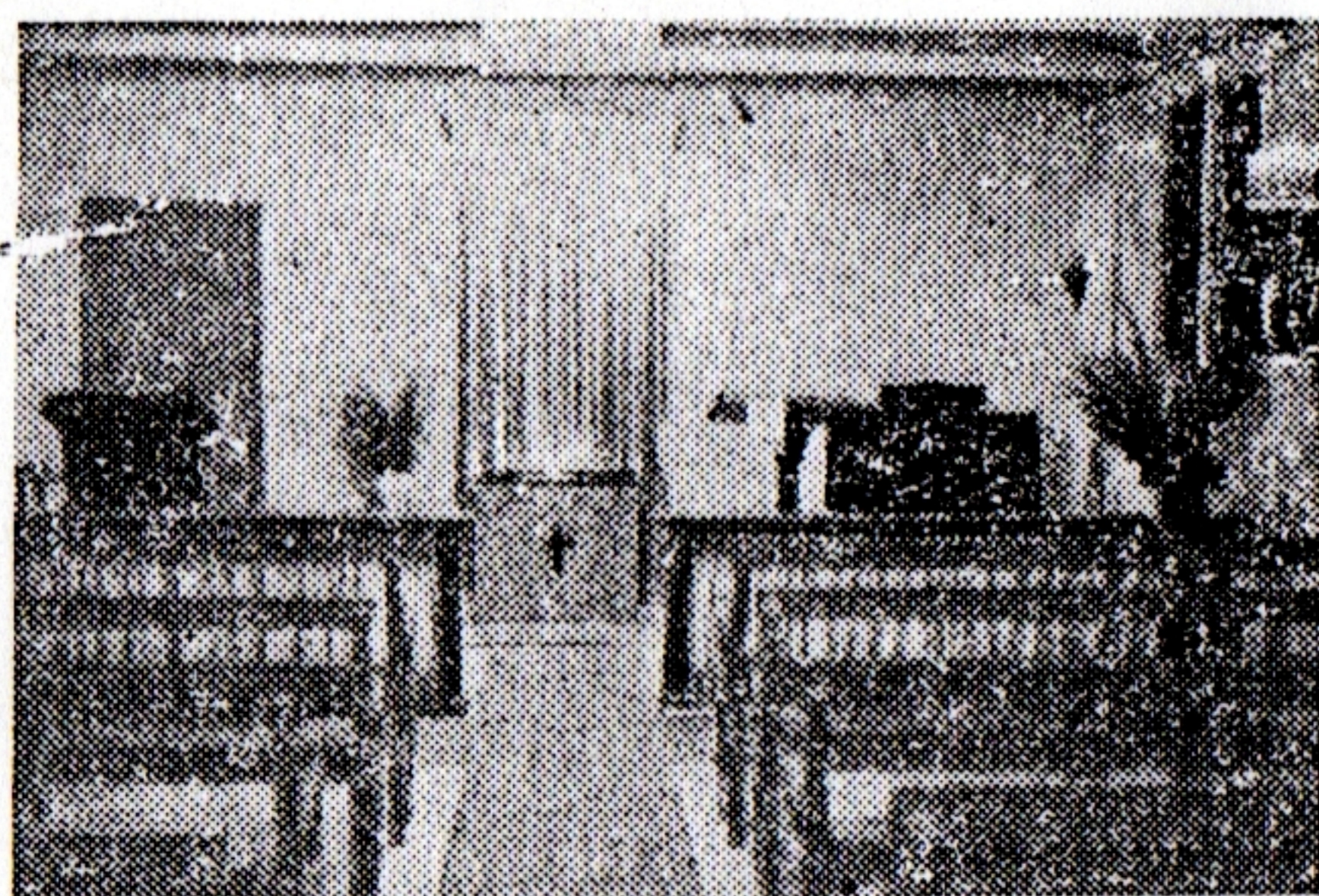


The Inter-Church Association

LEIGH CREEK
BY REV. F. M. MEASDAY



Inter-Church Association Sanctuary—Interior

I wonder what vision of Leigh Creek the reader has? Are you like the person who asked how far out from Darwin it was? It is approximately 350 miles north of Adelaide. "Well," you say, "that isn't far." No, it isn't, but the roads make it very distant. If it should begin to rain, or even look ominous a few days before you plan to go to the City, you leave immediately. Folk here have been known to leave dishes unwashed and beds unmade in order to beat the sudden onslaught of the weather. Exaggeration! No, the road for the most part between Leigh Creek and

Quorn is clay, red sticky clay. Good when it is set and freshly graded, but let a few points of rain fall on it and it is transformed into a mire. Every few miles there is a creek. These are dry most of the year, yet within half an hour in stormy weather they can become a raging torrent, carrying everything in their path, ripping out the stately gums, and rolling huge stones. Two-ton girders from a railway bridge have been carried two miles. A car caught in a similar cloud burst was rolled down stream and when finally found, was squashed about two feet flat. This happens of course in the summer rains, which can only be described as tropical. A sunny morning can be changed in a few hours to one of roaring, hissing rain. Yes, this is the North, and it is fascinating.

The township of Leigh Creek is nestled on a plain about seven miles wide, set between hills. A concert party coming North to entertain the residents arrived at Copley, six miles south and thought they had reached their destination—a hotel, few railway buildings, store, school. Is this Leigh Creek? No, "the Creek" is well mapped out. It is a carefully planned and neatly kept town. A modern school, two churches, row upon row of brick, aluminium and asbestos houses, a post office which would put many southern ones to shame, and so on. Each house is fitted with a "Breezair," refrigerator, electric stove, etc. There is 240A.C. power, deep drainage, as much water as one can use and as much coal as you can burn. The latter is delivered to each house, free of cost. An abundance of water makes it possible to grow things and the Gardening Club is an active and strong organization. Airmails come five times a week, and we are only two hours flying time from Adelaide. There are pictures in the local hall twice a week, garbage is collected every Friday, and so one could go on, telling of the modern amenities of this town. It could be a suburb of Adelaide with one exception. Here everyone knows each other because they work together. A neighbour is not just the person who lives alongside of you. In many fences there is a gate or a few palings missing where you can "run in" next door.

The scenery in the nearby surrounding hills can only be described as magnificent. There is no grass, but the little bushes which clothe the gentle slopes are vivid green in varying shades. Stately pines or twisted sheoaks or the tall mulgas are interspersed with carpets of vivid red hops. The rugged slopes are hued in blues, purples, reds and browns. This is the Flinders Range at its best. Huge wedge-tailed eagles, bounding uros, frightened leaping goats, all fit naturally into the wild untamed ranges.

I realize that in picking up this paper you do not expect to be entertained by someone in raptures over scenery, or to read a travel article; but look at a map of South Australia. Run your finger up the line to Alice Springs until you come to Telford (the Railway Station which serves Leigh Creek). It is at this place that I came this year, representing the Inter-Church Association (combined Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian Churches). The Home Mission Departments of these three member Churches contribute annually to the Inter-Church Association fund, which makes it possible for the work here to be carried on. My circuit embraces Leigh Creek, Marree and Blinman.

Let us go together to Marree. It is a Thursday night and we catch the new diesel-electric railcar to our destination 70 miles north. It is scheduled to leave at 11 p.m. Invariably it gets away about 12. At 3 a.m. we arrive. The only lights are those in the hotel, a great rambling two-storey building. In the pitch black we pick our way towards these lights. A feeling of desolation, of abandonment creeps over us and we want to get back into the luxury of the diesel car and go, anywhere but here. On entering the hotel we find the lights are kerosene lanterns in the hall and on the stairs. If we haven't booked a room we take our choice. It is cold—that dry cold that infiltrates even coats and scarves, yes, and even the blankets on the beds.

At breakfast in the morning we are waited on by a little Afghan girl, very pretty and very polite, then, the meal over, we make an appointment at the school to take religious instruction. The teacher is obliging. We can have as long as we like, as we only come up once a month.

That despairing, wild feeling doesn't depart with the darkness. In fact, the daylight confirms it. Marree has just grown, and as we look towards the railway station it is hard to stop from laughing. What could look more ridiculous? Here in the midst of this sprawling, untidy settlement is a diesel-electric train.

At 9.30 we keep our appointment at the school. There are about 25 children, some native, some white and some Afghan, all playing together, studying together. On a signal they assemble, and at a word from the teacher an Afghan lad gives the necessary instructions and marches them into school. What sort of a reception will we get? The teacher suggests they sing a hymn. There is no instrument, so he gives the note and they start. What a surprise! The singing is beautiful. It has expression and feeling. There are no books, but they sing every verse, word perfect:

"All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all."

Yes, from black, brown and white throats. Seeing our pleasure, they sing a hymn in Aboriginal tongue; then the tiny tots do an "action song." Another hymn, and then every eye is closed as they say together, "Our Father which art in Heaven." This is worth coming to Marree for. The kiddies are intelligent

and thoughtful. Inquiring later as to their knowledge of the hymns, etc., we are told that every morning before school commences, they sing a hymn and repeat a prayer.

Religious instruction over, we go back to the hotel and sit for a while in the parlour. It is too early to start bothering people with our presence. Just near the hotel we notice some Afghans sitting in the blazing sun. They sit there all day and apparently take no notice of the heat. A plane comes in and a few minutes later a chap strolls into the hotel. The greetings are the same as they would be if your neighbour "dropped in" for a daily chat. Half an hour later he leaves and we hear the plane take off. We learn he is from "such and such" a station up on the Cooper, or some equally distant spot. He may not be seen here again for five or six months, but the greeting will be just the same and he will just "drop in and out" as simply. Yes, this is Marree—fascinating and interesting.

The rest of the day is spent visiting, and soon it is time to catch the railcar for home.

Now let me take you South on the monthly visit to Blinman. Fifty miles south to Parachilna, and then twenty miles east we travel by car, because with derailments, etc., we could waste days by train. On the day to Parachilna we pass through Beltana, the home of the Australian Inland Mission Patrol, and have a chat with Mr. Morrell, the missionary, if he is at home. From Parachilna to Blinman we pass through a magnificent Gorge. The scenery, as we wind through the creeks and hills, is indescribable. Here "Possum" Kipling, of Redex Trial fame, acquired his skill as a driver. It is wise to drive cautiously as the road, while in excellent condition, is narrow and subject to sharp curves and blind corners. Turning right, then left, then right again, snatching brief glances at the scenery, on our toes in case anyone be coming in the opposite direction, we breathe a sigh of relief as we wave to a bus load of tourists, pulled up having lunch in one of the creek beds.

At last Blinman. There is a certain charm about this little place. It is an old copper mining town set in the ranges. The people live with the memories of past years, just the same as Wallaroo Mines and Moonta. We stay at the Post Office here and after lunch, visiting is the order of the day. Like everywhere else, some are glad to see you, others "put up" with you. We give the nine children at the school religious instruction, then prepare the Progress Association Hall for service.

As the organist, the Post Mistress, is on duty until 8 p.m., service commences then. There is a fire burning in the little stove which makes the hall very cosy. There are no aids to worship in the form of pulpit, crosses, etc., but the people have come a long way and you feel you can really worship here. After church, supper, and then the 70-mile drive back to "the Creek." It's a long day and a tiring one. The trip is lonely, but after a couple of hours we are suddenly greeted by a blaze of light from Leigh Creek. Tired as we are, we feel it is all worth while.

Here I have commenced my ministry. What better place could anyone desire? Where else would you get the experience that is to be had here? I love every minute of it and will be ever grateful for the opportunity given me to minister to these people.

Mrs Kipling & Mrs PRAYER

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* THE LUTHERAN/C of E, also met at I/CHURCH some months. I enjoyed all Denomin 'EUCUMENICAL' in the 50/60's.

x Frank Measday was followed by Geoff Diprose, Roger Boersma, (ex LOBERTAL) Graham Garfoot - All Trainees & tried hard. The organist was I.H. & Howard Theobald (Headmaster) Theo for VIP occasions. I was not fussy! Also visited Marree, Beltana & Blinman.