

Booklet

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DEBUT

ADVENTISM DOWN UNDER BEFORE 1885

By Milton Hook



Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series

Not for Resale

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A Heritage Series: Debut - Adventism Down Under before 1885
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Milton Hook is the author of "Flames Over Battle Creek", a brief history of the early days at the Review and Herald Publishing Association as seen through the eyes of George Amadon, printer's foreman at the institution. Dr Hook's doctoral dissertation researched the pioneering years of the Avondale School, 1894 to 1900, and he has published some of these findings.

He spent three years as a mission director in Papua New Guinea. His teaching years include primary, secondary and college level experience, especially in Bible subjects, in Australia, New Zealand and America. He is an ordained minister, married and the father of two sons.

He would welcome any information which may enhance the content of this series.

Not for Resale

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Clinking convict chains broke the silence of the forest. In Van Diemen's Land, far from the Mother Country, prisoners toiled under the lash of the free. Chains could be heard as a monotonous dirge at the dock, behind the inn, and along the dirt roads of the colonial village. Even the gaol church service was broken by the rattle of restless links.

Did a pensive convict ever ponder the thought that the free may be shackled more securely than he? The soldier, the trader, even the chaplain could be chained to his god whether it be liquor or power, land or intellect. Surely there were times when a convict's mind reflected on religious things.

Did a prison chaplain ever light up a convict's eyes with the hope of the Second Coming? Were soldiers and free settlers of the colonies constantly reminded of "the blessed hope"? As the Great Advent Awakening swept around the Northern Hemisphere in the 1830's and 1840's did it eddy in the bays of the Antipodes? Yes, it did, but ever so gently.

Chiselled into a Van Dieman's Land tombstone are the words,

Sacred
To the memory of

ROBERT FLOWERS
Late Private of H.M. 96
Reg~ Died July 12, 1845
Aged 36 years

I left my nation and my home
My country to defend
I here shall lay till the last day
Till time shall have an end
When Jesus calls my dust shall rise
When the last trumpet sound
With millions more ascend the skies
By angels guarded round

Who wrote this rhyme? It sounds as if the soldier of Queen Victoria wrote his own elegy. Or did the chaplain of his regiment, or a fellow soldier, put words into deceased lips? Perhaps amuse in the Mother Country, even a member of the soldiers own family, wrote it. Could his wife have written it? But he was most likely a bachelor. Then perhaps his girlfriend wrote it. No-one knows. Whoever it was must be called an Adventist--not a Seventh-day Adventist, mind you, but an Adventist nonetheless. Their hope was in the resurrection of those in Christ at His second coming.

Occasional news of the Millerite Movement in America appeared in Australian colonial newspapers. The "Southern Australian" of June 23, 1842, reported a Millerite camp meeting in New York State when six thousand people attended. The account continued, "Today the tent will be broken up, and the Millerites, as the cold weather is coming on, are going down to Ohio and the Southern States, which they mean to enlighten with regard to the Midnight Cry and the arrival of the Second Advent".

More was published in 1843. In the "Southern Australian" of September 8 appeared these lines: "The End: Latest News. We have seen a statement over Miller's own signature, dated 1st of January, 1843 in which he expresses his full belief, that the end of the world will take place some time between the 21st, March 1843 and the 21st, March 1844". Colonists, hungry for any news from the other side of the world, would not fail to read these reports.

Furthermore, Adventist preachers stirred colonial hearts. Pastors Jacob Abbott and Thomas Playford were two examples. Emigrating

from England to South Australia, Abbott helped to establish the Hindley Street Methodist Chapel in Adelaide. There in the late 1830's he preached the Second Advent. In 1844 he began gospel work among the aborigines. Soon after he became the leading preacher at the Kensington Independent Church, (now owned by the Seventh-day Adventist Church). Increasingly Abbott became associated with Playford as they ministered in the same area.

Playford had arrived in Adelaide in 1844 and immediately began to preach the Second Advent doctrine. Week after week he saddled up his horse, "Old Jim", and rode to the Mount Lofty Ranges; preaching at Grassy Flat, Gumeracha, and Burnside. On Sundays he would preach twice in the Bentham Street Christian Chapel and once at another service at Hindmarsh. This he did for almost thirty years, all without salary. In addition he published his sermons in a 200-page book in 1856. It's chatty title was, "Discourses in the Second Appearing of Christ, and on the Changes Predicted by the Inspired Writers in Connection with that Glorious Event". Another example of Second Advent preaching was the 1885 mission of Henry Varley in Melbourne. There the doctrine of a personal appearing of Jesus before the Millennium was forcefully delivered.

Before 1885 the Australasian colonies had heard something of the Second Advent, but what of the Bible Sabbath? Apparently a solitary voice did make an abortive attempt to evangelize Melbournians about the Saturday Sabbath. The voice crying in the colonies was Alexander Dickson. Earlier, he had left Melbourne as a missionary to the steamy shores of West Africa. There he worked alongside Miss Hannah More, an American missionary teacher who had toiled in Sierra Leone (1855-61). During her holidays she met Pastor Stephen Haskell in Connecticut, U.S.A. He gave her Pastor John Andrew's "History of the Sabbath" and other literature. Back in Africa she read herself into the conviction she should become a Seventh-day Adventist. By that time (1863) she was teaching at a missionary orphanage, Cape Palmas, Liberia, sponsored by the Protestant Episcopal Church, but she was not yet a baptized Seventh-day Adventist. At the orphanage she shared her new understanding with

Alexander Dickson. In 1864 she wrote to the "Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald" editor, "Thank God I now see clearly that the seventh-day is the Sabbath of the Lord my God, and am keeping it according to the commandment. Mr Dickson also is keeping it I do not know of any others on the Coast who keep the seventh-day Your people may now consider that you have wholehearted Seventh-day Adventists here, waiting with you for that blessed appearing of Him whom we love and adore, and purpose to worship evermore."

The following year, at the age of fifty-six, More returned to America with failing health. There is reason to believe also that her Seventh-day Adventist convictions were not acceptable to her sponsors and they readily released her from mission duties. Alexander Dickson probably had a similar experience and returned to Melbourne about the same time.

Dickson was not a baptized member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Nevertheless, he endeavoured to persuade contacts in Melbourne of his new found Sabbath convictions. A portion of his considerable wealth he spent on tracts for his evangelism. Interest was aroused and some did accept Saturday as the Sabbath but later abandoned their stand.

The mid-1870's found Dickson in America where he came in contact with some Seventh-day Adventists, eventually meeting Pastors John Corliss, Stephen Haskell and Mendel Israel. Dickson tried to arrange for tracts to be printed for his use in Australia but that did not eventuate. He himself became discouraged and faded like a meteor in the night sky. His presence in America had, however, sparked an interest about Australia among some of the church leaders.

Furthermore, at least as early as 1874, some in the colonies, specifically New Zealand, were receiving the church paper, the "Advent Review and Sabbath Herald", from America. This missionary mail was considerably increased in 1884 when Haskell, the California Tract Society President, and his Secretary, Miss Anna Ingels, arranged for randomly selected names from colonial directories to be

posted "Signs of the Times", They hoped this seed would germinate into a harvest. Mrs Sarah Adair, of Melbourne, was one of those selected to receive the missionary paper. She later became a church member. One American, Mr Edward Stockton, noticed in the Melbourne directory the address of a man of the same surname. He mailed a "Signs of the Times" with a covering letter to him. In this way the seed was sown in the family of Mr John Henry Stockton, one of the first to worship with the pioneer missionary party of Seventh-day Adventists.

Only gentle ripples of the Advent Awakening movement in America were felt in Australasia. Dickson's solo attempt to introduce the Saturday Sabbath into Australia withered and died. However, prior to 1885 religious literature posted to the colonists by church members in America proved to be the most fruitful introduction to Seventh-day Adventism.

Major sources for this booklet are the author's own doctoral dissertation entitled "The Avondale School and Adventist Educational Goals, 1894-1900" and the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia article on Hannah More.

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