

12th July, 1970."HE WENT OUT NOT KNOWING WHITHER HE WENT."

HEBREWS 11:8.

We stand today on the threshold of the last service in Poowong North Church. Wondering, peering into the distance, not seeing far. What shall we do next?

We can look at the past and give thanks to God for the way in which He has led us and blessed us during the years. Looking over some of the records I find that a meeting was held on December 8, 1889 for the purpose of starting a Sunday School: the chairman was E. E. Allchin; Wm. Pratt Senr. was nominated as Superintendent and V. Treadwell appointed secretary. Other names on the Trustees Register include, Stephen Tolley, Daniel Glover, William Glover, Francis Allchin, John Hackett, William Ferguson, Thomas Glover, Ebenezer Allchin, James Allchin, Charles Stanfield, James Watts, Allan George, F. White, Thomas Attenborough, Walter Hackett, Arthur White, Norman Maher, Wesley Stanfield, Robert Attenborough, Victor Wallace. To me many of them are just names, to you they have been real people. But I am confident that all of these men have rendered valuable service to the cause here at North Poowong, and we thank God for their devotion over the years. I would venture to surmise that there was a service here before 1889, possibly about the year 1885 or 1886. The earliest plan of services I have is dated 1880, when it was the Warragul and Drouin Circuit with 9 preaching places, but no mention is made of North Poowong.

I must pay tribute to our present Trust Secretary, Mr. James Watts, who has given stirring service in this capacity for 45 years, actually he was appointed on September 9th, 1925 so we are not going to argue over a couple of months. He has furnished me with one or two items which may be of interest to us. A marriage took place on April 21st, 1938 between Mr. E. Millier and Miss Eunice White, second daughter of Mr. & Mrs. A. White. Mr. White is one of our Trustees. During the period of Anglican services a Confirmation Service was held on November 3rd, 1946, conducted by the then Bishop of Gippsland, Dr. Blackwood. On November 11th 1951 an ordinary morning service was conducted by Bishop Baker of Ridley College. In previous years services were taken by Rev. Holden, President of the Methodist Conference, and Rev. Rentoul, another President of Conference. These services were held during the period of morning services in the 1920s. Mention must be made too of the work of Miss N. Beverly in the Sunday School, a fine Christian woman and a good Presbyterian, who was helped by her neice Miss Josie Beverly (Mrs. Van T'hoff), Miss Beryl Hamblin and Douglas Calvert and Mrs. Ailsa Attenborough. So, in gratitude we give thanks to God for these his faithful people who over the years have maintained a witness in this place.

It is sad to see a place of worship close, but then we must not dwell for ever in the past or on the past. It is no use longing for the days that were. It may have been policy in the horse and buggy days to have meeting places within a few miles of each other, but in these days of faster transport three or four miles is neither here nor there, and with people moving away from country areas, one has to be realistic and endeavour to consolidate the work in the more populated centres. Let us not be bitter or hold a grudge against the Trustees or anyone else now that a decision has been made to terminate our services. Let us accept it in good grace and look forward to the days that lie ahead.

What can we do next? We can wander along, undetermined and purposeless. We can stumble forward, lonely and afraid, or we can step out into the unknown bravely, because we have heard a promise, and trust the one who made it "Lo I am with you always, even unto th^e end of the world."

The days and years ahead may just consume us, or we seize them as opportunities. It is rather curious that four of the early versions of the English Bible made a mistake in rendering our text "not knowing whether he should go." That is to miss the whole point of the adventure. He was a pilgrim, not a tramp, and somewhere lost in the distance was the goal of his journey. Somewhere in the coming months of this year, next year is a goal for us.

As we look into the future we wish we could see more distinctly. There are things beyond the horizon we cannot see at all because we have not come far enough yet, but there are some things close at hand we ought to see, yet we cannot. To use a modern phrase, "visibility is poor". We are fog bound. We creep along chiefly anxious for ourselves. We stand on this new frontier, and most of us admit that man without faith, is not a satisfactory pilgrim. We look ahead, and we know that we need more than one another. Abraham made his choice. He went out not knowing whither he went, but one thing he did know; he knew that God had promised.

As we strive, we grow. The man with faith in the promises of God can look into the depths and not grow dizzy, he can see the heights far above and not grow weary, he can look into the overclouded distance and not be afraid. This is a sceptical age, and faith has waned. Many brilliant men are pessimistic at heart. Faith is not easy. We have tried to do without it, but the journey cries out for a goal. After long years of uncertainty John Wesley experienced the strangely warmed heart. He had his marching orders. He did not sit down and cry "The end." For him it was a beginning. He took the desert way deliberately. We cannot sit sheltering from God. He himself has set his face toward Jerusalem to give all men a new beginning.

If you will dare all things, believing, you will know the joy of discovery. Each new height climbed brings its surprising hour. There are so many frontiers to be crossed, birth, death, changing occupations, new human contacts, all the circumstances which make up this mortal life. We set forth trembling in the dark, alone, or we step out bravely, sure of unfailing comradeship.

From beyond the shadows come the voices Abraham, Paul, Livingstone, Wesley and a myriad more. STEP OUT. FEAR NOT. GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES they say. Above them all is that other voice. Can you hear Him? LO I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE WORLD.

WE WILL GO OUT FROM THIS PLACE TODAY, NOT KNOWING LONG STRETCHES OF THE ROAD, OR TO WHAT ADVENTURE GOD CALLS US, BUT KNOWING IT IS HIS WAY, AND ITS END IS HOME.

Let us then rise and sing our closing hymn, commonly known as the Methodist National Anthem, particularly noting the last two lines in the second verse, which sums up our service today. WE'LL PRAISE HIM FOR ALL THAT IS PAST, AND TRUST HIM FOR ALL THAT'S TO COME."