

CHAPTER VI

South Australia

Adelaide South

I felt very much in leaving New South Wales. But, fully believing that the Lord had sent me to South Australia, I went in His name. We had a rough voyage by steamer to Melbourne, where we arrived about two o'clock on Sunday morning.

In going to South Australia I had not only to follow a great and successful ministry, but, having been appointed Chairman of the District, a heavier responsibility was laid upon me than I had ever borne before; but the Lord was my helper. The principal church in the Circuit, in Pirie Street, is a fine building that will accommodate about one thousand three hundred people. We had it crowded Sunday after Sunday, and the Lord heard prayer, and in a very remarkable manner poured out His Spirit. We had soon to carry on our meetings night after night for weeks together, and every night sinners were converted. Our midday prayer-meeting was continued for six months: sometimes as many as one hundred and fifty and two hundred were present, and each meeting was a time of great power. The local preachers, leaders, and Sabbath-school teachers were all baptized with the Holy Spirit, and heartily entered into the work. It was delightful to see our local preachers going out in different directions on a Sunday morning, all full of love for souls, and longing to bring them to Jesus.

Some of the cases of conversion were very striking. A young man, a stone-cutter, was brought under deep conviction of sin, and came to the meetings in great distress night after night, but could not find comfort. He was indeed heavy laden. It affected his health; he was pale, wasted, and sorrowful. We tried in every way to show him the simple plan of salvation, and, many a time, we unitedly prayed for him; but his trouble remained. One Sunday afternoon, as I was returning from an appointment, a local preacher being in my buggy with me, about a mile from Adelaide we saw someone coming toward us. As he drew near I said, "Why, that is P-----; where can he be going?" When he was near enough for me to see his face distinctly, I said, "Depend upon it, P----- is saved; look at his face." There was no mistaking that; all the sadness and despair were gone. His face now shone with a brightness that told of joy. Soon he cried, "Glory be to God! I'm saved! I'm saved! I could not wait. I had to hurry out to tell you."

One fine young fellow was convinced of sin at one of our meetings, and soon found the Saviour. A few weeks after, he sickened and died. His sufferings at the last were very great, but his faith was firm, and his end most triumphant. After his death, entries like the following were found in his diary: - "Last night I dreamed that I was in heaven; and so real did it seem, that when I awoke I felt the wall of my room to make sure that I was still on earth." "It is hard to die so young, and so many perishing around me." The day he died his leader called to see him. He was in great pain, and the cold sweat of death was pouring from every part of his body. As soon as he saw his leader he said, "There, Mr. C-----; don't you see Him? There is Jesus waiting to receive me. Glory! Glory to His name!" "He that believeth on Me," said Jesus, "shall not see death." Whatever else that may mean, it was true here that this young man in

an agony of suffering did not see death, but Jesus – Jesus waiting to receive him. How true to His own word of promise, “I will come again and receive you.”

At one of our meetings, where an overwhelming power was on us, and many ere set at liberty and rose to witness for Jesus, a bit, strong man, who had just found Christ, stood in the gallery waiting for an opportunity of bearing his testimony to the power of Christ to save; but as often as he tried to speak, another spoke before him. At last he cried out, “Oh, do let me speak, or I shall burst.” A rough way of putting it; but clearly showing how the man longed to tell what Jesus had done for him.

I was preaching one evening in Pirie Street Church on “The lost sheep found,” to a very large congregation that seemed greatly moved under the word. When speaking of the finding of the lost sheep, and the joy of the shepherd and his friends, I gave an imaginary case; A young man, well and religiously trained, left his home in England for Australia during the days of the gold fever. When leaving home his pious mother gave him a small Bible, begging him to read a portion of it every day, and to remember that she was praying for him. With many good resolutions he left England, and arrived in Australia. Here the influence of home and early training, and a mother’s holy life and earnest prayers, held him fast for a while, and he went to the house of God, and tried to do right. But he fell among bad companions; and when a young man does that, the Lord pity him, for his danger is very great. Soon they led him to the theatre, the ballroom, the public-house, the gambling table. Down, lower and lower, he fell, with many a lash from conscience, and many a feeble effort to stop in his downward course, until he was a complete wreck. His money gone, dismissed from his situation, without a friend, for his companions had forsaken him, he determined, as many had done before him, to leave the city and go far away into the bush, and find, if possible, some employment there. Weary, worn and footsore, he reached a station many miles from the city, where he was engaged as a shepherd. Out with his flock one day, he was sitting in the afternoon on a log, with his faithful dog at his feet. As he sat there all alone, better thoughts came. The old home rose before him, and his good and holy mother, and the lessons she had taught him, and the prayers she had offered. As he sat thinking, his heart was deeply moved. The hot tears fell fast. The sun was sinking to the west, and it was time for his return. Collecting his sheep, he made for the station. Folding his flock, he went into the hut and took from his little bag all that was left of his home outfit – the Bible that his mother gave him. He opened the precious volume and read the fifteenth chapter in the Gospel by St. Luke, and as he read, subdued and bathed in tears, he said, “I will arise and go to my father;” and there was joy in the presence of the angels of God over that sinner repenting. – After the service we held a prayer-meeting in the large hall, which was packed. A wonderful influence rested on the people, and yet no one moved. I called upon them to decide at once, and not resist the Holy Ghost, but something held them fast. I cried to God for help, and, again addressing the people, said, “I am sent not to *invite* you to come to Christ merely, but to *bring* you in, to compel you to come in, and in God’s name I would do it.” Then I pleaded with them to come, and fifteen or twenty came from their seats to the penitent-form in great distress, and many of them soon found the Saviour. Among those who came was a withered man with a book in his hand. Coming right up to me, he said, “Sir, I’m the shepherd that you told the people about, and that’s the Bible my mother gave me; and I could take you to the gum tree, far away in the bush, at the foot of which I knelt

when God pardoned my sins.” The shepherd’s tale touched many a heart that night. We had a glorious time, and it was with great difficulty we closed the meeting.

Among those converted were many young men. No sooner were they saved than they began to seek others. One band of twelve were distinguished by their earnest zeal for Christ. By distributing tracts, inviting others to God’s house, and speaking to people about their souls, they were made a great blessing. Twelve or fifteen years after the revival, this band met again in Adelaide. They were not all present. One or two had removed to other lands, and two or three were in heaven; but the rest were still faithful to God. They sent me a telegram the day they met, and I greatly rejoiced with them.

The work was not confined to our meetings. Many in their homes, and at their business, were arrested and began to seek God. One evening about eight o’clock a young man came running to my house, and said, “Come away, sir, and see my brother and his wife; they have been on the floor all night crying for mercy.” I ran with him, and found them in great trouble. I pointed out to them the simple plan of salvation by faith in Jesus, urged them then and there to accept Christ, and then went to prayer. Their sorrow was soon turned to joy. One afternoon a man well known in the city, a coachbuilder, rushing into my yard without his hat, cried, “Oh, Mr. Watsford, come and pray for me, a poor, guilty, wretched sinner.” Nor was the work confined to the city, but spread into the suburbs, where many were added to the Lord.

In this as in most revivals there were some whose goodness was as the morning cloud and the early dew: it passed away. But this, surely, cannot be, as some affirm, a strong objection against revivals. Many who are brought to God in a quiet way, without excitement, fall away also; so that the objection, if it has any force, can be used as well against this kind of conversion. Many, again, in affliction begin to weep and pray, and are great concerned about their souls’ salvation; but when the crisis is past, and health is returning, they forget the vows made in trouble, and “rise to sin anew.” We had a very painful case of this nature in Adelaide. The doctors had said that there was no hope, and the sick man, knowing he was altogether unprepared to die, was filled with fear. He begged his friends to send for me. With our city missionary I visited him. We were encouraged to hope that he was sincerely seeking the Lord. Day after day we visited him; and most glad was he to see us, and most heartily he seemed to join in our prayers. One day we were told that we could not see him. We asked the reason. Was he worse? Had the doctors forbidden us? No, but he was better: the doctor had said the danger was past, and he did not want us now. No doubt there are other cases like that; but everyone knows that many who have been brought under conviction in affliction, when death seemed to star them in the face, have, when raised up again, lived holy, consecrated lives, and have had to say, “It was good for me that I was afflicted.” So in revivals, while many backslide, many stand fast. I venture to say that if we went through our Church today, we should find that the majority of our members were converted in revivals. “What is the chaff to the wheat?” No doubt great care is necessary in times of revival to guard against mere excitement, - to watch, and firmly, yet very tenderly, suppress all mere wildfire; but at the same time members of the Church, however much they may desire what is quiet and orderly, must be careful lest, in speaking against and opposing revivals, in connection with which there is some excitement, they should be found “fighting against God.”

In Adelaide I commenced a Mutual Improvement Association for young men. It was a great success. We had at one time as many as one hundred and fifty members. Such societies need great care in forming and carrying them on. They should always be under the presidency of the minister, or someone kind and firm and wise, lest they become mere frothy entertainments, more theatrical than Christian. We carefully guarded the Association here, and were preserved from evil. Beside our usual weekly meetings we had a quarterly social gathering, but this was never made public. It was confined to the members and their friends, each member having the privilege of introducing one or two. Persons offered to purchase tickets at a good price for admission to our meetings; but we stood firm to our rule. For the meetings of this Association, and for our Sabbath School, we felt our need of a large hall. We called our friends together, and subscriptions came in so freely that the trustees at once built the hall behind Pirie Street Church.

The sale of hymn-books and other Wesleyan publications had been thus far entirely in the hands of the Chairman of the District, who ordered from England, and supplied the brethren as they needed. I thought the time had come to do something more. I recommended the establishment of a Book Room. This was agreed to, and a Book Room on a small scale was at once opened. It did well from the beginning, and has continued to grow and improve, and is today a great help to our Church in South Australia.

Sydney, Victoria, and Tasmania had each its college, but South Australia had none. Everyone felt that one was greatly needed. I put the case fully to some who were deeply interested in our work, and, formidable though the undertaking appeared, we determined, after careful consideration, to secure a college. At a meeting when the Hon. John Colton, Mr. Thomas Waterhouse, Mr. G. W. Cotton, and others were present, we resolved to purchase a suitable piece of ground. We then had a public breakfast at which about three hundred persons were present, and the sum of £2700 was subscribed towards the college. His Royal Highness Prince Alfred was expected in a short time to arrive in Adelaide. We waited on His Excellency the Governor, Sir D. Daly, and begged him to use his influence on our behalf, and request the Prince to lay the foundation-stone, and allow the college to be called by his name, Prince Alfred College. This the Governor readily promised to do. When the Prince arrived, his consent was obtained. No sooner was this known than it stirred up some of the bigots of Adelaide, who regarded it as a scandal that a Prince of the Royal House of England should lay the foundation-stone of any building to be erected by those whom they were pleased to call dissenters. A letter filling one or two sheets of foolscap was written to the Prince, giving reasons why he should not lay the stone. When we waited again upon the Governor, he told us of this letter, and said, "When His Royal Highness showed it to me, I told him to put it in the fire. And now," he added, "let me say that I did not intend myself to be present at the ceremony, but I have resolved, since that letter came, that I will be there, and I'll tell them why I am there. You know what Church I belong to, and you know the priest may not like my going; but I mean to go, for all that." Sir D. Daly was a member of the Roman Catholic Church, but he hated bigotry with all his heart. He said to me on that occasion, "My greatest friend in Canada was a Wesleyan minister, the Rev. Dr. Ryerson. Depend upon it, if I saw him on the outside of the crowd on the day of meeting, I should soon be down

and have his hand.”” In the evening I had the honour of dining at the Government House with Prince Alfred.

The laying of the foundation-stone was a great even. Thousands gathered to see it. The arrangements were complete. A gold trowel suitably inscribed and a loyal address were presented to the Prince; the Governor spoke earnestly and well; and though to many of us it was a trying day, everything passed off in the most successful manner.

Through the zeal and liberality of the gentlemen I have named, and of others, Prince Alfred College has been completed. From the first the college was prosperous, and it is now regarded as one of the first education establishments in Australia. For some time a minister resided in the college as President, but it was thought that the Institution might well be left under the care of the Head Master, the President being non-resident. This plan has worked admirably, and has been a great saving in the expenses of the college. The present Head Master, Mr. Chapple, is deservedly popular, and has had great success in his work.

My brother ministers in South Australia were earnest men, and greatly honoured of God in carrying on His work. Some of the young men “taken out” in that Colony are now among the first ministers of the Colonies in which they reside. One who died while I was in Adelaide, Brother Colwell, was a superior man. We all looked to him as one destined to do good work for God. But God’s thoughts are not as our thoughts. After a brief ministry he was called home to God. His last words were, “I have full and perfect confidence in Jesus.”

In many of the country Circuits the work of God prospered, and many were brought to the Saviour. I once went to Callington, a mining town, to preach anniversary sermons. On the Sunday evening the power of God came upon the people; many cried aloud for mercy, and we could not leave the church until a late hour. All that week we had to keep the church open all day. The miners came up from the pit, and straight away to the church, just as they were, and crowded the communion rail. It was a sight to see them, with the tears running down their unwashed faces, as they cried mightily to God to save them. The miners said it was a regular Cornish revival. At one of the meetings Tonkin, the leader of the choir, stood in the middle of the church, hard and rebellious, determined not to yield. His wife and daughter were at the communion rail. Soon they found the Saviour, and just as they did so someone shouted, “Tom Tonkin’s down.” Away ran wife and daughter, and many others, and gathered around the now humbled penitent, pleading with God for his salvation. His distress was great, but at length the peace of God came to his mourning heart, and there was great joy – father, mother, and daughter praising God, and all rejoicing with them. That was a glorious week – one I shall never forget.

Adelaide North

At the end of three years I was appointed to Adelaide North. This was in some respects a different Circuit, but we found a kind, earnest, willing people. Keeping constantly before us the great end of the Gospel ministry, - the conversion of sinners, - the Lord blessed our united labours. We had difficulties, and knew what it was,

sometimes, to be discouraged; but the hand of the Lord was with us, and our souls were often cheered by hearing the prayer of the penitent and the song of the saved.

We had a glorious Camp Meeting in this Circuit, which was very largely attended. The brethren Knight and Simpson, who had just arrived in South Australia, took part in the services, and a blessed influence accompanied the word, and the power of the Lord was present to heal. At a service in our Archer Street Church many were seeking mercy. We had to carry on our meetings for some weeks, and many were brought to God. A woman came one evening and was evidently under conviction, but she sat all the time, and was determined not to yield. When spoken to she always said, "No, I cannot give up my friends." I visited her at her home, and urged her to give up whatever the Holy Spirit showed her to be in the way of her salvation. She said she knew that if saved she must come out from her ungodly companions, and she could not do it. One evening she came to the meeting, and, falling on her knees, cried to God for mercy. Now that the full surrender was made, it was not long before mercy came, and then she cried, "Jesus is better than friends: Jesus is better than friends. Glory to His name."

A draper, at one of our Sunday evening services, was powerfully wrought upon, but he hurried out after the service, afraid to stay to the prayer-meeting. "If I did," said he, "I should be compelled to yield." But the good Spirit follows him, powerfully striving with him. He came at last to one of our week evening services, and was soon at the penitent-form. After a hard struggle he was saved, and made unspeakably happy. He left the meeting clapping his hands, and looking up as he went along, unconcerned about everything around him. So absorbed was he in the one matter of his salvation that he actually passed through a flock of sheep, without noticing them, until he ran against the shepherd, who rated him soundly for dividing his flock.

I commenced a working-men's meeting in the school-room of North Adelaide Church. Our object was to bring the working-men nearer, and induce them to altogether abandon the drink. We need to do something, for the working-men are drifting father and farther from us, or we from them, and drink is ruining so many. We had generally a large attendance on Saturday evening, and we hope much good was done.

In South Australia I had the privilege of labouring for a season with that great and good man, the Rev. William Taylor, now Bishop Taylor of Africa, who was in my opinion the grandest evangelist that ever visited Australia. Everyone was struck with his common-sense. His way of putting the truth was forcible. What many would expand into a paragraph or a chapter, he would compress into a short sentence that it was difficult indeed to forget. No one knew better how to deal with all sorts and conditions of men. The power of the word as it fell from his lips few could resist. I once took an Adelaide physician, a German, to hear him, and the doctor was greatly interested. After the sermon he said to me, "What is the secret of that man's power? It is not the sermon; I have heard hundreds better. It is not the singing, for I think I could sing as well myself. What is it?" I am afraid the doctor knew little of the power from on high – it was that which made Bishop Taylor what he was.

My first introduction to Mr. Taylor and his work nearly upset me. He was holding a service at Pirie Street Church, and I was preaching at North Adelaide. After my

service I hurried over to Pirie Street, and found the church full, and the communion rail crowded with penitents. I went and knelt near to Mr. Taylor, inside the communion rail. Just then a very broad-brogued Scotchman, with head thrown back and voice pitched high, was praying in an unknown tongue. It was impossible for anyone but a Scotchman to understand much of what he said. This was bringing a coldness on the meeting, and Mr. Taylor felt it. Leaning over toward me, and nudging me with his elbow, he said, "Isn't that about as good as a tune from a cross-cut saw?" When the Scotchman finished, and before I had recovered from the shock I had received, Mr. Taylor nudged me again, saying, "Thank God, that job is over." This seemed to me so irreverent that it took me some little time to get over it; but I learned to know the man better afterward. I had a long talk with him one day about the secret of his success. He said, "I took to the Spirit. He teaches me. I get my message direct from Him. I go to the meeting expecting the presence and power of the Holy Ghost, and He never fails me."

The influence Mr. Taylor had over most men was very great. A gentleman in Adelaide of large fortune, but who never gave much to any object, was induced, under Mr. Taylor's powerful preaching, to stand up in church before the whole congregation and express his determination to be the Lord's. He became one of the most liberal givers the Church in South Australia has ever had. Among his hearers one day were some who contended that it was not necessary to join any Church. Mr. Taylor said to them, "Look here, my friends, if I am better than the Church, the Church wants me, and if the Church is better than I am, I want the Church; so, any way, I'm in." A Baptist, very unwisely, as ministers of his own Church would say, once introduced the question of immersion among the new converts, quoting the passage, "Buried with Him in baptism," etc. When Mr. Taylor heard it he said, "Well, brother, if you will have that in that way, you must take it altogether, and you know He was three days and nights in the grave. What do you say to that? I tell you, if you have the whole thing you'll come up as dead as a salted herring."

There are thousands in Australia today who were converted under Mr. Taylor's ministry, and many of our ministers speak of him as their spiritual father.

One of my little girls died in Adelaide. She was a dear child. Although very young, she had given her heart to Jesus, and was His true disciple. In her affliction it was touching to see how she thought of and cared for her mother, who was well-nigh worn out with watching and nursing. When the end was near I said to her, "Now, dear, you must think of Jesus." "Oh," she replied, "I am always thinking of Him."

At the Melbourne Conference in 1868 I was appointed to the Ballarat Circuit, Victoria. I closed my ministry in South Australia in March 1868. I felt very much in leaving, for all had been so kind to me, and I had made many dear friends. Methodism in South Australia is very strong, and full of life. In no part of the world are there more loyal and devoted Methodists.