

women shared their problems and loneliness and supported each other through the trials of colonial life and, bound by distant experience, remained very close after their return to England.

Many of their letters have survived, the writers revealing all facets of their life in New Zealand and discussing in detail letters, newspapers and books sent out from England. Sarah and Mary Ann both compiled memoirs towards the end of their lives: Sarah's 'Reminiscences' drawn from her letters were written at the age of eighty-three in 1892 for her family, while Lady Martin's *Our Maoris* 'gathered from diaries kept by the writer during a residence of thirty-four years in New Zealand'⁴ was published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in the year of her death in 1884. Many details in the lives of these pioneer women are absent from these two memoirs each written for very different readers, but they have their place in assessing the characters, roles and lifestyle of wives of public figures in an infant colony 'where we were all young. . . as were the great body of settlers'.⁵

Sarah Harriet Selwyn, daughter of Sir John Richardson, a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, was born on 2 September 1809 and spent her childhood in London. Her reminiscences suggest a reserved, observant personality, musical and artistic, with considerable sensitivity to her surroundings. In July 1839 she married George Augustus Selwyn whose future seemed to lie in 'preferment and prosperity in England'.⁶ Sarah enjoyed life at Windsor and Eton where in 1840, their son William was born. However as early as August 1839 Selwyn was writing to a friend 'about a new colony in New Zealand, and strong wishes are expressed that the Church should be well established at first on a good footing'.⁷ Two years later in July 1841 he was offered the 'Episcopal Office in New Zealand' which he accepted in the full knowledge of his wife's approval 'for they had married with that understanding'.⁸

Sarah's life in New Zealand began on 24 June 1842 at Paihia where the family was welcomed into the busy, hospitable home of the Rev. Henry Williams. Within a fortnight she had moved to her first home at Waimate and the Bishop had departed for six months on a tour of inspection through the North Island to Wellington and Nelson leaving his chaplain the Rev. W. C. Cotton in charge of the youthful party of catechists who had accompanied him from England. As Sarah reflected:

. . . when George is really gone and I am left with all this charge on my shoulders I shall feel more thoroughly alone than ever I did in my life before: but people are used to being alone in N.Z. and it seems so clearly the most helpful thing for me to do, to keep things strait [*sic*] and going forward at home, that I doubt not it will be well one way or another.⁹