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The Baptist Recorder

The Journal of the Baptist Historical Society of New South Wales

Next meeting:

It's almost time for the next address in our highly acclaimed "This is my life" series!

Next month we feature one of Australia's most popular Baptist personalities—Rev Alan Neate, with his wife Lillian.

A graduate of the NSW Baptist College, Alan served in churches in three states and was President of the Union in two of these.

Now retired, he is still as lively as a fire-cracker, and his inimitable cheerfulness and humour are as fine as ever.

When: Thursday 5 May
Where: Faculty Lounge, Morling College, 120 Herring Rd, Eastwood
Time: 7.30-9.00 pm

Open to everyone.
Supper included!

Alexander Gordon, M.A. **A Christian gentleman**

By Ron Rogers

The New South Wales Baptist College, now named Morling College, has a history of slightly less than ninety years, but already its founding Principal, Rev. Alexander Gordon, M.A., is almost forgotten.

There are probably several reasons for this. Eighty years, though a brief period in terms of history, is long enough for anyone who has not become a legend in his or her time to pass from living memory. Moreover, Principal Gordon's term of office was only five years and was almost totally eclipsed by the remarkable forty-year term of his successor, the Rev. George Henry Morling, O.B.E., M.A. In addition to those considerations, however, there was another factor that contributed to his being neglected. It was that Principal Gordon cut short his term of office by resigning and his resignation was in circumstances that many would not wish to remember.

This paper is written out of a conviction that he deserves better treatment. All available evidence supports the view that he was a greatly gifted man of absolute integrity. Dedicated to Christ, he strove for excellence in everything he did, and in that quest he would not compromise. In the formative days of the College he set the standards that ensured that the College motto, *Summa Supremo*, would continue to be a

consciously embraced ideal and not mere words.

Pastor at Egremont, England

At the time of writing it has been possible to discover little of his earliest days apart from the fact that he was born in Scotland and graduated from Glasgow University with a Master of Arts degree at the end of 1887. Like his famous Scottish Baptist namesake, Alexander Maclaren, he moved to England and pastored a church in a provincial city. While Maclaren was still at Manchester Gordon became pastor of the Egremont Church in Liverpool.

His call to the Egremont Church was according to some ideas of proper procedure a little unusual. A Church Meeting on 21 March 1888 had before it the business of deciding whom to call as pastor of the church. The Deacons reported that it had been decided to submit two names for the church to choose between. One was the Rev. Chas. F. Aked and the other Mr. Alexander Gordon, M.A. of Glasgow. It was reported that both were "very able men, very acceptable preachers and thoroughly evangelical in their doctrines."

The meeting was faced with two problems. One was that notice of the meeting had not been given on the two previous Sundays as

required by the church's Trust Deed. The other was that the same Trust Deed allowed only those who had been members of the church for the previous 12 months to vote in an election.

Just over a year previously, on 23 February 1887, the church had changed from being a closed membership to an open membership church, and during the year there had been an influx of members. Most of them, therefore, were not eligible to vote. So it was resolved that a test vote be taken of all members on the Church Roll, and for this purpose ballot papers were to be sent to all of them. The name receiving the highest number of votes was to be submitted to a properly constituted Church Meeting on 4 April.

When the church met the ballot papers were counted and it was reported that Alexander Gordon had received 47 votes and Charles Aked 37.

The Secretary then moved "That this meeting recognising the ability and earnestness of the Rev. Alex Gordon as a preacher of the Gospel desires to invite him to become the Pastor of this church and requests the deacons to take the necessary steps to that end." A ballot of the eligible members was taken and the motion was sustained by twenty-four votes to two. Charles Aked subsequently went to the United States of America, becoming the pastor of the prestigious Fifth Avenue Baptist Church, New York, and a leading preacher.

Alexander Gordon accepted the Egremont invitation, his membership was transferred from the Adelaide Street Baptist Church, Glasgow and he commenced his ministry on 6 May 1888. He found a partner to share his ministry when on 18 September 1889 he married a sister of the noted Congregationalist scholar, Rev. Dr. A.E. Garvie.

His pastorate of more than twelve years was happy and successful, clouded only by his uncertain health. The church membership more than doubled, land was purchased, a new church building erected and later a school and lecture hall. A monthly "Messenger" of which a thousand copies were circulated in the district began. Christian Endeavour Societies, then in their earliest days, were commenced, as were also a Young Men's Gymnasium and a Young Ladies' Gymnasium.

Throughout his ministry he experienced health problems. He spent the winter of 1892/3 making a trip to Egypt and returned somewhat recovered in health. A couple of years later he spent the winter in the Canary Islands, again with beneficial results. However, in 1899 he was far from well and on medical advice the church granted him leave of absence. Not long

after in the summer of 1900 he decided to seek a pastorate in New Zealand hoping that the change of climate would bring complete restoration.

His final Sunday at Egremont was 23 September and on that day he baptised twenty-seven candidates, many of them young people who had grown up under his ministry. The church had grown to 250 members and was in good heart. The people there never forgot him and his wife. As reported in *The Southern Baptist* of 12 February 1902, members of his Bible-class at Egremont had sent him Christmas greetings together with a substantial cheque. At the time he was in Melbourne filling in at Armadale Baptist Church. The Editor commented, "Considering that it is now over eighteen months since Mr. Gordon resigned his charge at Liverpool, such a remembrance speaks volumes."

Then, when he and his wife celebrated their Silver Wedding Anniversary while at the Armadale Church in Victoria, warm greetings were sent to them. Subsequently, when the Gordons returned for a period to England, it was Liverpool that they made their headquarters.

To New Zealand

For some time New Zealand Baptists had been sending out a 'Macedonian call' to British Baptist ministers to come out and help them. Perhaps Alexander Gordon was influenced by this but it is also true that, at that time, many of his fellow countrymen were deciding to venture out to 'the land of the long white cloud.'

At all events, in the closing months of 1900 the Gordons journeyed to the southern part of the South Island of New Zealand and became for a brief period 'neighbours' to Rev. F.W. Boreham, who was then the pastor of the Mosgiel Baptist Church. Boreham, who was to become a household name throughout the English-speaking Christian world, would subsequently succeed Alexander Gordon as pastor of the Armadale Baptist Church in Melbourne.

Obviously the long sea voyage worked wonders for Alexander Gordon's health for, on 8 January 1901, the Secretary of the Egremont Church received the following cablegram:

Dunedin 7/1 "Harrop, Cable Street, Liverpool. Robust. Returning March. Egremont—if vacant submit my name. Gordon."

As it happened, just one day previously the Deacons had agreed unanimously to recommend another man as pastor. The Secretary called the Deacons together to consider their former pastor's cable, but "after long and earnest discussion it was unanimously resolved . . . not to recommend the church to consider Mr. Gordon's application, as they were of the opinion that it

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was neither good for him nor for the church that he should return to Egremont.”

Hanover Street Baptist Church was the leading Baptist church in Presbyterian Dunedin. In 1900 the notable 18-year ministry of Rev. Alfred North came to a close. Although a number of branch churches had been started, the church still had about 500 members. Alexander Gordon became its pastor, but because of ill health his pastorate was very brief. However, he must have made an impression for late in 1902, after he had left New Zealand, the Nelson Baptist Church—the oldest and one of the most influential Baptist churches in the island dominion—gave him a unanimous call to be its pastor. The call was declined.

Pastor at Armadale, Victoria

In Melbourne in 1898, under the inspiring leadership of Rev. Samuel Chapman, the Collins Street Baptist Church commenced the Armadale Baptist Church and brought Rev. A.N. Marshall, B.A. from Toronto, Canada, as its first pastor.

After a ministry of three years, A.N. Marshall was followed by Rev. Alexander Gordon, M.A. It is not clear whether in the meantime the latter had made his promised return visit to England or had remained in New Zealand. F.J. Wilkin, in his *Baptists in Victoria*, speaks of Gordon having come “recently from Liverpool” to Victoria, but he may not have deemed it necessary to mention his relatively brief period of ministry in New Zealand.

On the other hand, the fact that at Christmas the Egremont Bible Class sent the Gordons, along with their greetings, a substantial cheque might suggest that the recipients had been all the time in straitened circumstances in a strange land. What is certain is that for three months he preached for the Armadale church and then in 1902 received a unanimous call to be its pastor.

His ministry proper began on Sunday 4 May. *The Southern Baptist* of 14 May carried an account of his commencement. Of his evening sermon on “The One Talented People,” it commented, “This was indeed a crowning sermon, powerful in quietness, impressive in earnestness, and it concluded with great emphasis on decision ‘now.’” A reception and public welcome was held on Tuesday 6 May, with Rev. S. Pearce Carey, M.A., as Chairman.

And a Baptist leader

Alexander Gordon quickly made his mark in Victoria. Following the resignation and return to England of Principal W.T. Whitley, the Victorian Baptist Theological College lapsed for two years. In 1903 it recommenced under four part-time tutors, among them Gordon. When the first Australasian Baptist Congress was held

in Sydney in September 1908, Gordon was not only one of the Victorian representatives but also made a major contribution to the proceedings.

One of the principal matters for consideration was the desirability of establishing uniform standards of ministerial training. The position paper was prepared and presented by Alexander Gordon. It was well-informed, balanced, perceptive and far-sighted. He summed up the existing situation and proposed a first-class blueprint for the future.

In the official proceedings of the Congress, Gordon contributed the Victorian response. It had originally appeared as the Guest Editorial in the October issue of *The Baptist*, the NSW monthly paper. As subsequent events proved, he was unduly optimistic about the move toward united action by the Baptists of Australia and New Zealand, but there could be no doubting his commitment to and enthusiasm for closer fraternal bonds between Baptists.

The former New Zealand neighbours, Boreham and Gordon, according to the former when speaking at Armadale’s jubilee celebrations, met next on New Year’s Day 1908 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, where “we watched the first and most exciting Test match I ever saw.”

Meanwhile, the Armadale church had greatly prospered under Gordon’s ministry, and his spiritual qualities and ability were so widely recognised that at the Assembly Meetings of 1910 he was elected President of the Baptist Union of Victoria.

It was a further mark of the place he had won in the esteem of his contemporaries that, when the Second Australasian Baptist Congress convened in Melbourne on 29 March 1911, it was Alexander Gordon who, in its opening session, was elected its President. His earlier enthusiasm for unity was undiminished, for the official proceedings record that “The key-note of the Congress was struck by the President in his masterly address on ‘All one in Christ.’” In his address, Gordon frankly recognised the diversity of Australasian Baptists, but greatly desired to promote their unity. He sought unity both as an expression of our common life in Christ and as a condition of effective evangelism.

In the light of subsequent events, it is of interest that later in the same year Gordon attended the Baptist Congress in Philadelphia, USA, and returned “filled with excitement at ‘the magnificent buildings of the colleges’ he saw there.” He was disappointed that he was unable to inspire Victorian Baptists to do more than plan to erect a modest building in the course of the next five years. A few years later that disappointment was compounded when his hopes for a

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worthy college in NSW were dashed.

It was about this time that the Literature Committee of the Baptist Union of Victoria issued a book, *Baptists and Baptism*. It was edited by Principal W.H. Holdsworth, M.A. of the Baptist College of Victoria. In his introduction the Principal said that it was “written in response to an appeal for a clear statement of our distinctive denominational principles.” Two of its six chapters were supplied by Alexander Gordon. He wrote on “Baptism and circumcision” and “Family baptism: Is it scriptural?” It is of interest that at one point he quoted with approval an interpretation of his Paedobaptist brother-in-law, Principal A.E. Garvie.

Clearly by this time he had become well known beyond the borders of Victoria. In particular he was forming links with New South Wales. *The Australian Baptist* of 1 July 1913 reported that he and his daughter had been spending a holiday in New South Wales and commented, “It was a pleasure to N.S.W. friends to find Mr. Gordon in such good health.” A year later he would be found on holiday at Blackheath. At the time Enos Coleman, later to be a student of Alexander Gordon and brother-in-law of George Morling, was serving a probationary period as pastor of the Blackheath Church. Later he, like Gordon, would leave the Baptist ministry.

Earlier in 1914, when Rev. F.C. Spurr, President of the Baptist Union of Victoria, had resigned and returned to England, Alexander Gordon had been elected President for a second time. At the Victorian College Commencement Service he gave the Commemoration Address on “The Christian Ministry.” It was a splendid utterance ideally suited to the occasion and was reproduced in full in *The Australian Baptist* of 24 March.

Throughout his ministry at Armadale he had maintained his involvement in theological education. In this connection there was an interesting article in *The Australian Baptist* by Rev. C. J. Tinsley. It began with a confession. “I was not always”, he wrote, “an admirer of the Victorian Baptist College, neither was I an advocate of its claims ... I was unsympathetic, nay, even antagonistic.” He went on to allow that in part his attitude may have been influenced by loyalty to Spurgeon’s Pastors’ College where he had trained. However, he now confessed,

My viewpoint has been vitally altered and I find myself undergoing a radical conversion. Not that I love the old College less. My relations are as cordial as ever. But I have learned to love the Melbourne College more, and to recognise its value and immense potentialities.

He accounted for the change in attitude thus:

The able and self-sacrificing work of men like the Rev. A. Gordon, Principal Holdsworth, Rev. F.J. Wilkin and Rev. F. W. Norwood, have gradually brought the College into a position of commanding influence.

The Australian Baptist of 23 June 1914 carried a report of the 16th Anniversary of the Armadale Baptist Church. There are glowing references to its pastor and an announcement that its very imposing property is now free of debt.

Not all was well, however, for Alexander Gordon. His wife did not enjoy good health and *The Australian Baptist* of 25 August reported that, owing to her serious indisposition, he would be unable as President of the Victorian Union to attend the Federal Board of Missions and the Interstate Board in Adelaide. Happily she made good progress and was able to share in the celebration of their Silver Wedding Anniversary on 18 September. In the light of subsequent events it may be significant that the NSW Annual Assembly sent congratulations to the happy couple.

As Alexander Gordon was moving to the end of his Presidential term, war broke out in Europe. As one from the ‘Old Country’ it was doubtless felt to be appropriate that at the Victorian Assembly he should move a patriotic motion. Having laid aside his Presidential responsibilities he was able to apply himself more fully to his pastoral work at Armadale. Before long, however, his ministry took a new direction.

Founding Principal of the NSW Baptist College

When W.H. Holdsworth was appointed Principal of the Victorian College in 1911 there was an expectation that it would become a Federal College, serving the whole continent. Indeed it acted in this capacity, accepting ministerial candidates from New South Wales without payment of fees. As time went by, a variety of factors made the achievement of the goal in the foreseeable future impossible.

With the Melbourne College becoming a purely State College, the Executive Committee of the Baptist Union of NSW, at its meeting on 8 June 1915, had a letter before it from the Victorian Union calling attention to the necessity for a consideration of future arrangements for the education of NSW students. When it realised that in future it would be costly to send students to Victoria it was decided to call a joint meeting of the Executive and the Education Committee to consider the situation.

From this point events took place with startling rapidity. At a meeting of the Council of the Union on 3 August Mr R.J. Middleton, M.A., Secretary of the Education Committee, pre-

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sented a proposal for the establishing of a New South Wales Baptist College. His report was adopted without dissent and the Committee was directed to present a detailed scheme to the forthcoming Assembly.

In the Assembly session of 24 September the proposal was submitted. With only minor amendments the Constitution of "The Baptist College of N.S.W." was adopted. Rev. C.J. Tinsley then moved that Rev. Alexander Gordon, M.A., be appointed as Principal for three years, the term to begin on 1 February 1916. Seconded by Rev. R. Goodman and supported by Rev. B. Gawthrop, the motion was carried unanimously.

In the same session Rev. A.J. Waldock noted that 1918 would be the Jubilee of the Baptist Union of NSW, and successfully moved the appointment of a Jubilee Committee. At a later time this move would have unforeseen repercussions. At the Union Council meeting on 9 November a letter was read from Alexander Gordon accepting the position as Principal of the College. There was also a letter from Principal Holdsworth of the Victorian College expressing earnest wishes for the success of the NSW College.

Gordon's decision to leave Armadale, and pastoral ministry, could not have been easy. The church had greatly prospered under his leadership. His preaching was not as dynamic as that of his predecessor, but Dr. F.J. Wilkin, in his history of the first hundred years of Baptist witness in Victoria, wrote,

Mr. Gordon's sermons, preached in a quiet arresting manner were full of thought and calculated to lead to a strong spiritual life. The Church continued to prosper in every department ... After a happy successful ministry of thirteen years Mr. Gordon was elected to the principalship of the Baptist Theological College of N.S.W.

He added,

Though greatly grieved at the thought of losing him, the Church recognised in his scholarship, spirituality and teaching ability Mr. Gordon's eminent fitness for his new sphere.

The Australian Baptist of 7 December recorded the resolution passed by the Victorian Baptist College Committee. It read, in part,

This Committee heartily congratulates the Rev. A. Gordon, M. A., on his appointment to the Principalship of the N.S.W. Baptist College. It also congratulates the Union of that State on securing the services of one so eminently qualified by

scholarship, vision and disposition ... The Committee places on record its high appreciation of the valuable services rendered to the College by Mr. Gordon.

During a period of thirteen years he has been an able member of the Committee; he has also served as College Secretary, and tutor in Apologetics and New Testament Exegesis. His wise counsel and high educational aims have left a permanent impress on the policy and future of the College...

In the report of his farewell at Armadale, reported in *The Australian Baptist* of 4 January 1916, there was included a tremendously impressive tribute to him. The church subsequently named its new hall in his honour.

Incidentally his friends at Egremont Baptist Church also maintained a lively interest in his affairs and sent greetings to him on his new appointment.

Arrival in Sydney and welcome

Principal and Mrs. Gordon arrived in Sydney on 13 January and were welcomed by representatives of the Union. They were given some opportunity to establish themselves in their new environment and then on 29 February a reception was held for them in the Bathurst Street Church hall. Invitations had been sent to the ministers and-officers of the churches and there was a large response. Rev. A.J. Waldock, first President of the College Council, spoke words of welcome on its behalf. Other addresses of welcome were by Mr. J.A. Packer, President of the Baptist Union, Rev. S. Sharp, on behalf of the Ministers' Fraternal, and Pastor J. Latimer, on behalf of those who were soon to be College students.

Two days later at the Concord Church Principal Gordon gave 'the charge to the church' at the ordination of Pastor T. McDougall. 'The charge to the minister' was given by Stanmore pastor, Rev. C.J. Tinsley.

On 14 March, in the Harris Street Church, a Public Welcome to Principal Gordon was combined with the official opening of the Baptist College of N.S.W, Mr. J.A. Packer, President of the Union, engaged in some seemingly derogatory remarks about academic degrees. In this he may well have been reflecting the opinions of some NSW Baptists. However, fine tributes were paid to the new Principal, and there were enthusiastic anticipations of the influence of the College on the Union. Greetings to the new College and its Principal were given by Principal Holdsworth of the Victorian Baptist College, Principal Thatcher of Camden College and Principal Bennett of Leigh College. Principal Harper of St Andrew's Divinity Hall was un-

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avoidably absent and sent an apology. It was an encouraging beginning.

His work at the College and the denomination

The College was, at that time, non-residential, lectures being held in what one of the first small group of students called “the gloom and grime” of the school hall of the Harris Street Baptist Church. If his report to the 1916 Assembly is any indication, the surroundings had no ill effect on Alexander Gordon. He wrote,

This is my first report. With feelings of pleasure, yet chastened by the sense of responsibility, I took up the work to which, in the Providence of God, you called me. The character and the vital importance of the work appealed to me. For, humanly speaking, the future of any denomination lies in the quality of its ministry. A well-trained and spiritual ministry is a great asset. The beginning of the College last March was not an experiment. You believed the hour had struck. You heard the clear call of God. On my part, I believed that the Divine summons had come to me.

After commenting on the studies, the staff and the students he added,

These facts should thrill the Assembly. We are out to train preachers – those whom God has called, and to whom He has granted gifts – preachers with visions of the greatness and glory and power of the everlasting Gospel. We desire the College to secure an outstanding reputation on this basis.

His annual reports still make stimulating reading.

Not surprisingly when the Half-Yearly Meetings of the Union were held at Burwood on 11 April, the Principal was one of the speakers. Rev. W. Higlett, the Secretary of the Union, noted in his diary, “Disappointed with Mr. Packer’s address but Gordon good and helpful.”

Because of the war that was raging United Intercourse Services were held. The Australian Baptist of 2 May informed its readers that Principal Gordon represented the Baptist Union and presided at such a service in the Pitt Street Congregational Church. This was of no special significance, but Mrs. Gordon had been a Congregationalist and subsequently the Principal would find himself being increasingly drawn into association with the Congregational Union.

Rev. W. Higlett, pastor of the Haberfield Church and Secretary of the NSW Baptist Union, quickly recognised in Alexander Gordon a kindred spirit. Both men were passionately

committed to the Gospel of Christ, but their sympathies were broad and they were hospitable to new ideas and approaches. When Haberfield installed new seating it marked the event with a special service. The Principal was the chosen speaker giving, as his friend noted in his diary “a fine address on ‘I will fill this house with glory’.” From time to time subsequently he would be invited back to fill the pulpit at Haberfield.

The students at the College were well satisfied with their Principal. They declared this by carrying enthusiastically a resolution framed by student George Morling, later to be his colleague and later still to be his successor. It ran,

At the conclusion of the first term of the inaugural session of the Baptist College of N.S.W. the students express their appreciation of the lectures delivered by the Principal, not only for the ripe scholarship which has marked them but also because of the fervent spirituality and the intense loyalty to Christ which has made them an inspiration in the Christian life and an incentive to faithful work in the high calling of the ministry.

The Great War, already two years old, did not leave the Gordon family untouched. *The Australian Baptist* of 8 August noted that Principal Gordon’s son, Mr. Rob. Gordon, expected to leave Melbourne for the front at the end of the next week.

Three weeks later, in the same paper, the guest editorial, “An Efficient Ministry,” was written by the Principal. It was favourably received, and during his term as Principal and beyond he was to be a frequent and much appreciated contributor to the columns of the denominational paper.

At the Assembly great satisfaction was expressed about the progress of the College, and warm-hearted tributes were paid to its Principal. The paragraph on him in the Report of the College Council said:

The College Council desires to make special reference to their appreciation of and complete confidence in our beloved Principal. We believe he is a man sent from God. His passion for Christ and his enthusiastic advocacy of ‘the best for the highest’ are contagious, and we thank God for what the Principal has brought us to see of the importance and privilege of giving our students the best possible training for this chief of all vocations the ministry of the Gospel.

Alexander Gordon was a committed churchman. In addition to his primary responsibility as Principal and all the committee work that that involved he sought to be available to the

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churches. He was much in demand as a preacher and in other capacities. During the latter part of 1916 he served as the interim moderator of the pastorless Burwood Church. In his preaching he was never more at home or more effective than when he was preaching to his fellow ministers. A fine example of this preaching is provided by his ordination charge, "The Ministry and the Man," which appeared in *The Australian Baptist* on 7 November 1916.

A note in the diary of Rev. W. Higlett on 28 November may have significance for later events. He wrote, "At night to Preachers' Society which is out of harmony with A.J. Waldock and others." Almost certainly Mr. Higlett attended the meeting as Secretary of the Union to listen to their concerns. At that stage the Principal may not have been included in the 'others' but later, he would be linked with A.J. Waldock, the Home Mission Superintendent, as being suspected by some of not fully conforming to the ethos of NSW Baptists. From the very beginning Waldock regularly lectured at the College and was President of the College Council and so any misgivings concerning him might easily be transferred to the Principal. It was perhaps unfortunate that Rev. C.J. Tinsley of Stanmore, at least in the early stages, was prevented by ill health from sharing in the lecturing program.

Principal Gordon continued to be encouraged in the work of the College, presenting his second report to the 1917 Assembly "with thankfulness to God." In it he sought to encourage and challenge his fellow Baptists as the following extracts sufficiently show,

let it be recorded that we have a splendid set of students. They are true men, fired with visions of the great calling with which Christ has honoured them. They are passionately evangelical. They work hard. It is a pleasure to witness their zeal. ... However varied the subjects studied all the work is saturated with a single purpose - the training of men so that they shall go forth thoroughly furnished, wise and able exponents of the Word of God, constrained by the grandeur and power of the Gospel.. Upon this the reputation of the College must rest.

What work could rank higher than this! It is second to none in vital importance. It affects the entire denomination. Humanly speaking, the future lies in the quality of the ministry. It is therefore true statesmanship to concentrate energy and resources and prayer upon the College, to make sacrifices on its behalf, to sow a good harvest, so that coming generations shall look back with gratitude and salute faith's foresight.

The Jubilee Fund

There can be little room for doubt that in that concluding paragraph Alexander Gordon was motivated by his knowledge that at an earlier time a sum of somewhat more than £50,000 had been raised through the Victorian Baptist Fund and that the Melbourne College had been a major beneficiary. Now he hoped that the NSW Jubilee Fund would do the same for the Sydney College. As things turned out this would not be and it would be a crushing disappointment to him.

The background was this. At the meeting of the Council of the Baptist Union of NSW on 6 February 1917 the Committee, previously set up to arrange the celebration of the Jubilee of the Baptist Union, submitted *inter alia* a proposal for the raising of £10,000 for the endowment of a Baptist College. Then at the Council meeting on 7 July 1917 it was agreed to recommend to Assembly an ambitious scheme for the erection of a Church House (Union Headquarters) in Bathurst Street. The Assembly in September accepted the scheme. During the same Assembly the Secretary presented the report of the Jubilee Committee and with an amendment it was unanimously adopted. The addendum, moved by Mr. William White of Stanmore, was:

That the Jubilee Fund and the Baptist Church House scheme be amalgamated and that at least £10,000 be raised on the understanding that the College Fund benefits permanently from the funds of the Church House.

The amendment could be seen as an attempt to finance the Church House by climbing on the back of the Jubilee Fund while supposedly safeguarding the College interest. As it turned out it was the kiss of death to both projects.

The Principal was again at Haberfield on 11 November and its pastor noted, "Principal Gordon preached a fine sermon on Priesthood. It was refreshing to me."

With the beginning of the 1918 session the focus of interest was on the College and its Principal. *The Australian Baptist* of 5 March featured on its front page 'Impressions of the College' by the President of the NSW Union, Mr. J.H. Burnett, and some others. High praise was heaped on the Principal. In the same issue there was included another of his ordination sermons, "The Honourable Calling." It was the sermon he preached at the ordination of George Morling. Further tributes appeared a fortnight later.

Broad sympathies and interests

Prompted in part by the national situation, the South Australian Baptist Union was giving consideration to the desirability of closer ties, even

to sow a good harvest, so that coming generations shall look back with gratitude and salute faith's foresight.

union, with Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Not willing to take unilateral action it approached the other Unions seeking their reactions. Such a project had no appeal for most NSW Baptists but it was felt necessary to frame a resolution that was sensitive to the South Australian move and yet was firm in its statement of the NSW position.

Rev. W. Higlett noted in his diary on 24 June, "Saw Gordon re Church Union resolution." It was a wise and understandable move for the Principal had sound judgment and sensitivity if little sympathy with the NSW position.

In August he was one of three NSW representatives at the Australian Baptist interstate Board in Melbourne. At the Board he moved two important motions. One concerned a newly constituted Federal Home Missions Board. It was to the effect that the Board should respect the autonomy of the various State Unions and should proceed immediately to commence work in areas of the Commonwealth outside their scope. It might also undertake work committed to it by the State Unions.

The other motion was that an Interstate Educational Committee, consisting of one member from each State, be appointed for consultation and co-operation in all matters affecting the training of ministers. It is probably to be regretted that the letter Committee eventually lapsed. The Interstate Board appointed Principal Gordon to a committee to report on the settlement and transfer of ministers between the States. It was just as well that the NSW Union at its Assembly soon after re-appointed him to the Australian Baptist Interstate Board.

Just before the Assembly, on 15 September, he again preached at Haberfield, the pastor taking special meetings at Dungog-Thalaba, where George and Gladys Morling, whom he had married, were staying.

At the 1918 Assembly the Principal's report was rather longer than in the two previous years. He clearly had some things that he wanted to say to his fellow Baptists as may appear from the lengthy extracts here included:

Each year has justified the conviction that the College sprang into being at the imperative call of God. It is wise, therefore, to remind ourselves of our primal ideals. The College expresses concretely our high estimate of duty to those whom Christ has summoned to the Christian ministry and to the associated churches. It is an inspired endeavour to secure that young men shall not only say, "Here am I; send me," but shall go forth well prepared, on the sacred ground that Christ is worthy of the best, and that the ministry

demands it. The inspired word of God in all its length and breadth and height and depth is the Text-book, the aim being that students shall be trained in right principles for understanding it, and in developing the power of faithful exposition.

The ideal of ministerial training is that in the ministry there should be room for diversities of gifts, and every man should have the opportunity of gaining the most thorough preparation along the line of his special gifts. I proceed on this ideal and endeavour, in each case, to shape the trend of study in such a way as shall prove most profitable.

The College is not a mould but a living school with the object of developing distinct personality in the ministry. At the same time the goal is one – the proclamation of the Gospel in all its grandeur and a burning enthusiasm for the extension of the Kingdom.

Anyone familiar with theological education will be able to read in the foregoing an answer to common criticisms. Something else lay behind another paragraph:

One has to be in the College, coming regularly into contact with the students, to fully appreciate the valuable influence of the College upon the students and their steady progress. In this matter, I would suggest that when information is desired, brethren follow the natural and proper course of consulting either the College President or myself [The College President at the time was Rev. A.J. Walldock].

In yet another paragraph there may be reflected a mistrust of the Principal on the part of some. He wrote:

I would also acknowledge the generous confidence with which the College Council surrounds me in my responsible position. No man could do his best except in an atmosphere of trust and loyalty and it is always a matter of earnest thankfulness to God that this is the atmosphere of the Council. The members are of one heart and one mind in their endeavours to realise the ideals of our College.

The closing paragraph of the report contained a definite and deliberate apologia for the College. The Principal acknowledged that he was doing more than merely reporting on past activities and went on to say,

My justification is that the College does not naturally come prominently before the

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churches except on two occasions of the year. Yet its importance can scarcely be exaggerated. All intimately engaged in it feel keenly the responsibility. The work is arduous, complex and far-reaching. It is fundamental to all other undertakings. I would therefore enlist the practical sympathy of all. All can help by unceasing prayer that Christ would thrust forth men of His own choice and that the Presence and Power of the Spirit may rest upon the College.

Our motto is 'The best for the highest'; beside this may be placed, 'This one thing'—one purpose, one organised, intelligent, spiritual aim—the training of men so that they shall go forth with the highest spiritual ideals of the Christian ministry, faithful exponents of the Word, enthralled by the unsearchable riches of Christ, glorying in His gospel as the power of God unto salvation. This is my aim; and, therefore, in submitting my report, I confidently place it before you as expressive of that aim.

Reappointment as Principal

The Principal's Report would have been in the hands of the delegates before the Assembly and doubtless there were those who discerned its drift. At all events the Assembly clearly wanted to encourage and affirm him for the minutes read, "The Principal on rising to read his report was received with prolonged applause."

After he had given the report it was moved by Mr. J.H. Burnet, seconded by Mr. W. White, and enthusiastically carried that "This Assembly desires to place on record its high appreciation of the splendid services rendered to the Denomination by the Rev. Principal Gordon, M. A.; expresses its unabated confidence in him and hereby reappoints him to be Principal of the College for a further period of three years."

However, there was further evidence in the Assembly that there was an undercurrent running against the Principal's hopes for the development of the College. This came to the surface when Rev. W. Higlett moved that the resolution of the last Assembly providing for the amalgamation of the Church House and College Endowment (Jubilee) Funds be rescinded. Mr. J.A. Packer moved as an amendment that the resolution along with the adoption of the Jubilee Committee's report by the 1917 Assembly be rescinded. This amendment was carried.

The effect of this was to clear the decks completely so Mr. Higlett then moved "that the Assembly now take steps for the raising of a fund of ten thousand pounds for the endowment of the College." An amendment moved by Mr. W.

White and seconded by Mr. J.A. Packer was that the consideration of the endowment for the College be deferred for twelve months. After discussion both this second motion and the amendment were withdrawn. This left the College Endowment Fund in limbo, doubtless much to the disappointment and even distress of Principal Gordon.

Later in the Assembly there was a motion concerning discussions with the Associated Churches of Christ. The Principal contributed to the debate and found himself appointed to a committee to have a conference with representatives of the Churches of Christ and also to open discussions with the Particular and Strict Baptist churches. To add to his responsibilities he was also elected as one of the Baptist representatives on the Council of Civic and Moral Advancement.

During the Assembly there was an Ordination Service. One of the ordinands, Pastor Donovan F. Mitchell, failed to attend. In the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting of 5 November it is recorded, "Bro. Gordon explained that he had specially urged Mr. Mitchell's presence. He could have come from Wentworth Falls where he was on honeymoon. The Secretary was directed to express displeasure of the Committee at Mr. Mitchell's disregard of the arrangements of the Union." It should be noted in extenuation of Mr. Mitchell's action that he had enlisted and could have been called away at any moment. The Committee, however, showed that it had some of the milk of human kindness in its veins, for it decided to hold a special ordination for Pastor Mitchell in his church at Hornsby, with Principal Gordon to give the charge to him and Rev. J. Barker to the church. Donovan Mitchell, spared overseas service by the cessation of hostilities, became an outstanding pastor serving in several most significant churches though, like his Principal, later leaving the Baptist ministry.

A little earlier in the October meeting of the College Council there had been an interesting development. The new President of the Council, Rev. C.J. Tinsley, proposed the holding of a College Dinner. It was held in Sergeants Cafe, Market Street, on 21 November with Mr. W. Buckingham, as host, meeting the total cost. At the Dinner the financial needs of the College for the coming year were presented and a total of £500 was promised. For many years following, this became the pattern, though the Dinner was moved to March which was designated College Month. There must have been some encouragement in this for the Principal and he would gladly have moved the vote of thanks to the host for the evening. The latter must have felt duly thanked and responded by providing a

he was also elected as one of the Baptist representatives on the Council of Civic and Moral Advancement

launch picnic for the College Council, past and present students and their wives or 'lady friends' on 13 March, the day of the College Commencement Service.

The Australian Baptist of 25 February 1919 reported that Sgt. A.R. Gordon, son of Principal Gordon, was expected home from Egypt in a couple of months. In fact it would not be till August that, to the great joy of his parents, he would arrive home safe and well. In the course of 1919 a series of articles by the Principal under the heading, "Quality Counts," appeared in *The Australian Baptist*.

One of the extra tasks that fell to Alexander Gordon in the middle part of 1919 was to head up a committee enquiring into the relationship of Associations to the Union and into their operations. In this connection he drew up By-laws on District Associations to come before the Assembly.

In August he went to Adelaide as a NSW delegate to the Australian Baptist Conference. At the Annual Meeting of the Australian Baptist Interstate Board that followed the Conference he was elected Chairman of the Board for the ensuing year. He presented to the Board a report on the settlement and transfer of ministers between the various States and successfully moved the resolution that such matters be handled through the Advisory Boards of the States. In this connection he had anticipated the decision by bringing forward to the NSW Executive Committee of 8 July a notice of motion for the next Assembly to introduce a By-law to establish an Advisory Committee for pastoral change and settlement and to help in cases of difficulty in churches.

An account of the Assembly proceedings appeared in *The Australian Baptist* of 30 September. Of the College session it was reported,

The work of the College seemed a matter of great concern, noting the attendance and attention. If there is a denominational work that is becoming increasingly popular, and ought rightly to become so, it is the College.

The account that followed was full of praise for the College and its Principal. Of him it was said, "The marvel to many of us is that he has not broken down under the strain long ago. But he's from hardy Scotland."

The Principal's Report presented to the Assembly was just that, an account of the life of the College during the previous year. Of special interest was the fact that he had commenced evening classes for the benefit of the churches. Those classes, and the College program generally, had been seriously affected by the influenza epidemic that followed on the heels of the war.

However, there had been an average attendance of fifteen and there were great hopes for the future. According to the Principal those who attended were eager and diligent and it was a pleasure to teach them.

Another matter must have given satisfaction to the hard-worked Principal. At that time the students were required to take some subjects at Sydney University. Alexander Gordon reported,

Professor Woods, of the University, in a recent letter to me said, 'I think you would like to know how the matter appears from our point of view. I am somewhat amazed by this appearance of a group of theological students among the best of our scholars.'

Several of that group of men were intellectually brilliant. It is a pity to have to record that almost every one of them left the ranks of Baptist ministers.

The difficulties under which the College operated were highlighted by a reference to a gift of 74 books by the well-to-do Baptist, Hugh Dixon. This was said to lay the foundation for a College library.

After the report had been received an expression of thanks to the Principal was moved by Rev. A.J. Waldock and "Unanimously and heartily carried." The one so honoured then moved a vote of thanks to the two part-time lecturers. One of them, helping for the first time, was Rev. G.H. Morling, B.A.

Failure of the Jubilee Fund

There was no joy for the Principal in another report that came to the Assembly. Rev. A.J. Waldock, President of the Union for the year just ended and former President of the College Council, had had it as two of the aims of his Presidential year to lay the foundation-stone of the Church House, and to raise an endowment for the College. These ambitions were unfulfilled, in some considerable part because of the influenza epidemic which led to the official banning of public gatherings for several months. This failure was a severe disappointment to the Principal.

What the Assembly did for him was to give him more work. The Principal of the College was made *ex officio* a member of the newly constituted Advisory Committee and was appointed to a Public Morals Committee. On his own part, concerned about a seeming spiritual malaise in the Union, he supported a move to set aside at the next Half-Yearly meetings a whole day for devotion and inspiration.

This concern of his surfaced at the next meeting of the Executive Committee on 7 October when he expressed the desire that the Council

The marvel to many of us is that he has not broken down under the strain long ago. But he's from hardy Scotland.

meetings be made more spiritually profitable. The Council, which was much more widely representative than the Executive committee, met three times a year and had become something of a rubber stamp for Executive decisions. Its meetings were generally brief and formal. The Principal wished to inject spiritual life and purpose into them.

There was an interesting and possibly significant item in *The Australian Baptist* of 4 November:

Principal Gordon was an interested listener at one of the sessions of the NSW Congregational Union. He was espied in the gallery and bidden to come down to the 'floor' of the assembly where, escorted to the front by the Revs. N.J. Cocks and Percival Watson, he was welcomed by the chairman (Rev. A.P. Campbell) and 'associated for the session'.

College lectures had probably finished for the year, leaving the Principal a little freer to move about. The next issue of the denominational paper said that, on Sunday 2 November, he was in Melbourne preaching at Kew in the morning, and at Footscray in the evening. It commented, "Many old friends were glad to see him and were pleased to hear his voice again."

Gordon's appointment, along with Rev. Tom McDougall, by the Executive on 9 December to represent the Union at a meeting called by the Dean of Sydney to consider 'Social Problem' work in the City probably reflected another of his concerns. At the same meeting of the Executive it was decided to decline to endorse proposals put forward by the South Australian Baptist Union to discuss church union with Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists. This matter had been in the air for some considerable time.

Though at an earlier time the Principal had been consulted on a fitting resolution, and though he was present at the Executive, he is not mentioned in connection with the Executive's discussion or decision. It may not be unreasonable to conclude that he was not entirely in agreement with the decision.

The 13 January issue of *The Australian Baptist* advised that Principal Gordon was to preach at the Brisbane Tabernacle for several weeks. In the same issue he contributed an article entitled 'The Silences'. In mid-February he was back in Sydney to preach at the ordination of three of his students. According to the denominational paper he "Gave the charge in loving, earnest words which will not be readily forgotten."

At the meeting of the NSW Executive on 9 March there was evidence of jealous concern for the prerogatives of the Principal. At the time he was the President of the Interstate Baptist

Board and so roughly equivalent to the later President-General of the Baptist Union of Australia. There had been a visit of the Prince of Wales and apparently the Principal had not been consulted about official Baptist representation. The Executive minute reads,

Secretary to write to Rev. F.J. Wilkin, Secretary of the Federal Board, that steps be taken to have official notices of Federal functions sent to Principal Gordon and that he represent the Federal Board in any function requiring such.

The syntax may have been rather clumsy but the intention of the minute was clear.

The Principal did not spare himself. Shortly before the College session began, he visited Newcastle to meet local preachers. He arranged a series of studies and undertook as far as possible to aid them by correspondence. College Sunday was 21 March and he preached at the morning service at Haberfield on Romans 12:11. It was a text that called for vigour, but the pastor's verdict was "Good, but very quiet." He may have been tired, but more likely he was burdened with other concerns soon to become evident.

In *The Australian Baptist* of 20 April there was an article by him. He called it 'Simplicities' and it was probably intended to express a deeply felt concern. Something of a heart cry might be discerned, for example, in this question:

Must we go on repeating interpretations and modes of presenting the truth which, however powerful and effective to previous generations, do not seem to suggest anything even to devout minds today?

It might well appear that he was feeling the pressure of entrenched, unreasoning conservatism.

Whatever misgivings some may have entertained about him, he was still much in demand for special occasions. On 4 May he gave what was described as a "fine paper" to the Baptist Ministers' Fraternal. At that period there was much agitation among Protestants about what was styled 'the menace of Rome.' There was to be a meeting on 14 June at the YMCA concerning this. The Executive meeting of 5 June appointed eight Baptist representatives, but it may be significant that Principal Gordon was not one of them. He may not have been perceived as sufficiently polemical.

Trouble in the Union

Meanwhile trouble was brewing within the Union. When the Executive met on 3 August it had before it the information that the Home Mission Committee had decided to ask Rev. A.J. Waldo to accept reappointment for three

Must we go on repeating [obsolete] interpretations and modes of presenting the truth?

years. "There was, however," the Executive minutes said, "an undercurrent of prejudice which should be enquired into and definitely settled." So "it was decided to ask the Advisory Committee to enquire into the matter and report to a special meeting of the Executive." Having done what was required of it, the Advisory Committee advised the Executive on 24 August that it had found that the problems were largely incidental to the administration of the office and therefore it recommended the reappointment of Rev. A.J. Waldock. Despite that, the Executive decided to let the Committee's report lie on the table.

On 14 September, at the request of the Executive Committee, there was a joint meeting with the Home Mission Committee. It was called in order to hear a report from Rev. W. Cleugh Black, President of the Union, who had just returned from a visit to the churches of the Northern Rivers District. His report reflected adversely on the Superintendent and was followed by lengthy discussion. At last the meeting was adjourned until the 17th to give the Superintendent opportunity to peruse the report. According to the minutes of the Home Mission Committee, when the meeting reconvened "Rev. A.J. Waldock replied fully and completely to the statements by the Union President and the meeting expressed itself as thoroughly in sympathy with the Superintendent and expressed its unbounded confidence in him." Consequently it was decided to renominate him.

Rev. W. Higlett, the Secretary of the Union, made the following diary entry on 17 September:

At night special meeting of Home Mission and Executive. Grave developments—a desire on part of some who desire to get rid of Waldock and Gordon from office.

In the meantime, on 23 August the last-named had chaired the meetings of the interstate Baptist Board and had been re-elected President for the coming year. It was perhaps a coincidence that Rev. A. J. Waldock was elected Secretary.

Then came the Assembly. *The Australian Baptist* on 28 September carried a report under the heading "Assembly Week in New South Wales." The opening paragraph ran,

Assembly week has come and gone. It was a week of surprises. The air was heavily charged with electricity. There were ominous clouds and storms threatened, but most of the clouds had a silver lining.

Not everyone would have shared that opinion — certainly not those closely associated with the College and the Principal. There was high drama, the drama of tragedy, in the College session on 23 September.

The Australian Baptist report for the previous day was written by Rev. D. F. Mitchell, one of the men trained under Principal Gordon. Of the Foreign Mission presentation he wrote,

The session was very fittingly closed by the beloved Principal of our College, Rev. A. Gordon, M.A., and thus, in a special way, the two Baptist educational centres of Mymensingh and New South Wales were linked up.

One has to wonder whether he had any idea of what was likely to happen next day when he wrote in that particular vein.

Resignation as Principal

The College session began in a quite routine fashion. The Secretary, Rev. H. Clark, and the Treasurer, Mr. A.J.H. Palmer, presented their reports. The Principal's report followed. He reported on the year's activities, paid tribute to his colleagues and the students and reiterated some points that he had made on previous occasions, but there was no hint of what was to follow — unless it was that the report was in part a summarising review of the whole of the College's course thus far. There was also something of a backward look in the final paragraph,

Our motto is 'The best for the highest.' Inspired by this, in the best and truest sense — the best for Christ — students, tutors and Principal have laboured and prayed.

After presenting his report the Principal moved:

That a commission be appointed consisting of the College Council, Executive and Home Mission Committee to consider the question of student pastoral charges and report to the next Half-Yearly Assembly.

That dealt with, "a letter was received from Rev. A. Gordon, M.A., resigning his position of Principal as from January 31st, 1921." The Assembly minutes give a very matter of fact presentation of what followed, namely:

On the motion of Mr. A. J. H. Palmer, seconded by Rev. J. Barker the resignation was accepted.

On the motion of Rev. J. Barker and Mr. W. White the General Secretary was instructed to prepare a suitable letter of appreciation of Principal Gordon's worth and service and submit the same to a later session."

The account of the resignation in *The Australian Baptist* added a few details. It read,

In speaking later Mr. Gordon said his decision was final, the whole matter having arisen from the determination of the Assembly not to have an endowment fund.

After presenting his report, a letter was received from Gordon, resigning his position of Principal

He considered the denomination should have a building worthy of it. The whole matter rested on a difference of ideals. Several delegates spoke feelingly of Mr. Gordon's services and it was decided to accept his resignation with reluctance.

Later in the day the Assembly had before it the reappointment of Rev. A.J. Waldock as Home Mission Superintendent. After protracted discussion yet with substantial support he was reappointed.

That night, Rev. W. Higlett wrote in his diary:

A day of tragedy. Principal Gordon resigned, driven out by Stanmore making it impossible re Second Advent. Gordon took and showed a most exalted Christian attitude. Home Mission afternoon and evening. Waldock reappointed after being on the brink of further tragedy.

In the morning session of the Assembly on Friday 24 September, Rev. W. Cleugh Black, one of several who over night had been doing some heart-searching, gave notice of the following resolution:

That this assembly rescinds the resolution of yesterday accepting Principal Gordon's resignation and urges him in the best interests of this Denomination to reconsider his decision.

It was decided to consider the motion at three o'clock.

Shortly after this, "Principal Gordon made a statement to the effect that his resignation was irrevocable and asked that the matter be not discussed." According to the account in *The Australian Baptist* he said "he regretted exceedingly that he could not conscientiously" withdraw his resignation.

Rev. W. Cleugh Black then sought permission to withdraw his notice of motion but a consideration of his request was deferred until the stated time of three o'clock. At the appointed time in the afternoon session he was given the permission he sought.

Rev. D.F. Mitchell then moved that the appointment of the college Principal be left to next Assembly. An amendment that if necessary a Special Assembly be convened to make an appointment was unsuccessfully proposed by Rev. S. Sharp.

Rev. A.J. Waldock moved that Principal Gordon be asked to serve till next Assembly, but his motion was lost.

The next motion was by Rev. T. McDougall and was also lost. It was that the Joint Faculty of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches be asked to undertake the training of

Baptist students until a new Principal was appointed.

As previously directed, the Secretary of the Union then moved a resolution of regret and appreciation in the following terms:

This Annual Assembly has received with profound regret the resignation of Rev. Alexander Gordon, M.A. as Principal of the Baptist College of NSW. Coming to the College at its inception five years ago, its work is largely the outcome of his character and labours. He has ever shown himself to be an indefatigable worker, an accomplished scholar, and a cultured Christian gentleman. Under his influence the students have gained distinction in their scholastic attainments and have gone forth with an exalted conception of and an enthusiastic devotion to Jesus Christ. Already some have joined the teaching staff of the College and in the churches all have proved themselves workmen that need not to be ashamed. We contemplate the severance of the relationship with deep sorrow. We pray that the richest blessings of the Almighty may rest upon him and we assure him that his permanent memorial will be in the lives and ministry of all who have come under the influence of his cultured mind and his gracious personality.

The resolution was carried unanimously and Rev. S. Sharp then had a motion accepted that the matter of suitably recognising Principal Gordon's services be left to the Executive. Nothing was done in the October meeting of the Executive to implement that motion, but in November it was decided that the recognition of Principal Gordon "take the form of 1) a public meeting; 2) an illuminated address; 3) a cheque. The officers of the Union with the officers of the College Council were appointed to take action."

At the Executive a month later the decision was taken to hold the meeting on Thursday 27 January in the Harris Street Church. The Secretary of the Union "was to notify Church Secretaries and to suggest retiring collections as best for certain churches." That last odd phrase was probably to take account of the fact that individuals in some churches would want to share in a presentation to the Principal though the churches as such would not.

Meanwhile on Sunday 26 September, immediately after the Assembly, Alexander Gordon was again at Haberfield and "gave a splendid sermon on Phil. 3: 12-15." Did he that day preach particularly to himself, counselling himself to "forget those things which are behind and reach forth unto those things that are before.?" The

He has ever shown himself to be an indefatigable worker, an accomplished scholar, and a cultured Christian gentleman.

Principal and the Pastor were together again the very next night at the Advisory Committee, chaired by the Principal. There was a special bond of understanding and mutual respect between Rev. W. Higlett, the Haberfield pastor, and the Principal. Further evidences of this are found in the former's diary. He noted on 31 October that, after speaking at Petersham's Sunday School Anniversary, he was driven by Mr. (later, Sir) Hugh Dixson to have lunch with the Gordons.

The Principal remained active in Union affairs. For example, in October he officiated at the opening of the Sans Souci Church; and in December he was present at the stone-laying of the Pymble Church, and replied to the address of welcome to visitors. The pastor of the latter church was his former student and present colleague, George Morling. He continued to share fully in the various committees of which he was a member. However, *The Australian Baptist* of 28 December advised its readers that Principal Gordon's residence would not be connected with the telephone after 31 December. This may indicate that his resignation took effect from that date and not from 31 January as indicated in his letter to the Assembly.

he had no desire to withdraw but the step had been forced upon him by circumstances

Farewell function

There was a report of the farewell to Principal Gordon in *The Australian Baptist* of 1 February 1921. Mr. C.W. Rogers, the President of the Union, chaired the function and Rev. W. Higlett, the Secretary of the Union, took part. Tributes were paid by Pastor A.C. Fox, a student from the College not much later to become Professor of Philosophy in the Perth University, by Rev. G. H. Morling, a lecturer at the College, pastor of the Pymble church and soon to become Alexander Gordon's successor as Principal, Rev. W.P. Phillips, a representative of the Ministers' Fraternal, and Rev. A.J. Waldock, Home Mission Superintendent.

The last-named presented a cheque for £150 to the Principal. At the Executive Committee meeting on 8 August 1921, according to the minutes, "Bro. Groves stated that the College has little prospect of repaying the £82/17/6 advanced to the Presentation of £150 to Principal Gordon and it was agreed that this item of indebtedness by the College should be written off."

The recently appointed President of the College Council, Rev. H. Clark, expressed his regret at the Principal's resignation, and said that if it had been handed to the Council it would not have been accepted. The report gave the gist of the Principal's reply, and from it the following is extracted:

He took the opportunity, and without any

feeling of unkindness, of correcting certain misconceptions which were prevalent regarding his resignation. In handing that to the Assembly instead of the College Council he had followed the instructions of the Union's legal adviser seeing it was the Assembly which had appointed him to the position, but he had informed the then President of the College Council of his intention to resign, and he replied that he thought it was the right course ... he had no desire to withdraw but the step had been forced upon him by circumstances with which the members of the Council were familiar.

The minutes of the Executive of 8 February make no reference to the farewell function, but they do note a letter from Alexander Gordon asking to be furnished with credentials as he would be visiting England from March until the end of the year. His request was "cordially acceded to."

Early in February the former Principal was back at Harris street, the College Church, to officiate at the wedding of one of his students, Harold Hackworthy.

Why did the Principal resign?

The Australian Christian World was a highly respected inter-denominational paper published by Dr. Robert Dey, a prominent Congregationalist. In the issue of 11 February 1921 there was an article headed, 'Why Has Rev. Alex. Gordon, M.A., Resigned the Principalship of the NSW Baptist College?'

The article presented quite a full account of the farewell function for Principal Gordon. It pointed out that officials of the Union and College had signed the [illuminated] address that had been given to him and it then added the comment, "although no effort was made by the Union, so far as is publicly known, to retain the services of Principal Gordon." An outline of the Principal's reply was given and then the article concluded with two paragraphs that 'put the cat among the pigeons'. They read:

It has been rumoured that the reason why Principal Gordon was obliged to hand in his resignation was because his views on our Lord's second coming did not agree with those of leading members of the NSW Baptist denomination, but surely any special view of Biblical interpretation on such a subject is not to be erected into a test of holding office in the Baptist Union. The Baptists have ever fought for the abolition of theological tests. They have declared for an open Bible and freedom of interpretation, and it is hard to believe they are now creating tests among themselves

and elbowing out those who are not prepared to subscribe to them. Men of the scholarship and teaching ability of Rev. Alex. Gordon are not so easily picked up that any college can afford to allow them to pass out without challenge.

As might have been expected, a response was not slow in coming. There were two Baptist letters in *The Australian Christian World* of 25 February.

The first was an official letter to the Editor dated 18 February and signed by C.W. Rogers, President of the Baptist Union; William Higlett, Secretary of the Baptist Union; Henry Clark, Chairman, College Council and G.H. Morling, Secretary, College Council. It read:

Sir, Our attention has been drawn to a statement in your issue of February 11, under the heading, "Why Has the Rev. Alex. Gordon, M.A. Resigned the Principalship of the NSW Baptist College?" and we desire to correct a misapprehension of the situation.

The resignation of Principal Gordon never came before the College Council because his appointment was made by the Annual Assembly, and therefore his resignation was handed to that body. At the Annual Assembly it was Principal Gordon's express wish that his resignation should be accepted without discussion, and the Assembly therefore had no opportunity to decline it, but was compelled reluctantly to accept it...

Neither the College Council nor the Baptist Union requires any of its members or officials to hold any particular interpretation of Scripture in respect of the Second Advent.

A second letter followed immediately. It was signed by W. Cleugh Black, ex-President, NSW Baptist Union. He was even quicker off the mark, for his letter was dated 13 February. It read:

Sir, Kindly permit me to refer to your recent account of the Valedictory to Rev. Alexander Gordon, M.A. ... You state that so far as is publicly known no effort was made by the Baptist Union to retain his valued services. This is hardly in accordance with the facts of the case. At the last Annual Assembly the Union received his resignation with deep regret; but subsequently deputed its officers to interview and request him to reconsider his decision, assuring him of the Union's hearty confidence and support. Principal Gordon courteously declined for purely personal reasons. From a Union standpoint there

was absolutely no valid reason whatever for his regrettable retirement.

Your article furthermore suggests that he was obliged to hand in his resignation because his views on our Lord's Second Coming did not agree with those of leading members of the NSW denomination. Principal Gordon was under no such obligation, even supposing there had been doctrinal disagreement thereupon, for neither the Union nor the College stands definitely committed to any particular interpretation of this doctrine.

But while it would be manifestly impossible to find any two members of this or any other Union holding identically the same views concerning all phases and implications of this much controverted subject it happens that Principal Gordon's oft expressed views, instead of being opposed to, are in substantial agreement with the main views held by the majority of the leading members of the Baptist Union; the Principal firmly believing in the personal, visible and victorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your article states very pertinently that "special views of Biblical interpretation on such a subject should not constitute a test for holding office in the Baptist Union," and you refer to your difficulty in believing that Baptists are recreant to their traditions and trust in creating tests, and elbowing out those who are not prepared to subscribe to them.

Happily your fears are groundless and, as a proof that the Baptist Union has adopted an elbowing in rather than an elbowing out policy in this respect, permit me to state that at the last Annual Assembly members were elected to prominent official positions whose views on the Second Advent of Christ were in many important respects widely divergent from, if not diametrically opposed to, the views held by their 'Premillennial' brethren who, though in the majority, nevertheless unanimously voted for them, recognising that this doctrine, however precious, is not by any means the magic standard of measurement for membership or office in the Baptist Union of N.S.W.

I mention these facts to assure you that the Baptist Union of N.S.W., despite whisperings to the contrary, has not degenerated into a set of sanctimonious shibboleth makers, but still stands and ever will for those principles of liberty of conscience and freedom of interpretation towards the securing of which our Baptist

It has been rumoured that Gordon was obliged to hand in his resignation was because his views on our Lord's Second Coming did not agree with those of leading members of the NSW Baptist denomination

forebears made a not unworthy contribution.

The Editor noted that he was pleased to insert the foregoing letters but added that no further correspondence on the subject was necessary. He was probably well aware that, while the substance of the letters could be supported, they didn't tell the whole story or get to grips with the underlying issues.

It could be maintained that the Editor left himself open to rebuttal by the wording of his article. Had he said that 'one' or 'a' reason why the Principal 'felt' obliged to resign was on account of his views on the Second Coming, and had he made it clear that by leading members of the denomination he did not necessarily mean Union officials, he would have been an surer ground.

However, both the official and unofficial Baptist letters were less than candid in relation to the Second Coming issue. They were correct in stating that official doctrinal tests were not applied concerning views on Christ's Second Advent.

Moreover Mr. Black could point at least to a few holding denominational appointments while having views on that subject divergent from the majority opinion. He might have named Rev. W. Higlett, the Union Secretary, and Rev. A.J. Waldo who, despite Mr. Black's own efforts, had recently been reappointed Home Mission Superintendent.

These men and others were accepted because of their personal qualities but were looked at askance by the majority of their fellow Baptists who at that time had been aroused to a high level of excitement by the confident preaching of Dispensational Premillennialism by Rev. W. Lamb, Rev. C.J. Tinsley and Rev. J.G. Ridley, among others. Men who did not hold that view tended to be seen by rank and file Baptists as being at least questionable in their orthodoxy and so were exposed to constant pressure.

Despite the disclaimers, there is evidence that there was some substance in the rumours that his Second Coming views were a factor in Principal Gordon's resignation, as the following points attest. First, as noted above, Rev. W. Higlett, Secretary of the Union, wrote in his diary on the night of the resignation, "Gordon driven out by Stanmore making it impossible re-Second Advent."

Second, in a letter to Principal G.H. Morling, Rev. J.G. Ridley, so closely identified with Second Coming teaching and preaching, indicated his dissatisfaction with Principal Gordon. "I remember so well," he wrote, "when you came into your office and how we hoped for a change in policy following the previous Principal."

John Ridley's letter was relative to a biography he had written on C.J. Tinsley of Stanmore.

Third, it may also be significant that when as President of the Union Mr. W. White of Stanmore hosted a College Dinner in March 1927, he said that in some respects he was not a College enthusiast. He regarded education as it related to the training of ministerial students as like electricity, a very good thing if properly controlled but dangerous if it got out of control. Fairly clearly he thought that it had got out of control in Principal Gordon's time.

It is relevant to note that at the very time of his resignation there was a heated controversy between Rev. D.F. Mitchell, one of Principal's students, and Rev. W. Lamb over an issue relating to the Second Advent. The Baptist Union Advisory Committee upheld Mr. Mitchell's complaint against Mr. Lamb, and it may be noted that although Principal Gordon was at the time Chairman of the Advisory Committee he was not present at the meeting that censured Mr. Lamb.

Fourth, shortly after the resignation of the Principal, on 8 October, *The Australian Christian World* asserted that his ideas of ministerial training were not "identical with those of other denominational leaders," and suggested this as one reason for his decision to resign. This was officially denied, but the Report of the College Council presented to the 1920 Assembly not only gives credibility to the assertion but also makes it highly probable that Second Advent teaching was an issue, as the following lengthy extract from the Report would indicate:

Policy of the College - The question of the policy of the college having arisen, it was remitted to a special select committee of the Council, consisting of the officers of the Council (namely, Revs. C.J. Tinsley, H. Clark and Mr. A. J. H. Palmer), and the Revs W. Cleugh Black and A.J. Waldo. This committee, having carefully considered the matter, made the following recommendation to the Council, which was unanimously adopted, *viz*:

(1) That Cramp's 'History of the Baptists' and Rooke on 'Baptism' be added to the text-books of the College, and that lectures on those subjects be given by Rev. G. H. Morling, B.A., in conjunction with his lectures on Church History.

(2) That the policy of the College be a continuation of the teaching, as set out in the synopsis of subjects, provided by the Principal, together with lectures on the books of the Old Testament; History of the Baptists and Baptism; and special lectures on Evangelism and Second Advent

there were rumours that his Second Coming views were a factor in Principal Gordon's resignation

teaching; the same to be arranged by the Principal and the College council.” It was further resolved by the College Council that Rev. G.A. Craike be appointed to give lectures on the books of the Old Testament.

When it is realised that in the Principal’s synopsis, to which reference was made, there was scope for all the additional material to be covered the recommendations of the committee have to be seen as reflecting on Alexander Gordon’s teaching in certain respects including that on the Second Advent.

Unquestionably a complex of factors led to the Principal’s resignation. He had a high ideal for the College and its development but he found his vision being frustrated by those who didn’t share it. In particular there was his disappointment that the Jubilee Fund to endow the College was undermined and failed. There were problems about “interpretations” and one of these certainly concerned the Second Coming.

At base the difficulty was probably a subtle one of ethos. Alexander Gordon had come from a different Baptist background and was an outsider. As such he didn’t conform sufficiently to the dominant ethos of NSW Baptists and so, no matter how much he might be admired for certain qualities, he was regarded as suspect. Some men could continue to live and serve under such circumstances but not a man of Alexander Gordon’s sensitivity and integrity. Rather than cause problems he would resign. Indeed he felt conscientiously compelled to take such action once it became obvious that his continued occupancy of office would cause division.

Subsequent activity and ministry

The Editor of *The Australian Christian World* was clearly very supportive of Alexander Gordon. The two men had probably established a friendly relationship. A further indication of this is that just three weeks later, on 18 March, the leading article in *The Australian Christian World* was by the Principal. It had nothing to do with the controversy.

By the time that article appeared in print, the Gordons and their two daughters were on the high seas, headed for England, having left Sydney in the second week of March. In his speech at the farewell function at the Harris Street Church, the Principal had explained the circumstances of the trip in these terms:

When he accepted the position [of Principal] he gave himself to it fully, and had no desire to withdraw but the step had been forced on him by circumstances with which members of the Council were familiar. Moreover, he had nothing else in view. Since the situation arose one of his

nephews in England had urged him to return and settle there and offered to pay the passage money for himself and his family. This he declined, feeling that his work was in Australia. Whereupon his nephew had generously offered to pay their return fares, saying that God had led him to do this. They were, therefore, going to England in March and would return to Australia at the end of the year.

On 5 April *The Australian Baptist* published a letter written by Alexander Gordon from Fremantle indicating that the trip was going well and that the party was in good health. Another letter written from England on 3 June (*The A. B.*, 19 July) sheds some slight light on his resignation. He wrote:

I am having a good time in reading the New Testament steadily through among the hills, trying to let its naturalness and glory saturate heart and mind, and to feel the inspiration of the immortal story minus the atmosphere of the conflict of diverse interpretations.

In the same paper on 13 December it was reported that Rev. Alexander Gordon, Mrs. Gordon and their two daughters had booked their passages for Australia by the *Orvieto*, leaving London on 21 January 1922. There also happened to be in that issue the beginning of an article by Alexander Gordon. It was entitled, “Spring is Coming,” and was a warm treatment of spiritual renewal in England. His reflection in a continuation of the article under a sub-heading, ‘The Meaning of Discipleship,’ in *The Australian Baptist* of 3 January certainly grew out of his unhappy experience in Sydney:

It [the word ‘disciple’] places the emphasis rightly upon a personal relation to Jesus Christ – a vital faith in Him, a whole-hearted devotion to Him, a supreme attachment to His teaching. We thus move in a personal atmosphere, where ‘isms’ and the demand for particular theories of Scripture interpretation, which often repel by their obscurantism and unnaturalness, do not exist. Christ is all-in-all, and our relation to Him the matter that counts.

Ministry in South Australia

On their return to Australia the Gordons disembarked at Adelaide where perhaps they expected to find a greater openness and the opportunity to make a new start. They certainly were warmly welcomed. Almost at once Alexander Gordon invited to take the Flinders Street pulpit for a few Sundays and the hope was publicly expressed that the Gordons might settle in South Australia.

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On 21 March *The Australian Baptist* reported, “Rev. Alex Gordon, M.A., was welcomed at the General Committee meeting by the President. Mr. Gordon is likely to remain in Adelaide.

There was competition to secure his services but he did not rush into a commitment. Doubtless he had learned to be cautious. Early in May he was in Melbourne. This was primarily to give a tribute to the outstanding Baptist layman, Mr Westmore Stephens, with whom he had been closely associated in the Armadale Church. No doubt he had conversations while he was there.

The Editor of *The Australian Baptist* was certainly keeping his name before the Baptist constituency. There was an article, “The Brotherhood,” by him in the issue of 30 May. In it he made reference to parochialism and once more the Sydney situation was probably in his mind. The main thrust of the article was a plea for cooperation. He recognised that church union was not possible and might not even be desirable but the denominations should seek ways in which they could work together.

More particularly, Baptists in the several Australian States should follow a course of federation and seek to establish a true Baptist brotherhood in Australia. Several things that he wrote in the course of the article afford a glimpse of some of the insights and convictions of the author, and even perhaps of his scars. Consider the following:

An outsider might come to the conclusion that Christianity was a wordy combat regarding the correctness or incorrectness of interpretations, or that it is a question of organisation. Whenever the Church departed from the truth men rose up in protest, and their protest came like Spring upon Winter.

In the cases that he went ‘on to instance, Luther, Wesley and the Scottish Covenanters, the protest took the form of withdrawal, though a reluctant withdrawal.

People are not now held by denominational instincts to the same extent as in former generations. They move from one denomination to another being guided sometimes, it must be confessed, by distaste for dissension, and the conflict of petty personalities: though more generally by the type of ministry.

It might be asked whether these factors were operative in his own subsequent change of denominational allegiance. The next week on 6 June an address by him at the Magill Baptist Church Anniversary was reported.

In the following issue on 13 June Gordon received double mention. An article by him

on Mr. W. C. Pearce, M.A., of the World Sunday School Organisation was included. It was reported that he had received an invitation to the pastorate of St. Peter’s Baptist Church, Adelaide. Dr. Sandford Fleming, the Australian who had made his mark in theological education in the United States, had had an interim ministry at St. Peter’s and a new church had just been opened.

It was an attractive opportunity but *The Australian Baptist* of the following week reported that the call had been declined. The reason for this became evident to Australian Baptists just a fortnight later, on 4 July, when it was reported that he had accepted a call to Brighton Baptist Church which, as it was revealed, had approached him before St. Peter’s. The South Australian correspondent commented, “We are glad to have him settled anywhere in South Australia. He will give additional strength to our ministry.” An account of his welcome to Brighton on 21 June was included along with a summary of the new pastor’s remarks.

Alexander Gordon continued to make fairly regular appearances in *The Australian Baptist* as the following skim through its pages will show:

5 September—A report of Brighton’s Anniversary with an appreciation of his ministry.

24 October—A report of Brighton’s Sunday School Anniversary with the pastor noted as one of the speakers.

12 December—An article by him, “Federation and the call.” It was a plea by him for a Baptist Federation in Australia, a cause close to his heart but one that would not win him votes in NSW.

19 December—A continuation of “Federation and the Call.”

27 February 1923—A report on the progress of his ministry at Brighton with references to ‘packed services’.

13 March—An article by him, “A Question of Values,” against the drift towards a secularised Sunday.

5 June—A report on the Ministers’ School of Theology: “Rev. A. Gordon, M.A., dealt with “The Spirit of Prophecy in the Bible” in a masterly way ... Mr. Gordon’s views of God’s revelation to men are sane, reverent and convincing.” [His views were in all likelihood substantially those of Professor James Orr, the outstanding Scottish evangelical scholar, as set out in his book *Revelation and Inspiration*, the text-book that Alexander Gordon had used in his College

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12 June—"Rev. Alex Gordon, M. A. , of Brighton, South Australia, is spending a holiday in Sydney as the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Palmer of Ryde." [In the light of subsequent events the visit to Sydney may well have been significant.]

19 June—South Australian ministerial students were being trained by lecturers from a United Faculty, and the State correspondent expressed the hope that Alexander Gordon may give specific Baptist teaching to Baptist College students. [He may have been more than a little embarrassed by that item.]

Admitted to Congregationalist ministry

After that burst of exposure, although there was a reference in *The Australian Baptist* of 21 August to Brighton's greatly increased giving to the Baptist Foreign Mission, there seems to have been nothing more about Alexander Gordon in that paper until 11 September when a rather surprising announcement appeared, namely:

The Sydney daily papers on Saturday announced that Rev. Alexander Gordon, M. A., formerly Principal of the Baptist Theological College in NSW and at present in charge of Brighton Baptist Church, South Australia, has been accepted by the Congregational Union of N.S.W. as a minister in full standing.

On 25 September the South Australian correspondent of *The Australian Baptist* supplied this comment:

The newspaper paragraph re Rev. Alex Gordon, M.A., was a surprise to most Baptists here. We thought at first that it must be a mistake but we learn that he is contemplating a change. There have been excellent reports of his work at Brighton and we hoped he would make South Australia his home. He is a fine scholar, a very able minister of the Gospel and a wise counsellor. Such men are a great assistance to a denomination. We wish our esteemed brother could be induced to remain here.

It was a vain wish for the die had already been cast. However, South Australian Baptists were gracious in their disappointment. *The Australian Baptist*, just one week later on 2 October, carried a report of their Assembly. In part it read:

The morning session was brought to a close with the Union Sermon, preached by Rev. A. Gordon, M.A., a very fine address. Regret was expressed in many quarters that Mr. Gordon found it necessary to leave the ranks of our ministry.

There was another brief item in that issue:

Rev. Alexander Gordon, M.A., has accepted a cordial and unanimous call to the Congregational Church at Roseville, NSW and expects to begin his ministry there at the end of this month.

Three weeks later there was a brief report from South Australia. It ran,

Rev. Alexander Gordon, M.A., has finished his ministry in South Australia. We believe it was his wish to get away quietly. His pastorate was very short but full of promise and many feel sorry that it has terminated so quickly, and still more so that he has left the denomination. Others will gain through our loss. We wish we could say with confidence that this is the last of the ministers who are forsaking the Baptist standard.

The final statement of that report reflected the fact that at that time there was great unsettlement in the ranks of the Baptist ministry. It may be added that this was nowhere more evident than in NSW where many particularly of the younger men left, most of them going to the Presbyterians.

There is in the public record no indication of the reason for Alexander Gordon's decision to leave the Baptist ministry. He had had an unhappy experience in NSW, but he was still greatly honoured among Australian Baptists generally and his ministry at the Brighton Church was apparently proceeding very happily. Moreover there were many avenues of usefulness open to him among Baptists in South Australia. Some factors may perhaps help to make his move more understandable, among them the following.

First, Baptists and Congregationalists have a great deal in common and in South Australia in particular the distance between them was often quite small and might be seen as just a small step.

Second, the fact that Mrs. Gordon came from a strong Congregational family probably made that step easier to take.

Third, almost certainly the family connection led to Alexander Gordon forming strong ties of friendship with notable Congregationalists in NSW. Fairly clearly these friends had lent him support and encouragement at the time of his resignation from the NSW Principalship.

Fourth, probably he had come to feel that he would be more free to be true to his understanding of Christian truth among the Congregationalists. However, none of these things were stated in so many words. While it is disappointing that he apparently made no explanation

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of his action, it does seem to be in keeping with his character as one who avoided public controversy. As noted above, he chose to slip out of South Australia with a minimum of fuss.

His transition to the Congregationalists was very low-key. In July 1923, the minister of the Roseville Congregational Church announced his resignation and the deacons were charged to find a successor. Among several names suggested for their consideration was that of Alexander Gordon. On 12 September they reported to the church members that they had asked Rev. W.F. Kench of the Congregational Union to approach Mr. Gordon concerning the pastorate. The church's response was almost unanimous, there being but one dissentient to the issuing of a call. As noted above, *The Australian Baptist* of the previous day had announced his unanimous acceptance by the Congregational Union of NSW as a minister in full standing. Obviously negotiations had been proceeding and it seems most likely that Alexander Gordon had decided to make the move before there was any definite sphere of ministry in view.

The Congregationalist of 1 October announced his acceptance of the call, though it was not for another two days that the Roseville congregation had the letter of acceptance before it. His Public Welcome was set for Saturday, 27 October, with his Induction the next day.

Among those sharing in the Public Welcome was Rev. James Barker. He spoke on behalf of the congregation and referred to the new pastor "as an old and very dear friend ..." Another to speak was Rev. Mr. Newbury, minister of the Chatswood Congregational Church. He described Alexander Gordon as "One of the choice spirits of the Baptist denomination." At the Induction Service, Rev. N.J. Cocks, M.A., who some years earlier had escorted Alexander Gordon to the floor of the Congregational Assembly, presided. Others who assisted in the service included Principal Thatcher, M.A., of Camden College and Dr. Robert Dey, proprietor and editor of *The Australian Christian World*.

Understandably the name of Alexander Gordon ceased to appear in Baptist official records and publications. However, an article by him, "The Christian Idea of Salvation," appeared in *The Australian Baptist* on 29 December 1925, and yet another on 6 December 1927. There may be other references which a quick perusal of the paper has failed to notice.

Death of Alexander Gordon

After a further lapse of almost two years, on 12 November 1929, the denominational paper announced his death. After a comparatively brief decline he died on Armistice Day and the funeral was held in the Roseville Congregational

Church where at the time of his death he was still the minister. It is evident from church records that he was a greatly loved pastor and that he had exercised a most effective ministry. He had also been very active in the affairs of the Congregational Union and it a mark of the esteem in which he was held by his fellow ministers that twenty of them served the Roseville congregation freely for three months so that the church could continue to pay a full stipend to Mrs. Gordon.

The Rev. Dr. R. Scott-West, minister of Burwood Congregational Church, who spoke at the funeral service, contributed a column to *The Congregationalist* of 22 November under the heading "The Late Rev. Alexander Gordon as I Knew Him." After a choice and moving personal tribute he wrote,

This kindly single-hearted gentleman, moving with firm step amidst the simplicities of Christ, was a hero in the defence of truth, and willingly sacrificed position and emoluments rather than prove recreant to his soul's convictions.

That clearly was his assessment of the deepest reason for Alexander Gordon's resignation from the Principalship. Dr. Scott-West then quoted another who said of the deceased, "He was head and shoulders above his peers and we could ill afford to spare him ..."

In the issue of *The Australian Baptist* of 19 November, tributes to his memory by Rev. Dr. F.J. Wilkin, Rev. S. Sharp and Rev. D.F. Mitchell were paid. The image of him that emerges from these is of a devout disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, an idealist, a dedicated scholar and, in sum, a Christian gentleman.

This paper was written by Rev. Ron Rogers, former Principal of Morling College, in the early 1990s and scheduled for re-issue in the present series on 3 February 2005. Due to the author's illness the paper was read by Rev. Rod Benson. The text has been slightly edited for style; there were no footnotes in the original.

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Notes on the Harris Street Baptist Church

By Ron Robb

The February meeting of the Society featured the story of the founding Principal of the NSW Baptist Theological College (now Morling College). The background to Baptist ministerial training in NSW has been dealt with in other publications and in this journal from time to time but eventually a proper college was founded for full-time, professional theological training. It was inaugurated in the Harris Street Baptist Church, Ultimo, in March 1916. The Society has a good photo of the founding class and it features Alexander Gordon. Fairly detailed studies have been undertaken about Gordon, the College Council Members and the 1916 class (one of whom was Gordon Morling whose name is now given to the College of which he became Principal for 40 years, replacing Alexander Gordon).

The history of the Harris Street is known in considerable detail but up until recently the Archives had precious little documentary holdings on it. However, over the past five or so years a steady and determined hunt has gathered together a reasonable collection of records which now includes some of the church minute books, some correspondence, a detailed set of architect's plans, some personal mementos and a couple of rare photos. There had been some confusion about the precise location in Harris Street but an old Sydney Council street map from the City Archives resolved that problem.

The Harris Street church in Ultimo had its genesis in the William Street (Woolloomooloo) church in September 1862. Many of its founding members came from the Bathurst Street church (later relocated to what is now the Central Church) as a result of falling-out with the Pastor there. For a time the church struggled until the arrival of the Rev. R. Moneyment. The congregation then moved to the Assembly Rooms in William Street. Moneyment died in 1863 so the church wrote to C.H. Spurgeon asking that one of his famous preachers might be asked to come out to the Colony to take-up the work.

In consequence, the Rev. Frederick Hibberd came and quickly consolidated and built-up the church. Upon Hibberd's arrival, it moved to the Masonic Hall, York Street. The church was the first Baptist Church in NSW to directly ask

for C.H. Spurgeon's help in finding a minister.

Hibberd moved to Launceston in 1867 and was relieved by the Rev. Alan Webb (who the next year was one of the founding fathers of the Baptist Union of NSW). Webb continued the growth impetus set in motion by Hibberd and the congregation decided to purchase a building of its own. A site was purchased in William Street but was later sold and a site obtained in Harris Street. A church was erected at a cost of £1,235 and opened in September 1868 (and was a founding church of the new Baptist Union).

The church then had a good ministry for a number of years but eventually the growth of industrial activities and the expanding Sydney Technical College saw the character of the area change from residential and it was ultimately decided to close the church. The last service was held in March 1938 (at which there were four baptisms). The church was formally dissolved on the 24th March.

The building was sold to the Education Department and became a training centre for the secretarial department of Sydney Technical College, in which capacity it was known as 'the Commercial Hall'. Of interest is that the Society President's wife, Mrs Velma Thornton, undertook her secretarial training there. The building has long been demolished and a large new block now stands there as part of the University of Technology - Sydney.

For those who want to know its location, it was on the left side coming from Broadway, not far from the corner and next to the famous old 'Bon Marche' Store. The popular old 'Glaciarium' was just around the corner on Broadway.

One final note: the church had a small but nevertheless substantial pipe organ. It still exists and its history is known. It was given by George III to a friend in NSW and eventually was placed in the Harris Street. On the church's dissolution the organ was relocated to the Newtown church, where it stands today (sadly in poor repair). It has been certified as the second oldest pipe organ in Australia.

Mr Ron Robb is the Honorary Archivist for the Baptist Archives, 120 Herring Rd, Eastwood.

The Baptist Recorder

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Society of New South Wales*

Baptist Historical Society of NSW

**Preserving, promoting and publishing
NSW Baptist history**

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Minutes of Quarterly General Meeting, 3 February 2005

Present: There were 18 present as recorded on the attendance sheet.

1.0 Opening

The Chair, Rev Bruce Thornton, opened the meeting in prayer and welcomed attenders.

2.0 Apologies

Apologies were received from Rev Ron Rogers, Janine Prior, Rev Roy and Doreen Henson, Bernice Cardwell, Jim Mallice, Phil Dart and Peter Young.

3.0 Reports

3.1 Treasurer

The Treasurer tabled a written report and advised that there was a balance of \$5944.65 in the General Fund, \$3576.81 in the Publications Fund, \$170.00 in the Spurgeon's Trust Fund, with total funds of \$9698.46.

3.2 Archivist

The Archivist noted that a second compactus had been installed on the ground floor of the Baptist Archives. The large portrait of Rev George Henry Morling, which hangs in a prominent place in the Faculty Lounge at Morling College, had been professionally restored. It was noted that Mr Ron Robb had personally worked

very hard in January, with some help from a few College students, in moving and returning archival materials during the installation of the new compactus.

4.0 Next meetings

The next meeting of the Society was scheduled for Thursday 5 May 2005, when Rev Alan Neate would present an address on his life and ministry.

5.0 Address by Rev Rod Benson

As a preface to the main address, Mr Ron Robb gave a brief address outlining the nature of theological education among Baptists in NSW during the 19th and early 20th centuries, and some information on the early days of the Harris Street Baptist Church.

The Chair then introduced Rev Rod Benson who gave an address written in the early to mid-1990s by Rev Ron Rogers, former Principal of Morling College, on "Alexander Gordon: A Christian gentleman," speaking for about 80 minutes with questions following.

The full text of the address was to be published in the forthcoming issue of *The Baptist Recorder*.

6.0 Close Mr Ron Syme closed the meeting in prayer at 9.20 pm, which was followed by supper.