

Marvellous  
Melbourne  
and A CHRISTIAN REVIVAL  
AND ITS LASTING LEGACY  
Spiritual  
Power

Will Renshaw



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# Preface

Will Renshaw is both a student of history and a maker of it. It is his commitment to the gospel which has made him both. Vital Christianity has been far more formative of Australian history in general and Melbourne history in particular than our secular historians have told us. Will Renshaw understands the dynamic way in which Christian enterprise works within human history. It has indeed contributed to making Melbourne 'marvellous' and Australia one of the most stable and prosperous nations on earth.

As a successful businessman who has fellowshipped with other outstanding leaders at the heart of Melbourne commerce (see the second half of Chapter 16 for Australia's own 'Clapham Sect' as I have previously called them), Will Renshaw has himself contributed to Melbourne's rich reserves of financial and spiritual capital. He understands the motivation (the inclinations of the soul and the convictions of the mind) of those who gave Christian leadership in church and society. Over many years he has shared his insights, based on deep research, in a circular entitled 'Some Melbourne Notes and Comments'. The 'Notes' were on subjects which enlightened the mind of those interested in the role of the church in society. The 'Comments' encapsulated the considered wisdom and unique perspective of one who had long reflected on all that the Lord was doing in our midst. Now the essentials of that research are gathered in one place, and, like all good history, are summed up in one key insight – the role of spiritual power in human history, secular as well as divine.

We have here the story of how revived Christianity's spiritual energy was translated into determined, innovative evangelism and sustained nation building based on godly policy and honest dealing. Here is a record of wide-ranging

evangelistic ministries and missionary endeavours at home and abroad and of the conventions for the deepening of the spiritual life which so often nurtured them. And, since all such enterprises are the work of anointed leaders, the spiritual power is personified in the Christian leaders who populate its pages. We begin with the remarkable Henry Reed of Tasmania, grandfather of the founder of Qantas. We meet amazingly effective evangelists such as John MacNeil, who was so Spirit-filled he was a walking conflagration. In C.H. Nash, the founder of the Melbourne Bible Institute (now the Melbourne School of Theology), young men were mentored for lives of service in the ministry, on the mission field, in the professions, and in the business world. As with all readable histories, this one has a surprising hero, Hervey Perceval Smith, manager of the Federal Hotel, a temperance hotel also known as a coffee palace. It is not as an individual that he shines, but in fellowship with, and as complementary to, other like-minded warriors such as C.H. Nash. We meet H.P. Smith first in the Introduction, and by the time we meet him again in Chapter 7, Will Renshaw's own powers of writing on spiritual subjects have reached full momentum! The pace is sustained to the end. The reader is left with a longing both to be involved in work of similar effectiveness and to be instrumental in the revival of the faith to which Australia owes so much.

*Stuart Piggin*

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# Introduction

Following the discovery of gold and the development of sheep-grazing areas, a rapid population explosion within just a few decades brought untold wealth to Victoria and its capital, Melbourne.

Railway lines were built which networked the state. These enabled the quick transportation of people and goods, enhancing the state's wealth and opening up the settlement of vast new areas. Impressive public buildings were built, many of which enhance the city to this day.

Within a mere 50 years, the population of Melbourne had grown to nearly half a million. Melbourne had become the biggest city on the continent and displayed its pride by holding an international exposition in the newly built Royal Exhibition Building less than 60 years after first settlement. In 1901 this impressive building was to become the venue for the inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia. In 1902 it was the main location for meetings of the Torrey-Alexander Mission.

About this time the city was touted as 'Marvellous Melbourne'. However, although the city's rapid economic growth and development testified to human ingenuity, there was also ample evidence of humanity's fallenness: greed, unscrupulous land and company speculation, corruption and scandals not infrequently involving immorality. Nevertheless, 'where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.'

Over the centuries, the Divine hand had clearly been revealed in the history of the English-speaking peoples. Immigrants to Victoria at this early time mainly came from Britain, bringing with them the spiritual energy of the Wesleyan revival. As the colony was a British possession, laws and infrastructure based on the Judeo-Christian tradition were woven into the

fabric of its public morality and regulations.

Christian clergy and laymen were active in meeting the challenges of the hour. Churches were forthright in proclaiming the gospel. In 1873, the Evangelisation Society of Victoria (ESV) was founded, an interdenominational organisation of laymen that was to impact Melbourne and beyond in a far greater way than its members could ever have anticipated. Another of these initiatives occurred in the early 1890s, when evangelical ministers of the major denominations formed a Prayer Band, meeting to pray for revival in their own lives and in the lives of members of their congregations.

The Torrey-Alexander Mission in 1902 came as an answer to those prayers. The impact on the Christian church in Melbourne, in Australia and then in Britain and other countries as diverse as India and Korea, with influences spreading to the revival in Wales in 1905, was extensive and profound.

In Melbourne, the manager of the opulent Federal Hotel, Hervey Perceval Smith, surrendered his life to the will of God. His conversion led to one of the most remarkable stories of spiritual power that came out of 'Marvellous Melbourne'.

H.P. Smith initiated regular meetings for Christians at the Federal Hotel, from which the ministry of the Melbourne Gospel Crusade (MGC) commenced. His early Christian experience was influenced by the message of the Keswick Convention in England, where large meetings 'of spiritual power' were followed by smaller meetings expounding deeper life teaching from the Keswick Convention. In Melbourne, the first Keswick-style convention was held at Upwey a few weeks after the end of World War I.

In the next decades, the twin effects of the growing convention ministry and the establishment of the Melbourne Bible Institute (MBI) under the Keswick-influenced founding principal, Rev. Clifford Harris Nash, precipitated an unprecedented lay-led movement for the advance

of evangelical endeavour. It raised up a generation of consecrated Christian business professionals who became leaders in this movement, a fellowship of gospel-focused men and women who believed the whole Bible. They applied the Bible's teaching in open-air work, in an extensive visitation ministry – particularly to the needy in the Great Depression-hit working-class suburbs of Melbourne – and in an extensive motor van evangelistic ministry that brought the gospel to a myriad of farms and small towns. Together, these efforts led to further development of the Upwey/Belgrave Heights Convention and the MBI (later the Bible College of Victoria [BCV] and now the Melbourne School of Theology [MST]).

All of this activity undergirded an extensive interest in world mission that led to new enterprises set up in Melbourne for world mission and resulted in missionaries being sent to every corner of the globe. These missionaries were men and women whose lives were consecrated to the service of God, who lived the Spirit-filled life that they had experienced after hearing the message of Keswick.

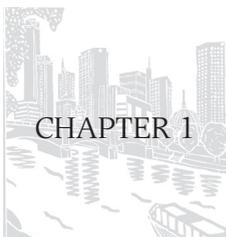
Those involved undertook united, believing and persevering prayer, which God answered powerfully through the advance of the gospel. The transformation of lives in Melbourne and Victoria spread throughout Australia and profoundly contributed to the spiritual fabric of the nation.

Now, more than two hundred years since its founding, Australia has a standard of living that non-Christian nations surrounding this island continent, even with thousands of years of civilisation, have not attained. Australia is looked upon as a stable and favoured country amongst the nations of the world. Today, however, many in Australia have turned away from the country's Judeo-Christian heritage of Old Testament law and the New Testament's 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you' – a scriptural balance of mercy and judgment. There is now an urgent need in Australia for spiritual revival.

*Marvellous Melbourne and Spiritual Power*

The life of Hervey Perceval Smith was a life lived to the glory of God. My prayer is that this account of his remarkable conversion and the Spirit-filled life that followed will result in the fulfilment of words found in Ecclesiastes 11:1, 'Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.'

*Will F. Renshaw*



## CHAPTER 1 Founding Days

### **The first preaching of the gospel in Melbourne**

The first recorded preaching of the gospel on the site that was to become Melbourne was within three to four months of the city's first settlement.<sup>1</sup>

John Batman was the first to settle on the site when he arrived in May 1835 via the Yarra River on the schooner *Rebecca*. His diary entry for 8 June 1835 records, 'This will be the place for a village.'<sup>2</sup>

Henry Reed, a 28-year-old merchant and an evangelical Methodist local preacher in Van Diemen's Land (later Tasmania), wrote:

having the welfare of the native population in view, went over to Port Phillip in the spring [probably September or October] of 1835 and in one of the only two or three huts that had then been extemporised for shelter, read and expounded a portion of sacred Scripture, and offered prayer to Almighty God.

The congregation had in it William Buckley, the escaped convict who had been living in a state of wildness and barbarism with the natives for over thirty years, the brother of Mr. John Batman, and three natives from Sydney who but imperfectly understood the English language.

I had prayers in the hut with these five men every day, read the Scriptures, expounding to them the Word of Life, and telling them of the love of God for poor sinners ... I went over to devise some means for preserving

the natives from destruction ... The Yarra Yarra tribe 'corroberied' to me, and alone I accompanied them up the river, and lived with them. Having gained all the information I required, I returned to Launceston, the Lord having mercifully preserved me whilst living with them in the wilderness.<sup>3</sup>

This was the earliest attempt to bring the city's inhabitants 'to the feet of King Jesus', and it was the first recorded preaching of the gospel on the site that within 50 years was to become known as 'Marvellous Melbourne'. Reed was still a young Christian – it was less than five years after he had committed his life to Christ.

### **Henry Reed's conversion at sea**

Reed had emigrated to Tasmania from England in 1827 and soon grew prosperous. He had a great aptitude for business: he was involved in founding a bank and had interests in bridge building and shipping, as well as other commercial enterprises. Point Henry in Port Phillip Bay was named after his vessel, *The Henry*, during a trip to Geelong in May 1836.

During a tumultuous storm at sea off Cape Horn when returning to England for a short time in 1831, he experienced a sudden conversion.

I saw all the mercies and deliverances of God; and when I saw them how astonished I was at the ingratitude of the wretch who had been watched over by that loving God, and not even thanked Him! ... When I saw it, I wept bitterly ... I was conscious that I had hold of God, and that God had hold of me.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly afterwards Reed returned to Tasmania, where he became a Wesleyan Methodist lay preacher. It was then that he first travelled across to the Port Phillip settlement to preach the gospel.

In 1875, in response to requests from 'the Churches of every name', Reed again visited Melbourne. It was no wonder that after his first experience of the city he would feel such a deep

interest in the place. How changed were the surroundings! After a 40-year absence, he now found a large and beautiful city. He held two open-air services, one as nearly as he could decide on the spot where he had lived with the natives so many years before. He was invited to preach in several of the churches and did good work in the short time he was able to spend there.<sup>5</sup>

Until his life's end, Reed was engaged in constant preaching, his supreme passion being the spread of the gospel. He was a keen and successful evangelist whose sympathies lay especially with the poor and the friendless, and he was also a strong supporter of William Booth in the development of the Salvation Army.<sup>6</sup>

He was as zealous for overseas missions as he was to evangelise at home, and he made extensive contributions to them. This included purchasing a steam launch in 1875 for Rev. George Brown to pioneer Wesleyan Methodist missions in New Britain. In the 1880s, when living in Launceston, his eldest daughter Mary went to China as a missionary with the China Inland Mission (CIM, later OMF International) until ill health required her to return home.<sup>7</sup>

### **The call to lay gospel initiatives**

In the preface to a biography of Reed's life, William Booth wrote, 'Oh that a larger number of its wealthy sons and daughters would consecrate themselves in the same bold and daring fashion to the glorious Christlike work of extending the Kingdom of God, as did Henry Reed!'<sup>8</sup>

Henry Reed was a Christian businessman who had a passion for evangelism. He was a forerunner of lay leadership, for which Melbourne was to become known. Among the lay leaders were those whom God had prospered in business and who, in the decades of Marvellous Melbourne's unique spiritual power, gave generously to promote the kingdom of God at home and overseas.

Included among these leaders was John Pascoe Fawkner, who arrived from Launceston in the *Enterprize* on 17 October 1835 and settled in Melbourne. The day after his arrival, he held a service to 'Praise his Maker' for bringing him, his wife and his party safely to the new country. According to his notes at the time, 'only our own people and Mr Buckley attended'. By the middle of the next year, Fawkner, with other members of that early settlement, witnessed the building of 'a mere wooden shell, shingled and incapable of keeping out the cold' on the western side of what is now William Street, to function as a church and a school. It was known as the 'Pioneer Church'.<sup>9</sup>

In 1837, the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Richard Bourke, visited the Port Phillip settlement and named it Melbourne in honour of the British Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, who at the time was a close adviser of the young Queen Victoria. Melbourne was officially declared a city by the Queen in 1847.<sup>10</sup>

The early settlers were for the most part God-fearing people who were genuine in their faith. They sought to establish the settlement at Port Phillip on the basis of it becoming a Christian civilisation such as they had experienced in the country from which they had come.