

Epilogue

George Brown had hoped to live long enough to see the opening of Wesley College at the University of Sydney and the end of the War. He saw neither. The business of his beloved Methodist Church went on without him. Another man was installed as next President General at General Conference but Brown was not there.¹ The war in Europe staggered on, through ever deeper carnage, for another seventeen months. Memorial services for Brown were held in Sydney, Barnard Castle and in the islands of the Pacific as people honoured their old friend. Glowing obituaries appeared in journals, listing his achievements.² Before the last of the funeral flowers had withered, Monica had collapsed with exhaustion after months of sharing the care of her father. Lydia, sad and tired, continued to care for her grandchildren with the help of Lizzie. Once more, her notepaper was rimmed with a border of black.

As the months of war ground on, the Methodist people, along with the whole society of Australia, struggled to understand the meaning of the horror. They asked, Why does God not stop the war? Who is to blame? A second referendum was called in 1917 and again the result was 'No' to conscription. Political power changed hands. Antagonism against Germany and German citizens resident in Australia became sharper as the months went by but the women of the Brown family retained their friendship with their German missionary colleagues. Lydia Brown wrote lovingly to Johanna Fellmann, feeling with her the pain of being parted from her older children in distant Germany as war raged around them.³ The war came to an end at last on 11 November 1918. That day, in Sydney, the Brown women were distressed to read in their morning paper that the German Chancellor was warning Germans living outside the Fatherland that they would be 'surrounded by hatred and malicious rejoicing'. That evening, writing to Johanna Fellmann on behalf of Lydia and Lizzie, Monica Brown wrote,

I want to assure you dear Mrs Fellmann that this is not the case, our hearts go out to you and always have done during these past four years.... While we rejoice today, it is not with a malicious hatred.... Accept our love for you which has never changed.⁴

It would be February 1920 before the Methodist mission office finally was able to secure permission for the repatriation of the Fellmann family to their original home in Germany.⁵ In August 1920, on the ship *Miltiade*, the family sailed at

1 The new President General was the Rev. J.E. Carruthers, a former colleague of Brown.

2 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April 1917; *Methodist*, 14 April 1917.

3 Lydia Brown to Johanna Fellmann, 6 March 1918. In private collection of Nancy Joyce.

4 Monica Brown to Johanna Fellmann, 11 November 1918. In private collection of Nancy Joyce.

5 *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, June 1891–June 1917, 4 February 1920.

last for home via London, after twenty-three years of missionary service. The connection with the Brown family was not broken, however, and George and Lydia Brown's great-granddaughter Nancy Joyce in Sydney continues a family tradition of friendship with the grandson of Heinrich and Johanna Fellmann, Dr. Ulrich Fellmann in Aachen, Germany to the present day.

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Soon after Brown's death, discussions began about creating a fitting memorial. The women of the Women's Auxiliary to Foreign Missions offered a plan which they believed would have pleased Brown. They would raise funds to establish a George Brown Memorial Home in Sydney, a place where women could be prepared for missionary service. At first there was some hesitation by the Board who acknowledged the need but thought that the 'time is inopportune'.⁶ The time was right in one respect; for the first time in the history of the Board of Missions, four women had been elected to the Board, including Monica Brown.⁷ Within weeks a group had been formed of men and women to work towards the establishment of a training Home.⁸ The women worked actively against the grim backdrop of war and its aftermath and by September 1920 the new George Brown Memorial Home was ready for its first residents.⁹ Over the next decades, this missionary training establishment moved from its original location at The Avenue, Waverley to 5 Rogers Avenue, Haberfield, trained both men and women and changed its name several times. The legacy for the training of Christian leaders continued in new incarnations and the name of 'George Brown' has been retained on property at the Centre for Ministry of the Uniting Church in Australia at North Parramatta since 1988.

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The home at 'Kinawanua' in Gordon, after the death of George Brown, continued to be a haven for family members and others in need. The women of the family gave shelter to a nephew, Leslie Dinning, returning from the war a paraplegic, and another niece, Hazel Dinning, joining her sister Amy Eadith after the death of their father. Other nieces and nephews came and stayed for extended periods with their aunts. Lydia Brown was becoming increasingly frail. She and her older sister Elizabeth Watkin (formerly Fletcher) were now respected old ladies in their eighties. Most of their siblings had died and they were among the last of those who remembered childhood and youth in the little mission house on

6 *Methodist*, 16 February 1918, ML MOM 278-279.

7 The first women members were Miss Monica Brown, Mrs. W.J. Eggleston, Mrs. C.T. Newman and Mrs. J.R. Uren. They first attended the annual meeting of the Board in February 1918.

8 *Methodist*, 23 February 1918. Women on the panel were Monica Brown, Mrs. Blow (Treasurer) and Mrs. Heighway (Secretary).

9 *Methodist*, 12 October 1918, 4 September 1920.

the rise above the Whaingaroa River in North Island, New Zealand, or the two young ministers, each determined to be a missionary in the Pacific, who came seeking their brides.

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Lydia Brown died on 7 August 1923. Toward the end, it was said, 'gradually and peacefully, she faded out of life,' cared for by her daughters. Perhaps she remembered, a few days before the end, that it would have been the sixty-third anniversary of the day in 1860 when she and George Brown pledged their lives to each other. An obituary for Lydia Brown said that 'her name ... is as an ointment poured forth,' generous, fragrant and healing.¹⁰ Her daughters lived to old age after years of service to family and church. Monica Brown died on 7 January 1950 and Mary Elizabeth Brown died on 22 July 1952; in her later years her fine mind was clouded with dementia.

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In his later years, George Brown had tried to arrange the safe keeping of his collection of artefacts and photographs. In his will, after planning his legacy to his own family and a bequest for the Methodist Foreign Missionary Society, he directed that his collection should go either to the new Bowes Museum in his birthplace of Barnard Castle, England, or to the Mitchell Library in Sydney. If neither establishment wanted it, then he bequeathed it to the New South Wales Methodist Conference. He insisted that the collection must remain as a whole.¹¹ Someone, perhaps Lizzie Brown, typed a long inventory with 683 items listed, many in multiples or bundles of ten.¹² When the Bowes Museum finally agreed to buy the collection, after complex negotiations, the vast accumulation of the years was packed and shipped across the world, far from the Pacific Islands where the pieces had been made and used. Over the years, as connection with Brown faded and interest in the objects of remote outposts of Empire was lost, much of the collection was relegated to storage. In 1953 the collection was sold to the University of Newcastle on Tyne for their new department of anthropology, passing in 1974 to the care of the Hancock Museum at that university. In the 1980s, to the dismay of many, the Hancock Museum decided to sell the collection to the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, Japan, which has a high reputation for excellence. The collection was now recognised as being very valuable, and there was fierce debate over the proposed sale; some declared that it should be retained in the United Kingdom or repatriated to

¹⁰ 'Memoriam', *Methodist*, 1 September 1923.

¹¹ A copy of Brown's will is held in the Archives of Uniting Church Synod of NSW/ACT.

¹² 'Ethnological Collection of the Late Rev. Dr. G. Brown,' Archives of Uniting Church Synod of NSW/ACT.

Australia and the museums of newly independent Pacific nations.¹³ Despite this outcry, the collection was sold to the National Museum of Ethnology in 1985, complete apart from four particularly valuable pieces which were bought by the British Museum. The Museum in Osaka presented a major exhibition of the George Brown ('Jōji Buraun') collection in 1999 and continues academic study and publications related to the collection.¹⁴ As for the photographs of Pacific people and events taken by Brown, the Australian Museum in Sydney was able to purchase the negatives in 1930. In 2002 a selection of photographs taken on his 1898 visit to Samoa was exhibited at the National Museum, Apia, Samoa,¹⁵ and later at the Uniting Church Centre for Ministry, Sydney, which has a significant community of Pacific Island students. In 2010, enlargements of a selection of Brown's photographs 1880–1905, on loan from Australian Museum Archives, were included in the *Body Pacifica* exhibition at Casula Powerhouse, Sydney.

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George Brown and his life had already taken on a legendary status before his death in 1917. As the years went on, his name was associated with the beginnings of missionary work in Samoa, the New Guinea Islands region and the Papuan Islands region of what was to become Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands. Institutions were given his name, including High Schools and training centres for Christian leaders. In 1925, fifty years after he first arrived in the Duke of York Islands, Jubilee celebrations were held in that region with guests from Australia present to witness the re-enactment of Brown's first arrival. Some old men could still remember that time. There was great dancing and feasting, with schoolchildren on display and students from the George Brown College among the dancers, as the festivities moved from place to place around the district.¹⁶ The *Litia* was in harbour at the time. By the time the centenary of the arrival of Brown and his party was celebrated in 1975, the tradition of marking 15 August as George Brown Day was well established and would become an accepted public holiday. By 1975, the fragile early beginnings of Christian ministry in the islands had grown into an independent Church, the United Church of Papua New Guinea, inaugurated in 1968, and some 15,000 villagers and guests gathered in Rabaul for a combined service of thanksgiving for the changes over one hundred years.¹⁷ One visitor was heard to mutter that he was completely

13 Jonathan Benthall, 'The George Brown collection,' in *Anthropology Today*, vol. 2, no. 4 (August 1986): 1–2.

14 For a longer description of the issues surrounding the Brown collection, see Helen Bethea Gardner, *Gathering for God: George Brown in Oceania*, Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006, pp. 150–54.

15 Jude Philp, 'The Reverend Dr George Brown in Samoa,' in *Muse*, magazine of the Australian Museum, February–April 2003.

16 Miss Jessie March, 1925 photograph album of Jubilee festivities in New Britain. Uniting Church Assembly Archives, Centre for Ministry, North Parramatta.

17 Joy Udy, 'The impact of one hundred years,' in the *Methodist*, 18 October 1975.

'Browned-off' after multiple re-enactments of Brown's arrival. 'George Brown Day' is celebrated in Papua New Guinea in regions where Brown's influence once had an impact, often combined with major choir competitions and the obligatory re-enactment. In recent years, a descendent of Brown, who found the connection with his forebear something of an embarrassment, was irritated to arrive in Port Moresby by ship with equipment related to his work; it could not be unloaded, he was told, because they had arrived on a public holiday for George Brown Day. The name of Brown is also respected in Samoa. When great-grandson, Julian C. Brown, arrived in Samoa on a visit in 1978, he went to the Methodist Church offices in Apia to seek some information from church records about his forebear. He was surprised to see a painting of George Brown, copied from the portrait in his autobiography, hanging in the office, and when he explained his quest he was greeted with great excitement and welcomed into the home of the Samoan Church Secretary. He was told of Brown's initiatives in training leaders, in pioneer work and in peacemaking, and was shown the George Brown Junior High School. 'It was clear that George Brown has had an immense impact on Samoa,' he wrote.¹⁸

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Not everyone has shared reverence toward the figure of George Brown. While some have written in admiring terms, others have been scathing.¹⁹ A journalist writing so-called 'historical features' asked whether he was 'Dedicated Parson or Ratbag Imperialist?' and, in sketching the controversy surrounding his work, hinted that he only posed as a missionary; 'In reality he was an agent of British imperialism, happy to flaunt his authority over the islanders simply to sate his vanity.' He suggested that following the murders in 1878 'horrified Wesleyan authorities hastily transferred Brown to an entirely different job as mission visitor.'²⁰ Historians include missionary Brown in their studies of the Pacific with varying views of his contribution. Theological students living in George Brown House in the 1990s found some of Brown's colourful tales quite bizarre and were known to declaim heroic passages from his autobiography in silly voices. Brown would probably have joined in their laughter. He is likely to have cared more for the opinion of Pacific Island people who had known him, men like Ione who called him 'a true Father and a man of love' and Kuliniasi who said 'It is not easy for us dark people to forget Dr. Brown. This chief was like one anointed, he carried fragrance wherever he went.'²¹

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18 Julian C. Brown, personal letter to family, 8 May 1978. In private collection of Nancy Joyce.

19 Admirers include C. Brunson Fletcher, *The Black Knight of the Pacific*, Sydney: Australasian Publishing Co, 1944; J.E. Carruthers, *Lights in the Southern Sky*, Sydney: Methodist Book Depot, 1924; R.J. Lacey, 'George Brown,' in *Encyclopaedia of Papua and New Guinea*, ed. Peter Ryan, Melbourne University Press in association with the University of Papua and New Guinea, 1972, pp.124–26.

20 *Daily Mirror*, 8 Nov 1968; an article in a similar vein appeared in the *Daily Mirror* on 11 April 1989.

21 Quoted in the Journal of Rev. Roy E.S. Taylor, 2 November 1919, manuscript loaned by Rev. Don Affleck.

Much has changed since Brown's time. Regions in the Pacific that he saw in the early years of contact are now independent nations. Leadership in the churches of the Pacific nations is in the hands of the indigenous people, a dream Brown cherished from his first encouragement of new converts to begin to share their faith. The Methodist 'mission' in the islands of New Guinea and Papua has become the United Church of Papua New Guinea. The Methodist Church in Australasia has become part of Uniting Church in Australia, inaugurated in 1977; Brown participated in the early and unsuccessful attempts to achieve this. The two Churches that developed from the early work of the London Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society continue to work independently in Samoa. The two Churches that were divided in Tonga in the 1880s remain divided. In the Duke of York Islands rising sea levels continue to erode the shore line below the hilltop where once the Brown family lived at Kinawanua and the little cemetery has gone.

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On 15 August 2007, on the anniversary of the day that George Brown and his Fijian and Samoan companions arrived in their region in 1875, a crowd of thousands gathered in East New Britain. Dignitaries from the Fijian High Commission and a delegation of clergy from Fiji had been invited to come to receive a ceremonial apology from the people of East New Britain for the actions of their ancestors. Memories of the murder and cannibalism of the bodies of four Fijian missionaries in 1878 had been kept alive through the generations, as had stories of the violent retribution that followed. Now, Ratu Isoa Tikoca, Fiji's High Commissioner in Papua New Guinea, accepted the apologies. Four great torches were lit to honour the four Fijians and Ratu Isoa said, 'We are deeply touched and wish you the greatest joy of forgiveness as we finally end this record disagreement.'²²

If George Brown had been there that day he would have been profoundly thankful. It was yet another evidence of the many-coloured grace of God whom he had served for so long.

22 *Fiji Times*, 16 August 2007.