



C. T. BINNS

## Charles Theodore Binns

One of the brave pens to have championed the Zulu cause in the war of 1879 was that of Charles Theodore Binns. It is therefore fitting that a tribute to him should be appearing in the issue of *Natalia* which commemorates the centenary of the Zulu War.

Mr Binns was born in Manchester in the year 1893. He received his initial education at Manchester Grammar School and then decided to train, like his father and grandfather before him, for the Methodist ministry. In his sixth year of training Mr Binns contracted tuberculosis. His health became so bad that he had to abandon his preparation for entering the ministry and leave the damp climate of England. It was to South Africa that he decided to move, arriving here in 1915.

Despite the added afflictions of a burst appendix and peritonitis, Mr Binns eventually recovered his full health. He did not go completely unscathed, however, as, after resuming his probationary training, he discovered that full credit would not be given to him for the years which he had served in England. This persuaded him to change denominations and it was in the Congregational church that he was ultimately ordained in 1927.

In 1933 Mr Binns left the church and joined the Treasury Department in Pietermaritzburg. At this time he married the person with whom he was to live in close companionship for the rest of his life, Miss May Leach. Later he became Town Clerk of Ndola, only leaving this position for health reasons. He then taught at Waddilove Methodist Mission near Marandellas. In 1957 Mr Binns returned to Pietermaritzburg and rejoined the Natal Provincial Administration as a cost accountant. Next he taught at St Charles' College. Finally he entered the Department of Bantu Education as an administrative officer. Because of a heart condition, Mr Binns retired to the lower altitude of Southport in 1970.

It was only after his return to Pietermaritzburg that C. T. Binns was able to give close attention to his lifelong interest in Zulu history and by further wide reading acquire the thorough knowledge which he had of even the most obscure literature about the Zulus. Now it was that his greatest joy became the many trips which he made into Zululand. Here he gleaned much valuable oral information and developed the feeling for the beauty of the country and the dignity of its people which comes through so clearly in his writing.

His first book, *The Last Zulu King: the life and death of Cetewayo*, had the distinction of being chosen as the Book Society's non-fiction choice for January, 1963.

In *Dinizulu: the death of the house of Shaka*, Mr Binns's deep and long research again allowed him to produce a book of great interest in which a sensitive assessment is made of the behaviour of a man who was despised by many and treated in an arbitrary way by British, Boer, and Natalian alike.

Few people in their middle seventies would have embarked on a work of the scope of *Warrior People*, as Mr Binns did. This book shows the Zulus as being an organised and busy people with many ancient traditions and beliefs.

Mr Binns was as skilled with carpenter's tools as he was with a pen. This was the only area in which his modesty waned and he would display with pride the fine pieces of furniture which he had made in his younger days. In his old age, when he was often in pain, he could not find an easy chair which was comfortable so he decided to make one of his own design, doing both carpentry and upholstery himself. It suited him perfectly and he used it for the rest of his life.

Although somewhat restless, Mr Binns could nevertheless spend many hours in concentrated thought or quiet reflection. He was not tolerant of laziness, poor behaviour, foolishness, or injustice. Of a perpetually inquiring mind, he had a keen sense of humour, was an entrancing storyteller, a true friend to many, and above all a man of God.

At the end of his life he returned to his early interest and was working on a three-volume history of religion when he died on the 11th April, 1978. According to his wishes his ashes were scattered in Zululand.

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