, placing everything under the authority of the bishop. His Indian converts and coworkers were dismayed. They begged him to change his mind. Seeing their desire expressed so strongly, **Rhenius and his three German colleagues then resigned from the CMS, gave up their salaries and resumed their work, depending on the Lord alone to provide. They were not left to starve.** Gifts came in from friends in Bombay and from Germany, and a few weeks later Groves declared, **“God has hitherto wonderfully supported them. and now the Lord will decide where and with whom his blessing shall abide.”** In Karl Rhenius and his friends he had found men after his own heart: **“I trust they will show that Societies are not needed to carry on very extensive missionary work anymore than to begin it.”**

## **17: Desired every member active to edify the body**

Reaching Madras in early 1834, Groves reflected on the timing of his coming to India when there were so many simple believers, yet also a growing attempt of organizations like the Church of England, Independents and Methodists to isolate the Christians for themselves. How urgent was the call to help Christian workers see the importance of establishing biblical Indian churches instead of imposing foreign denominations where they had no right to be!

**“My object in India,” he concluded, “is two-fold: to try to check the operation of these exclusive systems by showing in the Christian church they are not necessary for all that is holy and moral; and to try and impress on every member of Christ's body that he has some ministry given him for the body's edification - and instead of depressing, encouraging each other to come forward and serve the Lord. I have it much at heart, should the Lord spare me, to form a church on these principles; and my earnest desire is to remodel the whole plan of missionary operations so as to bring them to the simple standard of God's word.”** His favorite idea at this time was to select a

band of devoted men, ready not only to preach Christ fully, but to follow him in a self-sacrificing course.

He visited Calcutta in April 1834 and returned there again later in the year for a sad visit. Some of the expatriates were unhappy that he had preached and encouraged all the others to preach who had no ordination or authorization from the Church of England. Groves, they declared, was promoting schism and disorder, especially in his support of Rhenius against the CMS. It came as a shock when the chaplain took him to task: "I was told I was the greatest enemy the Church of England ever had in India, because no one could help loving my spirit and thus the evil sank tenfold deeper."... "But I do so feel what David means when he says 'when I speak of peace they make ready for war'; every day I have something or other to try me... I have so few like-minded, yet wherever I go, by God's grace, there have been some one or two who stand."

### **18: Lived sacrificial kindness to fellow workers**

While in Calcutta in north-western India, Groves visited a school of 300 boys established by a young Church of Scotland minister, Alexander Duff.... During this time, Duff became severely sick. Medical opinion advised an immediate return to Europe. Now Groves was forced to make a decision... There was no urgent need for him in Baghdad. (In fact, during Groves' trip to England all those who had remained at Baghdad left due to recurring plague.) In contrast, his recent travels had introduced him to almost all the Christian missions in India and had shown how great the need was for more workers everywhere.... **Duff's illness convinced him that now was the time to go**, "hoping by the Lord's gracious help to get a body of men like-minded to work with me."

In July 1834, they left for England. The morning before they sailed, Mrs Duff gave birth to a baby boy. Her husband, at death's door, "lay shattered and helpless and all but insensible"; mother, father and baby all had to be carried on board. Groves insisted on Duff occupying his cabin, which meant he had little privacy of his own... The Scottish Minister had heard about Norris Groves before his arrival in Calcutta. Indeed, they had exchanged some friendly letters, and Duff frankly confessed that his "first glow of devotedness" was inspired by a small booklet written by a certain dentist in Exeter (Groves). That little tract seemed to find its way everywhere!

Duff wrote, "I knew he was a proved man of God who had [jeopardized] his worldly interest, and even his life, in seeking to promote the cause of the Redeemer in the world."... Duff felt reassured from the moment he first shook

hands with Groves: **“No sooner did I meet with him than I felt drawn towards him with the cords of love. He was so warm, so earnest, so wrapped up in his Master's cause, so inflamed with zeal for the salvation of perishing souls...[He was] so fervent and glowing a spirit.”**

“[Groves] was so warm, so earnest, so wrapped up in his Master's cause, so inflamed with zeal for the salvation of perishing souls... Truly his visit was like an angel's visit, a visit of surpassing kindness and brotherly love.” – Alexander Duff

Finally on Christmas Eve 1834, England was sighted, and a week later they came ashore in Scotland. **“What, humanly speaking, could we have done,” reflected Duff many years later, “without the promptly, cheerfully, spontaneously rendered services of such a loving, able and skillful brother in the Lord? Truly his visit to us was like an angel's visit, a visit of surpassing kindness and brotherly love.”**

## **19: Joined in the work by like-minded fellow-laborers**

During his time in England, Groves married Harriet in April 1835. The Lord arranged for several believers to be stirred up to return to India with Groves. Visiting Barnstaple, Groves was introduced by Robert Chapman to some members of his Ebenezer chapel. They were William Bowden, a stonemason, and George Beer, a shoemaker, and their wives... All in their early 30s, these were sturdy country people, not very well educated but more than willing to respond to the vision Groves had shared for the vast unreached Godavari Delta on the southeast coast of India.

While waiting for the boat Groves had time to compose another carefully worded letter to John Darby on the subject of Christian unity, which with hindsight appears both wise and prophetic, and all the more impressive when we consider the other matters that must have been occupying his mind at the time. Perhaps this was the chief purpose behind the delay.

Eventually the boat arrived - complete with 40 rams, 20 pigs, cows, goats and geese in pens on the main deck, all sent on board by a kind friend who had gone to Scotland for that purpose. The final cost of the journey had been met by a complete stranger from India who called and presented Groves with 200 pounds “in the name of the Lord.” In July 1836 they arrived in Madras where they

were reunited with their sons Henry and Frank who had come from Baghdad along with Serkies, Harnie, Edward Cronin and the Parnell family.

## **20: Slandered by those devoted to church tradition**

Groves expected to renew the warm friendships established with the expatriate community two years previously. However, word had gone round in his absence, condemning him for his support of Rhenius against the CMS. A difficult year followed. He admitted to being “deeply wounded” by the hostility of almost the entire British community in Madras. **They had begun to realize that far-reaching consequences could follow from his principles of ignoring church tradition and episcopal authority, and encouraging unauthorized layman to act like ordained clergyman.** Before long his “free, unclerical meetings” were being mocked in drawing rooms and condemned in pulpits.

Groves hoped his own visits attending to the dental needs of British residents would break down barriers and prove his desire to be helpful in contrast to the reputation he seemed to have acquired as a troublemaker. “If they merely charged you with what was true,” he lamented, “you would bear it, though they made a crime of what you felt honorable, but there is an eagerness to circulate the most unfounded slander, and no willingness to contradict them in those who know them to be false. They seem to think, at all events, if it does nothing else, it will tend to sink me.” **Though never expecting everyone to agree with him, he was surprised by the degree of hostility,** and like many another sensitive spirit he began to long wistfully for some earthly Garden of Eden far from the strife of man: “My soul at times feels that if we were lodged in some vast wilderness, only seeking nearness to God, we could be so happy. **It seems so hard to be conscious of desiring only the blessing of others and their liberty in Christ and yet to be esteemed a disturber of their peace.**”

By mid-August 1836 the Bowdens and Beers were ready to open their base in the Godavari Delta, five hundred miles to the north... Gundert had already set off to visit Rhenius in Tinnevely... Serkies, converted in their home in Baghdad, had taken the gospel to every Armenian house in Madras, and to Groves’ delight, “ceased not to visit them till he was actually turned out. May the Lord abundantly bless the lad. This one fruit of the Baghdad Mission at all events is most comforting.” .... Barely a year later, Cronin announced he was returning to Britain. John Parnell too, with his wife and her children, was planning to leave. They may have been “disillusioned by the difficulties and discouragements.”

## 21: Saw unsound teaching undermine gospel work

Bowden and Beer were settling well in Godavari, evidently making good progress with Telugu, but nine months had passed since they received any mail from home, or any financial help. **When a letter finally came it was from their main supporter to inform them of his conversion to the view that the church is not called to preach to the heathen, for this will be the task of the Jews in the coming dispensation, he must in consequence withdraw his offer of a yearly donation.** Had all the brethren come to the same conclusion? Had they all decided that preaching to the heathen was not the will of God?

It was a dark moment and it was then that God “who comforts the downcast” brought them a visitor. It was George Baynes, Harriet's brother recently “awakened to the truth.” He attended their family worship and went to hear Groves preach at a military camp. Feeling that the army “was not the place of the Christian's greatest usefulness”, George soon resolved to resign his commission and join them.

Here was the first military recruit; more were to follow. **The effort Groves had put into preaching in the Army chapels was evidently not in vain...** Other encouragements followed. Colonel Cotton sent news that Mokayel was on his way to Syria and Lebanon “to preach the gospel in his own country.” There was word too of a friend of Serkies traveling to Persia “to preach the gospel there to his own people.”

## 22: Stimulated simple indigenous churches beginning

With ministry to the expatriate circle in Madras impossible, Groves and the team moved their efforts to a town called Chittoor (inland from Madras). They began a small farm there. There followed a year of blessing. John Arulappan, now age 27, came to help. With him came another Indian Christian called Andrew.... Boarding schools for boys and girls were soon established.... They found many places where the local people would welcome the establishment of a primary school.... Soon there were greater numbers joining them at the Lord's table than there had been in Madras.

Groves was delighted to be working closely with the young Indians Arulappan and Andrew. There was much for them to do, and Groves threw responsibility on them... In places he left them to meet with Indian believers on their own. “Until we came,” he remarked, “no one but an ordained Indian was allowed to celebrate the Lord's supper or to baptize; and when our Christian brothers

Arulappan and Andrew partook of the Lord's supper with the native Christians it caused more stir and inquiry than you can imagine. **The constant reference to God's word has brought, and is bringing, the questions connected with ministry and church government into a perfectly new position in the minds of many."** And here, Groves believed, were the first steps towards a truly indigenous Indian Church - a church free from foreign control, led by Indians, accountable to Indians.

Arulappan soaked up all the teaching and encouragement that Groves could give him. He received, at this time, a modest salary as a school teacher and translator of tracts and other Christian literature. But one day, while Groves was addressing the crowd and he was interpreting, a Brahman in the audience flung out the taunt that if the Englishman did not pay him, he would not be preaching Christianity. **Arulappan told Groves about this and then made a startling declaration: from that moment he would serve the Lord without wages of any kind. This was a turning point for Arulappan. He resolved to be known as a servant of God, and not of any man;** he would not even accept a monthly gift in recognition of his translation work. This was a radical step for an Indian to take, and Groves saw it as a further stage towards a genuinely Indian church.

## **23: Accepted slander as fellowship with Jesus**

In 1838 Groves traveled eight or nine hundred miles during a period of 3 months. He visited scattered groups of English-speaking Christians, many of whom hardly even saw a chaplain except at christenings and funerals. He was encouraged when a number started to minister to one another informally and to break bread as Jesus had commanded, even if no ordained clergyman were present.

From time to time word came of lies and exaggeration circulated in the foreign community. He was an extremist, people said, because he considered "Christ's life and words our only rule of life." And he was disruptive, because he encouraged people to follow the Bible rather than the custom of the church. **"I have had all manner of evil said against me," Groves admitted, "yet my heart has perfect repose in the thought of being rejected. I only trust I shall always be able to bear it in meekness... accepting all simply as that path in which we are to have fellowship with Jesus,** who was so misunderstood and whose principles were so little appreciated even by his apostles and brethren."

In Chittoor itself, the leading judge and his wife now regularly came to hear the gospel. "I do not know what errors Mr Groves may hold," said the judge, "but

this I know: that those who never looked into their Bibles before he came have learned, by his coming, to study them.”

In May 1838 news came from Tinnevely: “We heard from dear Rhenius last night. He is reduced to a fortnight's provision of bread but has in hand a good stock of faith and trust.” As many as 11,000 Indian Christians were now under the care of Rhenius and his colleagues. Groves had played no small part in strengthening the German missionary's hand at a crucial time and the CMS historian states quite baldly that his “breach with the church was due to Mr Groves influence.” “I do feel great thankfulness,” said Groves, “for having been the instrument of keeping Rhenius in his work.” It came as a great shock when Rhenius, exhausted by the stresses of the past months, died later that year at the age of only 47. He left Christian groups in nearly 300 villages.

## **24: Allowed other workers to go as led by the Lord**

Word came periodically from other workers. The Bowdens and Beers had recently preached and distributed tracks at an idol festival... Frank Groves, now aged 20 and an active missionary in his own right, was keen to start a coffee plantation as a basis for a self-supporting work... Gundert left Chittoor to pioneer an unreached area on the southwest coast.

This was not unexpected, but Groves found it a trial once again to face the prospect of friends and coworkers leaving. Harriet judged that **“he cheerfully gave up his most valued fellow laborers if they felt the Lord had led them to another sphere of service. He liked all with him to feel themselves the Lord's servants” - accountable to the Lord not to him.** But it left gaps in the work at Chittoor.

He cheerfully gave up his most valued fellow laborers if they felt the Lord had led them to another sphere of service. He liked all with him to feel themselves the Lord's servants – accountable to the Lord not to him.

Arulappan was preaching and visiting Christian groups over a wide area, and finding that Indians responded best to the gospel when they heard it from Indians - when there was no foreigner present at all. In 1840 he married a girl converted from a Hindu family in Chittoor, and felt the Lord leading them to settle in the Madurai district... Here he would start a purely Indian work. **Though sorry, as always, to lose a well-loved helper, Groves did everything he could**

to encourage Arulappan in this step. He saw indigenous initiatives of this sort as the key to reaching India with the gospel.

## **25: Distracted by commercial endeavors**

Groves was concerned for Hindus who converted to Christ. They needed a house and work. Settling in a rural area, the missionary team had hoped they might establish a farm colony where Indian Christians could live with them in peace... The climate of Chittoor seemed suitable for mulberry trees, and in 1841 he decided to rent some land from the government, plant the trees and rear silkworms. The experiment was a great success... The time seemed right, indeed, to expand the area under mulberry trees. Out of the blue there came the offer of a loan of 30,000 rupees from a military man who had been converted through the ministry of Groves and wished to express his affectionate appreciation. **To borrow money was against the principles Groves had held since his earliest days as a Christian. but Harriet does not shrink from telling us that Norris, George and herself together saw this as “an indication of the mind of God in this matter.”**... It was not long... before disease of every kind began among the worms. They tried everything they could to reduce the temperature of the buildings, but to no avail.... Fresh efforts were made to restock the farm with silkworms, but disease struck them each time. After 4 years, the attempts were finally abandoned.

As always, Groves blamed himself, and perhaps on this occasion he was right to do so. Afterwards he attributed it to **“having been too much engrossed with the external affairs of the mission, which had hindered his enjoying his usual hours of retirement and communion with God.”** He confessed, **“Often we are beguiled into worldly things with an idea that we can make them subservient to God's glory, but the things we thought would bend as a bow to shoot arrows against the enemies of God become the means of piercing us through with many sorrows and leading us away from God. Nothing requires more spiritual discernment than to detect the snares of the enemy; they are often so covered over as to appear the leadings of God.”** The words of Hosea seemed most apt: “You must return to your God.. and wait for your God always.” Groves put his finger on the point where he felt he had gone wrong: **“The prophet says, wait on thy God continually, and the beginning of the departure is found in only waiting on God occasionally.”** Groves was an excellent dentist, a skilled optical surgeon, a brilliant speaker and a wonderful friend to anyone in need, but he was not by nature, and never would be, a businessman.

Groves now set to work in earnest to pay off what he owed... In 1846 a consignment of locally produced raw sugar was offered for sale, and Groves sensed an opportunity to make a quick profit and thus pay off his debts at a stroke so instructed Harnie to buy it. The idea was to ship the sugar to Europe for sale, and then spend some time together as a family in England. All seemed well, but when the sugar had just been shipped, news broke of a sudden glut in the world sugar market. Its value crashed, and instead of a quick profit the sugar made a serious loss. Groves was devastated. The first shock gave way to the dull ache of sorrow.... It took him a further year in India to pick up what pieces he could... **At the age of 52 Groves looked back on years that the locust had eaten - so much time and energy expended on commercial matters, on things that he now felt had distracted him from the higher call to care for souls.** “It is much my desire,” he said, “to give the rest of my short space to uninterrupted ministry somewhere or in some form.”

## **26: Desired true spirituality rather than a critical spirit**

By January 1848 most of the administrative problems had been resolved, and Groves thankfully booked a passage for England. He was able to enjoy a visit to Kitto and then Serkies.... Despite the rigors of travel, the break had done Groves good; he was sleeping better and his mind was “more tranquil.”

Returning to Bristol he found fresh controversy in the Bethesda assembly. It seemed that Benjamin Newton had propounded certain ideas in Plymouth, concerning the exact nature of the humanity and deity of Christ, to which John Darby took a vehement exception. And now Mueller and Craik had to endure harsh criticism for failing to support Darby's position.

Groves himself was present during six anxious weeks while the church discussed accusations made against its leaders and against Groves himself. He was saddened by the conflict: “I always feel the very attempt to subject the one adorable Christ of God to a process of mental analysis is, in its very operation, desecrating.” The real need was not for a better understanding of the nature of Christ but a deeper love for Him and devotion to His service. “What we want is spirituality of mind, subduedness of spirit, an ability to look on another's interest rather than on our own, and **power to manifest our spiritual strength by our ability to bear with weakness in others rather than by our skill in finding out faults and failings alike in persons as in systems.**”

There was little Groves could do for the assemblies in Britain that others were not doing, and so his thoughts turned once more to the east. It would be a relief

to get away from the strife and contention... So after just 14 months at home, he set out once again for India in June 1849.

The news was all good when they eventually reached Chittoor. Almost all the administrative complications have been straightened out... Word from both Henry and Frank was encouraging... Everything continued to go well, with much interest shown in the Christian fellowship at Chittoor itself and further afield, and Groves was inspired with fresh optimism.... A special encouragement was the baptism of two Brahmans and their wives in Madras. Other Indians were coming to faith in the group started by Bowden and Beer in the Godavari area. And further south **Arulappan reported 12,000 recent conversions, making a total of 30,000 Indian Christians in his district.** This was something of real significance.

The English school was reopened and Groves resumed his teaching.... Groves continued to minister in the English-speaking community in Chittoor, including a number of high caste Indians who had learned English and were asking questions about the Christian faith. Many of them appreciated his weekly lectures on the book of Acts, highlighting the principles followed in the earliest Christian communities. All together it was a time of encouragement.

## **27: Learned of fruit from his labors years later**

Toward the end of 1851 Norris Groves visited Madras and while there was taken ill... After “very severe attacks of pain” throughout January 1852, a return to England was recommended as the only hope for a full recovery. It was midsummer before his affairs were finally wound up amidst increasing weakness, and after much prayer with his family, and many tears from his Indian friends, he bumped down the stony track from Chittoor for the last time.... On August 14, 1852 they boarded a steamer for England.

In London a middle-aged couple wished to see him. They had previously met in Bengal during his earliest travels in India, and now told him that they had been “brought to the knowledge of the truth” through his teaching at that time. Groves confided, **“There was something very refreshing in finding that seed sown so many years ago had still continued germinating.”** He heard of others, blessed through his ministry in India, now actively involved in local assemblies in many parts of Britain.

## 28: Encouraged intentional care for workers

In the Brook Street assembly at Tottenham an opportunity arose for him to speak about a matter that had long troubled him. Workers such as the Bowdens and Beers were not being adequately supported by their home church - in fact they were almost starving - and national evangelists like Arulappen were laboring with inadequate resources, all unknown to Christians in Britain who might wish to help. The assemblies everywhere seemed taken up with work at home to the detriment of work abroad... With the honorable exception of the level-headed George Mueller, no one seemed to have any systematic plan to support workers who might feel called to go.

The failure could be attributed partly to a preoccupation with doctoral matters, partly to a general prejudice against all form of organization, partly to the idea promulgated by Darby that the Great Commission would be fulfilled by the Jews in a coming dispensation, and partly in some cases to an extreme Calvinism that left the conversion of the heathen entirely in the hands of God. But concern raised by Groves struck a chord with the saints at Tottenham. As they prayed they became convinced that the time had come to establish more effective ways of supporting workers overseas and of encouraging others to follow the apostolic example. Groves was delighted to see such a positive response. "I feel thankful I came home; many things have been accomplished by it." Groves' son eventually was part of forming an organization Echoes of Service to help communicate news from the front lines back to interested saints in England.

## 29: Found rest in the Lord in his final days

On February 1, 1853 he celebrated his 58th birthday, and a week later attended the funeral of Harriet's mother. It was a sad loss. Yet for Norris and Harriet the death of Mrs Bay's marked a turning point, for she left a considerable sum of money to her daughter, and it paid off all the remaining debts.

In April Norris Groves entered the final phase of his life: three months of increasing physical weakness but of exalted and untarnished spiritual joy. "The Lord be praised," he said, "I can truly say He lets me see brightness on every side from His love. I looked through the cracks in my clay tabernacle up towards the everlasting hills and have now just concluded all those little earthly cares that must be attended to; I only think on my precious ones and glory."... He went to stay with friends in Malvern, a young couple who had been helped through his ministry in Chittoor. His hostess later wrote to Harriet, "**It made my heart ache to see him eating so little - and so patient, always rejoicing in the Lord, some**

**little song of praise forever on his lips** that so much had been smoothed for him. I used to love to hear him speak of the Lord's dealings with him since his marriage and residence in India."

His thoughts turned once more to Bristol, and his final journey was to the home of George and Mary Mueller - *his* home he called it, and the only home he possessed in England... Three days before his death he had several visitors. "I went to speak to him," one of them said, "but I stayed to listen to him. I went to give, but I stayed to receive. I went to cheer him, but I stayed to gather comfort and encouragement. It was blessed indeed to hear him speak of Jesus. His emaciated frame, his bodily weakness, his consciousness of the nearness of eternity made more real the power of redemption." "There was a sweet smile on his dear face and a beaming heavenly expression." Gone were the doubts, the worries, the regrets, the weight of worldly responsibilities, the pain of discord among brothers, all swept away in the joy of the Lord.

**"It is a wonderful thing," he said, "to come nigh to God - a wonderful thing."** Then, **"Pray that the face of my precious Jesus may shine brightly on me at the closing scene; that when my eyes no longer see your dear faces, they may see that bright face which is dearer still, and hear him say 'Well done' - wonderful - 'Well done', and to me who never did anything well."** A little later, "My sweet sisters, you are watching and waiting to see me depart. I shall be watching and waiting, not to see you depart, but to welcome you into the presence of Jesus."... Near midnight Groves whispered, "Precious Jesus", and then in Lydia Mueller's words, "Leaning his head on his hand, he sweetly fell asleep in Jesus."

### **30: Lived life with confidence in the living God alone**

**Groves went to Baghdad for a very simple reason: he believed God had sent him. He was not appointed by a mission board with wealthy directors to guarantee secure communications and a regular salary.** He did not command the respect given to a man ordained to the ministry of a prominent church denomination. He did not have a team of experienced colleagues to advise on matters of language and culture. He did not have anyone to offer support in time of sickness or political unrest. He did not even have a Bible in the language spoken by the people around him. **But he did have the promises of God (which he believed) and a heart taught to love everyone he met (whatever their background), and he had a vision to take those promises and that love personally to millions who knew nothing of it.**

Anthony Norris Groves was a pioneer among pioneers. The previous century had produced some brave initiatives and gospel work overseas. Some of the earliest missionary societies had already been laboring for 30 years. "But their activities were hampered, and the natural growth of churches hindered, by the fact that they worked on the plan of Western organization, and transplanted the organized church systems of the West instead of planting churches of the apostolic type shown in the New Testament."... He took with him his Bible and a determination to teach exactly what he found in its pages to the people of the East.

## ***Concluding Note:***

The above excerpts are only from the first half of the biography. Much more is gained by reading the additional chapters which provide insightful thoughts about the life and times of Groves, as well as biographical sketches of what became of others whom Groves influenced. Chapter 21 provides great insight regarding Groves' view of the unity of the body. Chapter 27 is delightful to read regarding the indigenous churches. Chapters 28-33 are rich considerations of Groves' character, devotion directed by God leading to liberty in ministry, living by faith, vision for missions, desire to empower native believers, and effect on the thinking and lives of others. Chapter 30 is excellent regarding "faith that dealt directly with God." I highly recommend you read the full biography.

*Excerpts are slightly modified for the structure of this booklet but largely are direct quotes from the biography.*



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*The referenced biography (available from GospelFolio.com) is:*

*Robert Bernard Dann, Father of Faith Missions (Authentic Media, 2004)*

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