



Bishop James Chamberlain Baker

THE HISTORY OF METHODISM
in
Southern California
AND Arizona

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Southerners Go South

1. FORMATION OF THE PACIFIC CONFERENCE

In 1849, following on the heels of the gold rush, the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, determined to establish a mission in California. Accordingly, Dr. Jesse Boring and D. W. Pollock of Georgia, and W. Wynn of St. Louis, sailed thither by way of Panama in February, 1850, with a generous supply of standard Southern Methodist literature.¹ After arriving in San Francisco they organized circuits and enrolled members. Since the work had progressed so rapidly, a new Conference was formed in San Francisco in April, 1852, known as the Pacific Annual Conference.

2. WORK OF THE PACIFIC CONFERENCE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

As was the case with the Methodist Episcopal Church at precisely the same time, the work of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was confined to the general vicinity of San Francisco. In 1854 the Southerners became aware of the possibilities in southern California. Los Nietos was a small community about fifteen miles southeast of Los Angeles. Here had been formed a church, evidently part of the Los Angeles Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Within the group an abolition society had arisen. Alexander Groves and other members of the congregation became dissatisfied because they felt that the church should restrict itself to worship and not concern itself with the slavery issue. Apparently under the leadership of Groves, they asked for the address of a Southern Methodist preacher but were refused. The Los Angeles Presiding Elder, however, mentioned the request in an article for the *California Christian Advocate*, the official publication of the Methodist Episcopal Church in California.² The Presiding Elder of the Stockton District of the Southern Church's Pacific Conference happened to read the article and immediately went to Los Nietos to investigate the possibilities of establishing his denomination there. Finding a group of nine people, including Groves, who had withdrawn from the Methodist Episcopal Church and were holding weekly meetings, he formally organized a

class of sixteen and promised them a minister the next year. Thus in 1855 J. T. Cox came to El Monte and E. B. Lockley to Los Angeles. They were the first Southern Methodist pastors in southern California.

Cox was a three-hundred-pound Texan, white haired and ruddy complexioned, who had been converted at fifteen from a rough background. One day he crossed a bridge owned by an uncouth blacksmith. The man watched for a moment, then heaped foul abuse upon Cox. When the preacher reached the other side, his pre-conversion spirit apparently returned, for he grabbed his antagonist, shook him thoroughly, and said: "O you foul-mouth villain! If it were not for the fear of God, I would beat you into jelly!"³ Cox was especially effective at camp meetings though in southern California these are mentioned infrequently.⁴

Lockley had his troubles too. In August, 1855, he wrote to a friend that he had been in Los Angeles six months. His total collections had amounted to ten dollars. He continued:

I have been studying a great scientific question, namely, the location of the seat of hunger. Is it in the stomach, or in the brain. After consulting all the best authorities, and *no little experience*, I have concluded that it is migratory—first in one, and then in the other.⁵

From these meager beginnings the Southern Church tried to extend its influence. The region, however, was not much more receptive to the Southerners than to the Northern Methodists. At least the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, unlike the Northern group, did not withdraw its ministry completely. A Los Angeles District was created in 1858 but was discontinued the next year. During the war years attempts were made at least to continue the work. While little evidence is available, it seems reasonable to assume that services were held periodically in various places. In 1860 Los Angeles circuit was left to be supplied, and this apparently was true also the following year. Then in 1862 the Rev. J. C. Stewart was sent to southern California. Not every place to which he went can be determined, but it is established that in 1862 he organized a society in Carpinteria⁶ and began work in San Bernardino.⁷ The following year a church was regularly organized in that city.⁸ Anti-Southern feeling prevented very successful efforts. In 1864, while traveling through Mexico on his way to Texas, he was killed by a Unionist. Rev. S. W. Davies succeeded him. That year's Conference report indicated 56 members and 39 probationers at Los Angeles.⁹ In 1865

the figures had not changed, but a new minister, Rev. C. M. Hogue, was appointed.

The war years were trying for the Southern Methodists throughout the entire state. As early as 1856 the two Methodist bodies in California, feeling somewhat closer to one another by virtue of the distance separating them from other states, had begun negotiations for unification. The California Conference took the initiative by stating a willingness to accept members of the Southern Church into their organization in the same grade and standing, i.e., probationer or full member, on trial or in full connection. This proposal was rejected by the Pacific Conference under the impression that it "was a well laid plan to bodily absorb the Pacific Conference."¹⁰ The Southerners suggested instead that steps be taken to look toward better relations and that each should ask its respective General Conference to set up a separate and independent Methodist Church in California. With the rejection of both of these propositions by the California Conference, efforts at unification came to an end. As the war progressed, the feeling against the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in California became bitter. One of its bishops, H. H. Kavanaugh, on episcopal visitation in California in 1864, was accused of being a spy and arrested while at a camp meeting. Only after considerable delay and a personal appeal to General Irvin McDowell was he released.¹¹ A Congregationalist periodical, *The Pacific*, joining in the general attack on the Southern Church, declared in an editorial in 1864 that "there is not a fragment of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, left in this State. It has long since ceased to be in the main a power for anything but evil."¹²

With the war over the task of reorganization was begun. In 1866 and 1867 only one appointment was made to the southern region—to Los Angeles. During 1867 the work evidently began to assume significant and lasting proportions. J. E. Miller was the sole Southern Methodist minister in southern California. Largely to him Southern Methodism was indebted not only for its continuation in southern California, but also for its attainment of a more solid foundation.¹³ In 1868 southern California became the Pacific Conference's Los Angeles Mission District. This consisted of Los Angeles station, Los Angeles Circuit, San Bernardino Mission, Santa Barbara Circuit, and San Simeon, with W. A. Spurlock as Presiding Elder. In September of that year the first Quarterly Conference ever held by Southern Methodists in southern California took place in Los Angeles.¹⁴ A year later the work was further enlarged with six more

appointments: Los Nietos Circuit (now Downey), El Monte, San Buenaventura Circuit, San Luis Obispo Circuit, San Diego, and San Luis Rey.

3. FORMATION OF THE LOS ANGELES CONFERENCE

The Southern Church soon felt that the ministry in southern California not only was progressing satisfactorily but also was assured of an increasingly fertile field for evangelization. In order to centralize the activities and to give them added importance the Los Angeles Conference was organized with ten ministers on October 26, 1870, at San Bernardino by Bishop W. M. Wightman.

The original members of the Conference and their appointments for the *Los Angeles District* were as follows: W. A. Spurlock, Presiding Elder; Los Angeles Station, M. W. Glover; Los Angeles Circuit, S. M. Adams; Los Nietos, W. Moores; El Monte, A. Adams; Santa Clara, J. E. Miller; Santa Barbara, D. M. Rice; San Luis Obispo, J. W. Allen; Tehachapi, J. M. Rogers; and G. E. Butler, Principal, Los Nietos Collegiate Institute. On the *San Bernardino District* the appointments read: W. Monk, Presiding Elder and San Bernardino Station; Arizona, A. Groves; San Bernadino Circuit, San Luis Rey, San Diego, all to be supplied; and R. A. Latimer, Sunday School Agent.¹⁵

As had been the case for the Methodist Episcopal Church, the war had interrupted the anticipated ministry of the Southern Methodist Church and had made necessary a complete reorganization. By 1870 with the formation of the Los Angeles Conference notable progress had been made. It was too early to see any impact upon society or upon the total Church, yet the ministers were sure that the years ahead held promise.