

CHAPTER 11

Farewell to Grahamstown

*“To every thing there is a season, and
a time to every purpose under the heaven.”*

Ecclesiastes 3:1

It was characteristic of Cross that whatever he undertook to do he did wholeheartedly. But, as a “willing horse” he was always in danger of being overloaded. By the time the war ended he was filled with an immense weariness. He had not spared himself throughout those years, and the load of extra work he had undertaken, combined with the emotional strain of the war, left him feeling tired and discouraged.

On the surface the work of the Baptist Church in Grahamstown seemed to be as flourishing as ever. Financially the church had no problems. Quite spontaneously donations started coming in for the renovation of the manse in recognition of the 25th anniversary of Cross’s acceptance of the church’s call in 1877. Also, the young people of the church undertook to renovate and repair the lecture hall. The Sunday School, the Christian Endeavour, and the Bible Reading Association were in a healthy condition.¹

Yet in some ways it was a difficult time for the church. As the war drew to a close a large exodus to the Transvaal began. Not only the returning refugees but some old Grahamstown families left for the north. There was a general feeling of unsettlement, and the Pastor wrote in his Report for the *Handbook*,

that in the more spiritual part of the work he had been "conscious of a rather depressing weight. The chariot wheels have dragged."²

That Cross still commanded the affection and loyalty of his congregation is borne out by the fact that they arranged a special celebration on the occasion of his silver wedding anniversary in May.³ The warm appreciation shown to both Mr. and Mrs. Cross seems to have taken them by surprise. They had planned to spend the day quietly at Clumber, where they had been invited to take part in a harvest festival at the little country church, but the Grahamstown deacons had made other arrangements. On May the 14th 1902, a large crowd gathered in the beautifully decorated Lecture Hall to congratulate Mr. and Mrs. Cross, and to present them with a formal address (printed in colours on satin, and framed in gilt) and a purse of 60 guineas. There were the usual speeches from officers of the church, from ministers of other churches, and from the Mayor, as representing all the citizens of Grahamstown. It was a happy and warm-hearted festivity, such as the church had held on many occasions in times past; but the old order was changing.

The country which emerged at the end of the war was very different from the colonies and republics which had made up South Africa in 1899. The nineteenth century had slipped away; the old Queen was dead; Cecil Rhodes was dead; Paul Kruger was in exile in Europe. In place of security and stability and optimism there was now bitterness and misery, and the enormous task of rebuilding a desolate country. Also, the centre of economic and political power was shifting to the north.

For a while Cross carried on as usual. He was busy winding up the affairs of the Refugee Fund, which finally closed in June 1902. Altogether it had handled about £7 000 and had helped hundreds of refugees during the war, and afterwards assisted them to return to their homes in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. A very great part of the responsibility of the work had fallen on Cross.⁴

He was able to have a holiday of sorts in August, when he and his wife spent a month in Port Elizabeth, but at the price of preaching every Sunday, morning and evening, in the Queen Street Baptist Church.⁵

In October he travelled to Cape Town to attend the first post-war Baptist Union Assembly. It was a devoutly thankful little band that gathered there to pick up the pieces of Baptist work after the war, and to plan for the future. In spite of the long distances representatives came from the Transvaal, Bloemfontein, Durban and Pietermaritzburg, as well as from the churches of the Cape Colony. Some of the old familiar faces were missing.⁶ The Rev. W. Kelly, pioneer of Baptist work in Johannesburg, had died after a short illness only six months after his return to the Transvaal. Another sturdy pioneer, the Rev. J.D. Odendaal of the Orange Free State, founder of the Afrikaanse Baptiste Kerk, had died during the war, in August 1900.

Cape Town welcomed the delegates with warmth.⁷ Apart from the usual business sessions there were cheerful social occasions, such as a tramway trip in a special car over Kloof Nek to Camps Bay on the as yet unopened tram line of the Camps Bay Tramway Company, who kindly arranged the expedition. Lunch was provided at Camps Bay, and the return journey was made via Sea Point, where the party alighted for the ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone of a new church. This was done by the Rev. G.W. Cross in his capacity as General Secretary of the Baptist Union.

But his days as Secretary were over. He had, in recent years, repeatedly asked the Assembly to relieve him of the office, but strong pressure had always been brought upon him to continue in it. Now that the war was over he was adamant in refusing to accept nomination again, pleading physical inability. Later, in his report of the Assembly for the *Handbook*, the Rev. Ernest Baker wrote:⁸ "The resignation of the Rev. G.W. Cross was the most affecting scene of the meetings ... The Assembly was not prepared for the turn of events, and found itself unable to adequately express its sense of loss." With "a demonstration of affection probably unequalled in the annals of the Union" a resolution was passed:⁹ "That the Assembly hears with great regret of the inability of the Hon. Secretary the Rev. G.W. Cross, to continue in office, and instructs the Executive to prepare a suitable and tangible recognition of the invaluable services he has rendered to the denomination in this country."

A year later, at the Assembly held in Johannesburg, the "tangible recognition" took the form of a beautiful illuminated address, with the 10th Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in the best available binding, in a revolving book-case.¹⁰ In thanking the Assembly for this generous gift Cross said he "would prize this expression of affection as one of the dearest treasures of his life. It had been a joy to serve the brotherhood."

In the same speech of thanks Cross recalled early Baptist history in South Africa. He mentioned some of the pioneers of the church, and noted how other denominations in South Africa, such as the Anglican and Methodist, had received considerable subsidies from England, but that the little Baptist Union had had no such financial assistance for 25 years, other than the personal help provided by the late Rev. C.H. Spurgeon. He himself, said Cross, had hoped that his life-work would be found "in song or story;" instead, his energies had been devoted to the "lowly operations of this Union."

Is it idle to wonder whether in fact he would have found fulfilment in creative literary work if his time had not been so endlessly absorbed by secretarial and committee work of one kind or another? Perhaps it was his misfortune that he was an efficient secretary, and that he was "always ready," in Evans's words, "to shoulder public burdens."¹¹ That this readiness was sometimes presumed upon and taken advantage of, seems to be clear.

Many years later, in his obituary of Cross which appeared in the *South African Baptist* of November 1920, Baker wrote:¹² "Mr. Cross had the gift of writing. His style was clear, nervous and strong. It was a great treat listening to the annual reports of our Union which he presented to our Assemblies. He wove a halo around the commonplace. In magazines and newspapers articles constantly appeared from his pen. His life was too busy, however, to allow him to write books, though had he done so our literature would have been enriched." Referring to Cross's Memoir of the Rev. J.A. Chalmers, Baker adds: "Its 52 pages of biography make one feel throughout what enrichment we should have had if he had found time to pen and print his thoughts and messages."

1903 opened with no obvious prospect of any great change in Cross's life. He was soon deeply involved in another civic responsibility. The citizens of Grahamstown decided to raise £2 000 for the purpose of erecting a worthy war memorial,¹³ and Cross undertook the task of Secretary to the committee, whose chairman was Daniel Knight. This meant that he was, once again, responsible for the collection and control of public funds. The money was raised by voluntary subscription from local people, especially members of units who had lost comrades in the war. This memorial was unveiled by the Governor, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, on March the 9th 1906.¹⁴ It was designed by Mr. S. Nicholas Babb of London.¹⁵ Bronze figures – the winged Angel of Peace holding aloft a laurel wreath above the head of a dying soldier – stand on a marble pedestal, on which the names of the men of Albany who lost their lives in the South African War are engraved. The 24 foot high memorial stands in a prominent place in Church Square, at the top of Bathurst Street, and it fits so appropriately into the Grahamstown scene that many people never see it. Yet at the time it was considered the finest work of its kind in South Africa, and Rudyard Kipling himself wrote the inscription for it:

They came of that same stubborn stock that stood
At Runnimele for freedom without fear;
Wherefore they gave the treasure of their blood
To stablish freedom here.

Although by 1906 Cross had left Grahamstown, he made a point of attending the unveiling ceremony, travelling all the way from the Transvaal to do so.¹⁶ Members of the late Town Guard paraded, Cross among them, and immediately after the unveiling ceremony they were presented with medals by H.E. the Governor.¹⁷

In spite of the war, Grahamstown was Grahamstown still – lovable and parochial and rather humourless. The Minutes of the weekly Town Council Meeting, published in the *Grahamstown Journal* of April the 18th reported that "Councillor J.H. Webber said that notwithstanding the stringent regulations

there were many loose horses and cattle wandering around the streets. On Sunday morning last some horses actually tried to get into the Baptist Church.”

In the Transvaal enormous changes were taking place. As thousands of refugees returned to Johannesburg and Pretoria the deserted and desolate towns revived. The British victors, guilt-stricken, were pouring money and men into the erstwhile Republics, to start up the machinery of administration and to revitalise the economy by re-opening the mines and transforming the ways of agriculture. Young Arnold Cross, who had entered the Cape Civil Service in April 1899 as a clerk in the Deeds Office, was already showing promise of the qualities that were eventually to make him the first Registrar of Deeds of the Union of South Africa; and in 1902 he was sent to Pretoria to help with the enormous and important task of re-organising land registration in the Transvaal.¹⁸ Graham had also been sent north in 1902, and he was now Public Prosecutor in Johannesburg.¹⁹

It is not surprising, therefore, that when the call came to Cross to go to Pretoria to re-build the war-shattered congregation there, he did not immediately refuse. Later, he told the Grahamstown church that on no decision had he spent so much time.²⁰ His ministry in Grahamstown was one of the longest in the history of the Baptist Church in South Africa. He was not young – 52 – and he was not sure that his gifts would be adapted to the new sphere. Twice before the war he had been to Pretoria, and he knew, with the inside knowledge of a high officer of the Baptist Union, that the work in Pretoria had always been difficult and financially precarious, and that the war had almost destroyed it. To quote Evans again:²¹ “The prospect was enough to daunt a less valiant heart.” It would demand all the wisdom and patience and faith he had learned through the long years of his Grahamstown pastorate.

And he loved Grahamstown. Years later, writing from Pretoria in reply to a letter from an old Grahamstown friend, he said:²² “Grahamstown news is always what we like to get. There are few spots on earth so dear to us and none can be dearer. There we began our married life and there our boys were born all but one and he was born close by and there and at Bowden 25 years of my ministry were experienced. All its people seem dear to us.”

It may well have been this very love of Grahamstown that eventually decided him to leave it. Perhaps he felt the spiritual danger of “going cosy,” and of being the Pastor of a large and successful church. He needed a challenge to strengthen his spiritual muscle. He was also keen to play a part in the rebuilding of the country. Grahamstown was too comfortable, too secure, too far from the scene of action. It was time for him to move on. In Pretoria he would be at the very centre of the new developments unfolding in South Africa.

The church Minute Books of Grahamstown are strangely silent about Cross's decision to leave. The minutes of this period are scanty, as if the church

members were too pre-occupied with other matters. The only reference to Cross's departure comes in the brief minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 1st April 1903 at which the Pastor reported "that the diaconate had sent to Dr. Gifford [Clifford?] and Mr. Shakespeare [the General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain] to choose a successor to Rev. G.W. Cross." This successor was quickly found, and by June the 2nd it was announced in the *Grahamstown Journal* that "Rev. Joseph Doke of Bristol, and formerly of New Zealand has accepted a call to the Baptist Church Grahamstown, and will assume his duties in July next, when Rev. G.W. Cross will leave for Pretoria."

The last months were so busy that there was not much time for regrets or sadness. The town suddenly woke up to the fact that it was about to lose one of its most valuable citizens, and a public subscription list was opened at the Public Library.²³ In May, Cross was invited to Port Elizabeth to preach farewell sermons and to give a lecture in the Victoria Hall under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A. Here he repeated his popular lecture: "My South African apprenticeship."²⁴

The E.P. Literary and Scientific Society, which had changed its name in 1899 to the Grahamstown Athenaeum, had managed with difficulty to keep going during the war, and Cross had been too busy to play a leading part in it as he had formerly done. His old friends had not forgotten him, however, and when they heard of his imminent departure they invited him to give a farewell lecture on one of his favourite poets. On June the 11th this meeting took place in the Council Chamber of the Town Hall.²⁵ There was a large attendance, and for 75 minutes Cross held the attention of his audience on the subject of "William Watson and his poetry." The manuscript of this lecture still exists, and is evidence of Cross's care and thoroughness in preparing the paper, and his absorption in his subject. When he had finished speaking Dr. Bays made the customary speech of thanks, but while praising the paper and its literary style, "spoke chiefly of the loss they would feel in Cross's removal." In reply, Cross thanked the speakers for all the too kind things they had said of his paper and of himself. He feared his would be the greater loss in leaving Grahamstown.

On Sunday June the 28th Cross closed his long ministry at Grahamstown.²⁶ At the evening service he preached his final sermon on the same theme that he had used almost 26 years before in July 1877 for his first sermon in that pulpit, taking the simplest text in the Bible: "God is Love."²⁷ "It was a knowledge gained through experience," he said, "which caused me to believe that the Love of God was the only ideal to serve, and it is in the spirit of that love that I have striven to carry on my ministry."

The following evening there was a farewell social in the church hall, presided over by Cross's steadfast friend of all the Grahamstown years, Mr. T.H. Grocott. There were the usual speeches, and a presentation of a purse of £30

from the church members. Cross spoke of the pangs of separation and his reservations about the future. He was going to a smaller church, fewer people and a smaller salary, and he frankly voiced his fear that his gifts might not be adapted to this new sphere. He did feel, however, that any true man, whatever his sphere might be, only desired an opportunity to prove himself, or an expression of the need for his services, for him to be willing to undertake the task. His final words of advice to his flock of so many years were: "Don't patronise religion, your minister, or his ministry."²⁸

On July the 1st, a Wednesday afternoon, there was a farewell function of a different kind, in the Shaw Hall.²⁹ On this occasion it was the citizens of Grahamstown who gathered to pay their respects and take their leave of Cross. Dr. Edington presided. "We are here," he said, "for the purpose of showing in a paramount way our deep appreciation of the services which the Rev. Mr. Cross has rendered to this city during the last quarter of a century." An address with about 50 signatures of some of the most prominent men of the town was then read out by Advocate Lardner Bourke, who also handed over a gift of money which had been subscribed by the citizens of Grahamstown. Cross, who had been given only two hours notice of this function, was almost overwhelmed by the kind things which were said about him. In his speech of thanks he said that he "owed more than he had given" to the institutions of the town. His boys had done well in Grahamstown schools. He doubted whether there were any part of the Empire where they could have had greater advantages. As far as the Library was concerned, he owed to that his first acquaintance with most modern poetry and literature, which had helped to make life so rich for him.

In addition to this function, a deputation from the Committee of the Public Schools waited upon Mr. Cross at the Manse to hand over a purse of 30 guineas and a written address expressing their appreciation of his long connection with the schools, and all the services he had rendered to education in Grahamstown.³⁰

An Editorial in the *South African Baptist* of June 1903 expresses the appreciation of the denomination for Cross's work: "A connection of over a quarter of a century and a Ministry of nearly that length constitute ties that only the Supreme Voice may sunder as between Pastor and people. It is that lengthy relationship that has given power to Mr. Cross's ministry, extent to his influence, and pathos to his parting ... The man who is steadfast from year to year, growing with his young people, and walking side by side with their parents through all the vicissitudes of family and business life, is the type of Christian pastor that our household of faith has ever prized above all others ..."

"No comment upon the work of Mr. Cross at Grahamstown would be reasonable which omitted to mention his service to the Churches which have issued from that spiritual homestead of our people in South Africa. He has been a true

Bishop. Our Union sprung up with his advent. He has been thrice its President. And, for years long enough to gain him a pension, if he had been a soldier, he has been an indefatigable Secretary. Honour to whom honour! We confess to a strong feeling of regret that a sphere of less strenuous and pioneering character has not fallen to his hands. He is not elderly. He feels young. He is a very juvenile veteran indeed. May his bow abide in strength."

Cross wrote finis to the Grahamstown chapter of his life when, on Tuesday, June the 30th, there was a sale at the manse of all the household furniture, "consisting of the usual dining-room, drawing room and bedroom furniture, including a number of elaborate book cases," according to the auctioneer's advertisements in the newspapers.³¹ Why this should have been felt to be necessary one can only guess. Whatever the reason, it must have been a sad time for the family, this breaking up of a happy home, this cutting of so many precious ties.

Soon the only link left with Grahamstown would be Nurden, who was staying on to continue his education. He had matriculated at the beginning of that year,³² and was now busy with post-matriculation studies at St. Andrews. In 1904 he registered as one of the very first students at the newly established Rhodes University College, and graduated B. A. at the end of 1905. Carson and Havelock would be going to school in Pretoria.

On Friday morning, July 3rd 1903, the Crosses left Grahamstown by train for Pretoria.³³

CHAPTER 12

Pretoria : A time to build

*“To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfil:
O may it all my powers engage
To do my Master’s will!”*

C. Wesley

The Baptist Church in Pretoria had a troubled history. The congregation had been formed in 1889, the first minister being the Rev. R.H. Brotherton. At the reception held in July 1903 to welcome the Rev. and Mrs. G.W. Cross to Pretoria, the Senior Deacon, Mr. Nottingham, recalled those first beginnings. Brotherton, he said, “turned up quite unexpectedly one Saturday night, and when they found him at the old Fountain Hotel arrangements were at once made for services in the Temperance Hall.”¹ Brotherton was at this time without a pastorate, and so he was invited by the little congregation to stay in Pretoria as their minister.

In the first decade after the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886 all sorts of people streamed into the Transvaal. The Uitlanders were not only gold-seekers. The adventurous, the curious, the hopeful in all walks of life, merchants, tradesmen, professionals – even Baptist ministers – were drawn to the Republic by the romance and excitement of the gold rush. Pretoria was already a well-established little town, and the seat of government, but it could not be unaffected by the prevailing spirit of restlessness.

Some people like constant change; they find it challenging and stimulating. Brotherton, now in his middle fifties, was not one of them. He decided that

pioneering work was not for him, and after a few months he returned to the Cape Colony.

He was succeeded in the pastorate by the Rev. H.T. Cousins, who had come to the Transvaal in 1888 from Port Elizabeth, and formed a church in Krugersdorp. He was an energetic young man in his thirties, full of zeal, with an equally energetic wife. Within a year this enthusiastic pair had so kindled their little congregation that enough money was raised to buy a stand in St. Andries Street at a cost of £900. Plans for a new church building were drawn by a friend, and a tender of £1 645 was accepted for its erection.² Everybody in the congregation was kept happily busy with the raising of funds for the new church. In September 1891, amid high hopes, the foundation stone of the new building was laid by Staats President S.J.P. Kruger.³

Unfortunately, zeal had outrun financial discretion. A large sum of money had been borrowed at a high rate of interest to pay for the building. The congregation was small, the community not a settled one, and times were hard. The financial burden was too heavy for the church to carry, and in 1892 Mr. Cousins resigned, and returned with his wife to England. There was a danger of the property falling into the hands of the bond-holder, so in desperation the trustees of the church appealed to the Executive of the Baptist Union, with a request to take over the financial liabilities (£2 000 at an interest rate of 10%) and to send a suitable minister to Pretoria.⁴

The abandonment of the work and the property would have meant not only a loss to the Pretoria congregation but a setback to the denomination as a whole. The Executive therefore decided to send Secretary Cross to Pretoria to investigate the whole situation and to report back.

About the beginning of February 1893, Cross took the train to the Transvaal. The line to Pretoria had not long been completed, and Cross, as always, enjoyed the journey and the opportunity of seeing new places. When he returned to Grahamstown he was prevailed upon to give a popular lecture about his travels, a lecture which, characteristically, he entitled "A Caper in the Transvaal." Such was the interest of the Grahamstonians in the development taking place to the north, that Cross held the attention of a large audience for nearly two hours, and the lecture was reported almost verbatim in *Grocott's Mail*.⁵

"The stir of life and business at the junction (Germiston) is very surprising to a Caper," said Cross. "There is quite a network of railways, and trains loaded with coal snort and pant along in rapid succession, and trains of empty trucks 200 yards long rattle past towards Bocksburg and Seven Springs."

He found Pretoria "very hot and humid." He was interested in everything he saw: the way the town "was laid out in squares in the usual Dutch style;" the

large erven, the public buildings, the electric lights "blazing all night long with a perfectly steady light at each street corner," the signs of wealth everywhere. "Some of the stores have the finest stocks to be found in the whole of South Africa." He noted that political passions were running high, and that the little town had "seven newspapers to express their love or their hatred for Oom Paul ... The keenness of the strife is characteristic of Pretoria at the present time – perhaps indeed of the whole Republic. The old and the new have met, and there is a great struggle for the mastery."

He also found that property values were high, and rising. Pretoria was as unsettled economically as it was politically, and this of course affected the church. Nevertheless, he was able to give a reasonably favourable report to the Executive on his return to the Cape, and they decided to pay the amount of interest overdue and to place the whole matter before the forthcoming Assembly when it met in Cape Town in March.

At the Assembly it was resolved to send the Rev. H.J. Batts, the Financial Secretary of the Union, to Pretoria to sort out the financial tangle. The Union was prepared to guarantee the interest on the bond provided it did not exceed 6%.⁶

Batts went to Pretoria in May. He must have been gifted with great financial skill, as well as tact and energy, for within two months he had re-established the church, reduced the debt by more than £300, and re-arranged the mortgage so that the interest was now only 6%. In addition, he arranged for the Rev. Charles Pummell of Alice to take on the pastorate.⁷

For a while all went well. Once again good congregations gathered, but, to quote Batts: "There was not sufficient denominational interest on the part of the people to save the cause."⁸ Many members were not Baptists, but Congregationalists. Pummell's report in the Handbook that year, while expressing gratitude for what had been achieved, pointed out that "Much remains to be done. We have had conversions, but we long for more, and for the deepening of the spiritual life, and the sense of individual responsibility."⁹

It may have been this lack of individual responsibility and initiative that caused the work once again to collapse. Towards the end of 1894 Pummell left, and returned to England, and another crisis was induced. For one month the church at Mowbray, Cape, spared their minister to Pretoria, and then the Executive invited the Rev. J.F. Owen of England to take temporary charge of the work. He had come to South Africa in November "for the benefit of his health" (ominous phrase in those days!). He preached in the Pretoria church for only one Sunday, and then was stricken with malaria and died about six weeks later, on February the 19th.¹⁰

Once again the whole future of the church hung in the balance. At the April 1895 Assembly, the Rev. W.J. Staynes, another recent arrival from England,

was asked to accept the pastorate in Pretoria. His salary was guaranteed by the Baptist Union, which also agreed once again to pay the overdue interest on the bond. In spite of this assistance Mr. Staynes found the situation too difficult. He shortly afterwards withdrew and seceded to the Congregational Union.¹¹

It looked as if the Baptist cause in Pretoria would have to be abandoned. At this critical juncture the Rev. H.J. Batts volunteered to take on the job. He resigned his happy pastorate in King Williams Town, and proceeded to Pretoria in October 1895.¹² He was to pay a very high price for this selfless action. One of his children died of fever in 1897, due to the unsanitary conditions of the town, and as a result he sent his wife and remaining children home to England.¹³

Batts was in Pretoria for five years, at the crisis of its history. He arrived shortly before the Jameson Raid. He had hardly begun to establish the church on a sound footing when the unsettled state of the country caused many English-speaking people to leave Pretoria, and the congregation dwindled. Batts, however, did not confine his ministry to his own little flock. He was made honorary chaplain to the gaol, and in this capacity he visited the Reform Committee prisoners in the gaol after the Raid, and was able to help them. When the war broke out in 1899 he remained in Pretoria and was allowed to visit British prisoners of war in the camps in and around Pretoria. After the fall of Pretoria to Lord Roberts's army he ministered to the British soldiers; until he finally left Pretoria in October 1900 to rejoin his family in England.¹⁴

It was undoubtedly Batts who really established the church in Pretoria, in spite of all the vicissitudes of the years he spent there. It was due to his indefatigable energy that the Baptist Assembly was held in Pretoria in 1899, although the church was small and poor.

When he left, the church was once again in a very difficult position. Help from the Wesleyan Methodists and from army chaplains kept the pulpit supplied for a few months.¹⁵ Then the Rev. E.R. Davies of Boksburg, who had been deported to the Cape Colony during the war, obtained permission to return to the Transvaal, and offered to help out for a while in Pretoria, since his own congregation was completely scattered. For nearly a year, from March 1901 until January 1902, Davies faithfully served the Pretoria church, keeping the congregation together and re-starting the Sunday School. He left when it became possible for him to take up his work again in Boksburg.

The church then decided to call the Rev. T. Perry of King Williams Town. He came on a visit in March 1902 for three weeks; and again from June to December by the generous permission of his own church; but to the great sorrow of the Pretoria church he did not accept the pastorate.¹⁶ Soon after he made his decision known the church resolved to take the bold step of calling Mr. Cross.

Such was the church to which Cross agreed to come in 1903. As Secretary of the Baptist Union he had an intimate knowledge of the ups and downs of its history; and as a close friend of Batts he was well aware of all the difficulties of the task. He was not young, and he knew that his talents and personality might not be suited to the work.

At the beginning of June the Committee of Management decided to raise a further bond of £2 000 on the church property for the purpose of building a manse. The senior deacon, Mr. Nottingham, was a building contractor, and offered to build a house at cost.¹⁷ A site was bought in Hamilton Street, Arcadia, near the corner of Vermeulen Street. Nowadays a large block of flats stands on the site, and it is difficult to realise that in 1903 there were very few houses in Hamilton Street.

The new manse was not finished when the Crosses arrived in Pretoria on Saturday July the 4th, and for a while they had to settle down in lodgings.¹⁸ Pretoria is not at its best in July, and before the streets were tarred it was unbelievably dusty in the dry winters. Mrs. Cross would not have been human if she had not felt a sinking of the heart at the prospect and cast back many longing thoughts to the comfortable home she had left for ever and to the trees and gardens and hills of Grahamstown.

The following day, Sunday, brought some encouragement. Cross was inducted to his new pastorate by the Rev. T. Perry, and the congregations were larger than any seen in that church since the historic Assembly sessions before the war.¹⁹ On Monday evening a reception was held in the Hartley Hall (kindly lent for the occasion by the Wesleyans), and Cross was able to meet not only his own congregation but fellow ministers from other churches in Pretoria and from the Reef. This event was chronicled in detail for the *South African Baptist* by an anonymous writer, apparently not a member of the church. He concludes: "The meeting was enthusiastic throughout, but it was impossible to get away from two impressions. The one – that in coming to Pretoria Mr. and Mrs. Cross have made considerable sacrifice and that which only a stern sense of duty enabled them to make. The other – that Pretoria offers a fine sphere of work, but one bristling with difficulties, requiring the utmost tact, and demanding persistent hard work."²⁰

Cross remained at the church in Pretoria for almost ten years: years which proved the accuracy of that diagnosis in every particular. The town itself had many ups and downs in this brief period, politically and economically.

For the first year or two after the end of the war there was a spirit of optimism. A book published in 1903, *The City of Pretoria*, by A. Macmillan, presents a very rosy view.²¹ "A new era has dawned for Pretoria", he says, "Citizens are in all directions improving their premises, and plans have been prepared both for

private residences and business houses, while land is bought freely at prices never dreamed of in the old days. The town is extending rapidly in all directions, and everyone talks of an increased volume of trade."

Political uncertainty, however, as well as country-wide depression affected this development. Although British Army headquarters remained in Pretoria, Lord Milner established the centre of his administration in Johannesburg, and there was talk that Pretoria might cease to be the capital of the Transvaal. With the depression, property values plummeted, and money was a scarce commodity.

The general election in England in 1906, which brought the Liberal Party back to power, meant a change in England's South African policy. Within a short time the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony, the defeated Republics, were granted the status of self-governing colonies. The new constitution of the Transvaal contained a clause that Pretoria was to be the capital, and hopes rose again.

This raising of the status of the two erstwhile Republics was of course the first step on the road to uniting all four Colonies into one Union or Federation. As the deliberations of the National Convention proceeded, Pretoria's future as a capital city seemed once again to hang in the balance, and in 1909 there was another exodus from the town. Not until Pretoria was firmly established as the Administrative Capital of the new Union of South Africa was the town able to grow and develop without these hesitations.

Social, political and economic circumstances are reflected as faithfully in the life of the church as in any other part of the community. Cross had been through many troubled times in Grahamstown during the last quarter of a century, but looking back on those years from Pretoria they seemed very peaceful compared with the choppy waters in which he now found himself.

The membership of the Pretoria Baptist Church was small, probably about 50 when Cross arrived, compared with the 200 of the Grahamstown church. Within the first three years of his ministry 44 more members joined the church,²² but there were also some departures, and the peak was reached in 1907, when the official figure was 89. From then until 1910 there was a steady decrease, down to 66. After Union matters improved, and by the time Cross decided to leave there were 76 names on the roll.²³

A small membership meant that there were fewer men to carry the normal day to day administrative load of the church, and more weight fell on the pastor's shoulders. Few pastors had been as blessed as Cross was in the diaconate of the Grahamstown church: they were men of initiative, leaders in their community, willing and eager to accept responsibility. Cross had never had to worry about

the finances of the church: he was able to concentrate on his pastor's role as spiritual guide, teacher and counsellor of his flock.

It was otherwise in Pretoria. The detailed record of the church's Minute books show that the church was never without financial problems, never able to make ends meet, in spite of financial assistance from the Baptist Union and the Colonial Aid Society. The burden of the borrowed money was a drag from which the church seemed to be unable to free itself. When the pastor had completed his first year at the church he inaugurated an Annual Thanksgiving Day, at which people brought their freewill offerings for the Lord's work. The deacons were sceptical about it, doubtful if even £60 would be raised. Great was their surprise when the total reached nearly £135.²⁴ In addition, a bazaar was held that year, and the financial position of the church was healthier than it had been since it began in 1889. Soon after this Pretoria fell on hard times, and often money which was raised to reduce the debt had to be used for current expenses. Sometimes the church was in a state of financial crisis when (as in 1906) the bonds were called up.²⁵ The pastor's energy and time were too often spent in the never-ending search for ways and means to avert financial catastrophe. He tried to obtain £400 from the Grahamstown church on debenture or in gifts, but was unsuccessful.²⁶ He spent time going to see prominent Pretoria businessmen to ask for loans, but they too had fallen on hard times. He gave public lectures on literary topics for church funds. Out of his salary of £400 he paid, as rent for the Manse, the interest on the loan of £1 700 which had been raised to build it, as well as the rates.²⁷

In spite of financial worries there were decided compensations in being in Pretoria. In the period of reconstruction after the War there was a steady flow of young men to the town, many of them civil servants who had been sent from the Cape Colony to help start the administrative machinery going again. There were also immigrants from the United Kingdom and other parts of the British Empire, some of whom had fought in the War, who felt that South Africa offered great opportunities.

These men knew little or nothing of Cross's reputation, either in his own denomination or in educational and literary circles. With them he could lay aside the burden of his prestige and meet them on the common ground of literary or artistic interests. He attracted them by the flexibility and richness of his mind, which were evident in his sermons and public lectures. Also, he loved an argument, and greatly enjoyed sharpening his wits against those keen young brains. Anyone was always welcome to visit the Manse after the Sunday evening service, to debate with the minister in his red wall-papered study with its orderly rows of books, about the sermon he had just preached.

At one time he held regular monthly services specially for the young men. An advertisement in the *Pretoria News* of Saturday April the 16th 1904 announced

that the following day he would preach a sermon on Atheism at the evening service. He took his text from Ephesians 2:12: "Having no hope and without God in the world."²⁸

He spoke of what he called intellectual atheism and practical atheism, and differentiated both from Agnosticism. He thought that moral, practical atheism, which might blatantly profess a belief in a god or gods yet deny that belief in practice, was more terrible and more prevalent than intellectual atheism. The main thrust of the sermon was that where there was no belief in God, hope must inevitably die. It was characteristic of Cross that he should illustrate this point from the lives of two poets, William Watson and James Thomson.

The impact of this sermon was such that the *Transvaal Advertiser* carried a long report about it next day. For weeks there was a very lively correspondence on the matter in the columns of that paper, a correspondence which seemed likely to continue indefinitely. It was still vigorous when the Editor used his "This correspondence must now cease" chopper on June the 3rd. On May the 10th a columnist of that paper wrote: "Rev. G.W. Cross's sermon seems to have set everybody writing, and my impression at the present moment is that if there is a single Churchman who hasn't sent an indignant comment, or a ferocious retort, it is because he is away on a honeymoon trip or on his holidays, and has not seen the papers."

In the midst of this newspaper tumult Cross decided to preach again on the subject on May the 9th, partly as a reply to some of the arguments set forth in the correspondence. The church was crowded, the congregation very attentive, and the sermon pronounced by many listeners to be the finest they had ever heard. Once again it was fully reported in the *Transvaal Advertiser*.²⁹ This time the theme was "The credulity of atheism," and Cross took for his text Matthew 8:10: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." "There was never an age more sceptical and more critical than the age in which we live," he said. Yet there was no superstition our sceptics today did not support. There was more faith in the gambler than could be found even in the simple believer. Cross spoke of a man he knew who professed atheism, yet believed in the planchette and in table-rapping. Not to any human sense could God be known, not to any human faculty could He be demonstrated. "I grant you," said Cross, "that when I say, 'In the beginning, God,' I express not an act or a sentence of logic, but a sentence of faith; yet I contend that the man who says 'There is no God' – that the man who says 'There was no beginning' – that that man exercises even a greater faith than I have to exercise when I believe in the existence of God." He went on: "Atheism tells me: John Milton made a poem, but nobody and nothing made John Milton. It tells me there never was a creation, that all this that looks like design never was designed – a mere blind chance. I have not found so great faith – no, not in Israel."

Cross's zest for life and his ability to throw himself wholeheartedly into the life of the community in which he lived were in no wise lessened by his move to Pretoria. He was soon as involved as he had ever been in issues of public interest, in education, in the turmoil of political, social and economic change which made the years between the War and Union one of the most eventful periods in Pretoria's history.

On July the 10th 1904 President Paul Kruger died in exile in Switzerland, and his body was brought home to Pretoria for burial. Grocott asked Cross to write reports for the *Mail* about the events of the funeral week in Pretoria in December. This was a commission after his own heart. In several articles, which were published in *Grocott's Mail* from December the 16th to the 23rd, he described all the proceedings in detail, from the arrival of the funeral train to the burial a week later.

The weather that week was typical of a Pretoria summer. "After the great heat at the beginning of the week," he wrote, "yesterday and today have been cold and stormy. The wind raged furiously all yesterday, and the town was blind with dust. Towards evening rain came on with lightning and thunder ... The weather is in sympathy with the history if not with the essential character of the great old man. What a storm his life was ... And yet I, for one, believe he loved peace. Meeting the man it was impossible to think otherwise."

On the day of the funeral Cross joined the great crowd on Church Square, and noted again "how silent these Boers are. An English crowd would have buzzed like a swarm of bees, this is still. About me there are long spaces of absolute silence." After the singing of a psalm, the funeral orations followed: Schalk Burger, De Wet, and Louis Botha. It was the first time that Cross had seen the legendary De Wet, and he was impressed by his striking appearance and by the force and fluency of his brief speech.

After the speeches the procession lined up for the last trek to the cemetery in Pretoria West. Cross, riding by side streets, reached the cemetery long before the cortege, and took up a stand as close as he could get to the grave. "Here it comes at last; his burghers, about ten of them, are carrying him on their great shoulders. They come slowly down the path and deposit him slowly and reverently by the side of the wife he loved so well."

The death of Kruger as surely marked the end of an era in South Africa as the death of Queen Victoria had done in Europe. New influences, new personalities, new philosophies were rising up to change the course of South Africa's history.

Cross was soon involved in the education controversies in the Transvaal. In 1903 Milner's Government had enacted a Public Education Ordinance, which,

while in some respects admirable, was bitterly resented by the Boers on three main grounds: the fact that the system was completely centralised to the exclusion of any local control; the scant time allowed for Dutch in the curriculum, and the use of English as the teaching medium in all schools; and the arrangements made for Religious Instruction.

It was this latter that brought Cross into the fray. The Ordinance allowed what was known as "right of entry." This meant that *if parents requested it* ministers of religion would be afforded the opportunity of giving instruction in the specific doctrines of their denominations for one hour per week during school hours and on school premises. This would be in addition to the two hours of Bible History given every week by the class teachers.

It sounds harmless enough. But the "right of entry" was grounded in a religious and educational philosophy which was alien to the Boers and to the English Free Church denominations. These all believed that religious education was primarily the responsibility of the Church and the parents, and not the State. Anglicans, who came from a country where their Church was a part of the State establishment, seem to have forgotten that in South Africa the Anglican communion was only one of many denominations. Milner's Anglicisation policy seemed to bring the power of the Church of England into the Transvaal, and the other churches feared proselytisation in the public schools, or, worse still, a kind of class distinction among the school children based on whether they belonged to the Anglican Church or not.

In practice this clause of the ordinance was found to be so unsatisfactory that in 1905 a Commission was appointed to investigate its working. Cross gave evidence before the Commission, as well as submitting a written statement to them.³⁰ He made a strong distinction between the teaching of religion and the teaching of dogma, which was in direct opposition to the Anglicans, who held that religion cannot be taught except dogmatically. "Essential religion," said Cross, "is not a mere part of life, but pervades the whole of it. It is better inculcated than taught by dogmas. Dogmatic teaching has often little or no essential religion in it."

He also held that it was wrong in principle to admit clergy and ministers into schools maintained by public funds, as this would amount to "the concurrent endowment of churches" by public funds. Here again he made a distinction between religion and the churches. "We are not advocating purely secular education in State schools ... Subject to the operation of a conscience clause, the Bible should be taught in selected portions by the teachers of the schools, and simple prayers and hymns used each day."

Most strongly did he feel that it was very wrong "to force upon children the strifes that separate men ... It is quite as possible to teach religion without

obtruding sectarianism as it is to teach history, to inculcate true patriotism without party politics.”

When the Report of the Commission was published, and it was known that the majority of the Commissioners were in favour of abolishing the clause, a lively correspondence ensued in the newspapers,³¹ in which Cross again played a prominent part. He also wrote an article on the whole issue for the September 1905 number of the *South African Baptist*, in which he stressed that “it behoves us to make our Sunday Schools very efficient. Let us give our children sound, thorough Bible teaching until they become mighty in the Scriptures ... Above all, let our parents look to their duty.”

Cross's interest in education was evidenced also in the more humdrum work of committees. He served on the Advisory Board for Coloured Education³² and on the Governing Body of Pretoria Boys High School, where his two youngest sons were now pupils. He again took on the job of Commissioner for the Cape University examinations, and devoted the income derived from this source to the maintenance of the manse.³³

In June 1909 a new way of public service was opened to Cross. He was offered the post of Chaplain to the Pretoria Central Prison and the Pretoria Gaol.³⁴ This work was to him a new challenge, and a very worthwhile experience. Here he found no fertile soil for the sowing of the Word. The ground was hard and stony, but any sign of germination and growth gave a satisfaction to the sower that he had not known among the “respectable” congregations he had always served. In this work too he found at least a partial answer to the question which had tormented him in his youth: “If God is Love, how can there be a hell?” In the grim precincts of Pretoria Central Prison he met men so hardened by a life of crime, their hand against every man's, and every man's hand against them, that no love could reach them. They had rejected God and man. In Cross's words, for such men “to be in heaven would be hell.”³⁵ God Himself cannot save those who do not wish to be saved. We are all free to choose: either to accept or to reject God.

Amid his multiple responsibilities in the church and in public work Cross still found time for his literary interests. In 1903 a Home Reading Union was formed in Pretoria to encourage the serious study of worthwhile books. It offered guidance in the selection of reading matter and suggested courses of study to be followed by the Reading Circles. It also arranged occasional lectures by local literary men. The Union was a practical attempt to raise the level of culture in South Africa, and as such it had the blessing and patronage of the very highest in the land. There were soon branches and reading circles in all the major cities of South Africa.

Shortly after his arrival in Pretoria Cross joined the Second Town Reading Circle. He was soon elected to the Central Committee of the Union³⁶ (the only

minister on it) and he was a frequent contributor to the *Bulletin* of the Union, which was edited by Prof. Purves of the Transvaal University College. Cross's lectures on literary topics were as popular as they had ever been in Grahams-town. In the December 1908 number of the *Bulletin*, in a report of the activities of the Pretoria Branch, we read: "On November 5 the Rev. G.W. Cross with his ever ready kindness gave a reading of Christina Rossetti's poem 'The Prince's Progress,' explaining the hidden meaning with such charm and feeling that we all felt it a great privilege to be among his hearers." And again: "The most delightful and profitable afternoon of the whole year we owe to the kindness of the Rev. G.W. Cross, who came and gave us a lecture on Count Tolstoi and his works ... Probably our literary men little know how much an occasional lecture does towards the reviving or keeping up of enthusiasm for reading, or how grateful people are when they so generously make time in their busy lives for such extra work."

The Tolstoy lecture was printed in the April 1909 number of the *Bulletin*. Later lectures by Cross, on Swinburne, Robert Browning, Olive Schreiner and others, were also published in the *Bulletin* or its successor, *The South African Bookman*.

We moderns, spoonfed on the thin porridge provided by radio and television programmes, magazines and newspapers, and suffering from a kind of intellectual and cultural malnutrition, may well feel humbled at the sort of study undertaken by quite ordinary people in the reading circles of South Africa in the early years of the century, as revealed in the pages of the *Bulletin*. The Syllabuses covered by the Circles cover an enormous range: not only literature, but history, travel and exploration, art and music, biography and scientific topics are included. The *Bulletin* regularly published lists of important new books in English, Dutch (including Afrikaans), French, German and Portuguese.

The range is astonishing; and when one realises that those who joined the reading circles did it solely for love, and not for any practical gain such as the obtaining of a degree with the hope of improving prospects of promotion, one can but sadly reflect "Where is it now, the glory and the dream?" Cut down to size to fit a University syllabus, probably; and only registered students may have access to it.

CHAPTER 13

Pretoria: Frustrations and achievements

“Life is not designed to minister to a man’s vanity.”

R.L. Stevenson

For a year or two after his arrival in Pretoria Cross was free of any office in the Baptist Union. However, in October 1904 he was re-elected to the Executive, and again in 1906. From then onwards he was once more deeply involved in the work of the Union, his most important contribution being his untiring efforts to establish a sound pension scheme for Baptist ministers and missionaries in South Africa.

For Cross, Christianity meant the acceptance of inescapable responsibilities and duties, first of all in the family and home, and then in the church and the wider world. Indeed, the founding of the Baptist Union in 1877 implied that the isolated churches were beginning to assume responsibilities beyond their own local congregations. The death in 1891 of the Rev. Charles Denyer of Cradock at the age of 31 years was a new challenge to the young organisation, since it was the first time in the history of the Union that one of its ministers had died. Cross wrote: “It became our duty to take thought for the widow and four young children he had left behind;” he himself took the lead in establishing a fund to assist the family.¹ Again, during the Anglo-Boer War it was he who was most insistent in reminding the churches of their obligation to help those ministers who had been left destitute by the war.

It was quite in character, therefore, that he should campaign for a pension scheme for the Baptist ministers and missionaries of the Union. Nevertheless, his interest was not fully aroused until the arrival in Pretoria in 1905 of young Theo Riemer and his wife. Riemer was the son of a pastor who had come from America in 1874 to serve the German Baptists in the Border area. Due to ill health Pastor Riemer was obliged to resign his pastorate in 1893, and his congregation presented him with a gift of money. Although his own financial future was uncertain he donated one tenth of this gift to the Baptist Union to be used as the nucleus of a pension fund.² A year or two later he made another generous donation for the same purpose. In spite of this inducement the matter was not taken up by the Baptist Union with sufficient zeal. Many churches were unwilling to co-operate. Various schemes were tried, but none seemed satisfactory. By 1905 there was an arrangement whereby the Union was prepared to pay the premiums on life insurance policies not exceeding £250 for those ministers who wished to take out policies. However, there was no compulsion on either ministers or churches to co-operate in the scheme.³

Theo Riemer and his wife joined the Pretoria church in January 1906,⁴ and Theo was almost immediately appointed church treasurer. The church secretary, Robert Eales, was also the son of a Baptist minister. These two men knew at first hand how poorly paid most pastors were, and how impossible it was for them to save anything for their old age. They prompted Cross to use his energies and influence to persuade the Union to take on the responsibility of a proper pension scheme.⁵

It was not a popular cause. Cross himself told his own church in his report on the 1907 Assembly, that "great pressure had been brought on him to allow the matter to drop."⁶ Opposition came from three different directions. There were those – among them the Rev. H.J. Batts⁷ – who thought that the Baptists of South Africa were too small and poor a community to be able to support an economically viable scheme. Others, with strong convictions about the independency of a Baptist congregation, disliked any scheme which would make it compulsory for every church to contribute on a fixed, regular basis, believing that this would interfere with their autonomy. The third type of objection came from those who quoted texts like "Take no thought for the morrow," and who believed that making provision for the old age of ministers showed a lack of faith.

For years Cross fought a stubborn battle on this bread and butter issue, believing that it was incumbent on the Baptist Union to accept this responsibility for its ministers. He would be satisfied with nothing less than a scheme which would be compulsory for all ministers and churches.

Eventually, at the 1909 Assembly it was resolved that "a serious effort should be made forthwith to provide an adequate fund to be used as a retiring or Old

Age Pension Fund for Baptist ministers and missionaries in South Africa, and that a Committee be formed forthwith with power to act, the sum of £3 000 to be aimed at within five years."⁸ Two laymen promised that when the first £1 000 had been raised they would donate £250 each, and again another £250 each when the second £1 000 was subscribed. Cross was appointed convenor of the new Committee, which included Theo Riemer and experienced businessmen like T.H. Grocott.⁹ It was at this Assembly that Cross was elected Vice-President of the Union for the fourth time.

The following year, Cross now being in the Chair as President, Riemer read the Report of the Committee and formally proposed the Union's acceptance of the scheme. So enthusiastic was the response that the whole Assembly rose spontaneously and sang the Doxology.¹⁰ In three years Cross, Riemer and Eales had succeeded in changing doubt, hostility and indifference into practical resolve. The persistence of the triumvirate was rewarded when the Committee of management of the new pension scheme was appointed; Cross being chosen as Chairman, Eales as Secretary and Riemer as Treasurer.¹¹

Cross's Presidential Address that year recalled the way in which Baptist work had expanded since the founding of the Union one third of a century previously.¹² "Surely we can say when we look at all this – 'What has God wrought!' But we should be wrong if we forgot our leaders and their enterprises." With reference to the new pension scheme he said that the fund would have its objectors, and those who would quote "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you," but it could not be called righteousness if they left their aged workers in poverty.

Non-Baptists are often puzzled at the lack of centralised control or cohesion in the Baptist denomination. The Union is precisely that – a free association of churches who work together for the common cause. The constituent churches are free to join the Union or not, and also free to withdraw from it. It has no power to legislate or to impose its will on any local congregation, nor has it any disciplinary powers. Basic to all Baptist theology is the simple, apostolic concept of the church as a community of believers in Christ. The local congregation, the "gathered community" (as it is sometimes called) of believers, is *the* church, so long as Christ Himself is present. "Where Christ is, there is the Church," said Ignatius. He Himself has promised to be there where two or three are gathered in His name. This concept of the church inhibits the rise of towering hierarchies, of state churches, of tightly centralised organisations, and of powerful synods. Each little local congregation has competence to arrange its own affairs: to decide who shall be accepted for membership, to control its own finances, and to call the minister of its choice.

Although congregationalism has the advantage of flexibility, the drawbacks of such a concept of the church are obvious. Baptist churches may pay a high price

for their independence in a loss of efficiency, a danger of self-centred parochialism, and an unhealthy need for ministers to retain their popularity with their congregations, sometimes at the price of their own integrity.

The Rev. H.J. Batts, President of the Baptist Union in 1896, made this the theme of his presidential address to the Assembly in April 1896. Batts had recently taken on the work in Pretoria, a very tough assignment, and there he had been confronted personally with some of the undesirable fruits of "independency." "While I am not going to admit the absolute failure of our present mode of working", he said, "I am confident that an alteration in some form is imperative if we are successfully to occupy and maintain the fields of service which are opening up for us ... In countries where the population is large and the area is more circumscribed than with us the 'Independence' idea may operate successfully, but there is evidence, even in England ... that some modification is in contemplation."¹³ Batts had learned by experience that the history and social conditions of South Africa were too different from those of England for the Baptist Church to operate in South Africa as it did in England. He was particularly concerned with the appointment of pastors (the question of credentials, suitable training and recognition of ministers by the Union, were beginning to be seen as important) and with the opening up of "new fields of labour" by the central body, without waiting for the initiative to come from the local people.

Cross's comment on this speech was "There is no sturdier Independent amongst us than our President. But he has seen that Independence may be made to mean congregational selfishness. We have not enough of the spirit of the body ... The Union should be dearer to each of us than the individual church."¹⁴

Political and social changes in South Africa after the Anglo-Boer War led to a growing realisation among Baptists of the need for more institutionalised co-operation between the churches, as the pension scheme proved. An outspoken letter to the *South African Baptist* in August 1907 blamed the lack of expansion of the church on the impotence of the Union to act with authority in matters affecting the ministry, local church finances, property, stipends, and disputes among members of local churches. Cross's comments on the letter were published in the same issue of the *Baptist*. "For my part," he wrote, "I think that, on the whole, it goes a little too far in the destruction of 'independency'." He cannot accept suggestions for a control of the ministry similar to the Methodist, although he is well aware of the need to "guard the entrance to the ministry," and he feels that it is high time that the Union "took steps for the training of such men as our country needs." The necessity to safeguard the quality of the ministry had been obvious for some years. Since each congregation, then as now, could call whom it chose to be pastor, the door was wide open for the smooth-tongued "con" man. In his 1898 Presidential Address Cross had said:

“South Africa has been, for years past, the hunting ground for adventurers of all kinds, and the ‘reverend’ species has been fairly represented.”¹⁵ Batts, in a letter to the Rev. James Spurgeon which was published in the Pastor’s College Annual Paper of 1893-94, mentions the same problem. In thanking Spurgeon for the men sent to South Africa by the College, he says: “I am very pleased to tell you that the brethren are doing excellent work, indeed every man we have sent for has turned out well. The trouble out here arises from men who say they have a mission to South Africa and are sure the Lord has sent them. In nine cases out of ten they bring nothing but trouble.”

Problems of the ministry were therefore among the most important reasons for the need of a more centralised control by the Union. At the 1907 Assembly proposals for re-organization were brought up. The following year a famous English Baptist, the Rev. F.B. Meyer, was in South Africa on an evangelical mission. Before he left to return home he met the Executive of the Baptist Union to discuss the matter, and he laid before them certain proposals for constituting a United Baptist Church of South Africa.¹⁶

These proposals, which covered matters like ministerial settlements, a central stipend fund, loans for the purchase of property, and the grouping of small churches in a district to share a superintendent minister, were discussed at the 1908 Assembly,¹⁷ referred back to the churches, and again discussed and amended at the 1909 Assembly.¹⁸ In 1910 all but one of the churches agreed to accept the amended proposals. It was therefore resolved that “until the United Baptist Church of South Africa and the Baptist Union of South Africa are synonymous and co-extensive, the United Baptist Church should be a federation of churches within the Union, affiliated with it and having for its objects the same aims.”¹⁹

Only Baptists could have thought of such a peculiar resolution of a difficulty. However, the United Baptist Church gradually fell away, and after 1919 we hear no more of it. Over the years other solutions have been found for many of the problems it was formed to solve.

During these years when Baptists were giving serious attention to their own denominational structure, they were also engaged in talks on the possibility of union between Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Wesleyan Methodists. The initiative for these talks had come from the Presbyterians, who invited the different bodies to send representatives to a preliminary conference in Johannesburg in July 1907. Cross, together with the Rev. T. Chapman and Mr. Walter Evans, represented the Baptist Union. At these talks, while it was clear that there were wide differences between the denominations, sufficient interest was shown to justify asking each of the four bodies to send eight delegates to a conference the following year. The Baptist Assembly of 1907 agreed to accede to this proposal, and chose eight men to represent them, Cross again being the leader of the group.

Cross wrote a full report of the 1908 Conference for the October issue of the *South African Baptist*.²⁰ He did not minimise the difficulties, both practical and theological, which strewed the way to a united church; but he also stressed the great advantages that such a union would bring: "the greater power, the economy of effort, and ... chiefest of all, the increase of brotherly love and enthusiasm." He concluded: "My last word shall be that we ought most strenuously to work for this union."

Further conferences were held in 1909 and 1910, at which Cross again represented the Baptist Union. However, in spite of the cordial spirit in which the conferences were conducted, the Presbyterian Assembly of 1910 declared against corporate union; surprisingly, since the first initiative for the talks had come from that body. At the Baptist Assembly in 1910 a resolution was passed thanking the members of the deputation for their services,²¹ "but, having heard that the Presbyterian Church ... has decided to discontinue such negotiations, we feel that we have no alternative but to accept the situation. At the same time, while holding distinctive convictions on Baptism, we are prepared to cooperate with others in furtherance of any scheme for closer union which may be determined upon, and for this purpose we hereby appoint the former delegates to the Kimberley Conference to be a Standing Committee."

The breakdown of the talks was referred to by Cross in his Presidential Address²² that year in tones of disappointment, but he said that he was glad that the breach had not come from the Baptist Church. He did not share the relief of those who were relieved that the idea of corporate union was put away for the present. The realisation of the dream of union had been postponed, but the vision would come again; in the meanwhile fellowship between the four churches should be increased.

Cross's own relationship with his brother ministers in other denominations had always been warm and friendly. In Pretoria he was loved and respected by the Rev. James Gray, the Rev. Amos Burnet, Bishop Furse and Ds. H.S. Bosman, men whose names are still remembered and honoured for the contribution they made to their own churches. Cross became a familiar figure in the pulpits of Wesley Church and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, where he was a favourite preacher for special occasions.

Between 1903 and 1910 several new churches were built in Pretoria. Cross was one of the speakers at the laying of the foundation stone of the Sunnyside Wesleyan Church in June 1904, and his speech was fully reported in the *Pretoria News*.²³ He reminded his listeners of the "mighty history" of Methodism, and recalled how the handful of Baptist families among the British settlers of 1820 had joined with the Wesleyans in sharing a minister, the Rev. William Shaw. While proud always of being a Baptist, and aware of the long history of the Baptist Church, Cross had the knack of making members of other

denominations aware and proud of their own heritage. Mr. and Mrs. Cross were also present as honoured guests at the laying of the foundation stone of St. Alban's Cathedral by Lord Selborne on July the 28th 1908.

Cross's manifold interests sometimes filled his mind to the exclusion of events happening around him. He had a reputation for absentmindedness. As he walked around the town, absorbed in his own thoughts, he was oblivious of the people and places he passed. There is the story of a young man, a loyal member of the Baptist Church, who, passing his minister in the street one day, gave him a cordial greeting, but received no word or look of recognition in reply. Anxiously the young man made his way to the Manse, and asked Mrs. Cross if he had somehow offended "Reverend Crawss," who had cut him in the street. "Don't worry," she replied, "he does it to me too." Mrs. Cross could always be relied on to defuse a tense situation with a joke or a dry comment.

Hospitality in the Pretoria Manse was as free as it had been in Grahamstown. The door was always open to the lonely, the troubled, the homeless, the needy. It was home not only to the Cross boys and their friends, but to anybody who cared to drop in. True concern and loving care for their flock meant that both the pastor and his wife walked many miles every week visiting members of the congregation in their own homes, which were as far afield as Brooklyn to the east and the Railway Reserve to the south west of the city.

By 1908 Graham and Arnold were both married, Graham to Hilda Blackwell and Arnold to Violet Batteson. "Our boys are a perpetual benediction," wrote their father to an old Grahamstown friend in 1908,²⁴ and he proceeded to give some news of all of them.

Arnold and Violet are nested like a pair of doves, they seem too happy for demonstration of happiness and are proud each of the other. Graham and Hilda have at length got a house and will soon be nested also. There are great differences between Violet and Hilda but they seem equally suited to their respective spouses. Nurden is developing rapidly, he likes the law and as far as I can see his baases like and appreciate him. He is reading hard for his final exam which he takes in December. I trust he will succeed for this training is an expensive business. He is an awful tease quite unmerciful to his little mother. In Church work he is quiet and constant and a great help – an open-air preacher & teacher in the Sunday School.

Carson is developing rapidly too. I suppose you know he is a bursar at the University College reading for his intermediate Arts. If he passes he will yet have to take two years for his degree.

Havelock is the one who has been most changed by our coming here – the influences of this place are very different from those of Grahamstown. I

think he is not quite so far on in education as he would have been had we remained in Grahamstown. But I doubt not that under his mother's training he will grow up well and develop, please God, into a good useful man.

Havelock was not yet fifteen years old when his father wrote of him in these uncertain tones. It is not easy to be a child of the Manse. Boyish pranks and exuberance, if allowed to get out of hand, are judged more harshly than they would be in a more private family life. There was a memorable occasion when a ball from the hand of Havelock came crashing through a window on to a table all beautifully laid out with tea things for Mrs. Cross's weekly At Home. History draws a veil over the awful consequences of this mishap, but it is known that the paternal hand could be hard and the paternal voice stern. None of his sons ever referred to their father as anything but "Father:" there was nothing of the "Daddy" in him.

Luckily the boys could always rely on their mother's sympathy and understanding and sense of humour. Clem Doke, son of the Rev. J.J. Doke of Johannesburg, lived in the Pretoria Manse while he was a student at the Transvaal University College. When Mrs. Cross died in 1938 Dr. Doke was the Editor of the *South African Baptist* and wrote of her:²⁵ "The Editor cannot refrain from giving a personal testimony to the wonderful character of the late Mrs. G.W. Cross. Twenty seven years ago, when he was a student in Pretoria, he regarded Mrs. Cross as his Pretoria mother; in her house he was at home. Her fund of Irish humour was inexhaustible and she was a comrade to her boys who (in those days) played with her and teased her almost as one of themselves. She was a tireless worker. It was after we went to bed (at 11 o'clock) that she would be busy in the kitchen bread-making, and none of us could get up in the morning before she did. We did not believe she ever slept."

From October 1910 to October 1911 Cross was once again the President of the Baptist Union. As such, he was asked to represent South African Baptists at the second Congress of the Baptist World Alliance, to be held in Philadelphia in June 1911. The Pretoria Church Minute books record that Cross stated that "circumstances made it impossible for him to attend the Conference."²⁶ The Report of the Executive of the Baptist Union says simply "The President found that he could not possibly represent us."²⁷ No reason is given, but the difficulty was probably financial. Apparently the Union was not able to pay the expenses. Batts, as General Secretary of the Union, had suggested to the church in Pretoria that they open a special fund for the purpose, but the Deacons felt that "the money could be put to better use."²⁸

The church was still struggling to keep its head above water financially. In the latter half of 1910 the Treasurer, Mr. Riemer, had circulated a memorandum to church members "to place the financial position of the church clearly before them," and "to solicit their earnest support in order that current expenses

might be met by current receipts, so that Thanksgiving Fund receipts might be applied exclusively to debt reduction."²⁹ But in October Riemer had to report that although the Thanksgiving Fund amounted to £144-5-0, the whole of the amount had already been absorbed in current expenses.³⁰

It is a sad reflection on both the Baptist Union and the Pretoria Church that Cross was unable to attend the Congress. He would have benefited greatly from intercourse with Baptists from all over the world; it would have been a liberating experience for him who sometimes chafed at the narrowness and limitations of the small group of Baptists in South Africa. Addressing his fellow ministers in his Presidential Address in 1898 Cross had said:³¹ "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.' "

Cross's catholic spirit, his wide reading, his ceaseless self-education, his administrative gifts, his eloquence, would have fitted him for a great London church. It would not be surprising if he sometimes felt lonely in "the wilderness." He seldom had the satisfaction of talking to his intellectual equals in his own denomination. How many members of his church were able to appreciate the breadth of his learning or the extent of his charity? His very catholicity was an offence to some.

There are evidences in the Pretoria Church Minute books of dissensions between members, and of resignations. Some problems were happily resolved. There was the man who resigned because he had been reading Campbell's *The new theology* – a book which caused a stir in 1907 similar to that caused in the 1960s by Robinson's *Honest to God* – and felt that he could no longer belong to what he called an "orthodox church." Having resigned, he acknowledged that he had received help from Cross's sermons and hoped to do so in the future, "as he would in all probability now attend the services more regularly."³² Others resigned because they were not Baptists, and were now being claimed by their own denominations.

But in 1909 the Deacons received a letter of resignation which "caused a great deal of anxiety."³³ A special meeting was arranged, so that the member could discuss the matter with the diaconate.³⁴ Nottingham was in the chair at this meeting, and correspondence between the Pastor and the dissatisfied member was read aloud by the respective writers. The deacons tried to persuade the man to reconsider his resignation, since it was evident that the correspondence originated by him was due to a misunderstanding. The member, however, was adamant. The outcome was that at the following Deacons Meeting Mr. Riemer moved and Mr. Nottingham seconded a resolution that the resignations of the man and his wife be accepted, and that the Secretary, in acquainting them of the fact, "inform them that the Diaconate entirely disagrees with the spirit of their correspondence."³⁵

In November 1910 Mr. Gregan died.³⁶ He was one of the oldest and most faithful of the deacons, and his death was a sore loss to Pastor and church. A year later the church heard that Theo Riemer, a civil servant, had been transferred to Johannesburg on promotion. "For ourselves we are sorry," recorded the deacons, "for he has been such a great help to us here in Pretoria that we feel we can ill spare him."³⁷ He was not only a very competent church treasurer, but the organist as well. Happily he was able to report, just before his departure, that the financial position of the church had slightly improved.

The Riemers left Pretoria on January the first 1912. For Cross, it was a sad beginning to a year beset with difficulties and sorrow. Two of the original founders of the Baptist Union, T.B. King and T.H. Grocott, died in 1912.³⁸ Both were co-workers with Cross for thirty-five years, indefatigable in their devotion to the Baptist Union; their contribution to the cause has never perhaps been fully appreciated. But Grocott's death was also a personal loss to Cross. His affection and regard for Grocott were almost filial; Grocott had always been to him a wise counsellor and most true friend.

Cross was now sixty one years old, and although he was in good health he was beginning to feel the strain of overwork. In 1911 he had asked the Baptist Union if they would help the church in Pretoria to bear the expense of an additional minister. The branch church in Brooklyn, which had started in Mr. Gregan's home in 1903, now held regular services in the Rissik Hall and had a flourishing Sunday School. The Assembly agreed to make £75 available towards the stipend of a minister, and to try and get another £75 from the Colonial Aid Society. Cross himself offered to donate £50 from his Prison Chaplain's salary, making a total of £200 for a year. The Union, however, could not guarantee the money, and the church would not be in a position to make good a deficit if the need arose.³⁹

Nevertheless, Cross wrote to the Secretary of the Baptist Colonial Society, the Rev. M. Staines, in England, asking him to find a suitable young man for the post. This was quickly done, and by January 1912 Cross reported to his church that a student just completing his course at Regent's Park College had been highly recommended and was willing to come.⁴⁰

The Executive of the Baptist Union of South Africa, however, were dilatory in confirming the appointment. In August Cross reported to his diaconate "that he had notified the Union Executive that the delay caused through their obstruction had prevented Mr. Bell's acceptance of an offer ... So much time had elapsed that it would be impossible even if an assistant were procured, for an adequate test of his abilities and suitability and of the progress of the work to be made in order to frame a report for the next Union meetings. He also wanted the assurance of the Executive for the continuation of the support for the next year." Cross also told the deacons that the Executive had asked him to

withdraw his letter, and that "trust be reposed in the brethren."⁴¹ The Executive could give no absolute promise of financial support. All through 1912 this matter dragged on, with Mr. Staines in England becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the uncertainty. He had already recommended two men, but both had now withdrawn. He wanted definite power to appoint, but the Executive was unable or unwilling to commit themselves.

If Cross's relations with the Baptist Union Executive were strained over this affair, there are hints that all was not well in his relations with his own congregation either. Reading between the lines in the old Minute books of the church it appears that the Pastor was suffering a certain amount of criticism from members of the congregation because of his work as a Commissioner for the University examinations, and perhaps also his prison chaplaincy. When Cross informed his deacons on November the 4th that he had again accepted the Commissionership, he stated that he had always on previous occasions quietly devoted the income derived from this source to the work of the church, but that now, "in order to avoid any misunderstanding with anybody he intended handing over all the monies to the Treasurer direct." The grudging way in which this offer was received is revealed in the next sentence of the minutes: "The Deacons expressed their appreciation of this arrangement"⁴² The alteration of that last word throws a good deal of light on the attitude of certain members of the church, and on subsequent events.

Three weeks later the Pastor summoned the Deacons to a special meeting, to inform them that he had received a call to the Lambert Road Church in Durban.⁴³ He could not say whether he would accept the call or no, but he thought it right that the deacons should know of it. He made it clear that he was not soliciting any expressions of opinion from the deacons. The meeting was then adjourned for a few days.

When they met again Cross announced that after careful consideration he deemed it for the benefit of the church and of himself to hand in to the Diaconate his resignation as Pastor of the Pretoria church, leaving it to them to decide the date on which the resignation should take effect.⁴⁴ He assured the Deacons that he had not taken this step lightly, and that nearly ten years of continuous labour as Pastor – being more than double that of any predecessor – was sufficient evidence of his interest and care for the work.

The deacons were taken by surprise, and asked for a few days to think the matter over. When they met again Mr. Davis reminded them that it was not within the powers of the Diaconate either to accept or refuse the Pastor's resignation, that being a matter for a special Church meeting. He then went on to say that "the matter was a little difficult as the Pastor had not assigned any reason for his resignation, and he did not see how it could be accepted unless the Pastor had accepted another call." Only then did Cross inform them that he had accepted the call to Durban.⁴⁵

A special Church meeting was called for the 11th of December to inform the congregation of Cross's decision. Two days later, Arnold Cross, who had been appointed Church Secretary in October 1912, resigned on the grounds that he felt that his position was untenable.⁴⁶ Although he was twice asked to reconsider his decision he repeated his opinion "that his position was untenable."

That Cross was no longer happy in the Pretoria ministry is clear, but the reasons for that unhappiness can only be guessed at. No man can give of his best if he is working in an atmosphere of criticism. Cross's unhappiness was evident in an increasing irritability. It was time to go.

His decision was reported in the *South African Baptist* of January 1913 by the Rev. H.J. Batts, then Secretary of the Baptist Union, in these terms: "Our honoured and beloved brother the Rev. G.W. Cross of Pretoria, has accepted the call to the Lambert Road Church, Durban. He has had a hard, uphill work in the Capital, and the demands of Durban will by no means be so exacting, where his coming will be heartily welcomed by all the churches."⁴⁷

Cross concluded his ministry in Pretoria at the end of March 1913. During his residence of almost ten years he had contributed in many ways to the life of the town, and made many friends beyond the circle of his own church. It was the Mayor of Pretoria, Mr. Andrew Johnston, who took the lead in convening a committee to arrange a farewell social and to collect donations for a presentation fund, in recognition of all that Cross had done for the town.

This public farewell function took place in the Town Hall on the 28th of March.⁴⁸ The Mayor took the chair, and there was a very representative gathering of citizens and ministers of other churches, some of whom had come from Johannesburg. The Mayor read out an illuminated address, which he presented to Mr. Cross together with a purse of 161 gold sovereigns. He informed the gathering that amongst those who had contributed to the presentation fund were the Governor General, Lord Gladstone, and General Smuts. He also mentioned a letter he had received from the Bishop of Pretoria, who regretted his inability to be present and expressed in high terms the great esteem in which he held Mr. Cross. He himself (the Mayor) had taken the initiative in organising the farewell function "to give Mr. Cross a proper send off, and thus publicly recognise his character and merit, and to give him some tangible proof of esteem and regard."

The Rev. Amos Burnet, Superintendent of the Transvaal Wesleyan Circuit, spoke on behalf of the Wesleyans, expressing his regret that Mr. Cross was leaving Pretoria. Ds. H.S. Bosman, in his speech, acknowledged that he had at one time been a little jealous of Mr. Cross, when he found that some of his own people liked Cross better than they liked him. However, Cross's friendly look and kindly disposition, his warm and brotherly Christian heart had dispelled

this jealousy. He himself, and his people, regretted Cross's leaving Pretoria, and he felt that Pretoria would be the poorer, spiritually, intellectually, socially and morally, by his going.

Cross seems to have been genuinely surprised and touched by the warmth of the remarks made about him in the speeches. He had sometimes found his work in the Pretoria church hard and discouraging; he had expended so much energy with apparently little to show for it. The realisation that he was indeed loved and respected in Pretoria, and that he would be missed by many, made it difficult for him to speak. He said that he had simply tried to do his duty as a preacher and pastor of a small church. All the merit of his ministry was due to Mrs. Cross, who had been a continual incentive and a continual blessing.

Mrs. Cross was thanked in a speech by Mr. Nottingham, and a gold watch was presented to her by the ladies of the church "as a token of love and esteem." Graham Cross replied to this on behalf of his mother; being Graham, it was not the usual formal speech at all. The mists of sadness, the charged emotional atmosphere, dissolved in laughter as he spoke. One echo of that speech has been preserved in family tradition. It was the remark that he, Graham, was worried about his parents, because "every time they moved they went to a hotter place."

CHAPTER 14

Durban : Valley of the shadow

“... the faith that looks through death.”

W. Wordsworth

Natal, the smallest and most beautiful of the four provinces of South Africa, looks towards the Indian Ocean, and turns its back – the formidable range of the Drakensberg – on the rest of the country. Both its history and its geography set it apart. Unlike the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, which were settled by expansion from the Cape Colony, Natal was first settled by independent traders and adventurers from England who by-passed the Cape. It was annexed as a British Colony in 1843, had its own Governor from 1845, and acquired its own Legislative Council in 1856. The *Pax Britannica* put an end to the tribal wars of the Zulu people, enabling the survivors to thrive and multiply and live in their own way, safe from the onslaughts of their own chiefs and of the Boers. Migrations of English, Scottish, German and Norwegian settlers have made the White population of Natal the least “Dutch” of all the provinces. There is also a large Indian population, whose ancestors came to Natal from India as indentured labourers to work on the sugar estates. In 1913 the population of Durban consisted of 35 000 people of European descent, 20 000 Zulus and 18 000 Indians.¹

The climate, too, is unlike the highveld, with its summer storms and winter frosts. The coastal belt is hot and humid in the summer, and mild and sunny in

the winter. Sugar cane covers the hills, and vegetation of all kinds grows lushly and rapidly. Bananas, mangoes and pawpaws are as common as blackberries in an English hedgerow. No one need starve, no one need die of cold or exposure in the winter. Humankind, lacking the challenge of hardship, grows indolent and complacent: the local term for this condition is "Natal fever."

As long ago as the early years of this century Durban was already the most popular holiday resort in South Africa. Even then it was easily accessible by rail from the Transvaal, and in July especially, when the wind blows thin and cold across the highveld, up-country visitors flocked (and still do) to Durban to enjoy the sunny beaches and to bathe in the warm breakers of the Indian Ocean. The city braced itself for the annual invasion, and the Corporation as well as private enterprise made provision for the housing, feeding and entertainment of the visitors.

Cross was well aware that the pastorate of the church in Lambert Road would not be an easy undertaking. He had last visited Durban in 1905, when he attended the annual Baptist Assembly there, and as a member of the Executive of the Baptist Union he had an intimate knowledge of the church's short and chequered history. He was now 62 years old, and beginning to feel the strain of the years: the high spirits and enthusiasm of his earlier years were somewhat subdued. But of his pastoral and administrative abilities, sharpened by long experience, he gave unstintingly; and to Durban he brought the same sense of civic responsibility that had characterised all his previous ministries.

The church in Lambert Road was the youngest and smallest of the three Baptist churches in Durban. It was an offshoot of the mother church in West Street, having been constituted in 1904 with a membership of 14. That same year the little church called a minister from England, and in October at the Annual Assembly of the Baptist Union it was admitted as an independent congregation to membership of the Union.² By the end of 1905 the membership had risen to 47, and the church appeared to be well established.³

Yet by 1906 the congregation found it impossible to continue to support a minister, and the church was again taken under the wing of West Street Church. Financially it was a time of hardship throughout South Africa.⁴ In 1908 the minister of the Bulwer Road Church also left Durban,⁵ and in 1909, when the Rev. A. Hall of West Street went to Canada, Durban was left without any settled Baptist minister.⁶ In 1910, acting on the advice of the Union Executive, the Bulwer Road and Lambert Road churches decided to unite in sharing a minister for three years, and called the Rev. Thomas Aitken to the pastorate. Under his care both churches began to revive.⁷ The following year Cross's old friend and colleague, the Rev. H.J. Batts, accepted the call to West Street.⁸

By the end of 1912 the work at both Bulwer Road and Lambert Road churches had recovered to such an extent that each church felt it would be able to support

its own minister.⁹ The three year period ended in March 1913. Mr. Aitken was invited to remain at Bulwer Road; and Lambert Road decided unanimously at a Church Meeting in December 1912, to call Mr. Cross.¹⁰ The membership then stood at about 60.

It was not a large church. It was not an important or influential city church. It was burdened with a debt of £830 on the property,¹¹ and it could not offer Cross a stipend of more than £300 per annum.

When the call came to him in Pretoria he hesitated before accepting it, perhaps feeling that his powers would be unequal to the task, and that a younger man would be more suitable. In the end he agreed to go for a period of three years. In 1916 he would be 65 years old, and eligible for a pension.

Cross was inducted into his new pastorate by the Rev. Thomas Aitken at the morning service on April the 6th.¹² Basing his sermon on Colossians 1:28-29, Aitken showed what Paul's concept of the function of a minister was: preaching Christ, warning his flock of the danger of neglecting salvation, and teaching them with a view to presenting every one perfect in Christ. This high and solemn ideal of his calling suited Cross. He was always aware of the terrible responsibility of his office.

The church was crowded again that evening to hear Mr. Cross preach his first sermon as minister of Lambert Road. He took for his text well-loved words from the Book of Revelation: "Behold I stand at the door and knock ..."; but, placing them firmly in their context (the message to the Church at Laodicea) he pointed out that these words were addressed to a church which thought it was rich and needed nothing, and had closed its door to Christ. The only successful church was the one where the door was open to Christ, and where he had supreme control. Where worldliness and love of money were allowed in, the gentle knocking of Christ could not be heard.

On Thursday April the 10th the usual Welcome Social was held. The Rev. T. Aitken was in the Chair, supported by the Rev. H.J. Batts and the Rev. T. Chapman of Pietermaritzburg. In the course of his speech Batts expressed his delight "that in the providence of God it was his privilege to be working in the same town as Mr. Cross, who during a friendship of over 36 years had proved the best friend he had ever known."

In moving to Durban Mr. and Mrs. Cross were separated for the first time from all their sons. Graham and Havelock were working in Johannesburg; Arnold, Nurden and Carson in Pretoria. Their mother missed them sorely, and spent many hours each week writing to them. Some of these letters have survived, and they provide a vivid picture of the homely detail of her life in Durban: the housekeeping, the cockroaches, difficulties with servants, the weather, and

always people in the house for formal or informal visits. Not all her sons were equally good correspondents. "We should like to hear from you a little oftener", wrote his father to Nurden in September 1914. "Carson is a splendid correspondent. The arrival of his letter is the event of the week to a couple of lonely old folk here."¹³

From these letters it is clear that at one time or another all their sons visited them in Durban. The first to go was Nurden, in July 1913. By then they had bought a house, 45 Claribel Road, not far from the church.¹⁴ It was the first house they had ever owned in their married life, and it is not unlikely that the purchase was made possible by a legacy from Mrs. Cross's mother, who had died in 1905. The house was given the name of "Clonlea", after Mrs. Cross's old home in Ireland, and they planned to continue living there when Mr. Cross retired.

Both parents were delighted to have Nurden with them again. His father took the opportunity during this visit of repeating a lantern lecture – "Livingstone the Lightbearer"¹⁵ – which they had presented together in Pretoria in March on the occasion of the centenary of Livingstone's birth. In December of that year Carson and Havelock spent a holiday in Durban, cheering the "old folks" with their youth and high spirits. "I think the boys have enjoyed themselves," wrote their father to Nurden, "at any rate we have enjoyed having them".

Under Cross's leadership the church in Lambert Road flourished. The report of the Baptist Union Executive, tabled at the Annual Assembly in October 1913, noted that "Lambert Road Durban is greatly encouraged under the able ministry of the Rev. G.W. Cross. Attendance at the services has more than doubled and finances have greatly improved".¹⁶ At the Church's Annual General Meeting in January 1914 it was noted that "church finances have never been healthier".¹⁷ Also, "very high and sincere compliments were paid to Mr. and Mrs. Cross" in the reports of all the various church activities, showing "that they were very active in every branch of the church's work."¹⁸ Only the Pastor himself was not satisfied. In his view all this activity could not conceal the fact that the church was failing in its primary function. His report as Minister was, in the words of the Minute Book, "remarkable for its brevity". The year, he thought, had been barren of conversions, and he asked for the prayers of all.

Cross did not devote his energies exclusively to his own church. He soon became as involved in community service and inter-church organisations as he had ever been in Grahamstown or Pretoria. Before the end of 1913 he was appointed to the committee of the newly formed Christian Social Service League of Durban.¹⁹ One of the League's functions was to collect information about social problems, and Cross was appointed to a small sub-committee whose task was to investigate the grievances of the Indian community, especially those pertaining to taxes and the recognition of Indian marriages.

Within a few months of his arrival in Durban Cross was elected a Vice-President of the Durban Church Council,²⁰ and he also played a leading part in the Durban Christian Ministers Association. The latter consisted of ministers of the “non-conformist” or “free” churches, but three times a year they held joint meetings with the Clerical Society of the Archdeaconry of Durban (Anglican). Early in 1915 Cross read a paper on “The Bible and some modern criticism” to one such joint meeting. It was very well received, and afterwards printed in the *Durban Presbyterian Magazine*.²¹

He also became Secretary of the Natal Baptist Association,²² but he was not now so intimately involved with the affairs of the Baptist Union, although he was still Chairman of the Pension Fund. In addition, he and his two fellow Baptist ministers in Durban, Aitken and Batts, formed the Education Committee of the Baptist Union, which was responsible for the Sunday School Scripture Examination.²³ These three men – perhaps as much for their educational function as for their initials – were known for years in denominational circles as the ABC of Durban.

One January day in 1914 a telegram arrived from Nurden in Pretoria to tell his parents of his engagement to May Batterson, Arnold’s wife’s young sister. This was followed shortly afterwards by a letter from May. Cross wrote to both May and Nurden: tender, loving letters which give an intimate glimpse of the happy family life of the Crosses. May’s own father had died when she was a baby, and she had always felt this deprivation keenly. Her joy in her engagement was increased by the knowledge that she would by her marriage acquire a father, a man whom she had loved and revered since childhood days in Grahamstown.

To May he wrote:²⁴ “Nurden’s news was a great surprise to us, and now that we are getting used to the idea that there is one he loves more than his mother it is a great happiness. I was greatly touched by the letter you wrote which of course I took and read all by myself. Yes, dear Child when a love of this kind comes to us it is all a solemn wonder – To me, in my case, it is ever more a wonder as the tale of the years lengthens ... No human being merits love. It is the Grace of God come when and to whom it may ... You say I am the only “father” you ever knew. Well now or shortly I suppose we can remove the quotation marks and I shall be not merely in the place of father but father indeed and in law as Nurden would add. I have sometimes had a sort of vague regret that no daughter was born to me but I have been most happy in those my sons have brought to me and our December May is most welcome for her sister’s sake and for Nurden’s and most of all for her own ...”

And to Nurden:²⁵ “There lies a letter before me now addressed to Mrs. Nurden. My cousin John died suddenly on Saturday last of heart failure & I have addressed a letter to her of condolence and comfort. And now to you a letter of hearty congratulations and good wishes for your happiness. I remember well

more than forty years ago I got the news of his marriage at the old "Folly" near Chipping Norton. That was even before I had met your mother. And now the news of your prospective marriage! And all the intervening time both for my cousin and for me has been nothing but love, love growing ever more precious and more wonderful. So it was with my old Grandfather and Grandmother: they were lovers at 80 or past when I last saw them. And so you see my boy I may well be happy and confident at the thought of yet another Nurden finding the same path and entering on the heritage ..."

In March the Crosses were able to escape the heats of Durban for a month when they went to Pretoria. It was not exactly a holiday, for Cross exchanged pulpits with the Rev. David Davies,²⁶ which meant preaching every Sunday. He was also, inevitably, involved with the life of his old church and old friends. In the *South African Baptist* of May 1914 the Pretoria Church reported that "Fine congregations have assembled to hear our old Pastor during the 3 Sundays he has been with us, and at a social gathering a great many friends came together to meet Mrs. Cross and himself ... The 1914 session of our Literary and Debating Society has commenced with a lecture, by our old Pastor, on the pre-Raphaelite illustrations of Tennyson and Watts. The lecture was illustrated by some 40 slides".²⁷

In spite of church responsibilities the holiday in Pretoria was a happy time, spent among their family and old friends. The Crosses returned to Durban in April with spirits refreshed, to begin the second year of their ministry in Lambert Road. On the 22nd April a social event to celebrate the first anniversary of Cross's pastorate was held in the church.²⁸ All the Baptist ministers of Natal were there "to do honour" (reported the *South African Baptist*) "to one who for 37 years has upheld so splendidly in the sub-continent the work of the Baptist denomination". The more detailed report in the *Natal Mercury* is not quite so bland.²⁹ It implies that the members of the church were not pulling their weight, and that Cross was finding the work a heavy burden. It quoted from a speech by the Rev. T. Chapman, who "lovingly urged the people to relieve him as far as possible of all unnecessary work and especially financial anxiety. He also paid a glowing tribute to the work of Mrs. Cross who so ably assists her husband in all branches of church activities".

Reading between the lines of reports and private letters it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Cross was fighting a hard battle in his church against complacency and indifference. How does a sensitive and conscientious pastor feel and act when he finds himself in Laodicea? The people in his church were charming and friendly and glad to have him as their pastor, but were they not also too light-hearted and casual and shallow?

1914. To us who know the magnitude of the disaster that was about to strike the world, the pre-war generation seem like children playing on the sea-shore, so

absorbed in their shells and their sandcastles, that they are unaware of the incoming tide and of the looming waves that will soon begin to curl and break, scattering shells and castles and children.

The winter season in Durban that year was particularly gay. Thousands of holiday-makers thronged the beaches and filled the hotels. There seemed to be no cloud in their sky. The little matter of the assassination of the Archduke in Sarajevo on June the 28th took up very little space in the local newspapers, which were full of horse races and other entertainments still dear to the heart of Durban in holiday time. Not until July the 27th, when the *Natal Mercury* appeared with the headlines DARK WAR CLOUDS – AUSTRIA REFUSES INTERVENTION, and carrying a leader under the words *The European Conflagration*, were the people in Durban suddenly startled into an awareness of the impending disaster.

On June the 27th Cross wrote to Nurden: "My Dear Boy, We are delighted at the prospect of you and May being with us next month ..."³⁰ It was a happy time. Nurden took his lantern and slides and camera with him, for he greatly enjoyed helping his father with illustrated lectures. For 20 year old May, shy and reserved, it was an opportunity to get to know her prospective parents-in-law in a more intimate way. Her love and respect for both of them increased with deepening knowledge. Margaret Cross, whose sons all adored her, could have been a formidable rival and threat to her daughters-in-law, but her own common sense and lively sense of humour prevented her from being possessive. After Nurden and May's wedding in June 1915 she carried on a regular correspondence with May, letters which May carefully kept.

Cross was (in his own words) "badly knocked over by the outbreak of the war".³¹ For him the Frontier War of 1877 had been a youthful adventure. The Anglo-Boer War had meant the heartbreak of a civil war. He had perceived as readily as it was possible to see at the time the tragic stupidity of it, and he had been unable to side wholeheartedly with his own country and people in the conflict. This war was different again. He wrote to Nurden:³¹ "I see in it the natural and inevitable result – and that plainly a punishment of the mad & wicked armaments of the nations especially during the last ten years. But it is God's crowning mercy to Briton [sic] that she goes in with such a clear right – and that she without jingoism and with nothing to gain – gives her idolised wealth without reserve and her best lives. God is saving her as by fire".

When it became clear that Britain would inevitably be drawn in to the European struggle the Prime Minister of South Africa, General Botha, sent a cable to London offering to send home the Imperial troops which were still in South Africa, and undertaking to take full charge of the defence and internal order of the country. The offer was gratefully accepted by the British Government.³² In addition the latter asked Botha if the South African Government would be

prepared to organise an expedition to German South West Africa, with the primary object of seizing the powerful wireless stations at Swakopmund, Luderitzbucht and Windhuk. Even at this early stage in the war Britain was well aware that these wireless stations constituted a threat to shipping in the Atlantic, and the South West Africa campaign was undertaken primarily with a view to neutralising that threat. Botha replied that his ministers "cordially agree to co-operate with the Imperial Government, and to assist in sending an expedition for the purposes indicated".³³

As early as August the 12th volunteers were being called for to strengthen the small South African Defence Force. One of the first to respond was Havelock Cross, not quite 21 years old. He was at that time articled to an attorney, A. S. Benson, in Johannesburg, and the adventure and romance of war seemed to him more attractive than the staid arts of peace as practised in an attorney's office.

In September he was on his way to Cape Town to join the South West Africa expedition when he experienced his first adventure of the war. The troop train in which he, together with some 500 other young men, was travelling, was involved in a serious accident on the Hex River pass. The engine and tender left the rails on a curve of the line, dragging ten carriages with them. 8 men were killed and 86 injured.³⁴ A few days later Cross wrote to Nurden: "We got a wire from Havelock after the train accident saying he was all right which greatly relieved us."³⁵

The first troopship from South Africa bound for Luderitz left Cape Town on September the 14th.³⁶ The immediate effect of this was the outbreak of rebellion in South Africa. After all, it was only twelve years since the end of the Anglo-Boer War, and the bitterness of that defeat still rankled. Many Boers objected to the idea of their country siding *with* Britain and *against* Germany, with whom the ties of blood and language were close. General Botha had to cope with this rebellion among his own people before he could continue with the campaign in South West Africa. Meanwhile a small South African force under General Mackenzie took over the port of Luderitz and waited on events in South Africa.

By the beginning of 1915 the rebellion had been effectively dealt with, and Botha was able to turn to South West Africa. He himself took command of the northern forces, and his old friend and comrade-in-arms, General Smuts, took over the command in Luderitz. Both were glad to be back in the saddle again, back to the life of the veld, back to that which they knew they could do supremely well. They were like the war-horse in the Book of Job; "He saith among the trumpets, Ha, Ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting."

The South West Africa expedition was probably the most efficiently conceived, planned and executed campaign in the whole history of the First World War.³⁷ This is not the place to describe it in detail, but it is worth remembering that it was fought without bitterness and with mutual respect and courtesy. The greatest obstacle the South African forces had to overcome was the desert: the provision of water for man and beast was a major problem. The men marched prodigious distances in record time to get from one water hole to the next. Havelock was with the forces that marched across the Namib Desert from Luderitz to Aus, a distance of some 80 miles.³⁸

By July the campaign was successfully over, and the South African troops were repatriated – unfortunately just too late for Havelock to be present at Nurden's wedding on June the 30th. He wrote to May, his old playmate of childhood days, on June the 10th from a place called Ebony: "I must make this a marriage letter. Really it does seem strange to think of May getting married. It seems only the other day when we used to have those never-to-be-forgotten dolls weddings. Well anyway I wish you the best of happiness and luck. I hope you have a nice day for the wedding. I'm afraid it is quite out of the question for me to dream of being present though you may depend upon it I shall remember you both all the day".

Nurden, May and May's mother were very busy with wedding preparations when news came at the beginning of June that Mr. Cross had fallen and injured his spine and broken a rib.³⁹ Nurden, at no time a great correspondent, wrote anxiously to his father asking for details, and on June the 9th Cross replied: "The Doctor says there is no injury beyond the broken rib. It is broken in the back pretty high up. Being so near the spine it might have been much worse ... I think to be recovered D.V. long before the end of the month ... I think we shall be able to persuade mother to make the journey but don't you trouble about fares. You have plenty to do just now ... I am very glad to hear that the side-board is so near completion. I suppose there is much less work in a table ... Love to May. We hear you and she are just dreadfully busy and that Mrs. Batterson is over-doing it. My advice is the same as the Irishman gave to the party gathered at his wife's funeral: 'My friends don't make a toil of a pleasure'."

May and Nurden were duly married in Pretoria on June 30th by Nurden's father. By the time they returned from their honeymoon Havelock was demobilised and back at his attorney's desk in Johannesburg. He visited them in their new house in Brooklyn and wrote an enthusiastic account of it to his mother.⁴⁰

Although Havelock was glad to be back among his friends and his family, he soon grew restless. The hardships of the campaign in South West Africa had toughened him, and changed the boy into a man. It was difficult for him to

settle down to staid office work while the war in Europe worsened. He decided to make his way to England and join a British regiment.⁴¹

He could not leave without first seeing his parents. Towards the end of November they were in Port Elizabeth attending the Baptist Assembly, and afterwards they went on to Grahamstown for a week's holiday. Havelock joined them there. It was a joy to be back in the quiet old city and to see so many old and dear friends. In Durban the war was an ever-present reality: the troopships coming in and out, the large military camps and hospitals, made it impossible to forget; Grahamstown was far from the bustle of war. Back in Durban again Mrs. Cross wrote to Nurden on December the 10th: "We spent a very pleasant week down there; they must have had fine rains for the country looks beautifully green."

In the same letter she writes: "We had a wire from Havelock yesterday; he had just arrived at Capetown, and had a fine trip round, so I suppose he was not sick or he would not have liked it so much ... he will leave Capetown to-morrow, all being well".

Towards the end of 1915 Arnold also decided to go to the war, although he was now in his thirty fifth year, with two children, and in a responsible post in the Civil Service. He was the strongest and toughest of the five brothers, keen on games and outdoor life. He was a good target shooter and had won medals for his marksmanship.⁴² Graham, Nurden and Carson all suffered from asthma, and for them any kind of war service was out of the question.

Arnold enlisted with the South African contingent which was preparing to go to East Africa to join the British Expeditionary Force there, with a view to dislodging the Germans from their East African colony.⁴³ About 20 000 South Africans volunteered, and arrived in Mombasa at the end of 1915. Hopes were high for a decisive victory there, as in South West Africa, especially when it became known that General Smuts had been appointed to the command of the British East African Expeditionary Force. This campaign, however, was not to be as neat and swift as Botha's South West campaign. The tropical nature of the terrain, the dense bush, the torrential rains, the malaria and dysentery were to prove more effective enemies than the Germans.

In January 1916 Cross turned 65, which meant that he was now eligible for a pension. Latterly his health had been giving cause for concern. There are frequent references in Mrs. Cross's letters to "Father's health". He found the Durban climate very trying, and insisted on working when he should have been resting. Although he was often ill with a bad cough or with stomach complaints his wife found it difficult to keep him in bed. He felt the strain of the war increasingly. Many of the young men of his congregation had joined the forces, and he suffered with their families in times of anxiety and trouble.

At the same time it seemed to him that his work was barren, that the lack of response in his congregation meant either that he was not the right man for the church, or that his powers were failing. After much thought he wrote a letter of resignation in September 1915 to the Diaconate of the church, informing them that he did not wish to continue in the pastorate when the three year contract period ended in March 1916. In reply the deacons wrote of "their high appreciation of the work of the Pastor in the pulpit, in the different institutions of the church and in the homes of the people, and at this stage of the ministry they unanimously wish to assure him of the affectionate loyalty of all and of their earnest hope that the Lord will long spare him to minister in Lambert Road ... A change in the ministry is by no means advisable and they lovingly and earnestly request Mr. Cross to minister in Lambert Road as long as he is able and fit to carry on the work".⁴⁴

So he carried on, refusing the pension to which he was entitled, but resigning his official position as President of the Pension Fund.⁴⁵

The year 1916 dawned with no sign of an end to the war. Mr. and Mrs. Cross sent out their customary New Year greetings card, choosing for a motto the words from a prayer of David the King: "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty".⁴⁶ As the shape of a great tree is best seen in the winter, when the boughs are bare, so the shape and the majesty of God became clearer to Cross as life was stripped of all the old comforts and hopes and lovelinesses in the harsh winter of war.

Havelock had gone to Belfast, to his mother's family, who welcomed him warmly for his mother's sake, and grew to love him for his own.⁴⁷ He joined the O.T.C. and was given a commission in the 10th Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers.⁴⁸ His eagerly awaited letters to his parents were passed on to Nurden and Carson in Pretoria, who in turn forwarded them to Graham, now living in Piet Retief in the eastern Transvaal.⁴⁹

In April the Crosses went as usual to the Transvaal for their annual holiday,⁵⁰ dividing their time between Violet and her children, Nurden and May, and the Graham Crosses. Arnold was now in the thick of events in East Africa, so that when the elder Crosses returned to Durban they took Violet and the two children back with them.⁵¹

The Crosses had a wide circle of friends all over South Africa, and as the war went on the load of anxiety for old friends as well as for their sons grew heavier. In February 1916 Mrs. Cross wrote to May:⁵² "We are so sad about Charlie Dugmore dying in Egypt; his mother will be in a way about him; & he was her right hand man, & looked after the farm for her. I must write to her, but don't in the least know what to say, that would be any help to her." On November the 5th she wrote:⁵³ "We were very pleased to hear that Violet had heard from

Arnold; she must be very anxious when she does not hear, though often I think 'No news may be good news', I begin to dread hearing the gate open in the evenings, for it seems to be in the evenings that most people down here get word of their boys being either wounded or dead, in France or elsewhere; still my one prayer is that my boys may be kept brave & very courageous, & that the dreadful catastrophe of being taken prisoner may never be theirs."

Although Mrs. Cross was as busy as she had ever been, with her house-keeping, her involvement in the activities of the church, and her open house hospitality, it seemed to her that time was empty, that life was just a waiting from one mail to the next. In a letter to Nurden and May she writes: "There is nothing much to write about at any time & as the English mail still keeps itself scarce there is even less than usual to write about this week."⁵⁴

Because of the war with its many calls on people's time and money, the work of the church suffered. Yet the annual letter in connection with the Thank-offering Day on October the 4th 1916, signed by the Pastor and Church Secretary,⁵⁵ is hopeful in tone. Referring to past Thankoffering Days as "not only days of generous giving but also of deep joy", the letter continues: "This forthcoming day should exceed all previous ones in joy, for on it we expect to bury for ever the debt which has rested on the Church Building and hampered the work since its commencement. Let us briefly review the case. The Church was opened twelve and a half years ago with a debt of about £1,800. No year passed since then without some lightening of this burden. Two years ago our debt stood at about £400. Then came the war ... with its incessant demand for more men and for unprecedented giving in aid of the families dependent on the men fighting for us, for war widows and orphans, for Belgium and France and Serbia ... The result on our plans was that we were not able to devote last year's Thankofferings to the debt as these had to go to current funds ... In order to wipe out the debt, liquidate the overdraft and provide for the work of the Church in the forthcoming year, we require £400."

In spite of the difficult circumstances this aim was achieved. The day concluded with a social gathering. The *Natal Mercury* reported: "The church was crowded in the evening, when with great joy the Pastor announced that a sum of £385 had been brought in, which was sufficient to pay off the whole of the remaining debt."⁵⁶ The report of the Executive to the Annual Assembly of the Baptist Union the following month congratulated Lambert Road "on their splendid achievement". It noted that "During the ministry of our revered brother the Rev. G. W. Cross a sum of £800 has been paid off the Church property, in addition to which a large classroom has been erected and paid for".⁵⁷ In addition to the improved financial position, 1916 also brought signs of spiritual awakening in the church.

The 37th Annual Assembly of the Baptist Union was held that year in Durban from November the 14th to the 22nd.⁵⁸ Inevitably this meant extra work for

both Mr. and Mrs. Cross. May wrote in some concern to her mother-in-law, asking just what it would entail. Mrs. Cross replied:⁵⁹ "Many thanks for your kind thought over the Union Meetings; I don't expect to have more to do than others, but all the same I wish they were well over; still perhaps it takes one's thoughts off other worries: knitting only helps thinking".

For the duration of the Assembly meetings, November the 14th to the 22nd, the Crosses were hosts to the Rev. and Mrs. J.E. Ennals of Johannesburg, dear friends with whom they had much in common. They were still at "Clonlea" when the long-dreaded telegram came, and their loving sympathy and practical help supported both parents in this crisis.

Havelock, out of consideration for his family, had given his address to the War Office in London as "c/o Alex Benson, Solicitor, Johannesburg", and it was to Benson that the official news of his death came: "2nd Lt. H.H. Cross Dublin Fusiliers was killed in action 13th November ..." Benson immediately passed the news on to Nurden in Pretoria, and he and Carson undertook the heavy task of informing their parents. It had to be done by telegram, and quickly, before the news reached them in some other way. Nurden sent the telegram off on the morning of November the 22nd (the last day of the Assembly meetings) with a prayer that his mother would not be alone at home when the telegram arrived.

His prayer was answered. A few days later his father wrote:⁶⁰

We concluded our Union Session about twelve that morning and sang our parting hymn:

'To serve or suffer as Thou wilt
Until Thy face we see'.

Mr. and Mrs. Ennals & myself came round home the top way from Bulwer Road and arrived about three minutes before Mother returned from the prayer-meeting. The Ennals saw me open the wire and knew at once. We agreed to keep it from her at any rate till after dinner. She with her beautiful courtesy of hospitality seemed to exert herself to lift a gloom which she probably attributed to exhaustion from the session which this time was rather more strifeful and jarring than usual. After dinner the Ennals left and attempted to excuse themselves from the evening meal on the ground that they were seeing lots of friends off by evening train ... She would not hear of it. I had business that must be done in town so took mother with me still in ignorance. We returned about 5 and were alone. I told her then. The shock was awful and her abandonment to grief for a while was terrible to see. By this time telegrams and letters were coming to the house. When the Ennals came back Mrs. Ennals just kissed her without a word. She got wonderful control of herself. She had said to me

just before we must not spoil our guests' holiday by our grief. I think it was providential we had such sympathetic friends with us. I have had little power to help and her beautiful thought for them gave her a courage which did not come to me. Two nights were very bad for her but last night she slept better. I think 100 letters & telegrams must have come. The kindness touches ones heart but it breaks one down too.

On the same day Mrs. Cross also wrote a short letter to Nurden and May:

... Father looks very bad and is so downhearted; you see this has come on him just as he was tired out with all the sessions and meetings. I am pleased to say that Mr. Ennals takes tomorrow night's service & Mr. Cooper the morning. We have had such a lot of wires and letters; people have been most kind; but oh I don't know what to do; sometimes it seems more than I can bear, & yet one must go on as usual & be pleasant – perhaps it is best so.⁶¹

Memorial services for Havelock were held on the Sunday following the receipt of the news of his death in the Lambert Road Church, the Pretoria Church,⁶² and the Rosebank Union Church in Johannesburg, of which he was a member.⁶³ Next day Ennals wrote to Nurden:⁶⁴ “They [Mr. and Mrs. Cross] have both borne up most bravely. It has cut deep with both & their thoughts are continually about Havelock, but they have both been able to talk about him & quite naturally too. In fact it has been a relief to them to speak I think. Your mother has never once prayed that he might be spared, your father says, feeling that she must trust to the Heavenly Father's love & that her boy's life might mean another's death ... Yesterday both Mr. and Mrs. Cross went to the church in the morning & evening ... I took the memorial service in the evening, & preached on Matt. 20 v. 28. Your father braced himself to read the names of the men at the front, but it was almost too much for him ...”

None of their family were able to be with them at this critical time, but Carson managed to get leave soon afterwards and went to Durban with Phyllis Spencer.⁶⁵ When he returned to Pretoria on December the 15th Phyllis stayed on for a while. On December the 10th Mrs. Cross wrote to Nurden: “We thought we might have heard from Havelock yesterday when the mail came in, but there was only a letter from my sister ... Father thinks we may yet hear, but I suppose it would not help now: oh my boy will never come home again: & still life must go on as usual & every little dreary duty be done; but I suppose it is best so.”

In December the whole Graham Cross family went to Durban for a holiday to be near Mr. and Mrs. Cross.⁶⁶ Nurden could not get leave until February, and he and May also planned to spend the time in Durban. Nurden was very anxious about his mother; and in January wrote to his father asking for explicit details about the state of her health and spirits.

Cross replied:⁶⁷

She has had a dreadful blow and it came at a time when she was physically a good deal exhausted. She dropped in weight to about 84 lbs, as light I think as she has ever been. I fear too her great clear faith suffered something of an eclipse. The mystery of evil seemed to blot out God. I am afraid I am a very poor comforter, but in this case I was powerless ... I never knew till now the awfulness of the pain of love for it is just her great love that visualizes her boy wounded & dying alone and brings to her very ears his "Mum, Mum".

On January the 18th Mrs. Cross wrote to May: "... much as we would like to have you here, I know it is much better for you to be at the Kowie. I can see that Durban does not suit Nurden; it is all right for Carson & he is quite energetic here, but Nurden is always tired and headachy here ... This morning Father had a letter from Nurden & from it I take it that Nurden is worrying about me: it is very good and kind of him to take such thought for his old mother, but there is no need to worry. I am much better & very much more reconciled to the loss of my laddie ... those letters from home and from France were a great comfort to me. I am sleeping all right now and would be all right if I could only get up a bit more enthusiasm into my everyday life and duty".⁶⁸

The letters from France included one from the Colonel of Havelock's regiment, one from the Senior Regimental Padre,⁶⁹ and one from a friend, Lt. W. M. Caldwell. The Colonel wrote on the 16th November: "It is with extreme regret I have to inform you that your son fell at the head of his platoon at about 6.15 a.m. on Monday morning last whilst gallantly leading his men against the enemy's first line system of trenches. He was killed by a machine gun bullet, death being instantaneous. His loss is keenly felt by all, more especially by me, as he was my Scout Officer, & one of my most capable officers. He was beloved by the men of his platoon ... We buried your son at 9 a.m. this morning at Knightsbridge Cemetery, Mesnil."

Havelock seems to have had a premonition of his death, for his friend Caldwell wrote:⁷⁰

Before he went into action he gave me your address and asked me to write to you ... I met him first at Cork on Feb 22nd, where we were together at a course of instruction and ever since we have been close friends; we were together in the Royal Barracks, Kilbride Camp, Pirbright, and in France almost invariably shared the same room. I hold him in highest regard and feel that I have lost one of my best friends ... He died a soldiers death and met his end bravely. He was wounded but continued on and very shortly afterwards was shot dead, death being instantaneous.

The Crosses went as usual to Pretoria for their annual holiday in March, with some hope that Arnold would be home by then on leave from East Africa.⁷¹ Arnold did indeed return to South Africa in March, but not immediately to his home. Like so many others he returned on a hospital ship, suffering not from wounds but from tropical disease. Durban could not cope with the influx of hospital ships which since December had been bringing seriously ill men from East Africa. Eventually only the most serious cases were taken off the ships in Durban, and the rest sent on to Cape Town. Arnold was one of these. He spent some time in Maitland Hospital,⁷² recovering from dysentery, far from his parents in Durban or his wife in Pretoria. It was May before he was home again with his family.⁷³ Fortunately he had a tough constitution, and suffered no permanent disability.

The war ground on. Sometimes it seemed as though there had never been a time when there was no war, and useless even to hope that it would ever end. The old happy, normal pre-1914 life was like a dream; the only reality was this interminable agony. For Mr. and Mrs. Cross the burden of their own grief was made the heavier by the deaths of other young men they knew: some from their own congregation, some sons of old friends, some close family relations in Ireland. The weight of sorrow numbed sensation: words of sympathy sounded empty and trite. There was nothing left to say.

Mrs. Cross kept up her regular correspondence with May. They are homely letters, full of little details of her domestic life, of the coming and going of friends, of family news. In May she wrote:⁷⁴

You are a very good girl to write so often & such nice long letters. We had a wire from Carson the other day telling us of his engagement to Phyllis Spencer & we are pleased it is settled at last, but I do not think any one would be taken by surprise ... We hope they may both be very happy & long spared to each other.

But in almost every letter there is reference to sorrow and loss:

I am truly sorry for Mr. Nottingham; I wonder how long these terrible times are to last.⁷⁵

We are so sorry for Mrs Tennant & family, it is very hard for her to lose two of her boys.⁷⁶

I had a letter from Lois Batts Thomson; her husband is in France since February & is in the front line.⁷⁷

In June the Arnold Cross family were on holiday in Durban,⁷⁸ and in August the Graham Crosses.⁷⁹ Carson spent Christmas with his parents.⁸⁰ On the 30th of December his mother wrote to May and Nurden: "You would hear of our very quiet Christmas from Carson; it was very good of him to come down and spend Christmas with us, especially as he had to leave his sweetheart to do so". The same letter carried the important news of "father's decision to leave

Lambert Road Church at the end of March, he then will have been five years here & I think the climate does not suit him. I consider that he could 'go further & fare worse', but then I am not a parson, etc. etc., only a very matter of fact female. I think if father had not tried to do heaps too much work for the church & the people he would have got more thanks & been less tired, but as I said before I am not a parson; well I suppose it all means another trek, but when or where we know not. Father seems better since he has given in his resignation & sleeps better ... he seems to think that by some he is not wanted at Lambert Road; he may be wrong in this, but thinking so, of course he is right to clear".⁸¹

A fortnight later Mrs. Cross wrote again to say that the church, having held a meeting, was unanimous in asking Mr. Cross to stay on and offering him an extra £50. "Father is reconsidering the matter but I think will stick to his first leading; he is not very well & can not be expected to work a church with the little help from his deacons that he has had ... perhaps when I write again Father will have made up his mind on the subject. I will let you all know as soon as I know. My idea would be for us to let our house furnished & go for a good long holiday; father thinks he might get preaching engagements in town here; I think he would be eagerly sought for at present in that way, but he must first have a rest ... he is far from well. He must too take his pension; it has been due to him for some time, but he would not take it, as he was working. I think it is £100 a year, so if he could get a little extra for preaching engagements we could scrape along somehow & be happy by ourselves, & no more 'At homes' thank goodness. Please keep my views among yourselves; I know they are not expressed as a parson's wife should express herself; but I get vexed when I see father working so hard – ill or well – with so little help".⁸²

In spite of the church's unanimous request to him to remain as their pastor Mr. Cross did not withdraw his resignation. He was very tired, and it is not surprising that early in February he fell victim to a kind of influenza which affected his throat and chest and left him very weak. On February the 10th Mrs. Cross wrote to Nurden: "I think he is on the mend: if he would only have patience & take things quietly, but you know what he is". It was not until February the 21st that he was able to write to May to congratulate her on the birth of her first child, born on February the 10th. The baby girl was named Mary Nurden, after her paternal great-grandmother. The same letter carried the news that Mrs. Cross was "very sick – utterly prostrate with the same kind of malady as she nursed me through ... The Doctor thinks it is a kind of influenza but in my case there was no temperature or pain, only prostration. I have called in a nurse who has had charge two days – and now I think there is an improvement. She is much worse than I was, having such head-aches and some neuralgia". The Durban weather did not help matters. He writes: "This place for 5 days since last Friday has been worse than the little hot house in the Botanic Gardens Grahamstown. If Dante's Inferno is any worse I won't go."⁸³

The nurse stayed for ten days; she left at the end of February, and the following day the house servant disappeared and never returned: a real hardship for two elderly people still recovering from influenza. However, a few days later Mrs. Cross was able to write to May: "An Indian man came to look for work, he had no papers, but we took him on a week's trial; he is not young, but so far has been a treat after my last experience. I went to church this morning and when I came back found the dinner splendidly cooked, the table very well laid, the serviettes done off like in an hotel & flowers arranged very nicely on the table; everything beautifully clean. I hope for some rest from housekeeping worry this month – if he stays. I am very down hearted at knocking up so & causing the extra expense we could so ill afford, but I could not help it".⁸⁴

The month of March was filled with "last things" – farewells, arrangements to be made about the house, windings-up and closing of accounts of Mr. Cross's numerous interests in Durban. A farewell social was held at the church on Wednesday March the 28th. It was reported in detail in the *South African Baptist*,⁸⁵ and while allowances must be made for a certain extravagance of language usual on such occasions, the overall impression left by the speakers is that Cross had indeed not spared himself in serving his own church or the welfare of Durban. In addition to several local Baptist ministers there were ministers there from other denominations. The Rev. G.H.P. Jacques, who represented the Durban Church Council, "referred in the highest terms to Mr. Cross's work as Secretary of the Council for the past three years, the multifarious duties of which position he had carried out with very great ability and extreme thoroughness, and with a display of more courage than any other man he had been privileged to know". In his response to all the speeches and the presentation of a purse of money Cross emphasised that "throughout his ministry he had endeavoured to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and to win the souls of his hearers".

At the last but one Sunday of the ministry in Lambert Road, harvest festival services were held in the church, with the intention of donating the produce to the local military hospitals. At the evening service Cross preached from the text: "The harvest is past, and the summer is ended and we are not saved".⁸⁶ The words from the prophet Jeremiah are fraught with a haunting regret and sense of failure. Cross was aware that the autumn of his life was upon him, that his days of sowing and reaping were nearly over. Had he failed in his ministry?

His last Sunday was Easter day, March the 31st. His text in the morning was from I Cor. 15:1 - 4, and his theme was the Gospel of the Risen Christ "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain".⁸⁷ In these words also there is an implicit warning which reflects back to the first sermon he preached in that church. Was Cross becoming more pessimistic as he grew older, or more realistic? Or did the oppressive sadness of the war, and the loss of his son, and his poor health obscure the light of God's love for him?

Whatever his own estimate of his work in Durban it was certainly not unappreciated by others. The Secretary of the Baptist Union (H.J. Batts) wrote in the *South African Baptist* of April 1918:⁸⁸ "The Rev. G.W. Cross has left Durban amid general expressions of regret. He has served his church and the community generally with rare devotion, and the influence of his work will abide. The only item of satisfaction in the matter of his going is that he will get the rest he needs, and Mrs. Cross equally with him".

Batts was a friend and colleague, and his words might be supposed to be biased. The same cannot be said of the tribute published in the *Natal Mercury*, which may stand as a fitting summary of the impact of Cross's ministry in Durban:⁸⁹

With the retirement from the active ministry of the Rev. G.W. Cross, the Baptist Church of South Africa will lose one of its very choicest men. For about forty years Mr. Cross has exercised a most fruitful ministry in this country. He is one of the most cultured and also deeply spiritual ministers of any denomination in the Union. His knowledge of literature is probably second to none in Durban. And he is a fine type of a Christian gentleman. A humble-minded, though gifted man, he has spent his whole ministry in exalting his Master and not himself. It has not been his to preach to the crowds, he has scorned to cultivate 'popular' gifts or to pander to present-day demands for short services. But people who have appreciated a spiritual ministry and are touched by the element of mysticism in religion, have found Mr. Cross's ministry a real benediction. Mr. Cross has been a true servant of Jesus Christ, who humbled himself and made himself of no reputation. During the past three and a half years Mr. and Mrs. Cross have regularly attended the midday prayer meeting at West Street, and in this way many outside Mr. Cross's congregation have been brought into contact with him ... Mr Cross has also been secretary of the Evangelical Church Council for several years, where his legal mind and wide knowledge have been invaluable. In all matters Mr. Cross has been worthily supported by his wife, who was evidently hewn out of the same rock. Much pleasure is felt at the prospect of Mr. and Mrs. Cross returning to Durban and settling in our midst.