

2. 'Alone yet not alone'

Samoa 1860–1864

The twelve Samoan oarsmen were singing and the small light across the water began to draw closer. The ship *John Wesley* was gone. The overloaded whaleboat strained towards the shore with George and Lydia Brown, cramped, uncomfortable and excited, staring across the dark waters to the island of Manono. It was 30 October 1860. The sun had set hours earlier and now they were nearly home.

Their new colleagues Martin and Sarah Anne Dyson were delighted to welcome them. For many months they had waited in vain for a promised co-worker. The four of them talked late into the night and discovered an immediate promise of real friendship. Martin and Sarah Dyson, originally from Yorkshire, were only a few years older than George and Lydia; Martin Dyson had just passed his thirtieth birthday and Sarah was expecting a child soon. As well as the practical matters of Brown's future appointment, however, Dyson raised a disturbing question. Whether or not they had heard hints of this, they now learned that there was debate over their presence in Samoa. Ought the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) be working in Samoa at all? Another Protestant mission in Samoa, the London Missionary Society (LMS), believed that their presence was provocative and unnecessary. Dyson told Brown that an LMS man had told him 'The frown of God is upon your mission in Samoa.'¹ Although the WMMS Secretary in Sydney had assured Dyson that 'You have a delightful and honourable sphere of labour,' Dyson's reaction was: 'Very true, if it were not already occupied by other labourers.... The Church of Christ is one. Shall we edify it in these beautiful isles by dividing the people who profess to belong to it?'² Brown and Dyson now asked themselves: had their church made a mistake in sending them to Samoa?

Whether or not it was a mistake, George and Lydia Brown had arrived and soon began to explore their new tropical home. The small island of Manono lay between the major island of Upolu to the east and the volcanic mountains of the island of Savai'i to the west. Rows of small and large canoes were pulled up clear of the beach shingle and fishing nets hung to dry. Unfamiliar trees—breadfruit, pandanus nut—shaded several small graves spread with white pebbles near the

1 Martin Dyson, Papers, Journal, 1858–1865, 14 June 1860, ML A 2579 CY 269.

2 Ibid., 9 July 1859.

mission house with its neatly trimmed lawn. The church building of split bamboo was large enough to seat three hundred people. On their first Sunday they were intrigued by the curious range of garments chosen by the congregation, and troubled by the comparative closeness of the neighbouring chapel of the LMS.

George and Lydia Brown did most things together in those early months. Lydia was young, fit and active, happy to join her husband on walks and canoe trips. Brown, in his new journal, described climbing together to the rim of an extinct volcano on a nearby island and attempting to talk to the local people in fragments of language. He noted: 'Blazing hot day but we enjoyed our walk very much.'³ Both George and Lydia were determined to learn the local language, as Lydia had spoken the Māori language from childhood. They began lessons under the guidance of Martin Dyson and with the help of Samoan speakers. George made a habit of waiting by the road until a Samoan came along who was willing to talk, then experimenting, mimicking words and phrases, prepared to make mistakes for the sake of adding words to his vocabulary. Lydia is more likely to have learned her language among the women. Dyson set Brown to working on passages of Scripture in Samoan translation and noted in his diary that 'Mr. Brown gets the language quicker than I did—his memory is younger, stronger and better cultivated than mine was in the commencement of my mission life.'⁴ Within the first months of their time in Samoa, Dyson wrote to a colleague in England that Brown and 'his excellent wife' had stayed with them 'while they got a little of the language. They both of them succeeded very well with it.'⁵ He also noted that Brown had preached his first sermon in Samoan, from a text prepared by himself and corrected by Dyson, just fifty-four days after his arrival in the country. Brown crowed in his own journal 'Bro. D. said that I did very well indeed and he was quite astonished.'⁶ He realised that it was a rare gift and wrote just before Christmas 1860, 'I feel that God has greatly blessed me and assisted me in acquiring the language of the people. O may this talent thus given be employed in His service.'⁷

Martin and Sarah Anne Dyson were very happy to have their company. Dyson wrote of his 'exceeding great joy' in the answer to his prayers for a colleague and relished their conversations, although he worried that their conversation had included worldly subjects and feared that they may not all have been edifying. Brown appeared to have had no qualms, and if he did, he did not record them. On George Brown's twenty-fifth birthday, 7 December 1860, Sarah Dyson went into labour and gave birth to a son. They were very thankful

3 George Brown, *Journal*, 27 November 1860, ML A1686-8-9 CY 225; Dyson, *Papers, Journal*, 1858–1865, 27 November 1860.

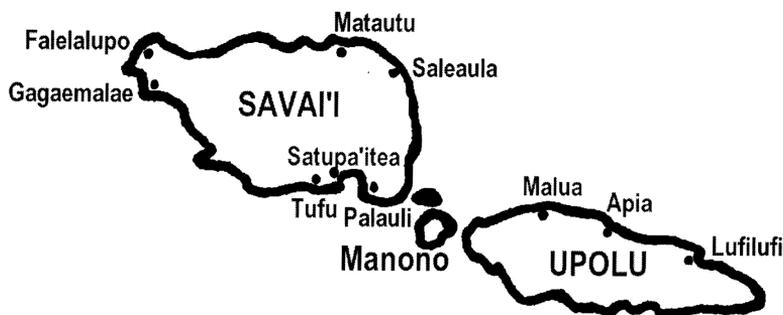
4 Dyson *Papers, Journal*, 1858–1865, 16 December 1860.

5 Dyson, letter to Rev. John Thomas, 1861, London: Methodist Archives.

6 Brown, *Journal*, 5 December 1860.

7 *Ibid.*, 23 December 1860.

to have Lydia Brown with them, as, whether or not she was an experienced midwife at that time, she was able to offer practical help. Sarah was very ill for weeks following the birth with a breast abscess and mastitis. They treated her with doses of purgatives, rhubarb, antimonial powder and opium but, to their distress, she did not improve. Dyson noted that it was a 'great comfort to have Mrs Brown in the house to take household cares off my hands.'⁸ On the evening of 25 December, Lydia Brown herself became ill, though she quickly recovered. No one mentioned that it was Christmas. By the end of December, Dyson was desperate with worry. His beloved wife was dying and the new baby screaming with hunger. Just when they were losing hope, a LMS man with medical skills arrived to help them. Sarah recovered at last and the baby lived. George and Lydia Brown had been in Samoa for less than three months. It was clear that life on an isolated tropical island had many hazards, and that pregnancy, childbirth, maternal health and the well-being of children were neither simple nor safe.



Map 1. Western Samoa.

Source: Drawn by Margaret Reeson.

During January, George and Lydia Brown travelled across to the larger island of Upolu and visited established LMS communities at Apia, Fasitaotai and Malua for the first time. They saw signs of unbroken influence in the area for over thirty years, with training school, extensive translation program, printing press and growing number of Samoan and overseas staff to serve many congregations. In contrast, the Wesleyan enterprise may have seemed inadequately resourced and with much to learn.

On 21 January 1861, the Browns left Manono with Martin Dyson and crossed the passage for their future home on the island of Savai'i. George had visited the mission site at Satupa'itea during December and their cargo had already been delivered. As they neared the beach that day, George Brown's 'feelings were of

⁸ Dyson Papers, Journal, 1858–1865, 13 December 1860.

a very mixed character but I bless God for the faith which enables me to trust in him.⁹ The next day, Dyson left them ‘and we are alone, as regards European society, alone yet not alone.’¹⁰

By this time they had learned more of the background of their new home. They were not starting pioneer work on a blank page. Their village region of Satupa’itea had been a leading community and headquarters of the Wesleyan movement in Samoa before any European missionaries had arrived in that land. The early influences had been through Tongan visitors, related to the Samoans through language, race and family ties, who brought with them rudimentary forms of Christian teaching in the wake of a strong move to the Christian faith, the *lotu*, among the Wesleyan Tongans in the 1820s. When the LMS brought Tahitian missionaries to Samoa in 1830, political alliances and rivalries between regions intersected with the new message of Christianity brought by two groups, *lotu* Tonga and *lotu* Tahiti. The people of Satupa’itea aligned themselves with *lotu* Tonga, the Wesleyans.¹¹ The Reverend Peter Turner arrived at Satupa’itea in 1835 to a tumultuous welcome and began visiting, teaching, preaching and translating Scriptures and hymns, with striking results. Unfortunately, tribal rivalry rode alongside religious rivalries. From London, the two missionary organisations decided that it was not right for both groups to continue to work in the same island group. To his profound disappointment, the Wesleyan missionary was ordered to withdraw from Samoa. He left, very reluctantly, in May 1839. Nonetheless, some of the Samoan Wesleyans were not willing to give up their identity and those around Satupa’itea persisted in following what they believed were Wesleyan practices.¹² As King George Tupou of Tonga declared in 1843, ‘The friends in England are not able to change the minds of the people of Samoa or Tonga, as to what religion they shall be of.’¹³ Samoans with family associations with Tonga were reluctant to be absorbed into the LMS. Sadly, some of the handful of Tongan Wesleyan workers who remained had lost their way, spiritually and morally. LMS staff members were offended when the WMMS in Australasia, recently independent of the British Wesleyan Missionary Society, were persuaded to re-establish the Wesleyan mission in Samoa in 1857, rather than let the remnant of Wesleyans finally accept the leadership of the LMS.

At Satupa’itea, their new home, the work had been re-established in 1859 with the appointment of the Native Assistant Minister, the Tongan leader Barnabas ‘Ahongalu. ‘Ahongalu, a widely respected man, had first come to Samoa in the days of Peter Turner and continued through most of the years since that time to

9 Brown, Journal, 21 January 1861.

10 Ibid., 22 January 1861.

11 A. Harold Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church Vol.1 Tonga and Samoa*, Melbourne: Aldersgate Press, 1975, p. 267.

12 Ibid., pp. 270–82.

13 Ibid., p. 285.

serve in Samoa with the remnant Wesleyans. Most Samoan Wesleyans viewed him as the father of their church. He had acquired a large block of land at Satupa'itea on the western shore of the bay, built houses and a church with local materials and gathered fifteen young men and their families into a mission community. The fertile land rich with fruit and nut trees was close to a large village population. Dyson was very impressed with his work and said he was 'worthy of commendation'. 'Ahongalu would become a wise friend and trusted mentor for Brown.

Although Lydia Brown had grown up in a household where her mother managed an efficient establishment in an isolated place, this was the first home of which she was mistress. Her family home at Raglan had been established for years, with livestock, food gardens and grain. At Satupa'itea the little bamboo and thatch house let wind and rain seep through, and until they found some woven mats, the floors were of earth. An LMS missionary wrote to them: 'Take care of your health—I would not sleep in that house of yours on this Island for a £1 a night.'¹⁴ George began to make plans to strengthen the walls and to build, if possible, a more substantial house of stone. In the meantime, Lydia was responsible for providing them with food, water, heating, light, clothing and basic hygiene—a daunting task.

Life was often an adventure for the young couple in their first year together. Everything in Samoa, at this time, was novel and interesting, and Brown filled pages of his journal with observations of the detail of their surroundings. There was the rhythm of preparation and preaching, a new class for young men, evening prayers after their meal, the beginning of work on a stone house. He reported his early nervous attempts to provide medical help to local villagers, with limited skill and the limited medications of his day.¹⁵ He would have preferred to spend more time on language learning. Although he was preaching now from a written text, he was frustrated. 'Oh, that the time will soon come when I shall be able to speak freely to these people in their own tongue. I cannot bear to read when my heart is full.'¹⁶

He recorded tales of exploring the district with Lydia and Barnabas ('Ahongalu); arriving home soaked and muddy through tropical rain one day 'we consoled ourselves with the idea that although it was bad then it would be pleasant to remember afterwards.'¹⁷ Another time they left by boat two hours before daybreak and travelled along the iron-bound coast of scoria rock, fascinated by the explosions of water from blowholes among the rocks. Unlike introspective

14 Brown, Journal, quoting George Pratt, 30 February 1861.

15 The medical supplies in the Samoa mission medical inventory in 1860 included Epsom salts, flowers of sulphur, ipecacuanha, opium, spirit of ammonia, extract of hemlock, castor oil and powdered ginger.

16 Brown, Journal, 10 March 1861.

17 Ibid., 21 February 1861.

Dyson, who used his journal to ponder his spiritual state, Brown's journal was the record of a practical man, filled with events, people, plans, observations, frustrations, illnesses and notes on matters that he thought might need a formal record—a Minute—in the future. As time went on he was less likely to comment on his spiritual life although he kept a disciplined record of the scripture from which he preached. As all Wesleyan missionaries were required to keep a journal with the expectation that selections could be used in mission publications, there was a degree of self consciousness in Brown's writing.

George and Lydia Brown welcomed their friends Martin and Sarah Dyson to Satupa'itea in May. After three months apart they all 'felt pleasure in again speaking in our own tongue.'¹⁸ Brown, Dyson and 'Ahongalu left together before dawn on 7 May 1861, with two whale boats and crews, to begin Brown's first journey around the island of Savai'i to visit the villages affiliated with the Wesleyans. The women were left as company for each other while they were away. As the men travelled west through rough seas along the southern coast, Brown discovered that his friend was not as good a sailor as he was. Brown was exhilarated and observed that it was a 'grand and awful sight to witness the turmoil of those troubled waters.'¹⁹ After ten hours of rowing, and sailing when the wind was right, they reached the western village of Gagaemalae and the pattern of visits began. At each place they made pastoral visits to Wesleyan teachers, inspected the simple village schools, questioned candidates for baptism and gathered the people for meetings where Brown and Dyson took turns in preaching. Villagers queued for help with medical problems and brought their annual offerings, mostly in the form of coconut oil, for the work of the mission. Over the next weeks they continued their journey, sometimes by boat, risking a wreck on the reef as they approached land, sometimes on foot along muddy tracks. In village after village they were welcomed by the local teacher and often given generous offerings of food. As they walked, they began a habit of planting young coconuts on land where chapels had been built; Brown noted that although he had first suggested it as a simple reminder of his first visit, they decided that perhaps it would prove 'a hold on the land and might secure it to us'.²⁰ There were some nights as they worked their way around the coast when they were still in the boat in heavy seas and rain until almost dawn and they both grew very weary. Dyson was not well, but kept going. There was little choice.

Despite the fact that the LMS and the WMMS had identified particular villages as being their territory, the Samoans had minds of their own. Although two or three hundred people might come to hear the visiting preachers out of

18 Ibid., 26 April 1861.

19 Ibid., 7 May 1861.

20 Ibid., 11 May 1861.

curiosity, Brown described several villages, on that first journey, as being 'very heathenish'. From his perspective, the traditional marks of long uncut hair, body tattooing and participation in the Night Dance 'proclaimed in unmistakable language of the spiritual darkness within.'²¹ Many were simply not interested in Christian teaching. And yet he also saw things that gave him hope for change. One evening, sitting with a crowd of Samoans in the shelter of the roof of the large village *fale*, as they listened to speeches about Christian themes, he

thought that there was no need for Cloister Cell or vast Cathedral to excite deep and solemn thoughts, no one, I fancy could look upon that assemblage and after allowing his mind to dwell for a few moments upon the many diabolical scenes that have taken place under that roof—and then contrast the fact of their being met together to worship God in the same place ... without his heart filled with thanksgiving to God.²²

In another village on a moonlit Sunday evening he was moved to hear his mission boat crew near the beach 'breaking the stillness of the lovely tropical Sabbath evening by their hymns of joy concerning the "new Kingdom"'. He recognised the leader as one who had previously been the leader in the 'obscene songs of the Night Dance.... I'm sure I never saw the Southern Cross appear more beautiful ... this lovely constellation seems to be a sweet remembrance of Calvary and him who died for me.'²³

Some of the schools were very basic, described as 'only average', but others gave them some encouragement. At one village school the students presented themselves mostly dressed in white and Martin Dyson 'was so elated ... that in his speech he said they reminded him of Angels—can't go as far as that—hope to find Heaven tenanted by fairer Sisters than they,' wrote Brown.²⁴ At intervals, the missionaries had interviews with young men who hoped to become Native Assistant Missionaries. At that stage there was no serious effort at training by the Wesleyans. He wrote, 'When shall we have a training school is a subject of frequent conversation. When?'²⁵ The novelty of the daily first aid call in each village soon wore off and Brown muttered in his journal, 'what wearying work.... If the people would exercise as much faith in the Doctrines we preach as they do in the medicine we administer we should soon have an incipient Millennium in Samoa.'²⁶ He became increasingly short with anyone whom he considered was

21 Ibid., 3 May 1861.

22 Ibid., 15 May 1861.

23 Ibid., 26 May 1861.

24 Ibid., 14 May 1861.

25 Ibid., 18 May 1861.

26 Ibid., 20 May 1861.

wasting his time over medical help; for one client, given to sleeping in church, he prescribed a cathartic and ‘in addition a course of castigation with a good thick stick.’²⁷ As he admitted, he was out of his depth.

I knew very little of the Principles and still less of the Practice of Physic when I came here and though I have endeavoured by reading and patient study to meet the exigencies of the case yet still I feel that unless assisted from above I am very very incompetent.²⁸

Three weeks after leaving Satupa’itea on their journey of some 150 miles around the island, they came in range of more of the chapels and stations of LMS on the north eastern coast of the island. They were given hospitality by LMS men Pratt and Bird as they travelled. Here was an odd and awkward division. On the one hand, missionaries from similar backgrounds, though different missionary organisations, offered each other mutual kindness and hospitality as fellow strangers in a foreign land. On the other hand, each group was uneasy about the presence of the other.

Brown and Dyson arrived back at Satupa’itea very wearily on 11 June 1861. Brown wrote that night that they were

heartily glad to greet once more those who make home dear indeed—found that the same kind Father who had watched over and protected us had also extended the same blessings to those so dear unto us and we found abundant reason for thankfulness.²⁹

When they had privacy Lydia would have shared with him her own news; by that time she would have had clear signs that she had conceived. The pattern was set. From now on for the rest of their lives, George and Lydia Brown would spend much of their time in separate places. He was the pilgrim. She was the home base to which he always returned.

Only days after that first journey around Savai’i, Brown was away again to travel around Upolu. On Upolu he found fewer Wesleyans and stronger LMS and Catholic mission work. Brown recognised that for some Samoans their affiliation with any denomination or mission was often linked with clan affiliations. He considered that for many ‘it is a matter of supreme indifference who they pretend to serve.’³⁰ In a climate of inter-church competition on that 1861 visit, a priest, Father Louis Elloy, accused Brown and Dyson of making statements about the Catholic Church which greatly offended him and challenged them to a public debate. At Lufilufi, seat of one of the most influential ‘talking chiefs’ and before

27 Ibid., 28 Feb 1862.

28 Brown to Eggleston, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 16 April 1862, in George Brown, Letters, 1862–78, ML MOM 102.

29 Brown, Journal, 11 June 1861.

30 Ibid., 3 July 1861.

a large audience of Samoans who respected oratory, Catholic and Wesleyan men debated for three hours, all in Samoan language. Later Brown wrote a long and detailed description of the event but pondered, 'Was it wise to accept the challenge and what impression was left on the minds of the Natives?'³¹ Perhaps to his own surprise, he was impressed by the young priest who 'behaved in the most courteous and gentlemanly manner and seems to be a very intelligent and well-read man—we both wished that his talents were consecrated to a better cause.'³²

For nearly a year George and Lydia had waited in vain for any news from New Zealand, Sydney or England. One night, 'just after we had finished family prayers a tap was heard at the door and oh joy oh joy a parcel from Manono and a large bundle of letters and so our long waiting was at an end.' It was 29 July 1861. The bundle of thirty four letters contained mail from George's family in England, Lydia's family and friends in New Zealand and church correspondence from Sydney. 'Such a treat as I have seldom enjoyed,' George wrote. 'We read until with aching heads we were obliged to go to bed but it was hours before we could get to sleep from excitement.'³³ By the time George and Lydia celebrated their first wedding anniversary on 2 August 1861 he could write 'Both my dear Wife and I feel that we have great cause to record our gratitude to God for his great goodness to us during the past year.'³⁴

It was inevitable that George Brown and Martin Dyson would clash from time to time, despite their friendship. More than once Brown recorded 'misunderstandings' between the two strong-minded men. In a letter to Dyson offering an apology, Brown wrote that he thought it 'best to express my views and have done with them than keep them and sulk over them. . . . I abhor the very thought of coldness between us.'³⁵ They both agreed that it had been a mistake for the Wesleyan work in Samoa to have been revived in 1857, but while Dyson believed that they ought to withdraw again, Brown considered that they ought to continue in support of those who identified themselves as Wesleyans. Dyson was so frustrated that he began to talk about leaving. This concerned Brown. Following a difficult meeting of the District Committee he wrote a letter to the General Secretary of the WMMS, the Reverend John Eggleston, and made a copy in his journal 'in case I should ever want the exact words.' He wrote,

Bro D[yson] makes a very chivalrous offer to lead a Mission to Papua, many thanks for the offer but I tell him that Manono is his place and

31 Ibid., 11 July 1861.

32 Ibid., 10–11 July 1861. Fr. Elloy became Bishop Elloy from 1864–1878. See John Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania*, Geneva: WCC Publication, Geneva, 1982, pp. 131–35.

33 Brown, Journal, 29 July 1861.

34 Ibid., 29 July, 2 August 1861.

35 Ibid., 6 Oct 1861.

there he will remain—he knows Samoan and he does not know Papuan ... however I am not afraid of his going. I should not like to see him attempt it for his own sake as well as my own he has not strength for it but he has been reading Dr Coke's life and I suppose has got a little fire from reading the life of that devoted man.³⁶

This letter, written on 24 August 1861, is the first of many references by Brown to 'Papua', a place almost unknown by the rest of the world apart from the tales told by adventurous sea captains.

The shine of excited first impressions had faded by the time Brown set off for his second and later journeys around Savai'i. The responsibility was his and it was often dispiriting work. He missed Lydia, who went to stay with other missionary households while he travelled. He faced storms and dangerous surf, heat and exhaustion and often rejection. After a day of rain, trudging between five villages to preach, Brown wondered about the legendary giants of former missionaries; their fabled feats of endurance would be 'impossible to the dwarves of the present day,'³⁷ he decided. He was not well, suffering from severe headaches and a painful swollen leg. Once settled at home again, he studied his medical books; 'my leg very painful—hope I am not going to be disabled here so soon. This attack presents all the appearance of Elephantiasis.'³⁸ Christmas 1861, like the previous Christmas which had passed without mention, was very quiet. For some years, a celebration of Christmas Day was deemed too Catholic a festival for Protestants so Brown wrote disconsolately, 'December 25. I wish all our friends a merrier Christmas than I am spending, my leg is painful and as the powers that be have ordained that no notice shall be taken of Xmas day—no services held—why, we would not know that it was Xmas except the Almanack reminded us.'³⁹ The service of Watchnight at midnight on New Year's Eve, commended by John Wesley to his people, was a substitute and the chapel was filled with perfumed garlands as they dedicated themselves to God for the New Year.

Lydia was looking ripe for childbirth and by the middle of January George sent Barnabas to fetch Sarah Dyson. George Brown had delivered at least one Samoan infant but this was his own wife and their first child and they were far from medical help. Lydia Brown gave birth to a baby girl in the early hours of the morning of 21 January 1862 after what Brown described as 'a very easy labour'. To their alarm the placenta did not come away as expected and they endured five hours of mounting fear before it finally was expelled. They were both very

36 Ibid., 24 August 1861.

37 Ibid., 17 November 1861.

38 Ibid., 24 December 1861.

39 Ibid., 25 December 1861.

grateful to Sarah Dyson for her help. The baby girl was named Mary Elizabeth to honour her mother and his, and was baptised at Manono by Martin Dyson in March.⁴⁰

So the motifs for the long life and work of George and Lydia Brown were all there, or hinted at, in their first year in Samoa. Isolation and illness with the hazards of childbirth, conflict between missions and tribes, the rigours of island travel and the resistance of island communities to change, kindness and misunderstandings between colleagues; it was all there. And that was just the first year.

Lydia Brown was faced with a difficult choice—to travel together with her husband or to stay at home. She wanted to be part of the excitement of discovery. She did not want to be scared, sunburned and seasick. She wanted to be with her husband. She wanted to sleep in her own bed. She did not want to be alone at home. She wanted to go. She wanted to stay home. An early attempt to take her baby on a journey was not a complete success; delayed by a storm, Brown complained that he 'could not stir at all—a wife and child I find are not so easily disposed of—had I been alone I could easily have gone on.'⁴¹ Lydia was not deterred and she continued to travel with him on day trips. Of one experience Brown wrote, 'Wife and Child and I went to Tufu in Barnabas' boat—entrance rather rough but we got in safely after all—L. was very frightened but not hurt.'⁴²

Their dream of having a third missionary in Samoa to work with the Wesleyan Methodists seemed to be short-lived. A new colleague came, and left again within a year due in part to the illness of his wife. Brown tended to be unsympathetic, suggesting that the woman's symptoms were probably due to hysteria. His own wife was not often ill, and was stoic about it when she was. All the references to Lydia Brown in her husband's letters and journals suggest a participant, not an onlooker. Lydia travelled long distances to support other isolated missionary women through childbirth. She taught a class of women to read and work with figures and was frequently hostess for passing travellers. In addition, Brown asked his wife to attend to correspondence; 'I have been obliged to give most of that work to Mrs B,' he told General Secretary Egglestone.⁴³ Her many personal letters to family and friends, although now lost, are listed in Brown's Letter Book.

40 Ibid., 21 January 1862. The story of Mary Elizabeth Brown has been told in Margaret Reeson, *A Singular Woman*, Adelaide: Openbook Publishers, 1999.

41 Brown, Journal, 19 March 1862.

42 Ibid., 12 April 1862.

43 Ibid., 27 July 1862.

Lydia would have been aware that George was finding travel more of a burden. The tone of his journal had changed by May 1862. No longer were there long lyrical passages about the beauty of the scenery. He was away from his family, tired and often ill. Even for a keen sailor, the storms, inhospitable rocks and reefs of the coastline made travel both stressful and exhausting. At each village community he worked for long hours on church tasks as well as medical work; 'I gave up at dark wearied and depressed,' he wrote.⁴⁴ Brown's journal was now studded with words of discouragement and disappointment—'very unwell ... cast down,' 'incompetence of some of our Teachers,' the 'ignorance' and lack of any training of some of the preachers. At home at Satupa'itea he felt guilty over the very slow progress on building a better house for Lydia. By May 1863 the new stone house was still not ready and their temporary 'shanty' was a shelter for rodents. Brown complained that he was 'sick and tired of this—no room—no privacy—books and goods all spoilt by the damp and dew and our own health suffering from it.'⁴⁵ Even though she knew the journey would be hot, uncomfortable, possibly dangerous and would last for at least five weeks, Lydia Brown decided to take her toddler Lizzie and join her husband on his next journey around Savai'i.

They left home together on 26 May 1863, spending the first six hours in an open whale boat on a hot windless day. The rhythm of classes, meetings, collections of gifts, baptisms, first aid and preaching in each village was all familiar to Brown. For Lydia, every place was new. The teachers and people in each place offered kind hospitality. She sat with the women, chatted, played with Lizzie and bore with the minute scrutiny to which the women subjected her, touching her skin and clothing, curious about this young woman who was a very long way from home. Her child made a natural point of contact between the local women and herself, and she was able to sit with them on the floor of village chapels for church services while little Lizzie staggered happily from welcoming lap to lap. While George Brown met with class leaders Lydia accepted the task of dispensing medicine.⁴⁶

They travelled on. Lydia was happier on foot, walking between villages past gardens of taro, banana and leafy greens. Together they met villagers, heard complaints, inspected little schools and extended their language skills. Most days, however, she had to brave the ocean beyond the reef. One day, leaving the village of Samata, they saw their own boats waiting for them beyond the reef. Brown wrote later,

The opening was very rough indeed and looked very bad. Mrs B was very much frightened indeed and for some time we gave up the idea

44 Ibid., 20 May 1862.

45 Brown to Eggleston, 27 July 1863.

46 Brown, Journal, 9 June 1863.

of trying but at length we determined to trust the people of the place. We sat in a large Native Boat high and dry on the beach and every man stood by the side of the boat with his paddle in his hand. At length the Steersman who had been watching the breakers cried out 'Away with her, Quick, Quick' and instantly every man seized the boat and dragged her into the sea and the next instant we were dashing through the surf the crew yelling and shouting like madmen. We were out in a very short time just mounting over an immense billow that rolled a few yards further and then dashed his waters in wild confusion on the place we had just passed. Our Crew stopped rowing and all indulged themselves in a most unearthly yell of triumph.⁴⁷

A few hours later they were off the village of Neiafu caught between dangerous surf breaking over the reef and an approaching black storm. 'We gave the boat up to the charge of the people of the place and committed ourselves to God—then watching a chance we followed an immense wave on to the reef.' In the turmoil of surf, a wave crashed over them, half-filling the boat, but at least they were over the reef or 'our fine Boat would have been broken up into matchwood and we left to do the best we could.... We were kindly received by the people and soon had a few dry clothes on.'⁴⁸ It may have been a great adventure for Brown. Lydia, clutching her child, sunburned, soaked to the skin and still shaking, may well have wondered what had possessed her to come on this journey. She still had more than three weeks of travel before her.

They went on. There was more of the same; new villages, unfamiliar places to sleep, and a weary, fractious and insect-bitten child to settle. By the time they reached the LMS mission station at Matautu and the kindness of missionary Pratt and his family 'My wife and Lizzie seemed very glad indeed to exchange the *faa-Samoa* for civilized usages again.'⁴⁹ When at last they reached home again, Lydia was becoming aware that some of her discomfort during their journey had been morning sickness.

The Brown family finally moved into their new house at Satupa'itea on 13 August 1863. It was large and stone-built, lime-washed with steep thatched roof, glass windows and wide verandahs. No doubt Lydia was grateful for the space and comfort. She would make shorter journeys in the following months but next time her husband set out for a journey right around Savai'i, Lydia did not travel with him.

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47 Ibid., 5 June 1863.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 13 June 1863.

As the new year of 1864 began, George Brown was not satisfied with his own spiritual life. He wrote 'I want to have a more earnest vigorous piety that my sermons and prayers may burn their way into all hearts.' He felt that he should spend more time at his desk in biblical study, translation and writing.⁵⁰ Brown was still on probation as a new minister. He had been offered no formal theological education prior to being sent to Samoa. Now he needed to prepare for a ministerial examination on the basis of study of a reading list of theological and other books.⁵¹ There was limited time for reflection or for study, however. It was a period of high energy and high expectations. He was still debating with Dyson over the presence of their mission in Samoa.⁵² He was deeply concerned about the practice of 'many of the Church Members here in mixing up and taking part in the Heathen Customs that are now being revived again.'⁵³ The old ways of the past were so closely enmeshed in their lives that it seemed almost impossible to disentangle the ways of tradition from the practices and beliefs of Christianity and the veneer of Christian faith was very thin in places.

Lydia Brown may have felt that there was no convenient time for her to give birth. Her husband was absorbed with his new project of opening a Wesleyan Training Seminary for Samoan teachers on a new site not far from the mission house at Satupa'itea. When Lydia began to experience the signs of the onset of labour, George was busy with preparations for the ceremonial opening of the seminary with the first sixteen students. On 17 March 1864, the Training Seminary was opened with speeches, gifts and feasting. Martin Dyson believed that they could not have made a better beginning: 'much praise is justly due to the assiduity and perseverance of Brother Brown. Our shrewd and devoted Native Assistant Missionary [Barnabas 'Ahongalu] opened the way and he, Brother Brown, made it.'⁵⁴ At the end of a long and exciting day Brown recorded that 'my dear wife began to feel a little unwell.'⁵⁵ This was understatement; the infant was presenting in a dangerous breech position, feet first. To their great relief, a daughter, Amy Eadith, was born safely not long after midnight on 18 March 1864 and after the bloodstained sheets had been removed and Lydia made clean and comfortable, George, Sarah and Martin gathered around the bed to thank God.⁵⁶ The danger to Lydia was not over. Within days she was very ill. Acting on what he thought to be good practice, Brown gave her repeated doses of laudanum, a tincture of opium, until she complained of extreme giddiness; he had given her an overdose. Although she recovered, neither of them could avoid the knowledge that childbirth and its aftermath was always life-threatening.

50 Ibid., 1 January 1863.

51 Ibid., 21 February 1864.

52 Ibid., 25 January 1864.

53 Ibid., 19 June 1864.

54 Dyson Papers, Journal, 1858–1865, 17 March 1864.

55 Brown, Journal, 17 March 1864.

56 Ibid., 18 March 1864.

As the year 1864 went on, George and Lydia Brown and their two little girls were often ill. When they heard news of the deaths of four young LMS mission staff, a shaken Brown wrote, 'Oh what solemn lessons and warnings God is giving us.'⁵⁷

Before the end of the year 1864, George Brown was formally received as a minister of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Australasia, having completed all obligations of study and service. At the same meeting Martin Dyson gave his resignation from the Samoan Mission with a request to be transferred elsewhere. Brown was very disappointed. He would now have to take on the responsibilities of being Chairman of a difficult District. He was still not thirty-years old.

57 Ibid., 24 August 1864.