

CHAPTER 8

Gathering storm

“Hold fast that which is good.”

I Thess. 5:21

In the mid-1890s Cross was busier than ever. He was still an active member of the Boards of the Public Library and the Albany Hospital. He played a leading part in the E.P. Literary and Scientific Society, and was one of the editors of that Society's Magazine. He piloted a move to unite the separate Debating Societies of the Baptist, Presbyterian and Wesleyan churches into the Union Literary and Debating Society, an organisation chiefly for young men, and he continued to take a lively interest in its activities.¹

His work as Commissioner for public examinations was growing year by year, as more and more scholars registered for the examinations. The Baptist Lecture Hall was eventually too small to accommodate all the candidates, and on Cross's shoulders fell the responsibility of finding other accommodation.² It could never be taken for granted that the Town Hall would be available. In a speech in June 1899, at a Public School prizegiving, Cross spoke of his dream of erecting what he called a University Hall in Grahamstown, for, said he, “We have to use the Town Hall for our examinations, and some day might find ourselves in the street.”³

As Secretary of the Public School Committee Cross also carried a good deal of responsibility. Since Templeton's death the school had declined in numbers

and reputation. The sudden departure in 1892 of the Headmaster, W. Chubb Meredith, to take up the Rectorship of the Grey Institute in Port Elizabeth after only three years in Grahamstown, was another blow to the school.⁴ His successor, James Angus, arrived in January 1893 from Scotland, and energetically set about re-organising the school and putting the boarding establishment on a sound footing.⁵ Gradually the school began to recover its prestige, and the enrolment increased, in spite of the opening of the Wesleyan Collegiate School (later Kingswood College) in January 1894. But Angus quite literally worked himself to death in the service of the school, and less than two years after his arrival in Grahamstown he died of tuberculosis.⁶ Once again the Committee had to work swiftly to find a replacement. By mid-January they were able to announce that from a number of applicants they had selected Mr. Geo. Grant M.A. of Aberdeen.⁷ It was a happy choice. Grant was not only a fine teacher in the best tradition of Scottish dominies, but a man of initiative and administrative ability. Under him the school made rapid progress. Within three years there was a 25% increase in the enrolment of boys,⁸ and there was a Girls' and Preparatory branch which had been acquired by amalgamating Miss Mingay's private school with the Public School, under Grant as Principal. The girls were housed temporarily in the Oddfellows Hall, with Miss Mingay in charge of the Senior Girls and Miss Margaret Glennie (another import from Scotland) in charge of the Juniors.⁹ This was a development of the School's work which had Cross's fullest support, for he believed as passionately in the importance of education for girls as for boys.

For a less dedicated and energetic man all these activities in addition to his work as pastor of a large church would have been more than enough. But from 1890 to 1902 Cross was also one of the chief executive officers of the Baptist Union of South Africa. As General Secretary for this unbroken period he gave to the still infant organisation a continuity and a stability which were of inestimable value. One of his most lasting contributions was the compiling and editing of the annual *South African Baptist Handbook*, which he did, to quote Evans, "with the efficiency of a born secretary and the good taste of an artist."¹⁰ It is indeed a model of what such a publication should be, and set a standard which has been maintained throughout the years. For the historian it is an indispensable source, but for Cross's biographer it is sometimes a disappointment, for there would certainly be more about Cross in it if he had not been the Editor!

In 1892 the Baptist Assembly decided that the time had come to launch a denominational magazine. A Committee consisting of the Revs. Batts, Cross and Nuttall was appointed to investigate the matter.¹¹ Cross was asked to be the first editor. Difficulties arose, however, when it came to finding a suitable publisher. T.H. Grocott's firm printed the Handbook, but apparently felt unequal to taking on a monthly magazine. It was finally decided that Cape Town afforded most facilities for publication, and Cross declined to serve as editor on the grounds of the great distance of Cape Town from Grahamstown.¹² The

Editorship was therefore offered to and accepted by the Rev. Ernest Baker of the Cape Town church, who had been a journalist before becoming a minister.¹³ The *South African Baptist*, which first appeared in August 1894, is the oldest English-language denominational periodical in South Africa still in existence, and it owes much to its first editor.

But although Cross (probably thanks to Grocott) was spared this additional responsibility, he was doing too much already. Even his tireless energy began to flag, and his superb health to feel the strain. In May 1895 he fell victim to a severe attack of erysipelas, a streptococcal disease of the skin, which was complicated by a congestion of the lungs.¹⁴ For a while he was very ill. When he had recovered sufficiently to travel he was taken to Bowden, where the peace of the farm and the loving care of the Dugmores restored him to health.¹⁵ By mid-July he was fit again, and returned to Grahamstown to plunge immediately with his accustomed zest into his many duties.

As the 1890s proceeded political tension in South Africa increased. Rhodes became Prime Minister of the Cape Colony in 1890, and the shadow cast by the Colossus grew until it stretched to the Zambesi. In the Transvaal the old President, fearing that his Republic was being encircled, and that the British (casting envious eyes upon the gold fields) were scheming to swallow it up, became more and more intransigent, especially in his relations with the "uitlanders" of Johannesburg. As the demands of Britain and the "uitlanders" grew more insistent, Kruger became more obstinate, and more determined not to give an inch.

Kruger's attitude appeared to be wholly justified by the events at the end of December, 1895. The Jameson Raid was a demonstration to the world of the perfidy and rapacity of the British. It vindicated Kruger and made the life of the "uitlanders" in the Transvaal even more difficult. Rhodes's involvement in the plot was patent and on January 5th he resigned as Premier of the Cape. Later, as the investigations into the debacle dragged their slow length along in England it became apparent that Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, had also had a finger in the pie, although attempts were made to cover this up.

Though far from the scene of these sensational events, the ripples soon reached Grahamstown in the form of train-loads of refugees from the Transvaal.¹⁶ Among the refugees who settled in Grahamstown were a widow, Mrs. Batterson, and her four children.¹⁷ For Mrs. Batterson it was a home-coming, for she was of Settler stock, and her mother, Mrs. George Dennison (born Webber) had been one of the first members of the Baptist church. J.H. Webber was Mrs. Batterson's first cousin, and there were other cousins to welcome her and her family and to give them all the assistance they could.¹⁸ Their coming was to have a permanent effect on the Cross family, for Violet, the eldest daughter, and May, the youngest, eventually married Arnold and Nurden Cross.

One of the saddest results of the Jameson Raid and its aftermath was its destructive and divisive effects on personal relations and even close friendships. This was epitomised right at the top by W.P. Schreiner's parting from Rhodes – a watershed in South African politics – but it affected also less exalted people. The *Grahamstown Journal* was at first impartial in its comment on the Raid and its causes: "Whatever may have been our sympathies with the oppressed population of the Transvaal it has been an accepted axiom in this Colony that they must be left to work out their deliverance without interference from us ... Are we to suppose that Mr. Rhodes has known nothing and suspected nothing of his subordinate's designs? To do so, is hardly to give the Premier credit for as much penetration as ordinary men have exercised ..."¹⁹ "The Colony has a right to explanations from him (Rhodes) as to his relations to recent events. We by no means desire to assume that the invasion of the Transvaal took place by his order; but if he remains silent, the world can come to no other conclusion."²⁰

Gradually, however, the *Journal* changed its stance, calling for support for Rhodes and his restoration to power in the Colony. There seems to be little doubt that Rhodes was using his enormous wealth and influence to manipulate the Cape press.²¹ Also, the long-drawn-out investigations in London into Rhodes's conduct only served to give him a martyr's halo in the eyes of many of the Colonists and Uitlanders, who knew quite well that although Rhodes might be a sinner, Kruger was no saint.

1896, the year that opened with the Jameson Raid, was one of the most terrible in the annals of South African history. The dynamite explosion in Johannesburg,²² the drought, the scourge of locusts, the disaster of the wreck of the *Drummond Castle*,²³ and, above all, the rinderpest which killed 4½ million head of cattle before it was stayed, all added up to a black year. The strain of the year certainly told on Cross.

The political polarisation set off by the Jameson Raid grew more serious as 1896 turned into 1897. Rhodes had regained considerable prestige by his courage and wisdom in dealing with the Matabele Rebellion. In December he returned to the Cape from Rhodesia via Beira and the sea, and in Port Elizabeth and Cape Town he was given a hero's welcome.²⁴ He had been summoned to England to face what he called the "unctuous rectitude" of his fellow countrymen; in other words, the Committee of Enquiry. In the Cape Colony his principal supporters were now the Colonial Jingoists whom he had hitherto despised; Schreiner had thrown in his lot with Hofmeyr and the Cape Dutch, who felt they could never trust Rhodes again.

Grahamstown was lustily for Rhodes. There were many uitlander refugees in the town, justifiably bitter against Kruger and his corrupt government. Rhodes at least was English, and so were they. Eagerly they read the brief telegraphic news items about the proceedings of the Committee of Enquiry which arrived

daily from London. One of those giving evidence before the Committee was W.P. Schreiner, and they liked neither his evidence nor his claim to represent the opinion of the Colonists. As a result, a public meeting was convened in the Town Hall on April the 8th, chaired by the Mayor, Henry Wood, to give the public the opportunity to express their indignation and to repudiate Schreiner.²⁵

In the midst of all the sound and fury Cross was one of the few who tried to keep his head. As the country slid towards civil war his ability to understand and sympathise with opposite points of view was costing him dearly. He attended the meeting in the Town Hall knowing that his views were unpopular, but determined to express them nonetheless. The Hall was filled to capacity with an excited crowd, who greeted the motion "That the citizens of Grahamstown repudiate Mr. Schreiner's claim to represent the opinion of British Colonials" with thunderous applause. Several speakers made the sort of speech that is usually made on such occasions, with no attempt at impartiality. Then G.W. Cross pushed his way determinedly to the front and ascended the platform, against considerable opposition. He asked simply for more light on the subject. Surely there must be more objection to Schreiner's evidence than what had been said? At all events he thought it wise to wait before condemning Schreiner till full reports of his evidence were available. R.W. Nelson replied to this with a speech chiefly remarkable for its insulting references to Gladstone, whose name was greeted with hisses. Cross, in no way disconcerted, retorted that he had asked for light and had got heat. He insisted on saying a word for an absent man, and deprecated deciding on the issue until full reports were available. He continued: "It isn't for us to say Schreiner doesn't represent the Colonists, for we aren't the only Colonists. There are the men of the German Legion and the men of Dutch extraction, the vast majority of whom are loyal. They are not traitors. I can repudiate that for them, as I have lived a long time with them."

"A Voice: Why didn't you stop with them?

Cross: Schreiner was probably correct when he said the Colonists were not enthusiastic over the Uitlanders grievances ... Is there a man in his sober senses who would say that the crisis was not engineered, and engineered by Cecil Rhodes. (Tremendous uproar. Cries of "Come down!")

The Mayor called for order.

Cross: It was through Schreiner that the drifts were opened by ultimatum. Schreiner sacrificed his interests and his own friends. I believe the loyal Dutch in the Colony would go with Great Britain in arbitration (hisses) or fair diplomacy in the Transvaal (hisses)."

Cross, undeterred, moved as an amendment "That the citizens of Grahams-town urge the firm maintenance of the London Convention, and redress of the Uitlanders' grievances."

But the citizens of Grahamstown would have none of it. They were after Schreiner's blood. Cross could not even get a seconder for his amendment. When the original motion was put to the vote, Cross was the only person who voted against it, and he insisted that his vote be recorded.

This was all grist to the newspaper mills. It is interesting to note that the *Johannesburg Times*²⁶ was fairer in its comment than the *Grahamstown Journal*. The latter's reports indeed evoked a letter of protest from Cross, a letter very characteristic in its courtesy, dignity and humility: "Kindly allow me a word of disclaimer with regard to your report of my speech at the recent public meeting. I daresay it is smart "copy" but it does not represent me. I will not go into the details of correction – possibly there are few of your readers who care one way or the other about my speech. I should, however, like to point out an omission. I rose chiefly to defend Mr. Schreiner from a charge of *mala fides* preferred against him by the mover of the Resolution. You say nothing of this, although all my speech hinged upon it."²⁷

Who, among the public figures of the time, was chiefly responsible for the tragedy of the Anglo-Boer war? It is a question endlessly debated. Jameson, Rhodes, Kruger, Leyds, Chamberlain, Milner? Milner, the new Governor of the Cape and High Commissioner for South Africa certainly contributed more than his share of fuel to the fires which were steadily being stoked up.

Shortly after his arrival in May 1897 one of Milner's first duties was to arrange for the reception and disposition of a contingent of British troops. Some were intended for Grahamstown – a fact which had an immediate and unexpected personal impact on Cross. On the 20th May he, in his role of Secretary of the Public School Committee received the following letter from the Civil Commissioner of Grahamstown:²⁸

Grahamstown, 20th May, 1897

Accommodation for Troops

Sir

The General Commanding the Forces wants the buildings at present occupied by the Public School for the above purpose; I have therefore the honour to request you to inform me of the conditions under which you occupy the buildings in question, the terms on which you are prepared to vacate them and the earliest date at which the military authorities could obtain possession in case satisfactory arrangements are arrived at.

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,
John Hemming, C.C.

The Public School had been housed in the old Drostdy House and Barracks since its foundation in 1872, which buildings at first were leased, but later, in the 1880s, were made over to the School by the Colonial Government.

When Cross received the letter the Chairman was away in Cape Town, and he himself hastily summoned an emergency meeting of the Committee to consider the letter. They replied immediately, reminding the Civil Commissioner that the buildings were the property of the School, "by freehold title in perpetuity." They had, however, no wish to obstruct the arrangement of troops, and were prepared to consider any proposals from the Government, on the basis of their being supplied with other suitable accommodation.

In faraway Cape Town the Chairman, Mr. J.E. Wood, fought a stout battle with ministers and officials to save the school. The Minister in charge of Education, T.N.G. de Water, saw no reason why the pupils should not be absorbed into other schools in Grahamstown, but fortunately Wood had the backing of the Superintendent General of Education, Dr. Muir. The Premier, Sir Gordon Sprigg, was away in England for the celebrations for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, so Wood went to the Acting Premier, Sir James Sivewright, and from him wrung a promise of £6 000 in cash, and a further £6 000 loan, later increased to £12 000, for the purpose of building a new school. An amount of about £5 000 was also contributed by the Imperial Government.²⁹

One may well ask why the Government did not simply build new barracks without going to all the bother of turning out the school. The answer is revealing, and is given by Milner himself. Parliament would provide money for a school, but not for barracks. "To ask the Ministry themselves to provide new barracks – to go to Parliament for a vote and raise the whole 'Peace or War' question in its most misleading form at this moment, would have been folly, even if I could have induced them to do it, and I believe that no man could have induced them. It must have split the Ministry ..." wrote Milner to the Colonial Office.³⁰

For more than a year the school was thrown into a state of upheaval, but thanks to the determination and astuteness of the Committee and the Principal what had at first seemed a disaster led ultimately to the erection of a fine set of buildings for the school.³¹ Wood, Cross and the rest of the Committee were very busy, considering possible sites, calling for plans and tenders for the new buildings, buying a house for use as a hostel and Principal's residence, and arranging to rent premises from the Baptist and Presbyterian churches for use as school-rooms until the new buildings should be completed. They were fortunate to secure a site adjoining the new girls' school, which had already begun to rise.

The first British troops arrived in Grahamstown in May 1897 and were housed under canvas.³² Another contingent arrived in June, to the gratification of the townsfolk, who remembered the old times when Grahamstown was an

important garrison town, and who thought that the glory which had departed in 1868 had now returned.³³

In August the School vacated the Drostdy buildings, and the troops moved in; and on September the 8th Sir Alfred Milner himself visited Grahamstown to satisfy himself that all the arrangements had been duly carried out.³⁴ It was not until September of the following year, however, that the foundation stone of the new school building in Beaufort Street was laid by the Chairman, J.E. Wood.³⁵ The formal opening of the school by Dr. Muir did not take place until April the 18th 1899.³⁶

The Annual Assembly of the Baptist Union – the twentieth – was held for the first time in Natal in April 1897, at Pietermaritzburg. At this Assembly Cross was for the third time elected Vice-President, which meant that he would be President the following year. He was also re-elected as General Secretary, the Assembly apparently seeing nothing odd in expecting him to hold the two offices simultaneously. The only concession to human frailty that they made was to appoint an Assistant Secretary as well, an office not provided for in the Constitution.³⁷

Cross's self-sacrificing work for the Union over many years was not unappreciated. At this Assembly the following motion was passed unanimously:³⁸

That the Baptist Union of South Africa in session assembled, hears with very great pleasure, that the Rev. G.W. Cross, who has been for many years the Honoured Secretary of the Union, and now its President-Elect for the third time, intends visiting the Home-land, after twenty years service for Christ in the Churches of South Africa. It also desires to place on record, its sense of gratitude for the splendid work he has accomplished and the high esteem and loving regards, in which he is held by us all in this land, and heartily and unanimously recommends him to the officials of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Churches of the home country, in every way worthy of a warm welcome as the representative of the Churches of South Africa.

Also, that a copy of this resolution be sent to Dr. Booth and the papers representing the Denomination in England.

The visit "home" was made possible by the generosity of the Grahamstown church and friends among the townfolk, who understood how much Cross needed a complete break from all his responsibilities.³⁹

Mr. and Mrs. Cross left Grahamstown by train for Cape Town on July the 20th 1897. They sailed on the *Harlech Castle*. It was their first voyage together, and their first real holiday since their marriage more than twenty years previously.

They had left the two youngest boys with friends, and Arnold and Nurden as boarders in the new hostel of the Public School. Graham, not quite 18 years old, having just matriculated, was still studying at St. Andrews College for the Civil Service Examination, which he wrote in December of that year. Before his parents returned he had joined the Cape Civil Service, beginning in the Transkeian Territories that illustrious career that eventually took him right to the top of the Civil Service of the Union of South Africa.

Many letters must have been written from England and Ireland by the parents to their boys in Grahamstown. Unfortunately none have survived. Only through reports in various publications do we catch glimpses of the travels of those months.

In October they crossed to Ireland, where a warm welcome was waiting for them from the Graham and Carson clans. How different was the return from the departure, under the cloud of Mrs. James Graham's disapproval. She must have found her son-in-law greatly changed. Twenty years ago he had been the young, impulsive, eager idealist; now he was the grave, responsible leader of the Baptist Union of South Africa. And Maggie, her beautiful young daughter, had become, in outward appearance at least, the staid parson's wife, dressed always in black, the sufferings and endurances of the years etched on her face. But her eyes were still the same, observant as ever of the absurdities and pathos of humankind, a-twinkle with kindly merriment.

The visit to Ireland was timed to coincide with the celebrations in connection with the opening of a new church. The plain old building in Regent Street was now too small for the congregation, and a great new church, to seat 600 people, had been erected in Antrim Road, crocketed and arched and buttressed in the finest style of Victorian Gothic.⁴⁰ Cross was one of the first to preach in the new building, conducting both morning and evening services on October the 24th. The *Belfast Newsletter* reported next day: "A peculiar interest centred round the presence of Mr. Cross, as some twenty years ago he was the pastor of this congregation, then worshipping in Regent Street, and fragrant memories are still cherished by many in Belfast of his unique personality and his evangelical fervour, and the unselfish devotion that characterised his ministry. There was a large congregation at the morning service, among whom were many old friends of the preacher, who gladly availed themselves of the opportunity of renewing the acquaintance of former days."⁴¹

In England, too, there were many old friends and relations to visit. Cross took his wife to Banbury to show her his birthplace. For him it was a sad experience to "go back to the haunts of childhood ... to traverse the familiar streets and realize that they contained no home" for him.⁴² When he stood by his father's grave he understood how great was the gulf that separated the young man he had been from the man he had become. His ties with England had been

loosened not only by the death of his father, but also of two sisters and a brother.⁴³

His step-mother had returned after her husband's death to her native Charlbury, where she was living with her youngest daughter, Louie. They visited her there, and Mrs. Cross met some of her husband's family for the first time.

Another nostalgic excursion into the past was made to Great Marlow,⁴⁴ where Cross had been student pastor while still at Spurgeon's College. He preached at both morning and evening services one Sunday in the familiar chapel, and the following evening delivered what was to prove one of his most popular lectures, "My South African apprenticeship." He repeated it several times later in South Africa, at Kareiga, at Queenstown, and at Port Elizabeth.

Clearly his furlough was not all holiday. He attended the Quarterly Meeting of the London Baptist Association.⁴⁵ He had interviews with Dr. Booth, the Secretary, and other officials of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, to discuss with them, on behalf of the Baptist Union of South Africa, the possibilities and difficulties of incorporating the Union by law. From them he received much valuable information and advice, which he conveyed to the 21st Annual Assembly in 1898.⁴⁶ He was also entrusted with the task of finding ministers for the churches at Queenstown and Troyeville, Johannesburg.⁴⁷

Before returning to South Africa Mr. and Mrs. Cross paid another visit to Belfast.⁴⁸ A special meeting was arranged in their honour in the Lecture Hall of the new church on January the 17th, to which were invited only those who had been members of the church during Cross's pastorate 20 years previously. More than forty people gathered, and Mr. and Mrs. Cross were deeply touched by the warm affection which was shown to them, and by the memories of twenty years ago evoked by all those present, for everyone was given an opportunity to speak. The meeting was brought to a close by the singing of "God be with you till we meet again." But neither Mr. or Mrs. Cross were ever to return to England or Ireland. The farewells were final. Mrs. Cross would never again see her mother, or her dearly loved sister Arabella and brother Harry.

They sailed soon after for South Africa in the *Hawarden Castle*, arriving in Cape Town on February the 9th, after a voyage of 18 days.⁴⁹ With a thrill of surprise Cross knew that he had come home. "When once again I saw Table Mountain," he said some years later, "the dusky faces in the docks and my fellow Colonists, I knew that here my roots were cast, and this was home."⁵⁰ Mr. and Mrs. Cross did not linger in Cape Town, but entrained on the mail train for Grahamstown, arriving on Friday the 11th in the late afternoon.⁵¹

Church and Town welcomed them back to Grahamstown at an official Social the following week.⁵² As Mr. and Mrs. Cross entered the crowded hall the

whole company rose to their feet and sang the Doxology. Mr. Grocott presided, and there were speeches by the Mayor, Henry Wood, and by John Wood, M.L.A., who spoke respectively on behalf of the town and the school, hospital and library. The Rev. Theo Chubb of Kingswood College said that for him it had been a great pleasure to give assistance to the church in the absence of its Pastor, because Mr. Cross was dearly loved of his brother clergy in Grahamstown. When Cross rose to speak he was loudly and enthusiastically cheered.

The Baptist Assembly of 1898 was held in Port Elizabeth at Easter time. It was fitting that at this, the coming-of-age Assembly of the Baptist Union of South Africa, Cross, who had played so large a part in its founding and development, should be inducted as President. The attendance was the largest ever recorded at an Assembly – 51 ministers, missionaries and lay delegates. The first words of the new President as he took the Chair were: “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”⁵³

The Presidential address, which was later published in pamphlet form, was entitled “The Baptist Union of South Africa: a history and some reflections.” It was dedicated to “Mr T.B. King and to those remaining of the little band of 1877, the Founders of our Union, and to the memory of those who have fallen asleep.”⁵⁴

The Address was largely an historical survey of the progress of the Union since its inception. “History is responsibility,” said Cross. “Experience teaches. To disregard its lessons were the part of the fool ... Let us then consider our past that we may improve our present.”

After detailing the reasons for the founding of the Baptist Union of South Africa, Cross gave a broad survey of the growth of Baptist work since the founding. In 1877 there were three English Baptist churches in the Cape Colony: at Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth and Alice, and one in process of formation at Cape Town; and two German churches, one in King Williams Town and one in Berlin. In twenty one years the six churches and six pastors had grown to 33 churches, with 29 pastors and 9 missionaries. Membership had grown from about 700 to 3 205. There were now 43 Sunday Schools with 2 875 scholars and 265 teachers.

Financially, too, the work had grown. “£15, afterwards made up to £20, were the first funds of our Baptist Union ... £11 000 were contributed last year in support of the work ... At starting we had not one rich man with us. Many of our people have since prospered and have helped liberally as their means grew, while the poor have displayed an equal, perhaps a greater, generosity contributing freely of their small means. Never has little money been made to do more work. But there is no room for boasting. We live in a wonderful land, and

our development, however rapid it may seem, has hardly kept pace with the development of our country ... Enterprise, energy, self-sacrifice have been unequal to the opportunities offered."

One of the difficulties was the lack of suitable men. Cross is outspoken about this. "South Africa has been, for years past, the hunting ground for adventurers of all kinds and the 'reverend' species has been fairly represented ... all the churches of Africa could well spare them." There were also ministers who came to this country for health reasons – usually tuberculosis – and sometimes they recovered and returned to 'civilization' and 'a large sphere;' but, said Cross, "oftener we have seen them – all the while their strength ebbing away – make mighty efforts to earn a livelihood, until pitiless disease cast them upon the charity of strangers for a death bed." But, "sick men cannot do the work required in South Africa ... We must take steps to supply our lack from our own midst ... no church will finally live that does not bring forth evangelists, missionaries, pastors and prophets from among its own sons."

Cross's references in the course of this Address to his visit to England, are revealing. To be in England in the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee was to see it at the peak of its imperial glory. Said Cross, "Just now there is a dream of Empire in British heads such as 'mortal never dared to dream before' ... So it comes to pass that a Colonist is, just now, received in the Homeland with an exaggerated welcome. But a Colonial pastor, going among the Home churches after a few years absence, is apt to find himself a stranger in a strange land. He may realize the Englishman's proverbial insularity, and understand for the first time what Frenchmen say of John Bull and his bearing towards 'foreigners'."

Cross speaks of "the infinite sadness" of going among one's own brethren, say at a Baptist Union Meeting, and finding oneself forgotten. "Something of this must needs be; it is part of the price we pay for being Colonists; but much of it ought not to be. Surely we might be made to feel our oneness with our Church as we feel our oneness with our Nation. Just now, our Home Unions are so intent upon a Great Federation of the Free Denominations that they hardly think of a closer union with their own ... Of the great Church organizations our Baptist Union [of Great Britain] alone ignores the Colonies." Within two years Cross was to discover that this was even truer than he thought.

The address concludes with a word of encouragement, "for our opportunities are glorious ... Let us not forget that we are pioneers. Not for us the great congregations in settled cities – 'the valleys clothed with flocks'; for us, 'the handful of sheep in the wilderness.' Ours is the frontier. Let us count it our privilege, as it will be our distinction, to be pioneers."

For Grahamstown 1898 was an eventful year. Cross was deeply involved in the affairs of the Public School. At the annual Prizegiving celebrations in June he

featured not only as the Secretary of the Committee but as a proud father, for Arnold was Dux of the School.⁵⁵

In the course of his Annual Report the Principal said:⁵⁶ “Early in the year, in order that no barrier might be placed in the way of the return of the Imperial troops to Grahamstown we were induced to sell the Drostdy Buildings to the Government ... We have secured a splendid site in the vicinity of the new Girls’ Department, and the buildings now in course of erection will be amongst the finest in South Africa. Until the completion of the Girls’ School our boys’ classes were scattered in halls throughout the city ... Since October the boys have occupied the school specially built for the girls ... who are still compelled to find accommodation in the Oddfellows Hall. After the Christmas holidays we hope to be able to occupy the new Boys’ School and to give up to the girls the buildings they have so long stood in need of ... In spite of the many disadvantages we have laboured under during the year our numbers have steadily increased and we now have 260 pupils on the roll of the whole school.”

On September the 17th of that year the foundation stone of the new Boys’ School was laid by J.E. Wood, M.L.A. at an impressive ceremony.⁵⁷ The day was fine, and a large crowd gathered. Flags waved in the breeze, and the School Cadets, very smart in their uniforms, gave colour and formality to the occasion. Secretary Cross read out the manuscript which was placed in the cavity under the stone. After giving a brief history of the school the document continued: “The present number of scholars is 279 viz boys 175 girls 104, Matthew Arnold Cross (matriculated) being Dux.” The document concluded with a list of names of the staff and Committee, and was signed by G.W. Cross, Secretary.

The stone, a fine piece of Queenstown freestone, was magnificently carved with the City coat of arms and the inscription

GRAHAMSTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
HIGH SCHOOL FOR BOYS

This stone was laid by John Edwin Wood Esq. M.L.A.
Chairman of Public Schools Committee 17 Sept 1898

Throughout 1898 Grahamstown was preparing for a great Exhibition, far surpassing that of 1887. Behind the Town Hall, buildings of wood and iron began to rise, five times larger than the 1887 buildings, and gardens were laid out, and the whole area lit by electricity.

As the year advanced the excitement grew. By December, heavy goods trains were arriving every day, bringing exhibits from all over the country, and even from England, which lent a valuable collection of paintings. Cecil Rhodes sent

items of historical interest, including pieces from Zimbabwe and a gun presented to Lobengula by President Kruger.⁵⁸ One of the most significant and valuable items came from Pretoria. It was the Bible which the folk of Grahamstown had presented to the Uys party of Voortrekkers when they left the Eastern Cape in 1837.⁵⁹ The *Grahamstown Journal* devoted a leader to it on December the 20th: "It seems to remind us that conciliation might do more to create union than threats or swords; and so it comes admirably in with the keynote of our Grahamstown Exhibition, which is 'peace, goodwill and friendship among all the states and races of South Africa.' May our hopes not be disappointed, and would that from this Christmastide onward the enmities and distrusts on both sides could be abated, and a new era of mutual help and union be ushered in!"

For the convenience of visitors 28 rickshaws were imported from Durban, with 38 Zulus to draw them. They arrived at the end of November, and by December the 2nd were plying for hire. Strangely exotic they must have looked in their colourful dress against the plain old Settler city, with its buildings reminiscent of Regency England. But Grahamstown could not resist dragging politics even into rickshaws, each one of which was given the name of a Progressive member of Parliament – Rhodes, Sprigg, Wood, Douglass, etc.⁶⁰ Sprigg's party had recently lost an election, and the new Prime Minister was none other than the despised Schreiner.

On December the 14th Lieut.-General Sir William Butler, Administrator of the Colony during Milner's absence in England, and Commander-in-Chief of British troops at the Cape, arrived in Grahamstown by special train to open the Exhibition the following day. Both his arrival and the formal opening ceremony were enlivened by the garrison troops, the 2nd Royal Berkshires, and their band. The opening was attended by a throng of specially invited guests, among them the Mayors and Town Clerks of Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, King Williams Town and Johannesburg, and all the civic and legal and church dignitaries of Grahamstown.⁶¹ Sir William Butler, who had, to quote his own words, "decided to preach peace to these unfortunate people who were being lashed towards war by so many hands," concluded his speech by saying: "South Africa, in my opinion, does not need a surgical operation, she needs peace, progress, and the development which is only possible through the union of many hearts and the labour of many hands."⁶²

The Exhibition lasted from December the 15th to January the 20th. Visitors poured into the little city, and those who could not find room in one of the hotels were accommodated in private homes. There were excellent catering arrangements at the Exhibition, under the control of a Port Elizabeth hotelier, where breakfast and lunch could be obtained for 2/6; and dinner (6.30 - 8.30 p.m.) for 3/6.⁶³ On the last day there was a "Grand Balloon Ascent and Parachute Descent" in the afternoon and evening, and a Torchlight Tattoo

complete with fireworks to round it off.⁶⁴ By the time the gates closed the turnstiles had recorded 171 433 visitors compared with about 70 000 at the 1887 Exhibition.⁶⁵

The *Grahamstown Journal* gave its final verdict on the Exhibition in a leader on January the 27th 1899:

The success of the Grahamstown Exhibition was a surprise to the large section of Colonists who had made up their minds neither to hope nor consequently to help, in this matter ... The promoters of the Exhibition had much to discourage them in the state of South Africa, which for years past had been scourged with locusts and stock diseases, and impoverished with droughts ... Political strife and racial bitterness were never so rife as now, and rendered many indisposed to join hands in an effort for the common good ... But the promoters of the Exhibition believed that there was still room for courageous action to achieve a prosperous issue; and, working with zeal and unbroken harmony, they triumphed over all difficulties.

In March 1899 Cross travelled to Pretoria for the 22nd Assembly of the Baptist Union. It was chiefly due to the Rev. H.J. Batts, then minister at Pretoria, that the invitation from the Pretoria Church had been given and “unanimously and heartily accepted” at the previous Assembly, in Port Elizabeth.⁶⁶ Both Batts and Cross were anxious to use whatever influence they possessed to pour oil on the troubled political waters of South Africa, and by conciliatory word and action to try to undo some of the harm that Jameson and his Raid had done.

It was in every way a happy and memorable Assembly. In spite of the fact that most of the delegates had to travel a long way, the attendance was the largest yet recorded. The small number of Baptists in the town would not, unaided, have been able to provide accommodation for so large a number, but help and hospitality were given lavishly by members of other churches. Cross commented later: “The good-will shown to us by other churches is a very pleasant memory of Pretoria.”⁶⁷

The Conference opened on Good Friday, March the 31st, with a public service in the Church in Andries Street, whose foundation stone had been laid by President Paul Kruger in 1891. His Honour the President himself attended the service, accompanied by the State Secretary and Mrs. Reitz,⁶⁸ whom Cross and Batts had met years before in Bloemfontein, when he was President of the Orange Free State. There were several other officials of the Republic in President Kruger’s party, among them young Advocate J.C. Smuts, the State Attorney.

The President-Elect of the Baptist Union, the Rev. J.B. Heard of Pietermaritzburg, having gone to England for a holiday following a breakdown in his

health, it fell to the retiring President, the Rev. G.W. Cross, to welcome the official party. He addressed President Kruger – through an interpreter – in the following words:⁶⁹

Your Honour

It is a great pleasure to us that you honour our Union by your presence at its first Assembly in the South African Republic.

We are of English and German speech, but we are one with you in the worship and service of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many of us were born in South Africa, most of us have lived in it a long time and all of us love it. We count it our highest privilege to labour in it and to seek its good always.

We have seen the marvellous rise of this State, have noted its wonderful deliverances, and have honoured in you, Sire, a strong, God-fearing ruler – one entrusted by God with the sword of State – called to be God's Minister to this people for good. We have rejoiced in you as an upholder of our precious Protestant Faith, and have noted with joy your service and support of your own Puritan Church.

We are here to co-operate with Your Honour in all work for the People's good. We know that a state, like a man, is only strong through purity, only exalted by righteousness.

May God spare you long and guide you and your beloved people in prosperous ways. May He give you power over the hearts of men, that you may heal the breaches between the peoples, and may He bless the land with Peace.

This laudatory address was well received by the old President, who was invited up on to the preacher's platform to deliver his reply, which again was translated clause by clause. He began:⁷⁰ "Brothers, Sisters, and Reverend Gentlemen, – I call you brothers and sisters because you believe with me in Christ. When I see how the Gospel is being spread, I think of the words 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring messages of peace'. Those words are dear to me, and I rejoice to see the fulfilment of the Word."

There is no reason to suppose that either Kruger or Cross were insincere in their speeches on this occasion. Unfortunately, although there were many men of goodwill in South Africa who were working for peaceful solutions and the relaxing of tensions, among them President Steyn of the Orange Free State and Sir William Butler, there were other, more powerful influences, both inside

and outside the country, who were determined on a confrontation. English imperialists, "drunk with sight of power," as Kipling feared when he saw "the Captains and the Kings" at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations,⁷¹ could no longer tolerate the idea that a small, ramshackle Republic, inhabited by a backward and boorish people, should stand in the way of the mightiest Empire the world had ever known. From this distance of time, when "the pomp of yesterday" is already "one with Nineveh and Tyre" we can see that by 1899 the great British Empire had already passed its apogee.

Before the Assembly closed, all the delegates, without exception, called on President Kruger at his house, and were introduced to him personally by Mr. Batts.⁷²

Some Baptists had had misgivings about inviting the State President and the State officials to the opening service. Cross felt it necessary to dispel such ideas. His report in the Handbook is a reflection of his own impressions of the service:⁷³ "The President did not hinder our worship, he helped it. There was no ceremony. Driving up to the Church fifteen minutes before the appointed time, the President sat near the front till we were ready to go on with the service. He rose to receive our address, and then, at our invitation, given because the Church was so full, he ascended the preacher's platform and delivered his reply ... Then he resumed his seat with the people and during the service there seemed to be no simpler or more whole-hearted worshipper than he. As the old man spoke his heart seemed yearning for peace."

CHAPTER 9

Whirlwind

*“For they have sown the wind,
and they shall reap the whirlwind.”*

Hosea 8:7.

But there was to be no peace. In spite of the desire of most South Africans that differences between Great Britain and the Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek should be settled amicably; in spite of the warnings of Sir William Butler to the War Office that a war would be very costly in money and men; in spite of the desperate efforts of men like W.P. Schreiner and President Steyn to avert a war, stupidity and arrogance and greed triumphed. When the Bloemfontein Conference between Milner and Kruger in May 1899 ended in failure, the momentum towards war was irreversible. To study the events of those months between the Conference and the outbreak of war is to read one of the saddest chapters in the history of South Africa, or, for that matter, of Britain.

The disingenuousness of the British government in dealing with the Transvaal, the lies and subterfuges, the pretence that they were concerned only to remedy the Uitlanders' grievances, all add up to a shameful picture of political opportunism. Even while the talks and diplomatic exchanges were proceeding the British forces in the Cape were being steadily augmented. The Opposition Liberal party in the House of Commons forced a debate on this issue and demanded that the troops be withdrawn.¹ Balfour, replying on behalf of the Government, blandly assured the House that the increase of troops had

nothing whatever to do with the internal situation in South Africa – the increase was partly due to the possibility of what might arise in other regions of the world. This reply naturally drew from the Opposition the tart question, “why the garrison was required at the Cape any more than Australia, New Zealand or Canada. It looked as if the Government were preparing for some great expedition.”²

Even before the Bloemfontein conference the exodus of Uitlanders from the Transvaal began. Nightly, packed trains left Johannesburg for Natal and the Cape Colony.³ Figures of the numbers of refugees were published in the *Grahamstown Journal*, showing 3 995 in May, 5 836 in June, 4 499 in July, 5 755 in August, and, for the first week in September, 4 775.⁴ All available accommodation in Grahamstown and Port Alfred was filled by the middle of September.⁵ The presence of so many refugees (some quite penniless) was to cause major social problems in all the coastal towns.

By August even Chamberlain had dropped the pretence that Britain’s major concern in South Africa was with Uitlander grievances. The real issue was that of imperial supremacy in the sub-continent. The *Grahamstown Journal*, in a leader of August the 21st, rather naively stated that “a mere concession of franchise rights would be an unsatisfactory solution ... the little State (i.e. the Transvaal) must be brought, by force if necessary, into the same position of subordination to the Imperial Government as the Colonies are proud to enjoy.” In the House of Commons Chamberlain spoke of the Transvaal “affecting our predominance,” and of being “menaced by the action of the Transvaal in refusing redress of the grievances. It was a state of things which could no longer be tolerated.”⁶

Early in August Parliament in London was prorogued, in effect leaving vital decisions on war or peace to the Cabinet.⁷ To most Members of Parliament the killing of grouse in Scotland was more important than the saving of lives in South Africa. General Sir William Butler, only too aware of the military implications of the political situation, found that his warnings and advice were ignored. It became impossible for him to remain in his post as Commander of the British forces at the Cape, since, (as the *London Times* politely put it) his “political attitude was too plainly out of harmony with that of Sir Alfred Milner.”⁸ He resigned, and on August the 23rd returned to England.

He had done his best to avert the disaster. On June the 21st he had written, in a despatch to the Colonial Secretary (Chamberlain): “Because I am convinced that the true condition of affairs here has been gravely misunderstood in England, I have deemed it my duty to write this despatch. I am unable to avoid the conclusion that powerful and persistent forces are at work here and in England to produce strife in South Africa, between the white races, at all costs. That these costs will not be small, if once the result is arrived at, I am deeply convinced of.”⁹ Two days later, in a reply to a War Office cablegram, he wrote: “I

believe that a war between the white races, coming as a sequel to the Jameson Raid and the subsequent events of the last three years, would be the greatest calamity that ever occurred in South Africa."¹⁰

Not that British imperialism was solely responsible for the calamity when it came. Deneys Reitz, in his book *Commando: a Boer Journal of the Boer War*, wrote:¹¹

Looking back, I think that war was inevitable. I have no doubt that the British Government had made up its mind to force the issue, and was the chief culprit, but the Transvalers were also spoiling for a fight, and, from what I saw in Pretoria during the few weeks that preceded the ultimatum, I feel sure that the Boers would in any case have insisted on a rupture.

When war did come in October there were many bewildered hearts in the Cape Colony. Schreiner, the Prime Minister, would have liked the Colony to remain neutral, but his government was overruled by Milner, who carried matters with a high hand. English Colonials were forced by circumstances and the ties of blood into loyalty to Queen and Empire; Dutch Colonials, who would have liked to remain loyal to the Queen (for whom they had a great respect), became more aware of the blood ties that bound them to the burghers of the two northern Republics. Consequently, when the Free Staters crossed the Orange River and annexed large tracts of the northern Cape Colony, many of the young Dutch Colonials threw in their lot with the Free State commandos, thus becoming guilty of treason. Later in the war, and after, the problem of "traitors" and what to do with them was a source of much strife and bitterness.

As in all wars, but particularly so in what amounted to a civil war, this forcing of people into opposing sides was one of the most painful aspects of the whole unhappy situation. To feel obliged to defend the indefensible, to have to learn to view your friends as enemies, was very hard for anybody with any regard for truth and justice.

For a Minister of the Gospel who understood his calling as being that of a reconciler, and of preaching by word and example the Christian ideal of Love, those years were hard indeed. Steadfastly Cross held to his faith, doing his duty in the place where God had set him. He could do nothing to avert the storm; but he could do his utmost to help his own people to keep their heads and to behave with courage and Christian charity while the storm lasted. He could and did devote his energies to succouring some of the victims of the storm.

On October the 12th 1899 a public meeting was held in Grahamstown for the purpose of forming an organisation for the relief of refugees.¹² The Mayor was in the chair, and among those with him on the platform were Cross and his old friend and pioneer of the Baptist Union, the Rev. W.E. Kelly. The latter had

gone to Johannesburg in 1888, where he became well-known for his work among the destitute outcasts of the primitive mining town. He had left the Transvaal only because he had been ordered by the authorities to go, and he had found a refuge in Port Alfred. At this meeting it was decided that a fund be raised to relieve those British subjects and others, who, having been driven from their homes by war, were in necessitous circumstances. It was emphasised that the resolution made no distinction as to the nationality of those to be relieved, an emphasis that Cross warmly underlined. A committee was appointed to carry out the resolution, and inevitably Cross was on that Committee. As the war proceeded he was to become more and more involved in this work. The first Secretary of the Committee was the Rev. W. Liddle of Trinity Church, but when he left Grahamstown in 1900 Cross took on the job.¹³ By November the 8th 1899 the *Grahamstown Journal* reported that there were already 500 applications for relief.¹⁴ The work was very exacting and time-consuming. It involved not only the responsible administration of funds, but the finding of accommodation for the homeless, the arranging of schooling for the children, and efforts to place the men in employment. An office was made available in the Town Hall, and it was open every morning.

One of those whom Cross helped, and who, many years later remembered and recorded that help with gratitude, was a young Boer lad from the Orange Free State, Victor Pohl. In his book, *The Adventures of a Boer Family*, he recalls how, as a boy of about fourteen, he was captured by the British for carrying messages for the Boers, and sent to the prisoner-of-war camp at Green Point in the Cape. He had an older sister, then living in Grahamstown, and she enlisted the help of Mr. Cross to rescue her brother from the camp and allow him to be brought to Grahamstown on parole. Eventually Cross succeeded in getting the boy to Grahamstown, where he was allowed to live with his sister and to attend the Public School: a situation that was not without irony when later in the war a Boer Commando came so close to Grahamstown that even the school cadets were placed on alert for the defence of the town. Pohl recalled how "the Principal, who was a Scotsman, (Grant) called me into his office and said, 'You go home, me lad, and have a holiday, for,' with a twinkle in his eye, 'you may be shooting some of us!'"¹⁵

Cross's attitude to the war can be deduced not only from his actions, but from the subject matter of his sermons at this time. Church services were advertised regularly in the *Grahamstown Journal*, and often, though not always, the titles of sermons were given. Thus in June, soon after the failure of the Bloemfontein Conference, Cross preached on "The ministry of reconciliation."¹⁶ In August he spoke on a topic that has long puzzled faithful Christians in times of crisis and distress: "The unheeding God."¹⁷ No sermon titles were announced in the *Journal* throughout the whole of that fateful October; but in November he preached on themes with martial titles:¹⁸ "Enlisting;" "A good soldier;" "The battle of life;" and "Armour for the battle of life," in which he spoke about a greater war – the Holy War for besieged Mansoul.

The first months of the war saw many severe military reverses for the British army. Large tracts of the Cape Colony were in the hands of the Free State Boers, and Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking were under siege. Black week in December, which brought news of the defeat of General Gatacre's forces in the Cape midlands, Lord Methuen's disastrous attempt on Magersfontein, and the Commander-in-Chief's (General Buller himself) defeat at Colenso at last awakened Britain to the seriousness of the situation. As General Sir William Butler had foreseen, the campaign would not be short or easy. Politicians and military men alike had been deluded by their own myth of British invincibility into a grave miscalculation of Boer tenacity and fighting capability.

However, the Boers failed to follow up their successes, largely due to old and conservative leaders whose tactics were more defensive than aggressive. By January 1900 the Boers had lost the initiative, and with the arrival of Lord Roberts British strategy changed. The surrender of General Cronje in February 1900 was the turning point of the war. The road to Bloemfontein lay open to the victorious British.

The Free Staters who had occupied parts of the northern Cape Colony consequently retreated back over the Orange River to defend their homes and their capital city. By March the 5th they had left Colesberg, and soon General Gatacre was in control over the whole area. Less than a week later the Rev. G. W. Cross was given permission to travel to the front, with a view to visiting military hospitals and camps and finding out for himself what conditions were like for the soldiers. In effect he was doing the work of a chaplain. Whatever his views on the rights and wrongs of the war he believed that the church must be where people were, and must minister to their physical and spiritual needs.

By the 18th of March he was back in Grahamstown and preached a sermon that Sunday evening on his travels and experiences.¹⁹ So eager were the people of Grahamstown to have first-hand knowledge of the war that he was asked to give a lecture – which he entitled “On the War Trail” – in the Baptist Lecture Hall a few days later.²⁰

The hall was full, for to quote *Grocott's Mail*, “everybody knew that there was a great treat in store, for, in addition to being a keen and shrewd observer of men and things, Mr. Cross's reputation as a most able and entertaining lecturer is a household word in Grahamstown.”

He began his talk by observing that he was subject to attacks of “war fever,” his first violent attack having been in 1877. He had (in his own words) “held a commission then as chaplain,” but this time he had been unable to obtain a commission, and had been glad to avail himself of an opportunity which had been afforded him of visiting soldiers' homes and hospitals.

He described his journey up the railway line to Rosmead, where he saw his first "rooibaatje," then on to Naauwpoort, where there was a large field hospital which he visited. At Naauwpoort he managed to obtain a permit to proceed to Colesberg, which had very recently been vacated by the Boers. He was very interested to see the Boer encampment, and the ingenious arrangements of the Boer trenches. From there he proceeded to De Aar, where he visited another hospital and heard first hand accounts from wounded soldiers of the battle of Paardeberg and Cronje's surrender. Leaving De Aar he went still further north, right up to Orange River, to visit another hospital before returning to Grahamstown.

His lecture, which lasted for an hour and a half, was made more interesting by his showing of relics of the war which he had picked up on various battle fields: fragments of shell, bullets, dum-dum bullets. He concluded by giving vivid descriptions of the battles of Belmont, Graspan, Modder River and Magersfontein.

His audience gave generously that evening when a collection was called for in aid of soldiers homes in the camps, and as a consequence Cross found himself in charge of yet another public fund.²¹

It was called simply "Rev. G.W. Cross's Fund," and its objects were to collect money, food, clothes, pipes and tobacco, books and magazines to provide comforts for the troops. By means of letters to the newspapers he reported meticulously on the receipt of gifts in money or kind, and the despatch of boxes, with details of their contents and destination.²² He showed as much concern for the lonely soldiers guarding bridges and little railway stations, whose chief enemy was boredom, as he did for the sick and wounded in the military hospitals.

These tasks were undertaken in addition to all his other responsibilities, none of which were neglected or dropped. He was still the Secretary of the Baptist Union, and in this capacity he was the chief target of an unpleasant attack from the Rev. J.B. Heard of Pietermaritzburg. Heard, although President-elect of the Baptist Union, had been in England when the Assembly was held in Pretoria in April 1899, and he was incensed when he heard of the part played by President Kruger on that occasion. His objections to what he called "this disgraceful scene in our history" seem to have been based equally on the old Baptist tradition that the church must have nothing to do with the state, and, (contradictorily), his own loyalty to the Empire. He was sure that what he called "this semi-religious farce" was designed "to embarrass the Government of the Empire."²³ He seems, in fact, to have been thoroughly muddle-headed, but feelings were running high at the time, and clearer minds than his were being misled by the distortions of newspapers.

He therefore resigned as President of the Baptist Union of South Africa, and did it by announcing his resignation in the columns of the *British Weekly*.²⁴ The

Editor of the *South African Baptist*, when he saw this, asked Cross as Secretary of the Baptist Union to comment on it. Cross's statement appeared in the November 1899 number of the *South African Baptist*.²⁵ It confirmed that Heard had "taken the very unconstitutional course of intimating to the world through the columns of the *British Weekly* that he has resigned his position in the S.A. Baptist Union, and has severed his connection therewith." Secondly, "That Mr. Heard was aggrieved that during his absence in England, the President of the Transvaal had attended the opening Public Meeting of the Union Assembly at Pretoria, and upon his return he wrote angry letters to the Secretary and threatened resignation. The Secretary pointed out that he had no power to alter history (the thing was past) or to receive the President's resignation."

The Editor of the *South African Baptist* (Rev. Alfred Hall), commenting on this affair, wrote: "There is a good deal of mystery about the matter, and in directing the organ of the Union we think we should have had the courtesy of a presidential communication made to us. Our people do not look to English papers for official announcements to South African institutions. It appears to us that nothing happened beyond the ordinary courtesies that are being constantly repeated in all civilized, not to say Christian, communities ... Clearly the Assembly has done no wrong. Even if it had voted an address to the State President, and Mr. Heard disagreed, that would hardly justify a resignation; minorities cannot rule in well-ordered communities of any kind ... Our Union did nothing unusual; and yet Mr. Heard has chosen to break away from it in a manner as offensively discourteous as could be after it had offered him its highest position of confidence and honour."²⁶

A reply to this was published in the January 1900 issue of the *S.A. Baptist* in the form of a letter from Heard.²⁷ But by that time Heard's petulant pipings seemed increasingly irrelevant in the face of the huge tragedy of the war. Among the sufferers were Heard's own colleagues, the Baptist ministers of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State.

In this connection a letter of appeal to the Baptist churches of Cape Colony and Natal appeared in the July 1900 number of the *South African Baptist*, over the signatures of the Revs. E. Baker, Acting President, G.W. Cross, Secretary and Ex-President, and Mr. H. Hall, Treasurer.²⁸

It began thus:

We sent an urgent appeal home to England for help in the serious straits to which our churches are reduced by the unhappy circumstances of our country. Our answer came promptly from the Secretary of the home Union, who writes: - 'I am very sorry to have to give a negative reply to your letter, especially as I realise the need is very great, but it is quite impossible for any grant to be made from the Century Fund or from any

fund under my control. We are absolutely refusing to disburse the Century Fund or to consider any applications until the close of 1901 ... I am very sorry not to be able to help, and I hope that when we have passed through this transition period we may be able to establish closer bonds with the Colonies'.

The letter from the South African officials continues:

Brothers, that which seems a transition period to our friends at home is our life and death struggle. The existence of every church in our northern territories is imperilled; and our Pastors, who have been driven from their work, and from house and home, and those who have remained at their post with a courage that is as great as that of any soldier, have now to face the direst poverty which will pinch most their wives and little ones ...

Now these men and these churches must be helped and must be helped quickly. To do all that needs to be done may be beyond the resources of our people here, but it may be our privilege to render first aid. We want immediately £300 to keep want away from these men ... That, if each will do his best, we can provide. He gives twice who gives quickly. Meanwhile we will appeal to our Colonial brethren in Australia and in Canada. Surely they will understand our appeal and will know that a vague promise of 'closer bonds' after 1901, however well-meant, sounds very like a mockery of our dire distress.

From later editorial comment in the *South African Baptist* it is apparent that the wording of this letter was from Cross's pen. In the September 1900 number the Editor wrote: "Our Union Secretary is a veteran of well-balanced mind and gentle heart and when he speaks of the English answer as 'very like a mockery of our dire distress' we are sure he feels deeply. His own figure is a very pathetic one. After long years of Colonial service, and equally long dreams of English sympathy, he pleads for Colonial ministers, their wives and little ones, in vain. It is a saddening revelation ... Do Little Englanders so predominate in Baptist Union Councils at home that political bias strangles piety? It is impiety to deny help to needy brethren."²⁹

An even more strongly worded editorial headed *How English Baptists have failed us* appeared in the November number. From this it appears that the refusal of monetary aid was followed by a refusal to allow "our representative, Rev. J.E. Ennals of Bloemfontein ... five minutes to speak for South Africa" at the British Baptist Assembly that autumn. "The total amount of British Baptist sympathy is set down at twenty shillings and sixpence. Surely a more disgusting record can hardly be found in the annals of Christianity or in the annals of England."³⁰

It is only fair to add that subsequently the Rev. J.E. Ennals managed to raise over £70 in England for the fund.³¹ As for the other countries which were appealed to, Cross stated baldly in the Executive's Report in 1901 that "communications sent to Australia, Canada, and the United States, have not been acknowledged."³² But the response in the Cape Colony was immediate and generous, and of the £373 collected up to May 1901 over £126 came from the church in Grahamstown.³³

This sad tale of British Baptist indifference did however eventually have a happy ending. Correspondence was opened with leaders of the denomination in England regarding the establishment of a South African Aid Society, and proposals were submitted for the organisation of the society. The inaugural meeting of what was called the Baptist South African Colonial and Missionary Aid Society was held on September 16th 1901 in London.³⁴ In 1910 this Society became the Baptist Colonial Society, and extended its work to other parts of the Empire.

In spite of this it is unfortunately true that Dr. John Clifford's words in a letter to the South African Baptist Union in 1897 – "I regret England knows so little of your work, and is so feebly sympathetic"³⁵ – are still valid to this day. It is England's lack of interest that caused South African Baptists to turn more and more to the United States, and it explains the strong influence of America on the theology and style of the South African churches.

There was no Baptist Union Assembly in South Africa in 1900, though at one time there had been hopes of convening an assembly in the spring of that year. In spite of the fall of Pretoria in June the war continued; the country had still to experience the full horror of guerilla warfare. As there was to be no Assembly the Executive, consisting of the Rev. E. Baker, the Rev. G.W. Cross, and Mr. H. Hall of Molteno, met in Cape Town before the end of 1900 to deal with urgent matters, particularly the allocation of the "War Losses Fund." The burden of maintaining the work of the Baptist Union fell heavily on these three men.³⁶ It was fortunate that throughout the war there was no break in the publication of the *South African Baptist*, which continued to maintain and strengthen the links between the widely-separated churches at a time when travel and communication were very difficult.

In Grahamstown Cross continued on his way steadfastly devoting much time to his work for refugees and his "gifts and comforts" scheme for the troops. He refused utterly to be drawn into political controversy, or to support the growing popular movement for the annexation of the Boer Republics to the British Empire. He was not present at a great mass meeting in Grahamstown Town Hall on April 3rd 1900,³⁷ in support of what was known as "Lord Salisbury's Imperial Policy," and his absence was noticed and commented on in a disparaging letter to the *Grahamstown Journal* on April 6th. Although he is not

mentioned by name, the fact that the anonymous letter writer chose to sign himself "Very Cross" is a clue to the "Free Church Minister" he attacks. Why he should hesitate to mention Cross by name is a puzzle, since he is not shy about referring to the Rev. S.J. Helm of the Congregational Church. "For a considerable time past," he writes, "it has been thought by many that Mr. Helm is very much pro-Boer in his opinions, and as he has now come to the front with the statement that he and one other clergyman in this town are of opinion that the present war was preventable, I would ask these rev. gentlemen to give us their reasons for their opinions. I must regret that they were not present (or if present not on the platform) at our great mass meeting in the Town Hall ... Possibly Mr. Helm and his clerical friend may see their way clear to have a little Exeter Hall meeting here, and give us their views. I can promise him or them an equally large audience ... but would not promise the same treatment to the speakers."

It is a sad commentary on the state of mind induced by the war that men should be branded as pro-Boer simply because they believed that the war was preventable.

Neither Helm nor Cross responded to the letter in the *Grahamstown Journal*, but the shadow of the stigma was always there. Cross's standing in the community was high and his services to Grahamstown plain for all to see. Yet one wonders what his own congregation – quite apart from the general public – thought when he refused to hold a thanksgiving service for Lord Roberts's victories, after the fall of Pretoria. On the very day that such a service was being conducted at Commemoration Church by the Rev. A.T. Rhodes, Cross saw fit to preach a sermon on "The doubt, despondency and sin of David."³⁸

On June 22nd 1900 a leader in the *Grahamstown Journal* pronounced confidently: "The war, we should say, is practically almost over. It is impossible that the fragmentary Boer forces which remain in the field can offer a protracted resistance." And the *Journal* called for a public meeting to make arrangements for fitting peace celebrations.³⁹

Yet unaccountably the war dragged on. While the Dugmore ladies at Bowden (and many like them) industriously made up large quantities of flannel into shirts and pyjamas for the sick and wounded, to be distributed by Cross;⁴⁰ while in England the political strife about the war intensified; while the British poured more and more troops into South Africa and criss-crossed the country with barbed wire fences and block-houses, the Boer commandos fought on. It was a kind of warfare quite new in British experience; nothing that Sandhurst had taught them could help the professional British officers. Meanwhile their men were dying in thousands of enteric fever, Boer families were being gathered up and placed in refugee camps, and the country was laid waste by the devastating scorched earth policy of both Boer and Briton.

Over huge areas of the Cape Colony martial law was proclaimed and movement restricted. In Grahamstown, from March 1901 no persons were allowed in the streets between 9 p.m. and 5.30 a.m. unless in uniform or in possession of a special pass.⁴¹ In spite of this it was decided to hold a Baptist Union Assembly in Grahamstown in May 1901.

Two years later, the Rev. E. Baker, writing Notes on this the 23rd Assembly for the *Handbook*,⁴² described vividly the difficult circumstances in which the Assembly was held: "We had not met for two years. The country was in the throes of the great war. Martial law was over the whole land. Our trains stood still at night for safety. We journeyed to our rendezvous with the signs of conflict on every hand. Camps, guards, ambulances, hospitals, flying columns, blockhouses, broken bridges and telegraph posts, twisted rails, ruined fences, desolated homes, graves and carcasses of animals, were all passed *en route*. We required permits to travel, and also permits at Grahamstown to remain out from our temporary homes after nine at night. The gaps in our ranks told of the difficulties of travel. Not a single representative of any of the churches in the Transvaal, the Orange River or Natal, were present. It was entirely a meeting of Ministers and delegates from the Old Colony."

The local Commandant, Captain R. G. Macdonnell, gave permission to the Baptist Union to issue military passes to all attending the evening meetings. These passes were issued every evening at the church.⁴³ In spite of the difficulties the 23rd Assembly was one of the happiest ever held. To quote Baker again: "The Grahamstown Church welcomed us as a mother who greets her sons assembled from afar. The re-union was pleasant to us all."

As 1901 proceeded the war came closer to Grahamstown. In January the *Grahamstown Journal* announced that the Colonial Government was calling for Volunteers "in view of the fact that the forces of the enemy have invaded the Colony."⁴⁴ The intention was to raise a special force, called the Colonial Defence Force, for the sole purpose of repelling the invasion and guarding the railways and other lines of communication. Advertisements appeared in the papers calling for recruits for Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, the Cape Colony Cycle Corps, Frank Douglass' Flying Column, Dennison's Scouts, and others. In February all bicycles in the Albany District had to be handed in at the Drosty Barracks; also fire-arms, explosives and ammunition in the possession of farmers and other civilians.⁴⁵

From the north the Boer commandoes came steadily nearer. From the west an even more frightening enemy threatened; the plague was spreading rapidly in Cape Town, and it seemed to be only a matter of time before ships brought it to Port Elizabeth – and would Grahamstown then be safe?⁴⁶

In March Kritzinger's Commando reached the Albany District. On Sunday the 10th the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Town Guard were hurried off to the trenches, which (to quote the *Journal*) "had not been constructed a moment too soon." It was not until the following Saturday that the *Journal* was able to publish any details of this exciting event, as "the authorities, with wise reserve, mercifully withheld the news."⁴⁷ It was then learned that the Boers had been within 18 miles of Grahamstown, but that during the scare all the farms in the district of Upper Albany were deserted, most of the occupants having come to Grahamstown.

Upper Albany was well known to Cross from Bowden days, and this event, which personally affected so many of his old farming friends, made the war a living reality to him. He had joined the Town Guard, and it is possible that he was among those who manned the trenches around Grahamstown that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday.

This immediate threat receded, to be followed by the news that the plague had come to Port Elizabeth. The Grahamstown Town Council was urged to take steps to improve the sanitation of the town, and special attention was given to the "location."⁴⁸ The plague, in fact, may well have been a blessing in disguise, since it forced the authorities to improve conditions in slum areas in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and other towns.

Cross was still very actively involved with the Refugee Relief Fund, and in July he wrote to the papers as follows:⁴⁹

Sir, Our relief fund still holds out, though our orders to restrict the help granted are now very stringent. Home friends have ceased to send supplies of clothing for more than a year past. There is considerable need. It is not pleasant to think of thin and half-clad, bare-footed children in weather like this. If local friends will send any things they can spare to me at the Town Hall, I will see they are well bestowed. Women's and children's clothing is most needed.

In September Grahamstown was again agog with news of an approaching commando. This time it was General Smuts and his men, who crossed the Fish River Rand and proceeded in a south-westerly direction towards Port Elizabeth. On October 3rd the *Journal's* headlines proclaimed: War at our doors – Smuts' Breakthrough – Nesbitt's Horse bar the way. "They could see the Boers 4 miles ahead, going over the Fish River Rand on Miles Bowker's farm. If the Albany men had been in position, in all probability Smuts' commando would have been cornered." Alas, the war was one long succession of "ifs," and Smuts' men were far too experienced to allow themselves to be cornered.

Towards the end of the year Cross found himself on yet another committee, this time to raise funds for Christmas comforts for soldiers, particularly the men in the blockhouses.⁵⁰ It was the third Christmas of the war, and he was also once again busily engaged in trying to raise something extra for the refugees for Christmas comforts.⁵¹ The previous year he had organised a picnic for them at Oatlands Park on December the 27th, the cost being borne by what he called "a few private friends."⁵²

This year there were fewer refugees in Grahamstown, as some were being allowed to return to the Transvaal. This was yet another job for Cross: he was Secretary of the Uitlander Committee of Permits in Grahamstown.⁵³ The number of permits issued was strictly limited by Lord Kitchener, and the Committee had to make decisions on who would have priority. Lists of names were published every week in the papers, and these people then applied to the Magistrate's office for their permits. From November onwards there was a steady exodus of refugees from Grahamstown.

May the 31st 1902 was a Saturday. Just before midnight the treaty which ended the war was signed in Pretoria. There was no proud victory for the British, only an immense weariness and a desire to put an end to all the suffering. Young Denys Reitz, who accompanied General Smuts to the Conference, told of Lord Kitchener meeting their train at Kroonstad: "He was anxious to bring the war to a close, for he referred again and again to the hopelessness of our struggle, telling us that he had four hundred thousand troops in South Africa against our eighteen thousand."⁵⁴ The outcome of the Conference was a foregone conclusion for, to quote Reitz again:

Every representative had the same disastrous tale to tell of starvation, lack of ammunition, horses, and clothing, and of how the great block house system was strangling their efforts to carry on the war. Added to this was the heavy death-toll among the women and children, of whom twenty-five thousand had already died in the concentration camps, and the universal ruin that had overtaken the country. Every homestead was burned, all crops and livestock destroyed, and there was nothing left but to bow to the inevitable.⁵⁵

News of the Peace reached Grahamstown on Monday morning by way of a telegram to *Grocott's Mail*. Great were the jubilations. Church bells were soon ringing, schools were closed for the day, there was a public meeting in the Town Hall at noon and a thanks-giving service in the Cathedral in the evening.⁵⁶

Cross expressed his thankfulness and relief at the news in a poem entitled *Peace!* which was published two days later in *Grocott's Mail*.⁵⁷ Here are three of the eight stanzas:

The Winter of our woe
Hath spent its lease;
Bloodshed and bitter hate
And War shall cease;
For God, long prayed, hath sent
His Angel Peace.

O Soul, uplift thyself
To God in song!
O heart, put far from thee
All thought of wrong!
O hand, clasp brother-hand
In union strong!

Contempt, and bitter hate,
And envy, cease;
Briton and Boer, one brotherhood,
In love increase!
For God hath sent to us
His Angel Peace.

CHAPTER 10

Interlude: Book lover and literary critic

*“Ah, did you once see Shelley plain,
And did he stop and speak to you
And did you speak to him again?
How strange it seems, and new!”*

R. Browning

The poet Francis Carey Slater, in his preface to *The Centenary Book of South African Verse* (1925) described Cross as “a man of great charm” and “a nice critic of poetry.” In a private letter to Cross in August 1917 Slater wrote: “The reading public in South Africa is comparatively small, and the support afforded to the Colonial product in the literary line, is very meagre. Poetry, in particular, receives practically no encouragement ... Allow me to express my sincere thanks to you for your kind and helpful review of my ‘Mimosa Land’ in the S.A. Bookman.”¹

The Claremont poet, A. Vine Hall, also thought highly of Cross as a critic of poetry. In an undated letter to Cross asking him to review his latest publication he writes: “I can scarcely desire you to be severe with it in the press but should be grateful for *every* criticism you can give me by letter. I know of no one whose judgement in such matters I should so entirely trust. I hope to do far better work, & with such help, I can.”²

Cross was, however, probably better known as a popular lecturer on literary topics than as a critic. He had early developed a taste for poetry, as many a cutting in his own scrapbook proves; yet he acknowledged that it was to the

Public Library in Grahamstown that he owed his first acquaintance with most modern poetry and literature, which, he said, "had helped to make life so rich for him."³ He became a subscriber to the *Cape Monthly Magazine* very soon after his arrival in South Africa, and he took a particular interest in the indigenous poetry he found in it.⁴

His first public lecture of which there is any record was given in the Town Hall in King William's Town in September 1886.⁵ The subject was Tennyson. In 1887 he lectured again on Tennyson in the Trinity Church hall in Grahamstown,⁶ and soon after he was invited to give a course of lectures on Tennyson at the Wesleyan Girls High School.⁷ His fame as a lecturer spread, and before the end of the decade he was asked to give lectures in Durban and Port Elizabeth as well as in Grahamstown. For more than thirty years he gave delight to audiences in all the major cities and towns of South Africa, and although he spoke with authority on many poets, English, Scottish and South African, Tennyson remained his first favourite.

All the press reviews of Cross as a lecturer emphasise two things. One was his enthusiasm for his subject and his desire to share that enthusiasm with his audience, in which he manifestly succeeded. The other was his skill as a reader of poetry. Forty or fifty years after his death he was still remembered for his reading of Tennyson's poems.

Some of the manuscripts of his lectures have survived,⁸ and testify to the long hours of loving care which he put into them. He had a catholic taste, and the manuscripts show that he was equally capable of lecturing on Robert Browning, D.G. Rossetti, William Watson, James Thomson, Coleridge, John Bunyan, and South African poetry.

In the 1890s he fell in love with the poetry of Christina Rossetti, whose (in Cross's words) "strange and striking individuality" stood the test of "Milton's great canon that 'Poetry must be simple, sensuous, passionate.'"⁹ After the death of Tennyson in 1892 there was a long delay in the appointment of a new Poet Laureate, and Cross began to put forward the claims of Christina Rossetti to the honour. In an article in the *E.P. Magazine* of October 1893 entitled "Who shall be Laureate? A brief for Miss Rossetti" he discusses and rejects for one reason or another the names of Kipling, Watson, Swinburne and Morris, and makes a good case for the choice of Christina Rossetti. This article was reprinted by special request in the *Baptist Magazine* of England in April 1894. It was a paper with a wide circulation and a respectable reputation for literary criticism. Whether Cross would ever have succeeded in his campaign is impossible to say, for Miss Rossetti died in 1894. The post of Laureate was not filled until 1896, when the new Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, appointed Alfred Austin. Considering that the two previous Laureates had been Tennyson and Wordsworth the appointment of Austin, a "Tory journalist" was

“so derisory, and was greeted with such contempt in literary society, that it was generally regarded as mere cynicism on the part of the Prime Minister” – as Kipling’s biographer, Charles Carrington, summed up the matter.¹⁰

One of Cross’s most popular lectures bore the title “The House that Jack built.” It was first given on October the 9th 1890 to the young men of the Trinity Church Literary and Debating Society in Grahamstown. It was repeated on October the 27th before a large audience at the Public School – Admission 6^d – in aid of funds for the school library. Then he was asked by the Rev. J.T. Lloyd of Pearson Street Congregational Church, Port Elizabeth, to give it there. Cross protested that perhaps a lecture on Tennyson, or D.G. Rossetti, or James Thomson would be more suitable, but Lloyd persisted in demanding “The House that Jack built.” So on November the 19th that same year Cross delivered the lecture again, in Port Elizabeth. Several years later he was asked to repeat it to the more sophisticated audience of the E.P. Literary and Scientific Society, in July 1894; and again in February 1899 at the Annual General Meeting of the Grahamstown Public Library. On this last occasion he mentioned that he had also delivered it in Bloemfontein.

This lecture (the tattered manuscript survives)¹¹ is a very good example of Cross’s humour, humanity, wide reading and earnestness. It begins playfully with a nursery rhyme and ends with Dante’s *Inferno*. The bridge between them is the old Greek myth of the Labyrinth at Crete, and how Theseus slew the Minotaur. This myth and its interpretation is the core of the lecture, and to those who might object to interpretations he says: “If you bring an empty mind to a Greek myth it will be merely an idle tale.

Minds that have nothing to confer
Have nothing to receive.”

He recalls an experience of his own, when riding one evening with a friend round Grahamstown’s mountain drive. They came to the eastward bluff and saw, of a sudden, the full moon rising over the great valley. They stopped, and in that magic moment his friend said: “How much the moon looks like green cheese tonight!” To some, said Cross, the moon will be green cheese, to others a burnt out world, and to yet others “That orbéd maiden with white fire laden, Whom mortals call the moon.”

To Cross the moon would always be more than green cheese. In his own words, “Meanings multiply as experience grows, and signs increase as minds become enriched.” So he brings us to Dante, “who coiled his hell in concentric spirals” after the pattern of the Labyrinth. He concludes: “We follow a stern guide when we follow Dante, but we do not follow him far. He found his *Inferno* in the human heart and the Labyrinth not in Greek myth merely or graven only on Greek coins but in the coil and twist of human passions.”

The lecture gives some idea of the range and richness of Cross's reading. Froude, Carlyle, Burns, Ruskin, Piers Plowman, Matthew Arnold, Chaucer, Pope, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Shelley and Shakespeare all contribute to the tapestry of thought that yet is so peculiarly Cross's own creation, and that was enjoyed by schoolboys and learned professional men alike.

In 1892 the E.P. Literary and Scientific Society (which had been formed in 1884 but lapsed when some of its leading members left Grahamstown) was reconstituted.¹² Cross was fully involved with all its activities from the outset.¹³ He was elected to the Committee and appointed to represent Literature on the Editorial Committee of the proposed magazine,¹⁴ the first number of which appeared in October 1892. The titles of some of the papers read at the monthly meetings of the Society reflect its wide scope: "With Bent at Zimbabwe"¹⁵ "Novels as literature",¹⁶ "Science in the Middle Ages",¹⁷ "D.G. Rossetti" (one of Cross's lectures),¹⁸ "Primitive man",¹⁹ "Reading, thinking and speaking",²⁰ "Australian poetry".²¹ On one memorable occasion the members gave a public play-reading of *The Merchant of Venice*, in which Cross took the role of Shylock. The *Grahamstown Journal* reported that the reading was "very successful" and "gave much pleasure".²² The E.P. Literary and Scientific Society gave Cross the opportunity to mix with his intellectual peers and stimulated his interest in subjects beyond the usual range of a hard-working parson.

It was Cross's literary interests that led to his becoming acquainted with one of the most colourful personalities and important literary figures in South Africa at that time: Olive Schreiner.

Although there is no record of when or where they met it is possible that Cross was introduced to Olive Schreiner by her mother. The old lady had been living in the Convent in Grahamstown since about 1880 and had a wide circle of friends. Many years later Cross was to write of Mrs. Schreiner: "I never knew a person of any age with so passionate an interest in life or one with wider culture ... She would talk on religion, politics, literature, art, or, above all, on her children as I have heard no one else talk. She had more of the quality called genius than any other person I ever met. She knew everybody of note in South Africa, and had known everyone who had achieved distinction in it from the early forties of last century ... It was my delight to get her to talk of the wild, fierce days of the Kafir wars, of the beginnings of the Free State, of a Missionary's life in those early times, when they were often driven from pillar to post."²³

In January 1893 Olive Schreiner paid a short visit to her mother in Grahamstown, and it is not unlikely that she met Cross then. By the end of the year their friendship was such that she sent him a copy of her newest book, *Dream Life and Real Life*, with the inscription:²⁴

For my dear friend Mr. Cross with affectionate
greetings

Olive Schreiner

Middelburg
Nov 14/93

Olive Schreiner was by this time a famous woman. Her *Story of an African Farm*, which was first published in 1883, had already run into many editions. It is an extraordinary book: that rare phenomenon, a truly underived novel. In its treatment of eternal human problems, giving them a local habitation in the Karoo, it has been compared to Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, whose setting is the Yorkshire moors. The *Story* was a passionate protest against sexual double standards and the contemporary attitude towards women, which may be summarised in the fact that Olive Schreiner thought it necessary to publish her book under a male pseudonym – Ralph Iron – to ensure that it would be taken seriously and judged on its merits.

It was a book that appealed strongly to Cross, with his sensitive imagination and sympathy. Olive Schreiner's rebellion against the narrow conventions of her age could not shock him. For him the theme of the *Story* was "the great salvation which is wrought out through suffering love."²⁵

In August 1891 Cross had given a public lecture on Olive Schreiner under the auspices of the Baptist Young Men's Literary and Debating Society. The *Grahamstown Journal* reported that "the Lecture was much enjoyed, the Rev. Lecturer shedding a flood of light upon the talented authoress's works, which should make them very popular among those who were present."²⁶ It may well be imagined therefore that Cross's meeting with the author whom he so greatly admired was for him a thrilling occasion.

The story of their friendship is crystallised in a handful of letters.²⁷ It is clear that Cross's sympathy and understanding were a great comfort to Olive Schreiner. The earliest of the surviving letters she wrote to him begins: "My very dear Friend – I have just been rereading your letter which was a very great comfort & help to me. You do not know *how* sore anything like conflict is to me. Yet all my life I have had to fight. It has been so impossible for me to see things eye to eye with the world about me. My heaven is a place where there is *work* but no conflict."²⁸

This letter was written from Kimberley in February 1895. Later that year, in August, Cronwright, her husband, was asked to give an address at Kimberley. With his wife's help he wrote a paper on *The Political Situation*, which was a robust attack on Rhodes (then Prime Minister of the Cape) and his Government, and the Afrikaner Bond. In Cronwright's view the Bond was being used by Rhodes to further his own interests, and that this would be done at the

expense of the Blacks. The speech was a plea to all men of goodwill in the Colony who were alarmed at these developments to make contact with each other and form groups.

Olive sent Cross a copy of the speech and asked him for his opinion of it. "The Cape Telegraph & Argus have both refused to discuss it on the ground of its being a woman's work," she wrote. "You don't know how tender I feel to you & Mr. Lloyd because you are the only two men I know in South Africa who would not discount a woman's work merely because it was a woman's work."²⁹ Both Olive and her husband felt that Cross was in sympathy with their political views. Cronwright wrote and asked him his opinion about the possibility of forming a branch of the proposed new political party in Grahamstown: "Let me know the feeling, and to whom to write to work it up, please."³⁰ And again a month later: "... it is time those who love truth & to whom fellow mortals are precious, should be heard. Rhodes is sowing awful trouble & misery for future generations in S. Africa."³¹

At the end of December 1895 the Cronwright-Schreiners passed through Grahamstown on their way to Port Alfred, and there was a brief meeting with Cross. Soon after their arrival in Port Alfred they received the news of the Jameson Raid.³² Olive wrote to Cross: "The one good that may grow out of it is that it may break the nightmare power which Rhodes has exercised over the country."³³ Cross, however, always slow to judge, was not immediately convinced of Rhodes's complicity, and was unwilling to condemn him on the available evidence. Olive knew this. As the post-Raid investigations proceeded in England and South Africa it became difficult to believe that Rhodes was not involved in the whole sorry debacle. An undated letter from Olive to Cross, written after her return to Kimberley, shows how strongly she felt. The letter, in a large, sprawling hand which almost fills the page, consists of one sentence:

Dear Friend

Are you waiting for evidence of Rhodes
complicity or, have you got it now ???

Yours ever
Olive Schreiner³⁴

At this time Olive was writing her "Stray thoughts on South Africa" – articles which were published in various papers between 1891 and 1900. In 1896 three articles on "The Boer" were published in the *Fortnightly Review*, and also an article on the native races of South Africa. A resumé of this latter article was published in *Grocott's Penny Mail* in August 1896. Cross was entrusted with the laborious task of reading the proofs. He not only corrected typographical errors, but occasionally amended or even added to the text. Olive had great faith in his judgement. In a postscript to one of her letters to him, written

apparently from Port Alfred in August 1896, she says: "It was all right about the heading. Anything you did would be all right, because the heart is right."³⁵

In August 1896 the Cronwright-Schreiners again passed through Grahamstown on their way to Port Alfred.³⁶ Cross met them early in the morning at the railway station and stayed with them until the Kowie train left at 8 a.m. A few days later she wrote to him: "Thank you so much for coming to meet us. It cheered my heart."³⁷

She needed cheering. The weather at Port Alfred was depressing, a steady, ceaseless downpour. "If the weather continues as it is now we shall certainly not stop *more* than the week & may leave sooner," she wrote. "If we do stay here I do hope you will be able to come down."³⁸

However, the weather did improve, and they stayed at the seaside for nearly three weeks. "We had a beautiful time at the Kowie bathing," she wrote in her journal on her return to Kimberley.³⁹ While they were at Port Alfred Olive received a copy of the August number of the *Fortnightly Review*, which included her article "The wanderings of the Boer". She sent it on to Cross with the request "When done with please pass on to my mother."⁴⁰

Her next letter from the Kowie began: "We leave this on Monday by the early train for G T : spend a few hours there at the Railway Hotel with my little mother; and go on by the evening train to the farm of a friend near Bedford. I do hope we shall see both you & Mrs. Cross."⁴¹

As requested, Cross accordingly went to meet the Cronwright-Schreiners at the Railway Hotel, but his wife did not accompany him. On more than one occasion Olive expressed the wish to meet Mrs. Cross: "I have heard so much of her from my mother who feels much drawn to her," she had written earlier that year.⁴² There is no evidence that Mrs. Cross ever did meet her, and it is possible that she did not wish to do so. She was more clear-sighted than her husband, and also proud, and she may well have resented the faint flavour of royal condescension in Olive's letters to her husband. Nor was she the kind of person to be impressed by the honour of meeting a famous woman.

Be that as it may, in her next letter to Cross Olive wrote: "It was a great pleasure to us both to see you ... My friendly greetings to your wife I wish I had met her. Tell her she is very rich with five sons. But I expect she knows that."⁴³

In the same letter she wrote: "Please be careful not to say anything to my dear little mother about my political views. I *never* answer her letters on the subject or refer to the matters she discusses. I fear my articles will very much anger her as they are sympathetic towards the Boer." And yet only a week or two previously she had explicitly asked Cross to pass on to her mother her article on "The wanderings of the Boer."

Did Cross find this inconsistency puzzling? Was he dazzled by Olive's extraordinary personality and flattered by her friendship? It is impossible to tell. None of his letters to her have survived.

Cronwright, in a letter to Cross dated 13 May 1896, compared his wife to Shelley. "I have just been reading J. A. Symond's life of Shelley. Shelley was a prodigious genius. In reading the life, I was frequently struck with his close resemblance to Olive; there is the same intensity, the same passionate devotion to truth in word & deed, the same god-like love of humanity." Unfortunately Olive Schreiner's undeniable genius and imaginative insight were matched, like Shelley's, by a surprising lack of imagination and understanding of other people's feelings, whether they were members of her family, friends or strangers. Shelley and Olive Schreiner may have loved humanity, but they could be cruel to individual human beings, unaware that lesser mortals too might have their sensitivities.

If Olive lacked understanding of other people her lack of self-knowledge was even more marked. This probably explains her frequent quarrels with friends, family and even strangers, to whom she transferred her own dissatisfactions, blaming others for her frustrations and inadequacies when she should, if she were honest with herself, have blamed herself. To be a friend of Olive Schreiner's was therefore to live dangerously.

In January 1897 Olive and her husband sailed for England to arrange for the publication of *Trooper Peter Halkett of Mashonaland*, the little book she had begun at Port Alfred in August. On February the 4th she wrote to Cross from Eastbourne: "I sent you last week the copy of a little South African story. Please regard it as strictly private till it appears ... The copy I send you is a rough unrevised proof. I will send you a copy of the book itself as soon as I have one. I know that I shall be bitterly and everywhere attacked in South Africa for writing it; but there are some things a man *must do*."

Olive Schreiner knew that she could rely on Cross's understanding and sympathy. The little book was the most controversial she ever wrote, and she did indeed suffer much at the hands of critics. Cross wrote a long review of the book for the June 1897 number of the *E.P. Magazine*. He took the work seriously, and paid it the compliment of treating it as a work of art, and pointing out its strengths and weaknesses as such; not praising or blaming it as a political tract, as many critics did. "Her power of expression in words is supreme," he wrote; "Her literary art has never triumphed more completely than here". But he points out that "Plot has never been the author's strong point, and the weakest part of this book is the management of the story." Nevertheless, Cross concedes that "the introduction of the Divine Stranger is a splendid triumph of constructive art. It will be noted that the work belongs to the realistic order. It is our work-a-day world depicted here ... Now, into this world comes a guest

breathing diviner air, shedding diviner light ... This guest is he whom Christians worship as very God. Yet never for a moment is the realism abandoned."

Cross, with memories of his own experiences as a trooper twenty years before, recognised and appreciated the skill with which Trooper Peter Halkett was drawn. "This man, merely a boy in years, with hard-set jaws, who can enjoy the good things of life, can do without them too. When a twenty-four hours' fast and loneliness yield no sign of friend or food, he keeps a sharp look out against an enemy, and draws in 'his broad leather belt two holes tighter.' This is the trooper to the life."

Cross concludes his article: "But the triumph of the book is the imaginative realization of the Christ ... only the simplest and firmest faith could have created Him."

In July 1897 Mr. and Mrs. Cross sailed for England and did not return until the following February. Their friends in Grahamstown welcomed them back at a crowded social function which was reported in detail in *Grocott's Mail*.⁴⁴ Old Mrs. Schreiner could not attend the social, but she read the report with interest and wrote a letter to Mrs. Cross next day. As an afterthought she wrote on the envelope: "Am sending last night's paper to Olive." There was no word from Olive, however, until Cross wrote protesting that she never wrote to him. She replied on April the 21st 1898: "You wouldn't say I didn't value your letters if you knew I had read your last over three times. I don't know whether it is because I am not physically so strong as I used to be that I cling so to my fellows ... I used to think I only wanted to give, I feel now I need more to receive."

This is the last of the surviving letters written to Cross by Olive Schreiner. Did their friendship gradually cool off, as friendships do, because of inward and outward changes? Was it broken by the Anglo-Boer war and their different attitudes to it? Or was it destroyed by Olive's volcanic personality?

There is an incident related by Cronwright in his *Life of Olive Schreiner* which may or may not refer to Cross. Cronwright tells the story to illustrate the unpredictability of Olive's temperament and also her fierce determination to keep her private life out of the public press – especially her relations with her mother and brothers and sisters.

Here is Cronwright's story:⁴⁵ "Among our friends was a leading Dissenting Minister of South Africa, a devout and cultured gentleman (now dead), who was a great admirer, not only of Olive's literary gifts, but also of her deep religious temperament and insight. This gentleman, in reviewing *Peter Halkett* made what seems to me the just remark that, though Olive quoted some of the noblest passages of the Old Testament, there was no consciousness of a drop when she resumed her own language, so magnificent was it. It happened, how-

ever, that in another article, which, though unsigned, was very eulogistic and obviously by a great admirer, he introduced personal details about Olive and others of the family, based on an interview he had with her mother. The references were not offensive, but some of them were untrue. In my opinion, if there is to be any censure on the ground that they were not correct, the fault lay with the old lady, whose imagination sometimes distorted facts. Whether the writer was justified in retailing them, even if they had been correct, is another matter. Olive was furious. She addressed an indignant letter to the editor, characterizing the statements as 'lies.' The editor replied, taking all the blame upon himself and acknowledging her to be entitled 'on all grounds to any apology' she might wish to exact from him or from the writer of the article. He went fully into the matter, expressed his deep regret, and explained that the writer was one of her greatest admirers. He added: 'My difficulty is to convey to the writer that this article has deeply pained the subject of it, yet I should like to withhold from him this correspondence. It rests with you. He is rather up in years; he is sensitive and highly strung and I am not sure that he has been very well lately.' Apparently Olive did not answer this letter, but sent a copy of *her* letter to the writer of the article, putting at the foot of it: 'It needs no answer.' But the writer sent a long, in many ways a worthy, reply. He took all the blame upon himself, offered some explanation and asked how he might 'correct the error.'

Across this reply, in her large strong hand, Olive has written: –

What the man doesn't see is that a man who writes of a lady as he has written of me and my family and private affairs ceases to be a gentleman or to deserve to be treated as such.

She adds: "I have written him another telling him a little more plainly what I think of him."

This letter, which is quoted in full by Cronwright, can only be described as hysterical. It is quite out of proportion to the alleged offence, and – dare one say it? – not the kind of letter that a 'lady' would write.

The point at issue here is: Was Cross the offender? It is fairly obvious that Cronwright is careful not to give away too much. He may even have distorted some of the facts deliberately in order to prevent identification of the friend.

For what they are worth the clues Cronwright gives are these:

1. He was a leading Dissenting Minister of South Africa.
2. He was a devout and cultured gentleman.
3. He was a great admirer of Olive's literary gifts and also of her deep religious temperament and insight.
4. He was dead by the time Cronwright's *Life* was written.

5. He published a review of *Peter Halkett*.
6. He wrote another, unsigned, article about Olive Schreiner which offended her because it contained personal details about her and her family based on an interview he had with her mother.

Cronwright gives no indication of the date of this article.

Numbers 1 - 4 could well refer to Cross; perhaps equally well to the Rev. J.T. Lloyd, but the most diligent search has failed to establish the date of Lloyd's death.⁴⁶ Cronwright's *Life* was published in 1924. Cross died in 1920.

Lloyd was a friend of both Cross and the Cronwright-Schreiners. Ordained to the ministry in 1876, he was a member of the Congregational Union, but served also in Presbyterian churches. His first South African pastorate was at the Presbyterian Church at Kimberley (1884 - 1889). From there he went to the Pearson Street Congregational Church in Port Elizabeth (1889 - 1894), and during this period he became very friendly with Cross. He preached on occasion in the Grahamstown Baptist Church, and he was a popular lecturer in Grahamstown halls on literary and philosophical topics. In the light of subsequent events it is interesting to note that one of these lectures was about "Agnosticism."⁴⁷ He first met Olive Schreiner and her future husband at the Kimberley Exhibition in 1892, at which he gave an address to the Literary Conference on "Literary Culture in South Africa."

From 1894 - 1902 he was minister of the Bree Street Presbyterian Church in Johannesburg. He resigned for personal reasons in 1902, and returned to England. He had been struggling for years with personal doubts about Christian theology and faith. In 1904 he was deposed from the Presbyterian ministry,⁴⁸ and we hear no more about him in church publications. In the great newspaper debate on Atheism conducted in 1904 in the pages of the *Transvaal Advertiser* (Pretoria) a correspondent referred to Lloyd as an "atheist." Cross wrote in reply: "I should be greatly surprised to find that Mr. Lloyd is an atheist, although for the time being he has taken the secularist platform. He is my dear friend of 15 years standing, and until I know more of his present departure from what I hold to be right, I prefer not to discuss his case."⁴⁹

In 1921, at Cronwright's request, Lloyd supplied him with notes on Olive for the projected *Life*; and various references to him by Cronwright in the *Life* seem to imply that he was still alive when the book was being written. A passing reference to him as "the late J.T. Lloyd" in the February 1929 number of the *South African Baptist* is as near as one can get to the date of his death.⁵⁰

As far as Clue no. 4 is concerned, therefore, Cross seems to be a more likely candidate than Lloyd. Apart from Cross and Lloyd no other friend of the Cronwright-Schreiners has been traced who fits the four clues.

Clue no. 5 poses a problem of a different kind. The unsigned review of *Peter Halkett* published in the *E.P. Literary Magazine* for June 1897 is almost certainly by Cross: the style is unmistakable. An earlier, unsigned review in *Grocott's Mail* of March 12 1897 may also be by Cross. But nowhere, either in these or any other reviews of *Peter Halkett* can be found the remark mentioned by Cronwright,⁵¹ that "though Olive quoted some of the noblest passages of the Old Testament, there was no consciousness of a drop when she resumed her own language, so magnificent was it." The nearest one gets to this is a sentence in the *E.P. Literary Magazine* review, that "... she reminds one of the old Puritans of the 17th Century or of the Hebrew prophets who feared no face of man and spoke unfalteringly for the Highest;" or the phrase "passages of lofty rhapsody and moral ire worthy of a Hebrew prophetess," from the unsigned review in the *Cape Times Weekly Edition* of the 17th March 1897.

An extensive search has also failed to uncover the second, *unsigned* article,⁵² "which was very eulogistic and obviously by a great admirer," but which "introduced personal details about Olive and others of the family, based on an interview he had with her mother."

Cronwright gives no hint of the date when this article which so offended his wife was published. Was it before or after her mother's death? Old Mrs. Schreiner left Grahamstown in October 1901 to live with her daughter Hetty in Cape Town, where she died in September 1903. Cross could have "interviewed" her at any time in Grahamstown up to the time of her departure; and he may even have visited her in Cape Town in October 1902, while he was there for the Baptist Assembly.

The most likely period seems to be in the years immediately prior to the Anglo-Boer War. The Jameson Raid and Rhodes's fall from power had placed a great strain on Schreiner family relations, about which Olive was very sensitive.

The letter which Olive wrote to the author of the article which so offended her is remarkable for its total lack of balance and restraint. It is the kind of letter that ordinary people, smarting under a sense of injury, might write in imagination in the dark hours of a sleepless night, but never commit to paper. But a pen was Olive's natural weapon. As she wrote her indignation grew: she became "inebriated with the exuberance of her own verbosity", as Disraeli said of Gladstone. The letter reveals her as totally self-absorbed; she seems not to have given a moment's thought to the effect the letter might have on the recipient.

Was the letter ever posted, or did Cronwright intervene? If it was sent, did the recipient send it back to Olive? How otherwise was Cronwright able to publish it in the *Life*? Surely Olive did not keep copies of her letters? No trace of the original has been found, and Cronwright may have destroyed it after the publication of the *Life*.

It is a sad story, but not an isolated instance in Olive's life. Johannes Meintjies, in his biography of Olive Schreiner, mentions her writing an offensive letter to Sir Stanley Unwin, the publisher, when he visited South Africa in 1912, and expressed a wish to meet her. "However," wrote Unwin, "her brother, the Hon. W.P. Schreiner, to whom I showed her offensive letter, made up for my disappointment by his great kindness to me."⁵³

One wonders how often members of Olive Schreiner's family felt obliged to try and smooth over some of the awkward situations and the hurts she caused. Cronwright himself, who possibly suffered more than anyone else from her eccentricities, wrote of her in the *Life*: "She was not good at the practical application of her theories to public, or often, to private life. Her restless and piercing mind, to which 'doubt figured as a disease', often caused her to misunderstand people, and made it difficult for her to suspend judgement on persons or things, sometimes inducing her powerful imagination to manufacture the missing 'facts', in which case they became more real to her than the facts themselves."⁵⁴

If Cross was indeed the "leading Dissenting Minister" referred to by Cronwright, and if this episode happened in 1898 - 99, there is some evidence that the story may not have ended there.

At the end of March 1899 Cross travelled to Pretoria for the Baptist Assembly which was held there from March the 31st to April the 5th. The Cronwright-Schreiners were then living in Johannesburg. Cross wrote to Olive from Pretoria. In reply he received the following letter from Cronwright, dated 5.4.99:

My dear Friend

I am just sending you a wire from Olive, who was so glad to get your letter last night. She says you must come and spend the day, & have lunch with us. Let me add my invitation to hers.

We live at Primrose Terrace, Berea Estate (next to E. Pullingers')

In hast [sic]

yrs most truly

S.C. Cronwright Schreiner

In this way the whole unfortunate affair may have been smoothed over by the two men, anxious to preserve the decencies.

The weak point in this theory is that no article remotely resembling that described by Cronwright, and published in 1898 - 99, has been found. However, there is another possibility.

Cross published a *signed* article about Olive Schreiner in the *South African Bookman* in January 1911. In this article there is no hint that the writer had ever known her personally. He writes at some length and with great admiration of Olive's mother, and he introduces information about various members of the Schreiner family, some of which he may have received from the old lady, but most of which was public knowledge. None of it could be described as offensive. Of the old lady he wrote: "The writer had the honour of her acquaintance during ten years of her old age ... I never knew a person of any age with so passionate an interest in life or one with wider culture ... This great mother was the chief teacher of her children, probably the sole teacher of some of them. The bond between mother and children nothing at any time could sever or even loosen. Many things have tried. Few families have been driven farther asunder by diverse ideals and opposing convictions of duty, and it never was in a Schreiner to make compromises in such matters."

Mrs. Schreiner had a mischievous sense of humour, and she may have had her tongue in her cheek, teasing Cross, and seeing how much he would swallow, in some of the stories she told him.

This, for instance: "I gathered that the young Schreiners had almost constantly breathed 'the keen and wholesome air of poverty,' that the family had often known actual scarcity of food. On one occasion when Olive was a little girl, she consoled her mother, who was lamenting that she had nothing for the dinner, by saying 'Never mind, Mummy, we'll have some beautiful Lecky.' They were reading one of his books at the time."

Could this be the passage referred to by Cronwright? "The references were not offensive, but some of them were untrue. In my opinion, if there is to be any censure on the ground that they were not correct, the fault lay with the old lady, whose imagination sometimes distorted facts."

Cronwright stated categorically that the offending article was unsigned. He may have deliberately been deceiving his readers in order to prevent identification of the writer, or he may simply have forgotten that the article was indeed signed. Aside from this discrepancy some of the other clues he gives seem to fit this article; for instance, the editor's description of the writer as "one of her greatest admirers ... He is rather up in years; he is sensitive and highly strung and I am not sure that he has been very well lately." Cross was sixty years old when the article was published, and there is indirect evidence in the Pretoria Church minute books of that period that he was "not very well."

The evidence is not conclusive, but this seems to me to be a likely solution to the problem of the identity of Cronwright's anonymous "leading Dissenting Minister."

If this was indeed the article that so angered Olive Schreiner I would like to suggest that the real offence lay not in any breach of confidence about family matters, but in one little sentence. Cross described old Mrs. Schreiner as having "more of the quality called genius than any other person I ever met." This from a man who had known Olive! It was unforgivable. She was mortally insulted, but, always a self-deceiver, she put up a dense smoke screen of misdirected indignation to hide from herself and her husband this intolerable affront to her self-esteem.