

CHAPTER V New South Wales

Sydney: Surrey Hills

We left Fiji in our Mission vessel, having on board with us Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Williams and family, and Mr. and Mrs. Peter Turner. We had a fairly good passage to Auckland, and thence to Sydney, where I learned that I had been appointed to the Surrey Hills Circuit – the best Circuit, certainly, in the city. I had a warm welcome from the officers and members of the churches in the Circuit. I was also received with great kindness by the ministers of the District residing in Sydney, most of whom have since entered into rest. The Rev. W. B. Boyce was Chairman of the District. I remember how kind he was to me, and how, whenever I was sailing, he would come and offer to do my work. I loved to hear him preach and speak, and it was a rich treat to have a long conversation with him. He was, undoubtedly, one of the best-read men in Australia. Sometimes he said quaint things that one never forgot. I remember hearing him give a remarkable “charge” to a number of young men at their ordination. Among other things he said, “Keep to your work in your own Circuit. Methodism has not been made by ‘wandering stars’ running about from one Circuit to another, preaching great sermons, but my men who have plodded away, working for Christ in their own Circuits. Depend upon it, if *you* go out of your Circuit, the devil will not. He never pairs off with any Methodist preacher.” The last time I had the pleasure of conversing with him, after some excellent remarks about Methodist preachers and the Stationing Committee, he said, “We often make great mistakes here; we ought to do as the rabbit-sellers do: put a big one and a little one together.”

Another of the Sydney ministers of that time was John Eggleston, “a good man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,” through whose instrumentality many were converted to God. Another was Stephen Robine, a “brother beloved,” and a “faithful minister of Jesus Christ.” There were also B. Chapman, afterwards Secretary of our Foreign Missions; H. H. Gaud, Benjamin Hurst, Joseph Oram, and others. I trembled as I thought of these men, among whom I had come to labour; but I ever found them true brethren, and always felt it an honour and pleasure to be associated with them.

I had for some time to assist at the missionary meetings in various Circuits, and was delighted, now that I was removed from the mission field, to be able in some humble way to help the work. The meetings of that year were most enthusiastic and successful, owing in great measure to the advocacy of an excellent native teacher whom I had brought with me from Fiji. His name was Tevita (David). He was a Bau chief of some rank, and stood six feet three inches high. When a heathen, with his mop-like head of hair, his long beard and painted face, he was a fearful-looking fellow. He was frequently at the Mission House before he embraced Christianity, and was very friendly. At length leaving Bau, he came to reside at Viwa, and became a Christian. He soon learned to read well, and was in time made a class-leader and local preacher. He first met in my class, and for some time we had to hear his confessions of terrible things done while a heathen. One day he told us that the sin which was heaviest on his conscience was his having, when on a visit to Lakemba, stolen a frying-pain out of the missionary’s kitchen. David was a diligent student of God’s word, and had a gift in prayer. It was part of his prayer that Walter Lawry

quotes in his first journal: "Lord, if our sins were tired on our backs we could unloose them; but they are on our souls, Lord, and Thou alone canst take them away." When I was leaving Fiji David was very anxious to come with me. I brought him, and good service did he render to our Missions. On our passage from Auckland to Sydney, not in our Mission vessel but in another ship, David found his way to the sailors, who were playing cards, a game which he had never seen before. Telling me of it afterward, he said that he had seen the sailors at their worship, and could not understand their way of using their strange-looking books, throwing them down and taking them up again. When near Sydney we had a violent hail-storm, the first David had seen, and it considerably alarmed him, his idea of throwing stones being associated with anger on the part of someone. When we reached Sydney, and were on our way to our home, he lingered in the streets, watching the horses, until, at last, turning to me he said, "I see now the secret of your superiority to us as a people. If we want water, we have to go and carry it; if wood or food, we ourselves must go and bring it; but here the horses do everything. If we want to get along quickly, we have to run; but here your horses run for you. Horses everywhere, doing everything: no wonder you do well!"

The people in Sydney took great interest in the chief, and treated him well. They gave him a complete outfit of good clothes, and would have him wear a high white "bell-topper," although David said it was "lifting him up to the moon." They would also have him wear a pair of strong boots, to which he, at first, greatly objected, as he said he should never learn to walk in them. Rigged out in his new suit, he started for our house; but before long he began to flag, and at last sat down on the kerb-stone, pulled off his boots, and for the remainder of the way carried them under his arms. Going with me one night to a missionary meeting where he had to speak, he lagged behind. After a while he came in. When he began, his speech told us that he had frightened a sister outside. Said he, "She asked me, as I suppose, where the church was, and I answered her in Fijian, and she ran for her life. I really believe she thought I was old Satan himself." At the missionary meeting he was very popular, and was remarkably good in his collection speeches. On one occasion he said, "We want more missionaries, and therefore we want more money in order to get them, and we want you to give it. Don't tell me you have not got it, for this is the land of gold. You dig it up out of the earth. You may not have it all with you, but you have it at home. And now that the collection is to be made, if you have not enough with you, I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll just sit down and wait till you go home and get some more." David felt the cold in Sydney very much. He would go into my kitchen and crouch over the fire, saying, "I'll never get warm again." Poor fellow! We were very glad when an opportunity offered of getting him back to his own sunny land.

We had a good work in the Surrey Hills Circuit. Our congregations were large, our local preachers and teachers were earnest workers, and the power of the Lord was present with us to save. Were I to begin to mention the names of brethren who zealously laboured with us, I know not where I should end. While I was in the Circuit some excellent ministers came to us from England, among whom were Dr. Kelynack, late President of Newington College, and W. Clarke, now an ex-President of the New South Wales Conference.

In 1855 our first Australasian Conference was held in Sydney, Mr. W. B. Boyce being President. It was a most important event in the history of our Church in the Southern

World, and in the comparison of our “statistical returns” is one of our prominent and fixed starting-points. The following table will therefore be interesting: - Forty-seven ministers and preachers on trial were present at this first Conference in 1855; of this number thirty-seven are dead, and only three are now in Circuit work.

Among many blessed cases of conversion in the Surrey Hills Circuit was that of a whole family. The gentleman at the head of the family had taken my place when I entered the ministry, and had always been interested in me. When I came to this Circuit he was about returning with his family to England. He attended our church, and he and his wife and daughters were led to the Saviour. I remember very distinctly the morning when I prayed with them all in distress in their home, and when they were enabled to rejoice in Jesus. They have been members of our church ever since.

Another case that I was deeply interested in was that of a dying backslider, who found mercy at the last. I was leaving one of our churches on a Sunday evening when someone said to me, “Will you please come, sir, and see a dying woman?” I at once went with him, and was led to the house. When I entered the sickroom, I saw a pale, emaciated woman sitting on her bed. The moment she noticed me she began to cry bitterly, and as soon as she could speak she said, most touchingly, “You’ve come to see a child of many prayers.” I sat down by her bedside, and besought her to be calm, and to tell me the cause of her deep distress. She said, “Sir, my father was a class-leader in the old country; he is now in heaven. One night, when a girl, I knelt at the communion rail in Great Queen Street Chapel, London, and there obtained mercy. For a while I went on my way happy in God, but did not wholly break away from young friends who were without religion. They had great influence, and led me wrong. One night I went to a dance with them, and my peace was gone. I then gave up my profession of religion, and ran into worldly pleasures; and here I am today, dying without hope.” I told her of Jesus, of His wondrous love, and His mighty power to save. She replied that she knew how great was His love and saving power, but she had despised them, and they were not for her. I quoted one promise after another, but she turned them all against herself. “I’m only feeling now because I know I’m dying,” she said; “I’d have no thought at all about it but for that.” Then I told her of the prodigal who only came back when he was perishing with hunger. I visited her very frequently, and so did Mrs. Turner, wife of Rev. N. Turner. Her state was very distressing: despair seemed fully to have laid hold of her. One morning, nearly a month after my first visit, I called to see her. When I entered the room, what a change I saw! Her face was shining with the light of gladness. She cried out, “You have come to see a happy woman today.” When I sat down she thus told me of the change: “Yesterday afternoon Mrs. Turner, when talking to me, quoted that well-known verse, ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ After she had gone I was thinking over my sins, and they seemed so many and so heavy, like twenty tons of lead upon my soul, when the blessed passage Mrs. Turner had talked about came to my mind, and I said, ‘Lord, I am indeed heavy laden: this burden is crushing me down.’ Then I seemed to be sinking into hell beneath my load, and I cried, ‘Lord, save me! Jesus, I do come to Thee.’ In a moment my burden was all gone, and my soul was filled with joy. Oh, it was joy unspeakable! Glory, glory be to God!” She continued in this happy and rejoicing frame of mind until the end came. Two or three days after she found the Saviour I read the funeral service at her grave, and as I stood there I thought, “Oh, what encouragement here for praying

parents!” Plead on, ye sorrowing fathers and mothers! Plead on. Your prayer may long remain unanswered, the loved one may be removed to the end of the earth, but plead on, for prayer can reach him there, and our God is faithful who hath promised.

Goulburn

At the end of three years, in 1857, I was removed to the Goulburn Circuit. We travelled to our new home one hundred and twenty miles in a large covered wagon. It was a long, weary journey of five days; but there was a warm welcome when we got there. Goulburn is a beautiful town, the climate is remarkably bracing, and in our Church were warm-hearted Christian men and women. The Circuit was very large: what was one Circuit then is a large District now. It had four ministers at that time. Dr. Kelynack lived at Braidwood, sixty miles from the centre; Mr. J. W. Dowson at Gunning, twenty-five miles away; Mr. C. Creed at Yass, sixty miles distance; and I resided in Goulburn. We had no railways, and Methodist preachers had not reached the age of buggies. We had to do all our journeys on horseback, and long tiring journeys we had. Dr. Kelynack had always to come sixty miles to the Quarterly Meeting; if held at Gunning, he had to travel eighty-five miles. Our District Meeting was held in Sydney, four days’ journey there and back. In our Circuit work, one round once a quarter took quite a fortnight. We had to have good horses, and we had to take good care of them, or the work would soon have broken them down. We had one wonderful horse in the Circuit – well bred and full of life. No matter what bit was used, when he came to one of the extensive plains he would run away and take a made gallop. Dr. Kelynack, who used him last, had one or two narrow escapes. On one occasion, when we were out together, the Doctor got off to take down slip-rails. Remounting, he found himself on the wrong side; but thinking it needles to go to the other side, he threw himself into the saddle. The horse, however, had too much mettle in him for that; and away he went, bucking with all his might until the Doctor came off, falling within an inch or two of an ugly stump. Fortunately, nothing worse befell than the dislocation of a big toe and a bad shaking. Another time the Doctor, going to the District Meeting, had just passed a cart filled with stones for repairing the road, when the cart was tilted and the stones rattled out. Instantly the horse bounded forward, and, putting his head between his knees, gave a fearful plunge, came down on his head, and broke his neck. The Doctor was thrown violently to the ground and bruised severely.

We had a blessed work of grace in the Goulburn Circuit. I remember well the evening when the power of God came mightily on the people. The first to come forward to the penitent-form was the Chief Constable. As he came, a local preacher, known everywhere as “Tom Brown,” who was helping me, called out, “Who won’t follow the Chief Constable to Jesus?” Many did follow. The work went on for many days, and not a few were converted. At one meeting, a woman who was in great distress was filled with joy unspeakable as soon as she cast herself upon Christ. For some time she remained on her knees praising God; then she got up and sat down on a chair, and clapping her hands, while the tears rolled down her face, cried, “Oh, I never thought it was like this. Glory be to God!” For an hour or more she sat there repeating the same words. One evening I knelt with three lads near me, who were all earnestly seeking Jesus, and soon found Him. One was my own son, now a minister of our Church in Melbourne, and another was the Rev. George Lane, a minister who

has done a grand work in our Church, and who was President of the New South Wales Conference a few years ago.

A lad came to our meetings who had a good mother, but whose father was a cruel, bad man. Through his mother's intercession the boy was allowed to come to the church; but his father told him that if he was ever out later than eight o'clock at night he would punish him severely. The first night the lad came with others to the penitential-form, but we noticed that at five minutes to eight o'clock he hurried out. So he did the next night and the next. On the following evening, however, his distress was so great that clock and everything else were forgotten. Eight o'clock passed, nine o'clock came, and soon after he found Jesus, and went home rejoicing. True to his threat, his father severely flogged him, and ordered him to his room. But the lad could not go to sleep. He knew that one heart in the house would be made glad by knowing what God had done for him, and so he gently called "Mother!" His mother was soon in the room; and the dear boy, throwing his arms around her neck, said, "Oh, mother, I could not go to sleep without telling you that God has pardoned all my sins, and saved my soul." Then mother and son rejoiced together.

Many of the boys became very earnest in trying to bring others to Jesus. They held a prayer-meeting every Sunday afternoon in my hay-loft, and induced many of the lads from the school to attend. It was delightful to hear those who had been converted pleading for the others. In the great day I have no doubt it will be known that some were born of God in that hay-loft of mine.

Among the helpers were my colleagues. Dr. Kelynack afterwards won honours, and in all Australia was respected for his great pulpit powers, and as president of Newington College; but he was never great than as I knew him pointing sinners to Christ in that Goulburn revival. Then we had Mr. William Davies, Mrs. Hurst Caldwell, and many others.

I have already spoken of "Tom Brown," who was respected all through the district. He was a big, powerful man, and in England had been a prize-fighter. Soon after his conversion he came to Australia, and for some years had a hard struggle, on a little farm at Camden, to get bread for himself and family. He removed to Jerriwa Creek, about thirty miles from Goulburn. There God prospered him on his farm, and made him a great blessing to the people. Jerriwa Creek was one of the worst places in the district, full of cattle-stealers. Tom went among them – a holy man, exerting a powerful influence, and preaching Jesus. The change that came over the place in a short time was wonderful. Cattle-stealers were converted and became honest men. A church of seventy members was formed, and a good brick place of worship was erected. It was indeed a pleasure to labour among the people, and the good work was chiefly the result of Tom Brown's labours. He was the hardest-working local preacher I have ever known. Sometimes he would travel forty miles home on the Saturday, preach at three different places on the Sunday, and then travel forty miles home on the Monday. He wore a green shade over one eye that had been turned a little aside. The occasion was as follows. He had a distant appointment. Not feeling well, he did not go to it. On his way to his own church on the Sunday he fell, and a small stick ran into one eye, and turned the ball round a little. When the doctor saw it he said that a slight operation was necessary, and then the eye would be all right. But Tom said, "No, I'll leave it as it is: it was the first appointment I ever missed, and I'll

carry the mark of it to my grave.” Tom Brown was a diamond in the rough. His sermons and speeches were always good, and he was very popular and very useful. When he first began to preach he could not read very correctly, and sometimes called things by strange names; but no one complained or was offended; everyone was glad to hear him. At one of our missionary meetings he was speaking of the Hottentots, and called them “Hopnitops,” and this was reported in the papers. At the next meeting in the same place Tom referred to the same subject, but in doing so said, “Now, you reporters there, don’t you go and put it ‘Hopnitops’ tonight, but Hottentots; that’s the right way to speak the word.” He then spoke of the triumphs of Gospel the wide world over, and said, “Oh, Mr. Chairman, how delightful it would be to go to Africa and the West Indies, and New Zealand and Fiji, and see what God has done there. I shall never be able to do that. But I tell you I’m going to the better land to meet them all there, and join with them in singing ‘Hallelujah to the Lamb.’” Tom was always seeking to save souls, and at nearly every service he had some seeking salvation. He had extraordinary power in prayer. I have seen him kneel down near a form crowded with penitents, and before his prayer was ended nearly all were rejoicing.

While stationed at Goulburn I went one year to our District Meeting in Sydney, and was appointed to preach in Bourke Street Church on the Sunday evening. The praying men had been pleading with God for the outpouring of the Spirit, and they did not plead in vain. The church was crowded, and the mighty power of God came upon the people. Fifty persons professed to find Christ that night, and many others were in distress. It was announced that I would preach the following evening. To a congregation which packed the building I preached from “Quench not the Spirit.” What a time we had! The whole assembly was mightily moved, the power was overwhelming; many fell to the floor in an agony, and there was a loud cry for mercy. The police came rushing in to see what was the matter; but there was nothing for them to do. It was impossible to tell how many penitents came forward; there must have been over two hundred. The large schoolroom was completely filled with anxious inquirers. How many were saved I cannot say, but the number must have been very large. We announced that a prayer-meeting would be held the next morning at seven o’clock, but long before that hour there were scores at the door in great distress. In the evening I preached the “District Sermon” at York Street Church, and we had a glorious time. It had been arranged to have the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, but that had to be delayed for an hour or more as so many persons were in great trouble, and we had to pray for them. The next evening I conducted a meeting in the Y.M.C.A. room. People were there from all the Churches, and we had a blessed meeting. At its close I said to Mr. Cuthbertson, and Independent minister, “I am sorry that so many of our Methodists prayed, leaving no time for members of other Churches.” He replied, “Oh, we do not think whether we are Independents or Methodists with this glorious power on us.” I had to return to my Circuit next day; but I have often thought that I did wrong to go. Had we all united and gone fully into the work, we might have had thousands and tens of thousands saved.

My three years at Goulburn ended, and we had to leave our kind friends. This is one of the trials of the itinerant system. Some feel it very keenly. We shall never forget Goulburn.

Maitland

In 1860 I was appointed to Maitland. During two years in this extensive Circuit we had frequent times of revival. We had a large staff of local preachers, and needed them, for the preaching-places were many, and some of them far away. The local preachers in this Circuit were indeed worthy of double honour. What would Methodism have been without her local preachers, and what a crippled, dwarfed Church we should be today if we had not their help!

In the Circuit we had an Annual Camp Meeting, which was attended by large numbers, and at which there was always great spiritual power. We took care to choose a suitable place, that could be conveniently reached from the different parts of the circuit. As complete arrangements for the meeting were made as possible. At one of these gatherings we had more than fifty converted to God. And it was not the good done at the camp meeting only that must be considered, but our people were quickened and blessed, and went to the different parts of the Circuit carrying the flame with them. We have never, in my opinion, used these Camp Meetings as we should have done: it would have been well if we had followed our American brethren, and arranged for these annual gatherings wherever practicable.

In the congregation of our principal church was a medical gentleman, who, though not a member, was a regular hearer, and a cheerful giver to the funds of the church. We had much sickness in our family at this time, and the doctor was exceedingly attentive. When the time for my removal was near at hand, one of our Circuit stewards, without saying a word to me, went to the doctor and said, "You have been attending Mr. Watsford's family now for two years, and we have had no account from you." "What do you mean?" replied the doctor. "What have you to do with Mr. Watsford's account?" "Oh," said the steward, "we pay the doctor's bills." "Do you? I did not know that. I'll let you have the account today; and look, I'll give half the amount myself." Meeting me the day after, he said, "I did not know the Quarterly Meeting had to pay your medical bill. I thought you had to pay it yourself, and you would never have had one from me. The steward has been to me for it, and I have promised to send it today, deducting half the amount as my share. And now I want you to go to the stationer's, and get anything you would like to the amount of the account the Quarterly Meeting has to pay." "No, no, doctor," I said; "I can't think of doing that." "Well," said he, "all right." The next day there came from the stationer's a beautiful *escritoire*, and a kind note from the doctor.

With the Chairman of the District I attended, in 1862, the Conference held that year in Adelaide, South Australia, and was appointed to South Adelaide, Mr. Butters being removed to Melbourne. My Chairman was greatly annoyed with the Conference for taking me away from New South Wales, and urged me to object to the appointment, as my District and Circuit had no thought of my being removed. But I could not do this. I always had a great dread of having anything to do with my own appointment. I had never accepted an invitation, being determined that the Lord should choose my inheritance for me. I believe that He could and would influence the Conference to do His will in my case, and I therefore could take no action in the matter. All through my life I have done this, and the Lord has guided me. I have never had to complain of being sent to an unsuitable Circuit. If I had chosen and fought for myself, it might have been very different.