

ronment so as to limit the range of potential marriage partners, or to exercise some control over behaviour.<sup>30</sup> What parental, or other control, was apparent in Susan and Donald's courtship? Donald had no parents, indeed no kin in New Zealand at this stage, so he was free to choose when and whom he should marry. Nevertheless he did receive advice from Helen Wilson, wife of Peter Wilson, the colonial surgeon at New Plymouth. Helen Wilson was one of McLean's oldest and closest friends in New Zealand. Some twenty-eight years older than McLean, she regarded him as a son, addressing him as such in letters. They both referred to her as his 'mother'. In July 1850, hearing rumours of McLean's engagement, Helen Wilson wrote:

all the world seem determined to marry you in spite of your teeth—*so now, mind if you don't wish it yourself, be on your guard for many a man has been talked into a marriage, and they are not the happiest.* . . .<sup>31</sup>

Despite such well-meaning warnings there is no evidence that Donald consulted anyone other than himself in making his choice of a marriage partner.

Susan's parents, on the other hand, were a constant presence. Donald McLean got on well with Robert Strang with whom he had a close business and personal relationship from 1848 until Strang's death in 1874. Whether it was Robert or Susan who drew Donald into the family circle is unclear. The relationship between Maria Strang and her prospective son-in-law was not so cordial. Perhaps angered by the effect on Susan of McLean's prolonged absences from Wellington or annoyed by gossip about the engagement, which Donald insisted should remain private, Mrs Strang could hardly bring herself to be civil to him when he reappeared in Wellington in October 1850. She was so rude on a couple of occasions when McLean visited Dalmuir Hill that he refused to make further calls and arranged to meet Susan elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> The incident shows how little control the Strangs were able to exercise over the relationship. Mrs Strang could drive Donald from her house and show her disapproval of his behaviour but she could not prevent his meeting with and writing to Susan.

The chances for meeting when Donald was in Wellington were frequent and often unsupervised. Meetings took place at Dalmuir Hill where Donald visited, dined and sometimes slept. They could take place at the homes of friends, at church and by arranging 'accidental' encounters around the town. Very little control seems to have been exercised over these meetings which could take place at any time. Susan had special memories of a 'delightful walk' to Dalmuir Hill from a friend's place one night and of a moonlight