WHAT METHODEISM HAS DONE
FOR THE NATIVES.

BY

D. D. T. JABAVU, B.A. (LOND.)

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The Wesleyan Native Church, King Williams Town, was crowded with an enthusiastic audience of Natives on Saturday evening, 28th April last, when Mr. Jabavu of Fort Hare Native College delivered a lecture on “What Methodism has done for Natives.” This was the culminating point in a series of events which had kept the town astir over the historic occasion of the Wesleyan Centenary Conference.

The chair was occupied by Mr. Ben Tele, the son of John Tele, who was for decades a commanding figure as Chief Kama’s counsellor at Middledrift where the Wesleyans first started their work. For decades a man should be both a delegate to this conference and in public life. He entreated his hearers to pay strict attention to the speech as it would uplift them.

The Rev. T. Major also addressed the audience and expressed his pleasure to be there at the final meeting of the centenary celebrations. The lecturer, he said, was in a position to bring to bear upon his subject a power of intellect and enlightened views on the questions of the elevation of the aboriginal races of South Africa.

By coming there he (Mr. Major) had learnt something in which the Natives had proved to be cleverer than the Europeans, namely the art of having a lecture sandwiched between the sweetness of musical items (laughter and cheers)—an arrangement that evidently served to change a lecture evening from being otherwise a dry performance into an attractive event.

Mr. Jabavu, after a hearty reception, proceeded to speak and continued for more than an hour. The audience was spellbound throughout as he graphically described the conditions of his Native land when the Wesleyan Church first visited South Africa.

THE PIONEER MISSIONARIES

first visited South Africa. He humourously depicted the uncertainty and the dangers of an average day in the life of the aborigines a hundred years ago, contrasting these with the comfort and safety of to-day and the contribution of Methodism to the process of transformation. To explore the dark-forested hinterland of this country a hundred years ago, he said, was a matter of gravest peril and risk to the body and health of any adventurer, hunter or traveller. The country swarmed with vicious beasts and reptiles whose influence seemed to render human beings equally savage. Even in the sixties conditions had apparently been little altered for we read in a Sesuto novel how two Basuto had to run for dear life somewhere between Grahamstown and Keiskama Hoek, being hotly chased by Xosa highway robbers who infested the bush living on the spoilsotten from the murdered bodies of innocent travellers; and how these men ran over roads strewn with skulls of victims for weeks and eventually emerged in the environs of Queenstown. Ours was a land of internecine feuds and unbroken warfare, anarchy, devastation and plunder. The Bantu, although they boasted a sound system of communistic tribalism, lived a social life that may be described, from a spiritual point of view, as a haunted nightmare of uncertainty and tyrannical witchcraft. Who of us can forget the terror that must have prevailed among the Ama-Ngwane and the desolation of superstition caused by the dictate of Nongquase? The life of a woman, especially, if not even yet an ideal and idyllic one, was one of absolute subjection dominated by polygamous manhood, whilst man himself lived in constant dread of murderous foes and malicious ambushes. There was no room for hope, no happy anticipation of an after life, no spiritual outlook. This was the atmosphere of the social conditions braved by William and Barnabas Shaw and their confederates. They must have been animated by a remarkable spiritual zeal. To have changed such a situation within the brief span of a century into what we see to-day bespeaks energetic work and prayerful devotion. An impressive picture of this metamorphosis was to be witnessed last week in the Town Hall of King Williams Town, the geographical centre of Shaw’s work, when the posterity of the erstwhile barbarians acquitted themselves with success in the difficult art of European music to the delight of a European audience.
The work of the pioneers spread like that of the original twelve apostles. They had the romantic joy of making history in their quest to possess this land and annexing it to the kingdom of God. They came out from Europe fired with a true love for the salvation of the soul of the black man from the miseries of superstition. The story is a long one and it is useless to refer you to the books of its sources for you will not read them; but there is a small new book which has been published this month expressly for you, “The Story of Century,” only 1/3, which you can read and get easily. Please try and get it and read it.

On there is a small new book which has been published this month with us here till yesterday. A man 88 and travelled over sixty-thousand miles on foot preaching the Gospel and vigour. In short, the result of the work of the pioneers is that Methodism has established 5,000 churches, controls 400 ministers and 7,000 lay preachers and evangelists. In point of numbers it stands an easy first of all religious missionary bodies in South Africa, being followed in order (according to the latest census figures of attenders) by the Dutch Reformed 88,956; Anglican 82,044; Presbyterians 35,580; Congregational 32,191; Roman Catholic 22,288; Baptist 8,043. Wesleyans have 137,041 attenders. Their secret is their concentration on the work of ministers and evangelists and lay preachers. They are always attacking the heathen at their kraals and winning them over to God. The famous chain of mission stations, so ably described by the Rev. E. Hurcombe in the “Daily Dispatch” series of articles comprises Wesleyville, in Mount Coke, Butterworth, Morley, Clarkebury and Buntingville. To-day the stations have spread far and wide in and beyond Natal. Among the giants of our earliest ministers: are John Lwana, Charles Pamla, Charles Lwana, Boyce Mama, James Mjila, James Dwane, James Sakuba, John Sikwebu, Johannes Mahonga, Gana Kakaza, Bekwa, Mahlutshana, Mabula, Nobanda, Skosana, Mngqibisa, Geduka, in the Cape; J. Bunga, Matebele, P. Mtembu, P. Mtinkulu, J. Mtinkulu in Natal; J. Paki, Petros Mochumi, David Mosefane, Matsipi, J.D. Goronyane, Nehemiah Mochumi (senior), Jacob Monyatsi in the Free State; John Gxola, Manciya, Paul Tuta, Sigoni, Nomvete, Giwu, January Menye, S. Makhobotloane, in the Transkeian territories, Embo-land. Among the greatest evangelists one may mention Joseph Ngqase, Mtoba (born 1846), Ntontela (who flourished 1834-1921 and was even pensioned by one of our European benefactors), Samuel Maja who worked for 30 years including many years when he was not paid for the work (I wonder how many of us to-day would work as evangelists and take no pay?); Jonathan Mkwane has also worked for 34 years as an itinerant evangelist for no pay except casual gifts of thanks. Among those of our ministers who have attained the rank of Superintendents of their circuits are: Peter Mpinda, Sebastian Msimang, Samuel Myambo, Gana Kakaza, C. Pamla, John Masiza, Kali Newana, C. Msikinya, A. Pitsa, Sigonyela Kakaza, Conjwa, W. G. Mtembu, Mafongqo, Mkosi, C. Mahlutshana, E. Mqoboli, Abner Mtinkulu, Z. Mahabane, Magobodi, P. Mahlutshana, Solomon Myambo.

The women have done important work under their Manyano organisation especially in propaganda, and in the spiritual work of the Church generally. Among the effects of the labour of the pioneers we may say that they have helped to give us a new and hopeful outlook on life and its possibilities for good. Polygamy has been supplanted. The Eastern territories have been transformed. We have been taught liberty, how to give and continue giving of our money and possessions to the Church; for it is universally agreed that no Church demands so much from its adherents as ours; it is sometimes pathetic to observe how some of our grandparents prefer to starve and go ill clad rather than fall behind in their church dues. In this manner we have been taught self-dependence, how to support our ministers comfortably without looking to Europeans overseas for help. The most recent illustration is the way the Fort Hare Wesleyan Hostel costing £14,000 has been up put free of debt (for the remaining £900 odd is sure to be wiped out by July next). It is this thoroughness of financial organisation that compels some of us to be unswerving in loyalty to our church despite occasions when we feel it considerably irksome to remain Wesleyans.

THE GOOD WORK CONTINUED BY SUCCESSORS.

The successors of the pioneers came, saw and conquered. They continued the good work and specialised by developing the educational side of missions. Day schools were erected everywhere and to-day these number over a thousand, attended by 65,000 scholars. They have afforded an opportunity for the display of sterling character in teachers who remained constant to their calling and whose memory will remain indelible in the minds of all of us who came under their training. Many of these have either passed away or are in advanced age; Jonathan Nangu, Theodore Ndandwa, Alfred Solilo, Petros Sidzumo, Stephen Mtoba, Stegman Dlakiya, Josiah Mpinda, Agnes Mahonga, Martha Sakuba (of those best known to me) and countless others. I hope someone will some day compile a complete record of such names for the inspiration of our posterity.
The majority of centres conducting secondary education for our people in this land is claimed by the Methodists: Healdtown (1857), Clarkebury (1895), Shawbury (1891), Bensonvale, (1881) Buntingville (1883), Edendale (founded by Rev. Ezra Nuttal in 1894), Butterworth (by Rev. W. J. Hacker 1890), Emfundisweni (founded by Ukanara, Rev. T. R. Curnick in 1916), Salt River (by Rev. G. Robson 1917), Indaleni (1902), Mount Arthur, Osborn, Kilnerton, Waddilove, Inhambane, Umtali, Quessua in Angola, and last but not least the Fort Hare Wesleyan Hostel which will remain a monumental commemoration of the devotion of modern missionaries in the heart of our Mecca of Higher Education.

In the realm of literature a great deal can be recounted, but for full information I must again refer you to the “Story of a Century.” In Bantu philology the pride of honour for discovering the Euphonic Concord as well as the first Xosa Grammar falls to Rev. W. B. Boyce (1834); that of issuing the first complete Xosa Bible to Rev. J. W. Appleyard; that of publishing a Xosa-English as well as English-Xosa dictionary to Rev. W. J. Davis, not to mention other items such as the hymn book, various classes of literature and productions by Wesleyan Native authors.

The achievement of the newer generation of Methodist missionaries is ample and creditable. It is different in kind but not inferior in merit and does not suffer by comparison with that of the pioneers. For this we grant them their meed and due. They have the gratitude of all the Bantu people. Their task has been, in some respects, a more difficult one because they have had to deal with the Native at a more advanced stage of development and civilisation; when the Native was more articulate and critical and less easily manageable and less easily satisfied with conditions that his innocent and simple ancestors were only too thankful to have. Proportionately their task is going to grow harder and harder with the advance of race-consciousness and ambition, justifiable ambition, on the part of their proteges.

**THE TASK OF THE NEW CENTURY.**

As a corollary to reviewing the work done in the past century we must look ahead to the new century and its problems, for the work is not yet at an end. The largest room in the world is said to be the room for improvement. The pioneers found the Natives a race of children, intellectually and otherwise. This has remained true for many years, but the church must take cognisance of the fact that this axiom in both its literal and metaphoric sense no longer holds good any more than a baby remains a baby for all time. The Bantu people have, in accordance with the natural laws of psychology, advanced from that to the next age: that of the growing child who has learnt to speak and ask questions, often awkward questions which however must always be honestly answered. To hush and squash the questions of the curious child is fatal. In his curiosity over the newly discovered universe he continuously interrogates his parent, What is this? So with the Natives within and without the church. Their restlessness is not unrest. It belongs to the normal order of development and there is no need to postulate Bolshevism, Communism, Socialism and Garveyism as its genesis, although these movements may incidentally provide them with additional pabulum for thought. The facts have to be squarely faced and a reasoned policy outlined for future guidance.

The church must organise to interest itself more than it has done heretofore in the general economic and social conditions of the subject races. To take a few concrete instances: the question of municipal beer canteens, striking as it does at the moral fibre of the race, cannot be left to solution by the Government alone. The church must have an organised body such as that so earnestly recommended by Rev. J. S. Morris in the Queenstown synod last January. Similarly quasi-political problems like Labour Conditions, Wages, Pass Laws, Land, Segregation must be taken in a direct manner if the church is to justify itself as standing for the tutelage of the subject races. In a meeting I had at Cape Town recently in one of our churches where I was discussing social problems, a solitary European church dignitary who was asked to say a few words was, to our shame on the platform, absolutely refused a hearing and howled down by the assembly on the ground that “White ministers do nothing for us in our public questions.” This is a sign of the times and it teaches us that our church cannot confine itself to the spiritual interests alone of a people otherwise persecuted by rulers of the same colour as its officials in the Conference.

Agricultural training must be placed on a wider basis right from the lowest to the highest level, in view of the increase of population in already congested areas where wasteful methods of cultivation predominate.

The training of our Native ministers must not be inferior to that of the rest of the community. The times demand more than the two years’ course at present provided. True education cannot be hurried. We must train our Theological candidates up to the point where they shall be enabled to discharge with efficiency the work required in our largest Native
circuits which naturally must ultimately fall to them. The new century demands that the way should be opened for our people to be trained adequately to replace the European ministers in predominantly Native circuits. This is the natural order of things and the modern theory of mission work, making for greater power and contentment within the church.

We too need to introspect ourselves and seek ways and means to improve our personal life and character in keeping with the higher responsibilities that we legitimately aspire to. Our young generation, one is sad to confess, has fallen behind its parents in active work for the church. The number of irreligious educated Natives is growing alarmingly. It will be a sorry day when our leaders are non-Christians. The question is for us Africans to solve. Again, we need more sincerity, earnestness and purity in our educated men and ministers. We need to show more evidence of a real call to the profession we adopt. The ministry should not be taken up merely as a more lucrative and dignified occupation than teaching. The new century is going to exact more spirituality from all of us who claim to be Christians. We cannot save others when we ourselves are lacking in faith. We too are required to go out and "preach .... teaching them" through the example of our lives rather than our words. There are actually more heathen to-day than there were in Shaw’s time because the population has multiplied since. Our task is by that the greater. We need more evangelists than ministers, more evangelistic ministers than pastors. We must lay great stress on the evangelistic side of our work. The war cry and challenge of the forthcoming century is that we must go forth to win and possess greater lands from the Kingdom of the Evil One. May we be enabled to show our gratitude to God for what Methodism has done for us during the past century by going forth in His strength to win more followers for his banner to the glory of His heavenly Kingdom and to the salvation of the Bantu race.

A standing vote of thanks was then accorded the speaker, and subsequently it was decided, from general requests, that the address should be printed as a pamphlet for circulation in English, Xosa and Sesuto.

Price of above address, 4d. per copy or 3/- a dozen, both post free.

Obtainable from the author, or from the BOOKSTORE, LOVEDALE, C.P. Also, by the same author, "THE LIFE OF JOHN TENGO JABAVU" 4/6, 6/6, post free, from the Manager, Bookstore, P.O. LOVEDALE, C.P.