

## 20. 'Grand old man of Methodist Missions'

### Australia, South Africa, United Kingdom, Solomon Islands 1907–1912

Applause broke out as the entire Conference stood to honour the Reverend Dr. George Brown. Memories of George Brown as a thorn in the side of Conference, or as an embarrassment to the worthies of Methodism seemed to have faded with his announcement of retirement. After a missionary career spanning forty-seven years and many fields, the words of appreciation flowed. He was, they said, their 'grand old man of Methodist Missions ... full of missionary enthusiasm and possessed of a unique knowledge of the Polynesian races ... a trusted leader in all our missionary forward movements, and a brother beloved and revered by all the missionaries on the field ... enjoyed the confidence and affection of the native races in all the Districts under our care.'<sup>1</sup>

They wished him 'a prolonged and restful eventide.'<sup>2</sup> Brown was not planning a restful eventide, however, and assured them that he had 'not lost one particle of love for mission work and would do all he could to carry on the work.'<sup>3</sup> He was given a formal designation as Honorary General Secretary with Benjamin Danks as his successor as General Secretary, and retained his seat on the Board of Missions. During the period of transition which would last into 1908 he would continue to participate in meetings and all the general work of the Board, would write more letters to the press under his nom de plume 'Carpe Diem' on the politics of colonial rule in the Pacific region and would go on writing his autobiography. However, when the mission ship *George Brown* sailed for New Britain in July 1907, it was Benjamin Danks who sailed with the ship, not Brown.

During that final year before formal retirement, a collection was made across the nation for a gift for Dr. and Mrs. Brown 'in the coming eventide of their lives.'<sup>4</sup> It was true that the sun was setting for people who had been dear to him. When he learned of the death of an old friend, Lorimer Fison, Brown wrote of his sense

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1 Minutes of Methodist Missions Board, 1906–1909, 17 April 1907.

2 *Methodist*, June 1907.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 December 1907.

of loneliness at the loss of almost the last of his friends from the early years of missionary work, men who had mentored and ministered to him, challenged and comforted him over the years. The reminders of mortality gave urgency to Brown as he thought of everything he still wanted to achieve.

The book manuscript was still incomplete but he had a publisher. As soon as he could relinquish the responsibilities of office in March 1908, he planned to carry his book to London where the publishing house of Hodder and Stoughton would help him with publication. It was twenty years since he had last been to England and he was excited about the prospect. Lydia made it clear that she would not make the journey with him; her little granddaughter Amy Eadith was now a four year old and needed her at home. Their daughters Lizzie and Monica would be his travelling companions and Lizzie would go on working with the unwieldy manuscript.

A new challenge was before the Board that year. In 1906, while visiting London and the British Methodist Missionary Society, the President General of the Methodist Church in Australasia, the Reverend Dr. W.H. Fitchett had been asked whether his church would consider accepting responsibility for a mission district in Jabalpur Province in North India. Fitchett offered to visit that region while he was on the way home to Australia and wrote that ‘there is wakening a sense that we ought to take some part in the Christianization of India. God has signally blessed our missions in the South Seas; may we not expect that He will open the way for us for service in one of the greatest fields of Christian work on the planet?’<sup>5</sup>

The Board of Missions did not warm to the idea at first. Their finances were already very tight. The region in North India was unrelated to the places of origin of the Indians now living in Fiji. In addition, the work that the British mission hoped to pass to them was unlike their usual model of mission; it was based on an orphanage with the hope that the children would be converted to the Christian faith. The Australian Methodists were prepared to accept new work in India on condition that it should be evangelistic, located in a region from whence the indentured labourers in Fiji had come and would provide training for future staff who would work in Fiji among the Indian population.<sup>6</sup>

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Every three years since 1881, George Brown had attended the Methodist General Conference as it gathered leaders from all the colonies to meet in one of their cities. In June 1907, General Conference met in the familiar space of the Centenary Hall in Sydney. He presented his final report as General Secretary

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5 Minutes of Methodist Missions Board, 1906–1909, 5 February 1908.

6 Ibid.; *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 March 1908.

and was encouraged when the meeting resolved that it was their 'distinct duty and privilege to maintain our missions in the Pacific in thorough efficiency and as opportunity offers, determines to extend them to the islands that are not at present evangelized.'<sup>7</sup>

With renewed financial buoyancy and under pressure from Fitchett and the Victorian Conference, General Conference directed the Board to pursue a plan for Australian mission staff to prepare for work in India. The recurring theme of lay representation in Fiji was still a live issue. The missionaries in Fiji, despite their threats of resignation in 1905, were still at their posts. Conference assured them that their faithful work in the rapidly changing social conditions of Fiji was recognised but insisted that the principle of lay representation must be adopted in 1908.<sup>8</sup> Brown participated in the long and keen debate and saw, in the end, an overwhelming majority vote to grant the new Constitution to the Methodist Church in Fiji, 'conferring the right upon each circuit to send a Lay Representative to the Fiji Financial Synod.'<sup>9</sup> The Methodists in Samoa were now asking for similar rights.<sup>10</sup>

The people of the Methodist Church farewelled George Brown handsomely, offering him glowing speeches and gifts. A speaker hoped that 'your dear wife, Mrs Brown, may be spared to you in health and strength for many years.'<sup>11</sup> In his reply, Brown said that he was 'thankful for the past days, rich in happy memories, and he owed much to his wife, who had been through times of stress and danger with him.'<sup>12</sup> Perhaps he recalled an old tale from the Samoan years where someone had dared to imply that Brown might be tempted to beat his wife. One who knew them both well wrote later, 'The idea of anyone attempting to beat Mrs Brown, who though exceedingly quiet and good tempered was full of feminine fire of the right kind, was sufficiently amusing; but that her husband who loved her and leaned upon her, should take to the stick was the greatest joke on record.'<sup>13</sup>

With warm applause in his ears, Brown took his seat at the end of the recognition of his retirement.<sup>14</sup> The old man and his old wife had survived. He had loved and leaned on Lydia through it all. Danger from cannibals, disease and at sea,

7 Minute Book, Methodist Church General Conference, 1890–1913, ML Methodist Church 581.

8 Ibid.

9 *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 March 1908.

10 Ibid., 4 February 1908.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 C. Brunson Fletcher, 'George Brown and the Pacific,' *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal and Proceedings*, vol. 7, pt. 1, 1921: 1–54, p.39.

14 *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 April 1908.

danger from errors of judgement and the sharp sting of criticism; they had arrived at the moment of retirement with honour, after all. A letter from one of the younger missionaries in Fiji at that time touched him. J.W. Burton wrote,

I sometimes think that we younger fellows are not as considerate as we might be. Never mind, Doctor, though we often make you the butt of our complaints—perhaps often unjustly—we all love you personally and I know your warm heart is glad because of that. We shall be sorry when a new General Secretary takes your place.<sup>15</sup>

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If he had thought this was an end to his work, George Brown might have been filled with grief at the stripping away of many things that gave his life meaning. It was not. As he planned to sail for England, he anticipated a life full of interest. He would complete his manuscript. He would organise his museum and home library and write other scientific papers and perhaps books. He was still a member of the Board of Mission. In London he would visit the British Methodists and negotiate the most appropriate way for Australian Methodists to begin new missionary work in India. The final annual report he presented as General Secretary of Missions included a potential beginning. The list of missionary appointments now included: 'India. Two to be sent.'<sup>16</sup>

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Since 1905, 'Father's book' had loomed large in the Brown family. There was such a wealth of material to be arranged. Brown had always encouraged others to keep their archival documents and had been very diligent in keeping his own. Now he had access to a vast archive as well as his own memories. With Lizzie's help, he had arranged it into chapters covering the large themes and contexts of his life; England, Canada and New Zealand, then Samoa, New Britain, Tonga, British New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. His selections had been, to a degree, self-serving. He had left out most references to his immediate family, though that may well have been at the insistence of his wife and daughters. He had conflated to a single paragraph many years of inter-mission conflict over the resumption of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission in Samoa in 1857, concluding,

I have always felt that the question as to whether it was expedient to resume the Mission after the lapse of so many years might at one time have been fairly questioned ... but the position I took up was that I was sent to Samoa by the Conference to take charge of our people in that group, and that it was my duty to be a loyal servant to the Conference.<sup>17</sup>

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15 J.W. Burton to George Brown, c.1908, ML MSS 263/1 \*7-939c; CY 3405.

16 *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 April 1908.

17 George Brown, *George Brown: Pioneer-Missionary and Explorer: An Autobiography*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908, pp. 29–30.

He ignored completely the years of dissension between himself and his brother-in-law J.W. Wallis, barely mentioned his own deep depression and frequent illnesses and reduced fourteen years of work in Samoa to a series of adventurous tales about coastal travel, hurricanes and tribal warfare. The five years of the beginning of the New Mission in New Britain had been the central point of his life, despite the fact that he had been away from the region for many months during that period; compared to a single paragraph about troubles in Samoa he devoted six chapters to events related to New Britain. Brown believed that he needed to justify his actions in 1878 and wrote in great detail, admitting that he had been intemperate in his reaction to criticism. 'I am older now and I hope that I am a wiser man than I was at that time.'<sup>18</sup> His writing on the three-year period of trying to make peace in a divided Church in Tonga threatened to overwhelm the whole manuscript; in the end he was persuaded to cut out a large portion of this material.<sup>19</sup> The vivid tales of the beginnings of the two new missions in British New Guinea and in the Solomon Islands were taken almost verbatim from journal entries and articles he had written at the time. Some themes were missing by choice. Endless debates over representation and inclusion, the long struggles for funding, difficulties, disappointments, the struggles of the work among the Indian population of Fiji, the newest proposal for an Australian work in India; there was no room for these in his book. His audience, he may have believed, would respond to his famous tales of cannibal chiefs and escapes from shipwreck but would find the sorry stories of failure or frustration too depressing. The weighty manuscript was still not finished but he assured his daughters that they would complete it during the long voyage to London.

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In March 1908, George Brown sailed for England with his daughters Mary Elizabeth and Monica. After years of sea travel in small vessels in the arc of the Pacific, Tasman and Coral Seas, this time he was travelling on the *SS Suevic*, a comparatively new and luxurious steam ship of 12,500 tons. Lydia Brown moved in with her daughter Claudia and Percy Slade and their family of little girls. Lydia knew that her help in that busy household would be valued. As so often before during their married life, her link with her husband would be through letters. As the *Suevic* steamed west along the southern coast of Australia, Brown looked forward with enthusiasm to his first opportunity to visit the ports of Durban and Cape Town in South Africa and meet once more his relatives, church friends and colleagues in the scientific world in England. Even so, he admitted to Lydia that 'I cannot say that I enjoy going to sea as I once

<sup>18</sup> Brown, *George Brown: Pioneer-Missionary and Explorer*, p. 271.

<sup>19</sup> The original manuscript version is held in the Mitchell Library, ML A 4096-97.

did,<sup>20</sup> and discovered that a combination of rough weather and little privacy meant that his grand plan of finishing his book during the voyage was doomed to failure. Brown was missing Lydia more than ever. Writing during the voyage, he told Lydia,

I have been thinking over the years we have spent together and I often feel very thankful to God for giving me such a dear good wife and one who has been such a help to me in my work. I know how you disparage yourself and often talk as if you were of little use in the world but this is not so. People often speak kindly of the work which I have done but no one knows so well as I know it that, if I had not been blessed with the wife I have, a lot of that work would never have been done. This is a simple fact. You have let me go to the work to which God called me without murmuring and this has enabled me to do that for which men praise me today. You and I however know that the praise is not to us but to the loving Father who has blessed and strengthened us in the work which he gave us to do.... It seems to me indeed that I think about you oftener this time than I have ever done before though I scarcely see how that is possible. God bless and keep you my own dear wife.<sup>21</sup>

Eight weeks after leaving Sydney, Brown and his daughters reached London. He visited his publishers on 22 May 1908 and discussed his manuscript. Methodists in London welcomed him. Invitations to speak at church functions began to come in and a new generation found themselves entertained and moved by his storytelling, his humour and his evangelistic fervour. An English observer wrote of a degree of hero worship that surrounded Brown and noted that Brown aimed at 'self-sustaining native churches, both as to men and to means. Christianity was not to be an exotic, kept by expensive European machinery but was to root itself in the soil and adapt itself to the climate. He had a great love for the Polynesian people and resented the name "savage".<sup>22</sup>

Carrying the bundle of manuscript with them in their baggage, Brown and his daughters caught the train to the north to spend time in his old home town of Barnard Castle on the hillside above the River Tees, with his half-sister Emily Brown and Dixon cousins. Lizzie was prepared to continue to work with her father on the book but first she had to catch him. On board ship his excuse had been lack of privacy. Now he had a busy itinerary and was constantly travelling. With some frustration Lizzie complained to Johanna Fellmann, who was in Germany on furlough at that time. Until her father returned to Barnard Castle to complete the revisions of the manuscript, she and Monica would not be free to

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20 Brown to Lydia Brown, 15 April 1908.

21 Ibid.

22 Joseph Nettleton, *The Foreign Field of the Wesleyan Methodist Church Vol. IV 1907–08*, London: Wesleyan Methodist Mission House, 1908, pp.193–98.

visit the Fellmanns.<sup>23</sup> At last the manuscript was completed and was published in London late in 1908 to some fanfare among the Methodists. A presentation copy was sent, with compliments, to Kaiser Wilhelm as a sign of respect as so much of the story was located in the regions now part of the colonies of Germany. It was a handsome large book bound in red covers, rich with photographic plates and a map of the Pacific with many of the island regions coloured Empire pink. A dedication read simply: 'To My Wife'.

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In a Sydney of summer heat and drought, Lydia Brown thought of her husband and daughters in the bitter cold of a northern winter. She was content and busy living with Claudia Slade and her family but watched eagerly for letters from England. She told a friend, 'Everyone wonders at Dr Brown being so full of life and energy and my dear daughters have improved very much in health, the change and rest have done them both good. They are just beginning to talk about coming home.... I hope before very long we will again be united.'<sup>24</sup>

George Brown and his daughters were not ready to return to Australia yet. Brown would admit later that he was 'so busy and going about so much in England.'<sup>25</sup> They visited relatives and friends, met the scientific community and both George and Monica Brown were invited to speak in churches. He told Lydia, who had always declared that she could never speak in public, 'If you cannot talk in public you can and do talk to people by the gently loving life you live.'<sup>26</sup> It was an exciting time to be in England, with suffragist marches, the opening of the vast Franco-British Exhibition and a chance to be at the centre of Empire. For Brown, as he was selling his book, it was a time to see the Pacific from the perspective of London, islands that were fabled, very far away and only a minor part of the global vision of the Methodists. It was gratifying to be described as one 'known all over the world as one of the intrepid pioneers of missions in the Southern Seas'<sup>27</sup> but sitting among the many hundreds gathered in the Royal Albert Hall for the 'Great Methodist Missionary Meeting' on 3 May 1909, Brown knew he was only a small part of a wide panorama of Methodist missions around the world.

George Brown and his daughters did not sail for Australia until 29 July 1909. Once more they sailed with the *SS Suevic* along with nearly five hundred other passengers, passing through dangerous winter storms as they crossed the Indian

23 Mary Elizabeth Brown to Johanna Fellmann, Barnard Castle, 1908. Private collection.

24 Lydia Brown to Johanna Fellmann, 30 January 1909.

25 Brown to Lydia Brown, 6 August 1908.

26 Ibid.

27 Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 'Review of George Brown D.D., *Pioneer Missionary and Explorer: An Autobiography*,' in *The Foreign Field of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, no. 56, vol. 5 (April 1909).

Ocean; it was feared that they would have to take to the lifeboats.<sup>28</sup> Two other passenger liners were lost that winter on that route to Australia, but yet again George Brown arrived safely home, landing in Sydney on 17 September 1909.<sup>29</sup>

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If there was a period of comparative calm following George Brown's retirement from his official work, it was the next few years. He told a friend, 'I very seldom go to the office now except to meetings of the Board. I am glad to have less worry and anxiety.'<sup>30</sup> He added in another letter, 'Lizzie helps me when I want her and does a lot of housework. Monica helps everyone I think and is always up to her neck in work for the Auxiliary and the Church. The *Alte Frau* and I just jog along quietly.'<sup>31</sup>

He spent many contented hours in his personal museum of objects and memories, working with his photographic collection, preparing a Samoan Hymn Book and Catechism for the press and writing another book that brought together his years of observations on the geography, languages, art, technology, folklore, religion, customs and culture of the people of the Pacific. This work, *Melanesians and Polynesians: Their Life Histories Described and Compared*, was published in October 1910 in London.<sup>32</sup> That year he travelled to Adelaide for General Conference where he was excited about the ambitious plans of the new leadership for the period 1911–13 with the launch of the Forward Policy for Missions.

Fifty years had passed since Brown arrived in Raglan, New Zealand, to ask young Lydia Wallis to marry him. During one of his long absences from home, Brown wrote recalling his memories of her as the 'bright happy girl' on their honeymoon trek through the wintry bush of New Zealand, and on board the tiny *John Wesley*, sailing for Samoa. Teasingly, he added, 'Though you did think that I was tired of you after three weeks of married life ... I only wish I was with you.'<sup>33</sup> Now, after all they had shared over the fifty years, George and Lydia Brown gathered their whole family around them to celebrate their Golden Wedding on 2 August 1910. Brown knew that Lydia's love had not wavered, despite the demands his peripatetic life had placed on her, and that he would always come home to her. The two had learned well the intimate language of their marriage, with its moods and nuances, subtle signs and unspoken

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28 Mary Elizabeth Brown to her aunt, Mrs Anna Caukwell, 2 September 1909, on board *SS Suevic*.

29 The ship *SS Maori* was wrecked in the storm through which *Suevic* passed. The new liner *SS Waratah* disappeared without trace as *Suevic* left Liverpool.

30 Brown to Johanna Fellmann, 5 July 1910.

31 *Ibid.*, 19 September 1910.

32 George Brown, *Melanesians and Polynesians: Their Life-Histories Described and Compared*, London: Macmillan and Co, 1910.

33 Brown to Lydia Brown, 3 September 1908.

understanding. The quiet loving woman offered the restless passionate man a place to rest, a strength against which he could lean. So often over the years Lydia had been parted from either her husband or her children. Now they were all together, and the bond of love was unbroken.

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If George Brown imagined that he would now invest in a rocking chair and settle to gentle domestic pursuits for his declining years he was mistaken. He had recently been appointed vice-president of the British and Foreign Bible Society and always relished the meetings of the Board of Missions, now held in the Board Room in the newly acquired Methodist property at 139 Castlereagh Street, Sydney. At a meeting of the Board late in 1910 Brown was asked to make a pastoral visit to the Solomon Islands on behalf of General Secretary Danks. Some significant problems had arisen there. Soon after Christmas 1910 he boarded *SS Moresby* and sailed north again for the first time in six years.

It proved to be a bruising task. On his way to the Methodist mission in the Western Solomon Islands, Brown visited the British Commissioner Woodford at his official residence on Tulagi. Woodford told Brown that he had removed an inexperienced young Methodist missionary from the recently established mission on the remote atoll of Ontong Java. Among other accusations, this man was said to have very unwisely struck an object sacred to the local people in their sacred place. Brown was shocked and declared, 'It is a wonder to me that they did not kill him at once.'<sup>34</sup> The Commissioner was angry; he had only just returned from bringing to justice those who had massacred a trader and his family in another part of the Solomon Islands which had led to many revenge killings.<sup>35</sup> In addition there were questions about another member of the mission disobeying mission policy by owning land and running a commercial plantation. As he met and discussed these problems with staff in several locations, Brown became very anxious about the future of the work.

Brown arrived at the head station of Kokenggolo on the Roviana Lagoon on Sunday morning 30 January 1911. He found a welcoming party of one hundred students lined up along the wharf to greet him. Ten years earlier the local people had been fearful and resistant to the idea of receiving missionaries. He was now led into a church filled with people.

I was simply delighted with the congregation, the singing and the reverential character of the entire service. I was so affected as I considered

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34 Brown to Danks, begun at Tulagi, Solomon Islands 24 January 1911, concluded at Kokenggolo, New Georgia, Solomon Islands, 2 March 1911, Private Collection.

35 'Bagga Massacre,' *Brisbane Courier Mail*, 5 January 1911; *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 March 1911.

the state of these people a few years ago and their present condition and appearance that I could scarcely control my feelings when speaking. Mr and Mrs Goldie have undoubtedly done a splendid service here. They are much beloved by the people and Mr G. has very great influence all over the District.<sup>36</sup>

Even so, all was clearly not well. Over a period of weeks, Brown recorded his observations in a long letter for Benjamin Danks.<sup>37</sup> There were painful interviews with the young missionary who admitted to killing village pigs and ‘the act of sacrilege in the heathen temple and you know how serious these are. I felt very much for the young couple but I confess that I would feel more sympathy if I saw some sign of contrition and repentance and a little more concern for the trouble which has been caused.’<sup>38</sup>

‘I have had plenty of knocking about here,’ Brown told Danks.<sup>39</sup> Brown endured the battering of a number of very rough sea voyages during that month, including a visit with the Commissioner to the atoll of Ontong Java some 240 miles north of Roviana, but found the anger and bitterness of many around him even harder to bear. The Commissioner was irritated with missionaries in general. The young missionary was rebellious at being transferred from the area on the grounds of being ‘guilty of excessive zeal’. Brown’s attempts to salvage the mission on Ontong Java were met by strong resistance from the local chief who was ‘very angry and time after time declared that there should be no more *Lotu* in his land.’<sup>40</sup> It was only with difficulty that he was persuaded to consider receiving a teacher again. John Goldie was outraged at what he believed was a misuse of power by the Board of Missions and Brown himself in the way the case was handled, later suggesting that Brown had colluded with the Commissioner to overturn Goldie’s authority.<sup>41</sup> No one was happy. From Brown’s perspective, he had done the difficult task he had been sent to do but it had not been a good experience.

When Brown returned to Sydney with his report, he found that the Board of Missions was debating some of the issues raised by the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in June 1910. They were impressed by the news that other major missionary organisations provided three years of training before sending new workers into the field. Would they have avoided some of their recent failures, they asked themselves, if new staff had been better

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36 Brown to Danks, begun at Tulagi, Solomon Islands 24 January 1911, concluded at Kokenggolo, New Georgia, Solomon Islands, 2 March 1911.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 John F. Goldie, ‘The Solomon Islands,’ in *A Century in the Pacific*, ed. J. Colwell, Sydney: William H. Heale, 1914, pp. 559–85, pp. 580–81.

prepared? Danks believed that they ought to offer at least one year of training and Brown supported him. It was clear that ill-prepared missionaries were at risk of making serious mistakes out of ignorance and could face grief and disillusionment of mind and spirit in the harsh realities of a missionary life. The Board decided that they must introduce training of future mission staff and began to form a policy.<sup>42</sup>

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A photograph in the mission journal caught Lydia's attention. A familiar shape, a tall cement chimney above a wide open hearth, stood alone tangled in jungle creepers and undergrowth, bereft of its original house. The caption read 'Remains of mission house, Port Hunter, Duke of York Islands.'<sup>43</sup> Years ago, she had stood every day at that hearth stirring a pot of food for her family, watching the smoke rising up through that chimney into the tropical sky. In those days a roof had covered her and her children had been around her skirts as she cooked. Now it was gone and all that was left was a cracked chimney and a cold hearth overwhelmed in creepers. Nearby the new generation of missionaries had erected a memorial plinth on the site of the first little bush church building and gathered to unveil a plaque. The inscription on the stone read: 'Ebenezer. Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. This stone is raised in joyful praise of the Love of God. 1875–1909.' Chairman Heinrich Fellmann spoke of the memories associated with that place and of the time when the people were afraid to travel freely. 'Kinawanua, as the site is called, is one of the hidden corners of the world. No one goes there, there is no native highway, it is buried in the bush. But how sacred are its memories!... Kinawanua had its day—a great day—and now, in keeping with the growing demands of the work, our headquarters are elsewhere.'<sup>44</sup>

Within months she learned that both the schooner *George Brown* and the small mission boat *Litia* would no longer be serving the mission; the *George Brown* was to be sold as it was proving too expensive and the *Litia* had been wrecked, beyond repair, on a reef.<sup>45</sup> It seemed that houses and boats had very temporary lives. Yet while property crumbled, and locations changed, important things lived on. Her family was close around her. Guests were always welcome under her roof. The close ties with Pacific islanders were unchanged and from time to time visiting senior ministers and chiefs stayed in her home with their staff in

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42 'The needs of our newer missions,' Extract from Minutes of Board of Mission, 9 June 1911, in Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Correspondence and Papers, vol. 1, ML CY 1365.

43 *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 May 1911.

44 *Ibid.*, 4 July 1911.

45 *Ibid.*, 4 October 1911.

the servants' quarters in the back garden.<sup>46</sup> The old buildings were now long gone but the Christian communities that remained were more important than the preservation of houses.

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The work in New Britain had always been very close to George Brown's heart. Nearly forty years earlier he had promoted the region as a New Mission and had invested all his strength and courage in seeing it begun. It came as a shock to read the annual report of the District Synod in New Britain early in 1912. The staff there admitted to deep discouragement and exhaustion as one person after another had retired due to illness and other causes, leaving a handful of men to struggle on. One wrote of a 'nightmare of pressing duties, which after every moment had been filled, is still bound up with the suggestion of duty neglected.'<sup>47</sup> As Neu Pommern was a German colony, the remnant staff argued, with a German bureaucracy, language and officials, it seemed almost impertinence for the work to be controlled from Australia. 'Surely,' they wrote, 'it is the natural thing for a German Church to do the work in a German colony?' and concluded that 'special difficulties lead us to think strongly that it will be well if Australasian Methodism can be relieved of Mission work in New Britain.'<sup>48</sup>

Predictably, Brown was appalled. For years he had had an ambivalent relationship with Germany, valuing close friendships with individual German people while being critical of German policy in the Pacific. He was becoming very uneasy about rumours that the German Reich in Europe was building up its armaments and increasing the peacetime strength of its army. Now, when invited to be part of a committee to form a policy on whether they should invite the German Methodist Episcopal Church to co-operate with the Australians in mission work in New Britain, or hand the work over to them entirely, he had strong views.<sup>49</sup> In his study at home, surrounded by symbols and artefacts of the people of New Britain, Brown defaced his copy of the printed proposal with a fury of exclamation marks, question marks, 'Why?', 'I don't believe this', 'This is another bogey', 'Who can vouch for these wild statements?' and 'There is no evidence for this'. When he had calmed down a little he framed his response.

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46 Personal letter from Brown's granddaughter Esmay Leader, daughter of Geoffrey and Ada Brown, to her cousin Millicent Bryant, January 1986.

47 W.H. Cox, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 March, 4 October 1911.

48 Report from the New Britain Synod of October 1911, published in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review* 4 January 1912.

49 Brown, 'Papers for Board in regard Transfer of New Britain: Private and Confidential for Members of Board only,' for Board meeting on 12 June 1912. Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Correspondences and Papers. Members of the Committee with Brown were clergy B. Danks, J.G. Wheen, W. Bromilow, J.E. Carruthers, Sellors, Beale with seven laymen from the Board, with representatives of the New Britain District W.H. Cox (Chairman), H. Fellmann and K. Schmidt.

He did not doubt, he said, the sincerity or integrity of those who had proposed this plan, but he strongly opposed it. In a long, lucid response, he set out his reasons, including the long and courteous relationships between the Australian Methodists and the German Imperial officials, and the very remote control that would result if the work was in the hands of German and, potentially, American Methodists. He concluded, 'I am absolutely certain that it would be disastrous to our missionary interests and work in Australia and in the older Mission Districts and that so far from helping on the cause of Missions in the Bismarck Archipel, it would most effectually hinder if not absolutely prevent the evangelisation of that great group for many years.'<sup>50</sup>

When the Board of Mission met to consider the committee's report it was clear that the possibility of losing their work in Neu Pommern had galvanised them into action. Rather than relinquishing their work in New Britain, they would strengthen it, applying more resources and staff to the region and inviting the German Methodists and their cousins in the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States to work beside them to pioneer new work in places where there were large populations still 'in a state of heathen darkness.'<sup>51</sup> Brown and his colleagues had confidence that the work they were doing in remote island communities was God's work, despite the voices of criticism that suggested that they were contributing to the decay and collapse of noble and natural societies and were there for unworthy reasons. They could point to transformations. Men on New Ireland recalled the days when they would never have gone into enemy lands unarmed but now travelled in safety far from home.<sup>52</sup> Three Solomon Island chiefs, formerly head-hunters who had lived with fear and sorcery, sent a message with their gratitude for the missionaries who came to 'teach us things that gave us peace and joy.' They wrote that they were happy because 'the *lotu* lives and grows in our midst. Ten years ago we were in very great darkness, but now our eyes have seen the Light and we are all men who belong to Jesus.'<sup>53</sup>

Dismissing the concerns of the Chairman of New Britain District, W.H. Cox, in June 1912, and despite serious correspondence about the possibility with church leaders in Germany and the United States, by April 1913 the Board decided that the transfer of their work in New Britain was 'neither desirable nor practical'.<sup>54</sup> They declared that there must be renewed energy, resources and staff for all their work in the New Britain District, Papua District and Solomon Islands. With the collaboration of their German and American friends they planned to expand into the new areas of West New Britain, New Hanover and

50 Minutes of Methodist Missions Board, Feb 1913–Nov 1917, ML MOM 205 CY3307, 12 June 1912.

51 Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Correspondence and Papers.

52 Rev. T. Reddin, in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 4 April 1911.

53 Letter from Solomon Island chiefs from Roviana Lagoon area, Gumi, Gemu and Sasabeti 'To Great Missionary Chiefs in Sydney,' in the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, 29 February 1912.

54 Minutes of Methodist Missions Board, Feb 1913–Nov 1917, 23 April 1913.

Bougainville.<sup>55</sup> Being denied the gift of foresight, the Board of Mission began to set out fresh goals. Each of the three Districts was asked to provide their plans for the future. By the middle of 1913, the Solomon Islands had prepared a three year plan, Papua District (formerly British New Guinea) had pictured eleven years into the future with detailed plans for 1913–1917 and New Britain District had produced an ambitious fifteen year plan noting that ‘we rejoice at the prospect of a serious attempt being made to adequately work this extensive District within a given time.’<sup>56</sup> The New Britain staff, perhaps to test the mettle of the Board, sent in their request for new workers; nineteen more ministers, five laymen and forty-eight mission sisters!<sup>57</sup> If the Board was serious about expansion, then let them prove it.

It was a beautiful vision. They dreamed that the plan would begin to take real substance in 1914.

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55 Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Correspondence and Papers, vol. 1, ML CY 1365.

56 Minutes of New Britain District Meeting, 17 January 1913, in Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Correspondence and Papers, vol. 1.

57 Ibid.