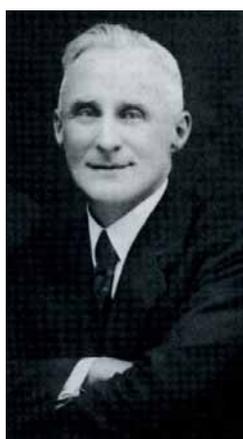


COURAGE IN THE LORD
THE STORY OF
ALBERT HENRY PIPER



FIRST MISSIONARY OF THE SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH IN AUSTRALASIA TO
ISLANDS OF THE PACIFIC

By MARYE TRIM

Marye Trim

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ALBERT HENRY PIPER

Education Department
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This is the story of the conversion experience and ministry of Albert Henry Piper, first missionary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australasia to the Pacific Islands, an administrator and pioneer in the first half of the twentieth century.

This account is based on the reminiscences of A. H. Piper himself, his wife, Nellie, and family members. Numerous church leaders, ministers and former Avondale students of the period¹ also contributed to this memory of a significant figure in Seventh-day Adventist church history in the South Pacific Division.²

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¹ At the time of publication, 2004, most of these contributors are deceased.

² The writer has researched widely over a thirty year period and does not intend to lionise the hero, rather to present evidence from a multitude of witnesses, writing in sanctified Christian story format.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author of this story, *Courage in the Lord*, is Marye Trim, BA, MEd, MLitt, PhD.

She trained as a teacher at Avondale College under Dr Geoffrey Rosenhain, 1949-50. She subsequently taught at Hawthorne Adventist High School, 1951-52, before marrying John Trim, a ministerial graduate of 1950, and in 1971 taught at Zillmere Adventist School. They have three daughters, two sons, seven grandchildren and a cat called Prince Caspian. (*Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C. S. Lewis is a favourite book). They now live in England.

In addition to mission service as a teacher in India and Thailand, Marye has been a lecturer in English at the Australian Catholic University, the University of Western Sydney, Loughborough University, UK (1996-2001), Newbold College, and Avondale College.

Author of *A Million Times Glad*, *Tell me about Ellen White*, *The Rights of a Child*, *Growing and Knowing*, and the video of author Hesba Brinsmead, *Longtime*, she has published hundreds of poems, stories and articles in both denominational and the secular press. She believes that the dedication, faith and sacrifice of early Adventist pioneers in Australasia should be remembered as an inspiration for the future.

*We have nothing to fear for the future
except as we shall forget
the way the Lord has led us,
and His teaching in our past history.*

E.G. White, *Life Sketches*, p.196.

One morning in 1883, the choir, wearing cassocks and white surplices, walked solemnly down the long red-carpeted aisle of the Christchurch cathedral. At the front of the procession, behind the cross-bearer, walked eight year old Albert Henry Piper, singing the anthem, 'Praise Ye the Father', in his boy soprano.

Through the nave he looked straight ahead, but as he neared the choir stalls he allowed his eyes to quickly glance down. Here there were sailing ships engraved on the floor which he regarded proudly as *his* ships. Hadn't his Mama and Papa sailed on one from England to New Zealand as pioneer settlers, making a new home on the Canterbury Plains? The thought passed quickly as he lifted his eyes again, singing, 'Praise Him all ye angels', easily reaching the D note in bell-like tones.

It was Sunday, day of two choral church services, plus Sunday School in the afternoon. Mother and Father Piper were always in the Sunday congregation, accompanied by his younger sister, Nina, and three younger brothers, Wensley, Reginald and Harold. Tall and talented for his age, fair-haired with bright, alert eyes, Albert was the handsome eldest child in the Piper family.

Sometimes he led his brothers into mischief, such as the night they climbed out on the branches of the peach tree by their bedroom window after prayers and lights-out. Perched over the laden branches they feasted on ripe peaches. With Nina he stole honeycomb from the honey barrel on the landing, just poking a finger in and scooping up the crunchy syrup as they passed on the stairs. But the children lived in Victorian times of the nineteenth century when parents believed that children should be 'seen and not heard' and demanded instant obedience. Beatings as punishment were inevitable, short, sharp and unforgettable; going to bed without supper was equally memorable.

Albert's mother wept after she had smacked him, explaining to him that it was her duty to God to train him up in the way he should go; that children should honour their parents, as the Bible said. She did not frequently kiss or cuddle him, for such was not the Victorian way, but Albert knew she loved him and he loved her strongly in return. Of his father he was less certain, but the story of how the devil defeated the Salvation Army for Albert's sake, assured him of his father's care. It happened when Albert became ill with high fever. Was his sickness caused by meningitis, or pneumonia, both of which meant death? The doctor finally decided, 'He has a severe abscess in his ear, and there appear to be complications. I will give him morphine to ease the pain but he must, and I insist on this, he must be in a quiet room and undisturbed. Your son is very ill.'

Sunday afternoon came when the local Salvation Army band assembled at the end of Peterborough Street, Sydenham, a Christchurch suburb where the Piper family lived. Standing in a circle, the bandsmen tuned and tested their instruments, making high

cascades of sound and alternative deep rumblings. Then they formed lines, and, at the Captain's command, began to march with loud and firm rhythmic steps.

Soon they began to play: trumpets, cornets, kettledrums and a big bass drum. *Dumetty-dum daa, boometty-boom boom*. Then the female singers began to sing, 'Onward Christian Soldiers, marching as to war' . . . and they tinkled and tapped their tambourines: *tinkle-tink TINK*. Residents hurried out to the kerb to watch the band's progress along the street; some children joined the vanguard and marched with make-believe instruments. The music sounded all over the suburb.

Then the procession moved near Albert's home. But who was this red-faced man who stood in the middle of the road, hindering their progress? Was it a drunk who needed 'saving'?

It was Joseph Piper, Albert's father. 'Excuse me, Sir,' he said to the Major who carried the huge Salvation Army flag. 'Please stop a moment.'

The band marched on the spot as Mr Piper jabbed the air with his finger for emphasis, saying, 'My son is very ill. The doctor insists he have quietness. Please go to another street.'

In reply the Major clutched his flag, his own cheeks growing as crimson as the cross that swirled over his head. 'Can't do that. We've come out to fight the devil.'

Albert's father pleaded again. The Major reiterated, 'We've come out to meet the devil. Band, on the count, qu --ii-ck march!'

Now Joseph Piper put his hand into his coat pocket. He leapt suddenly forward, stabbing the big bass drum with a pocket knife, shouting, 'You've met the devil right now. Stop, I say.'

The band stopped in confusion. The Major and Captain looked at each other. They followed the players and singers who were shuffling away, routed. Horrified neighbours went indoors, calling their offspring to follow. Now the street was quiet and not even a *tinkle-tink* had disturbed Albert. He lay in bed fighting to survive his illness.

In the late Eighteen-Eighties, Mary and Joseph Piper and their children moved away from Sydenham to live near the city of Wellington in the North Island of New Zealand. Joseph's business had been declining, partly due to his increasing use of alcohol and a gambling habit that started when he tried to rescue his finances. The family moved north to start again: father, mother and six children, for a new baby sister, Violet Mabel, had been born in 1886.

Albert felt sad to leave his home, school and friends in Christchurch, but he knew he could not be a choir boy much longer for his voice was starting to change. Sometimes a deep growl or sort-of cracking sound came out when he was supposed to be singing the treble melody. So embarrassing!

In 1891, Albert's mother attended some meetings in Wellington about Bible prophecy. They were led by a young preacher called Stephen McCullagh from South Australia who taught things from the Bible she had not heard before. On March 7, 1891, she wrote on the flyleaf of her own Bible, 'Kept the Sabbath.'

By this time Albert was sixteen years old, had finished school with honours and had gained a job in the Stamp Department of the prestigious Public Service. He did not attend Saturday meetings with his mother, though the younger children always accompanied her. Sometimes Reginald and the other brothers were teased by children who followed them about at school and on the street, shouting, 'Jew- boys, Jew-Jew Jew-boys.' Albert felt anger rising in him when his brothers reported the bullying. He could not understand why his mother did not rush to their defence, as his father had done for him with the Salvation Army band years before. Going to church on Saturday caused too much trouble; it was crazy!

Albert chose to attend a Presbyterian church with his friends from the tennis club. He thought that the girl he played doubles with was 'rather nice.'

Five years on, in 1896, Albert and his tennis partner were going steady as girl and boy friend, considering a future together. He continued to be unhappy about his mother's Saturday worship habit and, worse still in his eyes, was the widening rift caused by his father having started to attend meetings also, along with another baby sister, Amy. As if all that were not enough, Nina was now employed as a housekeeper for seven shillings a week for 'that prophet woman, Mrs White.'³

Albert resolved to go away from the 'madness' for a while; to request some extra holiday time; anything, perhaps even move to a boarding house or get married. What should he do? As he pondered, he saw pictures in his mind of his happy childhood years; of visits to his uncle's sheep farm south of Christchurch. There he had fished in mountain streams, explored vast paddocks on horseback and heard his own shouts that yodelled back to him from encircling hills as he played cowboys and Indians with his brothers. Carefree! The sheep farm - yes. That was the place to go!

³ See Appendix for letter by Ellen White about the Piper family with reference to Nina, Albert and their parents

“G’ Mornin’, Sir,” called a sailor as he pattered down the rungs of a ladder to the deck of a New Zealand inter-island ferry. ‘Nice mornin’ - jest a little chilly from the mountains. We’ll soon be in port, Sir.’

Albert, at the starboard rail, nodded in reply. He was now a tall twenty-one year old, fit from much tennis, other sports and hill tramping. His strong serve and volley aroused fear in his tennis opponents, he strode along the hilly Wellington streets like a mountain deer, but he knew he needed all that strength and a lot more for the job that lay ahead of him in the South Island.

He looked out over the waves, noticing how they were subsiding in height and force as the ferry entered between the ancient crater walls of Lyttelton harbour. He observed how sunrise shimmered pink and gold across the water. ‘Indeed it is a nice morning,’ he replied.

As the sun rose higher and Port Lyttelton drew closer, Albert remembered his early years in Christchurch. He thought of his father and grandparents who had come to the South Island of New Zealand forty years before as early settlers. They had travelled the long sea journey under sail from Middlesex in England. They had to walk with their baggage over the hills toward the plains to make a new home there.

Now, in 1896, Albert came overnight by ferry from Wellington in the North Island. He had a special purpose for this journey - to get away from family, especially his mother’s new religion. So he shrugged off memories and watched the seamen as they prepared ropes and anchor. He stared at the distant shore, at the miniscule figures on the wharf, wondering if there might, perhaps, be a welcoming face, yet at the same time recognising that no-one would meet him here. The welcome would come when he had reached Waimate by train.

That same evening Albert arrived at the small, lamp-lit railway station of Waimate, on the eastern side of the South Island to the south, past the township of Timaru. There was not a house in sight, only a railway siding and a building that served as office and home for the station master. Leading away from the station into darkness lay the beginning of a rough track with trees on either side. Albert shivered, then buttoned his coat for the air was, as the seaman had said that morning, just a little chilly because of the Southern Alps that stood like a zigzag backbone to the west.

‘It’s good to see you,’ his uncle greeted him, stepping forward to shake his hand, then taking charge of Albert’s trunk. He placed it in his buggy and as soon as they both were seated he muttered ‘Giddyupp,’ and the grey hackney trotted through trees along the dark track.

'Your letter said you wanted to be treated like the rest of the shearing team,' the older man remarked. 'Of course your aunt wants you to stay in the house with us, but if you want to get on with the men -'

'Yes, I do.' Albert replied firmly.

'It won't be like what you're used to. Comfortable home; posh government job at a desk in the city; only a ten hour day, or less.'

'I realise that. But I had to get away; try something new. My mother has become so unorthodox in her religious beliefs -- our home has become so . . .'

'Mmm. I see. Well, you won't have time for much of that round here.'

In the silence that followed, broken only by the rattle-rattle of the buggy and the beat of high-stepping hooves, Albert remembered what had happened on the Saturday evening before he left. Dressed in his white tennis flannels he had passed through the front parlour, only to meet the woman his mother called a prophet, sitting right in his way. 'Hello, Albert,' Mrs White had said in a kindly voice. 'I want you to know that I can see you will preach about the second coming of Christ.'

She had not spoken anything about the Sabbath that his mother was always reminding him of, only speaking of a second coming of Christ, of which he, Albert Piper, Public Service employee with good prospects, would preach. It was crazy! Sheer madness!

Yet , ever since, he could not chase the words out of his head. He had lost nearly every game of doubles that Saturday evening because of his lack of concentration. 'Albert, what's wrong? his girl friend had asked, trying to be patient, but not at all pleased by their defeat.

At the farm, Albert's uncle took him to his sleeping quarters. It was a one roomed cabin set near a long barn. 'You'll be with Robbie, my regular shepherd. In here,' he said, pushing the door open. 'The other men are settled in the barn already, but I think this will be better for you. Robbie can show you the ropes; he needs someone to talk to anyway. Strange fellow, bit of a loner but great with sheep; been with me nearly ten years.' He passed Albert the oil lamp. 'Take this. See you in the morning.'

Albert stepped into the unlined timber cabin, shut the door behind him and looked around. To his left, Robbie lay sprawled asleep under a layer of blankets and a heavy overcoat. He snored on, oblivious to Albert's presence. In the space between Robbie's bed and an empty bunk to the right, lay a black and white sheep dog which lifted its head and stared with big brown eyes. It watched as Albert pulled off his boots, sox, coat, shirt and trousers but kept on his undershirt and long johns. The dog watched again as Albert lay down on the bunk bed, pulling up rough blankets to keep out the cold.

'Well, this is it,' Albert told himself. 'Escape! A solution!'

As grey, early morning light crept under the door into the cabin, Albert woke up, hearing the voice of Robbie. The man's accent revealed his birthplace, Scotland, and Albert listened as Robbie muttered on and on to his dog about someone called Mackenzie whose own dog had been hung as a witch. 'Ay, but they canna have you, my boy. Mackenzie came in the night and warned me to take care. Take car-rre!' His voice grew shrill.

Albert lay still, thinking, 'What do we have here? More madness?'

As Robbie woke up fully he became aware of Albert's presence, and in a few words he introduced himself as they dressed. He explained the arrangements for bathing, soon afterwards adding. 'This way if you want some tucker.' He led the way to a long, sheltered veranda on the homestead where Albert's aunt served porridge and toast with scalding-hot tea. By seven o'clock Albert was in the shearing shed, being shown what he must do to work as a bag-hand, assisting the team of shearers who had moved into the barn on the previous day.

After that first long, sweaty day, one day soon merged into another, an unabated nightmare of effort for Albert as he packed, then hoisted over his shoulder huge bags of heavy fleeces. While at first it all seemed a great adventure, nevertheless he began to both pity and detest the sheep, their frantic bleating and the stench of blood mixed with sweat. Alongside the sun-tanned team of older men with their toned biceps, he felt inept and puny. They worked with apparent laid-back ease, yet they worked hard, swore hard and drank hard. Albert had never met anyone like them before and observed them with fascination

They teased and challenged him, too, for wasn't he a stuck-up new chum, bit of a gent from the city? Redheaded Clarry said, 'Heard about the ewe that 'ad lambs with twin heads, mate? You oughta get out on the hills with Robbie; some pretty sights there where the hawks have gouged out the sheep's eyes.' Rewi from Rotorua joined in, 'Some beaudies out there, real monsters, all blown up into stink-bombs!' He bulged his eyes and flexed his muscles. The other men laughed. 'You tell 'm, Mate.'

Every night, after the day's mess had been swept up in the shearing shed, Albert again met up with Robbie who had been out on the saddle in the hill country, mustering sheep during the day. Devoted to his chief sheep dog, the one which slept in the cabin, the Scot said little, and when he did he referred as if obsessed to the local folk lore of Mackenzie and his witch dog.

Eventually the shearing season ended. Albert watched with some sadness as his uncle and Robbie shut and secured the wooden windows of the shearing shed. Tougher now, used to the other men and accepted by them, he wondered if he would ever experience such a basic and rural life style again, believing it was very unlikely to happen

if he returned to Wellington and his chosen white-collar career. He had grown to appreciate burly Clarry, Rewi, the Maori, and the rest of the gang, recognising their competence, their respect for sheep and their ingrained knowledge of the mood and ways of the country.

On the last day, after the shearing team had shaken hands, winked at Albert and slapped his shoulder in their good-byes, he watched Robbie gallop by with the sheep dog running ahead, bound for a distant paddock. Then, alone in the cabin, he folded the work clothes his aunt had washed in readiness for packing.

But what was this book at the bottom of his trunk? Oh yes, a Bible, no doubt placed there by his mother. He had spent nearly a month away and in that time had largely forgotten about her new religion and her eager desire to see her eldest son become part of it. *Surely it was all madness! She actually went to a worship service on a Saturday. Saturday, when normal people did their shopping, played tennis and took their baths in readiness for church on Sunday. Surely if God wanted everyone to be like the Jews, his son would have made it clear when he lived on earth! Surely he would have made everything clear.* The thoughts raged through Albert's mind.

He took the Bible and began to read where it fell open at the 27th chapter of St Matthew which was headed 'The trial and Crucifixion of Jesus.' He knew the story, of course, and he had sung solemn Easter hymns and choral anthems for about six years in Christchurch, sometimes singing about 'the lamb that was slain for our transgressions.' He wondered, now, if had he actually ever read the chapter for himself. So he sat down and, compelled by the sequence of events in the narrative, lingered over the pages. Thoughts of sheep and a lamb that was slain kept intruding - how it must have bleated, like the sheep he knew in the shearing shed. Then, abruptly becoming aware of growing darkness outside, and shaking off his thoughts, he left his packing to go to his uncle's house for dinner. The book remained open on his bunk, its pages upturned. He planned that when he returned in an hour or so, he would continue his search for evidence that Sunday was the divine choice for a day of rest. *No sense in going back to Wellington with the issue not resolved once and for all. There must be an answer he could use to rebut his mother's crazy pleas!*

It was a black-dark night, with sudden stinging coldness outdoors compared with indoors and Uncle's log fire, when Albert returned along the track to the cabin. He turned the handle of the door and was surprised to find it would not open. 'What?' He tried again. Then he called, 'Robbie, let me in. The door's stuck!'

Robbie did not answer, yet Albert was sure he must be inside. Hadn't he heard the horse gallop by while eating dinner earlier in the evening? 'Probably ate at the pub; probably drunk again.' So he called again more loudly, 'Robbie, let me in. It's Albert here.'

Again there was no answer, just the haunting cry of an owl, 'Morepork.' A shooting star fell in an arc across the sky.

He made a third attempt. 'Robbie, open up for me, dear chap.'

Robbie's dog, inside, barked now in reply, with added whining tones, but Robbie still did not open the door.

'Right! Albert pushed hard at the vertical boards of the door. They strained, squeaked and shuddered while the dog barked again. On his next attempt, the door burst open.

As he stepped inside, holding his lantern to light the way, Albert realised that something was horribly wrong. There before him in the eerie shadows, he saw that Robbie lay sprawled across his bed with his gun fallen partly over his chest. His eyes looked glassy and staring. 'Robbie!' Albert exclaimed, lifting a limp hand to take the shepherd's pulse.

But it was no drunken stupor; there was no pulse; Robbie was dead!

Albert stood stiffly, taking in the awful sight. Then his eyes caught sight of the Bible lying open on his bed where he had left it earlier at the story of death. Now its white pages were criss-crossed with the deepening red stain of Robbie's spattered brain tissue, taking, it seemed, the form of, of . . .

A cross was appearing on the story of the cross! What was going on here, apart from the fact that Mackenzie's ghost and a witch and Robbie's other irrational ramblings had led the shepherd to suicide? Was the man of the cross, the sacrificial lamb for the world, trying to grab Albert's attention; to demand him to take notice?

Calm outwardly, despite the shock, with questions rapidly bubbling in his mind, Albert hurried back to the farmhouse to report the tragedy, while one sad-eyed sheep dog stayed on guard by his broken master.

CHAPTER THREE 1897 CALLED TO A HIGHER SERVICE

'Never, Piper! Absolutely impossible! Why should a talented man like yourself even consider resignation? You will be giving up a prestigious career and a secure future. Have you gone mad?'

It was over a year since Albert's return to Wellington, a time in which the Saviour of the bloodstained Bible story spoke more and more to his heart. Now he talked with his senior management officer in the Public Service.

'I guess you find it difficult to understand. I did myself, at first, and I assure you I struggled against it. Finally I wrote to you and requested Saturdays free from work.'

'And of course the answer was no. Never heard such nonsense, Piper. Look, I want to plead with you, don't be a fool and throw away your opportunities.'

Through Albert's mind flashed his deep study of the Bible and history since his return from Waimate; how he had grown in the conviction that, strange as it all seemed, he was being called to a higher service than that in which he already worked.

'I have another opportunity and I feel compelled to take it', he told the senior executive. They shook hands as Albert said good-bye. The older man, shaking his head, watched him go.

'Have you gone mad?' His girl friend echoed the same question. 'Albert, I can't handle these new ideas of yours. If you were going to work in the Presbyterian ministry, well, that might be difficult, but - I'm sorry. I hoped for a future together. You see, I love you, but, but . . .' She left in tears.

Albert's parents, however, felt proud of Albert's courage and new direction. His father understood, his own life having been changed since he heard Ellen White preach about temperance. Now he was publicly recognised as a man of high principles and had been elected a city councillor.

Thus, in the summer of 1897, Albert began work as tent master in Christchurch for an American Adventist preacher, Eugene Farnsworth. When Farnsworth's series of evangelical sermons finished, Albert moved to the coal-mining town of Westport on the north-west coast of the South Island. Here he began to preach, himself. Here he discovered he had a gift for preaching and that people would listen. Some were impressed by his story of a bloodstained Bible and of a Saviour who died to lift men and women out of the dark mines of sin and misery. They accepted God's gift of new birth and a day of rest and began to worship on Saturday with conviction like Albert's own.

While Albert ministered in Westport, he received a letter from an Australian lady named Martha Brown. 'Would you like to go to Australia to attend the Avondale School?' she asked. 'Ellen White has suggested that I lend you fifty Pounds so that you

can become an Avondale student; so that you can study the Bible and prepare to preach about the second coming of Christ.'

As he read the letter over and over again, Albert recalled that day some years earlier when Ellen White had told him, 'I can see you will preach about the second coming.'

With Martha Brown's letter in his hand, 'Thy will be done,' he prayed. Then he went out to enquire about the price of a ticket to sail to Australia.

'You've come at the right time, Sir,' the shipping company clerk told him. 'We have a special offer this week only. Are you interested?'

He was very interested, believing it was a sign that he should accept Martha's offer. After farewelling his Westport friends and his family in Christchurch, he sailed across the Tasman Sea to Australia.



Avondale Students 1897

Soon after his arrival at the Avondale School in Cooranbong, New South Wales, Ellen White came by phaeton from her home in Avondale Road. Reining back the pair of horses, she greeted him near Bethel Hall as he would always remember. 'Albert Piper, you are welcome here! Praise God for his leading and Martha Brown's generosity. I knew several years ago that you would come to this school.'

Now he began his student days in preparation for ministry in the service of God, the higher service. Quickly he learnt the routine: cold bath, six o'clock Bible class, breakfast, followed by classes until lunch, then gardening all afternoon, college worship and study at night. Blue skies overhead, the laughter of kookaburras, the unfamiliar tangy perfume of gum trees, smiling faces, friendships, books, discussions, prayers, peace . . . Albert praised his Saviour for his call and providence.

At the end of the 1897 school year, Albert packed away his *Bell's grammar*, *Hills Rhetoric*, *Steele's Physiology* and the rest of his books. He had arranged to travel

south to South Australia to sell religious books in order to earn money for his Avondale fees in 1898. He also intended to pay back to Martha Brown as much as he possibly could.

On his return in 1898, Albert received an invitation from Ellen White to stay in her home, Sunnyside, as a guest while he continued to be a student. It was another generous offer that he felt the Lord had prompted. So, gratefully, he settled into a small upstairs bedroom with a dormer window. From there he could see the Sunnyside orchard as well as glimpses of the nearby forest which frequently rang with the calls of curlews and the tinkle of bellbirds. In his quiet room he spent many hours in study and prayer. He walked to classes along a bush track past Amen Gate.

Gradually he began to recognise a distraction from his studies in the form of a slim and beautiful young woman of French descent. He had noticed her the previous year, then during the summer in South Australia which was her home. She was Hester Elizabeth Newcombe, called Hettie by her friends. She had a sweet face with eyes that looked at him directly and honestly through cute little rimless spectacles. She joined in all the worships and testimony services with sincerity and dignity. She frequently sat at his dining table and she captivated him totally.

As the months of his second year at the Avondale School passed, Albert wondered how he could tell Hettie of his serious interest in her. Had she guessed? Did she feel the same about him? He could not speak directly to her about it because courtship at school was not allowed. Students were expected to devote themselves wholly to serious preparation for Christian service and the second coming of Jesus. *What could he do?* He knelt by his bed in the little room at Sunnyside, and he prayed for guidance.

He found the answer in a cluster of tiny blue, bell-like flowers which grew along the pathway through the bush that led to the Avondale School. Gently he picked a bunch and took them to the college dining room at lunch time. There he wove the flowers around her serviette ring and passed it to her. Their eyes met and, looking into each other's eyes, oblivious of those who sat around, they both recognised what this symbolic gesture meant: *With this ring, I make my troth. Forever and ever, my heart will be true. . .*

In 1899, Albert Piper became the first minister of the Seventh-day Adventist congregation at Hamilton, New South Wales. With him came his bride, Hettie. Together they worked hard to promote and plan a church building at Hamilton, while Albert also worked as Secretary-Treasurer of the New South Wales Conference.



Hettie Piper

During 1900, Albert and Hettie were ministering in South Australia. What did it matter if their cupboards were made of packing cases? They had frilled cotton covers, sewn by Hettie. What did it matter that their meals were scanty and plain? What did it matter that they often received no wages because the Conference Treasurer had no money to pay them? Every day they felt rich because they loved each other and the Lord Jesus who led their lives.

In June 1900, some months after the federation of the Australian States, Albert received a letter that made his eyes shine.

'Tell me, tell me, Albert. What does it say?' Hettie asked, noticing how his face had lit up.

He took her hand. 'My dear, this letter is from Pastor Farnsworth, the evangelist I worked for in Christchurch. He asks if we are willing to go to the South Sea Islands to serve as missionaries among the people there.'

Hettie drew in her breath with excitement. 'Where to, exactly?'

'Pastor Farnsworth says Rarotonga is where the need is. It will be a completely new experience for us; we would need to depend on the Lord for guidance and courage.'

'To Rarotonga! Oh Albert, only last week I was reading about Doctor Caldwell's medical work there. He said - and I recall his words exactly - 'Pray for the Lord of the Harvest to send forth labourers into his harvest.' And I have been praying that every day ever since.'

Albert spread his arms wide open and Hettie fell into them. They clung to each other, knowing the answer they would give.

CHAPTER FOUR 1900 TO RAROTONGA: FIRST MISSIONARIES FROM AUSTRALASIA

Within weeks Albert received another letter, dated July 16, 1900. He frowned as he turned the four pages, then reread it from the beginning. Sighing, he sat down.

‘Albert, what is it. Is someone ill - your mother or your father or. . .?’

He passed the letter to Hettie. ‘It’s from Ellen White.’

‘Yes, and . . .?’

‘You read it and see what you think. It’s not to be taken lightly.’

Hettie read the thousand or so words through, noting that it had two parts.

The first was about the money loaned to Albert three years before by Martha Brown. Ellen White advised that the loan should be repaid fully; that he should not be giving money to other causes, such as for a church building at Avondale; that he should not go overseas until he had fulfilled his obligation.

Albert’s face showed distress. ‘The Lord knows I have done my best -’ he began.

Hettie added, ‘We have scarcely enough to live on as it is after we have given tithes and offerings, but God will -’

‘Yes. God will provide, my Love.’ Albert wiped a tear from her cheek. ‘And we will make every effort to pay off every farthing we owe. Every farthing.’

The second part of the letter was admonition about stewardship. It emphasised the example of Christ and the importance of honest character development. They were words of both rebuke and instruction, motivated by loving concern for his life, for Ellen White acted toward him not only as prophet, but as a surrogate mother. Again she used the metaphor of a ladder, just as she had done in a Testimony written in Copenhagen on July 17, 1886. It said:

Look to the top of the ladder . . . Jesus is this ladder. Climb up by Him. Cling to Him, and ere long you will step off the ladder into His everlasting kingdom.⁴

In the three months that followed, Albert managed to repay his debt to Martha Brown in full, every farthing of it. Albert and Hettie did this by eating less, even more plainly, and doing without some necessities. Perhaps he took on an additional job, as Ellen White had suggested. Then he and Hettie sailed for Rarotonga as the first Adventist missionaries from Australia and New Zealand to the islands of the South Seas. They were vanguards to the long stream of selfless men and women from Australasia who followed, going to other islands all over the Pacific Ocean. Heralds of faith and hope, the Pipers and those that followed were courageous missionaries

⁴ E. G. White. *Testimony for the Church*, Vol. 8, p. 130.

who changed many lives for good, establishing Seventh-day Adventism in the Cook Islands and beyond.

Doctor John Caldwell and his wife, Julia, met Albert and Hettie when they arrived by steamer. The Caldwells came from America and they had been in Rarotonga since 1894. The island people called him 'Dr Hotwater' because many of his treatments included hot water. The couple planned to leave in a few weeks, as their American teacher assistant, J.D. Rice, had already in 1899.

Hettie looked with interest at the lush and verdant island with its palm and coconut trees and tall mountain peaks to the centre. Here, in Aorangi, would be her home after the Caldwells left. The mission homestead was a whitewashed building built by Doctor Caldwell of bricks he made from coral burnt with lime and sand. Solid, the six-roomed house had ten inch walls to keep out the tropical heat. Hettie especially liked the bright green front door that seemed to make a pleasant background to the crimson masses of hibiscus in the garden.

Julia taught Hettie how to manage in the kitchen. 'No convenient corner stores here,' she laughed. 'Let me tell you what I use as basics: bananas, coconuts and sweet potatoes! And I make yeast for bread from fermented orange juice. I'll leave you my recipes.' She paused, then added. 'You can get occasional supplies from New Zealand, if the steamer gets through the reef, but they may be damaged. And if they're not, you'll have to store them well against rats, weevils and cockroaches.'

In the early weeks, Hettie listened and observed attentively. Steadily her confidence grew, contributed to by the welcome of the local people who brought baskets of fruit, shells and garlands of bright poinciana and frangipani flowers. She neither knew of Julia's exhaustion from perpetual heat, mosquitos and a mission programme that sapped away strength, nor had she discovered the grave of Mrs Sarah Owen in the churchyard of the London Missionary Society at Avarua. Sarah who had paid the ultimate sacrifice, was the wife of the American missionary David Owen, who worked in the area in 1894-5.

While the women talked, John Caldwell told Albert about the mission, including telling him how the Adventist members were compelled to pay a cash fine if they refused to work on Saturdays, or were forced to do compulsory labour on the public roads. Albert could see that such laws must discourage those who wanted to obey God's commandments and limited the growth in mission membership.

He said, 'Perhaps I should talk about the situation with the government administrative officer on the island. I have been in the New Zealand Public Service; that may help.'

John Caldwell replied, 'I suspect that is one reason why the Lord led you here.'

Soon the Caldwells sailed away and the Pipers were on their own. They grew to know and like the inhabitants of the village, easy-going people, of similar race to the Maoris whom Albert had mixed with in New Zealand. Albert and Hettie taught school, looked after the church and co-operated with the local government officers. It was a busy life. By 1902 Albert had taken on another task: planning a church design and constructing coral and lime bricks for a church at Titikaveka, on land bought and paid for personally by Dr Caldwell in 1896.

With sadness the Pipers now heard of Julia Caldwell's death, for she had never recovered from the effects of heat and deprivation during her eight years of sacrificial service on Rarotonga. But the Pipers could not be sad for long. They had a new baby boy, born in New Zealand where Albert's mother and sister, Amy, lavished care over the new mother and child. The baby's name was Albert Joseph, and when he was seven weeks old he sailed with Hettie to Rarotonga.

The children of the mission school had tied loin cloths - red, blue, yellow, green and brown - to the trees along the beach and the lagoon to welcome Hettie back. They were jumping around with excitement as they waited for the ship to reach shore, all excited to see a white baby.

'My Hettie, said Albert senior as she came ashore. 'My son!' It was wonderful to be together again, now as a family of three. The welcome of the island people made them feel that they were family too, loved and welcome.

Writing in the *Union Conference Record*, May 1, 1902, Albert described his work and his expectation that a teacher, Evelyn Gooding, might come to assist them soon. He also referred to a call from the island of Aitutaki to start a mission programme there. He suggested that:

'a married couple should be sent there. One of them should have a thorough knowledge of nursing, as the natives of this island have no medical help whatever and are in a bad state physically, as well as spiritually.'

Weeks flew into months as Albert and Hettie worked to establish their work in two schools and Titikaveka and Aorangi churches. Albert, as chief carpenter and superintendent of the mission, felt especially gratified to see the Titikaveka church foundation stone laid with joy and thanksgiving by its twenty-six Cook Island members on the 25th November, 1903. The clerk, Kuro, wrote about it in ink in the Maori language, describing the mission and its work, and the persecution and trouble the members experienced during its early years. Albert hid the details in a bottle within the walls, along with the names of the foundation members. 'The bottle will

probably never be found,' he told Tonga, the head church deacon, 'for the Lord is coming soon.'⁵

By January, 1904, they were ready for furlough. They looked forward to having a holiday in Adelaide and Christchurch where their relatives lived. They would be glad to escape the long hard days and the hot nights when sleep was often disturbed because of the shouts of drunken traders or brawling, heathen families.

While in New Zealand on furlough, Albert was ordained at the New Plymouth camp meeting. So he became *Pastor* Albert Piper, his calling to ministry in a higher service confirmed.

The date to sail back to Rarotonga was almost upon them when Pastor Piper was advised by his dentist that he should stay in New Zealand longer to have dental surgery. 'You must have this treatment,' both his dentist and doctor insisted.

"You stay,' decided Hettie. 'I'll go on ahead. You know how infrequent the shipping is to Rarotonga and we have these tickets . . . The mission folk are expecting us, so little Albert and I will go back while your problems are fixed.'

Pastor Piper could not persuade her to wait, so Hettie and little Albert returned. 'I'll be back as soon as I can,' he promised.

So Hettie and the little boy returned to Rarotonga where she took on every responsibility of running the mission programme. The islanders called her 'Mama.' When eventually her husband, the 'Master', returned, he glowed with good health, but Hettie, who had always been slender, was thinner than ever, like a reed that a hurricane could crush or blow far away.

Now they began their second term as missionaries together. 'I want to buy a property away from the village,' said Albert. 'I have a place in mind.' So in time he built a boarding school at Mizpeh where Hettie became its matron. It was there, on July 25, 1905, that a brother for young Albert was born, Laurence Alvin. She held him in her arms when she supervised the dining room; while she worked in the kitchen or taught in the school, he lay in a crib near her table. As she worked during the long hot days, she found herself wishing she did not feel so tired, so continually tired.

In 1907, *The Union Conference Record* reported on the Rarotonga mission and Hettie's health, saying, 'It is feared that in a very little while it will prove too much for her.'

That same year the Piper family planned to go on furlough again. Pastor Piper resolved that the family would stay together this time, taking their full allowance of time, making sure they were all well-rested and in good health before returning.

⁵ The bottle was found on November 25, 1975 by the missionary Pastor George Porter and Tere Mataio, church deacon, when a larger church was dedicated. The letter can be seen at Avondale. The Porters were stationed in the Cook Islands, 1972-80.

He looked at young Albert, noting his scabby skin and skinny body. 'Is it caused by worms, or mosquitoes, or some infection?' he wondered. 'Well, the good doctors at the Sydney Sanitarium will know what to do.'

With further concern he considered his two-year-old 'Rarotongan' son, Laurence, who was often sickly, perhaps because Hettie had breast-fed him for only a short time and had fed him in infancy largely on mashed arrowroot biscuits. Then he looked at his beloved wife. With her bright eyes and flushed cheeks, the Rarotongan's precious 'Mama' looked beautiful - yet something was not quite right. 'She needs a furlough' he comforted himself.

The day for departure came and Pastor Piper locked the green door. As the steamer moved away, the Piper family looked back at their many friends, including Rima, Tim, Rau, Tai Vairanga, Vaia, Solomon and their families, who had come to say good-bye. Singing as they waved, their voices wafted melodiously over the waves, 'God be with you till we meet again. Till we meet again . . .'

CHAPTER 5 1907 TWENTY-TWO THOUSAND KISSES

It's tuberculosis,' said Dr Laretta Kress at the Sydney Sanitarium. 'You must delay your return to Rarotonga.'

Albert hoped that Hettie's dry cough, weight loss, chest pain and sweating would soon be gone, for now she could have plenty of rest, good food and medical care. But months went by and still Dr Kress would not allow the family to return to their home in Rarotonga. So Albert began ministry in New South Wales, then when an invitation came, he moved with his family to the Darling Ranges in Western Australia where he was appointed President.

'It's a beautiful place,' he told Hettie. 'This is the place where you will recover, away from bustling Sydney. Then we can go back to our people in Rarotonga.'

In 1911, Hettie was well enough to return to the Cook Islands and the people she loved, but only briefly. There, she and Albert introduced George and Maybelle Sterling, new missionaries from America, into the programme on Aututaki. Back in Australia again, the Piper family moved into a small white house along Fox Valley Road, near the Sydney Sanitarium at Wahroonga. Nurses from the Sanitarium called in often to help Hettie, especially when the two boys became sick with whooping cough.

'I like Nurse Louise the best,' said young Albert.

Laurence pursed his lips as he thought about the bright-faced young nurses who came to put compresses on their chests, to read stories, or to clean and tidy the house. 'Ye-es,' he agreed. 'But Nurse Nellie isn't too bad, though she hates snotty noses.' He giggled and wiped his arm across his face.

'You shouldn't call her that,' scolded his brother. 'You're supposed to say Nurse Eleanor! Oh, I wish we didn't have to leave Mama and go to stay with Aunt Mabel. I want to stay with Mama and Papa.'

The boys did go to stay with Aunt Mabel, however, because Hettie feared she might infect them with her tuberculosis while they remained in a run-down condition from whooping cough. Mabel had graduated from teaching in 1909, taught at the New Zealand Adventist College in Cambridge and was now wife of ministerial student at the Avondale School, Harold White. 'It's just for a short visit. Till Mama gets stronger,' Hettie told her sons. 'Always remember - remember every day - that Mama loves you.'

The little white house in Fox Valley Road was unusually quiet and tidy after Albert junior and Laurence left with their father. First they travelled by steam train from Hornsby to Dora Creek station, then by launch up the deep and wide Dora to Avondale. In a starless night everything seemed strange and scary to the boys.

What fearful thing swam in the black-as-demons creek water? What made those ghostly wailing cries along the bank?

When Pastor Albert returned to Wahroonga alone, he did all he could for Hettie. He coaxed her appetite with sweet black grapes and dried figs; sometimes he brought her pieces of pawpaw or pineapple that reminded her of the tropics and those special years in Rarotonga. He often sat with her, reading or talking about the boys and their letters; remembering unforgettable times at Avondale, South Australia and Aorangi. Sometimes he massaged her neck or stroked her aching arms.

Hettie loved those hours together. She rested much while Albert went about his work and, if able, walked in the bush behind the house. Some afternoons she did cross-stitch embroidery, making bookmarks and wall mottoes for her family and friends.

In time, however, her leg and other body parts began to swell and she felt too tired to walk. She put down the embroidered word she was working on when she reached the last *E* of *P-E-A-C-E*, stitched in a delicate blue chain-stitch. She began to stay in bed as the incurable disease worsened.

Letters from the boys brought both smiles and tears as they told of books they had read, Bible texts they had memorised, cicadas they had caught in the bush and Aunty Mabel's discipline. In one letter, Albert wrote:

Dear Mama and Papa.

I love you very much. I am trying to be a good boy.

I am so sorry that you are so ill. . . ' He finished his letter by sending her 'TWENTY-TWO THOUSAND KISSES.'

Laurence wrote:

My dear Mama and Papa,

I love you all. Albert is doing his homework now. I have done my homework. We are so sorry that Mama is so ill. We have been getting wood.

Dear Mama, I will try to be such a good boy that if I do not see you again on this earth I will meet you when Jesus comes to take us home.

We will always remember you, dear Mama, and we will take care of

With all my love, I am, your little Laurence. With many kisses.⁶

On the first day of June 1912, a Sabbath day, Hettie woke to the pale sunlight of a winter's morning. 'I would like to wear my prettiest nightie,' she told Nurse Eleanor. 'Perhaps today . . .'

⁶ Both letters were lent to the writer by Laurence Piper over seventy years later

While the nurses' singing group visited in the afternoon she confided to Nurse Louise, 'The singing is beautiful. And it drowns out the roaring in my chest.'

She lay back in a nest of white pillows, smiling faintly as she smelt the purple violets in a vase by her bed and heard the comforting message of gospel songs. When the choir had gone she whispered to her husband, 'Oh Albert, I love you. You are - you have . . . Her lips were pale.

At about nine o'clock that evening, Pastor Albert briefly left his chair beside her bed. As she watched him go, Hettie spoke of him to the nurse who attended, 'Oh I do love Papa!'

They were the last words she ever said, for by ten o'clock, Hester Elizabeth Piper, known as Hettie, rested completely. By next day the violets had withered and their perfume, like that of Hettie's fragrant life, had faded away. The little white house in Fox Valley Road was now still and grey on a wintry day. The love light of the Piper home had burnt out.

Pastor Albert Piper and his sons ached with the pain of parting. They wondered if they could ever be happy again.

September 17, 1913 was a time of beginning again for Pastor Albert Piper and his two sons, young Albert and Laurence. It was early spring, cool yet bright, promising better days ahead.

On that day Pastor Piper married for the second time. His bride was Eleanor Kreutzberg, called Nellie by her friends. She had trained as a nurse at the Sydney Sanitarium and was one of the nurses who had helped the family during Hettie's illness.



Eleanor Kreutzberg

Nellie had a remarkable life story thus far. Her mother, who had told her stories and played with her in the garden, had died when Nellie was seven years old, so she had been brought up by her stern German father. Her piano teacher took an interest in the motherless girl and it was through this lady's influence that, when Nellie was thirteen years old, she came to believe in the seventh-day Sabbath. However, when she tried to talk about it, or to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship, her father grew angry and threatening. Finally he forced her to leave home before her fourteenth birthday, arranging for her to work in the country, near the New South Wales town of Mudgee.

The children of the home where Nellie assisted in housekeeping and childcare, noticed her eating habits and taunted her:

Jew girl, Jew. Jew girl, Jew.
Get a piece of port. Set it on a fork.
Do some Saturday work.
Jew girl, Jew. Jew girl Jew.

It made a fine singsong rhyme for the children, chanted over and over, followed by knee-slapping and great spasms of laughter.

When Nellie resolutely would not clean the house or wash and iron on Saturdays, her employer sent her back to her father. 'Give up this Sabbath nonsense!' he shouted to his trembling daughter.

Within a few days, however, she left her home forever and travelled to Sydney where she was given a room in the home of a Sabbath-keeping Adventist family.

One Sabbath, Nellie heard Ellen White speak about the use of talents. As she listened, she wondered if she had any talents. Then, as she read her Bible, she discovered 1 Corinthians 12, verse 28, about those able to help others. 'That's my talent!' she told herself. 'I can help people, even if I am only five feet two inches tall. I'm sure Jesus wants me to be a helper.'

So, in 1901, when she was eighteen years of age, she enrolled at the Summer Hill Medical and Surgical Sanitarium, the predecessor of what became the Sydney

Sanitarium and Hospital.⁷ In 1902, she joined the first nursing class at the Sydney Sanitarium and worked there as a nurse until 1913. There her first work was in the kitchen, because in those early years nurses did domestic duties as well as care for the sick. She had scarcely any money and she could not afford to buy stockings. So she darned and she re-darned until the original heels and toes disappeared. Then she prayed about this problem that caused her so much shame.

The very next day she found a gift of new stockings on her bed. Encouraged, she prayed again with more boldness. 'Lord, I need a few pennies for a packet of hair pins. When I'm busy my hair keeps falling down and getting in the way because it's so long.' The next day a packet of long hair pins, well suited to her need, lay on her bed.

Nellie said, 'It's happening as if Cinderella's good fairy was about, but I know these are gifts from Jesus, my dearest friend.'

On another day she told Jesus how cold she found the unlined dormitory in the upper story of the Sanitarium where, early and late in the day, she studied nursing books and her Bible. Cinderella's golden coach did not carry her away to warmth, but an answer to her prayer came in a surprise gift of a bulk of warm material. From this she sewed warm bloomers, petticoats and nighties. This, and other prayer experiences, assured her she was in the right place and that the Lord was with her.

She enjoyed meeting missionaries and other Adventist Church workers who came to the Sanitarium for medical care, and she felt inspiration in their selfless service and faith. One of these influences was Hettie Piper. Nellie felt awed by Hettie's husband however - that tall, gracious, handsome man who was so clearly in love with his wife, sons and Christian ministry. She observed him, heard him preach, and read his articles in the *Record* with admiration and respect. When she visited the small white house in Fox Valley Road with the nurses' singing group, she looked about with curiosity at the attractive though simply decorated home. When she looked after the boys with their great whooping coughs, and then cared for Hettie in her final illness, she thanked God that she could fulfil the talent of being a helper.

So it came about that the seventeenth day of September, in the year 1913, was Nellie's own wedding day. And it was with the man she had admired from afar, whom she identified as a man of courage in the Lord.

The wedding was a simple ceremony in the New South Wales Conference office. Eleven-year-old Albert junior was not pleased about it and his face did not match his shiny best clothes. Laurence, now eight years old, found it all very curious.

⁷ In 2004, called the Sydney Adventist Hospital, or, affectionately by many, 'the San.

Would he have to call Nurse Kreutzberg 'Mama', or 'Nellie' like his father did?' he wondered.

Very soon after the wedding, the newly-formed Piper family moved to Western Australia where Pastor Albert would be President of the church. He took Nellie and the boys to his house in the Darling Ranges, place of treasured memories, where he hoped for restored, secure family life. It was a long timber house with shady verandas on front and back. There were two acres of land, an orchard, a vegetable garden and one cow.

It was Albert junior's duty to care for the cow. He had to see it had enough feed and that it was milked morning and evening. His stepmother told him he must also gather firewood and help in the house and garden. The eleven-year-old pulled a face behind her back. 'I hate her; she's a witch!' he told Laurence. 'I told you before that Nurse Louise was the best. Father should have married her!'

Laurence listened, unsure how to reply.

'I'm going to run away,' his brother threatened.

'But where will you go?' Laurence asked, both impressed and scared.

'I'll go home of course, to - oh!'

'You can't go back to Wahroonga. It's millions of miles away. And you can't go to Grandma in New Zealand unless you can be a ship's boy.' Laurence's eyes brightened.

'And Aunty Mabel has gone as a missionary to Fiji, and that's even further away.' Albert blinked back tears, then turned to whistle to the cow. 'That dratted cow,' he muttered.

Beginning again is never easy, and it was hard for everyone in the Piper family at first. Pastor Albert was away all day at his work and so it was left to Nellie, an idealistic second mother to two grieving boys, to manage as best she could. What could she say, what could she do when Albert junior, almost as tall, shouted at her, 'You're not my real mother!'

Two and half years later, the boys had become used to Nellie's strict ways so relationships had improved. Young Albert had not yet run away. Now he competed with Laurence to wheel his baby sister's pram. She was Clarice Muriel, born December 28, 1915.

In the following September, Pastor Albert Piper became Principal of the Darling Range School, an institution similar in goals to the missionary-training centre at Avondale. It was just a mile from his home beyond a jarrah forest, through which he walked to the school every day. There he tried to be a friend to all his students. They started to call him - behind his back - by his initials, 'A.H.'

One new student was a young man named Len Minchin. One night at evening worship he heard Pastor Piper say, 'There is no limit to the usefulness of anyone who makes room for the Holy Spirit in his heart. It does not matter who you are - the girl in the kitchen or the boy from the farm. The Holy Spirit will make a difference in your life; will use you in a special way, in ways you can never imagine.'

'I am the boy from the farm,' Len told himself. 'A.H. is talking about *me!*' Little did he know then that he would go on to do great things for God in preaching, by using his talent with music and by becoming Youth Leader of all the world in the Adventist Church.

Back at Pastor Piper's home, beyond the jarrah forest, another little voice now joined in. It was that of Athol Vivian, born in February 1918, a brother for Clarice, half-brother to Laurence and Albert. Two years on and Olive Heather completed the family. Laurence still liked to push the pram, but not Albert. Still disgruntled, he planned to leave home as soon as he could.

Some years later, the A.H. Piper family moved to 69 Victoria Street, Box Hill, Victoria. The brothers, Albert and Laurence had elected to stay on, to work in West Australia. Pastor Piper had now been appointed President of the Adventist Church in the State of Victoria.

One summer afternoon, Clarice, Athol and Heather Piper played together in the Box Hill garden with their cousin, Ilma. They were playing hospitals.

'I want to do an operation,' announced Athol, picking up Clarice's doll. 'This patient has a terrible sawdust ache.'

'Ye-es,' agreed Clarice cautiously. 'But it must only be a PRETEND operation. Last time you really slit my other doll's mouth to take out her tonsils, and you RUINED her!'

'Oh that was a long time ago, when I came home from hospital at Warburton. I'd had gastro-enteritis.' He pronounced his final word with style, and looked around for approval.

'Yes, and I hid you from Mother, so you would not be punished. But Mother told me that mothers have to chastise their children sometimes if they are to grow up good.' Heather and Athol nodded as Clarice spoke. They had heard it many times before.

Clarice finished her threat. 'So if you wreck my doll today, you'll be in big trouble, Athol Piper.'

'What does chastise really mean?' asked Heather softly.

'You know,' replied Ilma. 'No supper when you've been naughty, or a beating. Go on Athol, do a boperation.'

While Heather and Clarice giggled, Athol glared at his cousin. 'Boperation, bah! That's what I said when I was very young, so you just stop teasing. Come on, Clarice, you have to take the doll's dress off or there'll be blood on it.' He turned to Heather, 'Nurse, I need some medicines.'

Heather ran to the front garden, looking for flowers to crush for medicines. While she was there, she felt a stranger's eyes rest upon her. She looked around curiously. She met the dark eyes of an olive-skinned gypsy woman dressed in gaudy colours, hoops of ear-rings and necklace. Heather watched when the woman knocked at the door and listened as her mother answered.

'I am a true Romany,' the Gypsy began. 'I have come to sell you some of my handmade lace. Please buy.'

In the silence that followed, the Gypsy spoke again in a coaxing voice. 'Or you can cross my hand with silver. Then I will tell you your fortune.'

Nellie Piper now spoke up. 'Only God knows the future. I do not need lace today but I will give you clothes that my children have grown out of, and some apples from our tree. But I do NOT want fortune telling here.'

When the Gypsy woman had stuffed some children's clothes in her bag and pocketed some apples in the large pockets of her purple, orange and red skirt she said, 'I will tell you what I see, anyway! You have a tall daughter who will grow to be clever and strong. You have son too - he will be a doctor, perhaps in a faraway land.'

Heather drew in her breath as she knew what Doctor Athol was doing right now in the back yard. She listened on.

'The other girl who is here, not yours Ma'am - she will live a happy life. And the little one -' she looked over at Heather whose hands were full of petals. 'To you little one with the beautiful blue eyes, much sorrow will come.' She faced Nellie again. 'And trials await you and your husband.'

Nellie shut the door with a firm click, wanting to hear nothing else. She shrugged off a sudden feeling of alarm and began to sing a hymn. The Lord was coming soon; he would save her family from disaster, she assured herself.

'Come on, Heather - what are you doing? We need the medicines NOW' called Athol.

Heather ran back to the operating table, squeezing red geraniums and rose petals until they stained her hands like blood.

CHAPTER SEVEN 1927 - 1937 HOME AND CHURCH LIFE

During the years 1927 - 1937, Pastor Albert Piper was at his peak in leadership of the Adventist Church in Australasia. He served as Secretary of the Union Conference (from the 1990s on, called the South Pacific Division) and as Vice President for Island Missions, a responsibility he shared with the renowned pioneer missionary to Fiji and New Hebrides, Pastor A. G. Stewart.

Pastor Piper was recognised as an excellent committee member and chairman. One later leader of the church in Australasia said of him:

While not educated as a lawyer, he had a legal mind and could present a flawless, logical argument.⁸

Others remembered his skill at summarising the flow of ideas in a meeting and his gift of spiritual insightfulness. He was in frequent demand as a preacher and counsellor; he was also an inaugural member of the Hornsby Hospital Board.



Always a lover of people and loved by them, he was sought after for dedicatory services of new churches, for weeks of prayer, rally days, camp meetings, spring services, weddings, funerals . . . He was, himself, as he described another church leader, A. G. Minchin, at a memorial service in 1947:

Always a Christian gentleman, quiet, dignified, with a touch of humour.

As a leader without partiality, he had his trial seasons - not always understood, nor did he always understand. But he realised that it does not matter what happens *TO* us, no matter how bewildering and painful it may be at the time. But what matters is what happens *IN* us.

At home in Wahroonga, mother and children lived busy lives too.

“Remember to practise the piano, Clarice,” Nellie would remind her elder daughter.

‘Yes, Mother.’

‘Remember to cut the firewood, Athol.’

‘All done!’

‘Then gather hay for the cow and dig the vegetable garden.’

‘Yes, Mother.’

‘And Heather, I need your help in the kitchen.’

‘Yes, Mother.’

However it was not ‘all work and no play’ for the children. After school when their chores and music practice were done, or on Sundays, they read, they played

⁸ W. G. C. Murdoch, in a tribute to A. H. Piper, August 21, 1980.

their own games or dressed little dolls to sell for missions. Often they heard their mother say, 'An honest character and a happy face are more important than good looks. And the Lord is coming soon; we must all be ready.'

When his father was home from visiting the island mission stations, Athol would sometimes go with him to visit patients in the sanitarium. One day he watched his father baptise a patient in a bath in the treatment rooms. Athol had one problem, however. When the Piper family went into the Wahrenonga Church on Sabbaths, why did his father pause so often to shake hands with so many people? It took ages to reach the family pew near the front. It was all too embarrassing, standing in line, trying to look pleasant, waiting for Father to stop greeting people.

Nellie Piper had a concern too. In 1927 Clarice was a sixth grade student at the Wahrenonga Adventist Church School. She played the piano at morning worships at school and enjoyed her classes, especially art. Nellie's worry was about where Clarice should go to high school. A Christian school was most desirable.

So Nellie began to pray about Clarice's education to the God who had provided her with hair pins, stockings and flannel bloomers many years before; who had led her life to this point in time in 1926. As she worked she prayed; early mornings and late evenings, she prayed in faith.

The answer came on the day that Pastor Piper returned from a visit to Fiji. On arrival home he unpacked gifts for everyone from his Gladstone bag, as was his custom after a trip away. Then he looked at Nellie, saying, 'What is it, Little Mother? I can tell that you and Clarice have a secret you are bursting to share.'

Heather clapped her hands with glee, while Athol smiled broadly, knowing what was to come.

Clarice spoke. 'Mother has been praying for an Adventist high school for me, for next year. And one is going to start at North Sydney! Truly, Father. Isn't it wonderful!'

When the summer of 1926 came, the family went to Collaroy beach for a holiday. They wore their bathing suits most of the time, except on the Sabbath when they had to dress 'properly.' They wailed as they saw their father go down to the surf and dive into the waves. 'Why can't we . . .?'

Hush,' said Nellie Piper. 'He's just having his cold bath like he has done every morning for nearly thirty years. That it's Sabbath makes no difference.'

Four years later, Laurence and his bride, Gwen, came to Live at Wahrenonga, too. Pastor Piper was very pleased to have his second son living nearby, and to know that Laurence served the church as Union Conference auditor. When he visited their home he recognised an embroidered motto, stitched by Hettie in tiny cross-stitch, which hung in the lounge room. For a moment he looked, remembering,

making his eyes moisten. Then he turned away with a smile, thankful that the Lord had given him many blessings and the courage to make a new beginning.

'Coo-ee,' he called as was his custom whenever he entered the front yard of his own home in Elizabeth Street, when returning from work, having walked through the bush from the railway station.

Heather's collie dog barked welcome at the sound of the Master's voice, and Albert Piper went indoors to where there were no shadows, where a gypsy's warning had long been forgotten.



*Family portrait. From left, Back Row: Clarice, Athol, Heather
Front Row: Eleanor Piper, Albert Piper Snr*

In 1938, A. H. Piper became Principal of Avondale, the Australasian Missionary College. Now aged in his sixties, still watching for the Lord's second coming, he was known as a man of wisdom and wide experience; remembered afterwards as 'a talented, dedicated, happy, courageous man.'⁹

'What's the new boss like?' asked a second-year student of his roommate when he returned a few days late from vacation.

'Well, he wears a black suit, and sometimes a homburg hat; he carries himself very straight, looks fit - rumour has it that he has a cold bath every morning and -'

'Oh come on, what's he really like? Don't tell me about the good-looking daughters; I've already heard.'

'Too tall for you, mate, so don't even try! About A.H. - all of what I said, plus a face rather like the Kruschens' Salts advertisement, so you can guess what some chaps are already calling him! But seriously, mate, even though he's an old-timer and knew Ellen White - a sort of a patriarch rather than the usual academic type - he's, er - well -' he paused.

'Get on with it. I've got an interview soon.'

He grew serious. 'Well, I've never told you this, but at camp meeting he suggested I come to college. That's why I'm here, like some other chaps.'

Pastor Albert Piper, or A.H. as he was now often called, soon became known for three things: his spiritual nature and absolute faith in God; his knowledge of Ellen White and trust in her role as a prophet; and his concern for, and encouragement of, every student.

'A.H. is all right,' agreed the student who had returned late, having heard the new Principal's talks at several worships and chapel hours. 'He never seems to run out of stories, especially about Rarotonga. Sort of inspires me to try mission life myself - if I can get a nice girl to go with me.'

'Try the Sanitarium, mate, the nurses.' The roommates laughed together, both recalling A. H.'s advice about young women: 'Remember, young men, do not handle her carelessly. That will spoil the delicate bloom, as would happen to a grape if you rub your fingers over its skin.'

In a sermon that many students never forgot - and still spoke of some fifty years on - he spoke from the first chapter of John, verse twelve, which says God

⁹ L. C. Naden in a letter to the writer, 14 September, 1971. Also reiterated by some college faculty of the period. Robert Parr said on 31 August, 1971, 'He was one of the great 'greats' when I was just a boy, and when I arrived at college he was installed as principal.. . we were inclined to smile at some of his rather Victorian ideas. Nevertheless, I think it can be fairly said that the students respected him and many loved him. . .he was a kindly man, absolutely dedicated and a man to whom no sacrifice was too great to make for the cause he loved so much.'

gives the power and the right to be his children. To illustrate his point he took a bookmark from his Bible while holding the book open in his other hand. In conversational tone he now said, 'Let this bookmark represent the Lord Jesus, and let this Bible represent my life.' Then he placed the bookmark in the open Bible, saying, 'Just as this Bible receives the bookmark, so we receive Christ.'

He finished his talk by stating clearly, 'The power of John 12 is a person, and that person is Christ.' Was he remembering a bloodstained Bible, open at the crucifixion story?

A. H. Piper was not all seriousness. He loved picnics, occasions when he wore his white tropical clothes and a white panama hat. He also enjoyed lingering over good food in the company of family and friends. 'It's a meal-hour,' he would say, 'not a meal-minute!'

Elma and Fern were two girls who worked in the laundry and there discovered for themselves the fun side of his nature. They had been up very early one steamy hot Sunday morning doing students' laundry. With the washing completed, they hosed down the floor, then the wall, then, laughing hilariously, they hosed the ceiling and each other. Water cascaded everywhere.

Suddenly they heard a voice at the door. 'Are you getting cooler?' It was A. H. Piper, smiling at the sight of puddles and the girls' dripping hair and clothes. As he began to laugh while surveying the flood scene, the girls continued laughing until they could scarcely stop.

One sad event happened during the 1939 vacation when a student died in an explosion at the Cooranbong Sanitarium Health Food factory, where many students were employed. Pastor Piper comforted the mourners by quoting from Psalm 139: 17-18. The verse ends, 'When I awake I am still with you.' He called his talk, 'Precious thoughts, more than sand.'

His final remark at the funeral; held a prophetic ring: 'The way may seem dark. Life is strangely tangled at times, but God has already thought out a solution.'

In late August, 1939, came the Week of Prayer, a time of spiritual renewal. The visiting speaker was Len Minchin, no longer a teenager who sought direction and purpose in his life as he had been at the Darling School, but now Youth Leader of the Adventist Church in Australasia.

On the Tuesday night he invited anyone who would to talk or pray with him to meet at the music building after the evening meeting. So some of the male student leaders and their friends met him, and the hours slipped by easily as they asked questions, discussed and prayed together. Suddenly Frank Breaden, a student leader, said, 'Do you know, it's already two a.m.? Shall we continue here, or do some of you want to take a walk before we go to bed?'

Douglas Jenkins, Lawrence Gilmore and some others decided to walk outdoors in the chilly air, silver-white stars aglow overhead. When they reached the gravel pit behind the chapel, they paused, 'Let me get it straight tonight,' said one. 'What does it really mean to be a Christian?' His question started discussion and prayer all over again.

At dawn, they and others who had come searching for them, still stood beside the gravel pit. 'Something is happening here,' several students said. Len Minchin said, 'I never before felt such a spirit of prayer, praise and surrender,' Les Coombe agreed.

Next day, Pastor Minchin told the full assembly of staff and students what had happened the night before. Then he introduced his new topic, 'The Spirit-filled life.' In a pause during Minchin's talk, suddenly a student stood up. 'Please excuse me,' he said, 'But I can't keep quiet any longer. I feel I have to apologise publicly to my theology teacher.' He turned to face his teacher. 'Sir, we had a problem, and I was unforgivably rude, and I also spread unfair rumours. I feel I must apologise! Please forgive me.'

In the silence that followed, some students looked down, others gazed at the chapel windows, others watched the faces of Pastor Minchin and Pastor Piper. The room seemed filled with emotion and waves of silent prayer.

The stillness was broken when the theology teacher stood up and faced the student who had spoken. 'I was largely to blame. Son, I ask *your* forgiveness.' he went over to the young man and put his arms around him.

A young woman stood up then, and with voice choked with tears she confessed publicly to the sins that held her prisoner. 'Please pray for me,' she begged.

Without planning or rehearsal, the meeting changed as a line of students formed, all wanting to go to stand near the platform, feeling compelled to speak. As the testimonies and confessions continued past the chapel hour, Pastor Minchin, noticing the chapel clock, asked, 'Pastor Piper, it is now time for classes. What shall we do?'

The reply came in a clear resolute voice. 'Brother Minchin, we shall extend the chapel hour. We cannot program the Holy Spirit.'

So the meeting continued well into lunch time. Occasionally a student left the chapel to go to find a friend who had stayed away. They would return together and become swept into the electric atmosphere where the Holy Spirit worked upon hearts.

That was the beginning of the Avondale revival of 1939, a revival that spread out to many parts of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific islands. It was a time

when individuals thought very seriously about God and asked him for grace and power in their lives.¹⁰

A week or so later, on September 3, 1939, the second world war began. At Avondale, A. H. Piper and his staff believed they had been strengthened and prepared for the conflict and challenges that lay ahead. As many students would become involved in some way in the war, they needed an abundance of courage in the Lord to arm them for the conflict.

AVONDALE

*Blue sky, trees, green grass;
feet that pass
down hallowed halls, white walls.
Music, laughter, song;
all day long
a breath of prayer, somewhere.
And God.¹¹*

¹⁰ Walter Scragg writes: 'The great revival that swept through Adventism in 1939 . . . found me as a lad in the Tasmanian camp meeting of that year. In the fall-out of that remarkable Spirit-inspired event, I gave my heart to the Lord and was baptized. A whole generation of young people . . . felt the influence of the revival Albert Piper encouraged, protected and shared.'

¹¹ Poem by Marye Trim, 1950.

During the years of war and afterwards, Pastor A. H. Piper served as President of the South New South Wales Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was a period when his life seemed strangely tangled, a time of three trials of faith and courage. The first trial threatened his character, the second threatened his church and the third almost broke his heart.

‘Why has Pastor Watson called you to talk to the Union Conference¹² committee, Father?’, Athol enquired as the first difficulty surfaced. Athol lay in bed at the Sanitarium, injured by a fall from an apple tree in the Elizabeth Street garden.

His father replied without malice. ‘It does not matter what happens TO us; what matters is what happens IN us. And Son, I have done nothing wrong, so do not be alarmed.’ He went on to explain. ‘A problem began with a man who worked in the Conference office, whom I reproved because I, and others, had noticed his flirtation with another employee. I also knew of his wife’s anxiety. As a result he turned against me, and he began a story that queried if I use illegal petrol, beyond my rationing allowance. He also suggested that I favour my several relatives who serve the Lord in church work, and that I even have a sideline of buying and selling, which as you know, is forbidden to our ministers. All the rumours began after I reproved him.’

Athol gasped. ‘His accusations are utter nonsense!’

A.H. replied, ‘The man did it as a joke at first. But you know how easily a story spreads, and this one snowballed to so large a size, that now I must report the facts.’

He explained to the committee¹³ that he did indeed have more petrol than most people in a time of rationing, because he had been legitimately provided with additional coupons on account of his ministry. This fact was verified by the source.¹⁴ He also affirmed that he had certainly encouraged his brothers, sisters, his own children and several nephews and a niece to give their lives in service for Christ - in fact, to inspire every person he met to live a spirit-filled life was essential to his calling. Finally, he refuted the charges of buying and selling - in a time when black-marketing was rife - pointing out that administration, preaching, and personal visitation that involved many miles of travel to meet with the troubled, sick and dying took all his time and energy. He concluded by saying, ‘I have proven the Lord a good paymaster.’

¹² The Australasian Union Conference, in 2004, is called the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

¹³ The writer found no reference to this incident in records of the Australasian Union Conference. Although the Piper family was distressed, it was apparently not widely known.

¹⁴ The writer double-checked and the source was acknowledged and verified.

It was probably during the time of the first trial that for weeks A.H. Piper spent many hours in the bush, praying for God to remove bitterness from his heart.¹⁵

Later, the church leaders apologised for showing any suggestion of lack of trust in this time-proven leader. The president made a statement of this nature: 'We did a great wrong by certain false accusations. . .'¹⁶

The second trial was not an attack against him personally but concerned accusations against the Adventist Church during the late 1930s and early 1940s. These were made, firstly, by Dimitry Nicolici who represented the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement. This was an offshoot body that began in Germany in 1915 with various criticisms of the church, but especially concerned Christians and their relationship to military service. Nicolici preached and debated that the Adventist Church was Babylon of Bible prophecy, and in so doing disturbed many congregations.

The second trial also involved accusations of heresy in print and pulpit by a movement called the 'Shepherd's Rod.' Furthermore, compulsory unionism became an issue, one in which A. H.'s brother Reginald was involved. Reginald, a plumber, applied for non-membership and his application became a test case. It resulted in recognition of non-membership status for all bone fide conscientious objectors.

In all these situations, Pastor A. H. Piper defended the Adventist Church, writing, speaking and travelling widely to restore confidence and order. While on such a visit to Christchurch, New Zealand, he met with the senior officer of the New Zealand Public Service with whom he had worked as a young man. The officer told him, 'Piper, my present job would have been yours if you had stayed on. You know, I get to travel all over New Zealand.'

A.H. smiled at his friend, thinking how his work in God's 'higher service' had taken him all over the world, had extended him and proved a rich experience. In his mind he affirmed what he had told the Union Conference Committee: 'I have proved the Lord a good paymaster.'

The third trial concerned the younger daughter, Heather.

*'I am a true Romany,' said the Gypsy woman.
I can see that the tall girl will grow up to be
strong and clever. The boy will be a doctor.*

¹⁵ A. H. Piper referred to this in a sermon when he warned against bitterness, at a Victorian Conference-wide meeting at the Assembly Hall, Melbourne, August 3, 1946. (Sermon notes seen by the writer).

¹⁶ It is recalled that Pastor W. G. Turner, President, made such a statement when the Australasian Union changed its organisational structure in the late 1940s, then becoming the Australasian Inter-Union Conference. It is recognised that A, H. Piper acted in a diplomatic, intermediary role between senior church leaders of differing points of view. He was appreciated as a conciliatory, senior statesman.

*But to the little one much sorrow will come.
And trials are also in store for you and your
husband.*

In January, 1949, Heather moved from New Zealand to Cooranbong with her small son, Dalton, and her husband, Bill Veitch. Bill was going to work as a scientist at the Sanitarium Health Food Laboratory. Nellie was delighted to see them move into a house near the swing bridge. She said, 'Every little boy needs a grandma. If I search I might find that old book about mice that my children loved, or the one about rabbits.'

She helped Heather unpack the shipment that had come over with them on the *SS Monowai*, unwrapping with care a set of crystal bowls - one of Heather's wedding gifts. Nellie shook her head. 'We didn't give or receive luxury presents like that in my day,' she told her daughter. 'Plainness and simplicity were always our guidelines. It worries me how the times are changing - are we delaying our Lord's return?'

Times were indeed changing, for Heather and her family, anyway. Doctor McLaren examined the mole on her back. Heather told him, 'It's been there as long as I can remember. It gets in the way of my shoulder straps and becomes sore.'

'Will you have it removed?'

'Ye-es. If you think I should.'

Investigation and surgery indicated that she had cancer. The future looked black.

'I want you all to talk as if I am healed', Heather told her family after she had been anointed in the Scriptural way, according to James 5:14.. 'But if the Lord calls me, Mother, please look after Dalton, my beautiful son. And just a plain white coffin, and a simple funeral.' She kept smiling and positive outwardly, following her father's example under trial. Yet who knows what the heart truly feels when it is alone?

November brought heat and humidity. 'If only it would rain,' sighed Heather from her bed. So she and Clarice prayed for cooling showers. The rain came, light at first, then streaming down, bringing relief. Other blessings followed and further answered prayers, but not the answer of complete healing.

Soon after, Heather died, aged twenty-nine years. To her husband and little son, to her brother and sister and parents, it was a terrible blow. Yet A. H. Piper came through this third trial saying in the words of the psalmist, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away. O sing praises unto the Lord.'

CHAPTER TEN 1950 - 56 COURAGE IN THE LORD

In 1950, Pastor A. H. Piper officially retired at the age of seventy-five years. He continued, however, to be a member of the Union Conference committee. He and Nellie called their retirement home at Cooranbong CLATHEA, formed from the names of their children. In this quiet place that overlooked the deeply-flowing Dora Creek, he cared for his flowers, a vegetable garden and twenty-six fruit trees. Beyond his home life he assisted the local Junior Farmers' Club.

In church life he took on a new role as he spoke to many congregations about the early years of the Adventist Church in Australasia. He told of the beginnings of Avondale College where he had been a student in 1897. He related the story of Adventist missions in Rarotonga and other islands of the Pacific before the Second World War. And he especially spoke about the year he spent in the home of Ellen White - the family life he shared, of Ellen's tiny prayer room and of her visits about Dora Creek and Cooranbong to help the poor and suffering. He also told this story¹⁷

:

One morning I went downstairs for worship and breakfast.

Mrs White greeted me, speaking in her lilting way, 'Good morning, Albert.'

I replied, 'Good morning, Mother.'

'And how are you today, Albert? Did you sleep well?'

'Yes, thank you, although early this morning a bright light woke me.'

'Oh, what time was that?'

'At three o'clock. I checked by my watch.'

Then A. H. Piper's face lit up in memory of how Ellen White had told him, 'That was when the angel came.'

Often he told of the impact of Ellen White's ministry on the Adventist Church in Australasia and her remarkable vision that brought about Avondale College. He spoke with authority, for she had prophesied about his own life, given him a home, written to him as a son in a letter which had made him become very careful with money - his own and that of the denomination- important when he was in church leadership. He could recite long passages from her 'Conflict of the Ages' series, had observed her closely and believed she was motivated and used by the Spirit of God. Thus he became known as the link with the Spirit of Prophecy.¹⁸

He delivered two series of these talks to students at Australasian Missionary College in 1949 and 1950. Now a new generation heard the parable of the grapes:

¹⁷ The writer heard A. H. Piper tell this story on several occasions.

¹⁸ L. C. Naden, Field Secretary of the Australasian Division of Seventh-day Adventists, wrote on September 14, 1971: 'To me he was the Australasian link with the Spirit of Prophecy . . . he was a wise administrator and never failed to remind the brethren of the wisdom there is in keeping to the 'blue print' as laid down by the Spirit of Prophecy . . . within the Remnant Church.'

'Young men, the blush of the grape is spoilt by handling. It becomes shiny and brassy.'

'Cute,' some students commented, paying attention. 'Old-fashioned,' sneered others.

Yet they listened politely, gaining insights into a past that was different from their present mid-century. Although he was old and silver-haired, they could see he cared about them; that when he wished them, 'Courage in the Lord!' it was the faith he himself lived by. (Many observed, in later years, that A. H.'s caring attitude brought purpose into their own lives). As he had always done, he would often place his arm on a young person's shoulder, saying, 'The Lord has a work for you to do.'

In the autumn of 1955, he returned home from visiting Tamworth where he had taken a series of meetings called, 'Living in the home of the prophet.' He said to Nellie, 'Mother, it's good to be home again. You know, sometimes I feel my strength waning.'

By the end of the year he was feeling unwell, but he attended the annual camp meeting at Eraring as was his custom. In the early morning air as sunlight and mist competed together over the mirror-like lake, promptly at six o'clock his signature tune announced the start of the early morning prayer meeting: 'There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God.' Crowds made their way to the big tent, knowing it was a power-hour to start the day. In spirit it resembled the week of prayer at Avondale in 1939.

At the final prayer meeting of the camp, he used the words of Ellen White:

Each morning, consecrate yourselves and your children to God for that day. Make no calculation for months or years; these are not yours. One brief day is given you . . .¹⁹

Outside the primary meeting hall, some children heard their mothers talking. One from Port Macquarie said, 'A. H. hasn't been to visit us this year. Has he visited your tent?'

Two friends shook their heads. Another said, 'Other years he visited everyone in every tent. No other minister ever does that! And he did come to our caravan the other day. But it's quite close to his own tent.'

'Doesn't look well,' observed the first speaker. 'Sort of shuffles along - not at all like our A. H.'

Pastor Piper went home to CLATHEA feeling as if he had toiled week-long at his uncle's sheep farm in New Zealand and lifted countless bales of wool.

'Tired, dear?' asked Nellie.

¹⁹ Ellen White, *Testimonies*, Vol. VII, p.44.

'I'm just sitting down, thinking about the camp-meeting and its blessings; and thinking about my family. I'm so pleased that Albert junior is happy and settled in his building trade after all these years; that he has a fine Adventist wife and that he is a Christian. I'd like to see my grandson in West Australia, Albert the third, and my granddaughter, Dorothy. She's planning to train to be a nurse.'

'At the Sanitarium, of course,' added Nellie, sharing his pleasure. She stroked his hand, 'Praise the Lord that our precious Athol and his wife Kathleen and their children are doing well over at Loma Linda.'

A. H. continued, reclining in his chair as he spoke, 'Laurence is Manager of the Sanitarium Health Food work in New Zealand; and Clarice is wife to Frank, busy minister that he is with his evangelism and illustrated charts. We are blest with their daughters. And there is dear Dalton, Heather's son . . .'

Together they counted their blessings.

January 1, 1956.

Steeple bells and sirens announce the start of a new year, a time of hopes renewed and holiday. At CLATHEA, however, Albert Piper is busy but weary as he organises his business accounts. Clarice's daughter, young Heather, tries to tempt him, when his work is done, with a vegetarian savoury.

He shakes his head, then looks lovingly at his granddaughter. In contrast to his wan face, hers is bright, surrounded by the reddish glow of shining, long hair. He tells her, 'I'm just trusting in Jesus. I don't want to die before Little Mother. She needs someone to look after her.'

'Is Grandpa going to die?' whispers young Heather's sister, Narelle to her mother.

Clarice gazes out at the creek where the tide has brought in a rush of water, high to the banks. Before long the tide will go out again. She blinks back tears.

Six days later A. H. announces, 'My zinnias need me.' His eyes are on the border of flowers in the garden as he leaves his home to go to the Sydney Sanitarium. There he is anointed for healing, according to the counsel of Scripture and comes out of a deep coma. He speaks of his love for Jesus of the bloodstained Bible. He prays, then sleeps again as Nellie, Clarice and Laurence take turns to sit beside his bed.

January 18, 1956

At the starboard rail of the inter-island ferry stands a young man. He strains to glimpse land as sunrise glitters pink and gold across the water.

'Daddy, can you hear me? Athol is on the phone from America. He wants to talk to you.'

There is the smell of death in Athol's nostrils as he says, 'I love you, Father!' In the bacteriology building at Loma Linda University where he is training to be a doctor, a lecture proceeds, but Athol's heart is not there. Among his thoughts are the words of a cable he will send: 'Our hearts are with you all. Love and sorrow. Isaiah 51. Courage in the Lord.'

'Athol, my boy! I love you too. God bless you, my son.'

The ferry begins to plough a channel between cliffs, making its way through the long harbour. The man stands alone, yet not alone.

'G'mornin', Sir, calls a crew member dressed in white. 'We'll soon be in port, Sir.'

His pulse is weak . . . won't be long now . . . nothing more we can do - we're so sorry - he has no pain . . .'

'We're all here, Daddy. We love you so much!'

Suddenly he raises his hands as in a final blessing, or is it in greeting? 'Oh bless the Lord,' he cries. And again he repeats, 'Oh bless the Lord!'

Thus ends the life of Albert Henry Piper, a man who was called from the Public Service of his country into the higher service of the Creator God. His call through a bloodstained Bible, and providential leading through more than eighty years, gave him purpose and power, so that he daily exemplified his own motto: courage in the Lord.

*It would not be a hard thing to wake up one morning
to the sound of bird-song in scarce-stirring willow trees,
waves lapping, oars splashing, chains running slowly,
and faint voices calling across the harbour;
to embark at dawn, following the old forefathers,
to put forth at daybreak for some lovelier still
undiscovered shore.²⁰*

APPENDIX

²⁰ Mary Ursula Bethel. 'The Long Harbour.' *Collected Poems*, Caxton Press, Christchurch, New Zealand, 1950

On August 13, 1893, Ellen White wrote a letter that mentioned four members of the Piper Family. It gives an insight into her concerns.

Dear Son Willie:

We are packing up to go to Hastings . . .

The girl, Nina Piper, has been with us for several weeks. She is a remarkable girl among girls. She is a sincere Christian and they have a large family and it is hard to support them. Mr Piper has been a drunkard and poverty has been their experience. I pay the girl seven shillings per week and she is getting herself some clothing. But she was very sad when we decided to go to Napier. She had been told by her father that she must go out to work and earn her food and clothes. He has work now and has not drunk for two or three years, but he is not a Christian. I thought it would cost too much money to have her go with us, but as the time drew near when we must go, I told Emily my mind was ill at ease. I could perhaps get a girl in Napier but she might be frivolous and want to be with the boys. She might be wasteful. She might be one who would be ill-satisfied with the work, and Nina is feeling she is so privileged. She is willing to work hard and is saving, quiet, not forward. She answers well for us . . . we decided that we will not in the end save anything to go at a venture and leave a good girl behind.

When I proposed the matter to her, she was so elated and felt so privileged, she acted as though it was a dream. I never saw a girl so thankful . . . I felt thankful that it was my privilege to make anyone so happy. She immediately communicated with her father and mother. They both felt very much pleased to have the girl with me . . .

She went to the government office where her brother is employed in the stamp department, and she told her brother of the proposition made to her. He told her that her lines had fallen in pleasant places. He is not a believer and is a staunch Presbyterian, but she came back so happy. She said he told her he was glad to see her. The mother came down evening after Sabbath and remained until past ten. . . The mother is a sweet-faced, amiable-looking woman. We shall have no trouble now in getting the help we so much need, and we know what

we have by experience, a child in years, yet a woman in stern experience. . . If i go to Sydney I shall certainly take her with me.

August 15. We leave here for Napier. I think we will be comfortable . . . Late last night Nina's father came to see us and her. He seems quite an intelligent man. He thinks it the most wonderful thing that I take an interest in their daughter and expressed great gratitude as though we were doing them a great favour. I assure him we would have an interest in her. He thought it was such a rare thing, so unexpected. ²¹

²¹ Manuscript Release, 952, Letter 138, 1893.