WILLIAM AND CLEMENTINA BUTLER

200

Global Ministries
Celebrating 200 Years in Mission

William Butler

Photo: General Commission on Archives and History

Clementina Rowe Butler

Photo: General Commission on Archives and History

Founders of American Methodist Missions in India and Mexico

The Butlers were probably the best-known Methodist missionary couple in the late 19th century. Born in Ireland, William Butler underwent a conversion experience, joined the Wesleyan church and became a minister. He immigrated to the United States in 1850. After being twice widowed, he wrote to Clementina Rowe in Ireland, who had been influenced by his preaching some years before. Clementina crossed the ocean and they married in 1854.

In 1856, the Butlers sailed to India as founders of American Methodist work. After their arrival, the Sepoy Mutiny broke out and they fled to the mountains, where they remained under siege for eight months. After the uprising was crushed, they opened orphanages for children left homeless by the rebellion.

In 1865, after putting the church on a firm footing, the Butlers returned to the United States, where they vigorously promoted foreign missions.

Clementina spoke to groups of Congregational and Methodist women about the needs of women in India. In response, women in both denominations founded women's missionary societies. Clementina was a founder of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church and served over the years as an officer and recruiter.

As secretary of the American and Foreign Christian Union, an organization devoted to missions in "papal lands," William was deemed the best person to found Methodist work in Mexico in 1873. As they had done in India, the Butlers established a printing press, schools, a girls' orphanage and church buildings.

Their two children continued their work—John W. Butler as a Methodist missionary in Mexico and daughter Clementina Butler as secretary of the American Ramabai Association and founder of the Committee on Christian Literature for Women and Children in Mission Fields.

Source: Dana L. Robert, in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions,* with modifications.

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