

two years later:

You can hardly fancy a more cosy and happy party than the two pair of Husbands and wives, when we do get an opportunity of a little esoteric talk together. We are so entirely happy and comfortable in all relations one to another, as spouse to spouse, as friend to friend, as cousin to cousin, as clergyman to Bishop. . . The warm co-operation and ready sympathy always at hand are so great a support to my dear Husband who has for the most part been little understood and less supported. . . in truth it is hardly a less satisfaction to his wife, to see him appreciated—his plans warmly taken up and faithfully carried out and to feel that the spirit of the thing is so entirely entered into by both Charles and Caroline. . . [who] put up with the squeezey house as they do with its overflowing fullness and with the innumerable matters English folk must detect as a want, or as an incubus.<sup>19</sup>

The Abrahams' letters are distanced in their attitude to the issues, insofar as they came to New Zealand almost a decade after the Selwyns and Martins. They were fully aware of the criticism both in England and New Zealand directed against the Bishop's aspirations and methods, and at the same time were deeply concerned at the health of both Sarah and the Bishop. They both commented on the busy life in a 'motley household' and Caroline soon came ' . . . down from her aesthetic heights to our level of divine drudgery' teaching the community's children with 'a mind ever alive to the best way of making a stew—or boiling bones to jelly to feed hungry lads'.<sup>20</sup>

The women were also to become involved in the issues which engrossed their husbands' plans and actions 'for laying the foundations of the Government and the Church in New Zealand' with the welfare and rights of the Maori people very much at heart. Mary Ann Martin expressed the thoughts of all when she wrote to the Rev. E. Coleridge in 1846:

Sometimes it seems, as if one must start off express to England, and talk to the good men there, and tell them with the truthful earnestness of an eye-witness, how such and such things really stand. But this is a regular woman's thought, . . . and so I go "fizzing on", as dear Sarah says, talking almost as freely to you, as if you were sitting here.<sup>21</sup>

Mary Ann and Sarah 'used dutifully to listen (and with much edification)', for example, to the discussions on the proposed system for Church government and Constitution founded on voluntary compact which Selwyn and Martin formulated over several years. That it was informed listening there can be no doubt when Mary Ann writes that she and the Judge had been reading together Tertullian and other theological writings 'rather than to take the words and assertions of others on so important a portion of Church History'.<sup>22</sup> Sarah, on her part, professing not to understand the subject, reports: