

## THE FOUNDING OF METHODIST MISSIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA <sup>1</sup>

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Into the dismal religious arena of early eighteenth century England there stepped the brothers John and Charles Wesley with their companion, George Whitefield. The formation, under their leadership, of the Holy Club at Oxford in 1729 set in motion a train of spiritual events that stirred England to unsuspected depths and profoundly affected countries that were then little known to Europe. Ten years later came the move that is generally held to mark the foundation of Methodism—the opening of the Foundry, near Moorfields in London, as the Methodists' own meeting place. From then until his death in 1791 John Wesley gave the society that came to bear his name a dynamic, methodical, almost tireless leadership; while Charles, through his more than 6,000 hymns, inspired a unity among a diverse and continually growing membership.<sup>2</sup>

At no time did the brothers intend to found a new denomination. They were both ordained clergymen of the Church of England, and claimed only to be revitalizing the body to whose service they had dedicated their lives. But they themselves were swept along in the stream their ministry had released, and were carried beyond the point where they could return to the bosom of the church in which they had been reared. In 1784 John took the decisive step of ordaining his

<sup>1</sup> A condensation of a doctoral dissertation, "Wesleyan Missions and the Sixth Frontier War," presented to the University of Cape Town in 1962.

<sup>2</sup> Standard histories of the Methodist Church give abundant detail of the movement's development. Recommended is W. J. Townsend, H. B. Workman, G. Eayrs (eds.), *A New History of Methodism* (London, 1909), 2 vols.

own ministers, while the autonomy of American Methodism in the same year marked yet another stride away from the Establishment toward complete independence.

It was hardly possible for such a movement to be confined within the limits of one small island. Wesley himself paid frequent visits to Ireland and saw a strong work spring up there from 1752 onwards. But the first distinct missionary move came in 1759 (*annus mirabilis!*) when a layman returned to his property in the West Indies and began working for the conversion of his plantation Negroes. In the following year, Methodism entered Italy, and the pace then quickened. Work for Indians began in Canada (1765); in the Thirteen Colonies meetings for Europeans opened in New York in 1766, the first church was dedicated in 1768, and by 1784 the work was strong enough to be given independent status under its own bishops.

It was not until 1790 that the Society gained a foothold in France, while Germany was only reached from the United States in 1789. Entrance into Africa came through Negro Methodists from Nova Scotia who settled in Sierra Leone in 1792. Between 1812 and 1816 Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa were supplied with missionaries. In 1813 the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society<sup>3</sup> was formed, with local branches throughout Britain; and in 1815 the Society became an integral part of the Church's organization.

### *Methodism Reaches South Africa*

The first steps in South African Methodism were propitious in that they were taken by a layman, and were not due to any artificial efforts to enlarge the bounds of the growing church. A fervent Wesleyan soldier arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in 1806 and shared his convictions with fellow soldiers and

<sup>3</sup> Hereinafter abbreviated as W.M.M.S. A reliable history of the Society is written by G. C. Findlay and W. H. Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society* (London, 1921-1924), 5 vols.

citizens. His place was later taken by a Sergeant Kenrick who, in 1812, appealed to London for a minister to care for the growing interest, and received his answer with the arrival of the Rev. J. McKenny at the Cape in 1814. The recruit, however, fell foul of the autocratic Governor, Lord Charles Somerset, and finding no legal outlet for his energies, went to Ceylon. Two years later a party of Wesleyans reached the Cape and explored possible avenues of service, but discovering that monopoly by the English and Dutch established churches restricted their activities, they turned northwards and, under the leadership of Barnabas Shaw, founded their first mission, Leliefontein, at Kamiesberg in Little Namaqualand toward the end of 1816.<sup>4</sup>

For ten years Shaw nurtured the slender threads of interest shown by the Namaqua, but converts came slowly and in small numbers. By 1821 two further stations were opened, both in Great Namaqualand, but the nomadic nature of the people was unfavorable to the development of mission stations and the work, compared with that in other parts of Southern Africa, proved unproductive.<sup>5</sup>

In 1821 Bechuanaland was entered by the Wesleyan Stephen Kay, and within two years Broadbent among the Barolong was giving evidence of vision and courage that rivalled those of the better-known Robert Moffatt. And while these men were preaching far beyond the boundaries of civilization, the climate of opinion in Cape Town was gradually becoming more favorable to their Society. The Colonial Office in England, under pressure from interests sympathetic to Methodism, and possibly influenced by the movement's increasing respectability, had conceded the right of its ministers to practise their profession in the Cape. A humble church was opened in the capital city in 1822, with Dr. John Philip

<sup>4</sup> Barnabas Shaw, *Memorials of Southern Africa* (London, 1841).

<sup>5</sup> The annual membership figure for the whole area north of Cape Town remained at 67 for the years 1820-1824.

of the London Missionary Society<sup>6</sup> performing the ceremony, and a little later an Anglican bishop consecrated a second church at nearby Simonstown.

The foregoing, however, represented no more than modest growth. Much greater activity was needed if Methodism was to enjoy its share in the expansion that was coming to Christian endeavor in Southern Africa. The required impetus came with the 1820 Settlement which was an emigrant movement from Britain serving the double purpose of easing population and economic pressures at home and providing the vulnerable eastern frontier of the Cape Colony with a stiffening of British settlers. The 4,000 immigrants doubled the number of English inhabitants in the Cape at one stroke and set a firm British mold on the area for more than a century.<sup>7</sup>

The articles governing the Settlement provided for the payment of salary to any minister of religion elected to serve a group of not less than one hundred emigrating families. Only one group, the Sephton party of 344 individuals, took advantage of this provision. Although they were by no means all Wesleyans they took with them a 21-year old Methodist minister, William Shaw (no relative of the above-mentioned Barnabas) who had volunteered for mission work and was appointed by the W.M.M.S. "as one of their duly accredited Missionaries, but in the special capacity of Chaplain" to the party of settlers.<sup>8</sup> Methodism, the emigrants, and South Africa were fortunate in the choice of such a man. From the day in early February 1820 when he boarded the emigrant ship *Aurora* at Deptford and refused the distinctive treatment that would have been willingly afforded his cloth, until his death in 1872 there was a crescendo of praise concerning his character and achievements. Colleagues, acquaintances, and

<sup>6</sup> Hereinafter abbreviated as L.M.S.

<sup>7</sup> Isabel E. Edwards, *The 1820 Settlers in South Africa* (London, 1934).

<sup>8</sup> W. Shaw, *The Story of My Mission in South Eastern Africa* (London, 1860; hereinafter abbreviated as SMM), p. 5.

even those who differed from him painted similar pictures of his many excellencies: and a record of his work confirms their judgments.

The Sephton party landed near the site of present-day Port Elizabeth and traveled to their assigned allotments of land in the newly-named District of Albany. Shaw shared the inevitable hardships of pioneer life, but quickly turned to his spiritual duties, ministering to the needs of the widely-scattered settlers. Those needs were many, for at that time there was no organized religion for Europeans east of Uitenhage and Graaff Reinet. Even the troops at Grahamstown had no chaplain, and it was generally understood that the practice of Christianity stood at a low ebb throughout the frontier region. Shaw, with a catholicity that marked much of his subsequent ministry, undertook the spiritual care of the whole settlement and thereby laid the foundations for Methodist predominance in the area. He soon passed beyond the immediate circle of British settlers and served Dutch and Hottentot groups. His parish, bounded by the Bushman and Fish Rivers, came to embrace 20,000 souls—15,000 immigrants of all ages, and 5,000 soldiers, Dutch farmers and Hottentot laborers. No one man could carry such a load. Within a few months of his arrival in Albany he was writing to his Missionary Committee, explaining,

It is utterly impossible for me to supply this scattered multitude with the Bread of Life. Beloved Fathers, believe me, I am ready to ride over hill and dale, through wood and water; and to preach wherever I come, and in every place, the unsearchable riches of Christ. I declare to you I have no wish to ask for help that I may sit down and eat the bread of idleness; but unless you send, at least another missionary to the station, many *important* places must be neglected; many Englishmen will become *heathen*—many thousands of children will grow up in ignorance, and your unworthy servant of the gospel must kill himself with labour and fatigue.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Undated letter in *The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (London; hereinafter abbreviated as WMM, with appropriate year of issue), 1821, p. 150.

While awaiting a favorable response to his appeal, William Shaw partially solved his own problem by organizing a group of ten local preachers to serve the 115 declared members of the Wesleyan Methodist Society. Three Sunday schools with 136 pupils were already operating, the minister himself was administering the sacraments to 80 persons, and his congregations were constantly growing.

Recruits from England slowly reached Albany, the days of single-handed struggle gradually passed, the pioneer could stand back and see a pattern of growth that augured well for the future. But he could not stand still: he organized orderly expansion to cover as large a frontier area as possible and had the satisfaction of seeing most sizable communities cared for by Wesleyan workers, either clerical or lay.<sup>10</sup>

### *Into Kaffraria*

Although Shaw had accepted appointment as official chaplain to settlers, he had no intention of always limiting his ministry to white congregations, but hoped that work among the Europeans in Albany would open the way for missions among the native tribes beyond the frontier. This was in harmony with Methodist policy which regarded all sections of the Society's work as parts of one whole. His plans therefore embraced the spiritual care of all races within his reach, and he soon was preaching to European, Hottentot, and Xhosa<sup>11</sup> groups; and when he visited Dutch farms he drew the owners' slaves into the circle of his compassionate ministry.<sup>12</sup> In this way he prepared himself for mission work beyond the eastern frontier.

In this outreach Shaw exemplified Methodist mission

<sup>10</sup> Shaw's accounts of his early work in Albany are given in *WMM*, 1821, pp. 150, 151, 534, 634, 788; *WMM*, 1822, pp. 127, 264, 671; *WMM*, 1823, pp. 619, 620; *SMM*, pp. 88-107.

<sup>11</sup> "Xhosa" is the generic name for the large group of Bantu tribes that inhabited the southeast section of South Africa, an area lying roughly between the Gt. Fish and Mbashe Rivers.

<sup>12</sup> *WMM*, 1821, pp. 150, 634, 788.

philosophy in contradiction to that of other societies. The Dutch Reformed and Anglican churches, for instance, directed their efforts almost exclusively to the white population, while the London and Glasgow Societies concentrated on the Hottentot and other African peoples. The Wesleyan agreed with neither school of thought, but declared:

Wherever there is a British Colony in juxtaposition with heathen tribes or natives, it will be our wisdom to provide for the spiritual wants of the Colonists, while at the same time we ought not to neglect taking earnest measures for the conversion of the heathen.<sup>13</sup>

The missionary made no unpremeditated attack on heathenism, however. In spite of his ardent desire to work among African tribes, he paused to gain the affection and confidence of the settlers, and through them, the approval of the authorities. His reputation was made, and when he came to apply for permission to cross the frontier he was looked upon with favor instead of suspicion. Yet he was never servile, and did not truckle to bigoted authority if it discriminated against his exercise of ministerial prerogatives.

As I had long before received and put faith in the dictum of an eminent English lawyer, that 'the Toleration Act travels with the British flag,' I resolved to regard the matter in this point of view; and hence I never applied for any licence or permission from any functionary whatever, but at once proceeded to discharge all public duties wherever I met with any class of people willing to receive me in the capacity of a Minister.<sup>14</sup>

Methodism was fortunate in the man appointed to accompany the Albany settlers. Had he been of any smaller stature than time proved him to be, the story of the Church's growth would have been different, for there must have been many more than the few failures that were eventually recorded. As it was, Shaw's character firmly molded the Society's history east of Algoa Bay, it largely determined the direction of its missionary effort, and it gave Methodism its primacy in the development of missions in Southern Africa.

<sup>13</sup> *SMM*, p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

The scope of Shaw's vision is disclosed in an early letter from Albany to his Missionary Committee in London:

I hope the Committee will never forget that, with the exception of Latakoo, which is far in the interior north of Kuruman [L.M.S.], there is not a single missionary station between the *place of my residence* [Albany] and the *Northern extremity of the Red Sea*; nor any people, professedly Christian, with the exception of those in Abyssinia. Here then is a wide field—the *whole eastern coast of the Continent of Africa*.<sup>15</sup>

In a later letter (1822) he spoke of "a chain of stations" which could be established between Albany and Latakoo, *via* Natal. The vision of this "chain" came to dominate his thinking: it directed his appeals and his planning for all the forty and more years he spent in Africa. It led him to set up a connected line of missions, each of which was within convenient distance of the other so that none was dangerously isolated. Enthusiasm never ran away with him: he kept his feet firmly on the ground while pushing mission advance ever forward. The success of his projects demonstrated the wisdom of his policy.

The first specific move to forge the first link in the proposed chain was recorded August 3, 1822, when he wrote:

I obtained permission from the Landdrost [civil officer] and Commandant [military officer] to proceed on a short visit to Caffreland beyond the colonial frontier.<sup>16</sup>

Armed with that permit the missionary and two colleagues visited the most powerful of the nearby Xhosa chiefs, Ngqika and, after some delay secured his permission to begin work among the Gqunukwebi, a tribe of mixed origin living east of the Gt. Fish River in a 60-mile strip of coastal territory about 30 miles deep. By December 5, 1823, Shaw with William Shepstone, a builder who was also a local preacher, had arrived at the kraal of the Gqunukwebi chief, Phatho, and

<sup>15</sup> *WMM*, 1821, p. 151 (author's italics; n.d.).

<sup>16</sup> *WMM*, 1823, p. 186. Pages 187-190 describe the route and reception of the party.

began to lay the foundations for his first Kaffrarian mission, Wesleyville.<sup>17</sup>

From the beginning, the Methodists endeavored to promote several objectives. They instructed the Gqunukwebi in the elements of Christianity, they shared with them the basic benefits of European civilization, and they promoted good relations between the Africans and the colonists. In the latter sphere there was plenty to do for the Xhosa propensity for cattle-rustling caused constant friction between whites and blacks, and led to *commandos*, retaliatory and punitive expeditions by colonists. Xhosa failure to mend their cattle-raiding ways, and colonial desire for territorial expansion were the root causes of an intermittent series of so-called "Kaffir Wars," the sixth of which, in 1834/5, was destined to cause serious interruption to Methodist mission growth. But in 1823 open war was some twelve years away and there was much to do in introducing the gospel throughout vast tracts of country.

The pioneer said little about the initial hardships involved in setting up house in a primitive community, partly because he was never one to stress difficulties, and partly because his previous experience in Albany made the Wesleyville operation relatively simple. When the primary domestic needs had been satisfied he left the remaining material tasks to his assistant, Shepstone, and turned to develop the spiritual opportunities that lay around him. In so doing, he settled to his own satisfaction the oft-repeated question: To civilize or Christianize?—and unequivocally decided in favor of priority for Christianity. "The only possible means of civilizing rude and barbarous people," he declared before the Aborigines Com-

<sup>17</sup> Shaw in a letter, Dec. 26, 1823, *WMM*, 1824, pp. 487, 488. In *SMM*, pp. 376, 377. Shaw states his reasons for giving English names to Kaffrarian missions: the local inhabitants rarely had specific names for exact localities, and if the mission had succeeded in naming a district, the Xhosa word would have been unpronounceable by a European.

mittee,<sup>18</sup> "is through the influence of Christianity."<sup>19</sup> But this did not lead him to neglect the civilizing of his parishioners: by personal example and by diligent practical instruction he introduced them to the simpler benefits of a European way of life. At no time did the missionaries find their task easy.

They [Africans] disputed every inch of ground with us; they were willing to go into inquiry, but we found them very different in that respect to [sic.] the Hottentots in the colony, who always receive with implicit credit what is stated to them by their teachers. The Caffres exhibited considerable powers of mind, and were not willing to receive any dogma until it was proved to their satisfaction.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, there were unremitting struggles against licentiousness, witchcraft, revolting cruelty, and polygamy, which explains slowness of growth. After the first year's work, Shaw reported that there were about 150 people attached to the mission, of whom 100 were adults, while 60 or so children came to the day school. Attendance at religious services varied between 150 and 200, among whom were numbered the chiefs who were "themselves rarely absent from divine worship," and who ever "afforded all necessary countenance and protection."<sup>21</sup> On March 22, 1825 the first Methodist class meeting in Kaffraria was formed when six people gathered for instruction in the Christian faith. After five months, the first public baptism took place, three of the six class members accepting the rite. A further ten months

<sup>18</sup> The Aborigines Committee, appointed by the British Government, arose from an inquiry into the Slave Trade. Its proceedings were officially recorded and embodied in government publications, *Imperial Blue Books (British Parliamentary Papers), Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, 2 Parts (London, 1836). Part I, serial number VII. 538; Part II, serial number VII.425. The two parts are hereinafter abbreviated as *IBB VII.538* and *IBB VII.425* respectively.

<sup>19</sup> *IBB VII.538*, p. 124.

<sup>20</sup> *IBB VII.538*, p.60.

<sup>21</sup> *Imperial Blue Book (British Parliamentary Papers), Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants of Southern Africa, Within the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope* (London, 1835), p. 189.

passed before the second baptism when three more joined the church; but by December, 1826, the number of communicants had risen to sixteen.<sup>22</sup> The missionaries hoped to win Phatho to the faith, but he never confessed Christianity. His brother, Kama, however, was a genuine convert who, after long preparation, was baptized in 1830. By that time Shaw was transferred to Grahamstown as director of the Albany-Kaffraria-Bechuanaland district, but Wesleyville continued to grow, and in 1834 could report a membership of 66 baptized believers.<sup>23</sup>

### *Continued Advance*

While establishing Wesleyville, Shaw was not forgetful of his plan to create a chain of stations toward Natal. In March, 1825, fourteen months after opening the first mission, he undertook an exploratory trip which led to the inauguration of a second station, Mount Coke, among the Ndlambe tribe some twenty miles north of Wesleyville. Work there proved less productive: the tribal situation was different, none of the chief's family became Christians, and results were consistently meager. After five years of witness, membership stood only at 13, and by 1833 it had risen to 18, but the following year saw it drop to a mere seven.<sup>24</sup> In addition to local hindrances, this small growth may be partly attributed to frequent changes in leadership, a rather uncommon weakness among the Wesleyans. Between 1825 and 1834 there were five successive directors of the mission. Nevertheless, the final reckoning justifies the founding of Mount Coke—it became the publishing centre for Kaffrarian Methodism.

<sup>22</sup> W. J. Shrewsbury (missionary), Journal, Nov. 24, 1826, *WMM*, 1827, p. 526.

<sup>23</sup> Mission statistics are drawn from *Minutes of the Albany District Meetings* (Grahamstown) which record the proceedings of the responsible committee and include annual statistical reports.

<sup>24</sup> S. Kay, *Travels and Researches in Caffraria* (London, 1833; hereinafter abbreviated as *Kay, Travels*), pp. 68-84, describes Mount Coke's early history, he having been the mission's first director. In addition there are his journals preserved in *WMM*, 1825 and 1826.

The same journey which forged the second link in Shaw's chain had taken the exploratory party northeastward across the broad reaches of the Kei River into Gcaleka territory where Hintsá ruled as paramount chief of the Xhosas. It was clearly important to gain a footing in such an important section, but the task proved frustrating, mainly because of missionary ignorance and neglect of Xhosa diplomatic formalities. Not until the end of May 1827 did the latest recruit, W. J. Shrewsbury, pass with his family over the Kei and unload his wagons on the site chosen for the third mission, Butterworth, which was named after a British member of Parliament who had been Lay General Treasurer of the W.M.M.S. The decision to set up home and mission at that place and time was undoubtedly unfortunate, for the Wesleyans had no formal permission to do so, and it would appear that in consequence a cloud hung over Butterworth from its beginning and prevented its enjoying the success its situation should have assured. In this instance, Wesleyan zeal outstripped Wesleyan wisdom, and Butterworth suffered the consequences for many a day. Chief Hintsá never completely approved its springing up on his doorstep; his subjects were naturally cautious about acting contrary to their chief's inclinations, and any success that came lay principally among the Fingos—an outcast people. The site also stood astride the main thoroughfares of tribal war, and consequently suffered from the political and military disturbances that frequently shook the area. The Methodists, nonetheless, persisted in their evangelistic work and valiantly sought to vanquish heathenism among the Gcaleka and their serfs, the Fingos.<sup>25</sup> But progress was painfully slow, and by 1834 the membership had not risen above twenty-two.

Yet Butterworth proved to be a useful investment, for it

<sup>25</sup> In addition to letters in *WMM*, 1827, 1828, Butterworth's history can be drawn from J. V. Shrewsbury (the missionary's son), *Memorials of the Rev. Wm. J. Shrewsbury* (London, 1869), pp. 256 ff.

served as an outpost from which further stations were established. About ten weeks after opening the new mission, Shrewsbury reconnoitred still further in a northeasterly direction with the hope of founding a station among another tribe—the Mambookies, as they were then known, but better described as the Bomvana. The tribe's old chief, Mdepha, was of distant European extraction, and welcomed the prospect of having a European missionary by his side. Almost two years passed by, however, before Shepstone, in May 1829, took up residence among the Bomvana and laid the foundations of Morley, the fourth link in Shaw's chain.<sup>26</sup>

The story of Morley seemed at first composed almost entirely of disasters: there were tragic deaths and frequent tribal disturbances. In October, 1829, the two resident missionary families were forced to flee before marauding warriors while the mission buildings were gutted by fire. When conditions permitted a return to the Bomvana, the original mission site was abandoned in favor of a better location, and the new Morley bore a reasonable fruitage in its early years.<sup>27</sup> From 1833, under the Rev. S. Palmer, it prospered and came to exercise a strong pacific influence over a wide area.

During his exploratory trip in May, 1825, Shaw clearly saw the desirability of planting missions among the Thembu and Mpondo tribes, both of which were numerous and influential east of the Kei. The Thembu occupied an inland region north of Butterworth, and were ruled by Vusani, who gave a fairly cordial welcome to the prospect of a mission among his people. Shortage of personnel and of funds prevented the Wesleyans from taking advantage of the situation before April, 1830, however, when they enabled Richard Haddy to camp in

<sup>26</sup> Morley's history is told, in great detail, in Shaw's Journals, *WMM*, 1830, pp. 56-63; Shrewsbury's Journals, *ibid.*, pp. 838, 839; *SMM*, pp. 500-503; Kay, *Travels*, pp. 376-380.

<sup>27</sup> Shepstone's account concerning Morley is given in *WMM*, 1831, p. 784; 1832, p. 377; 1833, p. 61.

Thembuland preparatory to building the station that was named Clarkebury in honor of Dr. Adam Clarke, the Methodist author of the famous Bible commentary.<sup>28</sup>

If it is true that "happy is the country which has no history" then Thembuland must have been reasonably content, for of all of Shaw's missions Clarkebury had the least recorded history. Later activities have amply compensated earlier silences, however, and it has long been the center of a thriving church life and occupies a prominent position today.

There remained yet one more people to be embraced by Shaw's initial planning. These were the Mpondo, an important tribe who held territory northeast of the Bomvana and southwest of Port Natal. They had been known to Europeans since 1686, but it was not until Wesleyans began work among them that their history and customs were discovered. They did not belong to the Xhosa group but to a different branch of the Bantu family, the Mbo. Entrance into their territory would bring the Methodists within reach of their immediate goal, Port Natal, so the Albany Committee were able to persuade the W.M.M.S. to make special efforts to find a missionary for such a strategic center.

While prospecting for sites among the Bomvana and Thembu in 1829, Shaw and Shrewsbury had visited the Mpondo chief, Faku, and secured his consent to the placement of a mission among his people; but as so often happened, the promised missionary, W. B. Boyce, did not reach his post until November, 1830. Even then, the site proved unsuitable and within seven months was moved to where Buntingville, as the mission was called, sent down strong roots that still support a vigorous work.

Boyce proved to be an excellent missionary and an exceptionally good linguist. It was he who discovered the vital principle of "euphonic concord" in Bantu languages, and brought system into their study. But his diocese was no

<sup>28</sup> Shaw, *WMM*, 1830, p. 56, and Kay, *Travels*, pp. 270, 271, and 285 ff. tell the story of Clarkebury's infancy.

sinecure. Buntingville's history proved as stormy as that of its sister missions, although it was the only one of Shaw's initial six to escape destruction by war. It became the base from which two other missions were soon founded—Shawbury among the Bhaca, and Palmerton, which was built on the farther side of the Mzimvubu (River).<sup>29</sup>

Thus, within eleven years, the firm leadership of William Shaw enabled the Wesleyans to stake their claim to an extensive sphere of missionary activity. They drove their stakes firmly, with the result that the main features of their mission structure can be clearly traced today. Yet toward the close of 1834, when our survey concludes, it seemed probable that much of their work would be destroyed by the war that broke out between the Xhosa and the Colony. The Methodists allowed themselves to become embroiled in politics; some of their missionaries, notably Boyce, were over-eager to assist the British Government in its struggle against the Bantu tribes, and earned for their Society the reputation of being pro-colonial and, by implication, anti-African. This was not just, and when the smoke of battle lifted and men were able to view events more clearly, the Wesleyan image was not seriously impaired. Long before the war and its issues had been settled, the missionaries returned to their posts, restored what had been partially destroyed, and prepared for further advance.

It was the continuance of this dedicated spirit that gave to Methodism its primacy among Christian agencies in South Africa. Today they are second only to the Dutch Reformed Church (which is virtually the state church in the Republic). They count more than 325,000 members on their books and a further 500,000 adherents, or a total of 825,000 members and adherents. These worship in about 3,000 church buildings that

<sup>29</sup> Boyce is the chief historian for early days at Buntingville. His letters appear in *WMM*, 1831, 1832, and are supplemented by A. Steedman, *Wanderings and Adventures in the Interior of Southern Africa* (London, 1835), 2 vols.; see II, 269 ff.

are widely distributed throughout the country.<sup>30</sup> The early struggles, thanks to the wise ministry of William Shaw and some of his successors, were not in vain.

<sup>30</sup> Drawn from *Minutes of the Seventy-Ninth Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of South Africa* (Cape Town, 1961), pp. 23-30.