

## Christian Missions : IX. Some Aspects of Baptist and Wesleyan Work from 1827-1864

### (a) The Baptist Mission

THE second period of Christian missionary work in the British Period was one of building on the foundations laid earlier. The Baptist missionary work begun by the Revd. James Chater and continued with the assistance of Hendrick Siers saw very slow expansion due chiefly to the inadequacy both of missionaries and of funds. There was some progress in evangelism in the church in Colombo but the missionary work at Hanwella declined and Hendela was adopted as a new centre of work. Evangelism was also begun in the Kandyan district with centres of work in Kandy, Matale, Gampola and Kadugannawa. In 1843 missionary work was begun at Kurunegala but was given up owing to the unhealthy nature of the place at the time. The total membership of the mission in 1828 was 33 and in 1862 it had only increased to 433 with 64 members of the mission in the Kandyan area<sup>1</sup>.

The founder of the Baptist mission, James Chater, left for England, owing to ill-health after 17 years of difficult service in Ceylon but he unfortunately died during the journey<sup>2</sup>. After about an year during which the mission was in charge of Hendrick Siers who was helped by the Revd. Benjamin Clough of the Wesleyan mission and some Ceylonese laymen, the Revd. Ebenezer Daniel, sometime minister of Luton who had volunteered to the Baptist Missionary Society in England for service in Ceylon, arrived with his wife and family in 1830<sup>3</sup>. His impressions of the Sinhalese congregation of Grandpass Chapel at that time appears to have been far from happy but he found the English congregation responsive. He spent a considerable time in the study of Sinhalese and began Sunday schools both for Sinhalese and Portuguese children and generally reorganised the work of the mission. His work in the villages was by no means easy. In a letter dated 8th July, 1840

1. See *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. VII, No. 3, pp. 202 ff. for earlier period. *Annual Report of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMSR)* 1863, pp. 54-7; p. 83; p. 86; *Report of the Colombo Branch*, 1858, pp. 7-8; *A Historical Sketch of the Baptist Mission in Ceylon*, p. 28.

2. *B.M.S. Periodical Accounts (P.A.)*, Vol. 8. Report of 18th June, 1829, p. 17; 19th June, 1828, pp. 17-18; *Missionary Register (M.R.)*, 1829, pp. 114; 33; 1830, p. 37.

3. *M.R.* 1830, p. 285; 1831, p. 120.

to the Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society in England he writes concerning his work at Hanwella.

'People in England may think it an easy thing to go to a Sinhalese village and preach to the people the good tidings of salvation through Jesus Christ. They may be ready to conclude that . . . as soon as the missionary begins to open his commission crowds of willing hearers will flock around him, and receive his message with breathless attention and joy. But although I have no doubt that such times of refreshing will come to this island, they have not yet arrived. The present race of missionaries, especially in the interior, have to sow in tears, and to labour against every discouragement. To collect people to hear the Gospel, and detain their attention long enough to enable them to see its real import, is one of those difficulties which every missionary here has to struggle with. If you wished to collect them together to give them ardent spirits, or to see the cruel diversion of cock-fighting, etc. there would be no lack of attendants . . . But call them to hear of the true God . . . and they will laugh at you; they will ask "what pray will you give us to do so? Give us a quarter of arrack, and we will come and listen to you", or if they are not so coarsely insolent, they will invent some idle excuse, and presently leave you . . . I do not say that all persons who preach the Gospel have to the full extent, these trials to endure. I state the results of my individual experience since I left Colombo'.

In 1833 Daniel's work in the villages suffered by a severe epidemic of small-pox and in 1834 by the occurrence of floods which destroyed the church at Hanwella<sup>4</sup>. His epitaph to be seen today at Cinnamon Gardens Baptist Church was richly deserved.

For nine years after Daniel's arrival the mission continued to have the help of Hendrick Siers. In June 1839, however, after about twenty-five years of service, he died at the age of 55 years<sup>5</sup>. In 1839, the Revd. and Mrs. Joseph Harris augmented the mission to take up work in Colombo allowing Daniel, who was looking after this congregation also, to spend more time in village evangelism. During this time the missionaries began work among Veddah and Rodiya folk on a suggestion made by the then Governor, the Rt. Hon. Sir Stewart Mackenzie<sup>6</sup>. And Daniel started a seminary in Colombo for training young men for the Baptist ministry. After fourteen years of faithful service in Colombo and in the villages Daniel died in June, 1844.

Joseph Harris moved to Kandy in 1841 and developed the mission which had been started in the district by a member of the church in Colombo who had studied under Chater, and had gone to live in Matale in 1835. Another missionary, Charles Dawson, followed Harris and established a Printing Press in Kandy and also started religious work among estate labourers in 1842<sup>7</sup>.

4. *M.R.* 1840, p. 211; *Historical Sketch*, pp. 13-16; 21-23; J. E. Tennent: *Christianity in Ceylon*, pp. 281-2, 290.

5. *M.R.* 1840, p. 64.

6. *M.R.* 1840, pp. 210-11; *Historical Sketch*, p. 19.

7. *Historical Sketch*, pp. 17, 20-31.

A very valuable contribution made by the Baptist missionaries both to the revival of national culture and to the total Christian missionary enterprise was their 'religious' and 'secular' literary work. Daniel not only held office as Treasurer of the Colombo Religious Tract Society, but also published the Tract Society Magazine jointly with the Revd. Benjamin Clough of the Wesleyan Mission. Harris started a bilingual magazine called *The Touchstone* and Dawson another magazine called *The Commentator*. The most outstanding literary work however was done by the Revd. Charles Carter who helped in the translation of the scriptures and also earned a richly deserved reputation as a Sinhalese scholar with several publications to his credit including the well-known Dictionaries and a Sinhalese Grammar.<sup>8</sup>

Despite all these activities the evangelistic work of the mission was seriously hampered by the inadequacy of workers and money. The requests made by Chater and Daniel for more missionaries and greater financial support were repeated many times during this period by those in charge of the mission in Ceylon. In 1859 the Revd. James Allen, a missionary who had arrived in Ceylon in 1846, wrote to the Baptist Missionary Society in England asking for more missionaries :

'The work demands it and must languish without it. Is there none to send? Will no one come? Have the old fields lost their charms? Are the new more attractive? What is it? In the estimation of everybody we work at immense disadvantage with such a puny European agency. This may be right or wrong but it is plain to me that additional help is needed'<sup>9</sup>.

In spite of such appeals comparatively little help was sent from England as the Home Society itself lacked the necessary funds at the time and far from developing the work some of the mission stations in Ceylon had to be abandoned.<sup>10</sup>

But the difficulties that the missionaries had to face were mitigated by the emergence of a Ceylonese ministry and local lay leadership trained in the schools of the mission. By 1850 there were eleven Ceylonese ministers, in 1862 there were nineteen. Among the more noteworthy of these ministers were P. Ranasinghe and James Silva both of whom served in the Grandpass Church and T. Garnier who did missionary work in the Kandyan district.<sup>11</sup>

8. *B.M.S.P.A.*, Vol. V, p. 141; *B.M.S.R.* 1860, p. 16; 1863, pp. 15-16; *B.M., M.H.*; December 1, 1859, p. 185; September 1, 1860, p. 162; October 1, 1860, p. 175; May 1, 1861, pp. 72, 73; December 2, 1861, p. 188, *Historical Sketch*, pp. 45-9.

9. *B.M., M.H.* August 1, 1859; p. 125; September 1, 1860, p. 162; October 1, 1860, p. 176; *C.B.M.S.R.* (Col. Br.), 1858, pp. 10-11.

10. *Historical Sketch*, p. 34.

11. *C.B.M.S.R.* (Col. Br.), 1858, pp. 5-6; *B.M., M.H.* March 1, 1859, p. 44; December 2, 1861, p. 186; *Historical Sketch*, pp. 19-32; *Lanka Pradeepaya*, January, 1940, p. 10. J. E. Tennent: *Christianity in Ceylon*, p. 292; *B.M.S.R.* 1860, p. 64; 1861, p. 60; 1863, pp. 55-7.

Another source of help to the mission was the influential English-speaking Baptist congregation in Colombo in which were such well-known members of contemporary Colombo society as Dr. Christopher Elliott who was the Principal Civil Medical Officer, and was considered to be 'a most efficient helper' and 'a devoted leader' of the church; and the members of the Ferguson family who founded the *Observer*. Led by such men this congregation was enabled to support Christian missionary work in other parts of the island.<sup>12</sup>

### (b) The Wesleyan Mission (1827-1864)

Unlike the Baptist mission which confined its evangelistic and educational work to the Sinhalese-speaking area, the Wesleyan mission continued the work it had begun in both Sinhalese and Tamil-speaking districts and had a much larger number of mission centres than the Baptists.<sup>13</sup> In the South Ceylon or the Sinhalese-speaking district the chief places in which the mission worked were Colombo, Negombo, Kurunegala, Moratuwa, Panadura, Kalutara, Galle and Ambalangoda; and in the North Ceylon or the Tamil-speaking district the chief centres were Jaffna, Point Pedro, Batticaloa and Trincomalee. The mission also had many sub-stations where there were schools and preaching places. The actual membership of the mission in all these places in 1827 amounted to 439 and there were 73 schools with 3,088 pupils of whom 2,572 were boys and 516 girls.<sup>14</sup> Between 1827 and 1864 when the jubilee of the mission was celebrated its educational work does not appear to have shown any great improvement as far as the number of schools and pupils was concerned but there was certainly a fair response to its evangelistic work.

Among the more noteworthy leaders of the mission during the period were the Revds. Benjamin Clough and D. J. Gogerly who had arrived in the earlier period and the Revds. Peter Percival, Ralph Stott and John Kilner who came to Ceylon during the present period. They were men of scholarship and administrative ability and under their direction evangelistic work in both North and South Ceylon districts expanded. They made a significant contribution to the building up of a Ceylonese Church with a Ceylonese ministry.

Benjamin Clough was Chairman of the South Ceylon district from 1828 to 1838. Besides his considerable literary achievements he was a great preacher and as R. Spence Hardy points out his administration of the mission

12. *B.M.S.R.* 1860, pp. 15-6; 61; *B.M., M.H.*, August 1, 1859, p. 125; September 1, 1859, pp. 134-5, *B.M., M.H.*, December 2, 1861, p. 186.

13. See *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. VII, No. 4, pp. 269 ff. for earlier period.

14. *M.R.* 1827, p. 105. A subsequent report published in the same report showed a slight increase: 74 schools with 4,113 pupils.

was marked by loyalty and ability, kindness and firmness<sup>15</sup>. Clough was succeeded by D. J. Gogerly who had been sent earlier to the southern circuits to make a special study of Buddhism. During his ministry in Ceylon for forty-four years he never gave up the study of that religion and became an authority on the subject. He had a knowledge of Pali and helped the labours of succeeding evangelists by his researches. For twenty-four out of the forty-four years of service, he administered the South Ceylon district. There is no doubt that he was one of the greatest Christian missionaries that Ceylon has had.<sup>16</sup>

In the North Ceylon district the most outstanding personalities among missionaries during this period were Peter Percival in Jaffna and Ralph Stott in Batticaloa. Percival translated the Bible and also prepared a version of the Church Offices, and was considered a notable Tamil Scholar. He opened the Central School (now Central College), a Girls' Boarding School, several village schools and a Training School. But he and Ralph Stott laid stress on different aspects of missionary method. Percival was strongly in favour of increased educational work as the chief means of conversion while Stott contended that the main duty of a missionary was direct preaching to the people for which he ought to equip himself with a sound knowledge of the vernaculars. On these different concepts of missionary policy Percival and Stott were often in conflict. But the questions involved appear to have been adequately settled so as to give the district the benefit of experiments in techniques based on both concepts of evangelism. There appears to be good reason to think that essentially both these missionaries were agreed on the need for the training of Ceylonese personnel for evangelism in Ceylon. In a report which Percival prepared towards the end of his period in Ceylon he urged that greater attention should be paid to 'the training of missionary agency whether native or European' and that there was need for 'a greater division of labour, a thoroughly uniform and uninterrupted course of action, and a more diffusive system of evangelical teaching by simple and inexpensive native agency'. John Kilner became Chairman of the North Ceylon district in 1859. When the mission celebrated its Jubilee in 1864 he had been Chairman

15. See *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. VII, No. 4, p. 276 ff; A. Surgeon: *A Voyage to Ceylon*, p. 18 f; C. Pridham: *A Historical, Political and Statistical Account of Ceylon* (London: Boone, 1849), Vol. I, p. 443; R. S. Hardy: *Jubilee Memorials* (Colombo: 1864), p. 303; G. G. Findlay and W. W. Holdsworth: *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society* (London: Epworth, 1921-4), Vol. V, pp. 68-9.

16. Findlay and Holdsworth, Vol. V, pp. 70-1; 73-4; R. S. Hardy: *Jubilee Memorials*, p. 239; 167-8, 305-306; W. M. Notices: May 24, 1863, pp. 96, 116; October 25, 1862, p. 196; J. Russell: *A Journal of a Tour in Ceylon and India undertaken at the request of the Baptist Missionary Society*, (London: 1852), pp. 13 ff.

for only five years and his best contribution to the work of the mission was to be seen in the period that followed.

The progress of the work of the Wesleyan mission during the period under review is reflected in the following statistics obtained from contemporary records although how far these statistics are reliable is a moot point:

	1827	1865
No. of Circuits .. ..	16	23
Chapels .. ..	45	51
Ministers .. ..	21	28
Day Schools.. ..	73	104
Day School Teachers	70	131
Day School Pupils ..	3,088	3,515
Full Church Members..	439	1,565 <sup>17</sup>

Of the schools in the North under Percival, Lord Torrington, then Governor of the island, remarked: 'Next to that of the American missionaries . . . the success of the pupils at schools under the Wesleyan mission is greater than that of any other religious body in the Colony'. Similar success was seen in the South under Gogerly. R. Spence Hardy stated in his *Jubilee Memorials* that the Wesleyan mission has had schools in almost every important village on the western coast of Ceylon as well as in many parts of the interior although apparently there were doubts as to the wisdom of running so many schools. 'It would have been better if they had sought to cultivate a small portion well rather than so large an area imperfectly'.<sup>18</sup> There is however some difficulty in assessing the exact number of schools. Although the missionary records give the statistics quoted earlier the figures given in government records vary considerably and show 112 schools with 4,316 pupils in 1863; 100 schools with 3,501 pupils in 1864; and 106 schools with 3,694 pupils in 1865.<sup>19</sup>

The mission press which had been started in the earlier period continued to help both education and evangelism. In 1852 the *Missionary Register* reported that an edition of 2,000 copies of the Old Testament and 5,000 copies of the New Testament was being printed under Gogerly's direction. Periodicals like *The Friend* for the Religious Tract Society and the *Lanka Nidhana* as well as a large number of tracts and other religious and secular publications were printed at this Press<sup>20</sup>.

17. *M.R.* 1827, p. 104; *W.M.S.R.* 1865, pp. 18, 19, 22, 158-9.

18. pp. 266-7.

19. *C.R.* 1864, p. 118; *C.R.* 1865, p. 121; *C.R.*, 1866, p. 90, cp. *M.R.* 1827, p. 105; *W.M.S.R.* 1865, pp. 158-9; and R. S. Hardy op. cit.: pp. 261-275. With list of schools on pp. 267-8.

20. *M.R.* 1852, p. 215; R. S. Hardy: op. cit.: pp. 275-286; 301; 331-334; J. E. Tennent: op. cit. p. 296.

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The Seminary or Mission Academy which had been started by the Wesleyan missionaries for the purpose of training students in Christian work and which had produced school masters, lay-preachers, and catechists was closed down in 1829 but the training of Ceylonese ministers continued under the personal supervision of missionaries. The Wesleyan Mission Notices of May 25, 1861 stated that 'upon the continuance and improvement of a native ministry the chief hope of a country's evangelisation must ever rest'.<sup>21</sup> Among the most successful of the Ceylonese ministers in this period were Samuel Niles, Cornelius Wijesinghe, W. A. Lalmon, D. D. Pereira and Peter Gerard de Zylwa.

The growth of a Ceylonese ministry came at a propitious time for, like the Baptists, the Wesleyans too found that grants from the Parent Society in England were being reduced towards the end of this period. The Society in England sent 'most stringent instructions' to the Synod of the North Ceylon district for the curtailment of its expenditure and Gogerly too had to limit his work in the South on grounds of economy. Schools' budgets too were reduced and suggestions were made for the deficiencies to be made good by the reduction of the personal allowances to missionaries.

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<sup>21</sup> p. 94; see also *M.R.* 1828, pp. 120-1; 1829, p. 118; 1830, p. 39; *W. M. Notices*, May 25, 1861, p. 94; 1862, September 25, pp. 165-7; 1863, May 25, p. 96; June 25, 1864, pp. 127-9; *R. S. Hardy*, pp. 112, 169; 172-193; 241; 306-310; 328-330.