

EARLY METHODISM
IN VICTORIA.

AN ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE JUBILEE
CELEBRATION, MAY 19TH,

WITH NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS,

BY THE

REV. JOHN C. SYMONS.

“Jubilate Deo.”

MELBOURNE :

WESLEYAN BOOK DEPOT, LONSDALE ST. EAST.
A. J. SMITH, SWANSTON STREET.

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EARLY METHODISM.

MR. PRESIDENT AND FRIENDS—It would be affectation on my part to pretend that I address you to-day without considerable trepidation, and some misgivings. My address will purposely be almost exclusively historical and biographical. It will probably be dull and uninteresting to many who ignore and forget the persons and work of the past and passing generations. Still, I hope there are many who feel that in a celebration like the present it would be unjust not to make a very distinct record of the work which the pioneers of Methodism have, by God's help, accomplished. They laboured, and you enter into their labours.

Dr. Mulford of America was once spoken to by a friend, who was about to give a course of lectures in Boston, and who expressed some misgivings as to his undertaking.

After a few moments' silence Dr. Mulford said—

“Now, there is no one within sight or sound of Boston who knows so much of this subject as you do. Therefore you should give your lectures without fear or favour. You have no apologies to make. You must speak with authority.”

I can scarcely venture to apply these words to myself; but I shall certainly make no apology for the nature or length of my address to you to-day.

Most of the present generation know little of the men who laid the foundation of our church in this fair land; they have a very inadequate idea of their toil, anxiety, and self-sacrifice. If I detain you somewhat beyond my proper time, and if I tire you with details which some may care little about; if I am considerably egotistic in some of my remarks, I must ask you to remember that most men become garrulous in their old age. I may also plead privilege, as the senior of all my brother ministers in full work, so far as this colony is concerned—that there are only two ministers in full work in the Australasian Conference, whose colonial ministry began

before mine—and that my first sermon in Victoria dates back to November, 1846.

Fifty years ago, on the 24th of April, as you all know, the first public religious service was conducted in Port Phillip—or Australia Felix, as it was then called—by the Rev. Joseph Orton.* Previous to this—in 1835—the late Mr. Henry Reed of Launceston had visited the settlement. In a statement published by himself, he says: “I went over to devise some means of preserving the natives from destruction. There were then but two or three huts in the place; Batman’s, Fawkner’s, and I believe another. Batman’s brother, Buckley, and three Sydney natives occupied Batman’s hut. Had prayers in the hut with these five men every day, read the Scriptures, and preached Christ to them; the Sydney natives understanding a little English. No doubt this was the first time the gospel was ever proclaimed in Victoria. The Yarra Yarra tribe corroborated to me where the City of Melbourne now stands, and alone I accompanied them up the river, and lived with them for a short time.”

William Buckley, of whom Mr. Reed speaks, had run away from, and was left behind by, Colonel Collins, who in 1804 abandoned the settlement which he had intended to make in Port Phillip, and removed to Hobart Town. Buckley had lived among the blacks for over thirty years, and when found by the new settlers had forgotten his own language.

As early as 1827 Mr. John Batman and Mr. J. T. Gelli-brand had proposed to form a settlement at Western Port, if they could obtain a grant of land; but their application to Governor Darling was unsuccessful.

In 1835 Mr. Batman crossed Bass’ Straits in a small schooner of 30 tons called the “Rebecca,” and after exploring Port Phillip Bay, anchored at the mouth of the Yarra.

* As a matter of fact, the first religious service held on the shores of Port Phillip was on the 23rd October, 1803, by the Rev. Robert Knopwood, chaplain of Lieut.-Colonel Collins’s expedition, at Point Nepean, near what is now called Sorrento. But the intended settlement was abandoned and removed to Hobart Town; so that it cannot be regarded as connected with the settlement of Port Phillip. Mr. Bonwick takes this view. See his *Discovery and Settlement of Port Phillip*, p. 132.

Reaching the site of Melbourne, in a whale-boat, on June 8th, 1835, he records in his journal—"This will be the place for a village."

Having purchased, as he supposed from the aborigines about 500,000 acres more or less, for a few blankets, tomahawks, and trinkets, he returned to report his success to the company which he represented, and to send over stock and emigrants.

On his second voyage (April, 1836) when he brought over his wife and family, Mr. Batman was accompanied by the Rev. Joseph Orton, who, on the 24th April preached two sermons on Batman's Hill, at which most of the Europeans of the settlement, numbering at that time about forty, together with about fifty aborigines, were present. The services were in the open air under the shade of the sheoak trees, which grew somewhat thickly upon the knoll. Among those present were Mr. James Simpson, the first police magistrate, who acted as clerk, and Dr. Alexander Thompson, who raised the tunes and led the singing. Thus, at this first service there was an evangelical alliance; the preacher a Wesleyan, the clerk an Episcopalian, and the precentor a Presbyterian. A striking feature in the congregation was ten Sydney blacks, dressed in red shirts, white trousers, with black kerchiefs round their necks. The chief wore a full military suit, with a colonel's cocked hat and feathers.

Mr. Orton left in the Quarterly Meeting minute-book a "Memorandum of the Rise of Wesleyan Methodism in the Town of Melbourne," from which I take the following, viz.:—

"Sunday, April 24th, 1836. At eleven o'clock the people of the settlement were assembled for public worship on the premises of Mr. John Batman. The service was commenced by reading the Liturgy of the Church of England, after which I addressed the audience from the young ruler's question, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?' At the conclusion of my discourse I took occasion to dwell on the propriety of a consistent deportment on the part of the settlers in this new settlement, particularly enjoining them to acknowledge God in all their ways, that they might ensure the Divine blessing with their undertakings; otherwise they might expect His curse in all they undertook.

"In the afternoon, the people again assembled, to whom I preached from John i. 12. The number of Europeans present

was greater than in the morning, but the largest portion of my congregation consisted of natives, about fifty in number, who sat very quietly during the time of service, and seemed particularly interested by the singing. I took the opportunity to make an appeal to the intelligent part of my audience in behalf of these poor degraded creatures, among whom they had come to reside, and whose land they had come to occupy ; endeavouring to show their incumbent duty to use all possible means to promote their temporal and spiritual welfare. I have not been more interested by any sight than the one presented this afternoon. My soul truly went out after their best interests. I felt as though I could sacrifice every personal comfort for their welfare. I longed to be able to communicate my views and feelings to them. I could but pray and anticipate the happy day when these poor creatures, or at least their rising progeny, will come to a knowledge of the truth, and participate in the blessings of the light of the glorious gospel."

Little did that small band of enterprising pioneers, on that Sabbath morning dream that in fifty years the spot on which they stood would be the terminus of a national system of railways ; that the desolate wilderness around them would be transformed into a city of 350,000 inhabitants—" Marvellous Melbourne," as Mr. G. A. Sala has called it—and that we to-day should be assembled in this noble building to celebrate and commemorate that humble service ; and unhappily that the natives whose condition so moved the preacher would have all but disappeared before the white population.

Among the earliest settlers in Port Phillip were some families of Methodists. Near the end of 1836, or the beginning of 1837, these formed themselves into a society. They consisted of Mr. George Lilly, Mr. J. J. Peers, Mr. W. Witton, Mr. Thomas Jennings, and one or two others. In March, 1837, they numbered seven, and Mr. W. Witton was appointed leader. Of this small band Mr. Witton and the widow of Mr. Peers still survive and reside in the colony.*

* Mr. C. Stone, who arrived in Melbourne in the latter part of 1838, says, Mr. Lilly, with Mr. Thomas Watson, known to old colonists as Waterloo Watson—he having fought in that battle—formed a class which met in the house of Mr. Geo. Worthy. Others say that it was in Mr. Thomas Jennings' house, near the present Queen's Wharf, that the first class was held, and afterwards in Mr. Witton's, in Bourke-street.

One of the objects of Mr. Orton's first visit was to arrange for a mission to the Aborigines. Taking Buckley with him for a guide, he proceeded about forty miles beyond Geelong and selected a spot for a mission station on the River Barwon, which afterwards became known as Buntingdale. Early in June, 1838, Mr. Orton proceeded to Sydney, to obtain a "location grant" for the mission. Sir Richard Bourke received him very favourably, and recommended the Legislative Council to provide half the cost of establishing the mission, and half the annual expense of its maintenance, up to a sum which had been named in the annual missionary report.

Meanwhile the Rev. Francis Tuckfield, and the Rev. Benjamin Hurst, who had been sent from England for this mission, had arrived in Hobart Town. Mr. Tuckfield left for Buntingdale in June, 1838, taking with him a tent, timber for temporary buildings, and stores. Mr. Hurst was detained by sickness, and did not proceed to his destination for some months.

Mr. Tuckfield preached in Melbourne on 21st July, 1838, from 1 Cor. xv. 3, a most appropriate text with which to begin his mission. Proceeding to Geelong he preached there, on 28th July, from Psalm lxxxiv. 11; and while making arrangements for the mission-station at Buntingdale, continued to preach in Geelong twice each Sunday until February, 1839. The services were held at first in a large shed or store on the Barwon, belonging to Dr. Thompson.*

For a most interesting history of the Buntingdale Mission, let me refer you to the papers by the Rev. J. B. Smith, in *The Spectator* of last year.

Mr. Orton visited Port Phillip again in April, 1839, and found that in the three years since his first visit the few huts and tents of 1836 had grown into "an extensive town, containing four or five hundred houses, many of them handsome buildings." The Methodist Society had increased to thirty, a brick chapel had been built, which would hold about 150 persons; there were two or three local preachers, a Sabbath-school had been commenced, prayer-meetings were regularly

* In 1841 a two-story wooden house was bought (the Rev. B. Hurst advancing the money). A part of the upper story was removed, making a sort of gallery. This was succeeded by a neat stone church on the site of the present church.

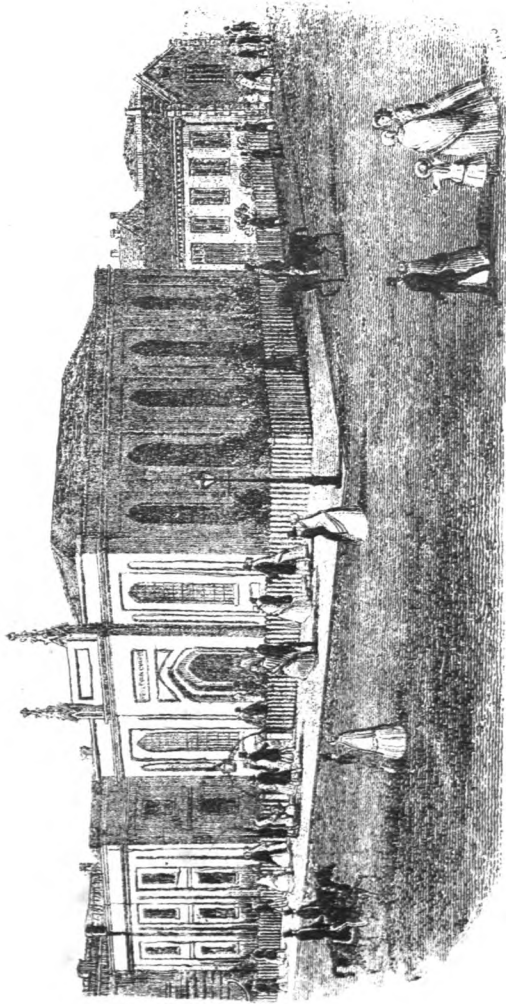
held in several places, tract distribution was in regular operation, and altogether the young church showed a vigorous life.

The brick church just referred to was the first place of worship erected in the colony.* It stood at the corner of Swanston-street and Flinders-lane, and was built by Mr. J. J. Peers, upon his own land, and leased by him on trust for a church at a nominal rent. Before the lease terminated the new church was erected, and Mr. Peers cancelled the lease.

When the new and larger church in Collins-street was built, this humble erection was transformed into a cottage, in which Mr. William Clarke, for many years organist of Collins-street Church, resided. Subsequently it became the kitchen of the Queen's Arms Hotel, and still forms some portion of that premises.

This church soon became too small, and as most of the population was westward of Swanston-street, application was made to the Sydney Government for the grant of half an acre of land at the north-west corner of Collins and Queen-streets. This land had been bought for £40 by a gentleman in Sydney, who forfeited his deposit of £4 rather than complete the purchase. The Rev. William Simpson had been deputed by the Van Diemen's Land District Meeting to visit Port Phillip. Referring to this, he says: "A most eligible piece of land has been reserved by the Sydney Government for the purpose of a chapel, with an intimation, however, that it will not be secured to the society until funds to the amount of £300 are actually raised, and deposited in one of the banks.

*I am unable to give the exact date of this erection (Mr. Peers' papers were destroyed by fire). I believe it was towards the end of 1838. There appears to be some doubt as to whether this was the "first place of worship erected in the colony." There was a small wooden building which in 1837 was used for public worship; it stood, I believe, a little back from Collins-street, near where St. James' Church now stands. Mr. Bonwick says, "Though ostensibly for the Church of England, it was open in the afternoon to the occasional ministry of other denominations." I have understood that this building was not used exclusively for public worship, and so I believe my statement in the text to be accurate. A correspondent of the *Argus*, June 1st, quotes from the first printed number of the *Melbourne Advertiser* to show that I am in error; but the paragraph which he quotes states, respecting the building to which he refers, "in which is also kept a day school."



WESLEYAN CHURCH AND PREMISES, COLLINS AND QUEEN STREETS.

Foundation Stone laid 11th May, 1840 ; Opened 24th June, 1841 ; Enlarged 1849. Land sold 30th July, 1857. The materials of the Church taken down and used in part in the North Melbourne (Hotham) Church. Site of Church now Bank of Australasia, Parsonage now Australian Alliance Insurance Company, School (Queen Street) now Royal Insurance Company.

In consequence of this, and inasmuch as attempts are now being made by the gentry of the town to obtain the land for other public purposes, I thought it necessary to endeavour to secure the land to the society at once. I accordingly called together a few of the friends, six of whom volunteered to raise £50 each, by the second Tuesday in January, and to write to Mr. M'Kenny immediately to obtain a grant. So that I hope there is no danger of our losing so valuable a plot of ground." This meeting must have been in December, 1839. I have ascertained through Mr. Witton, that the six Methodists to whom we are so greatly indebted were, Messrs. Peers, Lilly, Jennings, Witton, Thorpe, and Willoughby.

The land being secured, no time was lost in commencing the building. The foundation-stone was laid by the Rev. Benjamin Hurst on the 11th of May, 1840, "in the presence of an immense assembly." The church was of brick, 47 by 57; the design Gothic, and was prepared by Mr. Peers, and for that period of the colony it was a bold and noble enterprise for so small a community.

The church was opened on Thursday, the 24th June, 1841. The Rev. S. Wilkinson read the liturgy, and the Rev. J. Waterfield, of the Independent Church, preached in the morning from Matt. vi. 10. The Rev. Joseph Orton preached in the evening from Psalm cxxxii. 7, 8. On Sunday, 27th, the Rev. F. Tuckfield preached in the morning from Psalm cxxxvii. 5; in the evening the Rev. James Forbes, of the Scots' Church, preached from Acts viii. 5. The collections at these services amounted to £122 14s. 9½d. The tea-meeting, held on Monday, 28th, was addressed by the Revs. Messrs. Wilkinson, Waterfield, Orton, Forbes, Tuckfield, and Messrs. Dredge, Marsden, and Thorpe.

The cost of the building was reported to be (when completed) £3000, of which £1000 was given by the Government, £1200 contributed, £300 promised; leaving a deficit of £500.

Though out of chronological order, it may be as well here to state, that in 1849 the church was lengthened 30 feet, according to the original design. In 1857, while the Rev. W. L. Binks was superintendent, the land was sold for £40,000, with a portion of which Lonsdale-street Church and premises were built.* The church itself was pulled down, and

*The foundation-stone of Lonsdale-street Church was laid by Sir Henry Barkly on 2nd December, 1857; opened 26th August.

some of the materials were used in the North Melbourne (or Hotham) Church, particularly the windows, pews, and portions of roof. On the site of the church the Bank of Australasia now stands.

Dear old Collins-street ! What memories cluster round that name and spot ! There I worshipped on my first Sabbath in Melbourne ; there I preached my first sermon in the colony, now thirty-nine and a half years ago ; there I was ordained, in company with my dear brother Wells. There many who are present, and many of your fathers and mothers, worshipped. It has a grand history.

Mr. Orton paid a third visit to Port Phillip, arriving in Melbourne on 3rd October, 1840. He found the Swanston-street Church crowded to excess, "the spacious and handsome church in Collins-street in course of erection." At the first Quarterly Meeting on January 28th the number of members reported was 109. Of the eleven persons present, two are still alive—viz., Mr. William Witton and Mr. Thomas Wellard.

The Rev. Samuel Wilkinson was the first resident Wesleyan minister in Melbourne.* He arrived from Sydney in April, 1841 ; both he and Mr. Orton were present at the Quarterly Meeting on May 14th. In February, 1842, Mr. Orton took ship for England, but died on the voyage, off Cape Horn, on April 30th. At this Quarterly Meeting it was resolved—"That the cordial thanks of the meeting are due to Mr. J. J. Peers, for his indefatigable and continued exertions on behalf of the Melbourne chapel."

I shall be pardoned for referring somewhat fully to this excellent man, to whom, more than any other single person, Victorian Methodism is indebted.

Mr. Peers, with his wife and two children, had in March, 1837, set sail from George Town for Adelaide, in the brig "Isabella," intending to settle there. The brig was wrecked at Cape Nelson during the night of April 1st.† The weather was fine, and the crew and passengers, numbering twenty-one persons, were got into the boats—Mrs. Peers and her children

* Now a supernumerary in Sydney.

† She was commanded at the time by Captain Hart, afterwards so well known as a merchant at Port Adelaide.

with only their night-dresses and some loose wrappings. In the morning they reached Portland Bay, where the men of the whaling station aided them to land safely, took them to their huts, and treated them with great kindness. From thence they were taken to Mr. Henty's, and most hospitably cared for, and provided with clothing. A small vessel from Launceston arrived, and in a day or two Mr. Peers and his family returned by her, having lost all their goods in the shipwreck.

This accident changed their destination. Mr. Peers proceeded to Melbourne, purchased land, and about the end of 1837 removed his family to Port Phillip. Until he could build his "wattle and dab" hut, he and his family were kindly housed by Mr. Thomas Jennings, in whose hut it is said the first class-meetings were held (though others say they were first held in Mr. Witton's cottage in Bourke-street, where prayer-meetings and preaching was also conducted). This, as well as Mr. Peers' hut, was in what is now Flinders-street, not far from the Queen's Wharf.

I have spoken of Mr. Peers building the first church; he took the most active part in the erection of the Collins-street Church, and was one of its first trustees. For many years Mr. Peers was the leader of the choir; through his efforts the organ was obtained (it is still in use in Wesley Church, and is one of the best in the colony). Under his direction, and with the efficient services at the organ of Mr. William Clarke (known to old colonists as Music Clarke), the service of song in Collins-street was rendered with an excellence which has not been surpassed, and is unequalled to-day by any Methodist choir in Victoria.

Mr. Wilkinson was succeeded—in 1842—by the Rev. W. Schofield, who remained until 1845, when he removed to New South Wales, and his place was supplied by the Rev. Edward Sweetman.* By the end of that year the number of members

* Mr. Sweetman (in company with the Rev. Stephen Rabone) was wrecked at the Cape de Verde Islands, in the "Sir Thomas Munro," on December 10th, 1834. On October 2nd, 1839, he again sailed for New South Wales in the "Union," together with the Revs. J. Innis, H. H. Gaud, and Webb. The mission party arrived in Sydney on the 24th February, after a passage of 145 days. The foundation of the York-street (Centenary) Church was being laid, and they were able to be present at it, and the Annual Missionary Meeting, respecting which Mr. Sweetman wrote, "We were much gratified by these

reported was 359, with 17 on trial. Population was spreading in various directions; villages had sprung up as suburbs of Melbourne, and the names of Richmond, St. Kilda, Brighton, New-town (or Collingwood), Brunswick, Pentridge, and Williamstown, had one after another appeared on the circuit plan.

The growing importance of Australasia induced the Missionary Committee to send out a minister to succeed the late Rev. John Waterhouse as General Superintendent. The selection of the Rev. W. B. Boyce for this important position was eminently wise, and to his sagacity, and timely aid in the distribution of funds entrusted to him by the parent society, much of the subsequent stability and success of our church in this, as in the other colonies, is justly due. He was appealed to by Mr. Sweetman for additional ministers for the rapidly-increasing population of Port Phillip. The answer to that appeal was the sending the Rev. William Lowe,* the Rev. John Harcourt,† and the Rev. W. C. Currey‡ to Mr. Sweetman's help.

In 1850 the Rev. W. Butters§ succeeded Mr. Sweetman. By this time Melbourne had become a large and handsome town, and the colony was in a prosperous state. Population was settling in various districts. As far as it was possible the Wesleyan Church strove to meet the spiritual wants of the colonists, not only in the towns but also among the pastoral and agricultural parts. A "Bush Missionary"—the Rev. Samuel Waterhouse—was appointed to itinerate among the families scattered in the wilderness.

But a new era was to burst suddenly upon the young colony. During 1851 gold had been discovered in large quantities in New South Wales, and had produced intense excitement throughout Australasia. Crowds rushed to the

meetings, and by the presence of our brethren." Grave and dignified in bearing, noble in presence, courteous and affable in manners, a preacher of a high order, Mr. Sweetman was regarded with something akin to reverence, and his memory is warmly cherished by the older colonists. He returned to England in 1854, and died on Nov. 6th, 1856.

* Now a supernumerary in Western Australia.

† Supernumerary at Kew.

‡ Retired from the ministry in 1866, and died in 1882.

§ Now a supernumerary in London.

new Eldorado ; many places were almost depopulated, and persons of all classes were hurrying away to the goldfields.

Years before this, gold had been found in Victoria, but not in such quantities as to excite much attention. Towards the end of 1851 rich finds of the precious metal were discovered near Mount Alexander, Bendigo, and Mount Buninyong—now known as Castlemaine, Sandhurst, and Ballarat. In October of that year, the escort, on one occasion, brought one ton weight of gold from Mount Alexander ; and almost equally large quantities were brought from Ballarat. This caused population to pour into Victoria from the adjoining colonies to an extent almost incredible. South Australia in three months sent 15,000 men out of a population of 60,000 all told. Men left their farms uncultivated, deserted their stations, abandoned their homes ; villages were depopulated ; Melbourne was decimated—all were “ off to the diggings.” Clerks left their desks, tradesmen closed up their shops, or left their wives in charge of them. Merchants left their counting-houses, mechanics deserted their workshops, policemen left the people to protect themselves—in some cases parsons left their congregations ; one and all were away to scramble for the precious metal. It is impossible by any description to convey to the present generation the fierce and overpowering excitement, which, like an epidemic, swept over the entire population.

As may be supposed, the gold attracted to Victoria the worst characters from the surrounding colonies ; and as money was abundant, drunkenness, lawlessness, and immorality prevailed. Thoughtful Christian men stood paralysed, and felt themselves powerless in such a whirlpool of disorder, and such an outburst of vice. The excitement and infatuation pervading the community were highly unfavourable to religion ; the circumstances were unparalleled ; there was no experience enabling any one to predict what the issue would be. These were such times as those only who passed through them can realise, and they have no desire to repeat the experience. The young church was just sixteen years old ; its ministers only numbered five, viz. : Revs. W. Butters, J. Harcourt, F. Lewis, W. Lightbody, and S. Waterhouse, and one of these—Mr. Waterhouse—was under orders to proceed to Fiji. It was impossible to leave the congregations in the settled towns, especially as almost all the local

preachers had "gone to the diggings." Messrs. Butters and Harcourt visited, and held occasional services, at Mount Alexander, and Mr. Lewis did the same at Ballarat.

Never did the peculiar organisation of Methodism appear to greater advantage than at this juncture. Many local preachers, both from Victoria and the sister colonies, had gone to dig for gold. These valued brethren commenced and maintained religious services in many a gully, and on many a creek side; where on the Sunday the sound of the singing, the voice of prayer, and the proclamation of the gospel was heard, and companies of rough, bearded, earth-stained diggers gathered round these evangelists, and joined in the worship of Almighty God. Small companies of Methodists, as they "camped" near each other, held their class and prayer meetings in each other's tents, and thus, amid the excitement and confusion around them, maintained their piety. If the history of each neighbourhood, as to the commencement of religious services could be written, it would be found that in a large majority of instances Wesleyan local preachers were the first to begin them.

The first appointment of a minister to the goldfields took place in 1852. South Australia had lost a fourth of its population by migration to Victoria. Among these was a large proportion of Wesleyans. An extensive scheme of church building had just been completed, when this exodus almost emptied the churches, and left the residue with a crushing burden of debt. Under these circumstances, and as no minister was available in Victoria, I volunteered to proceed to the goldfields for six months. (I had been labouring in South Australia since 1849.) My mission was twofold—to preach to the diggers, and to raise funds among the South Australians towards the debts on the newly-erected churches.*

I reached Melbourne in February, 1852, and after consultation with Messrs. Butters, Lewis, and Harcourt, proceeded to Forest Creek diggings, where I preached my first sermon on the first Sunday in March, 1852. I had brought a tent, cooking utensils, and other appliances with

* For a report of this mission see *Life of Rev. D. J. Draper*, pp. 349—355.

me. I pitched my tent on what was then known as Pennyweight Flat, about half-way between old Post-office Hill (now Chewton) and Barker's Creek (now Castlemaine). Here I was joined by Mr. Joshua Chapman as my colleague; and together with a noble band of local preachers we were able to hold services on Sundays in the open air in about ten different places. From thence we extended our labours to Bendigo (now Sandhurst), when the population migrated to that district.

The first building erected for public worship on any of the Victorian goldfields was on what is now called "Wesley Hill," near Castlemaine. It was a rough structure, built of slabs with canvas roof, and was opened for divine worship on the first Sunday in July, 1852, on which occasion I preached twice, and held a love-feast and sacramental service in the afternoon—a service which no one who was present will ever forget. Speaking of this period, the late Mr. E. S. Parker, in a public meeting in Ballarat in 1864, said: "The Rev. J. C. Symons and another carried on the work with spirit, and built with their own hands a canvas place at Mount Alexander in which to hold their meetings for worship."

Thus the Wesleyan Church has the honour of holding the first public worship in Victoria, sending the first resident minister to the goldfields, and building the first place of worship on the goldfields.*

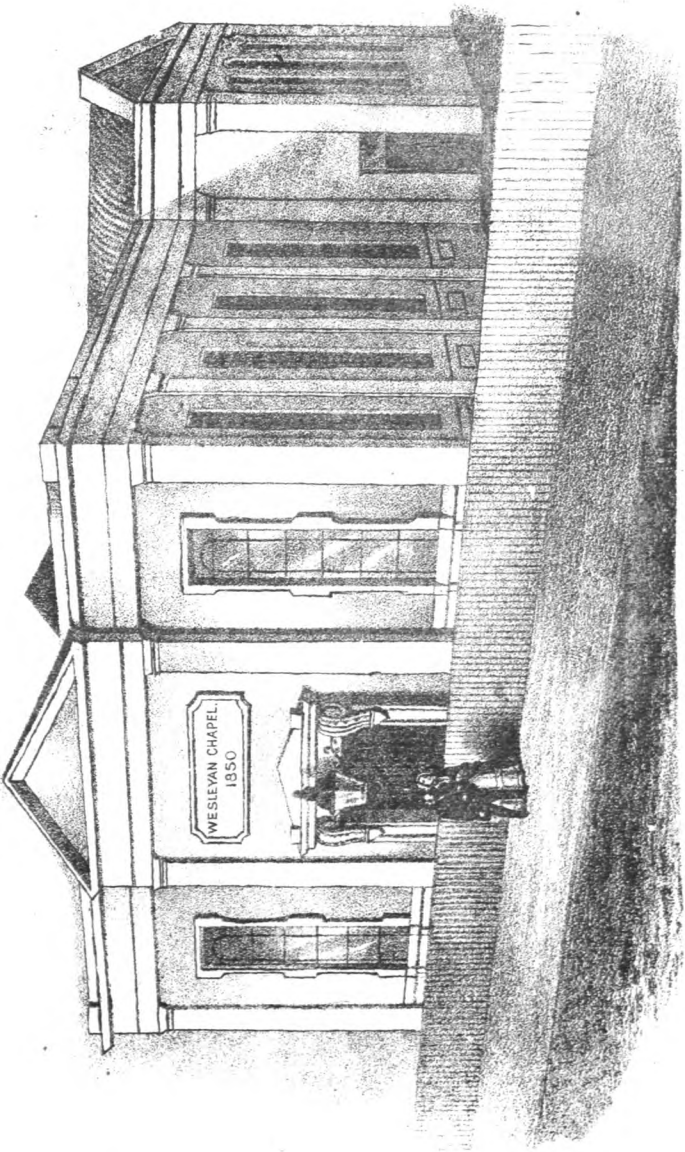
I left Forest Creek on the day after opening the church to return to South Australia. Reaching Melbourne I found that Mr. Butters had received directions from the General Superintendent—the Rev. W. B. Boyce—to keep me in Victoria, and to send Mr. Harcourt to South Australia in my stead, Mr. Harcourt's health having required a change. Mr. Boyce did not waste words in sending his orders. He wrote: "Detain Symons and send Harcourt to South Australia. Draper will have no cause to complain, for he sent Symons for his own pleasure." And so, without being in the least consulted—for if I had been I should certainly have

* There were other ministers at Forest Creek, but they were there with digging parties, and the "parson" was generally made the cook. The Rev. J. H. Gregory, now of All Saints', St. Kilda, preached regularly at Old Post Office Hill, and perhaps on some other part of the diggings, but he resided at a station near at hand.

returned to South Australia—my six months' residence has been lengthened to thirty-four years.

I had the honour of being the first superintendent of the Collingwood or Melbourne East Circuit—which was described in the English Minutes of 1853 as the "Collingwood Gold-fields," and entered upon my work in that circuit in September, 1852. At that time it comprehended not only the present Brunswick-street Circuit but the entire of what is now the Richmond Circuit. At that date, however, there were but two churches—one in Brunswick-street, 35 feet by 45, on the site of the present church, and another in Richmond, 20 feet by 30. It was no easy task to increase the church accommodation so as to keep pace with the rapidly-growing population. During the next four years Brunswick-street Church was enlarged three times at an almost fabulous cost, and how many opening and re-opening services were held I cannot remember. It finally gave place, in 1861, to the present building. New churches were erected at Richmond, Rose-street, Charles-street Collingwood Flat, Northcote, Hawthorn, Boroondara, and Dampier Creek (now Burwood), besides numerous others in other circuits, which I cannot enumerate.

Persons often in the present day make very disparaging remarks respecting what they are pleased to call the mistakes and extravagant expenditure upon church and school buildings; but to those who passed through those times the marvel is that so much was done, and so few mistakes made. The cost of building was almost incredible. Carpenters' wages were from 20s. to 30s. per day; stonemasons' and bricklayers' wages from 25s. to 40s. per day; three-inch deals 3s. per foot, bricks £10 10s. per thousand, and other building materials equally high, and very difficult to obtain. Ministers had to be treasurers of trusts, circuit and society stewards; in fact, had to take charge of all the business of the church as well as their own proper duties. And this not from any indisposition on the part of the church-officers to do their own proper work, but from sheer inability to give the time. Walter Powell on more than one occasion said to me: "I can give you money, but I cannot give you time. I would have more help, but we should only be in one another's way, and I cannot get more room." And what was true in his case applied equally to others. The fact is, that the Methodists of those



WESLEYAN CHURCH, BRUNSWICK STREET, FITZROY.

Foundation Stone laid March, 1849; Lengthened 1854; Trancept added 1855; taken down and present Church erected in 1860, and opened by Rev. Dr. Jobson, 10th March, 1861.

days were a noble set of men, and a spirit of enterprise and generosity in church affairs as well as commerce characterised the community.

When full particulars of the gold discoveries reached Europe and America, ships were soon crowded with living freight, and the influx of people from all parts of the world was enormous. In the month of October, 1853, over 30,000 persons were added to the population. Dwellings could not be found, and thousands pitched tents on the Government land just south of the Yarra, and "Canvas Town" sprang into existence. School-houses, vestries, and in some few instances places of worship, were converted into lodging places, and many a respectable family was glad of such shelter. To meet this condition of things in some degree, the Wesleyan Church erected at a cost (ultimately) of some £6000 the large wooden building so long known in Carlton as "The Wesleyan Immigrants' Home." This building, plain and somewhat rough though it was, rendered great service, and was really a "home" in a strange land to thousands of persons. Some idea of the rapid expansion of population may be obtained from the following figures: In 1851 the inhabitants numbered 94,489; in 1853, 222,436; in 1854 they reached 312,037; so that in three years the population considerably more than trebled.

I must not trespass upon your time by any details respecting the progress of our church in parts of the colony beyond Melbourne and its suburbs. It is right however that I should mention, that in June, 1842, Mr. James Dredge, who had resigned his position as one of the Protectors of Aborigines, was appointed to Geelong, and laboured there with great acceptance, until in 1846 failing health compelled him to leave and return to England. He however died in the English Channel. He was succeeded by the Rev. W. Lowe. In 1848 the Buntingdale Aboriginal Mission was abandoned, and the Rev. F. Tuckfield was transferred to Geelong. At the time of the gold discoveries the Rev. F. Lewis was the resident minister. A somewhat important society had been formed in Portland,*

* "The first stone of a Wesleyan preaching-house was laid on a piece of ground belonging to Mr. McDougall, in Henty-street, in the presence of a few persons, the unfavourable weather preventing others."—*Portland Guardian*, October —, 1843.

to which place Mr. Witton was sent in 1845 as a hired local preacher, and he was succeeded by the Rev. W. Lightbody.

The Methodists of England were not indifferent spectators to the new circumstances which were transpiring in Victoria, and the English Missionary Society—as a kind and wise parent, to whom we had been much indebted—determined to send a deputation to inquire into our state, and to strengthen our hands. The selection of the Rev. Robert Young for this duty was a popular one; for he was widely known as a preacher, and had considerable experience as a Missionary. He was received everywhere with enthusiasm. Victoria welcomed him at a breakfast-meeting in the Wesleyan Home, at which an address—which I had the honour of preparing—was presented to him. He was invited by the ladies to a public tea-meeting in Collins-street Church, which was crowded to excess, and during which £600 was raised to pay the passages of six ministers from England, to which another £100 was added by a single individual to pay for an additional minister.

The plan to constitute the Australasian Missions into a Church to be affiliated with the British Conference was readily adopted; together with a proposal submitted by Mr. Young, which was not in the original plan, viz.: that the management of the South Sea Missions should be committed to the Australasian Church, and ultimately that it should bear the entire expense of these missions.

Among the results of Mr. Young's visit, so far as Victoria was concerned, was the sending out additional ministers, the cost of bringing them from England being, for the most part, paid by the colony. Among those so sent were the Revs. J. S. Waugh, William Hill, William P. Wells, Theophilus Taylor, Joseph Albiston, Charles Akrell. Previously the Revs. Isaac Harding, Thomas Raston, Richard Hart, and James Bickford had arrived.

Of these valued brethren Mr. Taylor died at Ballarat in 1859; Mr. Hill was murdered in Pentridge in 1869; Mr. Akrell returned to England. Mr. Harding in Queensland, Mr. Raston and Mr. Bickford in South Australia, Mr. Hart at Stawell, and Dr. Waugh at Hawthorn have retired as supernumeraries. Mr. Wells and Mr. Albiston are still among us in full ministerial work.

At the first Conference, in 1855, Victoria reported the following statistics, viz.:—31 churches, 40 other preaching places, 14 schools used as churches, 15 ministers, 59 day-school teachers, 401 Sunday-school teachers, 151 class-leaders, 1955 church members, 84 on trial, 3507 Sunday scholars, 3007 day scholars, 18,897 attendants on public worship. The population of the colony was 364,324.

The appointment by the first Conference (1855) of the Rev. D. J. Draper to this colony proved to be an eminently wise one, and his administration of the affairs of our church was of great and permanent value. To the far-sightedness of Mr. Butters and Mr. Draper in securing sites of land, and their diligent attention to the claims of various parts of the colony, much of our present position is due.

Time would fail to tell, and a volume would be necessary to record the history of Victorian Methodism during the thirty-one years which have elapsed since the first Australasian Conference.

The sale of the Collins-street property and the erection of Wesley Church; the expansion of Methodism in Geelong, Ballarat, Sandhurst, and other parts of the colony; the erection in these places of numerous substantial and in many cases elegant churches and comfortable parsonages, culminating in the beautiful and commodious church in Lydiard-street, Ballarat; the visit of Dr. Jobson, and more recently of Dr. Smith—these and many other matters of great interest, I must pass by altogether.

Our statistics for the present year show a wonderful record, for half a century, considering the circumstances of the colony during that period. They are as follows, viz.:—480 churches, 123 school-houses, 82 parsonages, 109 ministers, 33 home missionaries, 16,095 church members, 751 local preachers, 4691 Sunday-school teachers, 40,459 Sunday scholars, 94,223 attendants on public worship, 2 colleges.

Cost of buildings £530,000, on which there are debts £135,000, of which £35,000 is due to the Church Loan Fund; value of land given by the Government and private donors, £100,000; * amount paid for land, £22,000;

* It is proper to state that until the passing of the Anti-State Aid Act in 1875 the Wesleyan Church received its proportion of the State

accommodation in churches and schools used as churches, 112,899, or one in nine of the entire population.

And now, I must be permitted to pay a passing tribute to the memory of some of those ministers and laymen who have laboured in Victoria, and have passed into their rest. It must be distinctly understood that I name those only whose ministry and work in Victoria began before the first Australasian Conference, 1855. Joseph Orton, the pioneer, who after a life of unusual pain and toil sleeps in the deep sea; William Simpson lies beneath the sod in Guernsey; Benjamin Hurst is laid to rest in the cemetery at Goulburn; William Schofield lies in the Sydney burying ground; Francis Tuckfield sleeps among the dead in Portland; Edward Sweetman and Frederick Lewis found graves in the land many of us still fondly call "home;" Daniel James Draper (with his estimable wife, and I doubt not many of his shipwrecked companions) went to heaven as his body sank beneath the waves on that awful 11th of January of 1866. In our own "God's acre" repose the precious dust of William Hill, whose cruel murder while in the vigour of his able ministry sent a thrill of horror through the entire community; of Joseph Dare, whose eloquent voice was hushed almost before he had reached middle age; and of John Eggleston in the ripeness of a life of intense earnestness and usefulness, which ended so suddenly that he

"Ceased at once to work and live."

Nor must I fail to mention the names of those laymen known to me, who were honoured of God to lay the foundations of our church, and into whose labours the present generation have entered, not always, I think, with the generous recognition which ought to be felt and shown. Abel Thorpe, John J. Peers, James Dredge, Edward Stone Parker, Thomas Wilkinson, Nehemiah Guthridge, Walter Powell, Robert Gallagher, John Lowe, Dr. Phillips, Thomas Forster, John Wills, Peter Davis, William Thacker, William Dredge, James Smith, James Fenton, Frederick Cooper, Oliver Parnham,

Grant according to their numbers as shown by the census. It must also be understood that the figures as to cost of buildings and land are approximate, but they are taken from our Church records, and are under rather than over the amounts actually expended.

David Hewitt, Eli Abbott, Leonard Robinson, Thomas Fielding, Robert Callaghan, James M'Cutcheon, Best Overend, Alfred Hurlstone, George Stirling, Richard Hodgson, James Wood, Charles Williams, and Mrs. Dodgson, better known to old colonists as Miss Newcombe.

Then there are others, who in the early times did good service, but who subsequently joined other communions; among whom I may mention Benjamin Cocker, who went to America, became a minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, LL.D., and Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy in the University of Michigan. In our own land, Henry Jennings—who was circuit steward when I came to the colony—Theodotus J. Sumner, John Randall Pascoe, James Webb, Charles Britten, and others whom I do not now remember. What memories these names call up to those of us who are old colonists; but I may not now linger over them.

It would be unpardonable of me to pass in silence the names of many who are personally known to me, who are still among us.

William Witton (the pioneer local preacher and leader), Thomas Wellard (a member of the first Quarterly Meeting), Charles Stone, Florence Gardiner, Francis E. Beaver, Richard Guthridge, Joseph Lowe, William Little, Alexander Fraser, Alfred James Smith, Samuel Grey King, Jabez Chambers, Nehemiah Wimble, Thomas James Crouch, Thomas Vasey, Theophilus Dredge, John Webb, Dr. Cutts, Joseph Ankers Marsden, Mars Miller, Edward John, William Nettleship, Alexander Dennis, Peter M'Cann, Richard Howell, Peter Learmonth, Dr. Towle, Edward Delbridge, John Wilton, T. G. Atkinson, James Jamison, Samuel Johnson, T. B. Hunt, Thomas Rix, James Callaghan, William Baldwin, Allan Nicol, Joseph Clowes, John Smith, J. Raddenberry, Frederick Peterson, Joseph Aspinall, William Cleverdon, Henry Clarkson, John Harbison, J. A. Hicks, W. H. Hotchin, C. T. Newman, James Seymour, George Chambers, William Rawlins Bennetts, Harold Rayson, the brothers Keys, and the brothers Lobb.

There are many names both of ministers and laymen, who are doing yeoman's work to-day, who are justly entitled to be mentioned; but I must pass them over as they have come into harness since 1855. It is quite possible, too, that from lapse of memory I have omitted to name some whom I ought to

have mentioned ; if so I have to ask forgiveness of them and their friends for my unintentional neglect.

Passing from individual names, I might, had I time, refer to instances of personal adventure, of toil, of hardship, of danger, on the part of Wesleyan ministers and people which would almost vie with the backwoods preachers of Canada and America. Nor have these days quite gone ; for in some of the distant stations our pioneers have still to endure hardships of no common order, riding over arid plains in the scorching heat of an Australian summer sun, or through the dense forest, with tracks almost impassable, or crossing creeks and rivers swollen with winter rains, and lodging in shelters of the roughest kind, but meeting everywhere with warm-hearted, hospitable people, who welcome them as the heralds of salvation.

The history has been one continued series of progression, marked by greater or less expansion. There have been periods of commercial depression, and these have sometimes checked progress. There have been times of great migration, such as the rush to Lambing Flat in New South Wales, or Port Curtis in Queensland, or Otago in New Zealand.

Then, too, we have had land fevers within our own borders, when men of all classes have been seized with a land hunger, and when tens of thousands have broken up comfortable homes, left settled neighbourhoods, and ordinary occupations and good wages, and have rushed hither and thither to obtain selections and make new homes in the "bush," far away from the conveniences of civilisation, the comforts of social life, and the ordinances of religion. All this produces a restlessness and excitement which are very unfavourable to substantial church progress, and which often prove destructive to personal piety and family religion.

Still, notwithstanding these and other unfavourable conditions, the Methodist Church has fairly adapted itself to the circumstances of the people, has followed them with the ordinances of religion, and has striven to be faithful to the traditions of its history and the direction of its founder, to go to those who wanted them most.

And so to-day our churches are found not only in the larger cities and towns but in the smaller mining townships, the agricultural villages, among the "selectors" on the sparsely populated plains of the interior ; while our ministers and local

preachers are labouring, and our Sunday-schools are seeking to train the young for Christ, throughout the widespread colony.

I have done my best in the limited time at my disposal to present to you as full a sketch as possible of the early history of our Church in Victoria. I have been compelled to omit very much that I should like to have said, and to refer briefly to much that I would fain have dealt with at length.

I have made no reference to other denominations, and to the good work which they have done in the past and are still doing. This is neither from forgetfulness nor indifference, but simply from want of time. Most cheerfully do I recognise their great services in God's cause, and most earnestly do I desire that they may have God's continual and abundant blessing upon their labours.

I must leave others to speak of the spiritual results of Victorian Methodism for the half century, and to urge the claims of the Jubilee Fund.

What shall the future be of our beloved land, and our beloved church? I am surrounded on this memorable occasion by many who have borne the burden and heat of the day; who will soon finish their work on earth, and leave our places to be occupied by you who are younger. We have done our best as in the sight of God.

It has been well said—

“Humility mainly becometh the converse of man with his Maker,
But oftentimes it seemeth out of place of man with men.
Render unto all men their due, but remember thou art a man,
And cheat not thyself of the reverence which is owing to thy reasonable being.”

It is not inconsistent with Christian humility to say here to-day, that by the help of God we have good reason to be thankful for the work we have been able to do; the results of which, you, the present generation, inherit. I charge you in God's name, brethren, that you be faithful to the trusts and to the inheritance which we transmit to you. Be faithful to the doctrines, to the discipline, to the traditions of your fathers, so that those who may be spared to celebrate the

Centenary, as we now do the Jubilee of Victorian Methodism, may say of you that you have done your duty.

“ Heaven sets us here for duty ; duty done,
He calls us hence to the celestial clime ;
Where we shall wear the medals won in time ;
Let all thy care be duty then—not fame ;
So shalt thou find thyself a happy son,
On whom the Blessed Father sets His name.”

The following table will show the progress in Victoria since the first Australasian Conference in 1855 :—

	1855.	1865.	1874. <i>a</i>	1886.
Churches	31	247	368	480
Other preaching places, including schools	40	73	118	311
Ministers	15	52	86	109
Home missionaries ...	1	—	—	33
Day-school teachers ...	59	137	—	—
Sunday-school teachers	401	2,524	3,717	4,691
Local preachers... ..	—	390	559	751
Class-leaders	151	566	727	818
Church members	1,955	8,088	10,600	16,095
On trial for membership	84	1,122	798	839
Catechumens	—	—	305	1741
Sunday schools	41	235	328	475
Sunday scholars	3,507	19,741	33,347	40,459
Day schools	37	69	— <i>b</i>	<i>b</i> —
Day scholars	3,007	6,677	— <i>b</i>	<i>b</i> —
Attendants on public worship	18,897	49,598	75,196	94,223
Population	364,324	621,095	808,437	1,000,175
Proportion of Wesley- ans to population } (approximate) }	1 to 19 $\frac{1}{4}$ or 5 per cent.	1 to 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ or 8 per cent.	1 to 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ or 10 per cent.	1 to 10 $\frac{3}{8}$ or 10 per cent.

NOTES—*a* First Victorian Conference. *b* Day schools taken by Government under Education Act, 1872.