

4. 'A great waste of men and money'

Samoa 1868–1874

The workmen came to George Brown, spades in hand. They had struck rock, they said, and were giving up their attempt to dig a well for fresh water. It was one more frustration to add to months of trouble. The community was ripped to shreds over tribal warfare, the fine mission property at Satupa'itea had been abandoned, and there was continuing tension between missionary societies. He had been separated from his family for months while he built a new house for them at another location, Saleaula in the north-east of the island of Savai'i. They were often ill. To add to his troubles, Brown learned that a large group of Samoans had recently defected from the Wesleyan Methodist mission and joined the London Missionary Society (LMS). In his journal he lamented:

It quite upset me and I was very nearly ill from its effect. I cannot imagine how people can act thus. Such an act of black ingratitude I never expected to find in Samoa.... I cannot imagine why they have turned over. I do indeed wish that the way were made plain for us to leave Samoa. It seems a great waste of men and money to keep us here. I wish I could go to Fiji or New Guinea anywhere out of this.¹

And now the workers had struck rock and he couldn't even provide a decent well for his half-finished house. The dry rocky hole taunted him, but, as he told the Mission Secretary, he did not like to be beaten. His men would keep digging in new places until fresh water was found.

With her four little girls, Lydia Brown joined her husband in a new but unfinished house at Saleaula early in June 1868. Only weeks later a passing ship brought news that shocked Brown. His father had died in Barnard Castle on 12 March 1868.

I could scarcely understand it. I have had so many trials lately which I thought were heavy enough but all as nothing compared with this. I feel very sad.... My Father was a good man. Thank God I can say this now ... I have often wished to go to England and see my Father there.²

¹ George Brown, Journal, 20 May 1868, ML A1686-8-9 CY 225.

² Ibid., 23 June 1868.

His father had earned great respect in his community and some eight hundred mourners followed his funeral procession through the steep cobbled streets of the English town. Months later his son, who had defied the father and run away from home, read his father's final letter: 'It was full of love to us and my heart was wrung.'³

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Debate was lively when the District Meeting gathered in September 1868. It was one of the rare periods when four British Methodist missionaries were in Samoa at the same time, working beside several Tongan Native Assistant Ministers. They were not of one mind on whether the time had come to abandon their work in Samoa and leave the way clear for the LMS. Finally, with some reluctance, it was agreed that Brown, with two Tongan Native Assistant Ministers, Barnabas 'Ahongalu and Tevita Kata, should attend the Australasian Wesleyan Methodist General Conference in Sydney in January 1869 where church policy would be formed. 'I wish to have the Samoan question settled once and for ever,' Brown told them.⁴

Two months later George Brown and his family sailed with the replacement mission ship *John Wesley*. After eight years in the insular world of Samoa with the many burdens of responsibility, Brown looked forward to the stimulation of visiting larger communities and hearing other voices. His journal, which for months had been mere fragments of notes about the mundane and the frustrating, now recorded his delight in the business of sailing, and his time with friends Martin Dyson, Barnabas 'Ahongalu and other new contacts. As they travelled south, they called first at Tonga where he left Lydia and the four little girls with her brother, the Reverend James W. Wallis and his wife Jeannie, and saw King George Taufa'ahau Tupou I. They sailed on to Fiji where he observed colonial life. He reported that 'we had an opportunity of seeing that famous personage [Chief Cakobau]. He was much more free than King George of Tonga but I think George is very much his superior in everything becoming a King.'⁵ In Samoa there was no single clear leader but a continual jostling for position and power with no resolution in sight.

On 19 January 1869 the *Wesley* sailed in through the sandstone cliffs of Sydney Heads. Last time George Brown had been in Sydney he was young, unknown, newly ordained and without island experience. Now he returned as Chairman of the Samoa District and anticipated taking part in debates. Among the men who had travelled from all the British colonies of the region was his beloved uncle Thomas Buddle from New Zealand, with news of the extended family. In

3 Ibid., 26 June 1868.

4 Ibid., 28 September 1868.

5 Ibid., 6 September 1869.

Samoa, their church meetings were comparatively small. In Sydney, seventy men gathered in the Centenary Chapel in York Street for the General Conference of the Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Church, with ladies in the gallery and journalists with pencils poised. For so long he had felt cut off from the support of his fellows, believing that 'in seasons of trial and deprivation the missionary was forgotten and that the interest in missions and missionaries almost extinct.'⁶

His first chance to tell his story was at the public Missionary Meeting, along with others who told of Fiji, Tonga, New Zealand and work among the Chinese in Melbourne. Although he could not have imagined the future, George Brown used this opportunity to present two themes that were to be continuing motifs through his life: the importance of the ministry of island people in the region and the need for the Church to continue to move into new areas of ministry. With the imposing Barnabas 'Ahongalu and Tevita Kata on the platform beside him, Brown could see that these men were not only exotic in the eyes of the audience but impressive. He assured the audience that there were many other men of similar calibre and that 'the great hope of the missionary was in their agency ... the time would come when, in order to extend the operation of this and other agencies, those islands would have to be given up to native teachers.'⁷

He spoke with great respect for the work in Samoa of the LMS, their 'great and glorious work', and the excellence of their translation of scripture into the Samoan language. He went on, referring to LMS plans to pioneer new work in New Guinea, 'They taught us a lesson too. There are islands to which he and others longed to go—to Papua, and all the adjacent islands, and *they would gladly receive the order*.'⁸ Although, he admitted, religion and social stability was in a low state in Samoa, even so he believed that many faithful Samoan Christians would be found among those who gathered around the throne of God.

If Brown had hoped that the meeting would see the virtue of withdrawing from Samoa in order to pioneer new work, those hopes were dashed when Barnabas stood to speak. Barnabas, a natural and confident orator, spoke in Samoan with George Brown translating. 'Although our languages are different, yet we have one scheme pointed out to get to heaven,' he said. In parable form Barnabas told the story of how he had gone with the Reverend Peter Turner as pioneer Wesleyan missionaries from Tonga to Samoa in 1835, planting a new garden for God. For over thirty years he had laboured in that plantation even though their mission had been withdrawn. He had returned to try to restore the garden, now overgrown and full of weeds, to health: 'We are trying hard to overthrow the Devil in those lands,' he said.⁹ Listening to the cheers as Barnabas sat down,

⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 January 1869.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

Brown knew that the audience had heard the passion of Barnabas to continue Methodist ministry in Samoa and had been deaf to his own plea for new pioneer work in other regions. Immediately, the next speaker began at great length to urge the audience to new heights of energy and faith, to understand that the needs of the Pacific Islands were the responsibility of the churches of Australasia. His speech was greeted with loud and impassioned cheering.¹⁰

It was no surprise, then, when a few days later the subject of whether the WMMS should withdraw from Samoa was debated, that the final decision was ‘that the Mission of this Society in Samoa ought to be sustained in full efficiency.’ A letter was to be sent to the LMS Secretary in Australia informing him of the decision and ‘stating that it is under the necessity of declining any further communication with the LMS on this subject.’¹¹ A deputation of senior church officials would travel to Samoa when Brown returned to ensure that their decision was unambiguous. Whether Brown was relieved or frustrated by this answer, he had been given a clear direction. The tension caused by the collision of two Societies in Samoa was not to be relieved.¹²

Through that summer, George Brown stayed in Sydney speaking in churches about Samoa. As the weather cooled into autumn, the mission ship returned. At the end of April, Brown sailed from New South Wales, in company with Dyson and other mission staff including the Reverend Shirley Baker and his family returning to Tonga. George and Lydia Brown were joyfully re-united in Tonga and with their children sailed back to Samoa and their new house on Savai’i. They were both refreshed and in better health. They would need to be.

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Samoa was not a simple or comfortable island paradise. The endless elbowing and shoving between representatives of territorial and traditional interests was becoming more insistent. Interleaved with the layers of tradition and local prestige were the interests of foreigners seeking to invest in island land and trade. Brown recalled the stories his father-in-law Wallis told of the way Māori people had lost land to foreigners in earlier decades, and was worried. Shifting alliances among those who identified with a particular church were often more political or traditional than religious or theological in basis. Samoan communities were at odds with traditional enemies, religious communities in rivalry with each other, new traders and settlers jostling for space with traditional landowners. By the end of 1869 Brown’s colleague Austin wrote that Samoa was ‘in a state

10 Ibid.

11 Minutes of General Missions Committee of Australasian Conference of Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1865–1898, 28 January 1869, ML MOM 1-4 CY 354.

12 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 January 1869.

of unrest from one end to the other.'¹³ And despite the encouraging visit of the church officials from Sydney, the Wesleyan mission was still on shaky ground; two of the four British missionaries had gone and a third was anxious to leave. They were grateful when Lydia's brother James W. Wallis joined them in Samoa, but James soon decided that it was a mistake for the Wesleyans to be in Samoa. By the time George Brown reported the birth of his fifth child, a son George Frederick, in March 1870, his sparse journal was a record of illnesses, hard travels, and 'the War'. Once again, childbirth had been hazardous for Lydia and when she began to haemorrhage George had been afraid that she would die; far from skilled help, he used every remedy he knew. Both Lydia and baby Fred lived but they knew that there was no room for complacency.

The continual conflict between Samoan groups during that period led to a grim loss of life and destruction of villages and subsistence food crops. In an attempt to persuade the Samoan communities with whom they had strong connections to make peace with their enemies, the missionaries of the LMS and the WMMS along with men working in consular affairs and trade entered into an alliance in August 1870. On the island of Upolu the deputation of white men supported by Samoan teachers, students and Church members approached the assembled Chiefs and Rulers to plead for peace. George Brown was asked to act as their spokesman: 'No one else was disposed to accept the work and so I had to consent though quite unprepared,' he wrote. Doing their best to follow formal Samoan protocol, the deputation presented to the Chiefs, 'our united request for them to make peace. We got no very decided answer but the general opinion was that a good impression was created.'¹⁴

There followed a time of intense negotiation and attempts at diplomacy and, on 25 August 1870, Brown wrote in his journal that they had met and 'agreed to make peace very much to our satisfaction.'¹⁵ The peace, however, was to be short-lived. It would be said that the interference of meddling white men could never resolve the deep divisions that existed. The strife would continue for at least another three years. Public strife was mirrored by the smaller conflicts within the churches, where temporary periods of calm were brief.

On Palm Sunday, 2 April 1871, Lydia Brown was taken ill in chapel. Their five children were all suffering from whooping cough and needed a lot of care, broken sleep and anxiety adding to Lydia's own health problems. For a week she suffered what was described as enteritis and by Easter Day, her children were brought to her bedside to say goodbye. Brown told a friend, 'we almost despaired of a favourable outcome.... It was a most anxious and trying time for me but

13 J.S. Austin, *Missionary Enterprise and Home Service: A Story of Mission Life in Samoa and Circuit Work in New South Wales* (illustrated), Sydney: J.A. Packer, 1922, p. 150.

14 Brown, Journal, 18 August 1870.

15 Ibid., 25 August 1870.

God was with us.’¹⁶ Lydia lived, but anxiety remained. George and Lydia Brown had been in Samoa now for nearly eleven years. Lydia had had no break from the demanding work and life in the tropics. Both George and Lydia experienced frequent ill-health; Brown was frequently semi-crippled with a swollen leg and eye infections troubled his vision. They were concerned over the education of their children as their older daughters approached adolescence; Lydia had been teaching them with the help of Jeannie Wallis, wife of J.W. Wallis, and both girls were gifted. Unfortunately, there seemed to be little chance that the Brown family could leave Samoa. Both the Austin and Wallis households intended to leave Samoa. Brown confided to new Mission Secretary Stephen Rabone that, if both men left Samoa, he would be forced to stay on, despite their health problems and the need for their children to attend school. ‘The only plan I can see at present is for me to send Mrs B. and the children up to New Zealand and stay down here a while myself.’¹⁷

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Many years later, when George Brown gathered his memories and documents to be shaped into the story of a long life, he chose to limit the material he selected to represent fourteen years in the islands of Samoa. In a single chapter he described Samoan landscape, language, customs, cyclones, local warfare, the hazards of island travel and some key events. There were few personal references. In a single paragraph he wrote a summary of the long-running difficulties between the LMS and the WMMS. ‘I do not think it necessary to enter here into details of the dispute (now, I believe, amicably settled).’¹⁸ There was a passing reference, unexplained, to ‘times of depression we had when we seemed to be labouring in vain,’¹⁹ but the impression is given that the Samoan period was not of sufficient interest to warrant much attention in the long volume.²⁰ Brown’s journal was neglected during much of the period from 1870 until he finally left Samoa in 1874. However, many letters were written and have survived. These records suggest that much material was deliberately left out of the formal autobiography, not because it was dull but because much of the period was frustrating, painful and deeply discouraging.²¹

No mission region was without its problems. In Fiji some mission staff attracted criticism for buying land and property for private use, against mission policy. In Tonga there was dissension among the missionaries which led to some

16 Ibid., 2–10 April 1871; Brown letter to S. Rabone, 14 April 1871, in Brown, Letter Book, 1871–76, ML A1686-2 CY2767.

17 Brown to Rabone, 14 April 1871.

18 George Brown, *George Brown: Pioneer-Missionary and Explorer: An Autobiography*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908, p. 29.

19 Brown, *George Brown: Pioneer, Missionary and Explorer*, p. 35.

20 In a manuscript of 536 pages, only thirty pages were given to the period 1860–1874 in Samoa.

21 George Brown, Letter Book, 1871–76, ML A1686-2 CY 2767.

making charges against the moral character of Shirley W. Baker to which he made counter-charges of libel. Brown told a friend that Baker was 'too smooth-tongued for me and so he never stood *very* high in my opinion.'²² In Samoa, Wesleyan Methodist Mission colleagues were at odds over whether or not they should remain in that country, and in a troubling twist, Brown's chief antagonist was his own brother-in-law, James Wallis. Brown was persuaded that, if the General Conference had made a decision to remain, then it was his duty to continue his work there. Wallis disagreed. Over the next years, Brown wrote one letter after another to Wallis. In May 1871 Brown wrote:

You are a Methodist preacher and promised honestly and solemnly to obey the Australasian Conference and to labour where ever they choose to appoint you; they have decided over and over again on the strength of the evidence which was enough for them that they ought in justice to our people here to resume our Mission here and with that and with your own consent they have appointed you here. Perhaps they are wrong, you at all events think they are but that doesn't at all affect the matter, so long as they rule, you as a Christian man pledged to them are bound to obey.²³

If Wallis was unhappy in Samoa, Brown argued, he should seek a change of Districts and bring his opinions through the usual channel for change, the Conference. However, he should remember that:

letter upon letter has been written, protest, resolutions etc have been showered upon them and still they profess their decided opinion that they are pledged to Samoa and mean to remain. I went to Sydney to satisfy myself and did so; 'twas no silent vote that was given in Conference ... they had had the whole affair up over and over again and at one time had given two days to it and nothing could be clearer ... simple justice and a sense of duty and right compel us to advocate a certain course which we feel to be painful both to ourselves and others.²⁴

Brown concluded that Samoan communities would form alliances—and break them—for their own reasons and not because of decisions made in London, Auckland or Sydney. He asked the question, 'By what law Independent, human or divine are they to be denied the right to choose their own Pastors?'²⁵ To another missionary he wrote,

22 Brown to Frank Firth, 5 May 1871.

23 Brown to James W. Wallis, 10 May 1871.

24 Ibid.

25 Brown to Frank Firth, 20 July 1871.

Let the way be clear, let it appear to be His will for us to go, to give up our Mission here, and I am ready at once to do so. I have nothing to reproach myself with nor should I feel grieved or ashamed if the whole affair was to collapse the day I left.... You know well that I have ever regretted the necessity which I firmly believe to exist for our Mission here but I do not and cannot see how a breach of trust (if it was one) can justify another one now ... our LMS Brethren and we ourselves are and have been reaping what was sown in past years.²⁶

It was an awkward situation. Brown and Wallis were tied together as brothers-in-law, with mutual love and respect for Lydia and Jeannie as well as ties with the extended Wallis family in New Zealand. James Wallis was concerned for his sister Lydia who was exhausted, often ill and by late 1871 was expecting a sixth baby. He tactlessly told his brother-in-law that he considered that Brown would murder his sister and commit suicide himself if the Brown family did not take leave soon. George Brown was offended. To Wallis he wrote, 'You call it Murder and Suicide to stay, neither of which I wish to commit,'²⁷ but he complained to others that the only reason he was not free to take leave was because his brother-in-law was neither willing nor competent to be left in charge in Samoa. While Brown admitted that he needed to 'guard against a tendency to pugnacity' he still cared about Wallis, but was becoming increasingly irritated with him.²⁸

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In between violent bouts of letter writing, Brown was continuing his regular work. There were the long journeys around Savai'i, the visits to villages and congregations, the teaching and class meetings, preaching, district meetings, medical work and dealing with small conflicts. Their home was usually open to their Samoan neighbours. Samoan people worked beside Lydia in the house, played with their children and joined them for daily family prayer. The Browns frequently spoke Samoan, or a mix of Samoan and English, in their home. They were both sincere in cultivating 'those relations with the Natives in [their] own family or outside which are generally thought necessary to a Missionary's success and influence.'²⁹ George and Lydia had lived in Samoa for so long that it was a familiar home with their plentiful food gardens, cows, chickens, pigs and three horses. Brown told his sister Anna in far Lincolnshire, 'We like Samoa and on the whole are perhaps as comfortable here as we should be elsewhere ... more independent here.... Our time is fully occupied.'³⁰

26 Brown to J. Osborne, 10 July 1871, from Saleaula.

27 Brown to James W. Wallis, 10 May 1871.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Brown to his sister, Mrs Anna Caukwell and Rev. Henry Caukwell, 13 November 1971.

Brown was developing what would become a life-long interest in local tropical flora and fauna, as well as language, ethnology and culture—beginning collections in several fields of endeavour. Brown was also a keen observer of the political movements of the region. Colonial powers were jockeying for power in locations across the Pacific that were perceived to be strategic or had commercial value. There were already German and American traders in the islands and Brown believed that soon Samoa would become either a German or an American colony. By December 1871 he would observe that 'speculators are buying up land in every direction and we can be sure that it will not be allowed to remain idle.'³¹ Land sales in the next few years were to reach such proportions, and involve such complexities of individual or communal ownership, that the time would come when land claims would amount to two and a half times the total land mass of the islands of Samoa.³² Continued unrest between Samoan clans meant that they had no shared strength to resist colonial incursions; Brown described them as a rope of sand.

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Piles of paper and buckets of ink flowed from Brown's desk as he kept up a lively correspondence with colleagues in Sydney, Auckland, London, Apia, Fiji and Tonga. Brown had opinions on everything.³³ With long periods between writing a letter and receiving a response, dreams were not tempered by other wisdoms; misunderstandings grew and mild arguments developed muscles. At times he was forced to apologise for immoderate language in a letter, and he told a correspondent, 'A good rule for many of us is never to touch a pen until 48 hours after any exciting letter.'³⁴ At such a distance from the theological niceties of the British Church, he was sometimes at odds with the accepted doctrines of the day, describing his own views as 'heterodox'. 'I have no faith myself in extreme views and not much in very sudden conversions,' he told a friend. He did not believe that he would be at home in the Anglican system, which would not suit 'any intellectual man of an ardent and impulsive temperament.'³⁵ He preferred the model of the Wesleyan Methodists. He strongly affirmed the work of the Bible Society as they provided scriptures for many language groups. 'This will make them Christians,' he wrote, 'I don't care a fig to make them into Methodists, they will adopt that if it suits them best.'³⁶ While on one hand he was very antagonistic toward the Catholic Church, he also insisted that 'I am no

31 Brown to S. Rabone, 18 December 1871.

32 I.C. Campbell, *Worlds Apart: A History of the Pacific Islands*, Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2003 [1989], pp. 114–15.

33 For correspondence in the period 1871–1874, see Brown, Letter Book, 1871–76.

34 Brown to J. Osborne, 10 July 1871.

35 Brown to W. Fletcher, 20 July 1871.

36 Brown to J.W. Wallis, 10 May 1871.

bigot and never try to keep up and perpetuate miserable sectarian distinctions. I am not generally considered narrow minded in other matters, my danger has been thought to consist in an opposite tendency.³⁷

Two themes played in counterpoint for Brown over the period between 1871 and 1874. The bright strand was his growing vision for moving into new fields with the gospel. A darker strand was the exhausting debate over the presence of the Wesleyan Methodists in Samoa. An LMS missionary hurt him by suggesting that the LMS had the ‘feast’ of good Christians in Samoa and the Methodists only had the ‘leavings’ that no one else wanted. More painful still was the sharp division of opinion with his brother-in-law Wallis. Brown complained to General Secretary Stephen Rabone that Wallis ‘really talks and acts more like one with a shingle short than anything else.’³⁸ Wallis was threatening to send a long letter of complaint against Brown to Conference, which was, Brown declared, ‘full of old stale matter and a lot of gross misrepresentation.’³⁹ In one of many letters exchanged between them, Brown told Wallis that he and Austin would defend themselves, but urged his brother-in-law to reconsider sending this material into the very public gaze of Conference. ‘If you send this paper up it will certainly cause a great deal of unpleasantness if not something worse ... [it] must end in pain for us all, both here and at home.’⁴⁰ Over many months the debate continued, with vacillation from Wallis about whether or not to send his document.⁴¹ Rumours and gossip spread among the LMS community. Wallis demanded a transfer to another district then changed his mind at the last minute. Relationships with members of the LMS continued to be frayed around the edges, even though there were times when the Brown home was crowded with friendly LMS house guests at the same time as some of their leaders were criticising their host. To add to the discomfort of a difficult relationship, Brown carried the daily pain of a grossly swollen leg as well as continual concern about the welfare and education of his children. It was not a happy time.

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News of a murder shook George Brown. Anglican Bishop John Coleridge Patteson, who had impressed him so much when he sailed with him from England to New Zealand in 1855, had been murdered on 20 Sept 1871 while visiting in the area of Santa Cruz in the eastern Solomon Islands. It was said that the killing was related to ‘blackbirding’ village men for plantation labour forces. Perhaps this

37 Brown to J. Osborne, 10 July 1871.

38 Brown to S. Rabone, 24 June 1872.

39 Brown to F. Firth, 10 November 1871.

40 Brown to J.W. Wallis, 7 November 1871.

41 Brown to Rabone, 24 August 1871, 20 September 1871.

news jolted Brown out of any lethargy caused by local disappointments and frustration. Time was limited. Who knew how long any missionary had to bring some change? There was no time to waste.

Brown had been thinking about other mission possibilities for a long time, almost as long as he had been living in Samoa. In 1862, in a light-hearted note about his work load to then Mission Secretary Eggleston, he suggested that he might slow down when he was older, 'that is if you don't send me away to Papua or some such place.'⁴² The following year, on hearing Martin Dyson talk of distant Papua, Brown assured Eggleston that Dyson could not be spared from Samoa but 'if you want to send, let some of us young ones go.' He added, 'It is a great field and there must be plenty of room for all. May God hasten the time where those poor Papuans also shall be won for Christ.'⁴³ In his journal at a time of particular conflict with the LMS in 1868 he had complained 'It seems a great waste of men and money to keep us here. I wish I could go to Fiji or New Guinea anywhere out of this.'⁴⁴ He was very outspoken when he heard that some Methodist benefactors in Sydney had sent generous funds for missions in Europe; this was not right, he declared, 'so long as India, China, New Guinea, New Caledonia and hundreds of other places have not the Gospel. I would never give one sixpence for those Missions.'⁴⁵ He told his brother-in-law William Fletcher, 'I wish we could make an attack on New Guinea, there's room enough there for all. I will go any time if only they will raise the wind.'⁴⁶ Now, in 1871, Brown learned that the LMS had at last taken the first step in a plan that had been mooted for many years; they were planning to begin new mission work in New Guinea.

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Early in November 1871 Brown began a marathon of letter writing with letters for family, colleagues and the Mission Board. As he wrote letter after letter his new idea took clearer shape. He had heard that the Board was considering selling the *John Wesley*. Don't sell the mission ship, he urged, but use it in a different way. 'I am going to propose to the Committee *not* to sell the Wesley,' he told Wallis, 'but let her take up New Guinea doing our work and also that of the LMS for the present.'⁴⁷ To Austin he wrote,

No single Society can hope to take up that immense Island, FAR larger than Great Britain. Let us have a District marked out and let us begin with Native Teachers. Let also the *Wesley* do the LMS work at the same

42 Brown to J. Eggleston, 21 November 1862.

43 Ibid., 27 July 1863.

44 Brown, Journal, 20 May 1868.

45 Brown to J.W. Wallis, 7 November 1871.

46 Brown to W. Fletcher, 20 July 1871.

47 Brown to J.W. Wallis, 7 November 1871.

time ... there would be no clashing in future.... We could get Teachers from Fiji, Tonga and Samoa and one Missionary could go every year with one of the LMS.⁴⁸

To colleagues in Fiji he explained his idea that instead of 'the old plan of crowding expensive Missionaries into a field' they should work more with trained islander agents. 'I wish we could plant ten or twelve of your Fiji Institution men under the charge of some good Native Minister on Papua, they would soon make themselves felt.'⁴⁹

By the time he wrote his formal proposal to Secretary Rabone, the principles had been formed. He proposed a new work, in a region negotiated with the LMS where there would be no risk of future competition, staffed by trained islanders rather than Europeans and supported by regular communication, supervision and supplies by the mission ship. It was a model for pioneer work very like that of the LMS.

I oppose the sale of our vessel with all my might, and propose that she be employed more exclusively as a mission vessel in opening out new fields.... I propose that we have a part of New Guinea marked out for us, and that we at once begin there with a band of native teachers placed under one or two of our native missionaries ... visited every year by the *Wesley* with a deputation, and as soon as possible, having a few European missionaries among them for general oversight and translation work ... we also could soon find plenty of good and pious men to carry out the plan.... We must excite an interest, and then the funds will rise.... If you begin a fund, I know one who will guarantee £5 for five years, and will go himself, if wanted.⁵⁰

Perhaps, if he was honest, Brown knew that his grand vision was only in part a call from God for the sake of the populations who had never heard the Christian gospel. In the mail bag that carried his dream of a new mission enterprise were also letters of criticism and recrimination over local grievances. His vision for New Guinea also offered a way of escape from the bondage and limitations of Samoa.

When replies came from the Board in Sydney many months later, they learned that the Board saw their dispute as a storm in a teacup. They realised that the Board was not persuaded by the Wallis arguments that they should reconsider the Methodist presence in Samoa. The Board directed that they should talk

48 Brown to J. Austin, 7 November 1871.

49 Brown to J. Nettleton, Fiji, 10 November 1871.

50 Brown to S. Rabone, 14 November 1871, 18 December 1871.

directly to each other and work things out. Sadly, relations were soured still further. Brown's enthusiastic letter about beginning a new mission did not even rate a mention in the Board Minutes.⁵¹

Isolated and unhappy, Brown struggled on. Lydia was busy with their sixth baby, Geoffrey Patteson Brown, born 23 January 1872. With great grief, they had risked sending their two eldest daughters Lizzie and Amy away alone on a small sailing vessel to their grandparents in Auckland. Their relationship with James W. Wallis was still difficult. His good friend and colleague John Austin had left, taking his ailing wife away to the colonies, where she was to die. Far from giving permission for the Brown family to take leave, the Board directed the *John Wesley* to bypass Samoa entirely on its 1873 voyage, citing delays due to weather and needed repairs. Brown's ill health, aggravated by the physical strain of island travel and the emotional strain of frequent disappointments, dragged him down into depression. Samoan Christians did not always live up to their protestations of faith; the power of the traditional attitudes out-ranked the strength of the new religion. Warfare between Samoan tribal groups was always either actual or threatened during that time, and the political divisions were echoed by denominational divisions; one allegiance was linked to the other with shifting loyalties playing out in the social, political and religious spheres. Brown was worried about the way Samoan communities were selling their land to foreigners, and about the dim prospects for stable government in the region.⁵²

Late in 1872, Brown was shocked to learn of the sudden death of his trusted mentor, Mission Secretary Stephen Rabone on 21 July 1872. Now, without their leader, the Mission Board was distracted by many other things. Questions in the letters from Wallis and Brown were not addressed until a year after they had been received, when new General Secretary for Missions, the Reverend Benjamin Chapman, took up the reins. The Board once again dismissed the Wallis proposal that the Methodists should withdraw from Samoa. The view from Samoa was very different. Brown felt that his hands were tied. Over the months the poison of suspicion and criticism had been infecting the body of missionaries, both the WMMS and the LMS. Two leaders of the LMS, George Turner and Henry Nisbet, were amassing a long list of grievances against the WMMS and Brown in particular. By the end of 1873 yet another long letter of accusations was on its way to the Board.⁵³

George Brown knew that some of the LMS leaders were angry with him, but perhaps he had not imagined the bitter force of a letter that LMS leaders Dr.

51 Minutes of Wesleyan Methodist Missions Board, 1865–1898, 19 February 1872, 26 February 1872, ML MOM1-4 CY 354.

52 Brown to F. Firth, 12 January 1872.

53 Dr. George Turner and Rev. Henry Nisbet, letter from Apia, 16 December 1873, quoted in Minutes of Wesleyan Methodist Missions Board, 1865–1898, ML MOM 1-4 CY 354, 23 February 1874.

George Turner and the Reverend Henry Nisbet sent to the Wesleyan Methodist Board in Sydney in December 1873. The Board, when it met to debate the letter in February 1874, was faced with a diatribe. Turner and Nisbet wrote that although ‘the most cordial sympathy and good will ought to exist between the agents of the two societies’ this was not true in Samoa.

The presence of Wesleyan Missionaries in Samoa is a serious breach of missionary confidence, and unwarrantable violation of deliberate and repeated engagements entered into between the Directors of the parent Societies in England, a sinful misappropriation of Mission funds and waste of Missionary strength and a continually felt hindrance to our work ... some of their [WMMS] agents who have laboured or are now labouring in Samoa, and especially the Rev George Brown, have made it their custom to resort to acts which are in manifest violation of the sacred engagement and promises entered into between the agents of the Australasian Wesleyan Conference and the London Missionary Society.⁵⁴

Turner and Nisbet went on with accusations that ‘unseemly strife’ between the agents of the LMS and the WMMS was causing ‘perpetuation of sectarian distinctions’. Though, they conceded, George Brown claimed to forbid proselytising, his Samoan workers ignored this. His willingness to forgive, prematurely, those who had been disciplined by the LMS for engaging in tribal warfare had led to LMS leadership being ‘prevented from the strict exercise of discipline by the fear of losing their people,’ who threatened to leave in a body. Brown was accused of recently purchasing several plots of land ‘where there are at present no Wesleyans’ and that at least one was for a WMMS chapel. The letter concluded with a request that WMMS officials meet with LMS people in Samoa for a consultation on the problems, at which time they would provide proof ‘of all the above assertions which we will be prepared to lay before the United Conference should you accede to our request.’⁵⁵

The formal reply came from the deliberations of the New South Wales and Queensland Wesleyan Methodist Conference in February 1874. Conference replied that they were offended by the discourtesy of the original letter and declined the request for a consultation in Samoa. Such a consultation, they believed, would ‘virtually resolve itself into a court of judgment on the character and conduct of the Chairman’ Brown,⁵⁶ who was planning to leave Samoa in any case, and Conference requested that the LMS deal directly with the official leadership of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference. They repeated their ‘unshaken confidence’ in their agent George Brown and quoted the recent

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Minutes of New South Wales and Queensland Conference of Wesleyan Methodist Church, February 1874, included in Minutes of Wesleyan Methodist Missions Board, 1865–1898.

resolution of the Samoa District Meeting, which mentioned their 'highest regard for his Christian character and its admiration of the earnest, conscientious and self-denying manner in which, during a period of 13 years he has devoted himself to the work of elevating and Christianising the Natives of Samoa.'⁵⁷

They did not mention the latest letter from Brown, which set out his own defence against the accusations and suggested that the LMS people assumed 'that the Natives could be parcelled out into Pens like so many Sheep or Cattle without any regard for their own feelings and inclinations.'⁵⁸ The resolution concluded on a defiant note, stating that the WMMS 'asserts its perfect freedom to obey its convictions of duty and the indications of Providence.'⁵⁹

Whatever others might be saying about him, George Brown was beginning to detach himself from life in Samoa. He and his family needed a holiday, whether or not those in authority over him were willing to entertain his vision for a new mission somewhere in the northern islands of New Guinea. Some suggested that he return to New Zealand or New South Wales, but the idea of a suburban congregation was now as alien to him as once the community of a Samoan village had been. He dreaded having his 'feelings rasped by any ignorant and miserly fellows at Quarterly Meetings ... I could never beg for my salary.' Nor was he eager to travel around as a missionary deputation, entertaining indifferent congregations with tales of exotic Samoa. 'I have no ambition to do the Dancing Bear business about the country,' he told Wallis Sr.⁶⁰ In a letter to his daughters in Auckland he encouraged them 'always to trust God not merely believe in him,'⁶¹ but there were times when he found this hard to do. It was hard to settle to anything when, he hoped, the mission ship would soon arrive to take them away. The every-day supervision of a large District had to go on, but even that could be exhausting. In January 1874, Lydia went with him to spend time with new young missionaries, the Reverend James Mathieson and his wife, at Lufilufi on Upolu. Lydia was with him as they struggled to deliver Mrs Mathieson's first baby, an infant who almost died. Their later journey home was difficult; a capsized boat, which left their clothing soaked and Brown's bundle of correspondence damp and a blur of smudged ink, a night outdoors then a long walk through bush and more than five miles along the shore. Samoan companions tried to carry Lydia over 'a rather formidable bush road but she got down and walked nearly all the way at a stiff pace. There is no other missionary's wife who would dream of attempting to do it,' Brown told his father-in-law proudly.⁶² As for himself, it just made him feel tired.

57 Ibid., quoting Minutes of Wesleyan Methodist Mission, Samoa District, 2 October 1873.

58 Brown to B. Chapman, 1 January 1874.

59 Minutes of New South Wales and Queensland Conference of Wesleyan Methodist Church, February 1874.

60 Brown to James Wallis Sr., 28 May 1873.

61 Brown to Mary Elizabeth and Amy Brown, 23 December 1873.

62 Brown to Wallis Sr., 23 January 1874.

The District Meeting had sent off the retirement Minute for him months earlier. His health was still not good and now they had to wait for the *John Wesley* to come to take them away. Their boxes were nearly all packed up for the journey. If they had known that the *John Wesley* was still delayed in Sydney waiting for repairs, and had still not left for the islands by the end of March 1874, they might not have bothered packing so soon. Brown continued to question visiting sea captains about possible locations for a new mission, telling Chapman, 'Tis no use we thinking of the Solomons. The Bishop goes there and it is best not to interfere. I think we ought to take up New Britain and New Ireland. They are large Islands and unoccupied.... I will gather up all the information I can to take up with me.'⁶³ If they had heard the enthusiastic debates in the distant Board room about new possibilities for work in Port Darwin, North Australia among the Chinese community—with a side glance toward the presence of many Aboriginal people in that region—and the request for missionaries from French officials in New Caledonia, they might have despaired of anything coming of Brown's dreams for New Guinea.⁶⁴ He was still under a cloud of uncertainty about how his church at home viewed his actions in Samoa and knew he would have to face an enquiry by the Board.

The only thing they could do was to wait.

63 Brown to B. Chapman, 27 January 1874.

64 Minutes of General Missions Committee of Australasian Conference of Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1865–1898, 23 February, 30 March, 7 May 1874, ML MOM 1-4 CY 354.