

CHAPTER 4

Trooper G. W. Cross of the Albany Rangers

"He's a tried and valiant soldier."

W. Shakespeare

In spite of its air of provincial complacency and stodgy peace, Grahamstown had a history of war and turbulence, which the townsfolk had not forgotten. Indeed, some of the original settlers of 1820 were still living and could well remember the terrible Christmas of 1834, when Albany was overrun by hordes of Blacks. In that war more than three thousand settlers had been reduced to destitution, and hundred of farmhouses burnt and pillaged. More vivid still was the memory of the last and most devastating of the frontier wars in 1850 - 52. And now, after twenty-five years of peace, there were rumours again of unrest among the Xhosa, and the young men of Grahamstown discussed the possibility of its now being their turn to ride out in defence of their Colony and their homes.

During the Session of the Cape Parliament of 1877 Members for the Eastern provinces of the Colony vehemently urged the Government to prepare for an imminent Xhosa rising; but the Western Members (living in comfort and safety six hundred miles from the frontier) were sure that these gloomy prophecies were unjustified, and that the frontier was in any case quite adequately policed.

It was some comfort to the infuriated Easterners that when Parliament rose the new Governor, Sir Bartle Frere, who had only arrived at the Cape in April of

that year, decided to visit the frontier districts to see for himself how matters stood. He entered Grahamstown on Monday, August the 27th, in the early afternoon, escorted by a troop of Albany Rangers from Salem. Loyal Grahamstown gave him a welcome befitting the representative of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. The Mayor and Corporation met him at the triumphal arch which had been erected in Prince Alfred's Road, and there was a crowd of cheering citizens. Next day the celebrations continued when His Excellency laid the foundation stone of the new City Hall in Church Square. The festivities culminated in a dinner given by the mayor. Among the guests was the new Baptist minister, who was honoured by being invited to respond to the toast to "The Clergy".¹

From Grahamstown the Governor proceeded to King Williams Town, arriving there on September the 4th. The town was so crowded with refugees from outlying farms that the only accommodation that could be found for the Governor and his party was in the military barracks. For in fact the war (which was to be dubbed in history books "The Ninth Frontier War") had already begun. The old and experienced Colonists on the Eastern frontier had not misread the signs: when stock thieving increased it was the sure prelude to another war.

This one began on the 3rd August as a minor incident at a Fingo kraal on the borders of Gcalekaland.² The Fingoes were celebrating a marriage feast, when certain uninvited Gcalekas arrived, and custom and courtesy demanded that they be made welcome. It was not surprising, however, that what with the excitement of the occasion, the singing and dancing and beer-drinking, the evening should end in a quarrel, which quickly turned into a fight. The upshot was that one Gcaleka was killed, and two others of high rank were badly injured. The rest were driven back over the border to their own kraals by the incensed Fingoes.

It was not likely that the Gcalekas would suffer such treatment with impunity, and especially not from the Fingoes, of all people, a race they despised. A few days after the fight four large parties of avenging Gcalekas crossed into Fingoland and drove off hundreds of cattle, sheep and goats.

The British authorities could hardly ignore such an affront. The Fingoes were British citizens and entitled to protection, and whether they liked it or not the White authorities were bound to be drawn into the conflict. They did their best to stamp out the fire before it got out of control. The Secretary for Native Affairs, Mr. Brownlee, visited the great Chief Kreli himself in Gcalekaland and tried to persuade him to meet the Governor at Butterworth so that the matter could be settled peaceably. This the old chief was not prepared to do, probably because such a course would not have been approved by his powerful son, Sigcau, and his warriors, who were keen to show their prowess in war. Kreli

assured Brownlee that he had no quarrel with the White people, and was anxious to keep the peace with them.

Nevertheless, on September the 26th a force of 5 000 Gcalekas crossed the frontier and had an encounter with a small body of mounted police, under Inspector Chalmers. Chalmers was obliged to fall back upon the police post at Ibeka; but when a few days later Kreli's men attacked again, the police, and some 2 000 Fingoes, were ready for them, and they were repulsed with heavy losses.

When this news reached Grahamstown there was great excitement. The request for volunteers which came through official channels met with an immediate response. On Monday, October 1st, a large and eager crowd assembled in the Albany Hall at a hastily arranged public meeting "to take into consideration the best means for arranging to equip a number of volunteers to go to the front." Judge Smith was in the chair; and old Mr Godlonton, now 83 years old, who had served as a Captain of the Grahamstown Volunteer Corps in the War of 1834-35, and who was the well-known chronicler of the last Frontier War, proposed that a fund be raised by subscription to equip the Volunteers with horses and other necessities. The sum of £990 was raised at once, and in addition twelve horses were promised.³

The prevailing excitement could not but affect the young minister from England. He donated £1 to the fund,³ and began to consider whether he could go to the war himself. There were several difficulties. He offered his services as a chaplain, but it soon became clear that no provision was made for such an officer in a colonial volunteer corps.⁴ The second obstacle was the fact that the deacons of his church were reluctant to give him leave of absence; after all it was not yet three months since his arrival. The third obstacle was the fact (though he did not mention it to anybody) that he had never ridden a horse in his life. It did seem that he would have to take the advice of older and wiser heads and remain in Grahamstown.⁵ On Wednesday morning, October the 3rd, he was a disappointed onlooker when the first detachment of Albany Mounted Volunteers left the city amid the cheers of the crowds lining the streets, with flags waving and bands playing. To see the young men of his own church riding off to the war without him was more than he could bear. He was determined that whatever the difficulties he would go to the war. He knew that a second detachment, the Albany Rangers from Salem and Sidbury, were planning to leave Grahamstown shortly, perhaps that very afternoon, and with Mr. Thomas King's help he procured a horse and led it up High Street and through the Drostdy Gate to the parade ground in front of the old Drostdy, to put in some private practice in riding.

At his first attempt to mount the horse he got up on one side and promptly fell down on the other. When he did succeed in staying in the saddle he found that no persuasion on his part could induce the animal to move. Mr. Templeton, Headmaster of the Public Undenominational School, which was then housed in

the old Drostdy, happened to look out of his window and was somewhat astonished at what he saw. He recognised the new minister and ran out to see if he could help. He found the curb rein strapped tight, and when he had loosened it the horse became more co-operative.⁶ After a little more practice, and some hints from Templeton, Cross felt justified in riding off to offer his services as a Trooper to Captain Gush, Commander of the Albany Rangers,⁷ for which he would receive 5 shillings a day, with rations for himself and his horse. His deacons gave their somewhat reluctant consent to his going, and one of them, Thomas Grocott, Proprietor and Editor of *Grocott's Penny Mail*, asked him if he would act as a special correspondent⁸ for that paper.

Next morning, at 5 o'clock, the Albany Rangers left Grahamstown to the shrill strains of a fife and drum band,⁷ and with them went the Rev. (now Trooper) G.W. Cross, managing somehow to stay on his horse and control it, though an acute observer might have noticed that the men on either side of him were riding suspiciously close.

The troop took the road to King Williams Town, which they reached on Friday evening, to find the Barracks completely full and the town overflowing with refugees. They were obliged to shift for themselves as best they could, and sleep in the bush on the fringe of the town. Poor Cross had fallen off his horse at least once in the two days' journey, and was sore and bruised from the unaccustomed saddle.⁹ But he had begun to make friends among his troop, and although at King he could have joined the Grahamstown men, he chose to stay with the Albany Rangers. Both troops were placed under the command of Captain Minto; under him Captain Darvall was responsible for the Grahamstown troop and Captain Gush the Salem and Sidbury men. The Sergeant of the Albany Rangers was a man after Cross's own heart, and they soon became friends. Sergeant Robert Michael Bruce was a man of nine and twenty, well-built and handsome, but quiet and retiring and bookish. Although like many of the other troopers he was a farmer and the son of a farmer he was obviously the best-educated man among them. In the growing intimacy of camp life and shared hardships some of his reserve melted and he told Cross that it was his ambition to be a poet, and that the *Cape Monthly Magazine* had indeed already published one or two of his sonnets under the initials B.M.R. However, he was too reserved to show any of his poems even to Cross.¹⁰

Saturday was a day of thorough confusion in King. Saddles had to be attended to, extra horses purchased for baggage, and necessities which there had been no time to acquire in Grahamstown sought from the harassed storekeepers of King. But the order was given to the Albany men that as many as could be ready should start at five next morning on the road to the Kei River.

Cross was among the first to leave. "Very quietly we left the town," he wrote,¹¹ "and I think very gladly. For though we were very kindly treated there we are

all eager to get to the front. Through the delicious morning we rode to Yellowwoods, where we off-saddled for breakfast. We waited in absolute quiet. Well, no, one or two Dutch farmers came to 'speak to us,' but they soon went away and then we were left quite still by the water under the shadow of the trees to bathe, or doze, or read, or dream, till our brothers came up, which they did presently, and we remained there altogether and dined and then saddled up and started for Hangman's Bush. As we ride through the mission station the gaily dressed Kaffir women coming from the church remind us that it is Sunday."

In the afternoon the intense heat of the day culminated in a thunderstorm, and the men rode on through heavy rain singing hymns. That evening they camped at Hangman's Bush – "a good place for a camp. Plenty of trees for shelter, of dead wood for fires, and of water for man and beast."

They made a large camp fire, and after tea the chatter and laughter died down and a quietness fell on the men as Cross stood up and led them all in a simple service of hymn and prayer and psalm and a few words of encouragement.

There was more rain during the night, but the Salem men were astir early again on Monday morning, and by six o'clock were on the road, with the thunder rolling grandly among the great hills around them. Then the weather began to clear and, wrote Cross, "in the most romantic dell imaginable we off-saddled for breakfast. I can't tell you the name of the place, if it has any, nor its exact whereabouts. I only know that we reached it miserably wet and gloriously hungry." After a rest they pushed on to Draai Bush, where they came up with a detachment of the 24th Regiment. Then on to Komgha,¹² seven miles further on, through beautiful country, with occasional glimpses of the sea.

They found Komgha under military law, and the reality of the war was more evident. Like King, the little town was full of refugees, most of them encamped in a laager around the church. Here too they found the rest of the 24th Regiment, and a detachment of Police, so that again there was no hope of indoor accommodation for man or beast; but somehow everybody found a place in and around the yard of the little country hotel.

Next day orders were given that the Albany troops were to escort five transport wagons, laden with ammunition and food, across the Kei River to Butterworth.¹³ With Captain Darvall's men in front and Captain Gush's in the rear of the wagons, the long cavalcade wound round and down the steep road leading to the drift. Beyond the river great black clouds of smoke billowed up. They did not realise then, but heard later that that very day Colonel Griffith's columns had attacked and burnt Kreli's Great Place and several other important kraals.¹⁴

They reached the great drift at sunset.¹⁵ There was a good deal of water in it, and much heavy sand on the other side. The first wagon went through without

much difficulty, but the second stuck fast. The men had to strip and get down to the hard work of yoking a double span to every wagon so that the tired oxen could haul them through the water and up the other side.

It was quite dark before the last wagon was across the river, and there was no time to look for a suitable camp site. That was a very uncomfortable night for everybody. They were now in Kreli's country, and extra precautions had to be taken. Double guards were posted, and no camp fires were allowed. Next morning at five o'clock they were on the road again. It was very laborious and slow work going up that steep hill, for once again they had to use a double span of oxen for each wagon. All the men were very aware of the vulnerability of their position, and indeed if a party of Gcalekas had appeared the Albany men would have been in a very serious predicament. Then the axle of one of the wagons broke, and all the goods on that wagon had to be taken off and divided between the other wagons. Also, one of the oxen succumbed. What with one thing and another it took them all that day and half the next to get to Butterworth: a distance of about twenty two miles.

The Albany men felt that they had at last arrived at the scene of action. On Friday morning Commandant Griffith, who was in direct command of all the forces operating in the Transkei, rode over to inspect the contingent from Albany and to address a few words to them. He was glad, he said, to see so fine a body of men so soon to the front. He knew Albany would not be behind; it never was. He urged them to keep together, and hoped they would soon have a chance of distinguishing themselves.¹⁶

But for a whole week they camped at Butterworth. Cross had the time to write his first report for *Grocott's Penny Mail*, which told in detail all they had seen and done since leaving Grahamstown. His description of camp life at Butterworth includes a vivid little sketch of Captain Minto "sitting like a jolly Bacchus on a barrel – no, on a chair, with a pipe in his mouth, which he removes to sing, in tones somewhat hoarse, 'We'll hang old Kreli on a sour apple tree,' to which very charitable strain the men respond in chorus, 'Glory, glory, hallelujah!'"¹⁷

The men were kept busy cooking and baking and laundering and barbering and caring for the horses. They were eager for action, but acknowledged that the rest was very necessary for the horses, of whom a great number had sore backs. Each day brought some excitement. On Sunday evening the service round the camp fire had scarcely concluded when one of the guards stopped a horseman, who had ridden from Ibeka with a despatch about two men who had come to Ibeka with a white flag, asking conditions of peace for Kreli. Next day the Albany men were interested to meet Veldtman, the Fingo chief, who rode into their camp asking for a Mr. Pocock, to whom he wished to make a present of bread and eggs, in gratitude for kindness shown to his son at the "Kaffir Institution" in Grahamstown.¹⁸

On Tuesday the reality of the war was demonstrated more acutely to the Albany men when a wounded man was brought in to the camp. Some of Captain Minto's men turned out of a room in a deserted store which they had been occupying, in order to make a temporary hospital ward. Cross deemed it a part of his duties as an unofficial chaplain to assist the doctor when he dressed the wound,¹⁹ and to make the patient as comfortable as he could under the difficult circumstances.

But the men were getting tired of the slow camp life, and when general orders came that they were to move on Thursday they received the news with nine hearty cheers.

Commandant Griffith's plan was to move forward in three columns and sweep Gcalekaland right down to the sea, with the aim of breaking up the Gcaleka army and destroying the kraals, so that the fighting men could not rally again. All three columns were to meet again at Lusizi, near Mazeppa Bay.²⁰ The Albany men were attached to the headquarter column, which went off in the direction of the Kei Mouth and then proceeded up the coast to Mazeppa Bay, patrolling, burning kraals and veld, searching in the kraals for grain pits, and finding everywhere immense hoards of mealies and kaffircorn (another sign that the war had been planned for some time), but getting no sight or sound of the enemy, who very prudently avoided a pitched battle, and simply melted away as the troops advanced.

Cross was by now a hardy campaigner. The man who less than three weeks previously had never been on a horse, and who had lived twenty of his twenty six years in London, was now spending long days in the saddle and thoroughly enjoying the rough life. On Monday, October the 22nd, "we were," he wrote, "as usual on the road again by five. We were rearguard this day and loitered on behind the wagons at the rate of half a mile an hour during the morning. But then the roads got leveller and by dint of thrashing and shouting the bullocks were persuaded into a very decent pace. On for a weary while. Up hill and down dale, by krantzies and kloofs. Under the burning noon sunbeams, on till the sun was setting, and the night darkened and the fires we left behind us glared up with a ghostly glow, and the whole country seemed filled with the smoke. Then thro' it all, calm and full and red God's great moon rose. I noticed that men were silenced and softened all along the line. For a time all loud talking stopped and many rode on in perfect silence, for still we were pushing on, and the moon went up the sky and as the light grew the men grew merrier, and tired and hungry as they were, and feeling anxiety for their horses as they all do, they broke out into some fine stirring songs and rode up to camp in high glee. It was nine o'clock before we had off-saddled. The longest day's march we had had."²¹

They had now reached Lusizi. The other two columns were already there, and they heard how the camp had been attacked in force by the Gcalekas the

previous day, and how they had only been beaten off after some sharp fighting. Two Europeans and nine Fingoes had been killed, and twenty one Fingoes wounded. As usual in this kind of warfare the enemy's losses were far greater – about seventy dead – because of their practice of advancing to the attack in close ranks, among which the Snider rifles of the colonists and Fingoes wrought terrible havoc. Not that the Gcalekas were without fire-arms; twenty or thirty muzzle-loader guns were picked up on the field of battle after they had retreated.²²

The Albany men were glad to be in camp again, and next day they went round greeting friends in other troops and gathering news. Cross visited the wounded Fingoes in their wretched makeshift hospital, just a large hut with a grass-strewn floor on which the patients lay rolled up in their blankets. There was a fire for cooking purposes burning in the centre of the hut, and only one tiny hole in the wall for ventilation until the doctor ordered two more to be made. One man had had to have an arm amputated without the blessing of chloroform, and others had bullet wounds in head or limbs or trunk. "All," wrote Cross, "seem to bear their pain bravely and patiently, and yet the Whites who attend upon them cannot speak with patience and gentleness of them ... Surely pain might assert their brotherhood with us loudly enough."²³

Three days after their arrival at Lusizi, on Thursday October the 25th, Griffith ordered his army – Police, Volunteers and Fingoes – to proceed into the Manubi Forest, where he believed the main army of the Gcalekas to be in hiding. The Fingoes led the way, and "as they went in before us they taunted us with being afraid, crying, 'come on, come into the bush; we'll show you how to go into the bush.' There was a general expectation of meeting the foe but I don't think a single man of us felt fear as we rode into the narrow path between the big yellowwood trees and the dense under wood. We cantered on in half-sections all in expectation and excitement, but came out on the other side without sight of a foe or sound of a shot."²⁴

The Gcalekas, in fact, had once again silently melted away. Griffith had too long delayed his attack, for which he was to be bitterly criticised by all the men under his command. When the Colonial forces foregathered at Lusizi it was known that the forest was crowded with the enemy, but two or three days were lost in inexplicable idleness, which gave the Gcalekas all the time they wanted to clear out.²⁵ They were obviously heading for the Bashee River, and there was nothing for it but to follow.

After more delay the army finally left Lusizi on the following Tuesday, October the 30th. The men must have been glad to be on the move again, for camp life had become very uncomfortable. The drought had broken, and for days there was a steady downpour of rain. Hardly a man in the camp had dry clothes, and there was no shelter at all for the horses. Food was scarce – the commissariat

was the weakest point of the Colonial organisation – and sometimes the men went whole days without tea, sugar, coffee or meat. Traders' wagons, with "the surliest shopmen that ever lived" sold biscuits, sugar and brandy to the men at very inflated prices. Altogether it was a relief to move off, although the weather showed no signs of clearing.²⁶

The army was again divided into several columns, which covered a wide extent of country. The scorched earth policy was continued: in Cross's words, "We found the country green as a paradise, we have left it behind us black as hell."²⁷ The wagons could not keep up with the columns, and the men had no tents and little food except what they themselves could find. It rained every night, and off and on all day. Fingo scouts sent in advance brought back the news that the Gcalekas, men, women, children and cattle, had broken up into small parties and were all pushing eastward. Griffith thought that they would make a stand in the large forest near the mouth of the Bashee River, but when he reached the river it appeared that the Gcalekas were crossing into Bomvanaland and dispersing among the tribes.

The Colonial forces turned inland and made for Fort Bowker, the camp of the British Military Headquarters, arriving there on Saturday afternoon. The wagons came up, and it was possible again to make a regular camp, with all the tents in rows and the wagons and horses in the centre, so that defence would be easy.²⁸ Thirty years later that camp was still vivid in Cross's memory, and he described it in a lecture he gave on South African poets and poetry. "After a savage week of patrol," he wrote, "with scant bad food and drenching rain – days hungry and nights of broken sleep – we came late on Saturday night into camp at Fort Bowker ... The Sunday morning broke divinely – a day of the sun – a day to make amends for years of gloom. We were busy washing and cooking all morning but by afternoon had some blessed leisure, and then the wagons from our base came in and brought our mail. A great hush came over that camp of 1 000 men as they opened their belated letters and drank in the news from home." Among Cross's mail was a copy of the *Cape Monthly Magazine*. There, for the first time, he read one of Bruce's poems, with the writer standing beside him. "I too had a ballad of my own in my pocket," he wrote. "I never brought it out in his presence. I hoped to do it some day ... The day never came. He was dead within three months of that Sunday."²⁹

The day closed with a campfire service conducted by Cross. It was the largest congregation he had had yet. The men, warm and dry at last, sang Moody and Sankey hymns with even more gusto than usual.³⁰

In the following days columns of Volunteers, Police, Fingoes and Tembus under Griffith, Ayliff and Elliott, crossed the Bashee River into Bomvanaland in search of the fugitives.³¹ Griffith visited Moni, the Chief of the Bomvanas, who were officially neutral, to try and persuade him to give up Krelu and

Sigcau. The Bomvanas were bland but unco-operative and professed complete ignorance of the whereabouts of Kreli and his son. It was quite impossible to strike a decisive blow against an enemy which refused to be drawn into an engagement, and which had learned from the animals and insects of the veld the value of protective colouring and of remaining quiet. It was very frustrating. The Colonials were certain that the immense herds of cattle which they saw in Bomvanaland were not all the property of the Bomvanas, but as they were claimed by Moni's people there was nothing that could be done. Griffith scoured the country to the Umtata River, and crossed it into Pondoland. The chiefs there, though probably in league with Kreli, when they saw the size of the forces at Griffith's disposal thought it prudent to assist the Colonial authorities, and even surrendered 1 100 head of cattle belonging to Kreli's people. But still Kreli and his son eluded capture.³²

There seemed to be no point in carrying on the war, and Griffith abandoned the pursuit. The weather was still wet, the Volunteers and their horses tired out and far from home, and provisions almost exhausted. On the 19th November General Sir A.T. Cunynghame, Commander-in-Chief, sent a despatch to the Governor, Sir Bartle Frere: "Commandant Griffith has been unremitting in his endeavour to carry out to the best advantage his military operation, in which he has been very successful. The whole of the country known as Gcalekaland has been entirely freed of the enemy, much cattle has been taken, and the enemy routed from their strongest positions. The Volunteer and Burgher Forces have displayed much alacrity in the performance of their duties, which have been of a very arduous character ... Circumstances lead to the indication that the termination of this war is not far distant."³³

In Grahamstown anxious relatives and friends were very happy to read in the *Journal* of November the 21st, an official telegram from Commandant Griffith to the Civil Commissioner which had been sent the previous day. It was to the effect that "Captains Minto and Gush, with their men, left this morning on their return home. All Well." It would be at least a week before they could be expected, and the citizens of Grahamstown had time to prepare a big welcome. The homeward progress of the two troops was reported in telegrams from Komgha and King Williams Town, which were printed in the newspapers. On Wednesday, November the 28th, the Town Council announced that if nothing happened to prevent the arrival of the Volunteers on Friday, it would be observed as a public holiday.

It rained all Thursday night, but on Friday morning the sun struggled through in time to give a warm welcome to the returning troopers. Shortly after 9 a.m. the band of the 1st City Volunteers, accompanied by a large crowd, marched out along the King Williams's Town road to meet the men and escort them in to the town.³⁴ Not far from where the railway station now stands a triumphal arch had been erected, and here the Mayor and Councillors waited to greet

them. They rode up between the cheering crowds to hear the Mayor read an official address of welcome, and there were other speeches and more cheers. Then the long cavalcade rode down to the Dundas Bridge, up to Church Square, past the Cathedral, and up the High Street, with bands playing and flags fluttering and holidaying children cheering, through the Drostdy gate and on to the parade ground where less than two months before Cross had had his first riding lesson. Here a square was formed, and Captain Minto, in a few simple sentences, called on all present to "thank Almighty God for allowing us to return home safely. Mr. Cross will offer up a thanksgiving." All the men uncovered their heads, and from his saddle the Rev. G. W. Cross offered a simple prayer of thanksgiving on behalf of all the men. Then there were more speeches, and cheers for the Mayor and Judge Smith and Commandant Minto. "The last three cheers were for the Rev. Mr. Cross and they were as cordial as any," reported the *Grahamstown Journal*.³⁵

This was Cross's first personal experience of war. He was to live through two more wars, and to suffer deeply because of them. Inevitably as he grew older his attitude to war changed; but in 1877 he was still a very young man. Young, healthy, adventurous, he seems never to have questioned the rights or wrongs of the campaign when he joined the troop. He did, however, have a strong feeling all his life, that it was a part of his pastoral function to be totally involved at all levels with the people of his congregation. Hence his desire, when he realised that all the young men of his church were volunteering to go to the war, to go with them. It becomes clear though, from his despatches to *Grocott's Mail*, that what he saw of the war through his personal involvement altered his attitude. War is not a game: it is suffering and death and scorched earth.

CHAPTER 5

Grahamstown: Sunshine and shadow

*“Yet in the maddening maze of things,
And tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed trust my spirit clings;
I know that God is good.”*

J.G. Whittier

Though he himself might not have been fully aware of it, the young man who returned to Grahamstown less than two months after setting out for the war, had undergone a great change. He was healthier and hardier, he had proved himself a man among men, and his determination to share all the hardships of the troopers as one of them, with no special consideration or favour, had won him the esteem and affection of all. They loved him as a fellow-trooper, and honoured and respected him as a chaplain.¹

They returned bearded, weather-beaten, toughened.² “A rough lot,” says one citizen in the crowd; and “Oh! they look grand” is the response.³ Cross discovered to his surprise that his going to war had brought him a kind of modest fame, which was not confined to Grahamstown. The *Cape Daily News*⁴ spoke highly of him and he was even mentioned in the *London Echo*.⁵ Many of the troopers and officers in their letters home had written of him in warm terms, and the *Grahamstown Journal* said that he “had done much to win the esteem of the city by his conduct in facing the hardships of the recent campaign.”⁶

The Baptist Church, in the face of this public acclaim, could not continue to take a disapproving view of their new minister’s action. On the 16th

December, just over two weeks after his return, he conducted the Sunday School Anniversary services in his church, and the townsfolk flocked to hear him. The Deacons resolved "that the Treasurer pay him in full for the period of his absence with the Volunteers in the field."⁷

The new year opened in a spirit of optimism, in spite of a severe drought and the continuing war. The Gaikas under Sandile had revolted, and to the difficulties of suppressing the rebellion were added the serious differences of opinion between the new Governor and his ministers about the conduct of the war.

The dispute became so serious that eventually in February 1878 the Governor dismissed the Prime Minister, Molteno, and offered the premiership to Gordon Sprigg. What would now be called "mopping-up operations" went on for months, but by July 1878 the Government was confident that the situation was sufficiently under control to order a "Day of thanksgiving to Almighty God for the termination of the war" to be kept on the first day of August. Editorial comment in *Grocott's Penny Mail* on this proposal was: "Whatever may be thought in districts at a distance from the frontier, very few in these parts are able to satisfy themselves that the war is over"⁸ – and neither the Baptist nor Presbyterian churches in Grahamstown held services on that day.

Cross now threw himself wholeheartedly into his pastoral work. He had a loyal band of deacons to support him, among them Thomas Grocott, printer, book-seller and proprietor of the *Penny Mail*; Thomas King, merchant, afterwards Member of the Legislative Assembly; George Luke, businessman, twice mayor of Grahamstown and also elected to the Legislative Assembly, although he died before he could take his seat; Joseph Dicks, confectioner; J.H. Webber, businessman, also to be twice mayor of Grahamstown; W.A. Smith; F. Jardine and J. Seller. Of these men Batts was later to write: "The church was indeed rich in men who were so conspicuous and outstanding in their devotion to the church they loved"⁹ and, one might add, "in their service to the city of their birth or adoption."

In a small, rather isolated city, a church was an important social and cultural centre, with varied activities which gave people of all ages opportunities of service, of self-development and of social intercourse to an extent which modern churches scarcely know. Religion embraced the whole of life, and people were encouraged in and by the church to use all their talents to the glory of God.

A kind of social gathering very popular at the time was the "soiree." It provided entertainment and an opportunity for social intercourse. The deacons of the Baptist Church had planned such a gathering when the new minister should have completed three months in the Colony, and the date was fixed for October the 10th 1877. The war had interfered with that plan, but eventually in February 1878 the social took place. Admission was by ticket, which cost 1/6 if

bought in advance, but 2/- at the door. Mr. Dicks provided the refreshments and, rather oddly, since the soiree was held in his honour, Mr. Cross was asked to arrange the programme.¹⁰ Mr. Kelly and his flock from the Kareiga were invited, and about 150 people packed the schoolroom for a happy evening of innocent merrymaking.¹¹ A few months later, in June, there was a very successful entertainment of music and readings – “a well-selected programme provided and ably carried through by various ladies and gentlemen” as the *Penny Mail* described it. On this occasion over 200 people were present; no mean achievement, since the weather had turned very cold and wet.¹² Indeed, next morning there was even a light fall of snow, a rare sight in Grahamstown.

Cross was now looking forward to the coming of his wife. She sailed from London on June the 26th 1878 in the *Warwick Castle*, the newest ship in the Currie Line, and arrived in Cape Town on Saturday July the 20th.¹³ There is no record of her arrival, but it may be supposed that she was met and entertained in Cape Town by the local Baptists. The ship stayed for a whole week in Cape Town, only leaving again on the following Saturday, July the 27th. Cross took leave of absence from his church that weekend and went to Port Elizabeth to meet her. The ship finally arrived in Algoa Bay on Tuesday the 30th,¹⁴ and Mrs. Cross never forgot the landing: there was no dock, and passengers as well as cargo were swung over the ship's side on to a surf boat which proceeded under sail to the beach. Here the passengers were seized by “fearsome-looking Fingoes and were carried pick-a-back to be deposited, finally, on the beach.”¹⁵

Margaret Cross, like many Victorians, was a woman of courage and endurance. She had left a loving, comfortable and cultured home in Belfast, and she had just turned 24 when she arrived in the Cape Colony to join her young husband after more than a year's separation. Surely she found him changed when they met again on the beach at Algoa Bay; so many new experiences had come to him in that year, while she had continued in her quiet domestic life at home in Belfast.

The day after she landed in Algoa Bay they proceeded to Grahamstown by train and coach as he had done the previous year. It was a wearisome journey, but in spite of her small and frail appearance she had plenty of stamina. She was to need it, for scarcely 24 hours after her arrival in Grahamstown she had to face the ordeal of a church Welcome Soiree, which was attended by about 200 people. At this Soiree the church surpassed itself. “The room was artistically decorated with appropriate mottoes of welcome, and festoons made of wild flowers and ferns hung around and across the room, giving it a wonderfully fairy-like appearance,” reported the *Penny Mail* next day.¹⁶ Margaret's loving heart doubtless appreciated the warmhearted welcome given to her by these strangers, but her sense of the absurd would have noted the “mottoes” with a satirical eye.

So these two young folk "set up house" and began to make a home. Mrs. Cross became a notable housekeeper, and was very willing to learn from the local wives. But she never allowed herself to become so absorbed in household duties that she neglected her mind. She shared to the full her husband's love of literature, and George Eliot and Christina Rossetti were two of her favourite authors. She was musical, too, and encouraged her husband to take an interest in music. Above all, she accepted her role as helpmeet to her husband in his pastoral work. Sometimes together, sometimes singly, they visited their church folk until they were intimately known in every Baptist home: known and loved.

The life of the church, stimulated by the enthusiasm of the young minister, prospered, and harmony prevailed among the members. The Sunday School, under the competent direction of Mr. William Grainger, was in a flourishing condition. Before coming to the Colony in the early '70s Mr. Grainger had spent some years in Canada and learned American methods of conducting a Sunday School, which he was quick to apply in Grahamstown.¹⁷ He gathered around him a good band of teachers, whom he was able to inspire with his own enthusiasm.

The musical life of the church was not quite as fortunate, and Cross soon discovered that he would have to give his personal attention to the choir if there was to be any improvement. With this in view he taught himself to read music and became the choir master. There was sufficient talent and enthusiasm for him to launch into rehearsals for a cantata based on *The Pilgrim's Progress*, for which he also recruited scholars from the Sunday School, and in March 1879 two performances were given in the church.¹⁸ On both occasions a collection was taken in aid of the War Sufferers Relief Fund for the widows and orphans of those who had fallen in the Zulu War.

As the quiet years passed George Cross became more and more involved in the life of the little city. He served on the committees of the War Relief Fund,¹⁹ of the Public Library,²⁰ of the Albany General Hospital,²¹ of the Public Undenominational School.²² In October 1878 the new Prime Minister, the Hon. J. Gordon Sprigg, himself a Baptist, visited Grahamstown and attended divine service in the Baptist Church.²³ This gave rise to a rumour that the Rev. G.W. Cross would be offered the colonial chaplaincy to the Yeomanry Force, in recognition of his voluntary services at the front the previous year,²³ but whether the post was never in fact offered or, being offered, declined, nothing more was heard of it. Cross had, in any case, contracted with the Grahamstown Church to stay with them for at least three years, and little more than one year of the contract had run.

September the 3rd 1879, was a gala occasion for the whole town, when the new railway station and line were officially opened. A large crowd assembled at the station to welcome the first train.²⁴ Two months later, in November, the annual

Baptist Sunday School picnic took the form of a railway excursion up to Atherstone. A special train was hired to take the children and teachers to the picnic spot, and a limited number of tickets was also made available to friends at 3/- each, which included railway fare and refreshments.²⁵ This was the first Grahamstown Sunday School to use the railway for this purpose, and great fun it must have been for everybody, since presumably most of the passengers had never before been in a train.

1879 was also the year of the beginning of the great controversy between the Dean and the Bishop of Grahamstown, which shocked the whole town, and which continued for some years.²⁶ While the affair would doubtless never have occurred had it not been for the aggressive and truculent personality of the Dean, it did revolve around a very real legal difficulty which had to be faced by every Anglican community in the world outside of England. Briefly, the Dean refused to recognise the authority of the Bishop or to allow him to preach in the Cathedral on the grounds that he (the Dean) was a priest of the Church of England and therefore owed no allegiance to Bishop Merriman, who had been elected by the Church of the Province of South Africa. The matter was taken to the Diocesan Court, then to the Supreme Court in Cape Town and, finally, in 1882, to the Privy Council.

Meanwhile, the Anglican community in Grahamstown was divided into two bitter parties, ranged behind the Dean and the Bishop, and the storm was felt by everybody in Grahamstown. Cross, serving on so many local committees, would have been acquainted with Dean Williams and Bishop Merriman. In September, 1880, both Dean and Bishop were present at a meeting of the Hospital Committee,²⁷ which must surely have caused some embarrassment to every other member present.

The Second Annual Assembly of the Baptist Union was held in 1879. War conditions had made it impossible to hold an Assembly in 1878, but in May, 1879, the delegates of the churches gathered in Port Elizabeth. Cross preached the Union Sermon, taking for his text St. Paul's words: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The manuscript of this sermon still survives:²⁸ a monument to the exuberance and the wide reading of its author, as well as to the patience of nineteenth century congregations, since it must have taken an hour to deliver. It is the product of a young man, trying to cram all his theology into one sermon; but it is also a foretaste of the Gospel that Cross was to preach for the rest of his life: the Gospel of God's measureless love and mercy to poor sinning mankind. This was not the sort of theology likely to be popular among some of Cross's Calvinist hearers, and it is possible that here, for the first time, he felt a chill of disapproval. The tiny organisation could not, however, afford the luxury of schism: General and Particular Baptists had to learn to live together. Cross was elected Vice-President of the Union, Grocott became Secretary and King was re-elected as Treasurer.

On October the 24th 1879, Mrs. Cross gave birth to her first child, a son.²⁹ He was given his mother's maiden name: Graham. Although his birth was surely a source of great pride and joy to the young parents, they were not the kind of people to display their feelings in public; all their lives they were to guard their family privacy jealously. The baby's birth was not announced in any of the local newspapers.

Yet, in spite of his multifarious interests, of the seemingly happy and prosperous church life, of his acceptance in so many spheres of the town's life, Cross was conscious of a growing inward disquiet. There were several reasons for this. It is possible that he began to feel restricted in Grahamstown. In spite of his friendships with men like the Rev. John Chalmers of Trinity Presbyterian Church, Templeton of the Public Undenominational School, and his own deacons, Grahamstown could not have been culturally stimulating or nourishing to one who was accustomed to the rich texture of life in London. He himself made a notable contribution to the cultural life of the town, especially in the late '80s and '90s, but it is worth noticing that in introducing a lecture on Tennyson's "Maud" which he gave in the '90s he states that ten years previously "it would not have been possible to find an audience in Grahamstown for such a lecture."³⁰

Nor was it easy to make intimate friends. In his Presidential Address to the Union Assembly in 1880 he said:³¹ "The inveterate determination of the people to set him apart in a place by himself, to conceive for him modes and manners even to his speech and his dress ... to put over face and feeling a mask when he visits them, assuming a sanctity that they think ought to become him, and a conversation essentially false to match, is the hardest thing a minister has to encounter."

Another source of unhappiness to his sensitive soul were the casual church manners of his congregation. This is evident in a letter from the Minister published in the Church's Yearbook for 1878,³² in which he chides his congregation for their persistent habit of coming late to church and disturbing the worship. It is clear that their lack of reverence pained him, and they seemed to be impervious to hints, plain admonishment, and the example set by the minister and his wife. Whether this behaviour was due to complacency or custom it irritated him, and he felt powerless to change it.

Then he began to be troubled by theological problems.

At this time great theological controversies were being fought out in Europe, engendered on the one hand by the new scholarly and critical attitudes to the Bible, and on the other by the growing influence of scientific researches and the general climate of intellectual curiosity.³³ All his life Cross was a wide reader and an independent thinker, and he found himself becoming more and more

concerned about the issues raised. Rowell, in a recently published book "Hell and the Victorians" (1974) writes: "Of all the articles of accepted orthodoxy that troubled the consciences of Victorian churchmen, none caused more anxiety than the everlasting punishment of the wicked." The doctrine of immortality itself was questioned, and in the 1870s, a decade which was, according to Rowell, generally marked by severe questioning of established orthodox doctrine, it was a living issue. Not only theologians but philosophers, poets and novelists were involved in the dispute. The Tractarians, the Evangelical Alliance, Unitarians, Calvinists, Arminians and Universalists all expounded and defended their views with skill and passion.

The echoes of this great debate reached even faraway Grahamstown. *Grocott's Penny Mail* of the 6th September, 1878, gave notice of the publication of a sermon by the Rev. G. Brown preached at Alice on July the 28th, entitled "Duration of Punishment of the Ungodly." "Appended to it is a Review corrective of some of Canon Farrar's assumptions." Farrar, then Archdeacon of Westminster, had at the end of 1877 preached a series of sermons on eternal punishment, which were published the following year under the title "Eternal Hope." The popular hell-fire preaching of the time seemed to him to "make a mockery of any claim that God was just and loving."³⁴

The publication of Brown's sermon could hardly have gone unnoticed by Cross, and the issues must have been debated in Grahamstown. A leading Wesleyan minister, the Rev. W. Impey, left that church because he could not subscribe to its official doctrine on this very matter.³⁵ The authority of the Bible itself seemed to be at stake, for to repudiate the idea of hell surely meant repudiating the words of Christ Himself as they were reported in the Gospels. Yet how could a man like Cross, whose faith was grounded in a belief in the limitless love and mercy of God, find room for the doctrine of eternal punishment in his theological framework? The dilemma was real and acute. He had, for his own peace of mind and integrity of purpose, to think his way through it.

He was later to acknowledge the debt he owed to the writings of the Rev. Samuel Cox, editor of *The Expositor*. Cox was the minister of a General Baptist church in Nottingham, and in 1877 he published a book entitled "Salvator Mundi", which showed him to be a thorough universalist; that is, he believed that all men would ultimately be saved, if not in this life then "beyond the grave." Cox's starting point, the problem which led him to investigate the theology of eschatology, is that clearly not all men are given the same opportunities to learn to know God and to find salvation. "Will God condemn them, and condemn them to an eternal death or an eternal misery, because they did not see what they *could* not see; when they did not repent, when the very means which would infallibly have induced repentance were not vouchsafed them?" Cox's clearly stated views caused the publishers of *The Expositor* to demand that Cox give an undertaking to exclude from the journal in future "all allusions

to 'the larger hope' and even to the general tone of thought which it carried with it."³⁶ As Cox could not in honesty comply with this demand he resigned the editorship. Cox's rejection of the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment became one of the points at issue in the Down Grade controversy a decade later, and Cross's sympathy with Cox explains why he was unable to give his support to Spurgeon in the controversy.

To what extent this great debate affected the Baptist congregation in Grahamstown is not clear. There is nothing in the church minute books to suggest that there was any dissension in the church, but it is probable that the old cleavage, the radically different views of General and Calvinistic Baptists, which dated back to the very foundation of the work in 1820, had never fully healed. Cross could never preach what he himself did not wholeheartedly believe, and he was incapable of trimming his matter or his style to suit popular taste. After his death his colleague and friend, the Rev. E.G. Evans, wrote of him, remembering the first time he heard him preach in 1883: "I recall the face lit up with interest in his subject, the undemonstrative manner, the deliberate speech, the impression received of a preacher who was original and brave enough to voice his own conclusions upon the great theme of his sermon, though they might differ from those generally accepted in evangelical circles."³⁷

The strain of his theological uncertainties began to tell on his health, but the deacons and members of the church were apparently unaware of his growing disquiet. When the deacons gathered for a routine meeting on March 24th, 1880, they were certainly unprepared for what their Pastor had to say. He reminded them that he had contracted with the church to stay for three years, and "begged to intimate that at the close of his engagement he would not be prepared to continue as the Pastor."³⁸ With some consternation the meeting was adjourned, and the deacons met again on April the 3rd,³⁹ without the Pastor, to consider the matter. After a long discussion they resolved to send two of their number, Messrs. Edkins and Jardine, "to wait upon the Rev. G.W. Cross and ascertain from that gentleman if he still adhered to the intimation made at the last Deacons' meeting." It would seem that they could scarcely believe that he was serious in his intention, and they were mystified about the reasons for this apparently abrupt decision.

Cross's mind was made up, however. On April the 14th he sat down to write a formal letter of resignation to the church to which he had come with such high hopes not three years ago:

Dear Brethren,

It is now three years since I received from Dr. Landels your call to the pastorate of this church. You stipulated in your letter that the minister who accepted your call should serve you for three years.

These three years of service will expire in the beginning of July next when it will be my duty to resign into your hands the charge I received from you.

For all the kindness and consideration that you have shown both to myself and my office during that time I thank you heartily.

Nevertheless I cannot consider our association as pastor and flock a happy one. I have been growingly convinced, almost from the first, that such service as you required from a minister I could not render, nor could you receive that which I had in me to give. I think it most probable that, if we could have met and known each other previously, our engagement would not have been made.

With this conviction of course I could not accept another term of service should you be desirous to offer it, nor would it be to the advantage of your church that I should. Your welfare brethren is on my heart and I am sorry that I have been almost powerless to promote it, and now commend you to God our Father. His love and faith be in you. And the Lord of grace Himself give you grace always by all means.

I am,
Sincerely yours,
G.W. Cross⁴⁰

This letter was read at a specially-convened church meeting that same evening.⁴¹ All the members who spoke regretted the decision made by the Pastor. A few days later another special meeting was called, and the attendance was more than doubled. After much discussion it was agreed that the letter of resignation be accepted.⁴²

However, at another special meeting called on May 26th it was "proposed that the Rev. G.W. Cross be invited to continue the pastorate for a further period of three months after June next."⁴³ This proposal was conveyed to him in a letter, and in replying he wrote: "It gives me great pleasure to comply with the church's request. I will serve them as I may, and ask their co-operation in an endeavour to make the remaining days better than any that have gone before by God's help and preparatory for whatever true workman he may guide hither."⁴⁴

A paragraph in *Grocott's Penny Mail* officially notified the citizens of Grahamstown of this development. "We regret to learn, that owing partly to ill-health, the Rev. G.W. Cross, the respected Pastor of the Baptist Church in this

city has decided to resign his charge at an early date. We understand, however, that Mr Cross will retain office until a suitable pastor shall have been obtained from England."⁴⁵

The "remaining days" of Cross's ministry showed that he was serious in his endeavour to make them better than any that had gone before. In July he delivered a special series of sermons to young men on Sunday evenings.⁴⁶ In August he was once again the conductor at a "Service of Song:" a cantata based on the life of John the Baptist; his friend the Rev. John Chalmers acted as the Narrator.⁴⁷ It was so successful that it had to be repeated on September the 7th, and again the church was crowded.⁴⁸ He was determined to do everything in his power to make it easy for his successor to take over from him: there must be no suggestion of divided loyalties or a split church. The new minister, the Rev. L. Nuttall, was to start his ministry in November, and that Cross succeeded in his aim is shown by the fact that a few months later Nuttall, in writing his first report about the church for the Baptist Union Handbook, was able to say that he felt "greatly encouraged by the Christian harmony that prevails."⁴⁹

Cross continued with his other activities, too, without any gradual withdrawal. Until he left Grahamstown he attended the committee meetings of the School, the Library and the Hospital. His theological difficulties did not prevent him from preaching, nor from preparing to take up the office of President of the Baptist Union. In Evans's words: "while he wrestled with his doubts" he preached "the truths he was sure of".⁵⁰ In September he travelled to King Williams Town with Grocott and King for the Third Assembly, where they were to be the guests of the German Baptist Church. Cross was inducted as President for the year by the retiring President, Brotherton, and on the evening of the first day he delivered his Presidential Address at a public meeting in the church.⁵¹

This address was afterwards published in the Handbook under the title "Christian Democracy"⁵² – perhaps a misleading title, for it had nothing to do with political systems. If one compares it with his Union sermon of April in the previous year it is clear how much he had grown in spiritual stature and in the mastery of his medium in those eighteen months. It is still very readable and very pertinent, and there is in it no trace of mental confusion or uncertainty. He chose to speak about what he called "the distinguishing principle" of the Baptist denomination, especially as it affects the organization of the church. "All organization and office is of and for the individual; in other words, there is no other church than an aggregate of individual members, and no office therein but for their service ... We declare that the members are not made for the church but the church for the members ... We admit or administer no rite but for the individual and at his own request. We are held together from within, not bound from without." He continues: "And here let me disclaim all intention of condemning other systems. To do so were to deny to others the

liberty we claim. Liberty most absolute. Liberty to forgo liberty, if the body so will ... Various nations need various governments. So it may be in religion."⁵³

But, "This principle of ours makes of the last importance the *man*. Not the individual for his gifts, be they never so transcendent, nor the man for his distinguishing personality; but the man for his manhood."⁵⁴

He traces this principle and its implications in the New Testament. "Thus Scripture shows all assemblies – all offices, all laws and rites the most sacred and solemn – and even itself [i.e. Scripture] to be the servant of man." The Lord Himself is Servant of all: "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."⁵⁵

He goes on to describe the practical working out of this principle. We must be reverent of our nature; we must use all things God has given us for the education of this nature. Life is ours: childhood, youth, manhood, old age. "And death is ours. And shall we shrink from acceptance of this gift after the others? As though God would give blessing and then cursing ... Death waits at the end of life, not to arrest it but to help it on. It lifts life into other and higher spheres, and is therefore a birth. It provides for the soul that which was unprovided by life ... And things to come are ours on the same principle. For if God gives us time for our soul's salvation – if things present help it – if even evil things provide opportunities of self-denial and self-conquest – surely things to come are ours. Eternity is ours.

"Brethren, the last inference we shall draw from these principles is, that we must be reverent of the human soul, wherever we find it."⁵⁶

Whatever Cross's intellectual difficulties may have been, this sermon shows that his faith in God's goodness and mercy had not been undermined.

On October the 21st the Grahamstown Church arranged a social function "to bid farewell to the esteemed pastor, Rev. G.W. Cross, who is retiring from the ministry, for a time at least."⁵⁷ Thus *Grocott's Penny Mail*, which reported the meeting in detail. As is usual on such occasions there were many speeches, interspersed with musical items. Mr Grocott, on behalf of the Church, presented Mr Cross with "a purse of fifty sovereigns and a beautifully bound photographic album ... as a token of love and esteem from the congregation." Then Mr Winstanley, on behalf of the choir, presented him with "a handsome timepiece, as a recognition of his many services, which he had so generously bestowed upon the choir." Both album and clock are with us to this day: the album, heavy and ornate, a monument to Victorian taste; but the "timepiece," a pendulum wall clock, is handsome still and still bears the silver plate which was affixed to it in 1880. The *Penny Mail* continues: "The Rev. G.W. Cross, with genuine surprise, thanked one and all of his flock for their kind and generous gifts and good wishes."

October the 31st was a Sunday, and the church was crowded both morning and evening for Cross's final services as pastor. In the evening he preached again on the theme which was closest to his heart, the same with which he had begun his ministry in Grahamstown; but this time his text was "Love one another."⁵⁸

The congregation seems to have been reluctant to let him go, for he was again in the pulpit the following Sunday morning, the new minister conducting the evening service. Cross actually presided at the Induction service for his successor on November the 9th – a most unusual proceeding. Grocott again reported the function in detail in the *Penny Mail*.⁵⁹ He described it as "an event of intense interest ... and no little anxiety. Should the retiring clergyman have gained, not only the respect, but also the love and esteem of his congregation, the newcomer rarely elicits, in the first instance, any feelings beyond those of curiosity, not unmingled with sundry doubts." However, the report continues, Mr. Nuttall's "kindly and earnest demeanour had already gained for him many friends who, whilst deeply regretting the departure of Mr. Cross, found consolation in the knowledge that his place would be filled by his successor." Mr Grocott, in welcoming the new minister, said, "You have come to a united church and friendly people."

Cross's ministry had been more effective than he had thought.

CHAPTER 6

Bowden : The country schoolmaster

*“Who going through the vale of misery use
it for a well: and the pools are filled with water.”*

Psalm 84:6

Book of Common Prayer

Northwards of Grahamstown, some 33 miles away, there is a farm, Bowden, lying between the Fish and the Koonap Rivers, on the north side of the Fish River Rand. To reach it you leave Grahamstown on the Bedford Road, and then branch off on the road to Fort Beaufort which, as you pass through De Bruin's Poort and on to Piggott's Bridge over the Great Fish River, seems to lead into ever more desolate country. The stony hills are bare; but the kloofs through which the river winds in great loops to the sea are densely wooded with queerly-shaped trees and bushes which call to mind Baines's pictures. This is the country of the frontier wars; in these kloofs great hordes of Black warriors once lurked in ambush with assegai and spear to fall upon the little bands of soldiers or burgher volunteers who rode out to recover stolen cattle. Nowadays the country seems empty of all inhabitants, Black or White. Beyond Piggott's Bridge the road rises to the summit of the Fish River Rand, about 2 000 feet above sea level. From this elevation you can see, to the east, the Amatola Mountains, with the unmistakable shape of the Hog's Back on the horizon; and northwards rise the Winterberg and Katberg. Here, leaving the main road, and driving along the crest of the Rand, the traveller will come a few miles further on to Bowden. The road descends to a stream, and rises again to the homestead on the opposite slope.

In all directions barren hills stretch away to empty horizons. To the newcomer the most striking feature of the landscape is its stoniness. Stones have been used to build the house and the farm buildings and the long dykes that surround the cattle "camps," but this gathering together of stones has made no perceptible difference to the number of stones lying loose on the veld. The soil is shallow and difficult to cultivate, but it nurtures a vegetation which is able to endure the intense heats of summer and frequent droughts. The hills are covered with scrubby thorn-bushes, tall aloes, prickly pears, euphorbias and low, dead-looking grey bushes, lichen-covered, which respond to rain by putting forth fresh green leaves and delicate, pinky-mauve flowers that look oddly incongruous on the dry, gnarled branches. Rain also quickly revives the tufted grass, and with very little encouragement the veld greens over. There are no large trees, but in the kloofs the bush is thick, and plumbago, with its flame-blue blossoms, flourishes, although the water-courses are usually dry.

The veld is very quiet, save for the birds, of which there are many, and the rustling of small lizards and insects. Early mornings in these uplands are beautiful beyond imagining, as fresh as if God had just created the world, and seen that it was good. As the day advances the sun grows fierce and terrible, and all living things wilt under the tyranny of heat, but the time of the going down of the sun is as beautiful as its rising. In the stillness God is very near, and He is the God of Abraham and Moses, of David and of Elijah: the God who speaks by silences and who makes Himself known to those who seek Him in solitude. In this remote place Cross was to find his Horeb, his wilderness, his Beth-el.

Bowden has been a farm since 1833. Official records show that it was first granted to one David de Lange in November 1833 for a perpetual quitrent of £4 per annum. In April 1836 he sold it to Lieut.-Colonel Henry Somerset, then Officer Commanding the Cape Mounted Rifles, for the sum of £300. De Lange had probably lost everything in the devastating frontier war of 1834-35. There is a gap in the records, and it is not known how long the farm was in Somerset's possession. The next recorded transaction is that it was sold by William Boyce to Matthew Ben Shaw in March 1847 for £1 300. Shaw, however, did not live long enough to enjoy his farm. Less than four years later he died, leaving his property, as well as the adjoining farm, Otterburn, to his kinsman, the Rev. William Shaw, the famous Wesleyan minister and missionary. William Shaw obviously had no use for the farms, for on the same day that he took transfer of them, January the 4th 1851, he sold both of them to acquaintances, the brothers William and John Dugmore and their brother-in-law George Barnes. Later, by mutual consent, a sub-division was made, and William and George sold their share of Bowden to John. In 1876 John therefore became the sole owner of two thirds of Bowden, while William and George retained Otterburn and the remainder of Bowden; and John's descendants are there to this day.¹

John Dugmore was the youngest of the three sons of Isaac Dugmore, 1820 settler, who had come to the Colony on the "Sir George Osborne" with his wife and five children. Before the voyage was over the family had increased to six; John was born at sea on April the 20th 1820.² His eldest brother, Henry Hare, ten years his senior, later became a Wesleyan minister and missionary, Xhosa linguist and colleague of the Rev. William Shaw, and one of the most striking and colourful characters among the Settlers.

Shortly after the brothers had taken over the farms John married and brought his bride to Bowden. Sidney Rebecca Morris, also of Settler stock, but ten years younger than her husband, was to spend the rest of her long life there, 51 years as wife and 14 years as widow. She bore her husband eleven children, four of whom died in infancy. Of the two surviving sons John Henry died in 1893 at the age of 26, so that eventually the farm came into the hands of Frederick, the youngest child.³ Beyond the cold facts recorded in the family Bible one seeks the living personalities of this family. Photographs tell more. Sidney's face has strength and sweetness and serenity, with humour in the mouth and eyes, while John's eagle eyes look out of his portrait still with a piercing gaze. Both were of the stuff of which pioneers are made, "with courage to endure."

Upper Albany is not suited to the growing of crops; the rainfall is low and undependable; droughts are frequent and devastating. But cattle, sheep and ostriches do well, and John Dugmore concentrated his interests in his stock. His wife took care of the dairy side of the farming operations, and became famous for her cheeses, even winning prizes for them in Europe. The farm, and indeed the whole district, prospered. As the population grew and conditions became more settled, the Dugmores (devout Wesleyans) suggested the building of a chapel at Bowden, which would be interdenominational and to which ministers from different churches and places would be invited every Sunday.⁴ The local farmers and their womenfolk supported the proposal, and set to work with enthusiasm to raise the money to build the chapel. In June 1879 the ladies held a bazaar, and one way and another it did not take long to collect the £400 or £500 which was required.⁵ By June 1880 the building was complete and in use every Sunday. Ministers were invited from as far away as Adelaide to the north and Grahamstown to the south, among them the Rev. G. W. Cross.⁶

When Cross was asked to conduct services at Bowden on August the 15th 1880 his future was still undecided, although he was due to leave the Grahamstown church in October. In the words of Batts, his friend and colleague, "His mental and spiritual conflict at that time is known only to himself. Those who knew him intimately knew that he would only act under a sense of deep conviction."⁷ Apparently he never even considered returning to England or Ireland; perhaps he was influenced by the memory of his first months in the Colony when he rode as a trooper to the war – the loveliness of the dew-wet morning, the comradeship, the veld-lore which he had learned. South Africa had stolen

his heart. He felt that if only he could go away into "a desert place" where there was solitude and space and time enough, he would be able to come to some conclusion about his theological problems.⁸

But he had a wife and child to support; and visionary, poetical dreamer though he was, he also had a very practical side to his nature. Since 1879 he had served on the committee of the Public Undenominational School, and this experience had stimulated his real and lifelong interest in education. He decided to earn his living as a teacher.

Local newspapers carried advertisements for teachers in Grahamstown schools and further afield, as far as Port Elizabeth. But he needed to get away from towns and the pressures of people, and it would not have been fair to the new minister to remain in Grahamstown.

Then came the invitation to preach at Bowden, and to spend the weekend with the Dugmore family. Riding about the farm with John Dugmore he realised that his was the "desert place" he was looking for. In that vast silence, under that tremendous sky, he would surely find rest for his soul. He found that he could talk about his problems with his host, who was old enough to be his father, and who was wise and strong in his staunch Wesleyan faith. Cross had noticed that there was an untenanted, somewhat derelict old house about a quarter of a mile away from the homestead, on the opposite slope. Would it be possible for him to take it over and there start a little school for the boys and girls of the district? Dugmore received the suggestion with enthusiasm. The education of their children was a perpetual problem to the farmers of the Colony: the great size of the upland farms, and the thinly scattered population, as well as the difficulty of obtaining suitable teachers militated against the establishment of rural schools. He was fairly sure that Cross would have no difficulty in finding pupils, and if he would be prepared to provide a boarding establishment as well, so much the better.

Cross's immediate future was settled. At the church's farewell function in October he was able to say that "though he was leaving the church and the city he would still be residing in Albany, and at times would be in their midst."⁹

Shortly after the arrival of the new minister, Mr. and Mrs. Cross and the year-old baby, Graham, left Grahamstown for Bowden. They went at first to the hospitable Dugmores, and stayed with the family while the derelict house was repaired and put in order. There was a great deal to be done, and Cross set to work with energy, aided by an old workman, Wilson, and a Black labourer, Jantje.¹⁰ Cross was, after all, the grandson of Oxfordshire labourers, and he found satisfaction in the hard manual work, which gave his over-stimulated brain a rest. In addition to the little house a stable, a wash-house and an incubator room, all disused, were commandeered, repaired and transformed

into bedrooms and living quarters for the coming pupils. When all was ready the furniture was brought from Grahamstown and the family moved in.

At the beginning of the new school year in January 1881 the Bowden Academy opened with two girls and three boys. Classes were held at first in the chapel, but as it was some distance from the house this was found to be inconvenient, and the school moved to a large outside room close to the Dugmore homestead. Life settled into a routine. Lessons occupied the mornings, and in the afternoons, when the heat of the day began to decline, there would be games for the children, cricket being the favourite. In addition to teaching, Cross took an interest in the farm. He acquired two pairs of ostriches and a few cows. The ostriches were kept in camps a good way down the valley, and every day in the late afternoon Cross could be seen wending his way thither with mealies in a bag to feed the birds. He grew fond of the ungainly creatures, and was very proud when they hatched their first chicks. The chicks were removed to little enclosures in the vegetable garden, to be nearer the house, and they were cared for by Jantje, whose duty it was also to milk the cows and take the milk up to Mrs. Cross. Some of the milk was set for cream, and later churned into butter.

For Mrs. Cross the life was very hard. She was caring for five children in addition to her own baby; the Irish nursemaid who had come with them from Grahamstown to Bowden, appalled at the loneliness of the farm, soon returned to town. It was difficult to find or keep reliable servants. Houskeeping in the country was quite different from the ordered and predictable ways of Belfast, or even Grahamstown. She found the heat of the summer months very exhausting, and the dust affected her eyes and caused her much suffering. As if this were not enough she was again enduring all the discomforts of pregnancy. Mrs. Cross was made of tough stuff, but even she might have found it all more than she could bear if it had not been for the kindness of the Dugmore family. In Sidney Dugmore and her daughters, Siddie, Emily, Mary, Alice and Jessie, she found true and lasting friends.

Their second son was born to the Crosses at Bowden on May the 6th 1881.¹¹ His father, with his head as usual full of poetry, decided that he would like the child to be named Algernon Charles Swinburne. When his wife objected he offered as alternatives either Dante Gabriel Rossetti or Matthew Arnold.¹² The poor little mother chose Matthew Arnold as being slightly less unsuitable than the others, and so he was registered. As Arnold he was known for the rest of his life, and family legend has it that he never, in all his ninety-two years, read the works of his namesake.

After his birth Mrs. Cross was very ill, and as soon as she was able to travel she was taken to Grahamstown with her two little boys to spend some time with the Wheeltons, old church friends, under whose kindly care she gradually regained her strength.¹³

In rural Albany, as earlier in Grahamstown, Cross quickly adapted himself to the community in which he lived. With his customary zest and determination he was at once schoolmaster, farmer and parson. He was a born teacher, convinced of the importance of education and capable of getting the best out of his pupils, as later results were to show.

He took a great interest in all the farming operations of the district, so different from his native Oxfordshire. He was one of the first to enrol as a member when the Upper Albany Farmers' Association was formed in December 1881.¹⁴ The monthly meetings of the Association provided a good opportunity for getting to know the district and its inhabitants, and he sometimes rode long distances to attend them. These meetings were reported in detail in the *Grahamstown Journal*, whose pages witness to Cross's active involvement in the concerns of the farming community of Upper Albany. He was particularly interested in matters such as the administration of justice in country districts, and the organization and function of the Divisional Police.¹⁵ Often the papers read at the meetings were on technical topics such as "The breed of cattle best adapted to the wants of this country." Sometimes members were expected to give brief, off-the-cuff talks on "snap questions" drawn from a hat. On one such occasion Cross had to hold forth on the question "Should we breed sheep and goats for wool or slaughter?"¹⁶

In October 1882 he was invited to read a paper at the monthly meeting on a matter very close to his heart. He entitled it: "Public Education: Is it within the reach of the farmer?"¹⁷ The subject aroused great interest, and there was a large attendance. "For the first time the meeting was honoured by the presence of ladies", reported the *Grahamstown Journal*.

At that time education was a warm political issue, and Cross introduced his talk by stating his conviction that (contrary to the views expressed in some newspapers) it was the right and the duty of farmers' associations to concern themselves with political affairs. "Our aim," he said, "is to influence legislation." He then went on to show why education is so important – to the individual, to society and to the political and economic advancement of the country. To the individual, because by enlarging his interests he will have more to think and talk about than the petty gossip which at present forms his "miserable amusement." To society, because "in liberal education I see the best power for breaking down that barrier between people and people, which may yet be the curse of this country." To political and economic advancement, because "knowledge is necessary for the discovery and development of the true resources of the land," and because without education "public opinion cannot be enlightened, nor public business progressive." The final part of the paper was devoted to a detailed description of the existing school system of the Colony, with particular reference to its inadequacy in the rural areas. He admitted that it was much easier to point out defects than indicate remedies. "Nevertheless it is our

business to point them out, for though we may not have perfect plans to substitute for the defective ones, yet our criticism may set others thinking."

There is an interesting passage in this speech which is an explicit statement of Cross's views on the relationship between Dutch and English speaking Colonists. This was the period of the growing influence of J.H. Hofmeyr and the Afrikaner Bond, which had led to the awakening of the political consciousness of the Cape Dutch population. This in turn had caused a violent reaction from certain arrogant English Colonists. Their attitude is summed up in a letter signed "John Bull" which appeared in the Grahamstown paper *The Eastern Star* on April the 15th 1879: "It would indeed be a bright day for the Cape if every Dutch Boer was driven out of it, or even if they were deprived of their privileges and treated as the wretched, disloyal, ungrateful foreigners they really are." Such crude arrogance appalled Cross, but he had faith that education would be a remedy for prejudice. "Though there are people who are educated, and are yet prejudiced and narrow in their sympathies, yet for one such we could discover twenty whom prejudice and the restriction of whose sympathies are in direct proportion to their ignorance ... Where is the Englishman of liberal education who would not feel ashamed to despise the Dutch? ... I am bold enough to say that the arrogant tone adopted by a considerable portion of our press when writing of Dutchmen or Dutch doings, and the flippant assumption of superiority, are indications of a shallow, ignorant judgement, and are calculated to do much harm."

An animated discussion followed the reading of this paper. The first speaker said that he believed that Mr. Cross had clearly expressed the views held by the farming community upon this subject. Mr. J.H. Nel, a member of the Afrikaner Bond who had lately also joined the Upper Albany Farmers' Association, was "particularly gratified with the general tone of the proceedings, and the liberal feeling of the meeting towards those of his own nationality."

Throughout his life Cross was consistent in his efforts to break down the barriers between groups which tradition had erected and which prejudice maintained. His attitude was the natural consequence of his living faith in Christ – "our peace ... who hath broken down the middle wall of partition." So he reached out to those of the community who spoke another language, to those of another colour, to denominations other than his own; and his attitude towards women in an age when they were universally assumed to be inferior to men earned him the gratitude of that great feminist, Olive Schreiner.¹⁸

Cross's connection with the Farmers' Association led to the, for him, novel experience of being the chief speaker at a political meeting in Grahamstown. It came about in this way.

A General Election was pending when, in October 1883, the monthly meeting of the Association was held at Heatherton Towers, the home of Arthur

Douglass. Douglass was one of the foremost farmers of the district. It was due in large measure to his enterprise and initiative that ostrich farming had become a flourishing industry at the Cape, and he was famous as the inventor of an incubator for ostrich eggs and the author of a handbook on ostrich farming. He was planning to stand at the coming election as a candidate for Grahamstown, and the most important plank in his platform was the issue of Protection, of which he was an ardent protagonist. This was the subject he chose to deal with in the paper he read at the Farmers' Association meeting in October.¹⁹ In the discussion which followed he was surprised to realise that not everybody agreed with him, and that his most determined opponent was Cross. Cross not only disagreed with the principle of Protection but also thought that Douglass was talking too much in the debate "and seemed inclined by a mere exhibition of force to override others." To which Douglass retorted: "As Mr. Cross says my arguments are too much for him, and is afraid ..."

Cross: "I will not be misrepresented. I did not say I was afraid of any arguments, but a speaker has no right in a deliberative assembly to override others by an exhibition of mere noise."

Cross was successful in having the meeting adjourned, and announced that at the next meeting he would move the following resolution: "That whilst the establishment of manufactures in this country is a thing to be desired the principle of protection is detrimental to public wealth, and a revision of the customs duties would be sufficient to establish any manufacturers likely to flourish."

Douglass (probably with an eye to the election) moved that the next meeting be held in Grahamstown. Cross would have preferred to have the meeting at Bowden: "He said he would not oppose going to Grahamstown, but it would involve some expense and put him to much trouble."

However, Douglass got his way, and so it came about that Cross was the chief speaker at what amounted to a political meeting in the Grahamstown Town Hall on Saturday afternoon November the 24th 1883.²⁰ In addition to the ordinary members a great many merchants were present. The subject was a matter of intense interest at a time of commercial depression, when there was much unemployment and many people were leaving the Colony to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

Although Cross was, as a parson, quite used to speaking in public, he had never before made a speech at a political meeting. He now, to his own surprise, found himself in the position of being the chief advocate of the anti-Protectionist cause. His speech was listened to with enthusiasm, and in the discussion which followed even one of his opponents said "it was one of the most admirable he had ever heard." When Cross's amendment was put to the vote it was carried "with much cheering."

Yet reading that speech now one realises that Cross was not of the stuff of which politicians are made. He had opposed Douglass in the first place because he was convinced that Protection, while favouring manufacturers, would increase prices for customers, and that the poorest would suffer most from the rise in the cost of living. Nevertheless, temperamentally he was too sensitive, in any controversial issue (political or theological), too clear-sighted and too humble to be a fervent partisan. As a political speaker this weakened his case, because he lacked the passionate conviction that his point of view was the only tenable one. When all the discussion was over, and he rose to reply to the points raised, he concluded by saying that "if Mr. Douglass meant by protection to encourage the natural resources and industries not by artificial means of prohibitive duties on imports, then they meant the same thing."

The meeting was the subject of the leading article in the *Grahamstown Journal* on the Monday following, and it is not surprising that that paper, an ardent advocate of Protection, felt that in spite of the vote for Cross's amendment, Douglass had gained his point. "The only practical difference between Mr. Douglass's resolution and Mr. Cross's amendment," said the *Journal*, "is that the latter would not go so far in the ways of Protection as the former."²¹

Although Cross thoroughly enjoyed the farm life and his work as a teacher he never forgot his primary calling as a minister. He preached nearly every Sunday morning in the Bowden chapel; and, as it was a long distance for Mr. and Mrs. Dugmore to walk, he took to holding Sunday evening services in the Dugmore home.²² He kept his links with the Grahamstown Baptist Church, and was sometimes asked to preach there when he visited Grahamstown in the school holidays. He was always invited to special events in the church's calendar. By this time he was an experienced and hardy rider, and in November 1881 he rode to Grahamstown to attend a service in honour of the first anniversary of the arrival of the Rev. Levi Nuttall. He was one of the chief speakers on that occasion,²³ and "If his speech," he said, "should be a jogtrot, they should ascribe it to the pony, as he had thought it out on his pony's hoofs that morning." The speech was, in fact, a parable based on his ride to Grahamstown: "a stormy day, great clouds floating about in the sky, the wind cold and the prospect gloomy."

In February 1882 he was one of several ministers who took part in the ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone of the new Sunday School hall by the Hon. J. Gordon Sprigg.²⁴ This was a gala occasion, not only for the church but for the town, and although it was on a Tuesday morning a large crowd (including the Sunday School children) attended, and a collection of £620 was taken. Cross presented the silver trowel to Sprigg, remarking that he thought that the fact of the article being entirely of Colonial manufacture would greatly increase its value as a memorial of the occasion.

The completion of the hall in July the following year was the occasion for more celebrations, and again Cross was invited to take part.²⁵ Grahamstown in 1883 was suffering badly from the prevailing depression, and it was only by hard work and sacrificial giving that enough money had been collected to enable the building to be finished. Mr. Nuttall, whose salary had been raised in 1881 to £400 per annum, in 1883 cheerfully accepted a reduction of £100 of that salary. His loving ministry was so appreciated by the congregation that when, in September 1883, his three years' contract expired, they invited him to become their permanent minister, and he was happy to accept.²⁶

During the Bowden years Cross also maintained strong links with the Baptist Union, attending the annual assemblies regularly (although an accident prevented his attendance at the 1882 Assembly),²⁷ and taking a full part in the proceedings. At the 1881 Assembly in Grahamstown he was invited to give a talk about his work at Bowden.²⁸ In 1883, at King Williams Town, he preached the annual Union sermon. That year the assembly "proposed that a deputation wait upon the Rev. G.W. Cross to urge him to undertake the work at East London at the end of the present year."²⁹ However, the Report of the Executive July 1884 notes that "the Rev. G.W. Cross has felt it his duty to decline the invitation which the Union at its last Assembly urged upon him."³⁰ No reasons are given. Whether he declined because of his absorption in his school work, or because he did not yet feel ready to take up a pastorate again, it is impossible now to discover.

He was certainly enjoying his work as a teacher. To anybody who is interested in and loves people it is one of the most rewarding of all occupations. It was a delight to him to watch and to stimulate the growth of the young minds in his care. At last, in 1885, he decided to enter five of his boys for a public examination: the University School Elementary Examination, which was roughly equivalent to our modern Standard 6. That year 780 candidates throughout the Colony entered for the examination, which was written on the 26th and 27th of March.³¹ The results, which were published in the Government Gazette of April the 28th, are revealing. Only 525 of the candidates passed, but the Bowden Academy boys did well, three of them gaining first class passes.³² One of these, W.M. Cloete, came 15th in the list; and it is interesting to see that one of those just ahead of him was the brilliant J.C. Smuts, the future General, Prime Minister, and world statesman, then a fifteen-year-old boy at school in Riebeeck West, who came 12th.

Cross had reason to be proud of his achievement as a teacher. Without support from the Education Department, without having had any training as a teacher, and without the amenities and stimuli of a town, he had succeeded in giving his pupils a schooling as good as any in the Colony.

Events in far-away Cape Town were the unexpected cause of Cross's return to pastoral work. The Baptist Church in Cape Town, started with so much energy

and enthusiasm by the Rev. William Hamilton in 1876, had fallen into a sad state of dissension, and was also overwhelmed with debt. Hamilton, unable to cope with the situation, returned to England. There seemed to be only one man wise enough and loving enough to retrieve the situation: the Rev. Levi Nuttall of Grahamstown. An urgent call was sent to him from the Cape Town church.³³ He was very happy in Grahamstown, and it was but a year or so since that church had invited him to become their permanent pastor. Yet he could not ignore the heart-cry from Cape Town, and at considerable sacrifice to himself he decided to accept the call. In June 1885 his decision was made public, and it was announced that he would probably leave Grahamstown in August.³⁴

At the beginning of July Cross was in Grahamstown for a few days, on his way to Port Elizabeth for the annual Assembly of the Baptist Union, of which he was then the Secretary. He was invited to preach at both the morning and evening services in Grahamstown church on Sunday July the 5th.³⁵ Next day, at a specially convened church meeting it was proposed and carried unanimously "that the Rev. Mr. Cross be invited to accept the Pastorate of the church for a period of three years."³⁶ The invitation was conveyed to Mr. Cross next day, in a note from Mr. Luke. On Wednesday Cross replied: "The call from the church shall have my earnest attention and I will prepare an answer to it as soon as my engagements in connection with the Union leave me time to do so. I do not think it will be possible for me to leave my work at Bowden till the end of the year. My duty seems plainly to be there till then. I trust that this has been duly considered and that even now if it seems likely to be harmful to the church to be so long without a settled pastor the church will consider that my duty at Bowden precludes my acceptance of their call."³⁷

Notwithstanding Cross's apparent reluctance to accept the call, the deacons of the church were able to assure him, before he left for Port Elizabeth, that the church would gladly wait for him until the end of the year, and persuaded him to give them a favourable reply. The news spread quickly, and the following week the *Telegraph* of Port Elizabeth, in reporting the Assembly meetings, referred to Cross as "Pastor elect of the Grahamstown church."³⁸ On Sunday evening, July the 12th, he preached in the Queen Street church on a subject very dear to his heart: "The compassion of Christ." The *Telegraph* reported that:

He carried his hearers along with him as he taught how human sorrow and grief would find response in the heart of Christ ... His compassion and tenderness remained the same, and His sympathy with human trouble and suffering was as great as ever.³⁹

Cross returned to Bowden to carry on with his school until the end of the year. The Dugmores heard of his decision with mixed feelings. While they were sorry to lose him they could not but rejoice with him at his return to the ministry.

Until the end of his life Bowden retained a very special place in Cross's affections. In times of stress, in times of ill health, in times of contentment and in times of grief, the Crosses would return to Bowden, sure always of a loving welcome from the Dugmores. Mr. and Mrs. Dugmore were "Uncle John" and "Aunt Sidy" to the whole family, and their daughters were "aunts" to all the Cross boys, and as well-known and loved by the three who were born in after years as to the two who had spent their earliest years at Bowden.

CHAPTER 7

Return to Grahamstown

"Blessed is he who has found his work."

T. Carlyle

The Rev. L. Nuttall left in August, glad "that he would be succeeded in Grahamstown by one so well-known, so able and so worthy to occupy the position as Mr. Cross."¹ For the church there followed an interregnum in which the pulpit was filled by the help of the Baptist ministers of Port Elizabeth, King Williams Town, Cradock and East London, and local ministers of other denominations.²

The Crosses returned to Grahamstown in January 1886, the year of the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand. They settled in a house high up in George Street. From the verandah they could look down on the town or up to the hills. Behind it there was more than adequate accommodation of stables and sheds for the pastor's horse and the family poultry, and a long reach of grassy slope which made a fine playground for the little boys.³

The public soiree to give an official welcome to Mr. and Mrs. Cross on Wednesday January the 20th was overshadowed by the news which had been received that very day of the death in tragic circumstances of the Rev. Robert Templeton, Headmaster of the Public School. Templeton and his newly-wedded wife, on holiday at Coerney, lost their way in the Addo Bush while out for a walk.

They wandered around until, exhausted, Templeton collapsed and died of a heart attack. His wife eventually found her way back to the hotel at six o'clock that Monday evening. All next day search parties were out looking for Templeton, but it was not until Wednesday morning that his body was found, and the news telegraphed to Grahamstown.⁴

There was hardly a family in Grahamstown unaffected by the news. Nevertheless over 200 people gathered that evening to welcome back Mr. and Mrs. Cross,⁵ among them the Rev. J. Chalmers of Trinity Church. His presence was an indication of his esteem and friendship for Cross, for Templeton had been one of the elders of Trinity Church and a personal friend, and his death was a great shock. All the speakers at that gathering, including Cross, paid tribute to Templeton; but in spite of their sorrow the congregation could not conceal their pleasure at having Mr. Cross back with them. The Mayor (who was in the Chair), the Deacons, the Sunday School Superintendent and Mr. Chalmers all expressed great satisfaction that the Church had succeeded in persuading Mr. Cross to resume the Pastorate, "for he was known, esteemed and loved by all." In his reply Mr. Cross mentioned the five years that had been spent at Bowden: "It was imperative – it was a call of God – to go out to that active work in the wilderness in which he had been engaged, and through that interval he had never left off the Lord's work; but the burden of preaching here for his daily bread had been greater than he could bear at that time. They had been five years of hard work, during which he had gained much experience, and with that enlarged experience he had come back to them. He felt that the proudest position he could hold was to be a minister of Jesus Christ."⁶

It was good to be back in Grahamstown. The drought had broken, and the town was looking its best. Cattle grazed their fill in the thick long grass of the commonage, and the trees on the surrounding hills were in full foliage.⁷ At the end of March *Grocott's Mail* reported that "Church Square has been, the whole morning, a scene of bustling activity such as has never been witnessed there since the deep, dark cloud of depression, by which this beautiful country of ours has been so long o'ershadowed, first rose above the commercial horizon. Crowded with wagons laden – or about to become so – with every conceivable description of merchandize, it reminded one forcibly of the good old days before the drought."⁸

There were other changes. The unhappy divisions in the Anglican Church community which had split Grahamstown society were healed when Dean Williams died in October 1885. Bishop Webb's tact brought the warring factions together, and on Christmas day they united in worship in St. George's Cathedral.⁹ Grahamstown breathed a great sigh of relief. It had not enjoyed the country-wide notoriety which the Williams scandals and lawsuits had brought it, and which had drained pupils from the schools and trade from the merchants.¹⁰

Cross's second pastorate in Grahamstown, which lasted from January 1886 to June 1903, was the happiest period of his life. They were years of self-fulfilment and growing confidence in his own abilities. He was 35 when he took up the work in Grahamstown again, in the prime of life, full of health and vitality, and now, after the Bowden years, at peace with himself and certain of his calling.

He slipped back quickly into the routine of church life and work. What Grocott described as a "spirit of devoutness, harmony and love" prevailed.¹¹ With George Luke as Secretary, Thomas Grocott as Treasurer, and a loyal and reliable diaconate, Cross need have no concern about the administrative and financial affairs of the church, and he could concentrate his energies on the spiritual and pastoral work. In this he was outstandingly successful. The membership, which had been about 100 when he left the church in 1880, and 160 when he returned, rose to 230 in 1892,¹² despite the fact that so many people, especially the young men, left the town, "in quest of, not wealth, but a bare livelihood" to use Cross's own words.¹³ This trend was accelerated after the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886.

Cross was a loving and caring shepherd of his flock, and spent much time every week in pastoral visitation. He was also very conscious of the fact that if he were adequately to fulfil the role of spiritual leader and teacher he must cultivate his own mind and heart. Only those who have to do it know what it costs to prepare two sermons every week, year after year; preaching to the same people, trying to reach their hearts and stimulate their thinking. Cross found inspiration not only in the Scriptures but in a wide range of reading which kept his mind fertile. In spite of the shortcomings of his formal education he became, by his own continuing efforts, a scholar and literary critic who was regarded with respect in the academic circles of Grahamstown and beyond.

The pages of the *Grahamstown Journal* and *Grocott's Mail* recreate vividly the pattern of life in Grahamstown in the last two decades of the 19th century, and testify to its vitality. The stage upon which this scene of Cross's life was to be enacted was crowded with all kinds of characters: interesting, lovable, eccentric, querulous, lofty, lowly. The names of some of them are still remembered. Dr. William Guybon Atherstone, the first to administer an anaesthetic in South Africa, founder of the Botanical Gardens in Grahamstown, and the one who identified the first diamond found near the Orange River in 1867. George Cory, who came to Grahamstown to teach chemistry at the Public School, went on to become the first Professor of Chemistry at the newly formed Rhodes University College in 1904, and is now chiefly remembered for his history of the Eastern Province, *The Rise of South Africa*. Old Mrs. Schreiner, widow of a German missionary and mother of a brood of children who left an indelible mark on South Africa, living in retirement at the Convent, and occasionally visited by one or another of her famous children: Theo, Hettie, Olive and Will. An impressive collection of schoolmasters, among them Canon Espin of St.

Andrews, Father Fitzhenry of St. Aidan's, the Rev. Theo Chubb of Kingswood, George Grant of the Public School, among whom Mother Cecile of the Teacher's Training School was well able to hold her own. Dr. Schönland of the Albany Museum, famous father of an even more famous son. Judges and advocates of the Eastern Districts Court. Members of the Legislative Assembly, merchants, and City Fathers.

Church circles, education circles, literary circles, political and legal circles: in the pages of the *Journal* and the *Mail* we see Cross moving in and through all of them. He knew and was known by all sorts and conditions of men in the town.

Although there had been a considerable influx of immigrants in the past twenty years the majority of the population were descended from the 1820 Settlers. Cross grew to love and respect the old Settler families. He had come to the Colony in time to meet and know some of the original Settlers, and, like Cory, he was fascinated by their stories of old wars, old hardships, old achievements. In 1888, at the annual service in commemoration of the arrival of the Settlers, he was honoured by being invited to preach in Commemoration Church.¹⁴

There was not much colour prejudice or friction between the White population and other groups, partly because most Blacks (at that time usually referred to as Kafirs) were still living in their traditional tribal way in their own territories, unaffected by the industrial revolution that was still to come. There was an area in Grahamstown known as the Fingo Location, but Fingoes and Whites had lived together on amicable terms for generations, and if there was any discrimination against them it was more of a class distinction than a colour prejudice. Blacks and Whites mingled happily and unselfconsciously in civic festivities such as Grahamstown loved to arrange for special occasions like the Queen's Jubilee, or the visit of a Governor or a Prime Minister; or in United Children's Services in Commemoration Church, when all the Sunday Schools of the town crammed the great church to capacity;¹⁵ or on more serious occasions when all the scholars of Grahamstown, Black and White, girls and boys, sat down in the Baptist Lecture Hall to write their public examinations under the supervision of the Rev. G.W. Cross, Commissioner.

Those years, from 1886 until the end of 1895 (when the Jameson Raid flashed the first rumblings of the storm that was to come) seem now, looking back from this distance, to have been, in Grahamstown at least, a period of security and tranquillity which any man or woman of the last quarter of the twentieth century might envy. Year succeeded year with the same predictable pattern: the Sunday School anniversaries and picnics before Easter; the Easter holidays; the months between Easter and winter holidays, when the town was a-bustle with public lectures, debates and concerts; the Flower services held in every church in October or November, when all the collections were donated to the

local hospitals, and the flowers to the patients; the end-of-year speech days at the schools. Then the Christmas holidays, and the exodus of hundreds of the townsfolk to Port Alfred, gay with all the delights of a summer seaside resort, until well into January; and the gradual resumption of the tasks and joys of the new year in February. What zest they had, those Victorians! How much delight they found in simple things: in hobbies of all kinds, in country walks and wild flowers, in games, in books, in debating societies and self-improvement, in cultivating their talents and in applying their minds seriously to serious matters.

Cross had scarcely been back a month when he was re-elected to the Committee of the Public Library.¹⁶ The Library was a source of endless joy to him, an Aladdin's Cave of inexhaustible treasure. He himself said that he owed to the Library his first acquaintance with most modern poetry and literature, which had helped to make life so rich for him.¹⁷ He was a compulsive reader, especially of the great Victorian poets; and accompanied in his study by his beloved books he would sometimes read all night, oblivious of the passing of the hours, until his wife, who habitually rose at dawn, would surprise him with a cup of hot milk and send him off to bed.

In February he was re-elected to the Committee of the Albany Hospital, a service he continued to give until his departure from Grahamstown in 1903.¹⁸ He also re-joined the Committee of the Undenominational Public School.¹⁹ His interest in education was quickly appreciated in other quarters, and his services as an examiner were enlisted by the Trustees of the Wesleyan Girls High School.²⁰ He discharged this function for several years, until, because of the pressure of other duties, he was obliged to give it up.

The 9th Annual Assembly of the Baptist Union was held in King Williams Town in September 1886. Times were hard, and only 7 of the 15 ministers of the Union were able to attend. The Executive's Report for the year spoke of hardships in all the churches due to the commercial depression.²¹ The Statistical Tables in the Handbook show a decrease in membership from 1731 the previous year to 1446, which was attributed largely to emigration.

During the Bowden years Cross had not severed his links with the Union, nor ceased to interest himself in its affairs, but he went to the 9th Assembly in the conscious awareness that he was once again the minister of the Mother Church. He preached at the inaugural service of the Assembly on "Moments of vision" – a sermon which was described by a layman who was present at the service in the following words: "Although enriched with choice poetic thoughts, spiritual fervour predominated, and the experience of all present seemed to correspond with that of the rapt disciple on the Mount of Transfiguration, when he exclaimed, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here!'"²²

The year 1886 drew to a close in a fearful heatwave, with temperatures of over 100 F. in Grahamstown.²³ Poor little Mrs. Cross was expecting her third child,

and found the heat very trying. Both parents hoped and expected that the baby would be a girl, and planned to give her the name of her paternal grandmother: Mary Nurden.²⁴ But when the baby was born on Monday, December the 13th it turned out to be a boy again.²⁵ He was given the name of George Nurden, and was known from infancy as Nurden, perhaps because it would have been awkward to have two Georges in the same household.

In many ways Nurden was closer to both his parents than his brothers. He loved to help his mother about the house, and throughout his life he was interested in such domestic arts as the preserving of fruit and the making of bread. He had his mother's impish sense of fun, and (unlike his brothers) he spoke with her Irish accent, which he never entirely lost. As he grew up his tastes began to resemble his father's; his love of books and his absorbing interest in theology and church matters drew him very close to his father. He was well named. Of all the boys he was the one most like his father and his father's family, not only physically but in his tastes and temperament.

1887, the Queen's Golden Jubilee Year, opened in Grahamstown with a visit from the Prime Minister, Sir Gordon Sprigg. Cross was among the 60 guests at a banquet given in his honour in the Assembly Rooms on January the 5th.²⁶ On June the 19th the Baptist, Presbyterian and Wesleyan churches joined together in a united service of thanksgiving in Commemoration Church to celebrate the Jubilee. About 2 000 people were present.²⁷ Grahamstown's most important event this year, however, was the holding of a South African Queen's Jubilee Exhibition, which was opened on the 15th December. Throughout the year the town was busy with preparations for this great event. The long list of important patrons included not only people like the Governor of the Cape Colony but also Presidents Kruger and Brand of the Transvaal and Free State Republics. The Exhibition was to be a shop window of the agricultural and industrial achievements of the whole country.²⁸ From its inception Cross was deeply interested in the project, to the extent of standing as one of the financial guarantors and paying in £25 – a month's salary!²⁹

From the time of the arrival of the Governor, Sir Hercules Robinson, on December the 12th until the close of the Exhibition on January the 16th, Grahamstown was en fête. The *Journal* reported large crowds of people arriving in the city. The Exhibition was formally opened at noon on December the 15th by the Governor, who remained in Grahamstown until January the 5th. Sir Gordon Sprigg arrived on December the 14th. The Governor was the guest of honour at St. Andrew's Collège on December the 16th, where he distributed the prizes at the annual Speech Day; the Undenominational Public School followed this up the next day by having the Premier to distribute *their* prizes.³⁰

By the time the Exhibition closed the turnstiles had recorded upwards of 70 000 visitors.³¹

During the eighties and nineties some interesting and famous people visited Grahamstown. In October 1887 the Crosses were hosts to Mr. J. Hannington, brother of Bishop James Hannington, the first Bishop of Eastern Equatorial Africa, who had been murdered in Uganda in 1885. Mr. Hannington preached in the Baptist Church on Sunday morning, October the 30th; and the following Tuesday, before a very large audience, he lectured in the Baptist Hall on the Life, Work and Death of Bishop Hannington.³²

Other interesting visitors whom Cross met were Olive Schreiner, General Booth of the Salvation Army, who spoke for an hour and a half to a packed Commemoration Church on the social and spiritual work of the Army;³³ and the Rev. Charles Spurgeon, son of the famous preacher, who came to South Africa in 1895 for the sake of his health, and was in Grahamstown in February and May.³⁴ From America came the Jubilee Singers, "a world-famous troupe of ten Coloured ladies and gentlemen" who "sing the weird, plaintive melodies sung by the former slaves in the Southern States of America."³⁵ They were immensely popular in Grahamstown, singing night after night to full houses from September the 22nd to October the 4th 1890,³⁶ and returning to Grahamstown the following year after touring all over South Africa.³⁷

From time to time visiting evangelists from England would arrive in Grahamstown, and the congregations of the Wesleyan, Baptist and Presbyterian churches would join forces to welcome them and to arrange the programmes and provide the necessary accommodation. Well-known South African church leaders also came to Grahamstown, and Cross became intimate friends with some of them: Dr. James Stewart of Lovedale and the Rev. James Moffat, the son of the great missionary, and himself an influential missionary in Bechuanaland and what was later to be known as Rhodesia.³⁸

Another clerical friend whom Cross met while he was on a visit to Grahamstown was the Rev. A. Vine Hall of Claremont, Congregational minister and poet. They had much in common. Vine Hall had a high respect for Cross as a critic of poetry, and invited his comments and criticism on his own poems.

In addition to meeting interesting visitors to Grahamstown Cross himself took every opportunity to travel in South Africa. These journeys were made possible by the expanding railway network. As Secretary of the Baptist Union he sometimes combined official business with the delights of travel, and on his return to Grahamstown he would usually be asked to give a popular lecture on the places he had visited. The first of these tours took him to Natal, which he visited in company with Thomas Grocott in March 1888.³⁹ They travelled from Port Elizabeth to Durban in the *African*,⁴⁰ and stayed at the Oriental Hotel in Smith Street. Cross was fascinated by the sub-tropical vegetation and climate and the clean and well-kept appearance of the town, but above all by the "variety of colour, costume and feature in the folks" he met. He wrote down his impressions as he travelled, and sent them off to Grahamstown to be published

in *Grocott's Mail*.⁴¹ They saw the great sugar plantations and visited the largest sugar mill in the country, at Mount Edgecombe, as well as a small tea estate in Prospect, near Durban, where they watched the tea being picked, and learned how it was cured. Did Cross spare a thought for that boy who was once himself, working at Twinings in the Strand?

They travelled up to Pietermaritzburg by train, passing through some of the most beautiful scenery in South Africa. As usual, they got into conversation with their fellow-travellers, and realised that the colonist of Natal was a very different breed from the Cape variety. "The Old Colony is spoken of as being very jealous of the New, and a deadly enemy in trade ..." he wrote. "We sometimes hear some funny things said of us. All is good-humoured, however, and we have enjoyed ourselves with our companions on every journey."⁴²

In Maritzburg Cross was again impressed by the well-kept air of the town. His comments are a sad reflection on Grahamstown in this respect. They visited the Baptist Church and also a Wesleyan mission station at Edendale, about seven miles away. Grocott was, of course, interested in the local newspapers, and they paid a visit to the offices of the *Natal Witness*, described by Cross as "the largest and most complete establishment of its kind in South Africa." On Saturday they joined the thousands who went to the park to watch a cricket match. The Governor and Lady Havelock were there, and, as it was St. Patrick's Day, the band played Irish melodies, "which made us laugh and cry by turns."⁴³ Cross never forgot that he was, in his own phrase, "Irish by marriage."

On their return to Durban they left the train at Pinetown and walked about five miles across the fields to visit the Roman Catholic mission at Mariannahill, run by German Trappist monks, who were at that time devoting most of their time and energy to the building of the church. The travellers were received with great courtesy, and shown all over the mission, meeting the school children, Black and White. They were greatly impressed by the self-sacrificing labours of the silent monks, with their austere way of life; and they enjoyed the simple meal, "true monks' fare," of sweet white bread, pure water and fruit, followed by coffee, which was served to them in the room kept for strangers. Then the monks arranged to have them driven back to the station, and they returned that night to Durban.⁴⁴

By the following Sunday they were back in Grahamstown.⁴⁵ There was great interest in the subject of Natal, and Cross was persuaded to give a public lecture on his travels.⁴⁶ It was such a success that it was repeated, by request, a few days later to "a crowded and highly appreciative audience."⁴⁷ As always, Cross's intense interest in his subject was conveyed to his audience in vivid and eloquent language, and his own enthusiasm evoked theirs.

A month later, at the Annual Assembly of the Baptist Union in Port Elizabeth, Cross made an official report on the Baptist churches in Natal.⁴⁸ Up to this time

there had been little or no contact between the Baptists of Natal and the main body of South African Baptists in the Eastern Cape Colony, and no representatives of the churches in Natal had ever attended the Annual Assembly. Cross's visit was therefore an important contribution to the strengthening of ties between the scattered Baptists.

In this, the third year of his second pastorate in Grahamstown, Cross was busier than ever with church and community affairs, yet he found time in addition to everything else to take on the responsibility of Local Secretary and Commissioner for the public examinations of the University of the Cape of Good Hope and the Department of Public Education.⁴⁹ This included the Elementary and Higher school examinations, the Matriculation examination, Music, University degree, Civil Service Law and Teacher's Certificate examinations. Like the Public School, the Library and the Hospital, this was a responsibility he carried until his departure from Grahamstown. The job was no sinecure, as it involved the registration of candidates and the collection of fees to be sent to Cape Town, as well as making arrangements for the accommodation of the candidates and the supervision of the writing of the exams. For many years the Baptist Lecture Hall was used for this purpose, until the increase in the number of candidates necessitated a move to the Town Hall. Cross loved the work, and the continuing contact with young people that it gave him.

For Cross 1888 was an eventful year. During the course of this year he lost two of his closest friends. The Rev. John Chalmers of Trinity Presbyterian Church died in June after a lingering illness, at the age of 52.⁵⁰ Cross had known Chalmers since his arrival in Grahamstown in 1877, and their friendship was of the kind that grows between men who work at the same trade. They could share with each other the problems, vexations, satisfactions and absurdities of their daily life in a way that would not have been possible with any of their church members. The friendship was fed by a mutual love of poetry, especially the works of Tennyson. When Chalmers knew that he was dying he left instructions that "Brother Cross" should conduct his funeral service in Trinity Church. Several years later, when Mrs. Chalmers was arranging to publish a selection of her late husband's sermons, she asked Cross to contribute a Memoir of John Chalmers. *Echoes of a Ministry: Sermons preached in Trinity Church, Grahamstown, by the late Rev. John Aitken Chalmers, with a Memoir by Rev. G.W. Cross* was published in Grahamstown in 1892.⁵¹ In the limited space allotted to him (50 pages) Cross sketched a memorable portrait of the man with an art which makes one regret that he did not write more often for publication.

George Luke's death on November the 21st was totally unexpected. He was at the time Mayor of Grahamstown, and had but two weeks previously been elected Member of the Legislative Assembly for Grahamstown. His death was a loss not only to the town and the Baptist Church, but also to the Baptist Union, of which he was one of the founders and most staunch supporters.⁵²

Once again Cross was called upon to conduct the funeral of a dear friend. George Luke was buried with all the ceremony that Grahamstown felt was due to its First Citizen. Yet when Cross began to speak in the crowded church it was with the simplicity of true feeling: "Mine is a bitter and an onerous task today; I am here to bury my friend."⁵³

One of George Luke's last acts as Secretary of the Church had been to forward to the pastor a resolution passed unanimously at a Church meeting in October: "That as the term of three years for which the Rev. G.W. Cross accepted the pastorate of this church closes with the end of the present year; the church requests him to continue his ministry amongst them and expresses its full confidence in his ministerial labours."⁵⁴

There was now no question about Cross's fitness for the pastorate of Grahamstown. In the three years since his return he had become so thoroughly a part of the life of the town that the renewal of the contract seemed almost superfluous. The church minute book placed on record "the harmony prevailing between the pastor and people."⁵⁵

1889 was a very busy year. As President-Elect of the Baptist Union, Cross made another journey to Natal to visit the isolated churches in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, travelling this time in the *Pembroke Castle*.⁵⁶ This was the ship on which Sir Donald Currie had entertained Lord Tennyson and Mr. Gladstone in a famous cruise round Britain and the North Sea in 1883 (bringing down the wrath of the Queen on her Prime Minister's head for leaving the country without her permission.)⁵⁷ At Copenhagen the Kings and Queens of Denmark and Greece and the Czar and Czarina had come on board to luncheon, and Tennyson had read some of his poems to them. "Oh to have heard his deep, rich, solemn voice as he read to the illustrious party!" wrote Cross, for whom even this tenuous link with the Poet was a thrill.⁵⁸

Cross found Durban "even more striking on a second visit than on a first. There is literally no untidyness, inactivity or poverty anywhere apparent ... The general prosperity of the place is in excess of anything I have seen in any other part of the world."⁵⁹ He travelled again to Maritzburg, and noted there that "the marvellous flood of prosperity which has swept over Natal during the last twelve months has perhaps done even more for the capital city than for the port". This prosperity was due to what Cross called "the Gold Fields trade."⁶⁰

He spent the Easter holidays on a farm in the Natal uplands, and, as always, he took a keen interest in all the agricultural operations. The grass, he noted, "was thicker and taller than we ever see it, and almost as green as in Ireland."⁶¹

Towards the end of April he returned to Durban, where he gave a public lecture on Tennyson before sailing for Port Elizabeth.⁶² He was back in

Grahamstown in the first week in May, and on May 10th recounted his travels in a lecture entitled "Natal Revisited."⁶³

In June he went to King Williams Town for the 12th Annual Assembly, where for the second time he assumed office as President of the Baptist Union. The Report of the Executive was more cheerful in tone and reported steady progress. Membership now stood at 1926, and the financial position had never been better. It was hoped that the churches would respond cheerfully to the call to "Go forward", for "there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed."⁶⁴ Cross's Presidential Address, which he entitled "The Good Fight: a reconnoitre and a review" was an examination of "the foes opposed to us and the forces we can bring to bear against them in this part of the world's broad field." The foes he distinguishes are Heathenism, Materialism and Ritualism. He defines the latter as "the materialization of religion ... it hardens beautiful symbols into rites having virtues in themselves." He considered Materialism the subtlest foe and the hardest to combat. The devoted labour of missionaries would eventually conquer heathenism, and "sweet reasonableness" supersede ritualism; but materialism could only be overcome by faith. This Address was printed not only in the *Baptist Handbook*,⁶⁵ but also as a separate pamphlet, in which form it received wide publicity, attracting comment in the press.⁶⁶

One of the resolutions passed at the 12th Assembly was "that the President and the Financial Secretary visit Kimberley at an early date, with a view to establishing a Baptist Union Church in that centre." No funds were made available to them, except that provision was made to pay their train fares to Kimberley.⁶⁷

Accordingly, in July Cross and Batts set off for Kimberley.⁶⁸ They had no money, but they took an ample supply of provisions for the long train journey, as Batts recalled more than thirty years later: "A goose from the manse at Grahamstown had been slain and prepared by Mrs. Cross, and other things from the manse at King Williamstown by Mrs. Batts." They thoroughly enjoyed the thirty hour journey, neither having ever before been to this part of South Africa.

On arrival at Kimberley they put up at the Central Hotel, and immediately set about looking for the local Baptists, members of various Baptist churches throughout South Africa who had been drawn to the Diamond Fields. The two ministers arranged to borrow a hall from the Wesleyan Methodists for a service on the following Sunday morning. For the evening service they hired the Queens Theatre. The fee was £5, and they had nothing. However, in order to justify the outlay they proceeded to spend another £5 on the printing of handbills and leaflets with hymns. In the few days then left before the Sunday, they distributed the handbills, and in Batts' words "left no stone unturned in order to find out and interest our people."

The congregation on Sunday morning was disappointingly small, but in the evening the theatre was crowded, perhaps because the holding of a religious service in a theatre was something new in Kimberley. Both pastors preached, and the well-known hymns were sung with zest. The congregation was told that it was the intention to form a Baptist church in Kimberley, and those interested were asked to remain behind at the close of the service. Well over a hundred stayed, and they pledged themselves to form a church and to support a minister. At this service the collection amounted to £15, which neatly covered all the expenses, including the hotel bill of the two ministers.

A day or two later they returned home, and, as they had been empowered by the Assembly to act, they proceeded immediately to send a call to the Rev. J. Hughes of Port Elizabeth on behalf of the embryo church at Kimberley. The pioneers of the Baptist Church of South Africa were quick workers. That first service in Kimberley was held on July the 21st, and before the end of August Hughes was settled in as pastor of the new church. He proved to be the right man for the job. He arranged to hire the Good Templars Hall on Wednesday and Sunday evenings for £12 a month, and here for two or three years the congregation worshipped.⁶⁹ The church was self-supporting from the outset, and in 1892, "with surprising energy erected a large and handsome church in the very centre of the town" (to quote the *Handbook*)⁷⁰ – in time for the great International Exhibition which opened in Kimberley in September of that year.

A similar exploit was undertaken by Cross and Batts to Bloemfontein in 1891.⁷¹ In some ways this was more difficult, as they knew of only two Baptists in that town. On the other hand, they had a letter of introduction to His Honour the President, upon whom they called to explain their mission. President Reitz was very cordial, and arranged a dinner party in their honour. The President and his suite also attended the Sunday evening service in the Town Hall, and Cross's sermon made a profound impression. Later, through the good offices of Spurgeon's College, a minister was sent from England to take on the Bloemfontein work, and in March 1892 Cross and Batts again journeyed to Bloemfontein to introduce the new minister to the people there.

Some idea of the rich and varied texture of Cross's life at this period can be gained by glancing at one month of his life in 1890, beginning on Whitsunday, May the 25th. On that day the 13th Annual Assembly of the Baptist Union opened in Grahamstown.⁷² Cross was not only minister of the host church, but also Secretary of the Union, responsible for the smooth and orderly running of the Assembly. Business sessions began on the Monday, the very same day on which Mrs. Cross gave birth to her fourth son.⁷³ Until Wednesday the meetings continued, all day and every evening, closing with the usual United Communion Service on Wednesday evening which, as the *Handbook* described it, "fitly brought to a close one of the happiest sessions ever enjoyed by the Baptist Union of South Africa."

The very next day Cross was early at the Church Hall in his capacity as Commissioner for the Cape of Good Hope University examinations. On that day and the next, 87 young people wrote their Elementary examination under his supervision.⁷⁴

On the following Monday Cross read a paper on Coleridge at a meeting at the Public School. It was one of a series of fortnightly lectures that the School had arranged that winter, and which were open to the public. The lecture, according to the *Journal*, was "an intellectual treat of no mean order," and the audience were particularly appreciative of Cross's reading of extracts from "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel."⁷⁵

On June the 10th, 24th and 26th Cross was again supervising the writing of examinations, matriculation and B.A. degree.⁷⁶ In the evening of June the 10th he took part in a concert in the church hall. A week later, as one of the two school examiners, he made a report at the Wesleyan Girls High School prize day celebrations.⁷⁷

All these activities were undertaken in addition to the normal routine of his daily church work, which included not only preaching and teaching, but the never-ending round of pastoral visiting, and the ever-open manse door. But he never drew a line between his purely ecclesiastical responsibilities and his other duties. In simplicity he expressed his faith by identifying himself in every way he could with the community in which he lived.

Any man who devotes himself wholeheartedly to his work will sometimes be criticised for neglecting his family and for being so busy that he has no time to talk to his wife. Among the crowding events of that May and June it is to be hoped that Cross had time to notice his new little son. The boy was called Alexander Carson, after his illustrious great-grandfather, and was always known as Carson. Like his elder brother, Matthew Arnold, who had no interest in poetry, Alexander Carson was also unsuitably named, since he never evinced any interest in theology. He was the only one of the boys to share his father's interest in education, and for many years was Chairman of the Governing Body of the Boys High School in Pretoria.

How did Cross appear to his contemporaries at this period of his life? "Those who have watched the soft hues of sunset do not always realise the glory of the noontide hour" wrote the Rev. J.E. Ennals in an Obituary of Cross in 1920.⁷⁸ The Rev. H.J. Batts, in a letter to the Rev. James Spurgeon published in the Annual Paper of the Pastors College 1893-94 wrote: "We have now *ten* Pastors College men out here, and I am by no means the principal man among them, as your letter suggests. The leading man, far and away, is G.W. Cross, of Grahamstown, who is a credit not to the College merely, but to the whole denomination."

One who knew him well and loved him deeply was the Rev. E.G. Evans, who arrived in the Colony in 1883. Evans has left an unforgettable portrait of the man.⁷⁹ "Mr Cross' tall figure and joyous smile of greeting were familiar sights in the Grahamstown of the eighties and nineties. These were the years when my pastorate in Port Alfred and Kareiga enabled us often to meet. I emphasise the smile, because it was a characteristic part of the charm of a magnetic personality. It illumined his face at times when preaching, or reading aloud to a congenial listener, the music or the sentiment of one of his favourite poets ... That smile dissipated self-depreciation on occasions. Before meeting him one might be in the mood of Mark Rutherford's confession:

For I was ever commonplace;
Of genius never had a trace.

That smile restored one's feeling of value.

"Some men suggest a walled town with its gate locked, bolted and barred. In effect they say, 'No admission to our confidence' ... Not so was Cross. He might be cautious to the doubtful, but to others his heart was like his home, an open house. The welcome was always evident. His friendship was a steadfast loyalty ...

"There was an entire absence of an embarrassing self-consciousness in him. Some men live in the shadow of themselves, and so are shy or awkwardly self-assertive. Cross was natural, unhampered by thought of himself in company or when addressing an audience. His modest self-possession made him a charming host, companion, or public speaker."

Evans also recalls that he once heard Cross "coldly criticised for his ecstasy over a Cape flower" by a ministerial colleague.⁸⁰ Cross was however as practical as he was poetic. He had administrative abilities of a high order, and a taste for working with his hands: building, woodwork, gardening. He could also, in a crisis, act with speed and spirit, as when he intervened one evening on Grahamstown station to remonstrate with a number of drunken louts who were behaving offensively to a party of women waiting on the platform. For his pains he was badly assaulted, but refused to prosecute his assailants.⁸¹ On another occasion he rescued a young man from drowning in the Kowie River.⁸²

In 1894, in addition to all his other responsibilities he took on the onerous task of Secretary to the Committee of the Public School. In the official history of the school (now Graeme College) by C.C. Wiles we find yet another portrait of Cross: "Puritan he was, and of that high Miltonic breed whose love of learning is exceeded only by their love of virtue ... Many owed their interest in the great English writers to his public lectures, or to private conversations in which, stroking his goatee, he would enthusiastically explain their merits, or, with a

thumb pivoted on each nostril and laughing through his hands, would comically enjoy their mirth."⁸³ He loved reading aloud, and in the intimate circle of family and friends shared with them his delight in the exploits of "Brer Rabbit" or "Alice."

That his own congregation held Cross in great esteem is evident from events recorded in the church minute books. In 1889 the Baptist Church at Port Elizabeth, bereft of its minister by his sudden departure for Kimberley, promptly sent a call to Cross to fill the vacancy. At a specially convened church meeting on September the 26th he laid the matter before the members.⁸⁴ He made it clear that he had no wish to go, but he wanted to do what was best for the church, and a change of pastorate might work for their good. He was prepared to leave the decision to go or stay in the hands of his church. He then left the meeting, and Mr. Hockey took the Chair.

The record of the discussion which followed is almost comical. Some members expressed surprise that their minister should even think of leaving; others that the Port Elizabeth church should have the effrontery to call him. Mr. Webber and Mr. Dicks thought the call "out of place," for Mr. Cross "was the right man in the right place." One fairminded member thought that they "ought not to blame the church at Port Elizabeth for giving the call as their pastor had been removed," but another thought that "it would be a great mistake for the Pastor to leave." When the proposal that the Pastor should remain was formally put to the meeting it was carried unanimously. The church's appreciation of their pastor was not expressed only in words. At a meeting a few weeks later, chaired by the Treasurer, Mr. Grocott, it was unanimously agreed that "as the church had over forty pounds to the good," and "provisions were very dear," a bonus of "fourty eight pounds" should be given to the Pastor.⁸⁵

Nearly seven years later the pastorate of the Port Elizabeth church again fell vacant, and once again the church sent a call to Mr. Cross. When the letter came Mr. Grocott was away on business in the Transvaal, but Cross did not want to put the matter to the church before hearing the opinion of his old and trusted friend, so he wrote to him. Grocott's reply, dated August 19th 1896, has been preserved. He wrote: "I cannot say that I am surprised that you have had a call from the Port Elizabeth Church – this is the second time of asking – as they gave you a call when I was last in the Transvaal – and as I then wrote so I write now – that I shall regret should you accept the same. I know you have been with us a good number of years – and to some of us the longer we know you the fonder we are of you and yours."⁸⁶

As soon as Grocott returned to Grahamstown the matter was put to a church meeting, and unanimously the members agreed that the following resolution be sent to the Pastor: "That this church wishes to place on record their sincere thanks, and appreciation for past services faithfully rendered during the past fourteen years. And trust that the Pastor, the Rev. G.W. Cross, will be guided

by the great head of the church to continue in unbroken fellowship as their Pastor."⁸⁷

Evidently the church did not feel that Mr. Cross's multifarious interests interfered with his primary task of servant and shepherd of his flock.

In 1889 a legacy of £50 was left to the church, and this became the nucleus of a fund to purchase or build a manse.⁸⁸ The women of the congregation worked busily for over a year, preparing for a bazaar in aid of the manse fund, while those whose talents were of a different sort, both men and women, gave periodical concerts in the church hall (admission 6d.) for the same object.

The Grand Bazaar, which lasted for three days, was held in the Town Hall in May 1891,⁸⁹ and was formally opened by the Mayor in full robes of office and accompanied by a retinue of seven Councillors. In his speech the Mayor said: "I have watched the development of this bazaar with deep interest from the beginning. The chief credit is due to Mr. Cross, because he obtained at the very start, what is indispensable to success, the sympathy of the ladies. He seemed to infuse into the ladies some of his own enthusiasm, and the ladies in turn excited the enthusiasm and zeal of other ladies and also several gentlemen, until it seemed at the fortnightly work meetings as if the whole church were working unanimously for the Bazaar. I am sure if the ladies and gentlemen of his congregation will work as hard for the spiritual welfare of the church as for its temporal good then the church cannot fail to be most successful. The object of the Bazaar is to provide a Manse for the Baptist Pastor and we hope that that will mean for the Rev. G.W. Cross for a long time yet. We hope that nothing but death will separate him from us." The *Grahamstown Journal* reported that the Bazaar was a great success: "The total takings free of expenses appears to be little short of £500, a splendid result for these hard times."⁹⁰

The members of the congregation had not much money to give, but they had plenty of talent and energy and enthusiasm, which they continued to use to add to the Manse fund. In April 1892 a house in Napier Street was purchased by the church at auction for the sum of £805.⁹¹ According to the auctioneer's advertisement it consisted of 8 rooms, kitchen and pantry, with outhouses, stabling, fowlhouses, etc. "The situation is one of the best in town and the view from the verandah is charming."⁹² The house was in the vicinity of the Wesleyan High School, on the site where Kingswood College Chapel now stands.

By July the house had been transferred to the Church. The total cost, including renovations and transfer fees, was £956-3-4.⁹³ At the end of July the Cross family left the house in George Street and moved in to the Manse. The Grahamstown church was the first Baptist church in South Africa to acquire a manse for its minister. There was still an amount of £300 to find before the debt on the property could be cleared, but the Pastor reminded the church that in

March 1893 they would be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the opening of the church building, and that a suitable way of celebrating the event would be a Thanksgiving Fund to wipe out the remaining debt.⁹⁴

It was in the Napier Street Manse that Mrs. Cross gave birth to her fifth and last child on Friday November the 17th 1893.⁹⁵ Once again it was a little son. He was named Henry Havelock Graham after his mother's brother, who in turn had been named after the famous soldier, Sir Henry Havelock, hero of the Indian Mutiny and the siege of Lucknow. Little Havelock Cross, three and a half years younger than his nearest brother and fourteen years younger than the eldest, Graham, was a happy, healthy little boy, loved and spoilt by the whole family, and duly brought to order when his charm and his spirit of mischief showed signs of getting out of hand. Like his great namesake he too was to become a soldier, to fight in a far more terrible war, and to travel a long way from the quiet city of his birth and boyhood.



The Parish Church of Saint Michael and All Angels, Great Tew, Oxfordshire



*George William Cross (above) and Margaret Graham (opposite)
at the time of their marriage in Belfast in 1877*

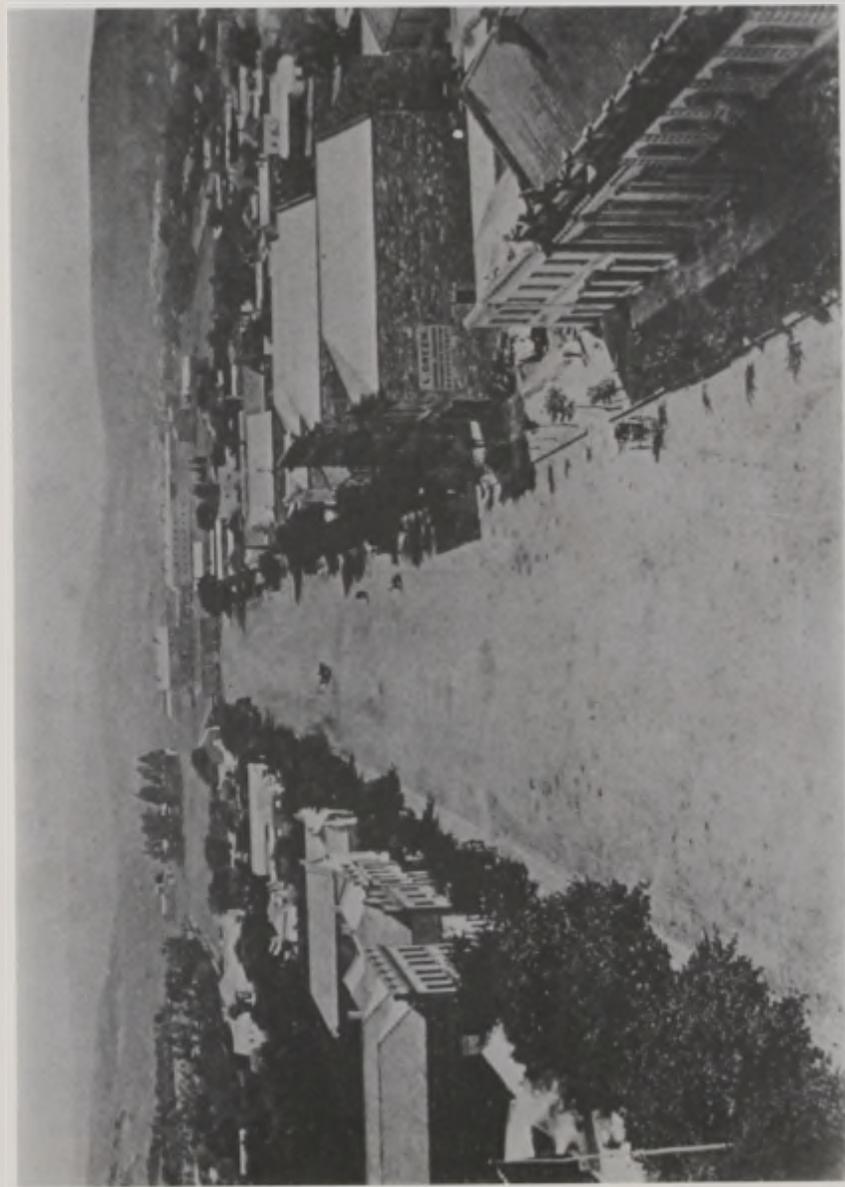




Grahamstown Baptist Church as it was during Cross's ministry



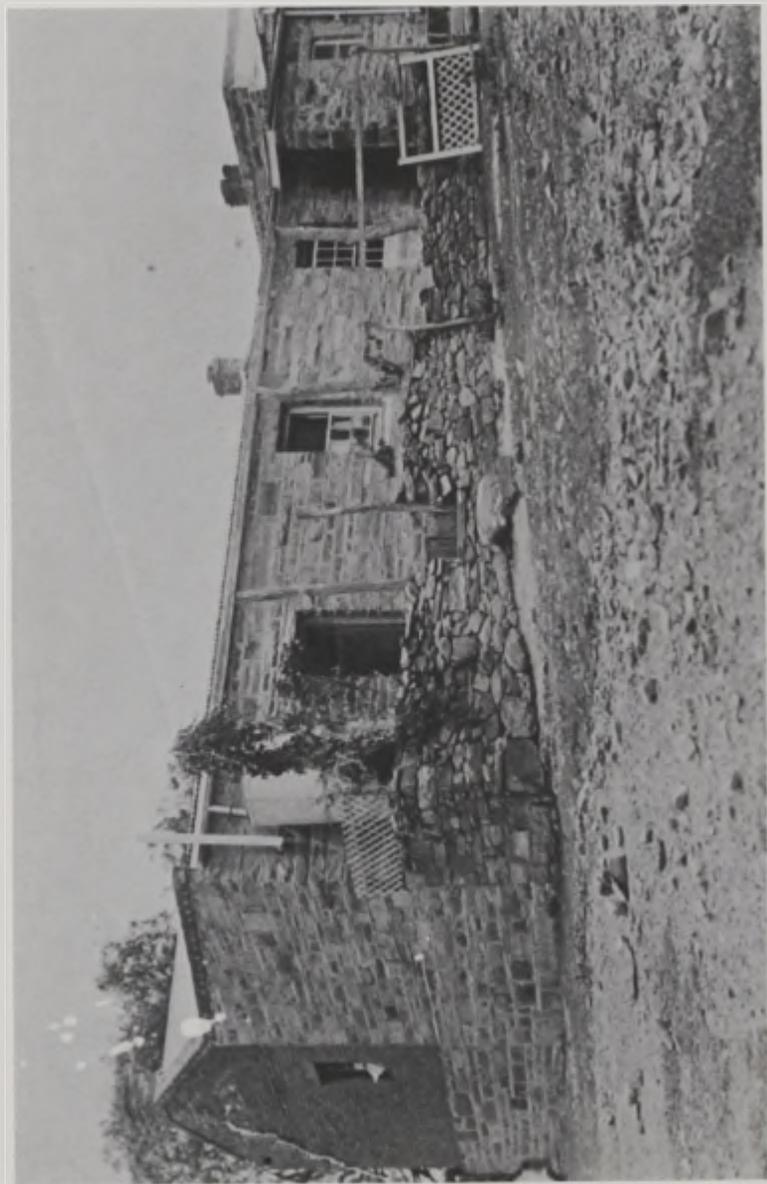
Comrades in arms 1877. Trooper G.W. Cross in the centre



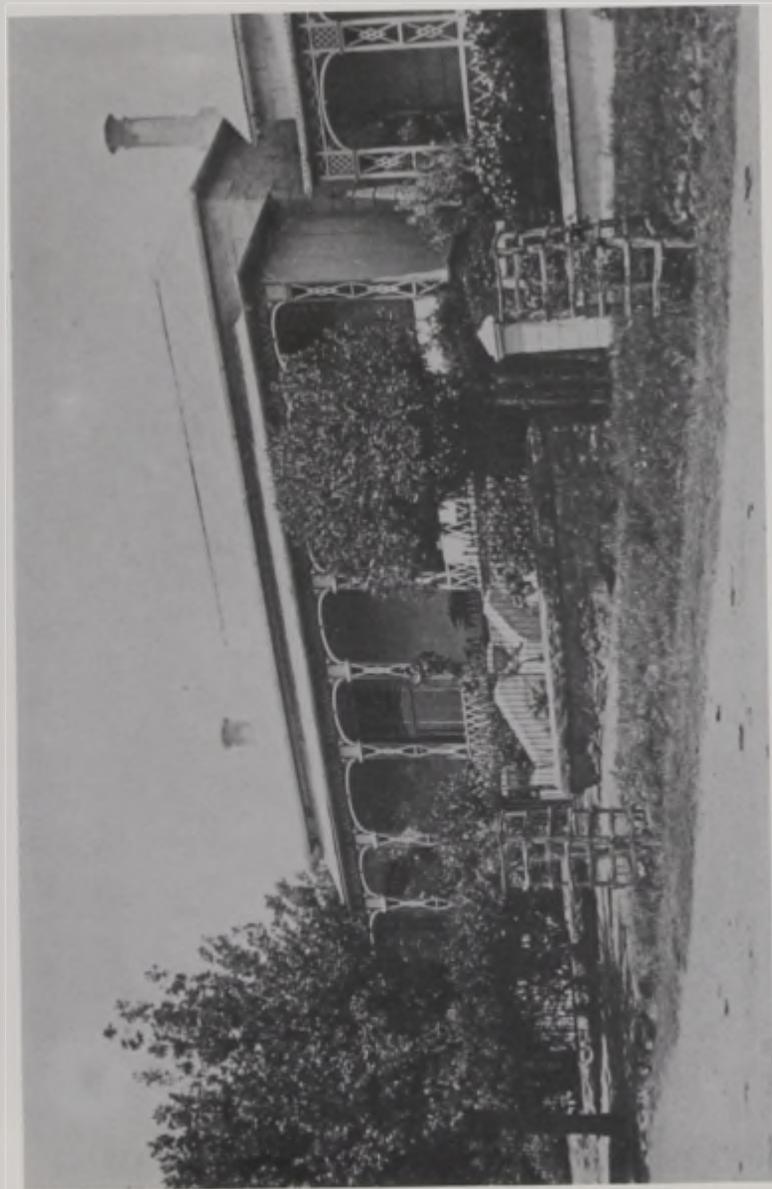
Grahamstown in 1877. View from the Cathedral tower looking up the High Street to the Drostdy (Courtesy of the Albany Museum, Grahamstown)



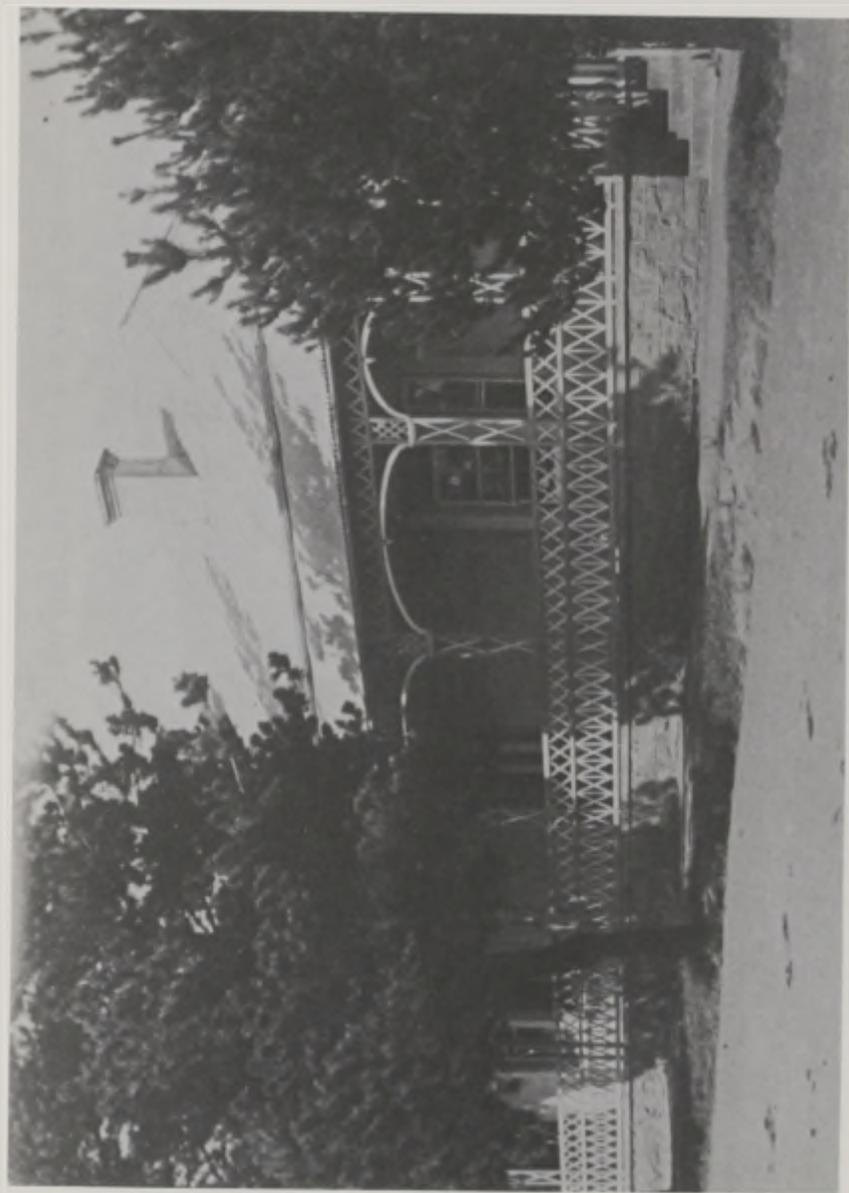
Fort England, Grahamstown, 1878-1880 (birthplace of Graham)



Bowden, 1880-1885 (birthplace of Arnold)



George Street, Grahamstown, 1886-1892 (birthplace of Nurden and Carson)



Napier Street, Grahamstown, 1892-1903 (birthplace of Havelock)



Sons of the manse (taken ca. 1897)
Standing: Arnold. In front: Nurden, Havelock, Carson and Graham

The American; see excellent
light.
By my dear friend
I am
most true
re reading your
letter which
was a very great
comfort & hope
to me. You
do not know
how to be right
You are so
well as ever.
My husband
wrote his
sweetest
words applied
to me. I believe
I shall be
right.

*G.W. Cross:
the second Grahamstown pastorate*



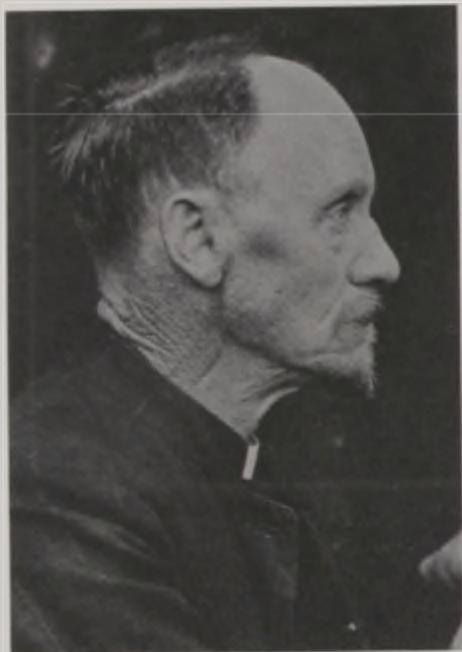
The Manse, Hamilton Street, Pretoria



When I was in Comrades in /77
after a savage week of patrol with scant food and
and drenching rain - days ~~and~~ hungry and
nights of broken sleep tho' the food ticks - we
came ~~very~~ late on Saturday night into camp at
Fort Beuker and for a day & two nights got
under canvas. The Sunday morning broke
divinely - a day of the sun - a day to make
amends for years of gloom - We were busy working
and cooking all morning but by afternoon had some
killed kudu and then the wagons ^{got} ~~we had~~
left ~~at~~ ~~about~~ before came in and brought
me milk. A great herd came over that camp of
1000 men as they opened their belated letters & drank in the ^{rain}
from home. Among the reaching mail was a copy
of the Cape Monthly in its orange wrapper
I opened & read the first item - Then it is

to you signed B. M. R
The writer was standing beside me at the time
~~then~~ he was my ~~Chum~~ Chum my word in the
mess. I knew he was a poet but he had never
read to me any of his poems like a true Songster
he was shy. Retired in worn-hide dew. Or as
a nightingale singing under from a sort of leafy
shade. I too had a ballad of my own in
my pocket - it was stained and crinkled now
with African rivers and rain and African sun

This extract from a manuscript in Cross's handwriting
is taken from a public lecture on South African poets
and poetry, delivered in Pretoria in 1910



*G.W. Cross:
the Pretoria years*



*2nd Lieut. H.H.G. Cross:
Royal Dublin Fusiliers, 1916*



Old friends: H.J. Batts and G.W. Cross in Durban