

## CHAPTER IX HOW THE CHURCH GREW

UNTIL the arrival of a preacher appointed by the British Conference, there was something lacking in the constitution of the pioneer Church. With the romantic arrival of Mr. Longbottom that want was supplied. Jacob Abbott describes his preaching as “fervent, animated, winning.” Souls were converted. The chapel was filled. It became too small. The Church was not only in a healthy condition, but was fast growing. The General Superintendent of Australian Missions (John Waterhouse) was delighted. Writing to the Missionary Secretaries in London, in 1839, he says: “From Adelaide the report of the work is most cheering. I have seen a letter from Mrs. Longbottom to a friend which has greatly delighted me.”

The memorial addressed to the Missionary Committee, quoted in our last chapter, speaks of “much prosperity and peace,” “bright prospects,” an “increase in membership.” There is also a very suggestive line: “We have raised £500 for a new chapel.” At this time Mr. Longbottom had only been in Adelaide a little more than two months.

A new chapel had become imperative. In addition to a contribution of £55, Edward Stephens gave a piece of land for a site in Gawler Place. On 27<sup>th</sup> November 1838 Governor Gawler laid the foundation-stone. It would seat five hundred persons, and cost about £2000. At the opening services, early in 1839, Mr. Longbottom preached in the morning from Luke xxiv. 46: “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day.” In the afternoon an address was given to the children. The evening service was conducted by the Rev. Thomas Q. Stow (Congregationalist).

The joy of the early Methodists in the erection of this large and beautiful chapel must have been tinged with sadness. Could they forget the little pioneer building in Hindley Street? Would not the windowless walls and tarpaulin roof rise before them? Would they not remember the pew in which they sat, and the pulpit in which Mr. Longbottom first stood before them? Yes; there were associations connected with the firstborn of their zeal and love that could never be forgotten. If the opening of the new chapel in Gawler Place was like a resurrection, the closing service in the old must have been something like a burial. If the one meant the realisation of greater possibilities in a grander tabernacle, the other meant “putting off” the old body that had been so serviceable. However, we may well leave the clay tabernacle to enter a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. So our pioneer Methodists could well afford to leave their little building, with its dear associations, to enter a larger and more perfect structure, in which they would do a nobler work for God. So long as change means progress, all is well. To the early South Australian Methodists such was its meaning.

New preaching places were taken up. The first service at North Adelaide was conducted by Mr. Longbottom in a hut near Pennington Terrace. Suburban openings followed, and new classes were formed. Jacob Abbott’s class was divided into two – the minister taking one, and William Collins the other; whilst the old leader formed a new class at North Adelaide.

In October 1839 there came another gala day in the history of the pioneer Methodist Church: this was the centenary of Wesleyan Methodism.

During the reign of the second George the moral decline in England reached its lowest ebb. Drunkenness, profanity, sensuality, and infidelity abounded. The

Puritan revival was spent. Its collapse proved how impossible it is to make a nation righteous by Act of Parliament. Methodism had not yet come into existence. Everywhere there was licentiousness and extravagance. It seemed as though the Sun of Righteousness in England had set, and the nation was sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. But brighter and better times were dawning. The Sun of Righteousness was to arise with healing in his wings. It was indeed a "crooked and perverse generation"; but in the providence of God a band of men were raised up who were to "shine as lights in the world," holding forth to others the Word of life. At the head of these men were John and Charles Wesley. At the same time the Spirit of God moved upon the hearts of the people. In the latter part of 1739 several persons, who felt the burden of sin, came to John Wesley in London for guidance and instruction. They asked him to spend some time with them in prayer, and to advise them how to flee from the wrath to come. He arranged to meet them every Thursday evening. The number grew. This was the origin of the Methodist Society – a Society that was to exert a powerful influence for good, not only in Great Britain, but throughout the world.

The centenary of the birth of this Society fell in October 1839. It was right that the British Conference should make it an occasion for special thanksgiving to God. The Conference of 1838 recommended the "members and friends of the Wesleyan Methodist Societies throughout the Connexion to unite in grateful and devout acknowledgment of the great and numerous blessings involved in the commencement and progress of Methodism by holding simultaneous religious meetings of Friday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1839."

The Society in South Australia was not yet three years old, but I was loyal to the recommendation of the British Conference. It did not stay to inquire, "By whom shall Jacob arise, for he is small?" Whilst the Methodists in the Old Land were rejoicing together, and giving their thousands, the pioneer Methodists in the youngest British offshoot were not wanting in charity or zeal. On Friday, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1839, meetings were held in the newly-erected chapel in Gawler Place. In the afternoon the foundation-stone of a chapel to be erected in North Adelaide was laid by Mrs. Edward Stephens. Over £600 was raised. This was devoted to the extension of Methodism in the new Colony.

Mr. Longbottom's constitution had been undermined in India. Shipwreck, exposure in the bush for several weeks, discomforts incidental to a new settlement, and hard work in connection with the establishment of Methodism in South Australia, enfeebled him. One Sunday evening, preaching on "the great white throne," suddenly he had to stop and sit down. Edward Stephens and Dr. Lichfield (who was in the congregation) went to his assistance. The service came to an abrupt termination. The congregation were alarmed, but were somewhat comforted when Dr. Lichfield told them that there was no immediate danger. It was weakness of the heart. The mental and physical strain in connection with the mission was too much, and the climate was trying: to the great grief of the people, the pioneer preacher who had been so mysteriously cast upon their shores, had to seek a removal. He was transferred to Tasmania.

On 4<sup>th</sup> September 1838 an important meeting was held at City Road Chapel. The President of the Conference (Thomas Jackson) was in the chair. John Hannah, Robert Alder, Edmund Grindrod, Jabez Bunting, Richard Treffrey, sen., John Beecham, and Elijah Hoole were present. Long before the time appointed for the meeting the chapel was crowded. It was an ordination and valedictory service. Peter

Jones (the Indian chief) was about to return to his native land. John Waterhouse, an esteemed minister, who had travelled twenty-nine years at home, was about to sail to Van Diemen's Land. He had been appointed Superintendent of Wesleyan Missions in Australia and Polynesia. No doubt, in his official capacity, he had been on the lookout for men of special promise. Two or three of such were about to set sail with him. There was the gifted and devoted John H. Bumby. There was also Samuel Ironside, whose long and laborious life spent in Colonial work deserves more than a passing record. Seated next to John H. Bumby was a young brother who was to make his mark in Australian missionary work. It was John Eggleston – a name that will long be remembered and revered in this part of the world. At the call of Thomas Jackson this young missionary came forward to give "an account of his conversion and call to the ministry." Said he: "Until the Conference, I had no idea of leaving my native land. There Mr. Waterhouse pressingy requested me to accompany him to Hobart Town. I felt such a consciousness of the presence of God, and that in His presence I could be happy in any part of the world, that I did not see any strong objections. I knew that I had a mother who loved me dearly, and that even my leaving her to go into the ministry at home had cost her many a pang. I wrote to her, however, and I received an answer of assent, which overwhelmed me. I saw clearly the finger of God in this dispensation, and that a blight would be brought on my ministerial character if I resisted this call. I therefore yielded to the impression; and I present myself before you this evening, feeling more than have ever felt of the missionary spirit, entreating an interest in your prayers, and trusting that the blessing of Heaven will continually rest upon you."

A few days after this meeting, Messrs. Waterhouse, Bumby, Ironside, Eggleston, with two other missionaries, went down to Gravesend, accompanied by Jabez Bunting and two of the Missionary Secretaries, and set sail for the Foreign Mission Field.

John Eggleston's appointment was to Van Diemen's Land. In 1840 he was transferred to Adelaide to take the place vacated by Mr. Longbottom. Writing to the Missionary Committee, he says: "I arrived at this place last Sabbath morning. We had a stormy, uncomfortable passage of seventeen days from Hobart Town. The vessel in which we came has not been able to reach the port, in consequence of the wind being unfavourable for coming up the creek. We anchored on the outside of the bar, a distance of thirty miles from the port, on Saturday evening. The captain, knowing that I was anxious to be in Adelaide on the Sabbath, kindly offered to send his boat the next morning to the pilot's station, which was abreast of us, six or eight miles off; from thence we were to walk through the bush two miles, procure a boat to convey us across the creek to the port, and then proceed by land to the city, which is six miles in the interior. I thankfully embraced the opportunity; left Mrs. Eggleston and child to come up in the vessel; and arrived in the chapel a little before twelve o'clock. The local preacher who was officiating recognised me, and beckoned me into the pulpit. I introduced myself to the congregation, and concluded the service. In the evening we had the chapel nearly full, and I felt myself much comforted while preaching."

John Eggleston was well received by the people. Said one of the early Methodists: "We found that we had one in our midst who, though young, was strong – so renewed our efforts in the work of the Lord, regretting, at the same time, the removal of our first beloved and devoted pastor."

The characteristic zeal of the young preacher comes out in his anxious endeavour to reach his appointment. It was Saturday evening when the vessel dropped anchor off what is now known as the Semaphore. Nothing could be done till

Sunday morning. Leaving his wife and child on board, he was rowed to the beach. A walk of two miles through the bush (now a popular watering-place) brought him to Port Adelaide. A journey of seven miles was then before him. Weary and travel-stained, he reached the Gawler Place Chapel. John White was conducting the service. Soon the young missionary was by his side in the pulpit. Looking round the church for a moment, taking in his new surroundings, he offered prayer, and then announced his text (1 Cor. xiv. 1): "Follow after Charity."

When John Eggleston arrived, the Colony had only been founded a little more than four years. Adelaide was still in an embryo condition. The young missionary had his domestic difficulties and discouragements. To the Committee in London he writes: "I am perplexed to know how to act with regard to the rental and furnishing of a house. ... The cottage Mr. Longbottom has occupied has two small rooms and a smaller kitchen, all open to the roof (without ceiling), and it affords very little shelter, especially from the heat; and yet it is a favour to have this at £50 a year. The rents are fearfully high, furniture of all kinds is excessively dear."

No doubt the Missionary Committee would be sympathetic, but we do not think it could do much, in a practical way, to help the young preacher in his domestic trials. How he finally settled down we are not in a position to say. It is more than probable that he had to put into practice the teaching of Scripture: "Be content with such things as ye have."

John Eggleston, like other young pioneer preachers, apart from domestic discomforts, had some peculiar experiences. The orthodox custom, in the early days, was for a rider to wear spurs. In fact it has been said that in those unconventional times, if a man wore a pair of trousers and spurs he was well dressed. So far as the wearing of the spurs is concerned, the young Methodist missionary conformed to custom – with what effect we shall see. One of the "preaching places" was at Willunga, thirty miles from Adelaide. A horse had been purchased for the use of the preacher. ... The rider put on his spurs, took his seat in the saddle, and started for Willunga. Riding down one of the main streets of the city, he was accosted by a friend. Leaning over the saddle, for a little conversation, one of the spurs got into action. Unaccustomed to such treatment, especially from a Methodist preacher, in a most determined manner the steed rebelled. It began to caper. To fall off in one of the leading streets of the city (Rundle Street) would indeed be humiliating. No doubt each leg of the rider would grip the horse firmly. In this way both spurs got into action. The consequence was, that very soon there was a divorce between the steed and its rider. John Eggleston found himself prostrate in Rundle Street, with bruised face and sprained ankle, whilst the liberated steed quietly made its way back to the stable. The congregation at Willunga were disappointed. We get wisdom by experience, sometimes of a very painful character. No doubt in every way the steed reaped the advantage. He had one journey the less, and next time the rider mounted him we expect the spurs would be left behind.

Mr Eggleston's stay in the Colony was not long. He returned to Tasmania, travelled subsequently in Victoria and New South Wales, occupied some of the highest positions that the Connexion could give, and died in 1879, aged sixty-six years.

In the infant Colony of South Australia he did a good work. Under his ministry many souls were convinced of sin, and converted to God. Often he would be at Jacob Abbott's house, in North Adelaide, by daybreak, tapping at the window or door. "Come on, brother!" he would exclaim. In a few minutes the two would be on their knees, pouring out their souls before God for the salvation of sinners, and the

fulness of blessing upon the Church. In an unmistakable way prayer was answered. There were "showers of blessings." Says one of the Methodist pioneers: "Great numbers were brought to God, and believers experienced a deeper measure of divine grace." The "Church quickly extended he borders, and rapidly increased in numbers through conversions, and accessions from England." There were now nearly three hundred members in Society, four chapels, and about twenty-one other preaching places.

It was during Mr. Eggleston's time that Jacob Abbott was called upon to give up his secular employment, and work as a lay assistant in connection with the Methodist Church. He was the first Methodist Home Missionary in South Australia. His appointment came about in this way. Amongst the Methodist pioneers was a man who has immortalised himself. His name stands in the same category as that of Richard Arkwright and James Watt. To John Ridley, Methodist miller and local preacher, belongs the honour of inventing the reaping and threshing machine. This was about seven years after the Colony was founded. It has revolutionised agriculture, and reduced the cost of production to a minimum. The machine strips the heads of wheat from the stalk, and threshes them, whilst the horses are drawing it to and fro in the field. It can only be used in a dry climate, where the head will easily break of.

Jacob Abbott was keeping a store at North Adelaide. One day the Methodist miller called upon him. The following dialogue took place: - Said the Methodist storekeeper to the Methodist miller: "You seem busy carting flour into Adelaide. I have a horse and dray doing very little just now. Could I assist in any way?" "What would you wish for the use of them?" was the response. Said Jacob Abbott: "About thirty shillings a week; you to find horse-feed and driver." "Agreed," said the Methodist miller; "but I would rather pay you that to go about the country to preach and visit the people, and render help to our minister." Jacob Abbott was taken by surprise - a very agreeable one. The matter was laid before the overwrought John Eggleston: he hailed the proposal with joy. For nearly two years this arrangement was continued, the Methodist miller, John Ridley, meeting all expense.

Jacob Abbott had some amusing experiences. In turn he had to conduct service at Willunga. During one of his visits the brother who usually entertained him was not able to do so, but he had very kindly made arrangements for the preacher elsewhere. He was to stay with an old Scotch couple. The welcome was a very hearty one. After the preacher was seated, the good wife came in with a pan half-full of warm water. He was asked to take a seat on the sofa. The pan of water was placed in front of him. "Now, sir," said the old lady, "let me take off your butes." Jacob Abbott was quite disconcerted. He must have felt as abashed as Peter. There as the same indignant remonstrance. "Oh dear, no," said he; "what do you wish to do?" The reply was: "Ye dinna ken we Scotch Methodees do always obey the Lord's bidding to wash the saint's feet, and it's vary refreeshing; and ye'll get a cup o' tea after it." Jacob Abbott looked inquiringly at the husband. He nodded assent; and the washing took place. After well drying with a clean, white towel, the old lady said: "Now, we'll take tea, and ye'll be right for your Master's work to-morrow."

Other early emigrants showed their regard for the Methodist Home Missionary in a less self-humiliating way. At the Meadows, about thirty-four miles from Adelaide, two gentlemen (Messrs. Stanford and Burley) had established a dairy farm and cattle run. As soon as the Methodist missionary came, himself and horse were well provided for, and a stock-boy was told to mount a horse and inform the surrounding settlers of his arrival. At McLaren Vale he was well cared for by Mr. and

Mrs. Colton, parents of Sir John Colton, of whom we shall have to speak. They were engaged in sheep and dairy farming, and the son, who rose to distinction in the new Colony, tended his father's sheep.

Some of the pioneer services were held under peculiar circumstances. At one "preaching place," a few miles from Adelaide, some gum-planks served as seats, a flour cask for a pulpit, and a small pannikin suspended from the roof, and furnished with oil and wick, gave light to preacher and people. Materially it may have been a "dim religious light," not so the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit. At a place called Mount Barker (now the site of a fine town), a few miles from Adelaide, service was held in a blacksmith's shop. The anvil did duty as pulpit, and the hubs of dray wheels, with planks laid thereon, served as seats. If the blacksmith's anvil, during the week, gave "no uncertain sound," we are sure that the same might be said of the Work of God as proclaimed from the anvil on the Sunday.

John Eggleston was succeeded by John Weatherstone.

Writing to the Missionary Committee in London, in 1840, Mr Eggleston said: "The state of the Aborigines here is most deplorable. I passed by a tribe as I came from the port to the city. The children were running about in a state of nudity, and the adults had a kind of blanket thrown carelessly around them. They are friendly, and spend the day in strolling about the town, begging provisions. From what I have heard, there is much prospect of success, could missionaries be sent out to labour amongst them." Mr. Weatherstone took a great interest in the blacks. He collected about nine hundred and fifty of the words spoken by the Murray River tribe, with their equivalents in English. It was his earnest desire and prayer that the Missionary Committee would relieve him from English work, and allow him to go as a missionary to the Aborigines. The request was not granted. It may have been well for both Mr. Weatherstone and the Aborigines if his desire had been fulfilled. Evidently, he was an enthusiastic in missionary work amongst the South Australian blacks, and had a genius for it. Mr. Weatherstone was a minister of ability, but his stay in the Colony was not a happy one. There were financial reverses, as we have pointed out, in the young Colony, and there were spiritual reverses in the Methodist Church. Perhaps, to a certain extent, one was the reflex of the other. The Church (still in its infancy) had to pass through a time of trial and trouble. There was a secession, in which, unfortunately, Jacob Abbott took part. The seceders formed a new organisation, termed "The Australian Methodist Society." It was not long-lived. Jacob Abbott became pastor of a Christian Disciple Church, and continued in that capacity until obliged to resign through weight of years. Ultimately, Mr. Weatherstone was recalled to England, became Superintendent of Missions in Sierra Leone, and finally resigned his position as a Methodist preacher.

After an absence of about four years, Mr. Longbottom returned to Adelaide. His second advent was hailed with joy, but his life's work was drawing to a close. In the Minutes of the British Conference for 1846 the following occurs: - Adelaide - Jonathan Innes. William Longbottom returning home for recovery of his health." The trip to England was not taken. Gradually he became weaker, and on the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1849 he finished his course with joy. To his wife he often said: "The great Atonement was made for me. I have an interest in the great sacrifice, and in the living Mediator. I have no fear of death; all will be right at last." One morning he said: "That verse has been on my mind all night; indeed it is always with me -

'Tis love! 'tis love! Thou diedst for me,  
I hear Thy whisper in my heart.  
The morning breaks! The shadows flee!

Pure universal love Thou art.  
To me, to all, Thy bowels move,  
Thy nature and Thy name is love.”

The hymn from which he quoted these glowing lines, and the one beginning, “The God of Abraham praise,” he often requested to have read to him. So especially our Lord’s words in John xiv. “The great truths of the Gospel,” he solemnly observed, “are registered in heaven; my confidence in them is unwavering. I believe that I have preached the truth as it is in Jesus; but, should I be spared to preach again, I would be more simple.”

The *South Australian Register* gave the following testimony to his worth: - “Mr. Longbottom was very highly beloved by his own immediate connections, and enjoyed, in a high degree, the respect and esteem of all classes of the colonists, to whom he endeared himself by his amiable and kind deportment, maintaining, to the hour of his death, a consistent uprightness of character, both as a Christian minister and a gentleman.” It was not long after that the editor the *Register* (the able John Stephens) followed him to the grave. The dust of both lies in the West Terrace Cemetery, Adelaide. A tablet to Mr. Longbottom’s memory has been erected in the Pirie Street Church. It reads as follows: -

SACRED  
TO THE MEMORY OF  
THE REV. WILLIAM LONGBOTTOM,  
First Wesleyan Missionary to South Australia.  
DIED 29<sup>TH</sup> OF JULY 1849,  
IN THE 50<sup>TH</sup> YEAR OF HIS AGE.

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Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.

This chapter ought not to close without some reference to Mrs. Longbottom. Amongst the pioneer Methodist, and throughout her life in South Australia, she was known as “A Mother in Israel.” One of the pioneers says: “The wife of our first pastor was an excellent helpmeet to her husband, very usefully engaged in service for Christ.” She visited the sick and poor, and took charge of a class.

Mrs. Longbottom was born in Wakefield, in the year 1796. Her conversion took place under the preaching of the Rev. Joseph Benson. She joined the Methodist Society in 1812, and at once entered upon Christian work. In 1822 she was appointed a leader by the Rev. Richard Watson, and a few years later was married to Mr. Longbottom. She shared the strange vicissitudes that we have described, and survived her husband about twenty-four years.

Mrs Longbottom had remarkable skill in acquiring languages. In six months after her arrival in India she conducted classes in Tamil and Portuguese. During the short time she spent with her husband at the Cape she acquired such a knowledge of the Dutch language as to be able to pray in public and to lead a class in that tongue. Her long life was devoted to good works. About a week before her death she felt that a change was coming. She asked to be raised in bed, and said: “What is this I feel? Can it be death?

Oh, let me have one smile from Thee  
And drop into eternity.”

Turning to her daughter she said: “All is right. I have no fear beyond the grave. Oh no; my trust is in Christ. But I have never yet been delivered from the fear of the article of death.” A friend remarked to her that she was nearly home. “Yes,” she

replied; “nearly home,” and added: “Christ in me, the hope of glory.” With peace and calmness she waited for the end. Without one sign of suffering she fell asleep.