

## CHAPTER VIII Home Missions

### Victoria

At the Conference held in Melbourne in 1874 I was appointed General Secretary of our Home Missionary Society. During the year I had prepared a plan for such a society in Victoria. Our Church was in a peculiar position. State aid to religion had been given to four Churches – the Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and Wesleyan. The money received by the Wesleyans had enabled us to build churches, help dependent Circuits, and extend our work. But an Act to abolish State aid to religion had been passed, and this was the last year of our receiving any grant. At this time, also, the lands of the Colony were widely thrown open for selection, and thousands of persons were rushing to take up land. Among them were many of our own people. From most of our Circuits, leaders, local preachers, and members were flocking to the new areas. We all felt that something must be done, or we, as a Church, should be placed in financial difficulties, and our people in the back blocks would be neglected, and be lost to us. After much thought and frequent consultation with many ministers, and with the assistance of valuable suggestions from some of them, especially from the President of the Victoria and Tasmania Conference for the year – the Rev. John Cope – and the Rev. H. Bath, I prepared the plan for the Home Missionary Society. It was submitted to the various District Meetings, and approved by them, and sent on to the Conference, where it was unanimously adopted. One of the provisions in the plan was that a minister should be set apart to superintend the work of the Society. I thought, when preparing the scheme, that our greatly beloved and popular brother Joseph Dare, who was returning from a visit to England, would be the very man for the work, and that in his hands, with God's blessing, it would be a great success. It was found, however, that Dr. Dare's health, which had been failing, had not improved by rest and change, and the Conference urged me to undertake the work. I clearly saw all that was involved in such an appointment: that I should have to leave Circuit work, in which I delighted; that I should have to travel the greater part of the year, - and I loved my home, where I had many children to care for; and that it would be placing a heavy burden on my wife. I therefore hesitated for some time to accept the position; but as the Conference continued to urge me, I was afraid that I might be fighting against God by refusing, and I consented to do my best.

For eight years, year by year, I was appointed General Secretary. I travelled thousands of miles annually, preaching, lecturing, holding revival services, meeting committees, visiting Circuits and Mission stations, and in every way directing and helping the work. God's good hand was upon us, and He made the work to grow and prosper. Our friends gave cheerfully and liberally to the cause, new stations were opened, missionaries sent out, congregations gathered, and sinners converted.

It was necessary that we should raise at least £2000 the first year, in order that our poor Circuits should not suffer, and that our work should be extended. The selectors going on the land had to build their houses, clear, fence, and sow the land, and when this was done few had much money left. Theirs was a hard life at the beginning, and when one bad season after another came they were greatly pinched and tried. With a little help from the Loan Fund they built their own churches. These, of course, were

in no case grand or costly. Some were made of bark only, or logs, or slats, and some of sun-dried bricks. But, poor as they were, they cost money. So the selectors had little to give toward the support of the missionaries; though what little they could do, they did cheerfully. We were therefore compelled to look elsewhere for help. The appeal made to our people in the various Circuits was nobly responded to, and the £2000 we needed was given.

Soon after our Home Missions were commenced I travelled among the new selectors, and found them anxious to have missionaries among them. These were sent as soon as possible. On the new stations churches were built about seven miles apart, and were well attended. On the Sunday people came many miles to the house of God. Those who had to take part in the Sabbath School in the afternoon brought their dinners with them, for the distance would not permit their returning home. A cry for help came to us from many parts of the Colony, and our difficulty was to supply the new stations that were opening up. To send young ministers there was impossible, for we could have no hope of these stations being able to take married men at the end of four years. After careful consideration, we recommended that some of our excellent local preachers should be employed in this work. It was thought that after a while those so employed would contend that they had a right to enter the regular ministry, and so we should have very little difficulty on this ground. We soon found a number of valuable men ready to engage in this work, and right well have they served the Church, some of them for many years. Among the first were Mr. Dounes, Mr. Henry Clarkson, J.P., and Mr. John Lees, all noble workers for God. Mr. Dounes' first station was Benalla, which is now a Circuit. He was afterwards received into our ministry, but his course was soon ended. He laboured hard and successfully, and died in the Lord. Mr. Clarkson was employed in the Home Missions for many years, and did a good work on many stations. Mr. John Lees, after some years of earnest toil, retired from the mission field. Some of the young men who have gone out as Home Missionaries have done so well that they have been received as ministers of our Church. I have never anywhere seen a better class of workers than we have had in this Mission; always at work, travelling long distances, preaching and visiting, and in every way seeking to save the lost. What was said by one who went to labour in one of our hardest stations, "I determined to give every man a chance of being saved," has been the resolve of most of them, and well have they carried it out. Wherever they have heard of a sinner they have been after him.

The Home Missionary Society has been a blessing to our whole Church. The new selectors have been supplied with the means of grace, and the local preachers and teachers removed into the bush have found new fields of labour. Through the weekly report, which I published in the *Spectator*, our people generally were deeply interested in the work, prayed for its success, gave towards its support, and were greatly benefited themselves.

Many thought that I should have more to do with financial matters than anything else; but I determined from the first that, God helping me, I would ever keep before me my great work of saving souls, and not only by all means seek myself to save some, but induce as many others as possible to do the same. I thank God that He gave me grace to do this, and made His work to prosper. I generally arranged beforehand to have in every Circuit a holiness meeting on Saturday evening, when I pressed upon our people the necessity of full consecration, and showed that it was their glorious

privilege to be sanctified wholly, now, by faith in Jesus. I preached twice on the Sunday, addressed the Sabbath School in the afternoon, and always had a prayer-meeting at the close of the evening service. At many of these meetings souls were saved. Some extracts from my journal will show this.

*June 27, 1875.* – Preached at Creswick at 11. Drove to Clunes and preached at 6.30. Great crowd and powerful feeling. Many seeking the Lord: some before the meeting closed could rejoice, knowing their sins forgiven.

*July 4.* – Preached at Lydiard Street, Ballarat, at 11. Addressed Sabbath School at 3. Preached again at 6.30. Many penitents; some saved.

*July 11.* – Preached at St. Kilda at 11. Addressed Sunday School at Hotham at 3. Preached at 6.30. Six or eight anxious about their souls; some of them enabled to trust in Jesus and rejoice in Him.

*July 18.* – Preached at Kangaroo Flat at 11. One saved. Addressed Sabbath School at Golden Square at 3. Many of the young people feeling deeply. Preached at 6.30. Five or six decided for God.

*July 25.* – Preached at Eaglehawk at 11. Much power. Addressed Forest Street Sunday School at 3. Preached at 6.30. Three persons in distress.

*August 1.* – Campbell's Creek at 11. Two penitents. Castlemaine Sabbath School at 3. Preached at 6.30. Six or seven persons crying for mercy, some of whom found the Saviour.

*August 15.* – Preached at Echuca at 11. At the Sabbath School in the afternoon we had a great breaking down among the children. Preached at 7. Many in trouble, most of whom professed to find peace.

*August 22.* – Preached at Daylesford at 11. Spoke to the children in the Sabbath School at 3. Preached at 6.30. Many seeking the Lord.

*Sept. 12.* – Preached at Koroit at 11. At Warrnambool at 6.30. Nine or ten penitents, many of whom could rejoice in the Lord before the meeting ended.

*Sept. 19.* – Preached at Portland at 11. In the afternoon many of the young people in the school were deeply feeling. At the service at 6.30 a good number decided for Jesus.

*Sept. 26.* – Hamilton at 11 and 6.30. Sabbath School at 3. At the evening service six or seven were anxiously seeking mercy, and not in vain.

*Oct. 10.* – Preached at Albury at 11, 3, and 6.30. There was a great breaking down among the people, young and old, in the afternoon and evening, and many professed to find Christ.

*Oct. 17.* – Bright at 11. Wandiligong at 6.30. The power of the Lord present to heal several who were seeking God.

*Oct. 24.* – Beechworth at 11, 3, and 6.30. Many in distress at the evening service, some of whom could soon rejoice in sins forgiven.

During this year we opened Missions at Benalla, North London, East Charlton, and other places.

In 1876 we appointed a missionary, Mr. Coles, to labour in the back slums of the city, and for two or three months I worked with him. We visited all the houses in the lanes off Little Bourke Street, and other vile places, and preached the Gospel in the open air among the poor wretched inhabitants of these districts. We were in the midst of evil in its most disgusting forms, but we rarely found any to speak rudely to us, for the people generally recognised us as their true friends. One day we went into a

miserable den, where were many vile women and a number of wretched-looking, rowdy young fellows. We gave them tracts, and told them "the old, old story." While we were thus engaged a young man came and stood at the door. We gave him a tract headed "Is it well with you?" He took it, and, reading the title, said, "Why, yes; it is better with me than it was last Sunday." One of the women said, "You were in jail last Sunday." "Yes, you wretch," he replied; "you put me there." The next Sunday morning we were at the principal lock-up, seeing the prisoners there. I was talking to a man who seemed almost distracted. Walking up and down his cell he cried, "I have a good business, as good a wife as any man alive, and here I've been drinking heavily, have disgraced myself and others, and am now shut up here." While I was saying a word to the poor fellow I heard someone tapping at the window of a cell some distance from us. As the knocking continued I went over and, looking into the cell, saw the young man whom we had met on the previous Sunday. "You don't look very happy today, my friend," I said. "No," he replied; "I'm in for it now. I was run in last night for garrotting. I want you to help me: nobody else will. Go to the first house in Little Leichardt Street, and tell the girls living there that I am here, and I want them to get a lawyer for me, will you?" I promised him we would; and having said a few words to him exhorting him to repent, we went and called at the house he had named. There we found three young women – two of them sisters – one very young with a pleasant face. She told us that she had not been long away from her mother's home. We talked to them till the youngest wept bitterly. We urged her to go with us to "The Home," and the other girls pressed her very much to go. She said she could not go then, but would on the morrow. When we called in the morning she was not to be found. When these poor, wretched girls get into these terrible dens the hold upon them is strong indeed, and it is very difficult to get them away.

In this city work we visited all the large lodging-houses. In them we found hundreds of men suffering from the previous night's debauch, and in a most deplorable condition. Coming out of one of these houses one Sunday afternoon, we saw a great crowd on the wharf not far away. Mr. Cook, an earnest worker for years among the lowest and the worst, was with us. We went to the crowd and found an infidel standing on a block with a Bible in his hand, about which he was saying the most shocking things. I said to my friends, "You go among the people and distribute tracts, and I will wait here and see if I can get a good opportunity to say a word." Presently the infidel saw me and began at once to attack ministers of religion, and to direct attention to me. I got a little nearer to him, and then cried out, "My friends, will you allow me to say a word?" "By all means," they shouted; "clear the way! make a ring! hear him!" I jumped on the block where the other man had been standing, and addressed the crowd. They listened most attentively while I told them my experience, how long I had tried religion, and what it had done for me. I told them the story of my mission to Fiji, and how the presence and blessing of the Lord Jesus had sustained and comforted me in sorrow, in danger, and in the face of death. They again and again urged me to go on, and when I had finished gave me a hearty cheer. The previous speaker then got up with the intention of replying to my remarks; but the people cried out, "You're an infidel! Shut up! Lie down!" and they would not hear him. I met this man soon after, and he invited me to go to their hall and read a paper that should be open to criticism. Again and again we met, and he continued to press his invitation. One day he said, "Well, you have not come to see us. You are, I am afraid, like all the rest: you call us poor lost sheep, and yet you never come after us to bring us back to the fold." "Mr. P-----," I said, "if ever I come among you I shall not

think that I am coming among poor lost sheep, but among a pack of ravenous wolves.” The fact is, no one going to these places can expect to get fair play, and I have come to the conclusion that public discussion with such men is altogether useless.

Our work this year extended, and new stations were opened at Alexandra, Elmore, Rupanyup, Kyabram, Mount Hope, and Kerang, and the country about Barnawatha. Other places were crying out for missionaries, and we hope to be able soon to send them. At the close of the year Mr. Matthew Bennett was engaged by the Committee as a General Missionary, and he laboured with a good measure of success for some time.

The greater part of the year I was travelling, preaching, holding meetings, and visiting the new stations, and the places beyond, where selectors were settling. Thank God, I not only saw the general work prospering, but the word of the Lord was with power, and a good number believed and turned to the Lord, as my diary shows.

In December I visited the Dromana district, where there had been a remarkable work of grace. A Mr. Shand, a farmer living here, was made an instrument of good to many. The power of God came upon the people all over the district, and in their homes and at their work many were convinced of sin and converted to God. I visited many families, and saw “the grace of God, and was glad.” I remained four days, preaching at different places, and directing those who were earnestly seeking salvation. I had made it a rule not to hold late meetings anywhere; but at the last meeting at Dromana I could not get away till eleven o’clock, and then had to travel sixteen miles through a dark forest to Hastings, where I arrived about three o’clock in the morning. After a few hours’ sleep I preached to the fishermen at seven o’clock, and then left by coach for home.

My work during the year 1877 was very similar to that of the last. We opened new stations at Traralgon, Shepparton, Numurkah, etc. etc. I visited the Riverina district, and preached at Howlong at the opening of a new church. There is a fearful state of things generally in the small towns of the backwood districts. The intemperance that prevails is simply terrible. Men who have been working for a few months receive their cheque and make for the nearest public-house, where they “melt it down,” as it is called; and it does not take long to do that. I met with a case in Howlong that is like a good many others. On Saturday a decently-dressed man came into the town and entered the public-house just opposite to where I was staying. They said he had a cheque for £25 in his pocket. Before long we could hear him making a great noise, as he was brought under the influence of the drink. As the drink went in the wit went out, and as the wit went out the clothes went off, and soon he was to be seen in the road without hat, or coat, or vest, or boots, or socks, inviting every passer-by to go in and have a drink. Till late at night we heard him. All Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday he was at it. I was leaving early on Wednesday morning. While waiting for my horse, between five and six o’clock, I saw the poor wretch raving round the public-house and crying out for drink. He had reached the end of his cheque on the previous night. They had put him in an outhouse, giving him a bottle of brandy, which he had drunk during the night; and now here he was, with his stomach all on fire, pleading most piteously for drink. Oh the cursed drink! How it is destroying men, body and soul, all around us!

There are hundreds of these wretched wanderers to be found in the bush. They are called tramps, swagmen, sundowners, etc., and are said to be on “the Wallaby track.” Generally they have run a sad course in the city, and, wrecked and ruined, have made their way into the bush districts. They are easily known, for they all dress alike. With dirty moleskin trousers, blue or grey “jumper,” billy-cock hat, worn-out boots, a swag on the back, and a billy in hand, there is no mistaking them. Many of them are men of little education; but often one meets with those who have received a first-class education, and now and then with a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge. Many have been neglected all their life long; but some are the children of godly parents. They work for a few weeks at shearing or harvest time, and then are away to knock their cheque as soon as possible. I have often seen them lying under a gum tree, or wearily trudging along the road, or taking their scanty meal by the wayside, and my heart has ached for them. In most cases the accursed drink has been the cause of all their misery. One who knew them well has written a short poem descriptive of them, and this has become very popular among temperance people. Some have credited me with the authorship, but I have not that honour. The verses were given to me by my son, the Rev. J. J. Watsford, who received them from the author, Mr. Potts, a young surveyor in Albury, New South Wales. The poem is entitled “The Wallaby Track” – a phrase everywhere well known in Australia. As the Wallaby is constantly on the move in the bush, never knows where he may stray, gets his food where he can, and sleeps anywhere, so it is with these poor wanderers.

#### THE WALLABY TRACK

My old cowhide boots are all patchy and worn  
 My trousers are ragged, my jumper is torn;  
 My billy-cock hat is an object forlorn;  
 My hair is unkempt, and my beard is unshorn:  
 And why is it so? In this fair land of gold,  
 Whose green swelling bosom hides riches untold,  
 Why should I e'er suffer from hunger or cold?  
 Why don't I grow rich as I know I grow old?  
 I'll tell you – Because with the swag at my back  
 I go roaming about on “the Wallaby track.”

When first I arrived here, long, long years ago,  
 My feelings were manly, my heart all aglow;  
 But now hope's bright flame in my breast has burned low,  
 For I've no one to care for, and nowhere to go.  
 As I sit by my fire in the cool morning air,  
 And break my night's fast on the swagman's rough fare,  
 I think of the riches in which I've no share,  
 I think of life's joys that to me are so rare,  
 Then with billy in hand, and the swag at my back,  
 I wander away on “the Wallaby track.”

Like the white yeasty froth on the ocean wave's comb,  
 On the waters of life I'm merely the foam,  
 As useless as it through the country I roam,  
 Without one single spot I can think of as home.  
 I know that by some my life is called free;  
 But in all of Australia, broad though it be,  
 There's no one ingle-side where a seat's kept for me,  
 Not one face that grows brighter my presence to see,  
 As weary and worn, with my swag at my back,

I come trudging along on "the Wallaby track,"

They call me sundowner; but what's in a name,  
Unless there's attached to it some honest fame?

'Tis little I care now, for life's weary game  
Has crushed my ambition and weakened my frame.

What matters it now that in youth I could gaze  
On the future made joyous through hope's golden haze,  
Since nought's left but regret for my past erring ways,

No prospect in view but to finish my days,  
With the sky overhead, and the earth at my back,  
In some out-of-way spot on "the Wallaby track"?

O you young men who dwell in this fair southern clime,

Draw a moral from this; take warning in time:

If you're fast in your youth, you'll be old in your prime;

If you cling to the worldly, you'll miss the sublime;

If your evenings are spent in some flash music-hall,

If you go to the *demi-monde* fancy-dress ball,

If you drink, and play billiards, and gamble, you'll fall

Into debt, into crime; you'll be shoved to the wall,

And, last scene of all, with your swag at your back,

Die a mendicant's death on "the Wallaby track."

This year I visited the Warragul district, known as Brandy Creek. Some of our friends had selected in this wild district. The Rev. J. C. Symons had visited one part of it some time before, and had held a service. There was no part of the Colony where I had been to be compared with this. The forest trees were very high, and the tall hazel scrub so dense that there was no getting through it. When one got off the main road there were only narrow tracks cut through the scrub, and along these everything had to be carried on pack-horses. This, I thought, will be a grand country when cleared; but it will ruin many in attempting to clear it, and then some others will come in and reap the benefit. Clearing is trying work: the scrub has to be cut down, and then there is a burning off. It is a grand sight when these fires are raging in the forest. During my visit I stayed with our friends Mr. and Mrs. Copeland, who have one or two selections here. One would have thought that it would have been very trying to them to leave their beautiful home in Melbourne and go away into the bush, where there were hardships and difficulties to which they had been strangers; but I found them happy and contented, and working away to change the wilderness into a fruitful field, and gather again the comforts of home around them.

Having to travel early by coach, I had to stay at the inn from which it started; and here I had painful experience of the fact that Warragul abounds, or did abound, in fleas. I had been told before I came to expect to see a few, but had no idea they were as numerous as I found them. I arrived at the inn rather late. All the rooms being engaged, I accepted the offer of a sofa-bed in the dining-room. Just after I retired another traveller came, and was given a shake-down in another corner of the dining-room. I was not asleep when he came, neither was there any likelihood of sleep; but I kept as quiet as I could. The stranger prepared for bed, blew out the candle, and lay down. Very soon he began to turn and rub, and turn and rub again, till at last he cried out, "I say, friend, are you asleep?" "No," I said; "what's the matter?" "Oh," he replied, "I'm afraid there are a few fleas here; don't you feel them?" "A few!" I said; "why, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of them." Well, those little bloodsuckers introduced us strangers to each other, and we rubbed and talked till we heard the hour

summoning us to be ready for the coach, when we speedily rose, shook ourselves thoroughly, and in half an hour had left at least the greater part of our tormentors behind us.

In different parts of the country our work greatly prospered this year, and new openings presented themselves on every hand. We still kept the soul-saving work in the first place. Sowing in tears, we reaped in joy. I must give a few extracts from my diary to show this.

*May 13.* – Preached at Kangaroo Flat at 11. Addressed the children at Golden Square Sabbath School at 3, and preached at 6.30. A time of great power. Many were convicted of sin. The communion rail was again and again crowded with penitents. Many professed to find the Saviour. Glory be to God! I noticed one man sitting in the church all the time of the meeting, intently watching me as I went among those in distress. At last I went to him and said, “My friend, are not you thinking of praying to God to save you?” “Oh,” he said, “I understand it all; you are not going to influence me; it’s all mesmerism.”

*May 14.* – We held a penitent meeting at Golden Square at 6 o’clock, when some were seeking the Lord. We began our Home Missionary meeting at 7, but had go to prayer and plead for those in distress. Before we closed, a good number obtained the blessing of pardon.

*May 15.* – I held a Home Missionary meeting at Kangaroo Flat, and then went to Golden Square, where Brother Harkness was conducting the meeting with some twenty persons seeking God. Many were enabled to rejoice in the knowledge of sins forgiven. Brother Spencer Williams had been very anxious about the work here, where he had earnestly laboured; now his joy was very great.

*July 16.* – Had a glorious meeting at Golden Square: twenty-two persons professed to find peace.

In July I went to Adelaide to speak at a meeting to be held for the purpose of securing funds for building another wing to the College. My old friends gave me a hearty welcome.

*July 27.* – I attended a breakfast meeting in Adelaide. About 400 persons present: Chief Justice Way, the Acting Governor, in the chair. Among the speakers were the Chief Secretary, the Commissioner of Public Works, and the Commissioner of Crown Lands. There was great enthusiasm. The sum of £1730 was raised, thereby securing £3460 from our truly generous friend Mr. J. G. Waterhouse. The meeting was continued for four hours, and there was no flagging in the interest to the very last.

*Sunday, July 29.* – I preached at Kent Town, morning and evening, and addressed the Sabbath School at 3. In the evening we had seven or eight penitents. During the week I lectured three times, visited many of my old friends, and met a number of them at evening parties.

*August 5.* – I preached at Archer Street at 11, and gave an address in the school at 3. In the evening I preached at Pirie Street to a great crowd. Many were penitently seeking God.

Returning to Victory, I visited the Western District, and on –



*August 19.* – I preached at Koroit at 11. Five or six in distress. At Dennington at 3. Three or four decided for Jesus. At Warrnambool at 7. Six or seven came to Christ. Glory be to God! O God, carry on Thy work!

During the week missionary meetings were held at Warrnambool, Koroit, and Belfast. At a holiness meeting at Belfast we had a glorious time: many were seeking the Lord.

*August 26.* – Portland all day. In the afternoon and evening many were crying for mercy. A good number blessed.

*August 27 and 28.* – Preached at Portland in the evening. Again rejoicing over penitents coming o Jesus and finding peace.

*August 29.* – Home Missionary meeting. Three decided for Christ. This has been a blessed week at Portland. To God be all glory!

*September 23.* – Preached at Colac twice. Gave address to Sabbath School at 3, when many of the young people were in distress. At the service in the evening there was a great breaking down. A good number found peace with God.

On the following Monday and Tuesday I preached to large congregations. On the first evening we had eight penitents at the communion rail, and on the second about fourteen. Many of these were enabled to rejoice in Jesus.

Among other places I visited this year were Durham Ox and Kerang, where our missionary was working hard with a good measure of success. I stayed at night at Tragowell Station. As I was sitting in the verandah about nine o'clock the next morning, a large brown snake came from under the room where I had slept. I watched him, and he watched me pretty closely. When he was some yards from the verandah I seized a hoe lying in the garden, and struck at him; but the rotten handle broke. The snake then turned on me, and was about to spring, when I struck him on the back with a piece of the broken handle, and he fell, and I quickly despatched him. The brown snake is very venomous. I was glad that during the night I was ignorant of his sleeping-place.

The year 1877 was a good year: a year of many, many mercies. Praise the Lord!

The year following we sent Home Missionaries to Warragul, Poowong, Clear Lakes, and other stations. At the last-named place there was a blessed work in connection with the labours of our missionary, Mr. G. Lee. About forty-eight professed to have found peace, and forty of them joined our Church.

In February I visited the South Gippsland district, and preached on the Sunday in a new church which had just been built at Poowong. Everything, of course, was rather rough. There were seventy or eighty people present, and only one house to be seen. The friends had brought a small harmonium, and we had good singing and a blessed service altogether. On the Monday we had a tea-meeting, and raised over £36 for the church. The meeting had to be held early in the afternoon to allow the people to get home, for there was no travelling at night. I had never been in a place where locomotion was so difficult. When I left in the morning I rode a pack-horse, and made five miles in two hours. Frequently I had somehow to get over or round a large tree that blocked the path. All the way I was in danger, unless very cautious, of

sharing the fate of Absalom among the overhanging branches. When we got into somewhat clearer country, and had to hurry on to catch the train, I was driven in a buggy at the extraordinary speed of twenty miles in nine hours!

The General Conference was held this year in Sydney. The President of the General Conference had then for the first time to be elected. To my great surprise, the requisite absolute majority of votes was in my favour, and I had to take the chair. I had no expectation of this, and I felt the great honour conferred upon me. I went to the platform with fear and trembling, praying God to help me. My address was very short, for I had, of course, nothing prepared. It was a most important Conference. The Rev. Gervase Smith, D.D., representative of the British Conference, was present. The great question before us was the class-meeting test of membership. We had an able debate, which lasted for two days. The brethren voted the right way, and left the Class Meeting untouched. My position during the debate was peculiar. I had very strong views on the subject, and had fully prepared for the discussion; but, being in the chair, I had to hold my peace. It was an exercise in self-repression that has been useful to me, I hope, ever since. On Sunday morning I preached at Bourke Street Church, in my old Circuit, and, blessed be God! I had the unspeakable pleasure of pointing several penitents to the Lord Jesus.

To all in my own home one great event of the year was the marriage of my second daughter, Emma, to the Rev. B. Danks, a missionary to New Britain. She was fully given up to God, and had the true missionary spirit. Though she was going to an unhealthy climate to labour among a savage people, we could wholly devote her to the work, and believed God would bless her and her husband.

As usual, I travelled the greater part of the year, preaching and giving addresses. By God's good providence I was preserved from all evil. Once I was in great danger. When about to start on one of my journeys I noticed that the driver of the coach was under the influence of drink. I got up on the "box" and sat by his side. Going down a steep hill, soon after starting, the horses turned off the road, and ran over a narrow bridge in the direction of a fearful precipice. Snatching the reins from the hands of the driver, and putting out all my strength, I succeeded in stopping the horses on the very brink of the terrible fall. It was a narrow escape indeed. This delayed us so long that I could not keep my appointment at Clunes that evening, the only appointment I have missed.

All through the year I saw at various places the grace of God in the conversion of sinners, and with a heart truly thankful I blessed His holy name.

While the Conference of 1879 was in session, the Rev. John Eggleston died. He was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith, and many people through his ministry were added to the Lord. In Tasmania, South Australia, New South Wales, and Victoria, his labours had been greatly blessed, and he was much beloved by all, both ministers and laymen. For some years he had been a great sufferer. The partial, and at the last the almost complete, loss of his sight was a great affliction; but he was ever resigned to God's will. We hoped that he would be spared for many years; but the good Lord ordered it otherwise. When the coffin was carried into the church and placed on the platform, surrounded by the "fathers" of our Church, it was a time of

weeping. We all felt that we had lost a brother beloved; yet we all knew that for him to die was gain.

My work this year was very similar to that of former years, both in what I did, and, thank God, to some extent in the success with which He was pleased to crown my labours. The Home Mission continued to flourish and extend, and the power of God was frequently displayed in convicting and converting sinners. To one case I would specially refer. I had retired to my room one evening, when the following telegram was placed in my hand: - "Take first train in morning and come to Queenscliffe; my son is dying and wants to see you. - E. B." I said to my wife, "I cannot make out from whom this has come. I cannot remember ever meeting a lady of this name." We thought I might be for some other minister in Fitzroy (the suburb of Melbourne in which I was then living). At last I said, "Never mind; it's from some poor mother whose boy is dying: I'll go." I was in Queenscliffe next morning by ten o'clock. It was all right; they were waiting for me. I went to the house, and then learned that the mother was a widow; that the son was a graduate of Melbourne University; that he had been ill for some time and had come to Queenscliffe seeking health, and that on the previous day two doctors from Melbourne had pronounced his case hopeless, and had told him that he must die in a few days. When he heard this he woke up to the tremendous fact that he was not prepared to die, and he became greatly alarmed. When the mother met me she said, "He has often heard you preach, and is longing to see you: come in." As I entered the room the poor fellow stretched out his bony arms towards me and cried, "Oh, Mr. Watsford, is there no one that can lift me out of this?" I sat down by the side of his bed and told him of Jesus, mighty to save. Then I prayed; but no blessing came. I went into the next room, and the lady of the house said to me, "Oh, sir, I have seen many die, but never one like this. It would almost have broken your heart to have heard him last night crying, 'I have a father in heaven, and a mother going to heaven; but I am going to hell.'" Returning to the dying young man I told him of the many precious promises that just met his case, and urged him to cast himself at once upon Jesus, his loving Saviour, who had said that He would give him rest if he only came to Him. He was now getting very weak, and death was drawing near, and yet there was no hope. I repeated two lines of a well-known hymn

—  
A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,  
Into Thy hands I fall.

He closed his eyes, was silent for a time, and then said earnestly, "Quote those lines again." I did so, very slowly. When I had finished the first line, "A guilty, weak, and helpless worm," he cried, "That is what I am. I am all that. Go on." I added, "Into Thy hands I fall." "Oh! may I?" he said; "may I now?" I exhorted him to do so. He was quiet for a moment, and then said, "Repeat them again." I did so, and he joined me, and I believe that while he said the words he cast himself into the arms of Jesus. He was now calm and quiet, and soon the end came. Jesus can save to the uttermost; but oh, how foolish it is to leave the work of salvation to the last hours of life!

Early in the year 1880 the Rev. Joseph Dare died. He was, perhaps, the most popular Methodist preacher in Australia, and certainly one of the most successful in winning souls to Christ. Young and old, laymen and ministers, all respected and loved him. In every Circuit in South Australia and Victoria where he laboured, the work prospered, and many were saved. He had a long affliction. That terrible disease diabetes had hold of him, and he could find no cure. He visited England and consulted some of the

most eminent physicians. He returned no better, but rather worse. For some months before his death I saw him once or twice a week. He was sometimes depressed and low; but, looking to Jesus, he could sing his favourite lines –

Thy mighty Name salvation is,  
And lifts my happy soul above.

He mourned that he had not more fully given himself to the work of saving souls, and that he had ever allowed anything to turn him aside for a moment from this. His confidence in Jesus was very strong at the last. He entered into rest on Easter Sunday, a day ever joyful to him. I preached his funeral sermon in Brunswick Church, from Phil. I. 21. The church was crowded, and all sorrowed for the loss we had sustained.

I was much among the new selectors this year, and was thankful to find that our Missions were growing and prospering everywhere. A grand work had been accomplished in the newly selected parts of our Colony, for which we praised the name of the Lord. I could give extracts from my diary referring to spiritual and financial success, but they would be only a repetition of what I have given before. I will, however, record one interesting case of conversion that gave me great joy. I was preaching one Sunday evening, and many were powerfully wrought upon. I invited all anxious about their souls to meet me in the schoolroom. Among others who came were some young men. There was a long form in front of me. I said, “Now, any of you who will decide for Jesus tonight, come and kneel here.” Five or six came; but seeing others in distress, I said, “There is mercy for every one of you; will not some others of you come?” A fine young fellow started from his seat, saying, “If there’s mercy for everyone, I’ll come;” and he came forward. I explained to them as clearly as I could the simple plan of salvation by faith in Jesus, and exhorted them to trust Him now. While I prayed, some laid hold of the Saviour and rejoiced in Him; but the young man referred to went away burdened and heavy laden. I arranged to meet the penitents again on the Tuesday evening. Coming that evening to the church, I found my young friend waiting near the door, his face shining with joy. “Oh,” I said, “there is no need to ask if you have found the Lord.” “Praise God!” he said, “I obtained mercy while kneeling in my room this morning, and I was just in time for the mail.” “For the mail?” I repeated. “What in the world had the mail to do with your finding mercy?” “Oh,” he replied, “I was just in time to write to my dear old father, and tell him that all his prayers were answered at last, and that Jesus had saved me.” Many a time since then have I thought of that letter, and the joyful news it told. I have fancied an aged couple sitting in their cosy room in some part of England, and talking, as the old folks will, about the children. “Ah,” says the old man, “we have much cause, mother, to praise God for our children, converted and working in the Church; but poor Joseph, away in that far-off land, Australia: he went from us unsaved, yet our prayers will follow him.” Just then there is a sharp knocking at the door, and the old man himself goes to open it, and soon returns with a letter in his hand. “See, mother, see,” he says; “we were just talking about Joseph, and here is a letter from him.” Opening the letter, he asks, “What can the lad mean by writing these few lines only?” Then he reads, “Dear father, the mail is closing. I’ve just time to tell you that all your prayers are answered at last, for Jesus has saved me.” “Glory! Glory! Glory!” Oh what a time for that father and mother! Late on into the night they are still reading that letter, over and over again, or are on their knees crying, “Glory, glory, glory be to God!” Thank God, we have had many of these children of many prayers from the old land saved in Australia. Some of the most touching letters I have ever received have been from sorrowing fathers and mothers in England, begging me to try and find their poor

prodigal; and I have had the happiness of leading some of these to the blessed Saviour. A man once said to me, "I was the only one of the family unsaved. When I was leaving home my dear old father fairly broke down, and cried, 'Oh, Samuel, Samuel, shall I have to say Amen in the Great Day to the damnation of one of my children?'" That word never left him; he was brought to repentance, and died well.

In 1881 there was a break in my work during my visit to England; but on my return in 1882 I was again hard at it, preaching as usual every Sunday, holding missionary meetings during the week, and very often lecturing to large audiences on my trip to Europe and back. During my absence the Rev. S. Williams had superintended the work, and on my return I found all going on well and prospering. Thank God, this year also I saw the converting grace of God, and was glad.