

other. They indicate a companionate marriage, in which equality of mind was important, to at least one party. Equality of mind did not necessarily mean that Thomas expected Mary to cross the boundaries between public and private, no matter how fluid they may have been. While she negotiated the lease of a house while he was in Auckland, and while he discussed prices and markets with her, encouraging her to make decisions without reference to him, nevertheless, the actual purchasing and even the disbursement of goods he suggested she leave until his return. They were part of his world. Similarly although he often expressed his wish to be at home, to provide help and support, that did not necessarily mean he would be involved in the household chores. He referred to the 'quiet evenings when my darling was by and though I might be absorbed in some pleasant book ... she was by my side and working with her patient industry'.⁴⁷ Rather for him, equality meant consultation, a partnership, rather than domination.

I do not consider my wife a toy, something to be cajoled and flattered and kept in ignorance. I wish her to have as much authority as myself and it has happened darling, that our feelings have not jarred and that we have not struggled for mastery.⁴⁸

This article does not pretend to provide a representative view of what nineteenth-century men felt about their families or their wives, but it does indicate the complexity of this subject and places in the public domain one relationship that was not characterised by a sense of subservience. 'His life and his wife have made him dry'? Apparently not.

REFERENCES

- 1 The author, during her tenure as the National Library Fellow for 1997, is researching and writing a book based on the love letters written by Thomas King to his wife Mary between 1841 and 1880. Thomas King was a prominent early settler in New Plymouth, at various times a bank manager, Member of the House of Representatives and Provincial Treasurer, as well as holding positions in local government. One of his sons, Frederic Truby King, later achieved prominence as founder of the Plunket Society. This article is work in progress and focuses on the early phase of Thomas and Mary's relationship.
- 2 Richmond to C.W. Richmond, 21 June 1856, cited in Guy Scholefield (ed.), *The Richmond-Atkinson Papers*, Government Printer, Wellington, 1960, vol.1, p.232.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Frances Porter, *Born to New Zealand: A Biography of Jane Maria Atkinson*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1990, p. 135.
- 5 Ibid., p.77. Merton was the New Plymouth farm of the Richmond/Atkinson group.
- 6 Ibid., p.52.
- 7 Frances Porter & Charlotte Macdonald (eds.), *My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates: The Unsettled Lives of Women in Nineteenth Century New Zealand as Revealed to Sisters, Family and Friends*, Auckland University Press/Bridget Williams Books, Auckland, 1996, p.146.