

Rev. William N Somngesi

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine

The Rev. William N. Somngesi was educated at the Wesleyan Training Institute at Heald Town. He joined our staff as a Teaching Evangelist in 1885 under Rev. J. Smith. He was placed at Rouxville in the Orange Free State, and became a candidate for our ministry, which he entered in 1891. For twenty-one years Mr. Somngesi has been looked upon as the “father” of our Free State churches. He travelled many thousands of miles in his work of visitation, and most of the churches he visited once a quarter, and even the most distant places once in six months.

He was a most diligent pastor, patient, tactful, methodical and industrious, and every European superintendent has found his work considerably lightened by the fact that he had in Mr. Somngesi one who could take full responsibility for the work and organisation of these widespread native churches. His accomplishments were considerably above the average. He was a diligent student, well versed in the Greek of the New Testament, and possessing a knowledge of the Sexosa, Sesuto, Dutch and English languages. He was a preacher of more than the average ability; his great success in his work was due more than anything else to his great devotion to his Church, his tactful method of dealing with difficult problems, and his unfailing patience.

His books were kept in a very neat and careful manner. Unlike many of the educated natives, he had a keen financial conscience. His own tradesmen's accounts were paid most promptly. He avoided running churches into debt; and his word was his bond with native and European alike.

He suffered many years from asthma, which prevented his acceptance for our Zambesi Mission. Had he been able to have accompanied our pioneers, there is no doubt that the early stages of the work would have presented less difficulties to our party.

His twenty-seven years amongst the natives at Rouxville are a record of steady and continual progress. Such was the esteem in which he was held by natives, English and Dutch alike, that they gathered from the whole surrounding district to pay their last respects to him at the interment. The Mayor and Municipal Council also attended the obsequies. His death is an incalculable loss to the Aliwal North Station, and the work of filling his position will be most difficult. He was almost without a peer in the native ministry of South Africa, and his life in all its aspects was a convincing proof of what the gospel of Jesus Christ can do for the native of South Africa.

He possessed quite a choice little library of the latest theological works, and was a consistent reader of all our Connexional publications. His knowledge of our Church rules was very thorough, and he installed the principles of Methodist Church Government into all his churches. Not only did the Class Meetings flourish under his care, but he and his wife instituted special women's praying bands, which have been a great power for good in the Church.

He has been looked upon by all the European ministers as a comrade in the truest sense of the word.

A special fund is being raised in the native Church to erect a memorial to him, which will be placed over his tomb in the Rouxville Cemetery.

We had hoped for many years of good service from him, but God has called His faithful servant home, and we are assured that he has had an abundant entrance, and brought many sheaves with him for the garner of the King.

References

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