CHAPTER THREE

„ein fauler Fleck“: LAKE BOGA, A PUTRID STAIN

At the beginning of the 1850s, the prospects for the first Moravian mission in Australia looked promising. Brüder Andreas Friedrich Christian Täger and Friedrich Wilhelm Spieseke had arrived in the new Colony of Victoria, and were expecting the support and help of the colonial administration through Charles Joseph La Trobe. By the end of the decade, however, there had been one failed mission attempt, three disgraced missionaries, and no Aboriginal converts. La Trobe had left the colony, and the new Government, which was busy dealing with the pressures of the gold rush, was not as supportive as the Moravians had hoped. The missionaries left the colony and returned a few years later, beginning a new their timorous attempt to establish a mission station. This chapter examines the ways by which the Moravian missionaries established the Lake Boga mission station, and the factors leading to their retreat back to Germany. It examines other mission stations within the colony, and the attempts therein to Christianize Aborigines. Finally, it will consider how the failure was received by the Moravian administration, especially in light of renewed missionary focus upon Victoria.

THE MORAVIAN MISSIONARIES REACH MELBOURNE

The previous chapter detailed the protracted departure of Täger and Spieseke for the antipodes. When they finally arrived in Melbourne on the 25th of February, 1850, they were eagerly welcomed by Melbourne’s Protestant church community, including Bishop Charles Stuart Perry of the Church of England.1 The Moravian missionaries’ arrival heralded a new phase in the ‘Christianization and civilization’ of the “poor, despised creatures, who are on the lowest level,” as Peter La Trobe had described the Aborigines in 1841.2 As we read in the last chapter, all

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1 Periodical Accounts, 1850, September, 412-413.
2 PUAC, 23 February 1841, #5, 177.
previous missionary attempts amongst the Aborigines of the Port Phillip District had failed. The Moravian Church were aware of this and knew that they would face difficulties in their attempt, with the self-perception of the church resting on the idea that the Moravians would succeed where all other missionary societies had failed. They also needed to find local funding for the new mission venture, and therefore fostered relationships with other denominations. The Church of England proved to be one of the Moravians’ most loyal supporters, commenting that the wealth of experience accrued by the Moravian Church through their global work amongst the “most ignorant and degraded of the human race” placed the Moravians in good stead to civilize even the Aborigines of Australia.3

Melbourne was only fifteen years old when the missionaries arrived, with the Port Phillip District on the brink of being transformed from an administrative district of the Colony of New South Wales to a Colony in its own right. It had grown substantially since 1835, when European incursion into indigenous land began in earnest. These incursions included ventures much further inland, leaving markers of European civilization in their stead. For example, by 1846, five squatting districts had been gazetted; a hospital had been established; newspapers were providing news to whet the colonists’ curiosity for local and foreign events; and there were a number of clergy to look after the spiritual well-being of the inhabitants. One aspect, however, that had not yet been successfully addressed in this flurry of new European settlement was that of the ‘Aboriginal problem.’

It was to take some time before the missionaries were able to form their own opinions on the state of the Aborigines, as they spent their first six weeks in Melbourne where few Aborigines lived. They journeyed to the Protectorate Station at Mt Franklin, on the Loddon River near Daylesford, about 75 English miles north of Melbourne. There they observed the workings of the Assistant Protector, Edward Stone Parker, and the English-language school that he ran for the station’s indigenous inhabitants. Parker, as noted in Chapter Two, had been a schoolteacher in England as well as a missionary of the Wesleyan Society. Despite these credentials, the station, and the whole Protectorate system was in decline. Like the Buntingdale Mission and the Aboriginal Settlement before it, the Protectorate was affected by a

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