

## Prompted by a Feather

James Mills Thoburn (1836 – 1922) was an American bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church best known for his missionary work in India. Born in St. Clairsville, Ohio, he graduated from Allegheny College in Meadville, Penn., in 1857 and began his Methodist preaching ministry that same year in the Pittsburgh Conference.

Thoburn went to India as a missionary in 1859 and was stationed successively at Nynee Tal, Moradabad, Lucknow and Calcutta, where he founded Calcutta Boys' School in 1877. Preaching in both the native and European languages, he built the largest church in India at that time. Bishop Thoburn was walking down the street one day when a large eagle feather drifted to the ground near him. He searched the sky for the eagle, but saw nothing. Turning the feather over in his hands, he recalled that pens made out of such feathers had written many historic documents.

He carefully took a sharp knife and sliced it across the heavy end of the feather. It wrote so beautifully that he decided to write a letter to his sister, Isabella Thoburn, in Boston. He wrote how the girls and women of India were mistreated and neglected, and that he felt God desired that something be done about it. Then he added, "You are a school teacher. Although you are excellent, there are thousands of others in America who could take your place. Why don't you come over here and start a school for the girls and women who come to my compound to church?"

His sister read the letter to the Women's Missionary Society of the church. Spontaneously, the members responded that if she would go, they would finance the project. Thus, she started India's first Christian school for girls, known as Isabella Thoburn College. It grew into a large institution that continues to this day.

The conclusion? Never settle for what is; settle for what God desires. Even if He must prompt you with a feather.

– Beecher Hunter