

CHAPTER X Victoria

Melbourne: Brunswick Street

At the Conference of 1883 I asked to be relieved from the Home Mission work and appointed to a Circuit. The constant travelling began to tell on me. I thought some younger man could do the work better, and I had a great longing to be again at Circuit work. Believing it to be God's will, I made the request, which was granted, and I was appointed to the Brunswick Street Circuit for the second time. The Rev. S. Williams was appointed my successor in the Home Missions, and for three years did good service as its General Secretary. He was then made President of the Ladies' College at Launceston, Tasmania, and the Rev. G. S. Bickford was elected General Secretary of the Home Missionary Society. Few men could be so suitable for the position as Mr. Bickford, and under his care the work has greatly flourished.

Our Home Missionary Society – perhaps the most important institution of our Church in Victoria – was commenced at a time when there was a good deal of interest in our Church, and when much discussion was going on in the public papers on various parts of our policy. When the Home Missions were brought under the notice of our people, and they began to see that a great work of vast importance had to be done, debating was soon brought to an end, and all set to work in downright earnest to spread the Gospel through the land, and give the ordinances of religion to the scattered thousands on the new selections. But for the Home Mission many of the outlying districts would have been left to be supplied by others. Now from north to south and from east to west of Victoria there are very few places where there are not Methodist ministrations. But for the Home Missions our poorer Circuits must have been greatly crippled and hindered. Indeed it is questionable whether some of them could have been continued for any length of time: four or five had to be given up as Circuits and placed on the Home Mission Fund. The city work undertaken by the Missions has been of vast importance, and is every year becoming more so. The whole of the results of this Society can never be fully known on earth. With it commenced a new era in our Church, and it is today perhaps more full of life and power and promise, and more popular with all our people, than anything else in the Methodist Church. To God be all the glory!

I entered on my work in the Brunswick Street Circuit in April 1883, and remained the full term of three years; but I was not as strong to labour as during my first term in this Circuit. The preaching work I could still do, but the walking wearied me. I tried to do the same amount of visiting as before; but it was with great difficulty, and very often with no little suffering. I think I was all this time leaning as near or nearer to God. I longed to bring sinners to Christ, and I believe I aimed at this alone; but I did not see the same results as when I was first here. Other churches had been built, many of the people had removed into the suburbs, and the congregation in Brunswick Street was very small compared with what it had been. Many of the young men were working outside the Church. They did not regularly attend our ordinary services, but wished to have meetings of their own and work in their own way. Thus the Church was much divided, and no Church in such a state can ever prosper. Yet we had some blessed meetings, at which believers were quickened and sinners converted.

Frequently on a Sunday evening, instead of holding the regular service. I invited some of the local preachers and leaders to assist me. We had brief addresses, plenty of lively singing, and many short prayers. Generally we had good results. In my own house I also held frequent meetings for conversation on holiness and the work of God. These were times of special refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Sometimes the Spirit came upon us in overwhelming power: this was generally followed by a blessed work on the next Sabbath. I had valuable colleagues, who worked earnestly and well. These were Rev. E. Nye, P. R. C. Ussher, R. Fitcher, and Thomas Grove. I thank God that in every Circuit I had been associated with most devoted men, and we laboured together in great peace and love.

Our General Conference in November 1884 was held in Christchurch, New Zealand. We from Victoria and South Australia were a large company in one of the New Zealand steamers, the captain of which we found to be a truly Christ man. Before we discovered this, one of our laymen was very anxious to speak to the captain about his soul. He got into conversation with him, and gradually approached religious subjects. Thinking to draw the captain out, he made some remark about the Bible, when the captain came nearer to him and, laying a hand on his shoulder, said, "My friend, you must be born again; and till you are, you will never know anything about that matter." Our layman was surprised and greatly delighted, and came to tell us how he had gone to warn the captain, and the captain had warned him. I had many a conversation with the captain after this, and was greatly pleased to find one in his position so fully devoted to God.

At one of the ports of call a large number of passengers came on board, and I was surprised that our cabin, with accommodation for four, was left to me and another. I afterwards learned that my companion had most effectually used me in a remarkable way in order to keep the cabin to ourselves. Shrugging his shoulders and tapping his head, he said to the purser, "See the old gentleman yonder who is in the cabin with me! He's very quiet now, but I hope none of the passengers will come in any way into conflict with him." A word to the ignorant as well as to the wise is often sufficient. The purser jumped at once to the conclusion that I was gone in my mind, and that he had better keep others clear of me; and so we two had the cabin to ourselves. Had I known of this at the time I should have tried to put things right, though perhaps my attempts to prove to the purser that I was sane might have only confirmed him in the conclusion to which he had come.

New Zealand is a charming country. It has a delightful climate, exceedingly fertile soil, and scenery equal to anything in any part of the world. Dunedin is a fine city, and Christchurch, with its green lawns and hedges, its blackbirds, larks, and thrushes, is as like a lovely English town as anything can be.

Our Conference was a very pleasant one: the friends were full of kindness; the services were marked by great power; and although questions of the greatest importance, concerning which there was much division of opinion, came before us, the spirit and temper of the Conference was remarkably good. Our dearly beloved brother, Rev. J. H. Fletcher, was President, and did his work well. At our love-feast, which was a glorious meeting, he said, "Now, brethren, we are going to have a good time: some of you will be so happy that you will shout aloud; when I am very happy I am very quiet." Then he told us of a remarkable answer to prayer in his own life. He

and Mrs. Fletcher were in a small vessel off the coast of New Zealand. It was stormy weather, and a gale was blowing them toward the rocky shore. The captain at last became greatly alarmed, and told Mr. Fletcher that they were in great danger, and must certainly be wrecked. Mr. Fletcher went below and pleaded with God; and the Lord heard his prayer, and gave him a sweet assurance that He would deliver them. He then went on deck and told the captain that God had heard his prayer, and would save them. The captain did not see how it could be, for they were fast drifting on to the shore; but at once the gale began to moderate, and presently the wind veered round, and very soon they were out of danger. Mr. Fletcher was a man of excellent spirit. He was modest and retiring, but he exerted a powerful influence for good on both ministers and laymen. He was a preacher of no mean order. His sermons were clear expositions of God's word, full of light and beauty. As President of Newington College in New South Wales he did a great work, which will continue to bear blessed fruit in our Church. He died at Stunmore in 1890. He had a long and painful affliction; but the grace of God was sufficient for him. A month or so before he died I saw him two or three times, and always found him calmly resting in the arms of his loving Saviour.

At the General Conference I was appointed, in connection with the Rev. F. Langham and W. T. Rabon, a deputation to Tonga, Friendly Islands, to inquire into the sad state of things there, and to report to the Annual Conferences. For some years we had had trouble in Tonga. It had now reached a crisis, and must in some way be dealt with. I was also appointed with the Rev. W. Kelynack, D.D., a deputation to Fiji in 1885, the year of their Jubilee Celebration.

After the Conference, and before I left New Zealand, I heard the painful news that my eldest son, the Rev. J. J. Watsford, had had a bad attack of haemorrhage from the lungs, and was in a very critical state. On my return to Melbourne I found him very ill at Mrs. Holloway's, Coburg. For some days he seemed to hang on the very brink of death, but God graciously heard prayer and raised him up.

Early in 1885 news reached us that there had been a secession from our Church in Tonga that what was called the "Free Church" had been formed; that the greater part of our people had, at the king's command, joined this Church; and that our minister, the Rev. Jabez Watkin, had left with them, and was at the head of the Free Church. The President of the General Conference and the Tongan Committee in Sydney urged the deputation to leave for Tonga as soon as possible. We accordingly made all haste to arrange for our Circuit work, and to go on our important mission. On Monday, April 6th, I left home by express for Sydney. There the Rev. J. Rabone and I met the Tongan Committee. While waiting a few days for the steamer I had the great pleasure of seeing some of my old friends. I was glad to have a long talk with the Rev. W. B. Boyve, who still delighted me in conversation. I went to see my dear friend the Rev. James Watkin, who was fast nearing the end of life. He was very feeble, very humble, and resting solely on the great atoning work of Jesus.

On Friday 10th Mr. Rabone and I left for Fiji. The President of the General Conference and many of the brethren accompanied us to the ship, and commended us to the grace of God. We had a pleasant voyage, fair winds and smooth seas, for which I was devoutly thankful, for I am as poor a sailor, perhaps, as ever went to sea. We arrived at New Caledonia on Wednesday 15th, and remained there two days. New

Caledonia is a French convict settlement. Its principal town is Noumea, at which we called. There were then in the island nine thousand convicts and about two thousand five hundred free whites. The number of the native population I could not ascertain. From all I could hear and see, the morality of Noumea was very low: every third or fourth house in some of the streets is a drinking-shop, and the social evil prevails to an alarming extent. Some time before our visit five hundred young female convicts were sent here from France, with the idea of their becoming the wives of the prisoners at the expiration of their sentences. These were kept in an establishment some distance away. When the time is near at hand for the liberation of any male prisoner, he is allowed to go to the prison for females and choose a wife, and when he is released they are married. It may be there are some good cases, but the universal testimony is that generally they are very bad. The wife in many cases leaves her husband and goes to live a vile life in Noumea, and in others she is kept by her husband and used as a prostitute to make money for him. From all I could learn, the convicts who conduct themselves properly, and have not been guilty of great crimes, are treated well; but the discipline in other cases is very severe. There is an excellent band of music in Noumea, composed of thirty-two performers, all convicts, and each one side to be an artist. Their leader was once a celebrated conductor in Paris. Twice a week they play high-class music, and all Noumea turn out to hear it. While I was delighted with their performance I was greatly pained to see such gifted men in such a degraded and wretched position. Some of the residents at Noumea are Protestants, but there is no place of worship in the town except the Roman Catholic.

We left New Caledonia on Friday 17th, and on Monday at noon were at the wharf at Suva, Fiji. The Rev. F. Langham,¹ the excellent Chairman of the Fiji District, was there to receive us, and gave us a hearty welcome.

We had some difficulty in arranging for getting to Tonga. One plan after another was suggested; but we were at last shut up to chartering a small steamer which was expected to arrive in a few days. We had to pay a large sum for this; but it was absolutely necessary, as we should otherwise have been unable to reach Tonga for a month or more. While waiting for the steamer we rested at the Rev. A. J. Webb's in Levuka. On Sunday I preached in English to a full church, and the power of the Lord was present to heal. Six or seven persons were seeking the Lord. On Monday 27th we started for Tonga. Until we left the Fiji group we had rather a roundabout voyage, having to call at Bua and Vuda. On Wednesday 29th we passed out of the Lakemba barrier reef, and with a fair wind and a very smooth sea we reached Tonga on Friday, May 1st, early in the morning.

I do not intend to refer to all that was said and done in connection with our deputation work in Tonga. I will give briefly the leading facts only. We found that the secession had really taken place; that the "Free Church" had been formed; that the majority of the people had at the king's command joined that Church; that three or four thousand remained truth and faithful to us, determined to suffer anything rather than leave the Wesleyan Church; that while the Rev. J. B. Watkin was called the Head of the Free Church, he was so in name only, Mr. Shirley Baker, formerly a minister in our Church and now Premier of Tonga, being supreme both in Church and State; that our people had been bitterly and cruelly persecuted, and were placed under many disabilities; and

¹ Now in London engaged in revision work. – Ed.

that Mr. Baker was determined to have his own way, and consent to peace on his own terms only. There could be no mistake about these things. We brought many cases of persecution before Mr. Baker; and while he tried to explain away his connection with them, he could not deny them. We came to the conclusion that our minister in Tonga, the Rev. J. Moulton, may have erred, and in our opinion did err, in some things, yet, considering the trying and perplexing circumstances in which he was placed, and the man he had to deal with, we thought that few men would have done better than he had done.

After carefully looking at all the facts of the case, repeatedly interviewing Rev. J. Moulton and the chiefs and people with us, and Mr. Baker, Mr. Watkin, and the chiefs with them, we unanimously agreed to propose four things, which we were prepared to recommend to Conferences: -

1. That the Tonga District now connected with the N. S. Wales Conference be transferred to the Victoria and Tasmania Conference.
2. That the Rev. J. Moulton be removed and appointed to a Circuit in N. S. Wales
3. That the Rev. J. B. Watkin be allowed to withdraw his resignation, that he be appointed to a Circuit in connection with one of the Australian Conferences, and that he suffer no disability on account of anything that has taken place.
4. That the most efficient men that can be found be sent to work in the Tonga District.

These were read to Mr. Moulton, and he at once expressed his agreement with them. They were then read to Mr. Baker and Mr. Watkin; but Mr. Baker objected to the third. He contended that Mr. Moulton should be removed, and Mr. Watkin remain, "and then after some time," he said, "I and Mr. Watkin may bring the two Churches together again." To this we felt that we could on no account consent. We then told Mr. Baker that we should go to Vavau to see the king. Soon after, he sent a request to be allowed to go to Vavau in our steamer. We knew that he was determined that we should not see the king alone, but we granted his request. When we arrived at Vavau Mr. Baker at once landed, and sent us word that the king would see us at seven o'clock. We reached the king's house about twenty minutes to seven, but he would hold no conversation with us till Mr. Baker came. Poor old man! he seemed afraid to speak a word in Mr. Baker's absence. When Mr. Baker came, we told the king of our proposals, and begged him, for his own sake, for Tonga's sake, for Christ's sake, to let us have peace. He, too, objected to our third proposal, saying, "Take away Mr. Moulton! take away Mr. Moulton!" We then repeatedly urged him to promise us that our people should not be persecuted, but he would give us no answer. Greatly pained, we bade the king good-night and left, deeply feeling how great a change had come over King George.

We visited Haabai and saw David Tonga and his wife and the king's daughter, who were all called afterward to suffer for Christ's sake.

We returned to Tonga on Thursday, May 7th, and spent the day in a last effort to induce Mr. Baker to prevent any farther persecution; but all we said and did was in vain. We told him that he had loosed a power that he would not be able to restrain,

and the terrible consequences would one day come upon himself. He laughed at our warning, and we left him.

On Friday morning we left Tonga, having failed, so far as we could see, to accomplish anything, except obtaining full and accurate information of the true state of things there. This we gave in our Report, which was very carefully prepared, and unanimously approved by the members of the deputation. That Report was presented to all the Conferences, and we were thanked for our labours. But in some of the Conferences a few doubted, and did not look very favourably on our Report. They to a great extent held with Mr. Baker and Mr. Watkin, condemned the action of the Sydney Conference, questioned the reality of any persecution worth the name, and were prepared to come to some arrangement that would be satisfactory to Mr. Baker. We of the deputation were prepared to wait the end, knowing that we had gone to Tonga with the firm resolve to be impartial and true, and to do all for the glory of God, fully believing that it would be seen by all at last that we were guided aright. What has since transpired has confirmed all that we said in our Report. His Excellency Sir C. Mitchell, then Governor of Fiji and Her Majesty's High Commissioner for the South Seas, visited Tonga with the Judge of Fiji, and, after carefully inquiring into the persecution, said there was quite enough to justify him in removing Mr. Baker from Tonga. He, however, allowed him to remain, on the promise of the king and Mr. Baker to put an end to the persecution. A deputation from the Sydney Conference was sent, but they could do nothing. At our General Conference held in Melbourne in 1886 the Rev. J. Moulton expressed his willingness to leave Tonga if the Conference thought that would help to bring about peace; and it was then resolved that Mr. Moulton should remove, and that the Rev. G. Brown should go to Tonga as our Commissioner and endeavour to heal the breach. Mr. Brown, who had always been regarded as Mr. Baker's friend, and to some extent his advocate, went on his mission, and did his very best to conciliate and to promote peace. His Report still more seriously inculpated Mr. Baker than any that had gone before. At last, Mr. Baker having written certain letters reflecting on the British Government, His Excellency Sir John Thurston, Governor of Fiji and High Commissioner, who had succeeded Sir C. Mitchell, went to Tonga, and at the request of a number of influential chiefs, most, if not all, members of the Free Church, ordered Mr. Baker to leave the islands. Since Mr. Baker's removal everything has been changed: the exiles have returned home; the prisoners have been released; liberty to worship as the people wish has been allowed; the king became most friendly; and although the results of Mr. Baker's evil work will be felt for years, there is now hope of peace and prosperity.

Our work in Tonga being so far ended, we returned to Fiji, where I remained a fortnight, visiting the scenes of my former labours, and rejoicing over the glorious work done in these islands. We arrived at Levuka at noon on Sunday, May 10th. I preached in English in the evening. The church was crowded, and some were anxious about their souls. On the Monday we proceeded to Bau, where, having to wait some days for the steamer, we prepared our Report.

No words can describe what I felt on this visit to Fiji. Forty-one years had gone since I first came to the islands. Then I was a young man, just beginning my work; now I was an old man, with my work nearly finished. Then Fiji was dark, cruel, cannibal – heathen Fiji; now not a heathen could be found in the land. The change was indeed

marvellous in our eyes – a change from darkness to light, from death to life. Very many of those living when I first came had gone; those remaining, who remembered me, came rejoicing to see me, and said the most complimentary things they could think of: “What a great chief he is!” “Look at him, how straight he is, how strong!” “See his teeth!” said an old lady, “not one has fallen.” They little knew what the dentist had done for me. Then they clapped their hands and shouted, “Oh, how old he must be! It is such a long time since he first came to Fiji: he must be more than a hundred years old.” How glad they were to see me, and how glad I was to see them, and the grace of God in them.

I called at Rewa and saw Rev. W. Bromilow and his devoted wife. An old chief, who remembered me, called at the mission house, and when he saw me cried out, “Oh yes, I remember him; this is the strong missionary that threw the priest into the water-hole.” Whatever else he had forgotten, he still clung to that absurd story that I have referred to elsewhere. I went to Viwa, where I began my Mission work, and saw the graves of John Hunt, Joeli Bulu, and others. When I landed at Bau my heart was full to overflowing. I thought of the scenes I had witnessed and the chiefs I had known. I thought of the great heathen temple where the dead bodies of the slain were brought, and of the huge stone slab in front of it, against which the heads of the dead were dashed before being presented to the gods. I thought of the terrible Thakombau, that man of blood, whom I had often warned to flee from the wrath to come. And I asked, “Where is the temple now?” The answer was, “It is gone; and in its place, yonder, stands that stone Wesleyan church.” “Where is the slab that used to be nearly always covered with blood?” “Come away,” said the missionary, “and I’ll show it to you;” and he led me up the church, and, pointing to the stone baptismal font near the pulpit, said, “There it is.” “And where is Thakombau?” “Come and see his grave,” said Mr. Langham. We went, and, leaning on the fence and looking down on that well-kept grave, I cannot tell how deeply I felt as Mr. Langham said to me, “If ever a man was converted, Thakombau was; and if ever one died a triumphant death, he did.” The story of his death has been told before; it can do no harm if I tell it again as I heard it from the lips of the missionary. In a Fijian chief’s house the sleeping-place is at the end, which is raised a foot or two, and covered with beautiful mats, and hidden from view by a large piece of native cloth suspended as a screen. Behind that screen Thakombau lay for many days waiting for death. “I very often stood at the other side of the screen,” said the missionary, “when the chief had no idea that I was near, and I heard him talking to Jesus, and praying for help and blessing. When he was dying I was there, and heard him cry, ‘Now, Jesus, now is your time to help: no one else can. I’m in the valley and shadow of death; Jesus, hold me fast!’ Then, triumphantly, ‘Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?’ and soon after, the happy spirit of this once terrible cannibal passed away, to be ‘for ever with the Lord.’” Oh the grace, the power of Christ to save!

They would have me conduct a service in their large church at Bau. I had not preached in Fijian for more than thirty years, so I promised to say a few words if Mr. Langham would interpret for me. I gave our the first hymn, and prayed very briefly, and then announced my text, “Lovest thou Me?” (John xxi. 17). Mr. Langham Said, “Say a few words first in Fijian; it will please them so very much.” “I’ll try,” I replied, “but I am afraid I shall soon break down.” I began, and went on and on, the old language coming to me almost as fresh as ever, till, the Lord helping me, I finished the sermon without Langham’s help. Probably I made many mistakes; but

the whole thing seemed wonderful to me. I had particularly noticed how well the natives sang, and I was struck with the interesting, beaming face of the leader, who seemed a host in himself. After the service I asked Mr. Langham, "Who is the leader of the choir?" "Oh!" said he, "don't you know him? Why, that is old blind Shem of Nandi. You'll soon hear of him, for he has been talking much of your coming, and longing to see you." I had not been long seated in the mission house before I saw Shem carefully finding his way along. When he reached the door he asked someone to lead him near to me, and, sitting down at my feet, he clasped my knees and cried, "Oh, my father! my father!" You may be sure I greatly rejoiced to meet him again after so many years. I visited the Native Institution at Navuloa, which is under the care of Rev. W. W. Lindsay, and I was delighted to meet seventy or eighty students there, all neatly dressed and earnest in their work. They were in the midst of their examination. Some of their papers were sent to me, and they were remarkably good. I also received letters from many of them, and I am sure these would compare favourably with any letters from the higher schools in our own land.

Altogether, this visit to Fiji was one of the great events of my life. I saw the grace of God and was glad. I remembered when we sowed in tears, and I could now rejoice with the reapers of an abundant harvest. I thought of the devoted men who had fallen on the field, and of those still living by compelled to retire, worn out in the work. The first missionaries with whom I laboured were good, self-denying men, and those who followed them, Morse, Waterhouse, White, Wilson, Royce, Carey, Nettleton, Wilson, Webb, and others, were worthy successors of such noble leaders. The late Chairman of the District, Rev. F. Langham, who was in Fiji more than thirty years, is a true apostle. He has been made a great blessing to this important mission. The Rev. Walter Lawry used to say, "A faithful Fijian missionary will have a great reward." That, no doubt, is true; but I say, "A faithful Fijian missionary has in the work itself a great reward." I bless God that ever I was sent as a missionary to Fiji. When I came back, an old Christian lady said to me, "Why, it has made a man of you!" Whatever I am I owe it, under God to a great extent, to my having been a Fijian missionary. If I were a young man again, no Colonial Circuit would keep me for a single moment. I would say, "Here am I, send me to the poor dying heathen." I wonder that we have not to put the restraining hand upon our young men in their eagerness to go to the mission field.

On July 15th we left Bau for Suva, calling at Navuloa and Rewa. From Rewa to Suva we had a rough voyage. On our way we found a boat capsized, and the owners struggling in the water. We sailed to them, and our crew of Fijians set to work to help those in distress. After some time they got the boat right, collected all the scattered things, and sent the thankful boatmen on their course again. In the days of heathenism, how differently would they have acted! They would have looked upon the shipwrecked as their lawful prey, and would have made short work with them. But the Gospel has changed the lion into a lamb, has made these once ferocious cannibals kind and compassionate Christians.

Jubilee of Wesleyan Church in Victoria

The year 1886 was the Jubilee year of the Wesleyan Church in Victoria. On April 24th, 1836, the Rev. Joseph Orton preached for the first time in Victoria, and a Church

was then formed. Wonderful have been the changes since then. The success which has attended the labours of our Church should call forth loudest songs of praise. Our statistics for the year 1886 showed that we had 480 churches, 123 schoolhouses, 82 parsonages, 109 ministers, 33 home missionaries, 16,095 Church members, 751 local preachers, 4691 Sabbath School teachers, 40,459 Sabbath School scholars, 2 colleges, and 97,114 attendants on public worship. The population of Victoria this year was over one million, so that ten per cent of the population were Wesleyans. The cost of our buildings amounted to £530,000, the value of land to £122,000. The accommodation provided in our churches was 112,899, or one in every nine of the people. The Lord had done great things for us, whereof we were glad.

At the Conference of 1886 it was resolved to celebrate the Jubilee, and that a Jubilee Thanksgiving Fund should be raised, the objects of the Fund to be: (1) The reduction and removal of existing debts on church, parsonage, and school properties; (2) The raising of funds for the new college affiliated to the Melbourne University, now called Queen's College; (3) The raising of an amount to be funded in aid of necessitous local preachers, the interest accruing from such amount to be administered by the Local Preachers' Aid Association. I was set apart as General Secretary of the Fund, and a large Committee was appointed to carry out the resolutions of the Conference.

As soon as possible after Conference we met to make all necessary arrangements. Papers were prepared and circulated among all our people, fully explaining the Jubilee movement, and pointing out the objects to any or all of which subscribers might direct their donations to be applied. Meetings were held with the representatives of Sabbath Schools, and with the choirs of the Wesleyan Churches, and arrangements made for a great gathering of the children, and for a grand united choir to conduct the singing at all Jubilee meetings. We informed Circuit Committees of all that was being done, and I visited as many Circuits as possible before Jubilee day, giving in public meetings full information of all the plans adopted by the General Committee, and urging the Methodist people to enter heartily into the movement. These meetings were so thoroughly successful and encouraging, that on my report to the Committee they were prepared to go into the matter on a large scale.

The week before Jubilee day, special services for praise, prayer, and testimony were held in every Circuit in Victoria. These were seasons of great power and blessing. The services in Melbourne were very successful. At the meeting in Wesley Church for young men and young women there were over two thousand present, and we had a blessed time. It was a glorious sight to see nearly two thousand young men and young women stand up to testify fully to the Lord Jesus. The holiness meeting, also in Wesley Church, was one that will not soon be forgotten. The large church was crowded, and many testified to the power of Christ to save from all sin.

On Jubilee Sunday, May 16th, appropriate sermons were preached in all Wesleyan churches, and golden offerings presented. All the collections were good: some were very large. Silver offerings were also presented by the young people in the Sabbath Schools. The whole of the collections for the day amounted to nearly £4000. Some persons were so anxious to present their gifts of gold, that having no gold coin to give they offered gold ornaments instead. In the plates were found gold locketts and chains, gold earrings, gold and diamond rings.

I preached the Jubilee Sermon in Wesley Church on Tuesday, May 18th. The text was Psalm cl. 6, "Praise ye the Lord." I felt a good deal in standing before the great crowd that filled the church; but the Lord helped me, and a blessed, thankful spirit rested on the congregation.

Jubilee day, Wednesday, May 19th, was a glorious day indeed – one of the brightest and best our Church has ever known, the influence of which will be felt for many a day to come. The meetings were held in the Exhibition Building; and it was well that the Committee had the courage to secure this, for no other building in Melbourne could possibly have accommodated the crowds that attended. About 1500 were at the breakfast, and about 4000 at tea. The meeting after breakfast, and that after tea, when six or seven thousand were present, were most enthusiastic. They were times of great rejoicing: fervent songs of praise ascended to heaven for the great things God had done. Nor did the people praise God with the lip only, for there was hearty, cheerful liberality. Promises from £1 to £1000 were quickly announced, one after another, till the total reached £18,000, making with the collections on Sunday £22,000 – a willing offering to our God for all His mercies to us and to our Church. I stood on the platform for about two hours without a break, reading out subscriptions. I never in all my life knew such cheerful giving. A gentleman from America, who had travelled round the world, said to me at the close of the meeting, "'ve been the wide world over; I have attended Jubilee meetings in America and Canada; but I assure you I never saw anything like this before. I never saw the money pour in as it has done today."

On Thursday, 20th, a very successful and interesting service, called "An Evening with the Wesleys," was held in Wesley Church. Saturday, 22nd, was the "Children's Day." From all the Wesleyan Sabbath Schools in Melbourne and the suburbs the young people came, to the number of eight or ten thousand, wearing their Jubilee medals, and all full of joy. It was a pleasing, cheering sight when, with thousands of their parents and friends, they gathered in the Exhibition Building, all so glad and happy, and all heartily joining in the sweet songs of praise. As merry a lot of children as ever met together.

After the Jubilee week I visited, with the deputations that had been appointed, the other Circuits, and held meetings in them, and in nearly every place there was the same enthusiasm as at our meetings in Melbourne. The amount promised to the Jubilee Thanksgiving Fund was £40,000. Of this amount more than £35,000 has been received. If the Conference had resolved that subscriptions might be applied to Circuit local objects, a very much larger sum would have been raised; but we think the best plan was adopted. The benefit of this Fund to our Church is immense. The Loan Fund formed for the relief of then existing church debts will continue its work until all are paid off, and will then be amalgamated with our regular Loan Fund that is doing such great service to our Church. The amount given to the Affiliated College has enabled us to build Queen's College, which has been a great success. But for the help from the Jubilee Fund, the building of this College would have been long delayed. The sum invested for local preachers in distressed circumstances will be a help and a blessing to many a good man who has worked on well for the Church. But the money received has not been the only or chief good arising from this Jubilee celebration. The review of God's dealings with us as a Church has called forth the gratitude and increased the faith of our people, and has, we believe, drawn closer to us

our young people, who have rejoiced that they were connected with a Church so honoured of God, and so successful in His work.

Brighton and Richmond

At the Conference of 1887 I was appointed to the Brighton Circuit, having for my colleague the Rev. J. B. Smith. Here I was among a kind and loving people, and I had the pleasure of having near me my old friends, the Rev. W. A. Quick and W. L. Binks. Driving in my buggy to and from my appointments on dark nights was very trying to me, for my sight at night was very bad, and I was sometimes in danger of being thrown over an embankment. I had no idea, however, when I went to the Conference of 1888, that I should be removed, and I was not a little surprised when I was appointed to the Richmond Circuit. I regarded this appointment as from the Lord, and went to Richmond with all confidence that He would bless me there. The Richmond Circuit had just been divided – the Hawthorn District, which was the wealthy part of the Circuit, being formed into a new Circuit. It was thought by some of the Richmond people who had opposed the division, that the Richmond Circuit, notwithstanding an annual grant from Hawthorn, was now too weak to support two ministers, and that we should have difficulties. The Rev. William Shaw, who had just been received into our ranks from the Methodist New Connexion Church, was my colleague, and well and most earnestly did he labour. Very soon we had unmistakable prosperity. The finances of the Circuit so improved that we were able to employ a Home Missionary at Cremorne Street. We formed bands for house-to-house visitation, for outdoor preaching, and for the care of strangers who visited our churches. Many of the members began to work well, and we had blessed results. When I had laboured here about eighteen months I had a very severe affliction. I had attended the District Meeting in the morning, and had told by brethren that I was watching and waiting, looking out for my Lord, for I knew not but that He might soon and suddenly come. In the afternoon I visited the sick in my Circuit. On returning home I felt very weary. In the evening we had a large and interesting meeting at our Bible Class. After this, one of our ministers was waiting to consult me on a most important business connected with his Circuit. While talking with him I felt very ill, and as soon as he had gone was completely prostrated. I thought the end was near; but I was calmly resting on Jesus. The doctor pronounced my case a bad one, the liver, pleura, and lungs being affected. He said to me, “The Lord can bring you through it, and you must look to Him.” I felt I could fully and cheerfully leave myself in the hands of my loving Father. What I was most concerned about was that I should glorify Him in the fire, and not say a single word of murmuring or complaining. I bless Him that He gave me all the grace I needed. Just opposite my bed was a text of Scripture that gave me day after day great comfort: “As they day, so shall thy strength be.” I seemed to hear my Lord saying to me, “If I gave you a pound or ten pounds to bear, and I gave you strength sufficient for that you would not sink beneath the load, and so if I give you a hundredweight or even a ton to bear, and I give you sufficient strength to bear that, is not that enough?” And I could say, “Yes, my Lord, quite enough.” So I proved it. Let me here say, “Put up these texts about your house: they’ll speak some day.” Another text, sent to me by my daughter, who was lying very ill in an adjoining room, was made a great blessing to me: “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” What more could I need? Oh, what rest was here! I now felt how precious Jesus was: how He alone was all in all to

me: no hope, no rest, no peace, no life apart from Jesus. One of my dear brethren who came to see me said, "You have a good record of fifty years' work done for Jesus;" but I turned away in a moment from that, and felt, "I have a good record of fifty years and more of the forbearance and love of my blessed Lord." I could go nowhere but where the saintly Wesley had to go at last, and cry, "I the chief of sinners am; but Jesus died for me." Of the first ten days I do not remember very much; but I remember the goodness of my God, and how He blessed me. For every pain He poured in a balm of heavenly sweetness. Generally in my former afflictions I had turned completely against food—it was nauseous to me; now, when the doctor told Mrs. Watsford that so much depended upon my taking food very frequently, everything given to me was so delicious that it seemed as if I had not before tasted anything so nice. The washing of my hands and face seemed like bathing in Paradise.

Just opposite our house was a stone-mason's yard, where they made a great noise hammering and chiseling the hard granite. The stewards of the Circuit tried to get them to moderate the noise, if possible. They said they would do what they could, but their work must be done. The doctor thought it would greatly disturb and injure me; but I left it in the Lord's hands, and He either put a little extra wax in my ears, or gave me what the doctor called "catarrh of the tubes of the ears," so that the hammering of the stone-masons gave me very little trouble. My wife brought our beautiful little canary to my window to let me hear his sweet song; but though they said he was singing nearly all the day, I only heard a faint sound once. "What a pity you cannot hear him sing," they said; "it is so sweet and delightful." "Ay," I said; "so, no doubt, it is; but only think, I can scarcely hear the stone-masons: is not that a blessing?" The stewards of our church and all the friends were extremely kind, doing all that could be done for me. Nor they alone. All my ministerial brethren, and ministers and members of other Churches, were full of sympathy and love. Special prayer was made to God for me in the Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Independent, Baptist, and Methodist churches, and our friends in Victoria, South Australia, and New South Wales were all praying to God to raise me up again. All this deeply moved me, and I know it was in answer to prayer that I was brought back from the very gates of death. I remember well one night when I knew that prayer was answered, and that I was to live. A feeling of disappointment tried to rise, that when so near home I should have to go back again; but God saved me from this, and enabled me to say, "Thy will be done!"

For three nights when my complaint was at its worst I had a peculiar and wonderful experience. Every night from the close of day to the dawn I had a glorious vision of the redeemed. The world of spirits was before me, and among the multitude that no man could number I saw many whom I had known and loved on earth: not in shining robes, but just as I had known them on earth, only with the "solar light," as Joseph Cook calls it, on every face. They looked on me and smiled. The whole night the scene was before me. I slept very little, only at short intervals, and awaking, there were the redeemed before me. It was no dream: what was it? Speaking of it to one of our ministers, he said, "Why, Paul says we are 'compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses,' and those nights the veil was drawn aside and you saw them." A Presbyterian minister to whom I spoke about the matter, said, "You realised then what Paul says, 'We are come to the church of the first-born,' etc. Though we generally see them not, it is a fact, and God may sometimes permit His servants to see them."

In about six weeks I was allowed to sit up, and in about two months the doctor permitted me to go to church in the morning, when I publicly returned thanks to God for His mercy to me. Not till the end of March could I take any service. Before the Conference I saw the members of the Circuit Quarterly Meeting, and released them from the invitation they had given me to remain in the Circuit another year. They unanimously pressed me to stay with them, promising to do all they could to help me. At last I agreed to do so if they Conference would send a young minister to help me. At the Conference I received a hearty welcome from my brethren, and the proposal to send a young minister to assist me was at once agreed to, and the Rev. T. Collins was appointed.

I had not intended to go to the General Conference in Sydney; but all thought that the change would do me good, and I went. The very day I arrived in Sydney the prevailing influenza seized me, and during the whole of Conference I had it very severely.

The most important question at the General Conference was the “class-meeting text of membership.” We had a long debate. The Conference was nearly equally divided; and it seemed as if we could not hold together as we were, or if we did not separate at once we should be a divided Church, and as such could not long stand. We carried a resolution by a small majority affirming that the class meeting should remain a test of membership, and then about four o’clock the various amendments proposed were went to a Committee for consideration. During the day I had shown to the different parties into which the Conference was divided, what seemed to me the best solution of the difficulty. I had been a good deal distressed about the matter for some days, and had earnestly prayed to God to direct us. The scheme I proposed seemed to open to me as if from the Lord. All to whom I showed it thought that nothing had been proposed would so well meet the case. When we went into Committee I was requested to read my proposals to the meeting. Very soon, with a few verbal alterations and a preamble added, it was unanimously agreed to. At seven o’clock we went into Conference, and our report was read and most favourably received. The next morning it was adopted, only one voting against it. The two principal points in the scheme were: 1. That meeting in class should mean meeting in the regular weekly class, or in a meeting held once a month for fellowship and testimony. 2. That a roll-book be kept in each Circuit, and that no name be added to the roll or removed from it by the minister if the Leaders’ Meeting object.

Soon after the settlement of the Class Meeting question I returned to Melbourne. Mr. Collins was now in the Circuit with me, working very earnestly and successfully; but the health of my excellent colleague, Rev. H. Brownell, failed, and he had at last to give up his work. This made it very heavy for me. I was altogether unequal to the full work of a Circuit; but I struggled on, very often suffering what no one knew, till in the end I was forced to give in, and allow others to do the work for me. Of course the Circuit suffered too, and this to me was a great trial. The Rev. Dr. Danue, an Independent minister, very kindly helped me in my distress, very frequently taking part, or the whole, of my work on the Sunday.

At one of the last services I conducted in the Richmond Circuit we had a most interesting case of decision for Christ that greatly delighted me. A very fine, intelligent, moral young man, of an old Methodist family, was a regular hearer in our

church, but a hearer only. As he afterwards told me, he was fast drifting into all manner of worldly pleasure and amusement. The theatre and opera-house were becoming very attractive. He looked upon religion as a restraint, a bondage, and believed that the only pleasure was to be found in "the world." He thought the preacher was too often and too strongly pressing the necessity of decision for Christ. On the first Sunday evening in the year 1891 I preached from the words, "Your reasonable service." I longed to see results, and had gone to the church expecting the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The Covenant service was held after the first service, and I was glad to see this young man remain. We had a good time; the Lord was very near. I administered the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper after this, and had given the bread and wine, as I thought, to all who were willing to partake of them, and had announced the closing hymn, when, all alone, this young man walked up to the communion rail and knelt down. I could see that he was under deep emotion: his hands were clasped and his head bent low. In a moment I understood what was going on. I had no need to ask him a word: the hour of decision, I knew, had come. Waiting a while, I approached him and gave him the bread and wine. We then sang; but he still knelt in earnest prayer. At the close of the service he seemed unable to speak, but his pressure or my hand said more than words. I bid him "goodnight," and only added, "Come to our testimony meeting on Wednesday evening." He said, "I will." On the Wednesday evening I was too ill to attend the meeting, but I learned that the first to speak after the meeting was opened was my young friend. He rose and said, "It would be mean of me if I did not rise and tell what the good Lord has done for me." Then he told of his decision for Christ on Sunday evening. He referred, as he did another time when I heard him, to the idea he had entertained that it would be a great loss, and very hard, to give up worldly amusement and pleasure; but, said he, "Christ has more than made up all that to me." The Church greatly rejoiced and praised God for this conversion, and his friends at home were filled with joy. One who had often prayed for him told me that he went home on the Sunday evening, and, meeting her at the door, cried, "Oh, it's done now; I have decided for Jesus." And, said she, "What a blessed change in him!" A week or two after his conversion he wrote to be praising God for what He had done for him, and enclosing £5, which he wished given to what I thought most needed help. If this young man is faithful, he will be a great blessing.