

A South Australian Romance

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTORY

HISTORY is full of romance. There is a peculiar fascination about it. It brings sunshine into our lives, and seems to lengthen out the thread of our existence. As we read the record of what our fathers did in the old time before us the “heart is strangely warmed,” and the imagination fired. The mind goes back to a time long anterior to the birth of the body, and the remote past is brought within the range of our experience. We see the battles that our fathers fought. We hear the song of praise and shout of victory. We see them grappling with difficulties, surmounting obstacles, till they have made the rough places smooth, the crooked places straight, and have burst asunder the bars of iron.

Many events in the history of a nation remind us that “fact is stranger than fiction.” It is so in the history of the Church. Take the Methodist Church, of which, in the course of the following pages, we shall have to speak. Its history is a modern Acts of the Apostles. It is a marvellous record of the wonder-working power of God. Again we see how God chooses “the weak things of the world to put to shame things that are strong, and things that are not, to bring to nought the things that are.”

Surely the *Arminian Magazine* had its genesis in a Divine idea. To John Wesley, in London, as to St. John the Apostle, in Patmos, there came the command: “What thou seest, write in a book.” The pages of that book are before us. We are grateful to God for the record they contain. Often has the soul expanded, the spiritual vision become clearer, and the intangible more real when studying the record made by our Methodist Fathers of what God has wrought. Here we see souls transfigured and lives transformed. Here is the record of men and women, in humble spheres of life, who exerted a powerful influence for good. Here we see great issues growing out of small beginnings. “Five chase a hundred, and a hundred chase ten thousand.” Here we see the mysterious operations of Providence more fascinating (at least to the Christian) than any fictitious romance. “The appearance of the wheels and their work, was like unto the colour of a beryl;... and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel within a wheel.” In our Methodist “Acts of the Apostles” is the experience of men and women who could say: “We are ambassadors, therefore, on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us, we beseech you, on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God... In everything commending ourselves, as ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings.... As deceivers, yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things.” As the result of this apostolic spirit, and devoted labour, multitudes became “obedient unto the faith.”

The canonical “Acts of the Apostles” came to an abrupt close, not so the Methodist record. The work begun by Wesley is still going on, and so is the record of that work.

We said, at the outset, that “fact is stranger than fiction”; we now give a different rendering: “fact is often more fascinating than fiction.” Methodism is full of romance – full of stirring incident, strange surprises, and remarkable events. That such is the case we believe some of our pages will show.

The foundation of this Colony, and the formation of the Methodist Church therein, run parallel. They are strangely interlinked. Both will come under review. It is our intention to give – not an up-to-date history of the Colony, nor of the Church, but a

vivid picture of early colonial life, and of the romantic circumstances under which a Church was formed, and the pleasing rate at which it grew.

It is not of the whole of Australia that we have to speak; but of *South Australia*. A caution here is necessary. We are so far away from the Old World, and our history, comparatively speaking, is so recent, that our kindred in the Old Land are apt to fall into error. Australia is a vast island-continent, divided into Colonies. Each Colony has an independent existence; it administers its own affairs, and has a Governor appointed by the Crown. It is of the early history of one of these Colonies that we have to speak. A good map of Australia will add much to the instruction and enjoyment of the reader as we show –

“HOW A COLONY WAS FOUNDED, AND A METHODIST CHURCH WAS
FORMED.”