



THE GOLDEN HARVEST
A HISTORY OF THE SOUTHERN VALES 1836-1880

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B.A. Honours

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ABSTRACT

The vales to the south of Adelaide were a part of the region in which commercial grain-growing first developed in Australia. This thesis seeks to explain why the southern farmers became so successful in the 1850s, and why the region declined as a grain-producing area in the 1870s. The writer argues that the 1840s Depression played a dual role, dashing the hopes of would-be pastoralists and compelling wheat-farmers to adopt more efficient methods of production. By the time of the gold-rushes in Victoria the farmers were ideally placed to take advantage of the heavy demand for their produce. In the 1860s a number of problems led the southern farmers to support legislation for credit selection. This began a chain of migration, by which many of the agricultural techniques and rural traditions formed in the "Old South" were transmitted to a new generation of cultivators on the Australian wheat-belt.

Wheat-farmers dominated Southern Vales society because of the early demise of the pastoralists and the relative weakness of urban development. A number of small townships competed fiercely for survival and prevented the emergence of a large regional centre. The farmers elected men to the colonial parliament who would place local needs before "national" issues. They were sensitive to any proposal to tax landholdings to pay for public works, but at the same time enterprising in the responsibilities they were prepared to undertake at the local level. These same qualities were apparent in the voluntary support they offered to their churches and schools, as well as in the relief of poverty and maintenance of order. The balance between voluntary effort and reliance on the central government varied according to

practices established in the formative years of the colony, but nowhere were the farmers content to surrender local control entirely.

This thesis tends to support Douglas Pike's emphasis on the importance of political radicalism and religious dissent in shaping early South Australia. What is interesting is the interaction between these ideologies and the realities of a new life-style as predominantly urban immigrants strove for commercial success as farmers.

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

Abbreviations

SAA	South Australian Archives
BRG	Business Record Group
GRG	Government Record Group
PRG	Private Record Group
SRG	Society Record Group
SAPD	South Australian Parliamentary Debates
SAPP	South Australian Parliamentary Papers

Units of Measurement and Currency

The material covered in this thesis predates metrication and hence all measurements have been given in the Imperial form. Also it has been considered an unnecessary and misleading exercise to adjust the currency from the pre-decimal pound (£), shilling (s) and pence (d).