

17. 'Sanctified audacity'

New South Wales, British New Guinea, New Britain, Fiji, Tonga, Solomon Islands 1896–1900

The region where once George Brown had met curious and hostile villagers was changing. The curves of coastline on the maps were familiar but the place names had become German. New Britain was now Neu Pommern. Duke of York was Neu Lauenburg. German colonial authorities were in charge. Priests and nuns from Europe, with the Sacred Heart Mission, had been in the area since 1882. In Australia, the Methodists realised that to maintain their place in that region it would be strategic to recruit a German agent. It was decided in 1896 to appoint a 'German Methodist Minister of good standing and ability,' and George Brown began the task of communicating with his counterparts in Germany.¹ By the middle of the year the Reverend Heinrich Fellmann had been selected. Brown wrote to Fellmann explaining that his aim in asking for a German missionary was to forge a strong link with the colonial authorities and to strengthen the status of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission in Neu Pommern.

The Roman Catholics seem to be able to do as they please and are openly trying to force us out of the land where we have done so much for God and the people there.... We want to assure [the German Colonial authorities] that we are extremely anxious to help them in every possible manner in their efforts to promote the well being of the native race.... We ask for no privileges which are not granted to the Roman Catholics. We simply wish to do the work God has given us to do and we never attempt to interfere with the politics of the secular government of the country.²

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Competing voices vied for Brown's attention. Messages from each of their fields of mission continued to ask for more resources or suggested new initiatives. In Sydney, the gentlemen of the Board of Missions shook their heads pessimistically in the light of the continuing financial stress. At home, the Brown family was conspicuous at the opening of the first small Methodist Church near Lindfield Railway Station on 19 April 1896; Brown preached, Lizzie played the organ,

1 Minute Book of Wesleyan Methodist Conference, New South Wales, ML 287.1/7 CY 1365, 1896.

2 George Brown to Heinrich Fellmann, 3 August 1896. In the private collection of Dr. Ulrich Fellmann.

Lydia and Monica helped with hospitality and a pregnant Claudia hoped that her baby would be the first to be baptized in the new church.³ This would be the home congregation for George and Lydia Brown for the next seven years.

That same month, in Suva, Fiji, a group of indentured labourers from the Solomon Islands approached the leaders of the Methodist Mission with a plea. They had been converted to the Christian faith while they were in Fiji, they explained, but although they had asked more than once for missionaries to go to their people in the Solomon Islands, the Methodists had always hesitated, wanting to avoid competition with the Melanesian Mission of the Anglican Church in that chain of islands. The men from the Solomon Islands were not satisfied. The Melanesian Mission was working hundreds of miles from their north-western homes, they said, and added that although the Melanesian Mission was a 'true religion' it was a 'slow religion' and had still not reached their home in Guadalcanal after many years. Their request was passed on to George Brown and the Board of Missions.⁴ Brown welcomed this approach. He had been raising the question of a new work in the Solomon Islands for years.⁵ Even so, it was not the only demand on mission resources. Requests and complaints arrived on his desk daily from the other mission Districts. He needed to visit the work in British New Guinea and Neu Pommern and grumbles about the limitations of the missionary efforts among the Indian labourers in Fiji were growing louder.⁶

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In December 1896, the young German minister, Heinrich Fellmann, arrived in Sydney. With him was his twenty-year-old bride, Johanna. Taking the newly-weds into their home, George Brown was impressed with the quality of the young man and enchanted with his bride, soon calling her his 'dear little *Tochter*'.⁷ Lydia Brown took Johanna Fellmann to her heart immediately. Johanna was beautiful and intelligent, fluent in English and French as well as her native German—and profoundly homesick for her parents, Matthaus Class, Wesleyan minister, and his wife Sophie, far away at home near Stuttgart, Germany. Lydia understood. At a similar age, she too had left her family a week after her wedding and left her home country to travel with her new husband to a foreign land. Unlike Johanna, Lydia had grown up in a missionary household in a Māori community. Johanna had recently graduated from an international school for young women in Europe.⁸ The adjustment, not only to Australia but to Neu Pommern, was going to be profound.

3 Geoffrey Stacy, *A Cloud of Witnesses: at Tryon Road Uniting Church 1896-1996*, Sydney: Lindfield Tryon Road Uniting Church Centenary Committee, 1996.

4 *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 July 1896.

5 John F. Goldie, 'The Solomon Islands,' in *A Century in the Pacific*, ed. J. Colwell, Sydney: William H. Heale, 1914, pp. 559–85, p. 565.

6 A. Harold Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church, Vol. III, Fiji-Indian and Rotuma*, Melbourne: Aldersgate Press, 1978, pp. 10–12.

7 Brown to Johanna Fellmann, 18 February 1897 (Private collection).

8 Ulrich Fellmann, 'Missionarsfrau Johanna Fellmann geb. Class und die wesleyanischen Methodisten,' *EmK – Geschichte, Quellen, Studien, Mitteilungen*, vol. 25 (2004): 5–11.



Figure 18. Rev. Heinrich and Johanna Fellmann, Sydney 1897.

Source: Fellmann Family Album, per favour Dr. Ulrich Fellmann, Aachen, Germany.

The Brown family did their best to make the young couple welcome. They discovered that Heinrich's twenty-sixth birthday was on Christmas Day and celebrated it with him in the strangeness of summer heat. In Sydney, there were shopping trips, social calls, church meetings, and a train journey into the Blue Mountains to walk with George and Lydia Brown through ancient sandstone rocks and bush of eucalypt and acacia, so remote from the linden and spruce of their homeland.⁹ Lydia Brown was worried to see how often Johanna suffered from severe headaches; new spectacles helped, but Lydia felt that the young woman's pain was linked less with eyestrain than with homesickness, the strange territory of a new marriage, a different language and an alien hemisphere. Much later Brown would remind Johanna, 'Do you remember our talk upon the veranda one day when you said, O Doctor, ten years seems to be such a long time before I shall see my Mother again.'¹⁰

On their last night together at Gordon, 28 January 1897, as the family gathered over their meal, George Brown told the tale of the tragedy of their family loss in 1879, when Lydia faced the deaths of their children in the cannibal islands without her husband. Lydia Brown may have regretted her husband's timing as insensitive.¹¹ Johanna offered the family her 'Poetry Book', with the loving messages inscribed in it by her family and friends in distant Germany. The Brown family each added their own words of blessing. Lydia wrote 'In the centre of the circle of God's love I stand....'¹² She treasured her own Autograph Book with its freight of memories.

Many missionary couples had been welcomed into their home over the years, and many had become deep and lifelong friends. This young pair touched the Browns in a particular way. After Heinrich and Johanna sailed north to their future home, George Brown wrote to Johanna of returning to the house after seeing them off and finding himself with tears in his eyes as he looked into their empty room. He joked gently about the 'German cakes made by the *kleine frau* that used to tease me so much,' and added, 'I thought of the dear good little girl who had come from the Fatherland with her dear husband to help him in his great work and I felt that she had crept into all our hearts and endeared herself to us.... We often talk about you both and think and pray about you and for you.'¹³

9 Photographs of family group with Fellmanns, and Lydia Brown with the Fellmanns in the Blue Mountains; Fellmann family photo album, in possession of Dr. Ulrich Fellmann, Aachen, Germany.

10 Brown to Johanna Fellmann, 28 November 1902. Series of personal letters in possession of Brown's great granddaughter, Miss Nancy Joyce, Sydney.

11 Ulrich Fellmann (ed.), *Von Schwaben in den Bismarckarchipel: Tagebücher der Missionarsfrau Johanna Fellmann aus Deutsch-Neuguinea 1896–1903*, Harrassovitz: Verlag, 2009, entry for 28 January 1897.

12 Lydia Brown, entry in Johanna Fellmann's Autograph Book, 28 January 1897. The Autograph Book is in the private collection of Dr. Ulrich Fellmann.

13 Brown to Johanna Fellmann, 18 February 1897.

The friendship between the Brown and Fellmann families, that had begun between a homesick young bride, her husband and a welcoming family in Sydney, was to continue unbroken into the next generations for over a century.

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It was six years since George Brown had visited British New Guinea and New Britain. He left for the north at the end of May 1897. He had suggested to his daughter Monica that she should travel with him this time, 'as I am getting very old now and they ought not to let me go alone.'¹⁴ He was in fact a very active sixty-one-year-old and Monica declined. His journey took him first to Port Moresby and then the small eastern island of Samarai where he was met by William Bromilow. For two weeks they sailed in the mission schooner *Dove*, visiting isolated mission stations in the eastern islands that had been pioneered since his previous visit.¹⁵

Brown and his companions arrived at the central island of Dobu on 9 June. The large new mission schooner *Meda*, purchased after intense fundraising, had arrived, bringing another party of teachers from Fiji. He planned to sail on to New Britain in her soon. Brown was moved to visit Dobu again, the place that he had selected in 1890 as a site for future mission work. He wrote, 'This has been one of the most memorable days in my life.'¹⁶ Where once there had been wild bush and a suspicious and indifferent people, he found houses and gardens, a church, small hospital and school, housing for teachers and students and a mission community of about one hundred people. By coincidence, Brown's arrival coincided with the sixth anniversary of the landing of the pioneer group. Now he watched as canoes came across the water from nearby Normanby Island with people coming to worship. The church was packed with people. The singing was sweet and tuneful, the many young people enthusiastic, the prayers and messages brief and lively, the congregation attentive. He later wrote,

As I looked on the large congregation and contrasted the sight with that which we saw on our first landing I felt deeply grateful to God. My eyes indeed were so full of tears that I could not read the words of the hymn. During the opening services I had the privilege of baptizing ten adult converts, who after a long trial and careful teaching and supervision were received into full membership of our Church. I have now, therefore,

14 Ibid.

15 George Brown, Journal, 7 June 1897, published in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 November 1897.

16 Brown, Journal, 10 June 1897.

baptised converts in six different languages. I preached to the people from Romans 10:12 ‘There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all who call upon him.’¹⁷

That evening, weary after a long day of preaching, meetings and a boat trip to Fergusson Island for a service held under the shade of trees, Brown saw the last of the canoes disappear under a sunset sky. He was tired but elated. The missionary team was an impressive group of people. They had ‘a strong love for all’ and shared Brown’s belief in the core of Christian faith; ‘the blessed story of God’s love to them, and to man everywhere.’¹⁸ The mission Sisters, who had come to this place as an experiment, were proving very valuable members of the team.¹⁹ The Fijian, Samoan and Tongan teachers were good people and Brown repeated his opinion that ‘we could never have made the progress which we have made but for the invaluable help of our native agents.’²⁰ Even though he knew that this could also be a place of doubt, disappointment, disease and conflict, at that moment he was profoundly thankful for what he saw. The investment of 1891—what Bromilow called the ‘sanctified audacity’²¹ of beginning mission work in such a place—was bearing fruit.²²

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The telegram came as a shock. In the warmth of her winter fireside, Lydia Brown had been imagining her husband in the tropics. The telegram painted an alarming picture. The brand new mission schooner *Meda* had been wrecked on a reef, and Brown and Bromilow were thought to have been on board.²³ The distance between her and her man was immeasurable. Was he safe? There was no way of making contact. There was nothing she could do but wait and pray with the support and care of her family, and her friends in the new congregation at Lindfield.²⁴ It was a week before another brief message arrived, this time from George himself and passed on by a passing vessel. The *Meda* was wrecked but he and Bromilow and the others were all safe. Again Lydia settled herself to wait. She, with her friends, would pray for the safety of the travellers – and for courage for herself.

17 Ibid., 13 June 1897.

18 Ibid., 13 June 1897, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 November 1897.

19 At this time, the mission sisters were: Eleanor Walker, Jeannie Tinney, Emily Newell, Minnie Billing and Julia Benjamin.

20 Brown, Journal, 10 June 1897, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 November 1897.

21 W.E. Bromilow, quoted in speech to Missionary Society, 28 Feb 1898, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 7 March 1898.

22 Brown, Journal, 13 June 1897, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 November 1897.

23 *Brisbane Courier*, 24 July 1897. The *Meda* ran aground on 15 June 1897. More detail on the wreck was published in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 November 1897.

24 The first anniversary of the Lindfield Methodist Church was celebrated on 16 May 1897. See Stacy, *A Cloud of Witnesses*.

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The loss of the *Meda* was a serious blow. Brown was forced to wait in the eastern islands of British New Guinea for another vessel. While he waited, he endeared himself to the staff by his willingness to travel anywhere with them. On one occasion, walking back from an inland village in the heat, sudden tropical darkness fell when the party was an hour's walk from home. 'So I had to consent to be carried, as I was footsore and lame and could not see the track.'²⁵ Two men made a litter, hoisted him precariously shoulder high and set off at a good pace over the rough coral track in the deep dark, while Brown nervously braced himself, expecting a heavy fall. Bromilow described the day when he and Brown sat on the ground at the centre of a crowd of villagers, sharing their meal of boiled bananas and yams taken hot from a clay cooking pot, adding, 'The Doctor has not forgotten how to adapt himself to circumstances.'²⁶

The weeks were passing, however, and George Brown knew that he was long overdue in New Britain. There was no way of letting the small mission community in the now-German colony know that the *Meda* was lost. After two months in British New Guinea, Brown decided to risk travelling on to New Britain in the little fourteen-ton schooner, *Dove*. He reached New Britain safely on 31 July 1897. The Methodists there had given up waiting for him, believing that he had returned to Australia. Johanna Fellmann, at home in the mission house at Raluana, 'could not at first recognise the strange old man in a long oilskin coat and a queer hat, who was coming up the path to the house, but as soon as she did so, I got a most hearty and loving welcome, and there was enough excitement to satisfy anyone.'²⁷

For George Brown, this was like coming home. From the mission house he could see the sweep of the bay with the distinctive shapes of the Mother and Daughter volcanoes, the dark volcanic sand, the familiar faces of the people. But there were great changes, too. Brown noted that, 'scene after scene of the early days presented itself to me. I could scarcely realise that I was in the same land in which I had lived more than twenty years ago.'²⁸

The presence of traders, explorers, scientists, plantation owners, missionaries and colonial authority in the islands was shaping a different society. Expansive, ordered plantations were in the control of outsiders. Once no white man dared land unless he was heavily armed, but now a German colonial authority ruled the region. Brown, with the Fellmanns and their colleagues William Chambers

25 Brown, Journal, 23 July 1897, published in *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 7 February 1898.

26 William Bromilow, letter published in *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 November 1897.

27 Brown, Journal, 31 July 1897, published in *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 7 February 1898.

28 *Ibid.*, 1 August 1897.

and John Crump, were entertained by German hosts.²⁹ Brown was driven along well-made roads lined with plantations of coconut and cotton, bright shrubs and telephone lines between substantial houses.³⁰ It was hard to believe that these were places where ‘wild, boisterous, excited men and women crowded around us on our first visit,’ naked, armed, aggressive, demanding trade goods.³¹ Now he saw thatched schoolrooms and church, and Johanna Fellmann’s mission house was elegant with potted palms, Chinese screen and solid furniture from Germany.³² It was no longer a region ruled by fear. Cannibalism was fading away.³³ Brown observed that,

The appearance of the people here, as in New Guinea, is wonderfully altered.... The change is indeed a very marvellous one, and we have in New Britain another proof of the great truth that ‘if any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature, old things are passed away and all things are become new.’³⁴

Children and youths with no memory of Brown’s time in the islands stared at this grey-bearded older man with curiosity. It was hard for them to imagine a time before the traders, before the Methodist or Catholic missionaries, before the plantations. They knew the name of George Brown, if not the man, from the newly established training institution for converts in the Duke of York Islands, George Brown College.³⁵ Most of the old people who, armed with slingshots and axes, had seen this white man first step on to the dark sand and bleached coral of their shore were now gone. When Brown showed his old lantern slides of the people from the past, the audience cried out ‘the dead are alive again tonight’.³⁶ Brown had been the pioneer but his time in the islands had been limited and interrupted. The sustained work had been done by men like Danks, Rooney, Rickard and the South Sea Island men. He noted in his journal, ‘I felt very thankful, indeed, to God for giving me the privilege of seeing the grand work which has been done here by the earnest, devoted men who have laboured here, and whose work He has so signally blessed.’³⁷

In a region where George Brown had experienced some of his most extreme challenges and most shattering times of depression and grief he was once more able to travel with the present mission staff. The Duke of York language came

29 Brown, Journal, 3, 4, 5 August 1897.

30 Ibid., 20 August 1897, published in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 June 1898.

31 Ibid., 31 July 1897.

32 Fellmann, *Von Schwaben in den Bismarckarchipel*, pp. 244–45, 254.

33 Brown, Journal, 9 August 1897, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 May 1898.

34 Ibid., 1 August 1897, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 7 February 1898.

35 Rev. J.A. Crump was responsible for the Training Institution, George Brown College. Land was selected for this property on Brown’s 1897 visit and it was established in 1898 at Ulu, Duke of York.

36 Brown, Journal, 12 August 1897, in *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 May 1898.

37 Ibid., 1 August 1897 in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 7 February 1898.

back up to the surface of his memory and he 'had no difficulty whatever in finding the words to speak to them again of the love of God.'³⁸ Returning to Kinawanua, he remembered 'those dark days when I and one very dear to me had to pass together through the deep waters of affliction, and what then appeared as hopeless sorrow.'³⁹ He could never forget Kinawanua, a place of hopelessness and hope, despair and redemption.

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It was time to go. Brown knew, much as he loved this region, that he could only be a visitor. Other challenges waited for him back at his office in Sydney. Although Johanna Fellmann pleaded that he should wait for the commercial steamship *Titus*, he insisted on sailing for the hub island of Samarai on the little *Dove* at the end of August 1897.

There were times during the slow journey home, when he wondered if he would ever reach his own front door and Lydia's welcome again. As he spent days in a dead calm with a choice of the insufferable heat of the little cabin or the unshaded deck,⁴⁰ he worried about the mountain of mission correspondence that must be accumulating on his office desk in Sydney. Lashed by torrential rain, he wondered what dire news his mission treasurer would have for him. After waiting in vain at Samarai for the steamer, Brown risked the hazardous passage of the Great Barrier Reef to Cooktown in the *Dove*. During the interminable five weeks it took to make the journey south to Sydney, Brown worried about all the work he ought to be doing. Fiji was one area on his mind. In the early months of the year he had been working with his Board on the longstanding issue of providing a ministry among the growing number of indentured Indian labourers on the plantations in Fiji, as well as those who had settled there. The initial appointment of an Indian catechist had ended after two years. An impassioned appeal at Conference had resulted in an application from a woman, Miss Hannah Dudley, who offered to go; Hannah Dudley had previous experience of work in India and spoke an Indian language.⁴¹ He and his Board had debated over several months whether it was right to send one woman, with no companion and few resources to support her, to attempt such a task among 10,000 Indian people. He had interviewed Miss Dudley.⁴² Just before he had left Sydney in

38 Ibid., 8 August 1897, *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 May 1898.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 27–30 August 1897, in *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 June 1898.

41 Morven Sidal, *Hannah Dudley: Hamari Maa, Honoured Mother, Educator and Missioner to the Indentured Indians of Fiji 1864–1913*, Suva: Pacific Theological College, 1998, pp. 1–6.

42 The Finance Committee of the Board received the application at their meeting on 17 March 1897, ML CY354.

early May the Board had decided to engage Hannah Dudley as a Missionary Sister but he did not know what had happened in the months since then.⁴³ He arrived home at last on 4 October. He had been away for almost five months.

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Lydia Brown welcomed home her husband with relief. Monica was glad she had chosen not to go with him. With her daughters, Lydia found it best to go on with her own life in his absence. There was plenty of family news to share: Fred's wedding planned for February 1898 to Eva Bloomfield; Geoffrey's studies and his courtship of Ada Price; Lizzie was learning to use a typewriter, Monica working hard as Secretary of the Ladies Auxiliary and as a public speaker. Lydia often caught the train to visit Claudia. Her grandchildren delighted her and Brown teased that if Amy's children had lived nearer to Sydney 'we would never have Mrs Brown at home.'⁴⁴ The community of Methodists in the new congregation at Lindfield, friends in her neighbourhood of Gordon and the scattered missionary community all gave Lydia a sphere where she could give and receive love. For her family she remained the secure anchor of their world.

George Brown now had to drag his mind back to everything that had been going on in his absence. It was hard, at first, to feel at home on a crowded city street. Work was continuing on the building site between the church offices and the Town Hall where workmen and artisans created dust and noise raising the splendid domes, stonework and stained glass of the Queen Victoria Building. The financial depression continued and his mission treasurer brought him grim reports of dwindling resources made worse by the wreck of the new ship *Meda*. Public debate continued about the possibility of a Federation of the colonies and church debate still struggled over the question of union of the several streams of Methodism. Brown took an active interest in both issues and was irritated when, after more than twenty years of debate on Methodist Union, the Wesleyan Conference in NSW in 1898 still failed to reach a conclusion.

As he had predicted, his desk was piled with work to be done, with urgent pleas from every mission region for more financial resources and stern warnings from his Finance Committee that he must reduce spending as their debt was becoming more and more alarming. It had been very different in 1891 when he had been able to arrange substantial resources for the New Mission in British New Guinea. While he had been away, the Ladies Auxiliary had committed their members to supporting Hannah Dudley in Fiji and had given her a fine farewell in August, but Brown was anxious about the rather loose arrangements

43 Minute Book of Wesleyan Methodist Conference, New South Wales, ML 287.1/7 CY 1365, 5 May 1897.

44 Brown to Johanna Fellmann, 24 February 1898.

that had been made.⁴⁵ When General Conference met in Auckland at the end of the year, there was considerable criticism of the contrast between the vast resources poured into British New Guinea and what seemed an inadequate and half-hearted effort in Fiji, and the Board was instructed to address the needs of the Indians in Fiji 'on a more aggressive and comprehensive scale'.⁴⁶ In the face of the criticism, it was a comfort to hear that, while visiting Sydney, Sir William Macgregor had said publicly of the Methodist mission in British New Guinea 'that there was no better conducted mission in the world ... he could testify from personal knowledge that they were not simply inspired by a temporary enthusiasm but that they worked as well today as when they first landed.'⁴⁷

'The Board thinks I must visit some of the Districts each year,' Brown wrote.⁴⁸ He had no objections. Despite the inevitable hazards of travel and the fact that he would often become ill far from home, Brown valued the opportunities to speak face to face with mission staff rather than through the filter of letters. It was true, however, that every time he went away the regular work of the Missions office was neglected. It was a great relief to him when his old friend and colleague, Benjamin Danks, who had shared some of the worst moments of his time in New Britain, was appointed to the role of Organising Secretary for Foreign Missions. Lydia and George Brown welcomed the Danks family from Victoria with an 'At Home' at 'Kinawanua', Gordon, on 7 May 1898.⁴⁹ The bond between Lydia Brown and Ben and Emma Danks was very strong. The younger couple held Lydia in very high regard. The two families would continue to be close friends and colleagues for the rest of their lives.

In 1898 George Brown was able to visit New Zealand, Fiji and Samoa. In Fiji there were some tense meetings with newer staff and a difficult encounter with Hannah Dudley.⁵⁰ Brown met with other mission staff and Miss Dudley; 'our unanimous opinion was that if we are to do any real work here, we shall have to adopt other and more effective means,' he wrote,⁵¹ but ambitions to provide more staff were being thwarted by lack of funds.⁵² Despite assuring her that he admired her work, Brown left Hannah Dudley disappointed that there were no

45 Minute Book of Wesleyan Methodist Conference, New South Wales, ML 287.1/7 CY 1365, 19 August 1897.

46 Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church, Vol. 111, Fiji-Indian and Rotuma*, p. 12.

47 Minute Book of Wesleyan Methodist Conference, New South Wales, ML 287.1/7 CY 1365, 28 January 1898.

48 Brown, letter to Johanna Fellmann, 14 September 1898.

49 *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 June 1898.

50 The Reverend Frederick Langham served as Chairman of the Fiji Methodist District from 1869 until 1895. In 1898 the new chairman was the Reverend W.W. Lindsay, with H.H. Nolan, A.J. Small, W.A. Burns, Jennison, W. Slade and J. Bathgate as colleagues.

51 Brown, Journal, 14 July 1898, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 December 1898.

52 Ibid.

funds available to employ her sister to help her.⁵³ It was not an easy journey. Brown was ill with flu as he travelled by sea and land to visit remote places and after a very long and poorly timed journey on horseback and on foot through the central mountains of Viti Levu he admitted that he had ‘often been tired in my life but I was never so utterly tired out as I was during those last two miles.’⁵⁴ Then it was on to Samoa, a place of so many memories shared with a young Lydia, and more sea and land travel. At Satupa’itea, where they had established their first home together, he opened a fine large church and witnessed the largest communal feast he had ever seen. His camera captured many images of the occasion, including thirty carriers bearing his own portion away after the formal distribution of food; his personal share of ten pigs, a thousand head of taro, a great many bunches of bananas and two roots of kava was ‘a very fair dinner for one man’.⁵⁵

Travel was as natural as breathing to George Brown but he knew that many Australians rarely left their home district. If only they could see for themselves the way in which the gospel of Christ was transforming societies, he thought, they would be inspired to be generous and the financial woes of the mission would be over. An idea took shape and an advertisement appeared for a ‘Winter Excursion’ to visit the mission enterprises of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Australasia. It would leave Sydney in June 1899 for a round trip through British New Guinea, Kaiserwilhelmsland, Neu Pommern and the Solomon Islands, with George Brown as tour guide.⁵⁶

The steamship *SS Moresby* sailed from Sydney Harbour on 18 June 1899 with what Brown described as a ‘very miscellaneous collection’ of missionaries as well as a small group making the Winter Excursion. With Anglican, Lutheran, London Missionary Society and Methodist missionaries there were also a group of Roman Catholic nuns, brothers, a priest and two Bishops. An old friend who had once travelled on another long voyage with George Brown would write of him that, ‘he had captured all whom he met; the captain on the bridge, the seaman in the fore-castle, commercial travellers, passengers, women, children ... where ever he touched he left his mark. He found God in everything; all loved him.’⁵⁷ If there was a time when this might be tested, it was now.

53 Hannah Dudley had been shocked to discover that a person she had employed to care for the little ones had been abusing some of them.

54 Brown, Journal, 20 June 1898, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 December 1898.

55 *Ibid.*, 13 July–6 August 1898, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 April 1899. Photos of this event are in the photographic Album of George Brown, held at the Australian Museum, Sydney.

56 ‘Winter Excursion,’ invitation from Australasian Methodist Missionary Society, signed by Brown, to the public to join a tour of Society’s mission fields in the South Pacific, departing Sydney, 1 June 1899, returning Sydney, 14 July 1899, Petherick Room, NLA JAFp BIBLIO F6291a.

57 Dr. Fitchett, speaking after Brown’s death at the Methodist General Conference, quoted in the *Methodist*, 26 May 1917.

Only days before they sailed, Brown attended a special meeting of the Board of Missions to discuss serious confrontations between Roman Catholics, Methodists and other Protestants, in Fiji, Samoa and Sydney.⁵⁸ Ever since he had witnessed a violent encounter between Scots Protestants and Irish Catholics in Montreal when he had been a young sailor in Canada in 1853, he had been aware of the depth of antagonism between these branches of Christianity.⁵⁹ Over the years he had debated with Catholic missionaries and bishops in Samoa, Fiji and New Britain. Recently, the French Bishop Julien Vidal in Fiji had been sharply critical of the Methodists there. The Irish Cardinal Moran in Sydney had outraged the Protestant community by writing in scathing terms of what he saw as the failures of most Protestant missions in the Pacific. No love was lost between the groups. Public debates and immoderate letters to the newspapers fuelled the fire. Among other statements that incensed the Methodists was the accusation by Cardinal Moran that a new translation of the Bible into Fijian, recently completed by Brown's friend Frederick Langham, was 'a book of lies, for many parts are absent from it, and very much is misinterpreted, but in the Catholic School they will be able to read the true original, they will hold the Sacred book in their hands in English.'⁶⁰ Now Brown discovered that he would have the company of both Bishop Julien Vidal from Fiji and Bishop Broyer from Samoa on board *SS Moresby* for many weeks, and there would be no escape.

The *Moresby* sailed north into tropical waters, while in Sydney the furore between Catholic and Protestant increased in volume and acrimony. Protestants were challenging Cardinal Moran to substantiate his allegations against Protestant missionaries in Samoa.⁶¹ Brown, however, had found some common ground with his Catholic fellow passengers. Within days of the public debates in Sydney, near Port Moresby Brown and a large party from the visiting ship accepted the gracious hospitality of the priests and nuns at the Catholic Mission on Yule Island. The whole community had gathered for a Retreat and Brown was impressed—and envious—to meet fifteen priests, sixteen lay brothers and twenty-one nuns. He enjoyed a long conversation with Archbishop Navarre; Navarre had arrived in New Britain not long after Brown had left there in the early 1880s.⁶²

58 Minute Book of Wesleyan Methodist Conference, New South Wales, ML MOM 203 CY 3305, 7 and 14 June 1899.

59 George Brown, *George Brown: Pioneer-Missionary and Explorer: An Autobiography*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908, pp.12–13. In Montreal in 1853, the Orange Order organised speeches by the fiercely anti-Catholic and anti-Irish former priest Alessandro Gavazzi, resulting in a violent confrontation between the Scots and the Irish.

60 *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 July 1899.

61 Ibid.

62 Brown, Journal, 9 July 1899, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 October 1899; Brown, *George Brown: Pioneer-Missionary and Explorer*, p. 507; John Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania*, Geneva: World Council of Churches Publication, 1982, pp. 237–38.

The ship sailed on. They visited the Methodist work in British New Guinea, landed Pastor Flierl and his party at the Lutheran Mission at Simbang, and reached New Britain in late July, much later than expected. Here again there was ambivalence about the relationship between Catholic and Methodist missionaries. Fellmann and Chambers recently had been involved in a court case over land claimed by both Catholics and Methodists. Yet Heinrich and Johanna Fellmann told Brown of the great kindness of Catholic Bishop Louis Couppé when Johanna had been dangerously ill with malaria the previous year.⁶³ By the time Bishop Vidal and his party left the ship, on an island near Guadalcanal in order for the Bishop to establish his pioneer missionary group in the Solomon Islands, Brown had been in their company for thousands of miles. Brown recorded their landing without rancour, adding that there was no sign of any Protestant missionary work in the western Solomon Islands.⁶⁴ Neither Brown nor Vidal would have been aware that only days before the two men had parted there had been a very large, noisy and acrimonious 'United Protestant Demonstration' in Sydney Town Hall, where representatives of many missionary societies expressed their indignation about accusations against their Societies by Cardinal Moran.⁶⁵ The grand 'Winter Excursion' came to harbour in Sydney again on 22 August 1899. They had travelled for nine weeks over 6,000 miles.

Brown had much to ponder. Of all the regions he had seen during that voyage, the area that stayed in his mind was the Solomon Islands. He had visited, unwillingly, that string of islands in 1880 as he struggled to return to Lydia following the court case in Fiji. This time he had returned once more to the beautiful region of Roviana Lagoon. He could not get out of his mind the pleas of the men from the Solomon Islands who had met with him in Fiji the previous year. The spokesman had said, 'Why, sir, when we first asked for a teacher, [British] New Guinea was heathen, and now we hear of the great success there, whilst our people are heathen still.'⁶⁶ It was true. Twenty years earlier he had tried to contact a principal chief in the area but his advances had been rejected. It was the same this time. Principal chief Ingava made it clear that 'for one reason or another, neither he nor his people want missionaries to live here.'⁶⁷ Brown wrote in his journal that the Roviana people

are all head hunters and still make raids on neighbouring islands to obtain these ghastly trophies, especially when a new *tambu* house is

63 Fellmann, *Von Schwaben in den Bismarckarchipel*, p. 255.

64 Brown, Journal 10 August 1899, in *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 November 1899.

65 *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 7 August 1899. Protestant Missionary Societies represented included Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational, London Missionary Society, Baptist and Council of Churches.

66 Brown, Journal, 10 August 1899, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 November 1899.

67 *Ibid.*, 3 August 1899, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 November 1899.

being built, or a canoe launched.... I wish that our Church would give some of us the opportunity of beginning Christian work amongst them. It would be a glorious work to win these souls for Christ and I am sure it can be done.⁶⁸

* * *

'I must hurry to write to you,' wrote Lydia Brown as she began a letter to Johanna Fellmann, 'for I know you will be disappointed if there is no letter from me.'⁶⁹ The next ship to leave for New Guinea and Neu Pommern was due to leave very soon and the women of the Brown family were busy with their correspondence. Lydia Brown had the official role of Corresponding Secretary for the Ladies Auxiliary. She knew the missionary wives and single women well. Many of them had visited her home. She understood from her own experience the value of a simple letter. Invisible webs of care and friendship were being woven, threads that would cross oceans and bring comfort to other women, linking them in ways that went beyond the deliberations of Board meetings or the columns of financial figures that ruled their world. The letters spoke of babies and growing children, of the anxieties of pregnancy, of understanding what it was like to be alone at home while a husband was away for weeks at a time. There was always news of mutual friends.

The place and value of the women, married and single, as part of the Methodist missionary work was constantly being brought to the attention of George Brown by the women in his private world. Lydia's place had always been central and he valued the practical contribution made by many missionary wives.⁷⁰ Their single daughters were intelligent, educated and capable women. Lydia wrote of them, 'Monica is as energetic as ever and so is Lizzie, who is very conscientious in all her work.'⁷¹ Not everyone saw the value of a wider role for women in church and community. Voting rights for women were still being debated in the community,⁷² and women could still not take a seat in the Conference of the Methodist Church. Although other Protestant missions employed women, and missionary nuns worked in the Pacific, very few Methodist women had been employed until the end of the nineteenth century. In earlier days, an isolated Lydia Brown had waited hopefully for mail and now she was determined to send regular letters to women who were teaching women and girls, offering health care, caring for orphaned and neglected children and instructing young people

68 Ibid.

69 Lydia Brown to Johana Fellmann, 24 September 1900.

70 An example is Mrs Heighway in Fiji; *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 September 1900.

71 Lydia Brown to Johanna Fellmann, 1 March 1904.

72 Suffrage for women was granted in 1902 in both NSW and the Commonwealth of Australia.

in the Christian faith. Some had discovered that life in a missionary setting was more mundane and ordinary than they had imagined. One mission Sister told Lydia,

I have just been trying to imagine how great a difference there must have been between your first impressions of mission life in New Britain many years ago and mine here in Dobu during the last three months.... Dr Brown has told of the terrible hardships you had to meet in your isolated position, in the midst of cannibalism and savagery, and how the trials were intensified by the infrequent intercourse with the colonies. How very unlike that is to our position here.⁷³

It would not be cannibals who disturbed such women, Lydia knew. It was more likely to be illness and isolation, the periodic abrasions of living with other women, the frustrations of having little voice in making decisions, the hurt when relationships within a small community went awry and lack of recognition.⁷⁴ From her suburban home on the northern outskirts of Sydney Lydia Brown now reached out to distant women. She knew that her own name had not been forgotten in the islands; the newly established college on Ulu Island for training local leadership was to be called Lydia College, and in New Guinea a mission boat was named the *Litia*. She still remembered what it was like to live where the younger women now lived, even though she was now an ageing grandmother.

‘The others are gone to bed,’ wrote the quiet woman, ‘and I still have a letter to write to one of the Sisters in New Guinea, so I will wish you goodbye for this time. You take care of yourself and with God’s blessing all will be well. Give my love to your husband and to your own dear self, in which my family unite. Believe me, dear Mrs Fellmann, Yours very sincerely, S.L. Brown.’⁷⁵

* * *

There must have been many times, as the century moved to its close, when being in the Mission office gave George Brown a very bad headache. He was being dragged in many directions. They should employ more staff—and withdraw staff because of their catastrophic debt. He needed to travel—and he needed to be available in the city office. He was invited often to promote mission work in city and rural congregations—and he was advised to care for his health and stay home. Some people accused him of timidity and lack of faith while others accused him of recklessness in the light of the debt. It was all impossible. In his

73 Sister Edith Lloyd to Lydia Brown, 19 February 1899; Sister Julia Benjamin to Lydia Brown, 20 March 1899, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 6 May 1899.

74 Annual Report of Australasian Methodist Missionary Society for 1897–98. In formal reports, male missionaries were listed by name but the single women were not (NLA N 266.7 MET).

75 Lydia Brown to Mrs Johanna Fellmann, 24 September 1900.

report for 1898 he stated, 'There was never a time in the history of our Mission when the success of our great work was more evident than it is today, and never had we more pressing demands for help than we receive from our mission districts by every mail ... but the Board is powerless because the necessary funds are not furnished.'⁷⁶

By 1900, despite every effort by the financial managers and the mission fundraisers to stem the tide, they had gone even further backwards. It broke George Brown's heart. Every mission District sent requests for help to maintain good work and begin new and urgently needed enterprises. Brown admitted to feeling 'very sad and troubled as he read letter after letter.' He was 'sometimes sorely tried and dispirited.'⁷⁷

His report for 1900 was ready to be presented. It was a difficult report to bring to the Annual Meeting and of all the duties of the Board, he admitted,

The most painful of all is to be compelled to refuse the most pathetic appeals for help, knowing at the same time that the assistance sought is sorely needed.... If the funds necessary for the carrying out of Christ's command be not given, then the work cannot be done, and the Church itself must accept the responsibility attaching to such a failure.⁷⁸

Brown knew that he must offer leadership in being disciplined, but found that he couldn't help himself. His heart was fighting with his sense of what was probably sensible. In the face of pessimism and despondency, even though it made no sense, he made a speech.

He felt himself growing old, but he would count it one of the honours of his life if they would commission him to found a new mission in the Solomon Islands.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 7 March 1898.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 8 January 1900.

⁷⁸ Annual Report of Missionary Society, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 10 March 1900.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*