

Mac Rooy, wife of missionary to Argentina Sidney H. Rooy, has written a series of articles on Dr. Antonie Cornelis Sonneveldt, pioneer missionary to Argentina from the Netherlands, which we are planning to run in THE BANNER consecutively, beginning with this issue. The Rooy's have served in Argentina for six years, where Rev. Rooy was pastor to the church at Comodoro Rivadavia for more than three years. He is now on the faculty of the United Theological Seminary in Buenos Aires.

This series is not a history of the mission in Argentina. It is the story of one man, among others, whose life has left an indelible impact on the work of the Reformed Churches in Argentina.

As Mrs. Rooy writes: "Everyone here over the age of twenty-one has memories of Dr. Sonneveldt. I first heard of him in Comodoro Rivadavia some four years ago and became so intrigued by the vital part he played in the church there that I began collecting incidents about him. Three years ago I paid my first visit for information on Mrs. Sonneveldt in Buenos Aires, though our family had been in her house for tea when we first arrived in Argentina. From her I learned the personal details that form so large a part of these articles, and her continuing interest has been one of my inspirations in writing."

## CHAPTER 1

# patagonian preacher



Dr. Sonneveldt  
with a  
Boleadora ball

BY MAE ROOY

Determinedly she squared her shoulders against the fresh west wind and climbed the slight incline up the Avenida Rivadavia from the Calle Belgrano. Low cement dwellings and storefronts faced the street. The doors between them, she knew, opened on passages leading to patios where a few flowers, carefully sheltered from the wind, would be blooming bravely and a scraggly tree or two would be casting its meager shade. To her right, where the rows of streets ended abruptly, rose the Chenque Hill, bare, brown, and squared off at the top as if by a giant knife. Grains of dirt stung her eyes as the stronger gusts of wind showered sand from the chenque over the sleepy city. It was Saturday afternoon, and there was little life on the streets.

Her arrival in Comodoro Rivadavia the night before had been the fulfillment of a dream for Edith Nanz. The dream had begun to take shape in Coyhaique, the little town in Chile to which she had gone a year and a half before as a missionary. Her welcome in Coyhaique had not been warm; villagers had thrown a dead cat into her well, and doors at first were closed to her. But little by little the women had begun to attend her Bible classes and the children danced delightedly when she appeared in the doorways of their houses. She was happy in her work in Coyhaique.

Every year in early summer groups of sheep-shearers go from Chile to all parts of the Patagonia. On the trucks are the machines with shears for nine or twelve sheep at a time. The men ride on the back of the truck with the machine, and a cook goes along to prepare the *asados* (roast meat) and the *mate* (Paraguayan tea). They spend

from three days to two weeks on each *estancia*, shearing the sheep that have been rounded up from their wide, scrubby, inhospitable pasturelands by shouting *peons* on horseback. The shearing crews in Coyhaique had spoken of Comodoro Rivadavia, the largest city in the Patagonia, and the eyes of the young missionary had grown luminous as she imagined the many people who must live there. "Are there church services in Comodoro Rivadavia?" she had asked the men. "Is there a Protestant missionary there?"

But those rough laborers habitually spent their Sunday mornings in bed and their Sunday evenings in one of the many bars in that faraway city, and they could only shrug their shoulders. She must go to Comodoro Rivadavia, she resolved. She must see for herself if the work of spreading the gospel, so dear to her heart, was being carried on there. But how could she go? There were no trains or buses. The road, always rough and impassable if it had rained, was closed by snow during the winter months. She would have to find a truck that was going to Comodoro Rivadavia in the spring and beg a ride.

And find a truck she did. The men had gallantly insisted that she ride in the cab instead of on the back where several of them swayed and jolted on the bone-wrenching ride. For four days they had bucked and jounced over the endless Patagonia, sleeping at night in some little *boliche* (tavern) where the beds might or might not have had clean sheets. "A *gaucho* slept here only one night," the matron had explained in one such place. "It wasn't worthwhile to change the sheets." But each night before retiring, Edith—with her Bible in her

hand—had found a seat with the others close to the fire. "What is that you are reading?" the innkeeper had invariably asked. And within a short time Edith had found opportunity to read and explain one of the miracles or parables of the Lord Jesus.

Finally, as the sun had set in a blaze of red and golden glory, the road had begun to descend from the pampa, and away in the east, between the rolling hills, Edith had caught her first glimpse of the sea. Blue and beautiful it had shimmered in the distance, but by the time they had driven into Comodoro Rivadavia it had changed to a shiny black, illuminated in part by a golden path of moonbeams over the softly lapping waves. The truckers had directed her to an inexpensive hotel, and from it she had set out this afternoon to look for a church. Ahead of her the Avenida Rivadavia rose steeply, long, barren islands dividing the uphill from the downhill traffic. How pretty it would look with trees and flowers planted there, she thought wistfully. She glanced at the building she was passing and stopped suddenly, her eye caught by the bronze plaque to one side of the door.

Gereformeerde Kerk  
In Gebruik Geneem 17/18 Maart 1934  
Iglesia Reformada  
Inaugurada Marzo 17/18 de 1934  
\* \* \* \*  
Soli Deo Gloria

She read the first part, wrinkling her forehead over the strange-sounding words. But their similarity to her ancestral German and the Spanish translation assured her that this was indeed a church, and she stepped closer to the curb for a better look. She saw white cement walls with wooden doors, a pointed roof with a circular window below its peak, and arched windows of beveled glass on either side of the doors. Intent on her observations, she did not notice the approach of a tall man until his voice startled her. "Are you interested in the church?"

"Oh, yes!" she gasped. "I . . . I am a missionary in Coyhaique and I came to see if there were a missionary in Comodoro Rivadavia and to begin work here if there is no one."

"But there is a missionary here, and a very good one," answered her new acquaintance. "His name is Mr. Willies."

"Oh," murmured Edith, feeling somewhat deflated. She had come so far, impelled by the need she felt must exist in this place. Was there truly nothing for her to do? Sensing her uncertainty, the other added in a gentler tone, "I do not live here. I have come as a circuit preacher from Buenos Aires to hold services with the South African congregation of this church for a few weeks. But Mr. Willies uses our church building every week for his Spanish service, and when I am here we often hold combined services. Tomorrow evening at 6:00 we shall have a vesper service together. In the morning I shall be preaching in Dutch—if you think you can understand something of it you are welcome to come. The evening service will be in Spanish, and afterward I shall introduce you to Mr. Willies."

Edith thought swiftly. But why not go? She must go

to church somewhere. It might as well be here. "I'll come," she assured him.

"Good," he answered, with a warm smile. "Till tomorrow then."

"Till tomorrow," she said, and continued on her walk, wondering what kind of missionary this Mr. Willies could be.

The next morning found her in a pew near the back of the church which was almost filled with well-dressed people, taller and blonder than most Argentines. "How different they are from my poor Chileans in Coyhaique," she thought. She spelled out the words over the high wooden pulpit. ". . . *God zei eer.*" Now the service had begun and the pump organ in the corner was wheezing out the notes of a choral. She joined in the singing with a full heart. The preacher announced his text from the book of Ruth, and she was delighted that her knowledge of German and English helped her to understand the greater part of the sermon. Filled with the joy of having met her God in a strange city in a church with a language that was foreign to her, she left the service with a keen anticipation for the evening vespers.

Six o'clock found her once more in the simple church. She waited timidly after the service for the tall preacher to fulfill his promise to her. He was at the door greeting the many families who filed past, and all of them seemed to have a long story to tell him. Finally they had all gone, and she was beginning to fear he had forgotten the promised introduction when he noticed her and nodded with a smile in the direction of a man who was collecting hymnals in front of the church. "This is Mr. Willies," he said, and led her toward the missionary. After a few polite inquiries about herself and her place of work, the missionary asked her to sit down on the front bench and proceeded to put her through as thorough a catechism as she had ever had about her beliefs in all the points of doctrine. She was a bit disconcerted by this turn of events but answered as well as she could. "You have answered well," he said at last. "I would be pleased if you would go with me to visit some of my families this week."

"I'd love to," she answered enthusiastically.

He saw her safely to her hotel that night, and she began her work as his assistant the next day. Seven months later they were married and worked together in Comodoro Rivadavia until his death many years later. Edith always laughingly gave the credit for their happy marriage to the tall pastor who had first introduced them. "If it hadn't been for him," she said, "we would never have met. I would have gone back to Coyhaique and would have continued my work alone."

Who was this circuit preacher who had come from Buenos Aires? He had lived in Comodoro Rivadavia years before. The silence and grandeur of the vast region that was his parish had entered his soul on his lonely rides on horseback or oxcart over the Patagonian pampas visiting the *estancias* of his widely scattered flock. He by his faithful presence had become part of the warp and woof of the South African settlers there. To begin the story of his life we must cross the ocean to the ancient town of Willemstad, in the Netherlands, where he was baptized Antonie Cornelis Sonneveldt.

Willemstad:  
"The street . . .  
is divided  
through the middle  
by a row of trees."

# From a Dutch Village

## CHAPTER 2

The street that runs from the old Koppelkerk in Willemstad to the municipal building just a few blocks further is a wide one and is divided through the middle by a row of trees. At the far end one can see the water of the Holland Diep shimmering in the sun and the fishing boats anchored off the pier. To the right, a block over, stands the great white windmill, and it and the church and the black-and-white-shuttered Stadhuis are the three landmarks of Willemstad.

In a small house on this street, near the church, lived a tailor who specialized in making uniforms for the soldiers of the Willemstad barracks. His wife and he had three children: a girl named Dina and another named Marie and a boy named Antonie Cornelis.

Life in that ancient town was quiet enough, but the very stones breathed history, and Antonie's imagination was fired by the true tales told him by his schoolteachers. The place had once been a swamp and so confused a legendary Roman that he had confessed, "I don't know whether to call it land or water." It was first surrounded by dikes in 1564, and the resulting polder was called Ruigenhil. But six years later a great flood washed parts of the dike away. At the same time the revolt against Spain broke out, and the intrepid "Beggars of the

Sea" made the strategically situated Ruigenhil their base for their nocturnal raids against the Spanish ships and troops along the coast of Brabant. The Spanish commander Mondragon ordered reprisals to clear the area of "Beggars," and several farms and homesteads in Ruigenhil went up in flames. However, in 1576 an armistice was signed, in 1583 the dikes were reinforced, and in 1584 the town was renamed Willemstad in honor of the Prince of Orange.

When Antonie was ten years old, his family left the large, domed state Reformed Church in which they had all been baptized and began worshipping with the Gereformeerde (Christian Reformed) group that was meeting in a barn just a few doors away from their house. In December of that year, 1890, the group received permission to build a fine new church, and the Sonneveldts continued to worship there.

Antonie's grandfather and most of his uncles were bakers, but he was neither interested in that nor in becoming a tailor like his father. He wanted to be a minister. But since the family hadn't the money necessary for such long years of study, he chose the next best: he would become a teacher. Willemstad had no secondary school, so after Antonie had finished his primary education the family moved to Amsterdam. Here Antonie

studied to be a teacher and a principal, and here, his father died at the age of forty-seven.

The story of the Boer colony in South Africa had long held a special attraction for Antonie, and as he neared the completion of his studies he thought seriously of going there. But the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899 changed his mind. He became headmaster of the school in Haarlemmermeer, and his mother and sisters moved there to be with him. Before long he became very active in the young men's society and was elected president. At a party with the girls society pretty Metje Pruisen caught his eye. She lived on a nearby farm and was second to the youngest of nine children. He saw her again at his school when she came to help the younger children with their handwork. From talking to her at church and school he progressed to visiting her in her home, and when he moved to Brouwershaven in 1907 to become principal of the school there, he promised to come back on his vacations.

The next year they were married: first, according to Dutch law, in the Stadhuis and later in the Gereformeerde church in Haarlemmermeer. They had a happy wedding reception at Metje's house with the parents and all the brothers and sisters. Two days later the young couple moved to Brouwershaven into a huge house.

Dating from the seventeenth century, it had formerly been a hotel. The burgemeester of the town and his housekeeper lived upstairs and shared the kitchen with the young Sonneveldts.

For two years the kindly principal taught in the school in Brouwershaven with a teaching staff of one other person. He loved the children, and they gave him their affection and respect in return. Little Cornelia was born, and Metje was a happy, satisfied mother. But this idyll was interrupted by a notice Antonie saw one day in *De Standaard*, the Christian weekly newspaper. It pointed out the dire spiritual straits of a Dutch group of colonists in Argentina and advertised for a teacher and preacher for them.

"Argentina!" exclaimed Antonie. "Where's that?"

"In South America," answered his wife.

"Now, I would like to try out for that!" was the happy response.

Metje looked up in surprise and some distress. "Ton! You're not serious! Cornelia is so young, and your mother is not getting any younger, and you're her only son!" Then she stopped. Antonie had always wanted to be a minister, and she knew of his teen-age yearning to go to Africa. Perhaps his place was in Argentina. She would be still and await the outcome of the required examination.

On the advertised date thirteen young men presented themselves to the synodical committee, the *Deputaten Voor Zuid Amerika*, and Antonie was among them. Because the need was so great for one who could be both teacher and preacher, those who had no theological training had been required to make a sermon. Now they each had to preach ten minutes of their sermon and hand in the written copy to the committee.

After the ordeal they all shook hands and were told that the decision would be announced in five days. Those days were long ones, for Metje and her mother-in-law especially, but both of them trusted the great Designer of lives, and perhaps neither of them was surprised to learn that Antonie had been chosen to go.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

# a Cry in the wilderness

BY MAE ROOY  
BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

Buenos Aires  
Harbor  
in 1910



## CHAPTER 3

On a cold, cloudy Saturday afternoon in January, less than a year before schoolmaster Antonie Sonneveldt answered the advertisement for Argentina, an unsightly black coal freighter, sheathed in ice and flying the Dutch tri-color, steamed out of the Amsterdam harbor.

As it sailed south along the coast, it stopped in boulogne-sur-Mer, in La Corona, in Vigo and accumulated a considerable number of third-class passengers. Emigrants from France, Russia, Poland, Italy, Spain, even from Syria and Arabia, they attracted the interest of a gentleman who had embarked in Amsterdam. This was Dr. J. Van Lonkhuizen, up till recently minister of the church in Aarlanderveen in Zuid Holland, now en route to Buenos Aires. From this distant city had come cries for help to the "Deputies for Correspondence with Foreign Churches," this being one of the synodical committees of the Gereformeerde Kerk in the Netherlands.

Dr. Van Lonkhuizen knew that in 1889 a rather sizable group had left the Netherlands to settle in Argentina. He also knew that no pastor had accompanied them. Few of them were confessing members of the church. Now there were reports of "hopeless division, endless confusion, and limitless decline" among the Gereformeerde members of that group. (See *Argentinië, Een Belangrijk Land ook voor Nederlanders*, by Dr. J. Van Lonkhuizen, p. 10) Dr. Van Lonkhuizen was on his way, aboard the *Zaanland*, to investigate and to spend, if need be, two

years in helping restore order and in reviving the hope of the church there.

Buenos Aires in 1908 was already a sizable city of more than a million inhabitants. As the *Zaanland* neared the Argentine shore the smoke stacks of the breweries in Quilmes loomed in the distance. Many boats passed the *Zaanland* as it steamed toward its haven, and several with a Dutch captain or machinist aboard tooted a salute. Dr. Van Lonkhuizen noticed with patriotic pride that almost all the dredges that they passed had been made in Holland.

A cordial welcome awaited Dr. Van Lonkhuizen as he disembarked and was met by a group of the colonists. As he rode through the streets to the southern part of the town where the Dutch immigrants and most of the other dock workers and day laborers lived, he was amazed at the variety of shops, the movement of the traffic, and the cosmopolitan air of the city as a whole.

But his joy over his safe arrival and his appreciation for the beauty of the city were replaced by shock after the second cup of coffee, when his hosts began to tell of their experiences. With a growing horror he learned of how the five- or six-thousand Dutch immigrants, ignorant of the Spanish language, had arrived to find that a revolution had taken place. They had been promised rich lands along the Rio de la Plata by the former president. Instead, they had to wait till landowners from the interior came looking for workers. Then they were loaded onto trains and sent for miles over the flat grasslands to where the tracks ended. Some of them were assigned to sod houses nearby; others were sent further on their way by carts drawn by horses.

Everywhere the story was the same: little equipment, insufficient water, no heat, inadequate shelter. Their food until they could plant gardens was meat, salt, and sugar; this was too abrupt a change from their Dutch diet of potatoes and vegetables. Many sickened and died, especially among the children. It was whispered that a man, half-crazed by grief over the death of his wife and the wailings of his children, had killed them and staggered down the tracks toward Buenos Aires, hoping to find his way back to the coast.

After infinite suffering some of the people settled around Tres Arroyos and San Cayatano, eventually starting farms on that rich soil. Others got to Rosario, at that time the second largest city in South America, where a Dutch group had established itself twenty years earlier; and a third group found its way back to Buenos Aires.

There was silence in the little room as Dr. Van Lonkhuizen pondered these tragic tales. Then, abruptly, he asked, "But the believers? Are there churches in these places?"

Briefly the men sketched the situation. Rosario had written earlier to the professors of the seminary at Kampen in the "old country," explaining that they had no pastor and asking what to do. The good professors had sent back money and books and advised them to ordain one of their elders, Mr. A. Struis, who was also vice-consul of Holland. The church in Rosario was organized in 1893; in 1897 Mr. Struis was ordained and called to be pastor of the church. But he received no salary and continued his daily work during the week. In 1900 he or-

ganized the Buenos Aires church and in 1901 accepted the call there. Once a year he went back to Rosario, and in 1905 he baptized twenty-five children in Tres Arroyos. He worked in Buenos Aires for five years, but the group dwindled and finally split. Many joined other churches or were lost completely to the church. As one German minister who had tried to help them said, "What the mission gathers in by drops is here poured out by bucketfuls."

Without a stable church group and without a Christian school, the outside influences pulling at them were proving to be too strong. Dr. Van Lonkhuizen was later to report: "Argentine materialism with its gaiety, its flightiness, its frivolity, exercises a strong suction especially upon the younger generation. They go to the Argentine public schools together; there they get to know each other, find there their friends, both male and female; they go along to the dance house and often at a very early age to the marriage altar . . . . As long as there are no Christian schools . . . all the labor over this generation will be in vain."

Rosario had also written to the Christian Reformed Church in the United States. In 1898 Synod received an overture from Classis Iowa about a communication they had received from Rosario. The overture asked synod to recognize this group and to see what could be done to establish a church there. (I know this date seems to conflict with the 1893 mentioned in the preceding paragraph, but I am quoting from two different reports as they were written.—MR)

The committee for pre-advice that year had also received a communication from the Gereformeerde Kerk in the Netherlands, urgently requesting that synod delegate someone to go to oversee the establishment of a church. The committee recommended acceding to this request, but the *Acta der Synode* reports that after much discussion "the sympathy of Synod was with these brethren, but it felt that it must rely on the Gereformeerde Kerk in the Netherlands for the brunt of the work, since it was too weak to meet the necessities of its own circles and so could not do what it otherwise would do willingly." It was decided to refer the matter to the Board of Home Missions and to send Rosario three copies of the Acts of Synod and six copies of *De Wachter* weekly until the following synod.

In 1902 our synod received a letter from Rev. Struis and his consistory in Buenos Aires, requesting closer ties with our church, but the matter was referred back to the Home Missions Board. This board was considerably burdened by the plight of their South American brothers, and in the words of the *Acta* of 1904 "insisted" that one of our preachers be sent to Buenos Aires and that synod designate under which classis this work would fall. "They have called 'help us' for so long," pleaded the committee. "We are convinced a preacher must be sent to South America for about a year to work among our people there."

That year the motion passed, and in the beginning of 1905 Rev. A. J. Brinks, a member of the committee itself, was scheduled to leave. A Mr. J. Broens, not a church member but evidently a prominent man, wrote a lively seven-page letter from Buenos Aires in answer to a request for information. In it he declared as his opinion that

a minister preaching in the Dutch language there would be as a voice in the wilderness and rather pessimistically predicted that "The Gereformeerde way of worship will never make much of a dent here. The population as a whole is too typically southern, too lighthearted."

Rev. Brinks' departure was delayed for various reasons and his plans were finally canceled because of the high cost of travel for himself and his family, the "lack of ministers in our own land," and for reasons of health. Dr. J. Rullmann points out in his book *Een Geslaagde Mislukking* that to get to Buenos Aires from New York in those days one had to go via Amsterdam. There was no direct route. In 1906, synod decided not to call another man because of questions about salary, term of service, vacation, and the question under which classical committee for home missions this work should fall. The matter was thus at an impasse in the United States when the committee of the Gereformeerde Kerk in the Netherlands decided to send Dr. Van Lonkhuizen to Argentina.

Dr. Van Lonkhuizen spent about a half year visiting all the Dutch church groups. He organized the church in Tres Arroyos, where he had found seventy unbaptized children. In Rosario he found six hundred Dutch people scattered in all kinds of Spanish-speaking churches, from Salvation Army to Seventh-Day Adventist. He organized them into a Holland Evangelical Alliance, hoping to pave the way for a church. Their leader was a former Presbyterian elder. In Buenos Aires he organized a Christian school society with the Dutch ambassador as chairman, relying for financial support on Dutch businessmen outside the church who lived in Belgrano, the rich residential section of the city.

Since there were now two churches, one in Tres Arroyos where Elder Diego Zylstra led the services, and one in Buenos Aires, Dr. Van Lonkhuizen organized them into a classis that would meet once a year. He also revised the Church Order, gearing it to meet the peculiar situation in which these two churches found themselves. Somewhere in between all these activities he found time to accumulate enough material to write a rather astonishing book, *Argentine, een Belangrijk Land ook Voor Nederlanders* (Argentina, an Important Land Also for Dutch People), which he published that same year. Its more than 180 large pages cover every subject from the history and economic geography of Argentina to tables of the cost of living for families of various sizes and lists of equivalents of Argentine weights and measures.

In his impatience to get help for the struggling new churches, Dr. Van Lonkhuizen left Argentina after barely six months and made a report that stirred the Gereformeerde Kerk in the Netherlands to action. He placed the advertisement in *De Standaard* that moved Antonie Sonneveldt to apply for service. And he sent what Rev. J. Wyngaarden (father of retired seminary professor Dr. Martin J. Wyngaarden) was later to call a "rousing letter" to the Christian Reformed Church synod, outlining the situation in Argentina and asking for help. "What we must do now," he said, "is make up for what was neglected, make fast what is loose, and from the dispersed gather together what can yet be salvaged." He suggested that all money collected be sent to the editors of *De Wachter*. (TO BE CONTINUED)

# SO SEND I YOU

BY MAE ROOY  
BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

What a mountain of arrangements had to be made before the Sonneveldts could leave Holland! What letters and telegrams were sent to the church and Wilhelmina (school) Society in Buenos Aires! What plans were made by the *Deputaten* of the Gereformeerde Kerk and what conferences held with the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Holland!

From the Deputies for South America of the Christian Reformed Church in the United States came a warning note written by Rev. J. Wyngaarden: "Our Synod promised \$400, not for a schoolteacher, nor for buildings, but for a preacher with the unquestionable presupposition that pioneer work in South America shall be begun just as we are accustomed to doing it here in North America, not alone or first of all by a schoolteacher, but by a preacher . . . . If Brother Sonneveldt is called and ordained and can also be a circuit preacher in order to preach not only in Buenos Aires but also as much as possible in the other colonies, then we are authorized to give \$400 per year for two years for this purpose . . . . But if Brother Sonneveldt cannot be ordained, then we must find another, even if this good brother goes there too as a schoolteacher and lay reader."

From Dr. Van Lonkhuizen to Buenos Aires went the cheering telegram: "Sonneveldt has permission to preach . . . . He is a congenial and God-fearing man, self-reliant and practical." Having been examined in the Netherlands, he would be ordained in Buenos Aires; thus he would be a recognized minister in both countries.

Finally all the letters were sent and received and all the plans completed. The Sonneveldts packed their personal belongings and furniture and said farewell to their friends and relatives in Haarlemmermeer and Brouwershaven. At an impressive school function in July, farewells were said to Headmaster Sonneveldt and a welcome was given to his successor. How the children cried when they saw their teacher and principal go! On September 1, 1910, the little family, father, mother, and the sixteen-month-old Cornelia boarded the *Hollandia*, one of the new passenger boats of the Hollandsche Lloyd company, and set sail for another world.

What long thoughts must have been in the minds of Metje and Antonie as the ship slowly ploughed the

waves, always south and west. After twenty-three days of sailing, they too saw the Quilmes smokestacks and the river boats of the Rio de la Plata. They were "home."

*De Wachter* brought the news to the churches in the United States: "Mr. A. C. Sonneveldt arrived here (in B. A.) on the 24th of September. It is no wonder that joy reigned among the brothers and sisters of the Dutch Gereformeerde congregation, now that their prayer was heard and their fervent longing, after many disappointments, was satisfied."

The home that was waiting for the Sonneveldts was a small rented one, and it was used for services as well. The day after their arrival was Sunday, so Metje cleared away the baggage and tidied up the rooms as fast as she could so all would be in readiness. About one hundred and fifty people usually came to the services. How did they all fit into the house?

But fit they did, and they sat or stood with sparkling eyes and welcoming smiles on their usually somber faces while Antonie was introduced by Elder De Boe and addressed a few words of greeting to them. Antonie took charge of the whole service the next Sunday and preached on the words of God to Moses in Exodus 3:14: "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." At the end of his sermon he turned to the consistory and to the congregation and then poured out the love and yearning of his heart for them in a fervent prayer. It was his thirtieth birthday.

To be both pastor and schoolteacher is a heavy responsibility. The Deputies for South America noted this in their report to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in the United States in 1910. They explained the work that faced Antonie Sonneveldt and went on to say that besides this he was supposed to work in other colonies two or three times a year. "Surely a comprehensive and weighty work which certainly calls for much encouragement."

That this was pioneer work made it all the more difficult. Antonie had to work not only with a congregation that had already been split in its short history, but also with the rich and prominent Dutch people in his school society. He had to learn the customs and language of a strange land and oversee a building project, for the Gereformeerde Kerk in the Netherlands had promised help for a parsonage and for a building that could be used as a church and school. Rev. Wyngaarden was pleading in *De Wachter* for help from the Christian Reformed church in this project.

Metje tried to make a home of the tiny house that was also both church and school. Her expectations for the next year were causing her both joy and apprehension, for another baby was on the way. The tiny Adriana was born in a year of great events: her father was ordained as a minister of the gospel; another home, better suited for a parsonage, was rented, and a church-school costing \$1400 was erected on the property behind it; and a second preacher, Rev. A. Rolloos, came from the Netherlands to work in Tres Arroyos.

Dominee Sonneveldt (as he was called for the next forty-eight years) wrote an article that appeared in *De Wachter* early in his ministry in Buenos Aires. In it he expresses his recognition of the immense field of work that

Argentina presents and his early apprehension that perhaps he had overestimated his strength in taking on such a load. But he was encouraged by the conviction that it was God who had led him here and by the joy and love with which his flock had received him. He outlined as the four goals he had in mind when he began his work:

1. Progress in the church and obtaining an adequate church building.
2. A Christian school for Dutch children.
3. A monthly news bulletin for closer relationships among all the Dutch people in Buenos Aires.
4. A Spanish Sunday school for Argentine young people, to be followed later by preaching in this language.

In attaining these goals he reports that, while they still have a long way to go in the church, they at least have a strong new building seating two hundred and fifty people. The Christian school had begun the year with sixteen pupils and ended with about forty, and it had a Christian lady teacher. They had a small newspaper *De Hollandsche Stem* which, Ds. Sonneveldt says, "cannot be anything but simple, but it's better than nothing."

"Finally," concludes Ds. Sonneveldt, "our consistory took an important decision a few weeks ago. A Bible study course in the Spanish language will be made available to the youth of the congregation. There are already twelve young people enrolled. It is clear that from this circle the nucleus of the Spanish Sunday School will come. It is not impossible that the doors of the church will already be open to the Argentine youth when you read this article. There, above all, lies a great field of work for us."

Boundless optimism, energy, and enthusiasm! For Ds. Sonneveldt the obstacles of overwork, poverty, and the indifference of the Argentine people just didn't exist. He went about his business preaching, house-visiting, catechizing, teaching in his school, editing his news bulletin, encouraging subscriptions to *De Wachter*. Three elderly men of the church held Dutch Sunday school and young people from the Spanish Bible class held Spanish Sunday School, report the Deputies to the Christian Reformed Synod in 1912. There was also a "singing school" and a young people's group.

News from Tres Arroyos was less encouraging. Rev. Rolloos had not been able to obtain a subsidy from the Dutch government for his Christian school, as had been done in Buenos Aires. His group was very small--about twenty worshipers on Sunday and eight to ten pupils in his school during the week. In the summer vacation, when the public school was not in session, this number rose to twenty to forty pupils. However, other difficulties developed, attendance at both church and school dwindled, and less than a year after he had come Rev. Rolloos and his wife went back to the Netherlands.

Nine weeks after he had left, friends of the Sonneveldts, a Mr. Rijper and his wife, came to take his place. What joy, to meet old friends after a separation of so many months! Classis Buenos Aires, which had been organized by Dr. Van Lonkhuizen but had not met for some years, was resurrected and convened on August 16, 1913, to examine and ordain Candidate Rijper for the ministry. Rev. Rijper and his wife then left to take up their ministry among the still-struggling farmers of Tres Arroyos.

One day in 1912, a visitor arrived at the Sonneveldt home who was to change the course of their ministry in Argentina. He announced himself as Coos Visser, an elder in the Gereformeerde church in Chubut. "Chubut!" said Ds. Sonneveldt, knitting his brows. "Ah yes. Aboard the *Hollandia*, on our trip over here, there was a chap from South Africa who had lived some years in Chubut. Do you remember?" he asked, turning to Metje.

Yes, she remembered, and they made their visitor welcome. Elder Visser told a story of lonely sheep ranches on the Patagonia, widely scattered Gereformeerde and Nederduits Gereformeerde believers from South Africa, and no spiritual care. "Won't you come to help us, please? Just six weeks," he pleaded. "Visit our people on their ranches, pray with us, baptize our children, and preach for us."

How could Ds. Sonneveldt refuse? Busy as he was, he consulted his consistory, and he and Metje took the thirteen-day voyage south to the Patagonia during his summer vacation from school. Of this we shall have more in the next chapter. Suffice it to say that according to Rev. Wyngaarden's historical sketch in *THE BANNER* of May 23, 1930, on this first visit to Chubut he visited almost every farm on horseback (he who had never ridden before), passing out tracts, preaching twenty-five times, and celebrating the Lord's Supper in eight places. He installed elders and deacons in the church, baptized sixty children, and organized a young people's society.

The next year his consistory permitted Ds. Sonneveldt to go to Chubut for four months. Baby Arie was now three months old. How slowly the months passed for Metje! At this time Elder Bening from Buenos Aires wrote to Rev. Wyngaarden in the United States, "The school needs another principal, since Ds. Sonneveldt is hearing the pipes playing other music." After some discussion the consistory decided to request Holland for help, and shortly thereafter schoolmaster Hoogendorp from Delft arrived. There were fifty-three pupils in the school.

Perhaps it was not altogether unexpected that the combined Nederduits Gereformeerde and Gereformeerde churches called Ds. Sonneveldt as their pastor after his second visit to Chubut in 1914. Before deciding this call, the Sonneveldts felt they should take a furlough in the Netherlands. Perhaps it would be easier to decide without the multitude of constant pressures they felt in Buenos Aires. On the nineteenth of July they set sail, and early the next month they were back again in their beloved fatherland. One can imagine the joy with which Mother Sonneveldt received them and her three small grandchildren in Aalsmeer.

During his furlough Ds. Sonneveldt was a busy man. He met with the Deputaten from the synod of the Gereformeerde Kerk, pleading as a representative of Classis Buenos Aires for closer relations with the mother church. He wrote articles about Argentina, encouraging people to emigrate and join the established churches there. Everywhere he spoke about Argentina. But in between, he and Metje prayed for light on their decision, and on October 6 he mailed an acceptance as pastor of the Nederduits Gereformeerde and Gereformeerde churches in Chubut.

(To be continued)



The year is 1900. The place: a round tent under the scorching sun in a concentration camp in Orange Free State, South Africa. An eleven-year-old boy is patting his mother's shoulder as she sobs over the tiny body of her little son. Tears fill the boy's eyes—this is the second little brother who has died from typhus fever. Grandfather died three days after they had all been taken from their farm to prison—but he had been very, very old. Little Jaap was only two, and Kris had been three. Why should little boys have to die like this? thought Jan. Why couldn't we just stay on our farm, even if Pa did have to fight? He sat down wearily on the ground, his head aching. Listlessly he watched a scorpion scuttle along the side of the tent. How his mother hated the snakes and scorpions and insects of every description that infested the tents!

The next day Jan was sick and his older brother, too. For almost a year the fever kept its hold on him. At one point all of his hair fell out. But a relative who lived close to the camp kept them supplied with milk, and both boys lived. When the Boer War was finally over, the mother was free to go home with her ten remaining children. Her husband had survived the fighting, and together they planned their future. The English, who had put them in the camp, had been victorious. How could they live under that hated flag?

Other Boer soldiers were having the same problem, and that same year a notice appeared in the newspaper that Francis Behr, an ex-officer in the army, and Jan Coulter were organizing a group to emigrate to the Patagonia in Argentina. Soon all the Boers were buzzing with the news. Who would go? In December, 1902, the *Guardia Nacional* sailed from Cape Town with nine families, excited over the prospect of new homes in a "fertile land" with "opportunity for all." The next year the *Cornwall* left with a hundred more emigrants, and in 1905 the *Highland Fling*.

Aboard the *Highland Fling* was a little girl named Nellie Small. She was an old lady, stooped and gray, when I knew her, but the story of her trip from South Africa was as fresh and clear in her mind as if it had happened the day before. She had lived in Bloemfontein, and the first view she had ever had of the sea had been when the Smalls boarded the ship in Cape Town. The trip across that alien ocean had taken three months. As food for the voyage they had taken dried meat called *biltung* and a large sack of toasted bread, and boiling water for their tea could be had in the kitchen. They had finally reached Buenos Aires, but another voyage of thirteen days lay before them before they reached the town of their destination: Comodoro Rivadavia in the province of Chubut.

But what kind of town was this? Bloemfontein and Cape Town had beautiful buildings and paved streets, and the family had gone out to their boat on a long pier. But here before them was nothing but a brown, dusty beach with a few shedlike buildings sprawled across it. Behind the beach were small, rounded hills covered with scrubby brush, with bare patches showing between. Beyond the hills a high, squared-off mesa towered nine hundred feet into the air. But where were the roads? Where were the houses? "Where shall we sleep?" thought Nellie.

## IN DARWIN'S CURSED LAND

BY MAE ROOY

Taking bales of wood to town



Now it was time to get off the boat, and the sailors, waist-deep in water, were helping the passengers down a makeshift gangplank which could not reach all the way to shore. So many people, all standing along the beach with their baggage and bundles piled around them. The old lady telling me the story shook her head sadly at the memory.

Then she chuckled a little. "We were issued tents," she said, "and we all put them up right there on the beach." But that night a howling wind storm arose, and the tents began to flap and billow. The Smalls had a black boy with them called Piet. He immediately got up to check the stakes and spent the rest of the night keeping down the two tents occupied by their family. Above the howl of the storm Nellie could hear children screaming and parents calling on God to stop the wind. She was dimly aware of people running back and forth, but the full extent of the damage hit her next morning when she came out of the tent into the bright sunlight, and rubbing her eyes in the glare, saw to her amazement that only two or three tents besides their own were still standing. Where were the others? Bobbing out in the ocean like so many aquatic mushrooms. The other families had crowded into the sheds and into the one hotel named, ironically enough, Hotel Eden.

For eight days they waited there in their cramped quarters until they saw coming around the hills high carts with huge wheels, each drawn by two oxen and driven by gauchos with baggy trousers who sat between the animals and prodded them with sticks to make them go. One by one the families got into the carts and were taken out to one of the already existing colonies. The Smalls went to Escalante, about twenty-five miles away. It was a slow trip, and at night they pitched their tents while the gauchos slept on the ground, rolled up in blankets.

Escalante was a green oasis in that barren land because of its springs of water, and the Smalls found a spring of their own near which they would build their house. They lived in their tents while they made the bricks. Their father, a plumber, worked out for other families during the week. He came back on weekends when he would set the corners square in the walls on which the rest of the family had been working all week. Each of these new settlers received their land at a very cheap price, but they had to promise to buy two hundred sheep and to cultivate a certain number of acres. After their house was finished they set out fruit trees and planted a garden, and after a few years the place became home.

But what had happened to Jan, he of the tent in the concentration camp? He had a harder time than Nellie. His mother, brave soul, had come to Argentina with her ten children while the father stayed behind a year to settle property matters. She lived in a small homestead with her younger children, but the older boys were farmed out to work for more prosperous farmers already settled there. Jan, age thirteen, was assigned a flock of two thousand sheep to guard far out on the pampa, miles away from the nearest house. He had no winter clothing, but he protected himself from the snow and bitter winds with a poncho of sheepskins and he slept in a cave with a flap of canvas over the mouth. For three months he saw no one—his only companions were the sheep and the puma prowling around. He spread poison to kill the puma and somehow stayed alive on a diet of mutton and water.

At the end of the year he received twenty-three new lambs as his wages. The lambs were too young to take to his mother, so he stayed another year, working for the same man, and this time he received one hundred sheep before shearing. This seemed a princely wage to him, for now the wool was also his. He drove his small flock of a hundred twenty-three animals to his parents' homestead and found to his joy that his father had arrived safely. Jan's sheep, with those his brothers had earned, made a flock with which the family could begin to work. For five years Jan worked for other sheep-herders, and after that there was enough work to keep him busy at home.

Jan's family were members of the Gereformeerde Kerk in South Africa, a sister church of the one in the Netherlands and of the Christian Reformed Church in the United States. The Smalls belonged to the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk. The differences between the two groups were not great—for one thing, the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk believed that only psalms should be sung at the church services. A minister from the Gereformeerde denomination, Rev. L. Vorster, had been aboard the *Cornwall* in 1903, and he with twenty-three other persons had held a meeting during the voyage to organize a church and elect a consistory. Sometime after the arrival of the group in Chubut, Rev. Vorster had returned to Buenos Aires where he paid a visit to the Minister of Colonies and to the Gereformeerde Kerk there, pleading that the church assume some responsibility for the spiritual care of their brothers in Chubut. Then he had gone back to South Africa.

Three years later, in answer to pleas for a pastor received from the colonies, the newly ordained Rev. A. J. Jacobs was sent out. When he arrived in Buenos Aires, he

must have been rather nonplussed to find twenty-four colonists waiting to go back to South Africa. However, a group of forty new immigrants soon joined him, and together they proceeded to Chubut.

Rev. Jacobs worked in Chubut four years with growing disillusion. The land itself was bleak enough: Charles Darwin on his famous trip to the Patagonia had called it a "cursed land," and the South African Behr, on his arrival in Comodoro Rivadavia, is said to have exclaimed, "May God forgive me for having brought my family to such a place!" But Rev. Jacobs worried most about the spiritual health of his people. He saw drunkenness and ungodliness, disregard for God's Word and the sacraments, and he felt that the great distances separating his flock were largely to blame. How could they have a regular church life? How could there be Christian education for the children? He urged the people to return to South Africa and finally, convinced that work in the colony was hopeless, went back himself. In South Africa he wrote a report in which the future of the colonists was painted in such dark colors that the Committee for Help for Needy Churches, to which it was presented, advised the synod of the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk to give up the work. This was done without further investigation.

Water was the constant problem of the colonists living in and around Comodoro Rivadavia. The nearest springs were about twenty-five miles away, and the water had to be hauled by horsedrawn cart and sold by the bucketful in the city. The Boers petitioned the government for a well, and in 1907 a drill was sent down from Buenos Aires. The rest of the story is history: oil was struck instead of water, and a new chapter began for Comodoro Rivadavia. Economically, the discovery was a boon; socially, it was not. Undesirable characters, lured by the thought of easy money, came drifting into town, and law and justice began to take on the flavor of the Wild West days of our own country.

A Boer farmer, one De Lange, was shot from ambush in a case of mistaken identity, and as the police were neither organized nor equipped to handle such a crime, two of the colonists decided to take matters into their own hands. Seeing the murders in town, one of them grabbed his Mauser and they tracked the men to the top of the Chenque Hill where they shot the one and wounded the other in his elbow. The unfortunate survivor thereupon surrendered, thus putting an end "to the series of crimes which up till that point had been committed with impunity" (*Cincuentenario de Comodoro Rivadavia*, "La Colonia Boer," 1951).

This was the parish to which Ds. Sonneveldt was called in 1914. At the same time that Elder Visser had called on the Sonneveldt's in Buenos Aires, a letter from the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk had been sent to the mother church in South Africa. It asked that the relationship between the two be clarified and that, if possible, a pastor be sent to help them. This letter was never answered. Thus it came to pass that Ds. Sonneveldt became the minister of the combined congregations of the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk and the Gereformeerde churches of Chubut in the year 1915.

(To be continued)

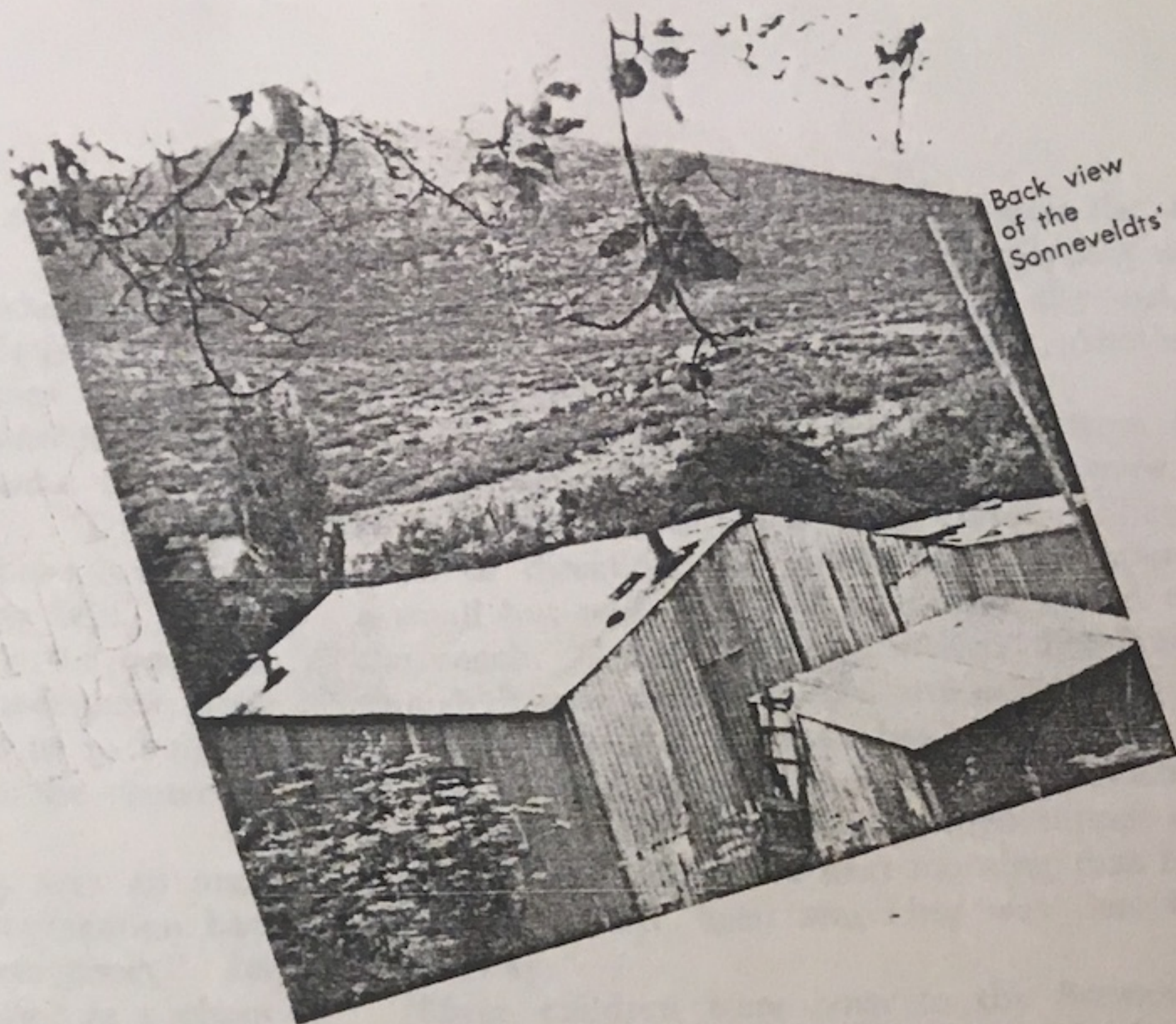
## CHAPTER 6

One bright day in the fall of 1915 (though it was spring in the southern hemisphere), a freighter slowly steamed through the Gulf of St. George to the Patagonian city of Comodoro Rivadavia. On the boat was a tall, distinguished-looking gentleman of thirty-five with his wife, two little girls, and a two-year-old boy. The eyes of the woman anxiously scanned the horizon. What kind of place was this to which they were going? How bright the sun was! It dazzled her eyes as it danced on the blue, blue water.

The Chenque hill loomed in the distance. Now she could see long, low sheds along the beach and a scattered settlement of houses behind them. They had to transfer from the freighter to a launch, which lurched and rocked in the choppy waves, and then at last they walked down a gang-plank to shore. The five or six waiting families warmly welcomed the travelers. At last Dominee Sonneveldt and his family had arrived.

Near the beach lived Marinus Venter with his general store, and to his house the Sonneveldts went for a cup of coffee. Mr. Venter told them that a small house up the hill was empty and had been rented as a parsonage. It was *very* small—only two rooms—but it was home.

In Brouwershaven the vegetable man, the milkman, the baker, and the fishmonger had all come to the Sonneveldts' door. In Buenos Aires there had been all kinds of shops in which almost everything could be bought. But Comodoro Rivadavia was different. Nothing grew near that desolate village where the wind roared up the unpaved streets at night and howled around the tin-roofed houses. Canned milk was brought in from Chile, but it was very expensive. Metje more than once watched compassionately while mothers tried to still their wailing babies with a bottle of tea. Some fruits and vegetables were brought in from *chacras* or acreages some distance away, but it was not much. Water was an even greater problem than food. They carefully hoarded in a covered barrel the little rain that fell, and the rest that they used had to be bought from the horse-drawn wagon that came once or twice a week from Manantiales Rosales or Kilometer 38. For a time the Sonneveldts had a horse, a gift from one of their parishioners, but it ate and drank so much that they had to give it back.



Back view  
of the  
Sonneveldts' home.

BY MAE ROOY

Life was difficult in Comodoro Rivadavia, but the hardships seemed to draw the people together. When the Sonneveldts held their Sunday services with their little flock in the Venters' general store, the love that flowed from one to the other lent encouragement and joy to soften the rough places.

But very few people could come to church on Sunday. Hundreds of the congregation were scattered over an area of about two hundred miles, and so Ds. Sonneveldt mounted his horse and left for long weeks while his wife managed at home or took the children and stayed at one of the ranches.

The consistory with which he worked was composed of men from both the Nederduits Gereformeerde and the Gereformeerde churches. Generally the two consistories had separate meetings, but twice a year they would meet together. The two groups cooperated to pay Ds. Sonneveldt's salary. They divided the great area in which their people lived into districts, and in these districts there were *kerkplekken* or places to which the surrounding colonists would come for church services when Ds. Sonneveldt arrived on his circuit. When he was not there, the individual families had services in their own homes and the fathers took charge. Many had reed organs in their living rooms around which they would sing.

At first there were twelve *kerkplekken*; later there were twenty-two: fourteen in the Dutch language, three in Spanish, five in English. For the English-speaking people Ds. Sonneveldt used Psalters and catechism books from our Christian Reformed Church. As early as 1916 an item of \$11.68 appears as "books to Sonneveldt" in the treasurer's report of the Deputies for South America.

Rev. J. Wyngaarden tells us (*THE BANNER*, May 30, 1930) that during the first four circuits twenty-eight confessed Christ, sixty-seven children were baptized, and Ds. Sonneveldt closed each day with prayer in the house in which he stayed. In an early letter to the Deputies for South America from our church he reports that one of the elders on the circuit remarked that he was amazed and overjoyed at the wonderful joint meetings and the unexpectedly good cooperation between the Nederduits Gereformeerde and the Gereformeerde people in Chubut.

At the end of 1916 this group established an official relationship with Classis Buenos Aires.

It soon became obvious that living in Comodoro Rivadavia was not ideal for the Sonneveldts. Metje had been a farm girl. She longed for a place to plant a garden, where she could have a cow and where the children could drink fresh milk. Her husband thought about his work and wrote to *De Wachter* (March 3, 1916): "This work is very dear to me, so that I thank the Lord, who has allotted to me this part of His vineyard as my field. There is only one less pleasant subject, and that is the question of living quarters. We live in a small, inadequate, and inconvenient house. The ideal thing would be to build a house, school, and church outside, more in the center of the parish."

About sixty-five miles north of the city was an area called Salamanca where several of the congregation had ranches, one of which was called "Sneeuwpoort." Its owner offered a building on his land to be used as a school and a church. Onto it they would build a home for the Sonneveldts. By the middle of January, 1917, the building was finished and the move began. All the belongings of the family were piled on a train of ten ox-drawn carts which then slowly wended its way northward. The Sonneveldts themselves stayed with friends during the week it took for the carts to arrive, and then they too traveled north to their new home.

After the dirt and barrenness of Comodoro Rivadavia the new location was beautiful. "Sneeuwpoort" lay in a long deep valley, at the bottom of a winding descent. The scrubby brush covering the surrounding hills looked velvet in the distance, and the grass on the slope above the house stood deep about a gurgling spring. The Sonneveldts had more room here for themselves and three bedrooms for boarding pupils. A neighbor drove a train of cattle from the Andes region, and from him they bought a cow, which later produced two calves. Metje had her garden which she fenced with thorn bushes. But many were the times she had to chase the cow who insisted on breaking in and sampling her tender vegetables. She hauled water for the house and garden with pails from two deep wells. From the herds of sheep there was an unlimited supply of mutton. Metje, like the other ranch women, made her own soap and candles from the heavy lard. When someone went to Comodoro Rivadavia with the horse and wagon he would bring back staples such as flour and sugar.

The school opened in February of 1917, and Ds. Sonneveldt soon had about twenty pupils. They came by horseback from ranches miles away, small eight- and ten-year-old boys and girls. Weekends most of them would go home. Once a month there was a worship service in the schoolroom with Ds. Sonneveldt at the pump organ, wheezing out the psalm tunes.

Legends about the good pastor began to grow. How cheerful he was, so encouraging and so even-tempered! He sang as he jogged along on his horse, a suitcase bouncing on either side of the saddle, and the children screamed with delight when they saw him coming. They called him "Oom-dominee" (Uncle-dominee).

He had his mishaps. One spring he and his elder had to cross the Rio Chico when it was swollen from melting

snows and early rains. Their horses swam the stream, but the two men arrived on the far bank dripping wet. In the heat of the fire which they built to dry out, Ds. Sonneveldt burned the seat of his trousers. Another time he fell off his horse and injured his thumb.

One late afternoon they were riding from Pampa Pedrada to Sierra Chaira when it began to snow. Soon the air was thick with the drifting flakes. They lost their sense of direction and finally stumbled upon a *puesto*, a small hut where lived a *peon* who tended that part of the ranch. Grateful for the shelter, they hurried inside, though it was dark and cold and empty. In a corner of the shelf they found a little bag of flour, and by mixing it with water they made some pancakes which they baked over an open fire. With that as their supper they slept all night and discovered the next morning that the house for which they had been searching was less than a half mile away.

Three children were born to the Sonneveldts during these years in Chubut: Anton, Bas, and Mathilda. Metje had to go to Comodoro Rivadavia for medical attention before Mathilda's birth. One of the elders, the Jan of the concentration camp in Chapter V, was the first in the area to have a car. He brought Metje to the town, and there the baby girl was born.

After Bas's arrival Metje became ill with flu, a lung infection, and phlebitis. A doctor had to come out from Comodoro Rivadavia to tend her. When she had recovered, it was decided that she needed a change. She should go along on the circuit with her husband. Various members of the congregation took the other five children, and Metje with her three-month-old baby boy set out in an ox-cart. It was a change!

While the Sonneveldts had been working in Chubut, the churches in the north had been having problems. The schoolmaster who had come to take Ds. Sonneveldt's place in Buenos Aires had also been ordained, and for six years all had gone well. But the twin responsibilities of church and school were impossibly heavy, and gradually the work began to suffer.

The Rijpers had been working diligently in Tres Arroyos since 1912, but Ds. Rijpers, too, had a dual role in church and school plus visiting out-stations in San Cayetano and Rosario. Besides the regular Dutch services and Sunday school there was a Spanish service and Bible school on Wednesday nights. Ds. Rijper and Elder Zylstra translated into Spanish sermons, the compendium, and our forms for the sacraments and marriage.

As far back as 1914 in the report to the synod of the Christian Reformed Church, the Deputies for South America mention that Ds. Rijper needed more time to visit outlying churches and therefore a Christian principal should be sent to Tres Arroyos. In 1916 a notice appeared in *De Wachter* that Ds. Rijper had been in the hospital a month for the restoration of his "shattered health." Finally in 1920 his health failed completely, and he and his wife went back to the Netherlands, hoping to return after a furlough. The doctor forbade it. He became a minister in Holland. Ds. Rullmann tells us of his tragic death in *Een Geslaagde Mislukking*: he and his two sons were shot during the German occupation in the second World War.

In 1922 the agreement between the two churches in Chubut expired; they renewed both it and their call to Ds. Sonneveldt. He accepted, but asked for a furlough the following year. It had been eight years since he had been back in the Netherlands. Early in 1923 the family left Chubut, Metje going directly to the Netherlands with the children, and Ds. Sonneveldt remaining in Buenos Aires for the classical meeting.

It was an unusually difficult meeting, for all of the problems and irregularities regarding the pastor of Buenos Aires had to be discussed. Ds. Sonneveldt was president. Finally it was decided to suspend the Buenos Aires pastor temporarily. He returned to the Netherlands where he again became a schoolteacher and did not return to Argentina.

During his stay in Buenos Aires, Ds. Sonneveldt preached in the church there and was invited to address the Chamber of Commerce on church life in Chubut and on Dutch education. He also preached in San Cayetano and Rosario. At the classical meeting of 1923 Rosario had made its last tragic appeal for a pastor. It could not be granted: there was no one to go. Later Ds. Sonneveldt made a few more visits there, but the people had scattered, and to this day we have no church in Rosario.

The Sonneveldt family settled in Aalsmeer for their furlough, but their hearts were still in Argentina. Ds. Sonneveldt was burdened by the plight of the struggling churches there and longed for the moral and financial support a new group of immigrants would lend. To encourage this he wrote newspaper articles and a pamphlet about Argentina. He spoke with authorities in church and government, and it was through his untiring efforts that future emigration groups from the Netherlands were better organized and more adequately underwritten by the mother country. He preached almost every Sunday, radiating the message of God's wonderful providence for His creatures in no matter what circumstances they find themselves.

For various reasons his furlough dragged out longer than originally intended. In a postscript to a letter to his long-time friend in the United States, Rev. J. Wyngaarden, he wrote in June, 1924, "Everything takes so long here!" But the body of the letter is characteristically optimistic: "Hearty thanks for the love-support we have gratefully received from you in the name of the Deputies. We are hoping not to prove undeserving . . . . There is still a lot of work, wonderful work for our God and His dearly-bought church. We are feeling somewhat overwrought lately, sometimes unwell, but we hope the Lord spares us.

"How much I should like to have been in your midst! But that is certainly not laid away for us. For that matter, our privileges are really great . . . ."

Earlier in his furlough he had written to Rev. Wyngaarden to check in THE BANNER and *De Wachter* offices to see if his temporary address in Aalsmeer was noted, ". . . because I should not like to do without these magazines." He adds a note: "Many and hearty thanks for your always-consoling letters."

Some of the members of the Deputies for South America became impatient with the tangle in financial affairs which resulted from the problems in Buenos Aires before the classical meeting of 1923. One member wrote

to Rev. Wyngaarden, expressing his opinion that the colonists should leave Buenos Aires and settle in Texas or southern California. "We must recommend to Synod to stop financial support after this year," he said. But another member that year was Dr. J. Van Lonkhuizen who had left the Netherlands in 1911, soon after the Sonneveldts did, to become pastor of the Alpine Avenue Church in Grand Rapids. Now he was serving the First Church in Chicago. Remembering the earnest young schoolmaster who had become so great a preacher, he wrote to Rev. Wyngaarden, "Ds. Sonneveldt is a man we can rely on, a wonderful Christian, sensible and charitable." He suggested they channel some of their funds through Ds. Sonneveldt.

What wisdom, objectivity, and far-sightedness are needed in making decisions bearing on a situation foreign from one's own! These qualities had characterized Rev. Wyngaarden in his dealings with Argentine missions since 1897, and Ds. Sonneveldt depended on his letters. He expressed some of his esteem for his American friend, whom he had never met, in the second article in his series on "Our Christian Reformed Churches in South America" in *De Wachter* of August 19, 1941. "How our churches had the love of his loving heart!" he exclaimed. "How he comforted us and encouraged us and worked and prayed for our interests as long as he could! [Rev. Wyngaarden had died five years earlier.] . . . Yes, I ask myself if the good that has come to us in the last year is not the fruit of the prayers of Ds. Wyngaarden."

After the classical meeting of 1923 the Buenos Aires and Tres Arroyos churches were vacant. Rosario had called in vain. There was no pastor left in the north. Ds. Sonneveldt was preparing to return to Chubut. But his plans were to be changed by a succession of events that would almost break his heart.

(To be continued)

## HUMBLE

SALLY CATTS

Lord, keep me humble, this I ask,  
What'er my lot, what'er my task;  
For foolish pride, with luring mask,  
Would hold my soul within its grasp.

Oh foolish pride, thou art so vain;  
With much conceit thy self dost frame.  
Yet 'tis of naught thy boldest claim,  
For 'tis by grace I shall attain.


What'er the task then sent by thee,  
Let humbleness be first in me;  
My weakness, Lord, make me to see  
And bid all sinful pride to flee.

Oh banished be all earthly fame,  
Nor from mere men seek honored gain.  
Be this my motive, this my aim  
To glory in my Savior's name.

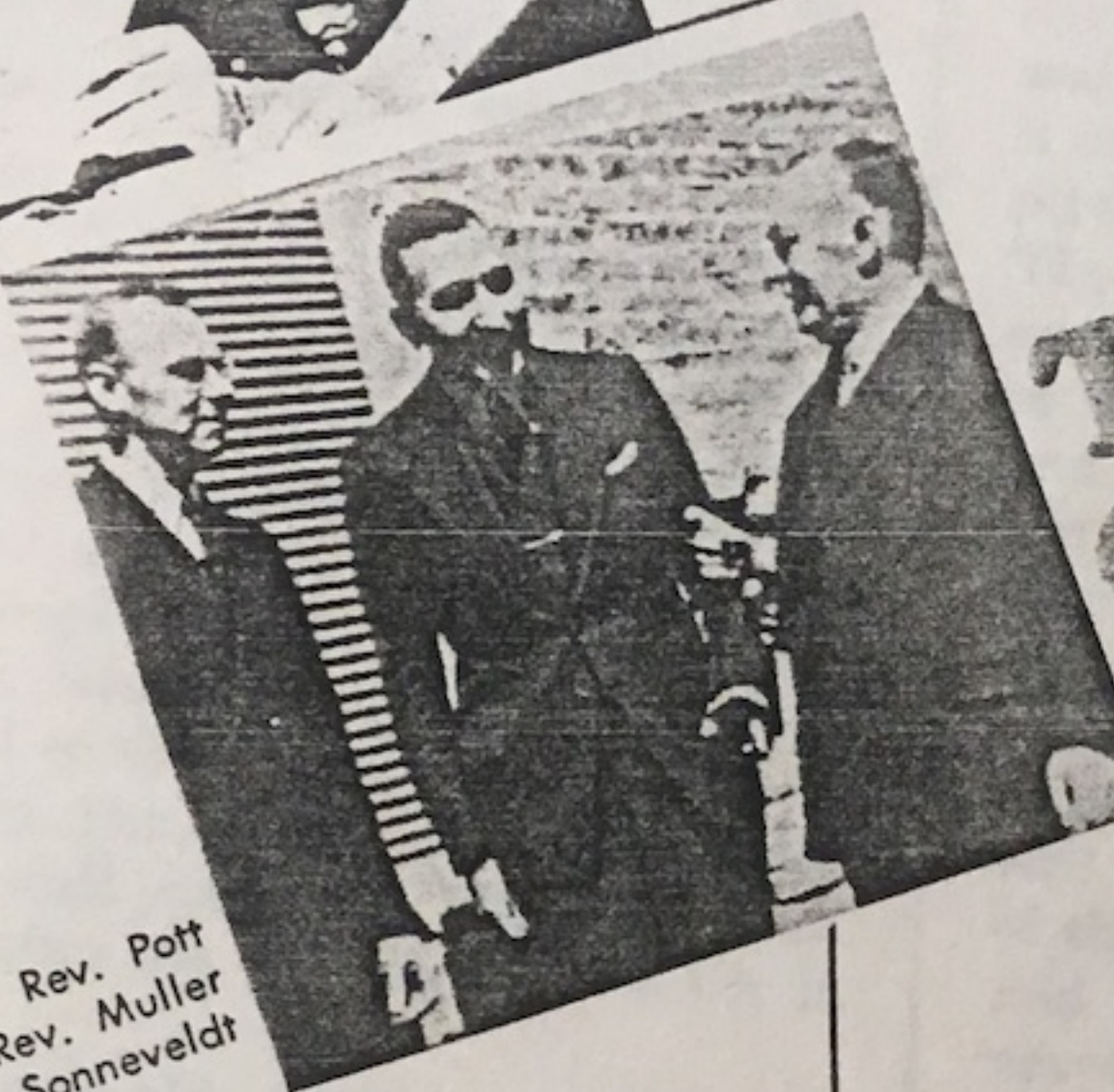
## CHAPTER 7

# THE CLOUD OF SCHISM

BY MAE ROOY



Ds. and Mrs. Sonneveldt  
and Adrianna  
in the Netherlands  
in 1950



Rev. Pott  
Rev. Muller  
and Ds. Sonneveldt

In September of 1924 a letter was sent from Comodoro Rivadavia to the Synod of the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk in Cape Town, South Africa. It broke the silence of fourteen years that had existed between the daughter church and the mother. Written by an elder, it referred to the "sad circumstances" in which the daughter church found itself in Chubut and begged that a pastor be sent to investigate the situation and to help them. The Committee for Help for Needy Churches, to which the letter was referred, recommended that the secretary, Rev. Lückoff, visit Chubut to see what could be done, and this was approved by Synod. Notice of the decision was sent both to Ds. Sonneveldt, still in the Netherlands, and to the Gereformeerde Kerk in Chubut.

The Sonneveldts received this message with mixed feelings. For eight years they had worked and prayed for the church and school, giving freely of their time and strength to Nederduits Gereformeerde and Gereformeerde alike. In one sense the letter seemed a negation of all their toil and sacrifice. The two churches had worked together as a team and just before Ds. Sonneveldt's furlough had renewed their articles of agreement. Members of both groups had traveled from their far-flung ranches in numbers that had amazed the populace of Comodoro Rivadavia, to wave farewell from the dock as the Sonneveldts had sailed for Holland. Why then this dissatisfaction?

On the other hand, the good Ds. could anticipate the visit of Rev. Lückoff with some pleasure, hoping to discuss some of the aspects of the heavy burden of responsibility that he had been carrying in Chubut with an understanding brother. Perhaps they could arrive at solutions that would increase the Christian love already existing between the churches and strengthen the witness for God in the community.

July, 1925, found Ds. Sonneveldt back in Buenos Aires

at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the church. A distinguished group, including the consul-general from the Dutch embassy and representatives from the Scotch Presbyterian and other churches, heard his sermon in the morning based on Psalm 103:2. This was followed by a program of music and speaking talent. Dr. Wyngaarden received a letter from Elder Bening describing the festivities and printed it in *De Wachter* in September. Elder Bening mentioned the possibility of having a communal preacher who could travel between Buenos Aires, San Cayetano, and Tres Arroyos. Ds. Sonneveldt, who had gone to visit the churches in the last-named places, was bringing this matter to the attention of these congregations for discussion.

In September Ds. Sonneveldt arrived in Comodoro Rivadavia alone, since Metje had stayed behind in the Netherlands with her children. Rev. Lückoff arrived in October, visited some of his Nederduits Gereformeerde people, and decided (1) that it was a psychological impossibility for the two congregations to work side by side and (2) that the attempt should never have been made. At a meeting between him, Ds. Sonneveldt, and some of the Gereformeerde leaders on November 6 the agreement between the two churches was terminated. Rev. Lückoff left, to be followed through the years by a series of Nederduits Gereformeerde pastors who stayed for short terms. Ds. Sonneveldt remained pastor of the Gereformeerde group in Chubut, but it was decided that he should live in Buenos Aires where his presence was so necessary and make two circuits each year in the Patagonia, one in the spring and one in the fall.

Disheartened, struggling with an overwhelming feeling of futility, Ds. Sonneveldt packed the few personal belongings that had to be sent north and left Comodoro Rivadavia. In Buenos Aires he moved back into the same four-room house into which they had come in 1911. But

how quiet it was without Metje and the children! She would come back when the school year was over. How many weeks and months had she been left alone while he was visiting the ranches in Chubut! Now he knew what it was like. In the meantime he plunged into the work of encouraging his flock and stimulating the projects that had lagged in their almost three-year vacancy.

It was a glad reunion when Metje, Cornelia, and the three younger children returned in 1926. Adriana and Arie had been left in the Netherlands for their secondary education.

When Ds. Sonneveldt had begun his work in Argentina, he had set forth a news bulletin as one of his goals. The resulting *Hollandsche Stem* had expired in 1913. In March, 1927, a new paper was born: *De Kerkblad Voor Zuid Amerika* ("Church Paper for South America"). Its purpose was not first of all news or a "closer relationship between all Dutch people," as had been the case in 1911, but that the truth which the church members professed might be applied to their lives and be expounded and defended. Besides the editor, Ds. Sonneveldt himself, there were four staff members. This *Kerkblad* appeared regularly until after Ds. Sonneveldt's death in 1959.

Christmas, 1928, Ds. Sonneveldt tried a new medium of communication. He was the first Protestant pastor to preach the gospel over the radio in Argentina.

One of the most important holidays in Argentina is Independence Day on July 9. On this date in 1933 appeared the first issue of a Spanish religious paper, called *La Palabra Fiel* ("The Faithful Word"), dedicated to the cause of evangelism. Ds. Sonneveldt and Rev. Bruxvoort, then pastor in Tres Arroyos, were co-editors.

"The liberty which the native son won with his arms and generous blood," wrote Elder Diego Zylstra in this first issue, "is shared equally today by the honest, industrious foreigner, as much in the religious as in the civil and political sphere . . . our church has resolved . . . to contribute to the spread of the gospel of salvation in the national language and, if God wills, to complement in this way political with spiritual liberty."

For twenty-seven years this little paper went out once a month with its articles on Bible passages and religious subjects, comments on the news, and suggestions for a healthy spiritual life and Christian home. It was a stepping-stone that indicated the progress of the church from "Gereformeerde Kerk" to "Iglesia Reformada." Both mean "Christian Reformed Church," but the first is in Dutch and the second in Spanish.

Ships from all nations were constantly coming and going in the busy Buenos Aires harbor. When a Dutch ship was in, the seamen often found their way to the church or parsonage where they were sure of a warm welcome. They would bring Christian literature from Holland, and Ds. Sonneveldt would give them copies of *De Wachter* in return. The little parsonage was full to overflowing when the seamen were in town. Visitors from Chubut would often find a refuge with the Sonneveldts too. Because medical facilities were primitive in Comodoro Rivadavia, South Africans in need of an operation would usually come to Buenos Aires. They

could not always afford to stay in a hotel for extended periods of time, so the church benches would double as beds and Metje would put extra plates on the table at meal time.

Aware of all this activity, Rev. Wyngaarden stressed the need for new facilities in his article in *THE BANNER* on July 4, 1930. He said, "What has served the last twenty years is a \$1,400 church in a vulgar side district and on the back yard of a rented four-room house which is used for parsonage, consistory, seamen's home, and hospital for patients from outside churches and colonies . . . . The small parsonage is always crowded more or less. The good brother and sister enjoy this and make good use of their opportunities, but such a life is a constant strain and sacrifice." The Sonneveldts did move into an old, but commodious, apartment eight years later, and the new church building was erected in 1942. But Rev. Wyngaarden died before these things came to pass.

Dr. Henry Beets came with his wife to visit the classical meeting in Buenos Aires in February of 1936. He was well known to the group there as a long-time member of the Committee for South America in the United States, and the two were warmly welcomed. Arie and Bas Sonneveldt with some other men occupied the church pews the nights the Beets were there so that the distinguished visitors could have their beds. They were startled into wakefulness one morning by a solemn voice from the pulpit. The fun-loving, early-rising Dr. Beets had entered the church unobserved and had begun a sermon for their benefit.

Ds. Sonneveldt took his two trips to Chubut each year as his vacation. Metje's vacations must have been the comparatively slower pace of activities when her husband was not at home—there are no other ones recorded.

Though they were both in Argentina, Chubut and

## PRAYER

BARBARA M. R. VAN DYKEN

The cut of the hope  
Wounds deep  
And deeper with each  
Night's thrust  
As the pain moves up,  
Writhing,  
Reaching.

Pulsations revolve  
Dizzy  
In bleeding redundance.  
Lesion  
Rent wide in my need,  
Beating,  
Reaching.

Delirious joy:  
Revealing.  
Healing.

Buenos Aires were worlds apart. The cobblestone streets and tall buildings would change to endless pampas, deep valleys, and rugged, leveled-off hills. The clang of the trolleys and the whir of the city traffic would become the profound silence of the Patagonia, broken only by the trill of a distant bird or the yucking of a curious guanaco. The sight of these llama-like animals, running together in bands of a dozen or more, and the small rheas called "avestrug" by the Patagonians, never failed to excite the pastor with their wildness and foreignness to the life he had always known.

On his circuits in the Patagonia, Ds. Sonneveldt kept a series of small diaries in which he recorded the births, deaths, baptisms, professions of faith, the places he had been and, usually, the weather. From these and the *Kerkblad Voor Zuid Amerika* we learn the history of those days. Over the years transportation changed. The voyage that had taken thirteen days was shortened to ten and eight; there was the possibility of going by train to San Antonio del Ooste and then taking the bus to Comodoro Rivadavia. True, the roads were horrible, and in the pages of the diary appear delays on this account, but to one who had traveled by horseback this was not intolerable. Once in Comodoro Rivadavia, there were enough people with cars to make travel by horse unnecessary. This was a great relief to Ds. Sonneveldt, who had developed painful boils on his legs in his riding days.

The circuit now included only the Gereformeerde families, but there were still five *kerkplekken* or worship places in three languages: Dutch, Spanish, and English. The area was divided into six districts, and the circuit took six weeks. Ds. Sonneveldt explained in *De Wachter* of August 26, 1941: "The first district lies about eighty miles from the city, the next one another forty-five miles further; you might say the average distance between districts is about sixty miles."

The South Africans were still struggling with their school problem. On October 22, 1928, school in the Pampa Pelada district was officially opened at a meeting at which Ds. Sonneveldt presided. This was the first school in Chubut to have a certified South African teacher, one Florisse. The Association of Christian Women of the Gereformeerde Kerk had to a large extent financed this project, and one of the ranchers in the area had donated a building for the school and for a home for the teacher and his wife.

This school lasted a few years, but then Mr. and Mrs. Florisse returned to Africa and the school was discontinued. The next year there was talk of another school in Salamanca, to be taught by one of the girls of the colony. In 1933 there was more talk of a school, this time in Sierra Victoria with another teacher. To this day the need for a Christian boarding school in Comodoro Rivadavia remains, since schooling for the children invariably means a split home with the mother and children going to town and the father remaining miles away on the ranch.

After the opening of the school in Pampa Pelada, the Association of Christian Women began to plan ways and means of building a church in Comodoro Rivadavia. To begin raising money they asked all the ranchers to

donate several wethers which would later be auctioned off. Those who had no herds were asked to contribute money. For several years they had a bazaar, and in 1933 we read that the walls were being put up, but the cornerstone-laying was to be postponed till the next March. Metje and three of the children went along on the circuit that year. Then follows the note that because of a storm on a Sunday morning the walls had collapsed! By March 17, 1934, not only had the walls been repaired but the church was finished and a dedication service was held with much joy and thanksgiving.

The day after the dedication service, Ds. Sonneveldt got up early to catch the small train (called the *autovia*) that runs between Comodoro Rivadavia and Sarmiento a hundred-seventy kilometers away. The trip normally took four or five hours, and he expected to arrive in Sarmiento in the early afternoon. But the locomotive broke down at Kilometer 127, and the passengers waited until eight in the evening when a replacement arrived from Comodoro Rivadavia. The weary pastor finally got to Sarmiento at eleven thirty that night where a faithful elder awaited him. They talked around the table till two o'clock in the morning. Such were the "vacations" of Ds. Sonneveldt.

Ever since the first colonists had come to the Patagonia there had been talk about going back to South Africa. Ds. Jacobs and his successors after 1925 encouraged this sentiment. Offers of help with travel costs and of fertile new locations from the home church and the South African government made the project feasible, and in 1937 and 1938 about half of the settlers left. Ds. Sonneveldt was not in sympathy with this solution to their problem, and as it turned out, many of the colonists were deeply disillusioned by what they found in their homeland. About four hundred and fifty of the original eight hundred souls were left, and with this group, now united in a common need, Ds. Sonneveldt went on working.

(To be continued)

## DID YOU EVER?

SIMON C. WALBURG

Did you ever try to analyze  
A fear?  
Take its dimensions, scrutinize  
How queer,  
Your thinking is, how warped and odd?  
Indeed,  
It is because you left out God.  
The seed  
Of your anxiety is plain.  
Your eyes  
Are fixed on Self, and in disdain,  
The size  
Of faith shrinks, and your troubled soul  
Ablaze,  
Forgets that God is in control,  
Always!





# an open door

During the years of 1925-1955 Ds. Sonneveldt must have felt at times like a juggler with up to five balls in the air, each with its own satellitic cluster of problems, and at other times like a voice crying in the wilderness.

In 1926 he received a letter from a Dutch colony, consisting of eighty souls, in Brazil. Would he come to visit them? In 1928 the Committee for South America of the Christian Reformed Church in the United States reported that Buenos Aires needed its own pastor (you remember that Ds. Sonneveldt was actually the pastor of Chubut) and that the colony in Brazil was still waiting for the visit of the busy Ds. Sonneveldt. The same report stated that Tres Arroyos and San Cayetano urgently needed a pastor. Two years later Ds. Sonneveldt thankfully threw that ball to the Christian Reformed Rev. Brandt Bruxvoort, who served the Tres Arroyos group well till 1935.

In 1931 Ds. Sonneveldt succeeded in visiting Carembehy, Brazil, and in 1933 a call went out again from Classis Buenos Aires for another preacher. Carembehy is twelve hundred miles to the north of Buenos Aires; Chubut is twelve hundred miles to the south. Clearly another man was needed. The minutes of the Committee for South America of May 29, 1933, brought a ray of hope at this time: Student William Muller and his wife were interested in working in South America. The committee decided to concur in Mr. Muller's desire to study Spanish at Princeton before the synodical meeting of 1934. After the November, 1934, meeting of the committee the glad news was sent to Ds. Sonneveldt: Ds. William Muller has been examined and ordained and will be sent to Carembehy! After a farewell service in the church of Midland Park, New Jersey, he and his wife sailed on December 8 of that same year.

Some of the Argentine church history of the 30's and 40's reads like a jigsaw puzzle. Shall Rev. Muller take Rev. Bruxvoort's place in Tres Arroyos after he had left and someone else be called for Carembehy? Carembehy will not hear of it and sends a petition with fifty signatures to the Committee for South America, asking that Ds. Muller stay. Rev. and Mrs. Muller stay. Ten years later: shall Ds. Sonneveldt be officially appointed "General Home Missionary" and Rev. Muller be sent to Buenos Aires to take his place? Lacking Rev. Muller's consent, the matter is dropped. Five years later, in 1951, Mar del Plata is emerging as an ideal spot for the immigration of fishermen from the Dutch island of Urk. Shall Ds.

Sonneveldt be sent to begin work there? Who would take his place?

As the years passed and as problems developed and were solved in their fashion, Ds. Sonneveldt went on working, working in Buenos Aires. He began two new outposts in surrounding suburbs, translated sermons and other materials into Spanish, published his *Kerkblad Voor Zuid Amerika* and *La Palabra Fiel*, and ministered to the souls of his people. Every year for twenty-six years he made his two two-month trips to Chubut.

Ds. Sonneveldt never became materially rich. When in 1920 and 1921 the Chubut ranchers had a bad year, he cheerfully accepted half his salary. He always thankfully acknowledged the subsidies sent him from the United States and Holland, never acting as if they were his just due. During the second World War, when it was impossible to send money from the Netherlands to Argentina, the Christian Reformed church increased the amount of its subsidy. A rather pathetic minute of the Committee for South America on April 9, 1940, reads: "Seeing that Rev. A. C. Sonneveldt has received only \$300 from our Committee and nothing from the Netherlands for 1940, it is decided to send him \$600."

Gradually through the years more workers came to Argentina, and the burden began to be lifted from the shoulders of the solitary pastor. In December of 1937 Rev. and Mrs. Jerry Pott arrived in Buenos Aires and took up their work in the farming community of Tres Arroyos. For a time after Rev. Rijper and his wife had left this area in 1920, the Christian school had been discontinued. But the determined colonists had formed a school society, and the treasurer had paid for the passage of a schoolmaster from the Netherlands out of his own pocket.

This teacher left in 1938, and in 1939 there came a principal who was to be not only the spark of the school in the years that followed but the moral support of every preacher with whom he came into contact. Genial, capable, dedicated, buoyant—Meester C. Sleebos was one with Ds. Sonneveldt in his radiant Christianity. In 1940 the church in Tres Arroyos celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, and in 1943 a new church building was dedicated.

Rev. Pott was joined in 1950 by the first Argentine Christian Reformed pastor—Rev. J. Vander Velde. Born in Tres Arroyos, Rev. Vander Velde studied at Kampen in the Netherlands and for the next twenty years served his home church as its pastor. Upon Rev. Vander Velde's

arrival, Rev. and Mrs. Pott were transferred to Buenos Aires and later to Mar del Plata. Rev. and Mrs. Edward Meyer came from the United States in 1958 to carry on with evangelistic work in Tres Arroyos and San Cayetano.

As we have seen, the history of the Iglesia Reformada (for such is the name of the Christian Reformed Church in Argentina) has its roots in three countries: the Netherlands, South Africa, the United States. All three of these lands had the love of Ds. Sonneveldt's great heart. As the churches in Argentina grew in numbers and in strength, the question was asked repeatedly: To the Synod of which land shall Classis Buenos Aires belong? At one time even Brazil was part of this huge classis, but the differences in language and church problems led Brazil to become separate. In August of 1946 the First Reformed Ecumenical Synod was held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with delegates from North America, the Netherlands, and South Africa. One of the items for discussion was the question of Classis Buenos Aires.

In the succeeding years the pendulum sometimes swung in favor of the Netherlands, sometimes toward the U.S. The May, 1949, minutes of the Committee for South America refer to Chubut's desire that Classis Buenos Aires become a separate denomination. That same year Rev. Pott wrote an article mentioning this as a solution to the problem, but it was not until after Ds. Sonneveldt's death, in 1961, that this decision was made.

During the first decades of their existence, the churches in Argentina held services and carried on their business in their native languages: Chubut in Afrikaans and the northern churches in Dutch. Gradually this changed to Spanish. The churches in Tres Arroyos, Buenos Aires, and Mar del Plata still have some Dutch services in addition to the Spanish, but in all the other churches and outposts Spanish is the only language used.

The use of the language of the land opened opportunities for evangelism and for relations with other evangelical churches. Ds. Sonneveldt, while working first of all with established churches, was most deeply disturbed by the emigration from Chubut to South Africa in 1938 because it detracted from the effectiveness of the witness of the church in the community. Already in 1911, when he had just begun his work in Buenos Aires, he had written of a Spanish ministry to the Argentine youth, adding, "There, above all, lies a great field of work for us." You remember that evangelism was the purpose of *La Palabra Fiel*, begun in 1933. The minutes of the Com-

mittee for South America of December 19, 1945, report the opinion stated by Rev. Pott that you cannot separate home and foreign missions in South America. At this meeting the Committee decided to suggest to Classis Buenos Aires that it "inaugurate a program of intensive evangelization, irrespective of racial background . . . ."

Ds. Sonneveldt had written from time to time about the work of the church in Surinam and in other Dutch colonies. In his diary of February 9, 1942, he mentions a visit to the Waldensian colony in Uruguay. The cooperation between the Iglesia Reformada in Argentina and the Waldensian, Methodist, and other evangelical churches has increased through the years. At the present they are cooperating in a seminary in Buenos Aires for training Christian workers.

The last fifteen years of Ds. Sonneveldt's life brought some joyous moments. Rev. Pott, in describing the dedication of the new church building in Buenos Aires in 1943 wrote in *THE BANNER* of ". . . the ever-inspiring leadership and untiring efforts of its genial pastor, the Rev. A. C. Sonneveldt, who for more than thirty years has served the churches in Argentina . . . ." He goes on to say, ". . . the joy and gratitude of our beloved colleague knew no bounds that beautiful Sunday afternoon."

In 1908 Antonie Cornelis Sonneveldt and Metje Pruisen had exchanged marriage vows, and 1948 brought the fortieth anniversary of that date. Their friends and church members in Buenos Aires helped them celebrate, and Dr. Beets from the United States congratulated them via *De Wachter*. *De Kerkblad Voor Zuid-Amerika* expressed the general sentiment when it said, "We have so much for which to thank the Sonneveldts! What all haven't they done for us and our people during the thirty-eight years they have spent in Argentina! . . . Doesn't their house always stand open? Aren't they always ready . . . to help us in a hundred different ways? Who ever knocks at their door in vain?"

Two years later the church held a great celebration on the fortieth anniversary of Ds. Sonneveldt's ordination to the ministry. Rev. Pott and Rev. Mulder wrote special articles of thanksgiving and appreciation in the *Kerkblad*. Rev. Muller based his words on Psalm 92:12a: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree." To the joy of the Sonneveldts, the church gave them a trip to the Netherlands as a gift. They had not been back to their homeland since 1925. Indeed, as Ds. Sonneveldt was to say in his farewell sermon four years later on the occa-

sion of his emeritation: "We must not live in two lands, in the Netherlands and in Argentina, but only and exclusively here." It was wonderful to see old friends and relatives again.

For years Ds. Sonneveldt had been calling in his *Kerkblad* for someone for either Buenos Aires or Chubut, and the possibility of a Gereformeerde preacher coming from South Africa was discussed at the Ecumenical Synod in 1946. In 1952 Ds. Sonneveldt made one of his last trips to Chubut, to bid farewell to the people there as their pastor and to install the South African Rev. Opperman. The grateful congregation, mindful of the forty years of faithful ministry in their midst, presented their old pastor with a plaque. "With wisdom and tact you have built up the congregation to the honor of the King of the Church," it said in Afrikaans. ". . . In the parsonage you and Mrs. Sonneveldt always received us hospitably and treated us kindly. There was an open door and an open heart for everyone who knocked at your home . . ."

Rev. and Mrs. Opperman stayed in Comodoro Rivadavia for two years and then returned to their homeland, but this time a replacement was not hard to find. A native of Tres Arroyos, Juan Boonstra, had been studying at Calvin College and Seminary since 1948, and by 1954 he was ready to return to Argentina with his American wife. He was called by Comodoro Rivadavia. Once again the aging pastor, now seventy-four years old, went to Chubut to install a new minister. For him it was a joy, for it meant the continuous advancement of God's kingdom. As he had written of Chubut in *De Wachter* in 1951, "Also here rings out the pure gospel; also here there is a ray of light in the darkness of unbelief and superstition; . . . and also here something can be seen of the glory of our King."

Plans were begun for the emeritation of Ds. Sonneveldt. A new minister from the Netherlands, Rev. G. K. Geerd, came to take his place. On March 20, 1955, the old minister addressed himself to his congregation for the last time as their pastor. He turned their thoughts back to his first sermon, on his thirtieth birthday, when he had preached to them on Exodus 3:14: "I AM hath sent me unto you." He said that for him that word had meant that his call was to Argentina, and that since God had called him, he would provide all things necessary for his material well-being. "I have never been disappointed in this," he said, "but I have been amazed and overwhelmed by the loving care of the Lord."

Now he wanted to address his congregation on Acts 20:32—"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." With his exposition of the text he could not help but tick off the various fields in which he had worked and for which for years he was a voice crying for workers. "The last four years you had a second preacher in Rev. Pott . . . . No work was ever too much for him . . . . Rev. Geerds has begun his work among us with great zeal. And when I think that Tres Arroyos has in Rev. Vander Velde a dedicated and appreciated pastor and Chubut has in Rev. Boonstra a youthful and promising shepherd, then can no fear, but only thankfulness and

trust, fill our heart. The Lord has done all beyond our asking and thinking. Soli Deo Gloria!"

The Sonneveldts experienced a great personal sorrow later in that first year of emeritation. Their son Anton, who had married and was living in Maryland in the United States, became ill with leukemia and died. The distance and expense were too great for them to see him before his death.

Emeritation did not mean cessation of activity for Ds. Sonneveldt. He continued to write in the *Kerkblad* and in *La Palabra Fiel*, and almost every Sunday found him preaching somewhere. Rev. Geerd had to return to the Netherlands for reasons of health, and Rev. Van Rijn came to take his place. While the new preacher was learning Spanish, Ds. Sonneveldt took charge of the weekly service in that language.

And so it came to pass in the ordinary course of events that Ds. Sonneveldt was in Tres Arroyos in February, 1959, for a funeral. While there he had a heart attack and spent a few days in bed. Back in Buenos Aires he visited the doctor who ordered rest. He went on with his activities as usual until July 22 when he had another attack in the afternoon and died instantly. His wife and three unmarried children were left in the roomy, high-ceilinged apartment that seemed so much emptier now without his dynamic presence. Mrs. Sonneveldt, now eighty-four years old, still attends church and still greets her visitors with the open-hearted hospitality that has characterized her all her life long.

The place once occupied by Ds. Sonneveldt is a large one, and it is filled now by a number of men. A long list from the Netherlands, the United States, and Canada they have come, and some have gone: Rev. Van Bentham, Rev. Van Halsema (a cousin of our Rev. Dick L.), Rev. Van Dyk, Rev. Langeveldt, Dr. Schuurman, Rev. Brinks, Rev. Meyer, Rev. De Vries, Rev. Van Ryn, Rev. MacLeod, Rev. Dokter, Rev. Rumph, Dr. Rooy, Rev. Wagenveld, Rev. Jipping, Cecelia Drenth. Besides Rev. Vander Velde there are five more Argentine pastors: Rev. Wolf, Rev. Millenaar, Rev. Obermann, Rev. Zijlstra, and Rev. Viviers. Several young men are training to become pastors in Buenos Aires, and the North American Rev. and Mrs. John Hutt are studying Spanish in Costa Rica in preparation for their work in Argentina.

The challenge that is Argentina is different today from the one that faced Antonio and Metje Sonneveldt in 1910. Ds. Sonneveldt saw that challenge change in his forty-five years as pastor in this great land. Today there is social struggle, student rebellion, intellectual doubt, and a searching for answers. More than ever before there is a pressing need for a strong Christian witness, not confined to Sunday preaching, but overflowing into everyday walking and talking.

Because the churches in Argentina are still small and weak, the appeal made by Ds. Sonneveldt in *De Wachter* in 1951 is urgent today: "Therefore, brothers and sisters, make haste . . . . There is still an open door; send out your ministering servants, that they may enter through that door with the Word of Life and win new victories for the cross, souls for salvation, and honor for our God."

THE END