

McLean's cajoling that she had no great desire to be the wife of a bush settler.

Following months of correspondence Donald McLean and Susan Strang were finally married in late August 1851. After the wedding party at Dalmuir Hill they spent a fortnight at Taita, often referred to by both of them as the happiest time of their life, and then took up residence in a rented cottage on Wellington Terrace. On 30 September Donald was off again on another land purchasing trip to Ahuriri, saying on his departure that he would be absent no longer than six weeks but in fact not returning until just before Christmas. This separation could not have come at a worse time for Susan. The sudden loneliness was difficult to cope with. She avoided the parlour in their small cottage for 'I cannot sit alone in that room where I have spent so many happy hours with my dear husband without feeling very dull'. Without Donald around the cottage 'everything seemed changed'.<sup>46</sup> The feelings of loneliness were soon displaced by a growing anxiety and distress over her mother's health. Mrs Strang had not been well for some time and was now getting thinner and weaker daily, confined to her bed with a racking cough. Within a few days of Donald's departure, Susan was spending most of her time at Dalmuir Hill. At first she went for the days, then the nights as well. Early in December she decided that she would be unable to return to the cottage and most of her furniture and other belongings were moved back to her parents' house for safety's sake. Mrs Strang was clearly dying. She had a close circle of women friends who could be called on to sit with her at times but the burden of nursing fell mainly on Susan.

Susan was distraught at the thought of her mother's death and, lacking her husband to 'comfort' her, found prayer her main solace. Her prayers were not for her mother's recovery, although she hoped this might occur, but that she would be granted the strength and resignation to submit to God's will. This was a 'proper' Christian response and occupied much of Susan's thoughts. After her mother died on 30 December she gave way to a terrible grief but still felt that this was 'very wrong'. It was six months before she was able to accept that the strength to nurse her mother had come from God and no longer to 'think of my dear Mother as laying [*sic*] in that grave over which I have wept but [to] think of her singing the praises of her Saviour in his Kingdom, often I think that her spirit watches over me'.<sup>47</sup>

To add to the trauma of these months, early in November Susan had a miscarriage. Her first reaction to this was disappointment but disappointment gave way to a feeling of relief as she realized that a continued pregnancy would have made it difficult to give her mother the attention she needed, and which Susan wished to give.<sup>48</sup>