16. ‘Rev. Dr. Georgium Brown’

New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, Samoa, Tonga
1892–1895

Names…. He had been plain George, ‘Geo’ to close friends, ‘Palauni’ to the Samoans, the Reverend George Brown. Now his name appeared in Latin on a splendid certificate—Georgium Brown, Fellow of Royal Geographical Society,’ and the citation ‘Propter magnum scientiam Literarum Sacrarum in comitus publicis.…’¹ He had been awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Divinity by the Wesleyan Theological College, McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada on 6 April 1892. As a youth he had spent two years in Canada and had been involved in a shooting accident there with a romantic rival; if the shot had not gone wide he might have spent years in a Canadian jail. That fiery youth would never have dreamed of academic honours. Even if there were some raised eyebrows over his many scientific and political interests beyond the church, it was plain that his broad interests were taken seriously. A month later a selection of his photographs was sent to the Chicago Exhibition as representative of the Pacific region.² For a man who had always regretted what he saw as his inadequate education, this recognition must have been a source of great satisfaction. The runaway sailor, failed ship’s cook and almost criminal had transmuted into the Reverend Dr. George Brown.

Not everyone viewed George Brown in a heroic light. Some members of the Board questioned how well he was fulfilling his role as General Secretary for Missions. There were hints in the Board Minutes that his long absences from the office had caused frustration; he was rarely present at meetings, work and decisions had to wait until his return, and there was an acerbic note at one point, hoping that the Tonga work would soon prove useful ‘so that he may return at an early date to attend to his Secretarial duties.’³ People admired his energy and enthusiasm for the New Mission in British New Guinea and worried about ‘the unreasonable demands made on the General Secretary’s time and strength, imperilling his health.’⁴ However, some were irritated that so much of his time was focussed on a narrow range of work—Tonga and its troubles, New

¹ The framed certificate is held in the Archives of New South Wales Uniting Church.
² Minutes of General Missions Committee of Australasian Conference of Wesleyan Methodist Church, ML MOM 2 CY354, 25 May 1892.
³ Ibid., 25 May 1892, 23 April 1889, 11 November 1889.
⁴ Ibid., 15 December 1891.
Britain as it developed, the new enterprise in British New Guinea—while other demands seemed to be ignored or neglected. The appointment of a Chinese catechist to work among Chinese labourers and shopkeepers in Darwin received little publicity or support. There was no sign of any Methodist interest in work among the Aboriginal people anywhere in the Australian colonies, despite regular information about those communities in the newspapers and the work of other churches. There would be future criticism of ‘this inexcusable neglect’. When the Board was asked by Methodist mission staff in Fiji to recruit a catechist from India to work among the thousands of Indian labourers who now lived in Fiji, the response was delayed. There was a plea from Solomon Island Christians who had worked in Fiji, asking for missionaries to their own islands; this, too, was postponed indefinitely. It was clear to the Mission Board and to Brown himself that the opportunities for new work were almost endless. They were also overwhelming.

It was not reasonable to lay all the blame for inaction on the focus of General Secretary Brown on the people of the Pacific islands. The times were very hard. Banks were failing, strikes were crippling, the numbers of unemployed were increasing. Finding little sympathy from government, groups speaking on behalf of those facing penury appealed to churches. When a delegation approached the Methodists asking for help for those seeking employment and in dire financial need, Brown was with the group who met them. He believed that

the business of the church is to concern itself with all that affects man’s welfare, either temporally or spiritually, that it has to do with the bodies as well as with the souls of the people, and that in so doing we are but following the example of Him who had compassion on the multitude because they had nothing to eat…. It is only that as we fully recognise the truth that love to God must be accompanied by love to our fellow men, that we realise the importance of all work, and all efforts for the welfare and happiness of our fellows.

As if in defiance of the anxieties of wider society, several new and vigorous movements were emerging. Women were becoming more visible and outspoken, expanding educational opportunities for girls and women, and advocating suffrage for women, temperance, rights in the work force and sex education.

5 Ibid., 24 March 1893.
6 Sydney Morning Herald. For example, on 21 October 1892 it reported on plans for a school near Walgett, fishing equipment for Port Stephens, a new manager for Warangesda and activity in Grafton.
8 Minute Book of Wesleyan Methodist Conference, New South Wales, 1892–94, 1892, ML 287.1/7.
9 Methodist, 10 March 1982. W.G. Taylor of the Central Mission and Richard Bavin were with Brown in this task.
10 George Brown, ‘Retiring address at end of term as president,’ in the Methodist, 5 March 1892.
On this rising tide of opinion, the Methodists had begun debating whether women could participate in the courts of the church. Brown had been trying to persuade the Board to employ single women for several years, and he published a letter from William Bromilow in the new missionary magazine. Bromilow, writing from British New Guinea, argued, ‘We all think there is a splendid field for women to work among their coloured sisters here. The native women have considerable influence, own property, possess the power of witchcraft, and have quarrels among themselves which the men are powerless to check.’\textsuperscript{11} To Brown’s satisfaction the Board of Mission decided to employ single women in their mission fields in February 1892, with not a single voice of dissent.\textsuperscript{12}

The great crowd that overflowed beyond the Centenary Hall in York Street in February 1892 numbered in the thousands. They listened with open hearts to a challenge to serve the living God and before they left that place over a hundred women and men had offered for missionary service.\textsuperscript{13} Two women were chosen as the first in what was seen as a daring experiment; Eleanor Walker and Jeannie Tinney were appointed to join the New Mission in British New Guinea with the Bromilows.\textsuperscript{14} On the day of their farewell on 11 April 1892 a group of women met to form a Ladies Missionary Auxiliary, with the goal of supporting Eleanor and Jeannie with prayer, regular correspondence and practical financial and other help.\textsuperscript{15} Lydia Brown and her sister Lizzie Fletcher were among them, along with other wives of former missionaries. Both sisters were invited to speak, but at the last minute Lydia decided that public speaking was not for her. The formal launch of the Missionary Auxiliary was a grand occasion in the Centenary Hall in May, with a large attendance. This group was committed to their new task and when the first meeting of the Executive was held in the city on a miserable wet wintry day, eighteen of them splashed through puddles to attend. Though Lydia was unwilling to speak publicly, and was happy to defer to Mrs Moore as president, she was appointed treasurer.\textsuperscript{16}

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After the great excitement of establishing the new work in New Guinea, the meetings of the Board of Missions now seemed rather mundane. There were

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\item \textsuperscript{11} William Bromilow, Letter, 28 October 1891, published in the \textit{Australasian Methodist Missionary Review}, 6 January 1892.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Minutes of General Missions Committee of Australasian Conference of Wesleyan Methodist Church, ML MOM 2 CY354, 8 February 1892. The men who made this important decision were: the Reverends W. Clarke, George Brown, S. Wilkinson, W.H. George, J. Clifton, R. Bavin, J. Oram, J.E. Moulton, B.J. Meek and Messrs R.H. Ducker, R.S. Callaghan, E. Dawson, W.A. McClelland and Dr. O’Reilly.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Methodist, February 1892.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Eleanor Walker had been working with the Central (York Street) Mission in Sydney and Jeannie Tinney was from the Lydiard Street Methodist congregation in Ballarat, Victoria.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Minutes of General Missions Committee of Australasian Conference of Wesleyan Methodist Church, ML MOM 2 CY354, 4 April 1892.
\item \textsuperscript{16} \textit{Australasian Methodist Missionary Review}, 5 Sept 1892.
\end{itemize}
always anxieties about money and Brown was forced to write to the staff in the field rejecting their requests for more funds. Their needs were real. The limits were equally real. There were disappointments. News from the field reported illness even among the healthiest staff, indiscipline in some regions and rumours of unfortunate friction between clergy and lay staff; the Board realised that they needed clear regulations to cover these relationships. On a happier occasion, the Board welcomed the Indian catechist from Lucknow, John Williams, on his way to begin work among the Indian migrant labourers in Fiji. It was a daunting task, and perhaps even the worthy Board members may have wondered what a single person could do, even with fluency in Urdu and Hindi languages, attempting something new among thousands of people with their own, mainly Hindu, views of the world.

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No single grand project occupied Brown over the next few years. He was active in many spheres, within his Church, as General Secretary of Missions and with his friends in the sciences. As he was now more often in Sydney, he had been appointed to almost every committee that existed under the banner of Wesleyan Methodism in the colony; in 1893 he was a member of thirteen Conference committees. Of particular interest was membership in the committee promoting union of the several branches of Methodism that had splintered away from the original body over the early part of the nineteenth century. The task was to ‘promote the organic union of the various branches of the Methodist Church’ by working with the other churches, and if it seemed likely to succeed ‘to prepare a draft scheme as a possible basis of Union.’ Brown himself believed that ‘one of the most cheering signs of the times is the steady growth of opinion in its favour.’ When travelling in Canada in 1886 he had been told of the success of a similar union of Methodists there. In North Queensland he had been troubled by the ‘great waste of men and money’ caused by disunity and said that ‘I, for

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17 Minutes of General Missions Committee of Australasian Conference of Wesleyan Methodist Church, ML MOM 2 CY354, 8 February, 29 February, 18 July, 21 July 1892.
18 Minutes of General Missions Committee of Australasian Conference of Wesleyan Methodist Church, ML MOM 2 CY354, 6 June 1893.
19 Ibid., 20 June 1892.
20 For example, in 1893, Brown was a member of the Board of Missions, (Protection of) Privileges Committee, Examining Committee, Newington College Council, Ladies College Burwood Council, Provisional Theological Institution, Affiliated College Committee (with the aim of establishing a College within the University of Sydney), Centennial Thanksgiving Fund Committee, the Methodist publication committee, Discipline Committee, Methodist Union Committee, Executive of the Church Sustentation and Extension Committee, Book Committee. See Minute Book of Wesleyan Methodist Conference, New South Wales, 1892-94, ML 287.1/7.
22 Minute Book of Wesleyan Methodist Conference, New South Wales, 1892–94, ML 287.1/7, 1892.
23 Methodist, 12 March 1892.
one, hope to live long enough to see this growing desire an accomplished fact in this fair land in which we live.’

A year later in 1893, Conference recorded ‘its deep and solemn conviction that, in the interests of Christ’s Kingdom in these colonies, an organic union of the several Methodist Churches is desirable.’ A Joint Committee prepared a draft Basis of Union and sent this document out for comment to all the Quarterly Meetings and District Meetings across New South Wales. However, to the disappointment of the working group, it seemed that Wesleyans in New South Wales were not persuaded about the value of union. Reluctantly, the Conference of 1894 had to record that ‘it is thought that the Churches are not yet ripe for such a union.’

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News of unresolved problems between missionary colleagues in Samoa reached Sydney. Brown was asked to visit that region and left Sydney in April 1893. At that time, Samoa was in the throes of continuing instability, with tensions between the ‘Three Powers’—Great Britain, Germany and the United States—over colonial authority in the region, as well as longstanding conflicts over traditional authority between rival Samoan leaders Mata’afa and Malietoa Laupepa. As he travelled around the communities of Samoa in the course of dealing with church business, Brown remembered their history of fluid alliances. Near the end of his visit, Brown met with his friend Robert Louis Stevenson at Vailima on the island of Upolu. Stevenson was writing about the simmering conflicts of Samoa for the British press and reported,

Dr George Brown, the missionary, had just completed a tour of the islands. There are few men in the world with a more mature knowledge of native character, and I applied to him eagerly for an estimate of the relative forces. ‘When the first shot is fired, and not before,’ said he, ‘you will know who is who.’… There are too many strings in a Samoan intrigue for the merely European mind to follow.

Stevenson renewed his offer to write Brown’s biography. Again Brown postponed the offer until a more convenient time. Stevenson’s sudden death in 1894 cut off this possibility.

It would have been a relief for Brown to reach Tonga. The island nation that had seen so much sadness in previous years was now calm. There were still challenges

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24 Ibid.
25 Minute Book of Wesleyan Methodist Conference, New South Wales, 1892–94, ML 287.1/7, 1892.
26 Ibid., 1893.
27 Ibid., 1894.
28 Ibid., 1893.
ahead. The people were still in mourning for their aged and venerated King George Tupou who had died at the age of ninety-six years, to be succeeded by his nineteen-year-old great-grandson. Brown reported that ‘Everything was quiet in Tonga and civil liberty was enjoyed by all.'

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While her husband travelled during the winter of 1893, Lydia Brown learned of the death of her aged mother Mary Anne Wallis, far away in Auckland, and welcomed another grandson, a second son for Amy. Lydia was thankful that she had been able to visit her parents the previous year. Amy and Ben Dinning were now stationed at Richmond on the outskirts of Sydney so, with her husband away, Lydia was free to be with Amy and help with the new baby. As well as her commitment to the needs of her family and local church community, Lydia Brown continued to take a personal interest in the families and single women who had gone from Australia and New Zealand to work in the island communities across the Pacific. Letters and parcels of supplies were flowing between the concerned women of the Ladies Auxiliary and the women in the field. Early impressions were that the single women were finding their place and beginning useful work among the local women. The Mission Board was very encouraged.

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Brown returned from the tropics in June 1893 to a bleak colony. It would be described as a year of ‘extraordinary calamities and financial disasters, which have caused suffering, direct or indirect, to the whole colony.’ Failed banks, unemployment, political struggle, lost crops, severe flooding and bankrupted businesses touched everyone. Financial loss among their church members had its own impact. Brown was back in time to observe the formal establishment of the Australasian Federation League on 3 July 1893 in the Sydney Town Hall, note support for the new political movement, the Labor Electoral League, and hear fierce public debate over political representation with some demanding ‘One Man – One Vote’. The spectre of unemployment sharpened the demand for protection for local workers with ‘the total exclusion of all Asiatics and other

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31 Australasian Methodist Missionary Review, 4 July 1893.
33 Australasian Methodist Missionary Review, 4 August, 4 October 1893.
34 Minute Book of Wesleyan Methodist Conference, New South Wales, 1892–94, ML 287.1/7, 1893.
35 Ibid., 1894.
36 Rev. Joseph Spence, quoted in the Minute Book of Wesleyan Methodist Conference, New South Wales, 1892–94, ML 287.1/7, 1894. The Conference rejected a request from the recently separated Conference of Queensland for financial help on the grounds of the ‘seriously embarrassed condition of its own Church Property trusts.’
aliens whose standard of living and habits of life are not equal to our own.'\(^{37}\) All around there was great unease. People were even beginning to suggest that fractured colonial society was faced with a choice: federation or revolution.

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Shaking and instability were not limited to the colonies. In the area of New Britain early in 1894, where earth tremors were commonplace, a severe earthquake shook the region. The new young missionary wrote from Kinawanua to tell Lydia Brown of their fears of a tsunami and worry that the cliff-top mission house ‘would have fallen over the precipice’.\(^{38}\) It was still standing, though there was much damage across the Duke of York Island. The missionary wrote sadly, ‘The grave where your dear little children were buried sank down and the tombstone was thrown down, and fell on the iron railing and was broken.’\(^{39}\) Lydia could picture the place, the sacred spot among tall tropical trees where she had so often gone to weep and remember. Now it was desecrated, muddied and broken. Not even the graves of her children were secure.

The family was to move yet again. The elegant terrace house in Randwick was rented and now George was considering building a house of his own. His collection of artefacts and documents continued to grow, and he dreamed of building a house with more space. Suburbs were springing up along the new railway line running north of Sydney Harbour where once orchards and small farms had been hidden in bushland. Families that had once lived close to the city on the harbour began to move north. Brown decided to buy a block and build a family home in the new suburb of Gordon near several other Methodist families. The house would be called ‘Kinawanua’. That other cliff top house, shaken by earthquakes, anxiety, depression and grief, could never be forgotten.

While their new house was under construction, Brown planned a journey to the west, sailing to Adelaide in April 1894 and then on to Albany and Perth in Western Australia. Lydia decided to travel with him, despite having an injury that kept her on crutches for a period. During the five weeks while Brown travelled widely to visit churches in Western Australia, Lydia stayed with friends in Adelaide until her husband returned there for the three-yearly General Conference.\(^{40}\) Memories of that other General Conference in Adelaide in 1881 were difficult. Then some colleagues had accused him of murder. Now

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39 Ibid.
40 *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 August 1894. Among other places, he visited between 26 May and 1 July 1894 Albany, Perth, York and Beverley.
he returned with honour as Dr. Brown. He had never forgotten the emotions of that time and when addressing newly ordained young ministers warned them that they would probably experience times of depression and of doubt, times when the world will seem strangely out of joint, and you are tempted almost to doubt the existence and over-ruling power of a good, loving, wise God. There may come to you experiences so painful and so mysterious that you are unable to reconcile them with your ideas of justice and of right. In these times you will have to wait, to suffer and be strong…. You will need that higher courage, which comes from perfect loyalty and perfect love to Christ. You will have to be fearless in the discharge of plain duties, even should your actions entail the pains of misrepresentation, unpopularity or loss of friends. You will have to stand fast in the faith against the assaults of open enemies and false friends.41

The focus in 1894, however, was not on the crimes of George Brown but on the issue of whether or not the Wesleyan Methodists should move to a union with the other smaller communities of Methodists. Brown was a committed member of the New South Wales panel appointed to work with other Methodist bodies ‘to promote a spirit of unity … that oneness of spirit and practical fellowship which is absolutely necessary for Organic Union.’42 For twelve hours they debated the issue in Adelaide and finally decided, ‘that union with the other branches of Methodism in these Colonies, practically identical in belief and teaching with itself, sprung from the same spiritual stock, and separated from it merely by difference in ecclesiastical order, would be for the glory of God and the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom.’43

Even though he feared that New South Wales would be slow to ratify this, Brown now thought he would probably live to see Methodist Union come to pass.44

A group portrait of the Brown family was taken around the time of Claudia Brown’s wedding in May 1895. In the photographer’s studio they are arranged formally, unsmiling, and even the two little grandsons have kept very still. Each one is linked with an arm around a shoulder, a hand reaching to touch. The four-year-old grandson leans back in his grandfather’s arms with a hand on his grandmother’s knee. This is a rare moment when they are all together. Lizzie

41 Brown, ‘Charge to ordinands,’ in the Methodist, 12 March 1892.
42 Minute Book of Wesleyan Methodist Conference, New South Wales, 1892–94, ML 287.1/7, 1894.
44 In 1895, Brown worked on the Methodist Union Committee with clergy, J.E. Carruthers, Spence, W. Clarke, Pincombe, R. Sellors, G. Lane, J. Austin, R. Bavin, Maddern, J. Woolnough, P. Clipsham, W. Rutledge and twelve laymen.
has returned to live in Sydney, the Dinnings are in town briefly from their country appointment and George Brown is at home for once. The new house at Gordon has been finished ready for the wedding and the newlyweds will be living not far away in the new suburb of Lindfield. All of Lydia’s children who have survived are now adults, all beloved. In the midst of the fragility of human life, with news of deaths and loss around them, this moment early in 1895 has been captured.45


Source: Brown Family Album, per favour of Miss Nancy Joyce.

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Tolerant he may have been, able to accommodate a wide range of theological opinions and happy to enjoy the company of knighted gentleman, cannibal chiefs, small children or crusading women. Tolerant George Brown was not when his beloved mission work was under attack, most particularly when that attack came from a Roman Catholic Cardinal. Cardinal Moran gave an address

45 The original of this photograph is in family possession. It has been published in Margaret Reeson, A Singular Woman, Adelaide: Open Book Publishers, 1999, p. 158.
in Sydney in June 1895 in which he compared unfavourably the efforts of Anglican and Protestant missionary organisations with those of the Catholic Orders. Not only was Brown outraged. The speech struck at the heart of all those working for organisations such as the Church Missionary Society, the Australian Board of Missions, the London Missionary Society, the Presbyterian Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. In the Methodist Centenary Hall, ‘packed from floor to ceiling on Sunday afternoon,’ in July 1895, the Anglican Primate Dr. Saumarez Smith used his authority to control the audience as ‘applause swelled strong in the bosom of the auditory’ and Brown made a long speech that the secular press described as a ‘formidable controversial’ address. The Catholic Church, he conceded, must be given credit for taking seriously the need for missions to the heathen centuries before the Protestant churches. However, he examined the history of Catholic missions of long standing in South America, China, India and Japan and asked, ‘Does there exist now, after three and a half centuries, a powerful Native Church?’ ‘No,’ he declared. In many cases, local tribes had been wiped out, or had returned to their original beliefs. Giving examples from the Pacific, he assured his audience that strong ‘Native churches’ had been established by Protestant missions, where the people of the place participated in leadership and had made the church their own. In the Pacific, he announced, the priests had almost always followed the earlier Protestant missionaries, when the region was deemed safe. The Protestants had not fought among themselves nearly as much as the Cardinal had suggested and he listed the various benefits brought to island communities by the Protestant missions, with Bible translation and the gift of an ‘open Bible’ a significant blessing. His audience loved it. It would have done nothing to endear Brown to the Catholic community in Sydney. Combative speeches and outraged responses were to continue for years.

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Both Lydia and George Brown were very busy with their pens. Lydia kept up a wide correspondence with extended family members in New Zealand and New South Wales, as well as regular pastoral letters to missionary women across the Pacific. Her caring motherly approach brought understanding of their remote situations, and she passed on news of mutual friends; the babies, the weddings, the illnesses. Letters from the islands often carried requests for items for women’s activities—school supplies, or ‘2 yards of print or turkey red (double width) hemmed at both ends’—and she did her best to find these things. Her

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46 Australasian Methodist Missionary Review, 5 July 1895.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 For example, Cardinal Moran made another critical speech in 1899 that prompted a large gathering of Protestants in Sydney Town Hall.
50 For examples, see Australasian Methodist Missionary Review, 4 August 1893, 4 October 1893.
letters always carried the promise of prayer. George Brown did not much enjoy being bound to his desk at 381 George Street, Sydney, but perhaps remembered the hurt he had experienced when his own letters from Samoa had not been answered quickly. From the desk he understood the difficulties of writing with wisdom concerning the many challenges being faced in distant places. As well as business correspondence, he wrote frequently for church and scientific journals. His life was busy as church leader, fund raiser, committee member, public speaker and active member of his new local congregation; in 1895 he and son-in-law Percy Slade were among the signatories for the certificate of title for land bought near Lindfield Railway Station for a new Methodist Church.

In July 1895, Lydia’s aged father the Reverend James Wallis died in Auckland. He was the oldest surviving Methodist minister in the colonies of Australasia, having been ordained over sixty years earlier. He was greatly respected, with strong appreciation for his years in Māori communities. At his funeral his old friend, the Reverend H.H. Lawry, spoke of ‘the lifework of his departed friend, laying special emphasis on the care and fidelity with which he trained his family in the fear of God. In both the work of the public ministry and of the home, God had crowned his labours with success.’

As the century came closer to an end, organisations for women and for youth grew stronger. In the churches, groups like the Christian Endeavour, the Mutual Improvement Societies, the Band of Hope and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union were flourishing. Large numbers of younger people gathered for local meetings and from time to time met in great combined events in the city. The women of the Brown family had a special interest in their new Ladies Auxiliary supporting women missionaries. The two single daughters, Lizzie and Monica, now invested much energy into this, with Monica taking responsibility as Secretary of the group. In a time when there were robust debates about whether a woman could represent her church community at the annual Conference, a correspondent to the church journal wrote,

Should not women as well as men have opportunity of exercising their gifts and graces? Are the domesticated Marthas to be everlastingly applauded for their cuisine, and the congenialities with which they set the table, and the spiritual, the intellectual and the philosophical Marys to be undervalued…? At the Lord’s table, in the prayer meetings, in the work of the Church, and in the hope of heaven, woman is equal to man, and on a level with him. Why, then, should she not be his associate in Conference?

George Brown agreed.

51 Methodist, 20 July 1895.
52 William Hill, Letter to the editor, in the Methodist, 11 May 1895.
Lydia Brown may well have seen herself as a ‘Martha’, a traditional home-centred woman with hospitality and personal relationships at the heart of her world. Lizzie and Monica were both equally competent in domestic matters as they were in leadership, management, music, art and teaching. Her married daughters Amy Dinning and Claudia Slade, also gifted and educated women, were both expecting babies and Lydia looked forward with delight to having her arms full of grandchildren. Her husband would go on travelling, she knew, visiting his widely flung people and taking their story across the colonies. He was already considering two new projects. For herself, she preferred to stay home in her new house and help with the babies.

53 Stanley Dinning was born on 19 November 1895. Mabel Slade was born on 8 September 1896.