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#### CHAPTER IV

#### INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY

When William Carey went to India, in 1793, he set in motion a Christian influence that spread much farther than he or his associates ever dared to dream. He was, indirectly at least, responsible for the introduction of Christianity into a number of provinces in India. Through Carey's mission, work was started in Burma; and it was through Serampore, the headquarters of the Carey mission, that Assam received its first Christian impetus. Through his efforts of translating the Scriptures into several languages, Carey sent the teachings of Christ to a number of tribes that were not to have any European missionaries for several decades to come. Missionary work was carried on among these various peoples through Indian preachers. It thus happened that in his stupendous scheme of translating the Bible into all the languages of India, Dr. Carey included the Assamese. The New Testament was completed in 1819, and the whole Bible was translated in 1833.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately this was not a good translation, since it was practically unintelligible to the ordinary Assamese. In making this translation, Dr. Carey had to rely entirely on an Assamese pundit who had no knowledge of Christian theology or terms with which to express it. The result was that so much Sanskrit was incorporated as to render the book useless for the purpose for which it was originally intended. It was only a very

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small learned group who could comprehend it, and then, all theological terms were misinterpreted as they were based entirely upon the Hindu religion.

The English Baptist Mission in Calcutta was located on the very threshold of Assam; and it was but natural, therefore, that these early converts to Christianity, who received their training at Serampore, should desire to go beyond the borders of Bengal and penetrate the fascinating hills at the north as well as to traverse the fertile valley of the Brahmaputra. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Carey's first convert, Krishna Chandra Pal, was the first missionary to the Khasia Hills. It was through his efforts that the first Khasis were baptized. As far as Assam proper is concerned, there is no record of any Christian converts coming alone from Bengal or any other part of India to make an important contribution to the spiritual life of Assam.

Rev. John Mack wrote to his Society,<sup>2</sup> on January 4, 1835, presenting the commercial possibilities of Assam, particularly mentioning the cultivation of tea. He saw how Assam could become a highway of commerce between China and the East India Company's realm. He also saw alongside this commercial opening, opportunities of tremendous importance regarding the development of Christianity in this part of the world. He wrote: "The barrier against intercourse between our subjects and Chinese . . . would be broken down . . . and an open door afforded into the celestial empire." It is evident from this citation that the early thought was to possess Assam for Christ and then to use it as a means to greater ends, — namely, as a highway into China. After having thoughtfully and carefully considered what sacrifices such an opening would demand