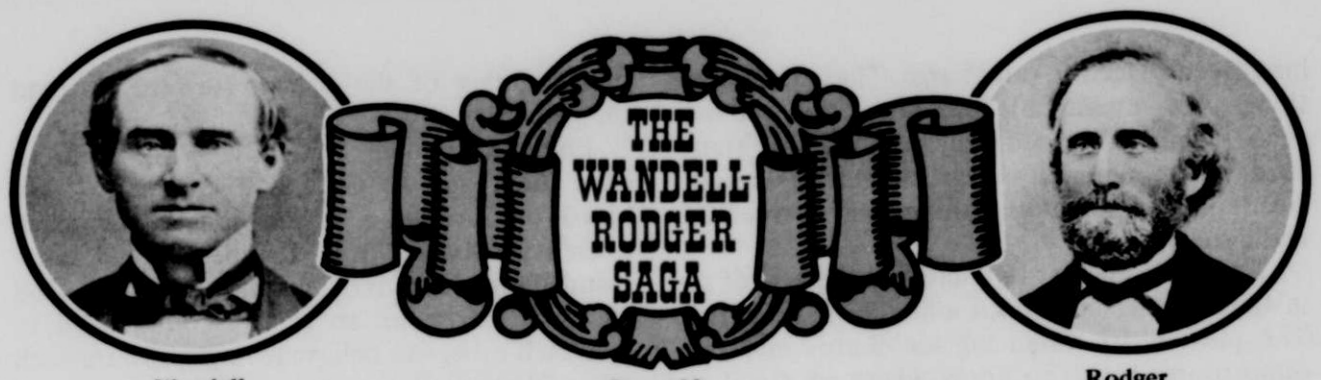


Wandell

Rodger

## Part II

**By Winifred Sarre**

**November 1875**

As he reached the top of the hill, Glaud Rodger reined in his horse and shaded his eyes to look into the distance. It had been some time since he had passed through the town of Bulahdelah so Bungwahl should not be far ahead . . . but he could see nothing. The undergrowth was too thick, and even the height of the hill did not reveal anything more than closely growing gum trees, their leaves glittering and swaying in the afternoon breeze.

The track he was following sloped gently ahead of him, its brown rutted surface disappearing almost immediately as it turned into the bush. He set off again, walking his horse slowly, enjoying the warmth of the sun on his back. It seemed strange that not long ago he had felt he hated the Australian countryside. Today as he had ridden mile after mile through the virtually untouched bushland he had begun to feel that it was curiously appealing. There was a timelessness about it, a sense of primeval mystery in its unexplored depths, a feeling of enduring patience in its warm stillness. Suddenly he found it immensely moving, and he tightened his hands on the reins and urged his horse forward at a faster pace.

He was glad indeed that he had had the opportunity to make this trip. From the moment of departure he had felt a lifting of his spirits, a stirring of his old enthusiasm and energy. In the months since Wandell's death he had found it difficult to rise above his grief and sense of loneliness. He had done his best not to let this feeling show and had thrown himself into his work with such fervor that a series of meetings which he and Richard Ellis had arranged had proved astonishingly successful. Attendance had grown every night—so fast that the hall they had hired became inadequate, and the enthusiastic response of the audience had delighted Richard and made him talk excitedly of the future. But Glaud somehow had felt himself apart from it all, unable to experience the sort of elation which was usual on such occasions. He had felt a poverty of spirit that was hard to banish.

But as he had boarded the steamer and sailed up the coast to Raymond Terrace, as he had traveled on the coach to Booral, then ridden on horseback through the hilly countryside his depression had melted away until now he was in high spirits. Settling his hat more firmly on his head, he rounded the next bend at a trot.

There ahead of him, in a raw clearing among the tall gums, was the village of Bungwahl. Slowing his horse to a walk he surveyed the scene. It was a typical small country town, a cluster of unpainted wooden houses with corrugated iron roofs, dusty yards where white hens pecked at the ground, post and rail fences with flowers and shrubs straggling beside them, a store with roughly painted advertisements on its verandah, a blacksmith shop, a small church. . . . A dog barked at him as he rode toward the town, his eyes searching beyond the houses for what he had come to find. There it was—the sawmill, a huddle of machinery and corrugated-iron sheds surrounded by piles of logs and heaps of sawdust. Arriving at it, he dismounted amid the screech of the saw and the hiss of steam. Several shirt-sleeved, sun-browned men stopped working and turned to watch as he approached, and he felt a tight constriction of excitement in his throat as he searched their faces. If he was not mistaken, one of these men was his brother.

Many years had passed since they had last seen each other, yet Glaud Rodger could vividly remember their parting. In the little Scottish town where he and his brothers had worked in the coalpits they had lived a happy life, full of laughter and good fellowship despite the fact that theirs was a poor community. Within his strict Presbyterian family, there was little sympathy for the new message that was being

preached in the local hall. Glaud Rodger knew, even while he listened to the preachers and gradually became persuaded to believe them, that his family and friends would not approve. But he had not realized, until the day he broke the news of his intention to be baptized, the depth of their feeling.

He had not visualized the anger, the threats, and the coercion his father had exercised. In vain he had tried to explain the way he felt, but there had been no understanding in the small house. He could see the scene clearly now, the fire reddening the walls and the candles flickering, while his mother cried and wiped her eyes on her apron, and his brothers sat around the table in their working clothes and thick boots and looked at the floor. The threat of disinheritance had not hurt, but the rejection of his family had . . . so much in fact, that he had flung out of the house in anger and grief, declaring he would never go back.

In the years that followed, during his ministry in his own country and in England, he had become to some extent reconciled with his family, and, although never forgiven by his father, had from time to time written to his mother and brothers. Not long ago he had received news that his brother John was now living in Australia, and he had been anxious ever since to contact him. This was the first time he had had the opportunity.

One of the men was looking toward him with narrowed eyes, moving in his direction. He took off his hat. "John?" he asked cautiously . . . and in a moment they had clasped hands. The other men asked questions in loud voices, then began slapping them both on the back and laughing at their obvious emotion. But Glaud and John found it difficult to talk to each other until, some time later as the shadows lengthened and the sun began to set, they walked together in the cool dusk toward John's house.

"Has it been worth it to you, Glaud?" John asked. "Would you do the same again?"

Glaud did not look at his brother, but at the tall trees silhouetted against the purple sky. "Yes," he said, "I would," and meant it. His belief in what he was doing and his sense of purpose were stronger than ever.

But he thought with pain of the time when he would not have answered in that way—the time when he and his wife, Matilda, had journeyed to Utah. He had loved his work in England—the ready response he had found to his impassioned preaching, the respect he had enjoyed among the members of the church and the visiting officials, and the sense of mission which had constantly inspired him. But when a group of members had decided to go to "Zion," he and Matilda had decided that this was what they should do too. It would be the culmination of all their hopes.

He could hardly bear to remember it even now—the sale of all their belongings, the hardships of the voyage to the new land, the terror of the wagon train across the rough country to Utah, and—worst of all—the trickery of the church official who had taken their money and not produced the goods which he had promised. They had been sorely disillusioned and filled with disappointment. Even now he could remember Matilda sitting in the tent that was their only home and saying, "Let's go back. Oh, Glaud, can't we go back?"

They had not been able to, of course—yet even with the remembrance of their unhappiness he was able to say, "Yes, I truly believe that I am doing the work the Lord wants me to do."

During the days that followed, John returned often to the subject. He wanted to hear more of Glaud's life and the convictions that motivated it. Sometimes they would sit until late at night around the kitchen table in John's small house, drinking tea and talking. On most occasions John's wife was there, and often his friend John Wright and his wife and some of his family. They all seemed eager to hear what he had to say, and on these occasions he felt such a sense of assurance and power as he told of his beliefs that the outcome seemed inevitable. He was not at all surprised when one evening, after the others had gone, his brother said, "Glaud, a few of us have been talking it over. We've decided we want to join with you in your church."

There was silence for a moment in the room. Glaud listened to the measured ticking of the old clock which had stood on the mantelshelf of their home in Scotland, and thought about the past. "I wish," he said finally, "that I had been able to convince you before. We might have had all these years together in the work."

John leaned against the mantel. "I don't think it would have been possible before," he said. "All I was interested in was living life to the full as I saw it—and you, well, . . . you were different then." To the question in the other's eyes he replied, "You were too sure of yourself, too certain of everything, too confident. You

didn't seem to care what any of us thought. You didn't seem to care about us at all."

Glaud began to protest, but then was silent. What John said was probably true, and the thought was painful to him. He looked up, however, as his brother went on, "But you're different now—very different." Pushing himself away from the mantel John walked to the window, looking out to where the moon was covering the rough sheds and newly turned earth. "And I've changed too. I'm not satisfied with my former way of life anymore. For the last few years I've been feeling that something has escaped me. I've asked myself over and over again what it is, but until you came I've never had any answers."

He turned and looked at his brother. "You may not have found all the answers, Glaud, but you have something, that I would like to have. What do you say?"

Glaud cleared his throat and searched for words to express his feelings, but all he said finally was, "I'm glad. We'll arrange the baptism before I go."

**January 1876**

As the boat moved slowly down Cockle Creek its occupants were quiet and preoccupied. Each was wrapped in his own thoughts, and only Glaud Rodger, seated in the stern, seemed aware of his surroundings—the smoothness and depth of the water on which they were traveling, the bright sun above, the tall stringybarks along the bank, and a cicada chorus reverberating from them. He felt soothed and relaxed and was almost sorry when he heard Richard Ellis say, "This looks a likely spot."

They had gone quite a distance from the city, and the area around the little pebbly beach was still and deserted. The people in the boats stepped easily onto the shore and began to spread out on the ground the canvas sheeting which they had brought with them. Soon they were all seated in the shade of the tall trees, facing the river. Rodger sat on one side. The ground beside him was stony and dry, baked brown in the summer heat, and he picked up some pebbles and tossed them idly into the water. He was still very much affected by the charm of the place.

Richard now stood up to speak and Glaud Rodger looked at him with affection. He had been indeed fortunate to have this man as a friend. Their relationship had grown over the last few months, and Richard's help and advice had been invaluable to him. They had suffered hardships together too, trudging hundreds of weary miles through all sorts of weather. Today for example they had walked to Cockle Creek from Teralba, and Richard's face was red with sunburn above his black beard. It had been a hard, hot walk, but now, Glaud reflected, it all seemed worth while.

"We are very far from the land of Palestine, and our surroundings here are very different," Richard was saying, pausing for a moment as the raucous laugh of a kookaburra rang out above his head. He smiled. "There would not have been the call of a kookaburra at the baptism of Jesus, would there? Nor the sound of cicadas either. The Jordan was a very different sort of river, and the Jews were a different sort of people. But in essence our service here today is the same. Those who have come to be baptized are committing themselves to a certain way of life, a certain relationship to God and to their fellowmen, just as those early saints did, and this is the most important thing they will do in their lives."

Rodger felt deeply moved. How true that was. This was what it all came down to in the final analysis—the commitment of men and women to the Christian ideal. It was easy to become so enmeshed in the perimeter activities, the wrangles in the newspaper columns, the slander of opponents, the disruption and physical violence at meetings, the misunderstanding of the population at large, the angry contentions of members over policy, that the central purpose of the whole exercise was somehow lost. It was moments like these that brought it back, that put everything else in true perspective.

Into his mind came the words of Peter at the Mount of Transfiguration, "It is good for us to be here," and as he thought of them he became deeply impressed with a sense of the essential goodness of this occasion. Whatever doubts came to him at times, however inadequate some of his efforts seemed to be, he was fully convinced that here today was a moment of true worth.

He could feel now that those around him were equally moved. Everyone was hushed. Even the children had ceased to fidget. As Richard finished speaking and he himself stood up there was not a sound apart from the rippling of the water and the constant background of the cicadas. He waded into the river, then turned to beckon to the first candidate—a

girl* in white whose face was serious, even afraid. She moved out to join him, and as he took her clasped hands in his and said the familiar words, "Alice Ann Gregory, having been commissioned of Jesus Christ I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, amen" he was filled with a sense of assurance, a conviction about the future greater than he had ever known before. The people at the baptism of Jesus talked about the Spirit descending like a dove, but there was no dove here, nothing to be seen at all. Yet as he performed the baptism and the girl walked back toward the bank he felt the Spirit of God so strongly tears came to his eyes.

He recalled Wandell's telling him that he must not expect to move mountains. He no longer hoped for that. He knew now that the future was shaped by small events. The promise of progress was in people such as these, the decisions they made, the children who would come after them. Who knew what seed had been planted today and into what it would grow? As each candidate was baptized he felt the sanctity of the occasion in ever increasing measure, and as he walked back to the bank he could tell from Richard's face that the feeling was not his alone.

Those sitting under the trees were no longer singing, neither were they talking. Some were wiping their eyes. Glaud Rodger looked up to where the tops of the trees were swaying against the vivid blue of the sky. He felt that whatever any of them did in their lives, wherever they went, they would never forget this day.

**August 1878**

Inside the little Victorian hall the cold was intense. The missionary, standing on the small platform at one end, found it difficult to control the shaking of his knees as he preached. He reflected that he could never remember a night as cold as this even during his winters in Northern New South Wales. It was not surprising that his audience was so small. He could not blame anyone for wanting to stay at home by the fire.

Only half the hall was occupied. Men and women sat in thick overcoats, their knees wrapped in blankets, their hands encased in woolen gloves. As Rodger brought his sermon to a close and announced the hymn the sound of rain on the metal roof increased to such a volume that it almost drowned out his message. As soon as the hymn was completed and the unheard benediction said, the people hurried out, scattering as they reached the door to make for the warmth and comfort of their homes.

With the lamps extinguished and the doors locked Glaud Rodger and his friends the McIntoshes hurried home through the dark, stormy night. Holding their umbrellas against the wind, trying not to slip on the wet, muddy road, they arrived breathless and dripping at the little farmhouse. Soon they were inside, lamps were lit, the fire was revived, and water was put on to boil. With pleasure the two men stood holding out their hands to the growing blaze, while the hostess prepared a light meal.

"Not a very good night," said David McIntosh, turning so that his back was now to the fire. "Not a very good meeting at all." His face was solemn and discouraged.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Rodger. "Nobody threw anything." Seeing the look of surprised reproach with which his companion received this flippancy, he quickly went on, "I'm never sure which I find hardest to bear, violence or indifference. The weather was against us tonight, of course, but I have experienced that same sort of apathetic reception on more pleasant occasions. I would almost rather have violence. At least it means they are listening."

"Well, I don't know how you keep it up," said the other man. He left the fireside and eased himself into a chair, loosening his unaccustomed necktie and running a finger around his tight collar. "And that's a fact. I don't mind telling you that I find it pretty hard going myself sometimes, and I've been at it only a few months. You've been in Australia four years." He shook his head, "I don't know how you keep it up," he repeated. "It never seems to worry you."

He did not seem to want a reply, and Rodger did not make one. Next morning, however, as he set off early for his usual climb to the top of a nearby hill the question returned to him again. How had he kept going?

Part of the answer of course was found in occasions such as this. Wherever he was he tried to find time and place for contemplation and prayer, and not long after he had arrived in Glen Forbes he had discovered that the hill just

*(Continued on page 31)*

*Later the wife of the first bishop in Australia, George Lewis, and mother of Apostle George Lewis.

experiences as we perceive them against the image of Christ and calls us to encounter new life in him. Culture or environment does not create religion, but it does provide the base upon which the Christian explanation of life is built.

Faith is a living relationship with Christ which shapes who we are and who we are becoming. It is not a specific set of beliefs expressed through special words, nor is it particular feelings or actions. Faith is most clearly understood as a frame of reference from which we live out our lives. All of our beliefs, feelings, and actions issue from our faith. Faith cannot be taught by a teacher to a student; it develops through participation in the life of the community of faith. We must turn our attention from teaching *about* Christianity and the Restoration movement to offering within the community which comprises the church those vital life experiences which *demonstrate* our faith and enable us to live out our heritage. This principle applies to a five-year-old, a twelve-year-old, a young adult, or a senior citizen. It is the foundational understanding upon which the World Church graded curriculum is built.

Christian education is *not preparation for life;* it is *involvement in* the life of faith. Unity in Christ is possible, but it does not come from prescription of belief; it arises from active involvement in a community of faithful persons whose identity and stability are clearly a result of their radical and affectionate commitment to Christ and, therefore, to each other.

1. Report of the First Presidency, April 10, 1970, World Conference.
2. *Saints' Herald,* February 1, 1954, pp. 103-104.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Doctrine and Covenants 3:16.
5. III Nephi 5:31-43.
6. II Nephi 13:29-32; 14:4-7.
7. *Saints' Herald,* August 15, 1967, p. 553.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 552.

## The Wandell-Rodger Saga

(*Continued from page 25*)

behind the McIntosh house commanded a breathtaking view of the valley on the other side. He had made it his practice to climb to the top every morning, and there he had even built a small rough altar of rocks. Now, as he reached the top, he felt himself stirred again by the prospect before him. The rain had cleared and the cold morning mist was rising. Just below a tract of wattle splashed incredibly yellow against the paddocks now thickly green after winter rains. The hills rolled onward for miles, with here and there a small house from which smoke rose against the blue sky. As usual he paused for a long moment to look, and also as usual felt himself regenerated as he prayed.

But this was not the only reason for his steadfastness. There was also his conviction about his calling. David McIntosh had commented on his four years in Australia, but it had been long before that—thirty-five years ago in fact—when he had started his ministry. And in those years he had never forgotten his moment of confirmation. He could still hear the voice of the officiating minister, "You shall become an instrument in the hands of God in carrying the gospel to the nations of the earth." This prophetic statement had given him a sense of mission which had been constantly within him. It had buoyed him up and helped him to survive the terrible disillusionment of Utah. It had sustained him during the ten years he had spent in California—difficult years without church contact. It had urged him to accept the Reorganization and to work for another decade in the United States—walking, preaching, exhorting. And it had inspired him on this trip to Australia, reaffirming in him a resolution that had sustained him in the face of all hardships. He had had a work to do, and he was doing it to the best of his ability. He was sure now that he could never give it up.

He stood up, and with one last look at the scene before him turned to go down again. The grass was slippery, and he had to walk carefully to avoid falling. Looking at his boots he thought of the hundreds of miles and the very different types of country over which they had taken him. Yes, he had kept going, but it had not been without cost.

What had his host said? "It never seems to worry you." He stopped as he reached an outcrop of rock and looked down toward the town. He alone knew the depths of weariness and discouragement, the doubts and fears and temptations that too frequently assailed him. There were moments when he felt certain and assured, full of hope for the future and satisfaction in the past. But there were other times when doubt swept over him and he could not see the way. How he longed to see clearly, to know. A verse of a poem that he thought he might write one day formed in his brain.

This hope's an anchor to the soul,
While through this weary world I go,
Though wrapped in mist, the cloud will burst,
And I shall know.

(*Continued on page 51*)

*(Continued from page 31)*

Would he ever truly know?

He hurried now, reaching the yard of the McIntosh home and walking along the gravel path to the back door. As he entered the kitchen the smell of baking bread made him realize how hungry he was. His hostess looked up at him from the vegetables that she was peeling and said excitedly, "Oh, there you are, Brother Rodger. We were looking for you everywhere. What do you think? This morning you had a visitor. It was that Evan Jones from over the other side of town." She gestured animatedly with her knife in the direction of the man's home. "And you'll never guess. He is thinking about joining with us. He said he could not sleep all night after your sermon last evening, and this morning he had to come right over and tell you. Who would have believed it?"

She finished peeling the potato and picked up another, then paused and looked up again. "Yes . . . and not only that. He says there are some others too. He knows they're thinking about it seriously. And he has a family too, several sons. Who knows what might come of it? I couldn't believe it." She laughed at the expression on his face. "I knew you'd be surprised too," she said.

She finished her peeling, wiped her hands on her apron, and began to set some breakfast on the table beside him. As she worked she continued to talk about the future with excitement and certainty.

Sitting at the table Glaud Rodger felt a warmth and happiness spread through him that had nothing to do with the good food he was eating. At what unlikely times the future opened up! After five months in Victoria he had begun to fear that the McIntoshes were to be his only converts. Now there was reason to hope that this was not to be the case. He knew that he would not be here to see where this decision might lead. His time in Australia was drawing to a close, he was sure. But someone else would see. Perhaps this Evan Jones? Perhaps his sons?* Perhaps they would go to the huge areas of this continent which he himself had barely heard of. The certainty spread through him in a mounting wave, but all he said was, "I'll go and see him this afternoon."

**March 1879**

The ship was about to leave. Glaud Rodger had made his farewells and now moved to the gangplank. Richard Ellis walked beside him, and at this last moment the departing missionary wrung his hand once more. He looked with great affection and sadness at the man's face. "Perhaps some time in the future, Richard?" he said. Richard agreed and, releasing his hand, stepped back toward the large group of well-wishers standing on the dock. Glaud Rodger looked at him with regret. He knew very well that they would never see each other again.

As the ship pulled away and the shore receded Rodger leaned wearily and with sadness on the railing. The day when he and Wandell had first seen these shores was vividly in his mind. So much had happened since then. How hard it was to assess its value. He could look back on good times and bad, but what had been the final balance? His failures seemed to leap to mind so much more readily than his successes. Why was that so? he wondered.

His mistakes loomed large—his anger with opponents, his contempt for those within the church who had acted badly, his stubbornness, his decisions which afterward had proved to be the wrong ones. Hardships were easily remembered, too—being hungry, tired, wet, cold, waiting months for letters from home, disappointed when promised missionary help did not come. His setbacks had been so daunting—newspaper attacks, violent crowds, rebellion in isolated branches, illness. And on the other side, his achievements seemed so small—a few dozen people baptized, a few branches organized. Even among these there were unresolved problems, he knew. Had he left anything of value at all?

The ship moved slowly through the Heads. Before it now was the open sea, and as it turned away from the land and left Australia behind, a strong breeze blew across the deck, ruffling Rodger's hair. Despite his thoughts he felt his sadness lift. He had done his best. What was it Wandell had said? "If we are filled with God's Spirit, nothing we do in his name is ever lost in the Eternal Purpose." He would cling to that belief. He was too close to the situation now to see it clearly. It would be for others who came after him to judge his contribution. He turned his face to the east. Now he was going home!

The End

*John H. H. Jones, one of Evan's sons, did indeed become a wide-ranging missionary in Australia. He pioneered the work in Adelaide, South Australia.