

WILLIAM SWAINSON, F.R.S., 1789-1855 and

HENRY GABRIEL SWAINSON, 1830-1892

In July 1966 the Library bought a group of drawings by William Swainson, the naturalist, and a diary kept by his son, Henry Gabriel Swainson. These came from Mrs Janet Leeper, of London, a grand-daughter of William Swainson's youngest son, Edwin.

Of the two distinguished William Swainsons who arrived in New Zealand in 1841, the one of particular interest to Wellington is the naturalist. The other, the Attorney-General, lived chiefly in Auckland and published several books which although of interest are not uncommon. The naturalist also published books but they are less important to us than the first-hand records of early Wellington left by him and his children. William's own legacy was the many drawings he did between 1841 and 1849 of Wellington, the Hutt Valley, Porirua and the Waikanae coast. It appears that very few of his letters or papers have survived.¹ His children, however, wrote voluminously and their letters and diaries are still held by their descendants, who have kindly allowed many of them to be copied for the Library.

Of William Swainson's drawings the Turnbull already had in its collections four hundred or so scientific drawings and plates and fifty-six landscapes and tree studies done in New Zealand and Australia. There are many more in New Zealand, in libraries, galleries and museums, as well as in private hands. The collection just acquired by Turnbull comprises thirtyseven drawings of New Zealand and Australian interest and thirtythree 'Sicilian' sketches.

These drawings are a welcome addition to a strong collection of original works by the artist. The diary of his son, for the two years 1850 and 1851, is doubly welcome, not only as one of the very few original Swainson manuscripts in the Library but because it covers a period when Henry, who was in the Navy, was in the same squadron as the survey ship *Acheron* and based at Sydney.

The events in William Swainson's life which preceded his decision to emigrate to New Zealand were summarized by himself in an *Autobiography* which appears to be the basic source of subsequent notices, including those in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*.² The original *Autobiography*, which is more informative than these paraphrases, was published in one of the twelve volumes he wrote comprising the Natural History section of Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*. The publication of the autobiography in the *Treatise on Taxidermy, with the Biography of the Zoologists, and Notices of their Works* (1840)³ marked the announcement of his retirement from professional authorship and intended emigration to New Zealand. Briefly, Swainson's career had fallen into two periods - the Army 1806-1815;