

is however a tragic relationship that the correspondence reveals, for four months after Susan was married her mother died. Before the following year was out Susan herself had died in childbirth. Donald's and Susan's letters tell us not only about courtship and marriage, but also about childbearing and death.

Most historians agree that by the mid-nineteenth century love was the major determinant in the choice of marriage partners in the western world. Love was certainly an emotion Susan Strang and Donald McLean believed they experienced but it was an emotion that developed gradually. Friendship and sincere affection were seen as the necessary bases upon which love could grow. The few letters written before McLean visited Wellington in May-June of 1850 reveal little about the state of either Susan or Donald's heart. Although Donald's form of address, 'My dear Susan', and closure 'ever yours sincerely Donald McLean' suggest some kind of mutual possession, he did not openly acknowledge the understanding that existed between them. (Indeed even after they had firmly committed themselves to marriage both Donald and Susan regarded the decision as a very private one.)¹⁴ During Donald's stay in Wellington in mid-1850, the relationship moved into a new phase of a firm, although still private, engagement. Susan felt both more secure and more aware that her future happiness now depended on someone else. Nevertheless for a time she continued to use the terminology of friendship and affection rather than love. Shortly after Donald left Wellington she wrote to him that she felt 'much more happy and contented . . . now I feel assured of your affection for me and know that no absence will ever cause you to forget me'. Three weeks later, in answer to a question from Donald about her happiness, she wrote:

I am sure I would be very discontented if I were not so, for I have everything that I can wish in this world, I enjoy good health, I have a kind Father and Mother, and in you I have a friend on whose affection I can place the greatest reliance.

In September she wrote that there were 'no trials or suffering' she would not undergo for Donald's sake and added, 'if your affection is as sincere as mine I am sure you would do the same'. A month later, however, as Donald's absence stretched past its expected span, she freely confessed that she loved him; she wrote,

do dearest take care of yourself, remember if anything were to happen to you, I would never have a happy day in this life again, it is perhaps wrong in me to say this, I know it is sinful to love anything in this world so much as I love you, but I hope it will be forgiven¹⁵

Donald was more careful to conceal his feelings before marriage. His form of closing letters changed to 'yours affectionately' or even