

## 'I must write a pamphlet, or I shall burst'

JUNE STARKE

In this way Sarah Selwyn, wife of the Bishop of New Zealand, opened her letter of 30 August 1860<sup>1</sup> to her cousin and regular correspondent in Leicestershire, Mary Anne Palmer, quoting '... Dr Arnold's usual state'.<sup>2</sup> She quickly wrote: 'I do not intend a pamphlet, leaving that to my betters, but I must needs talk about our most troublous public matters.' Conversation between family and friends left at home could only be carried on by correspondence; 'the tyranny of distance' looms large in many letters from New Zealand especially when there was disagreement with the actions of the colonial government and when contentious events occurring in the colony were reported in British newspapers and discussed in public places. Sarah's vehement outburst on this occasion concerned the effect on the Maori people of the government's purchase of land for European settlement at Waitara in Taranaki, an action which brought Maori and settler into open confrontation and gave rise to a pamphlet war. In fact a pamphlet containing this letter was to be published in 1861 while Sarah Selwyn was in England. The publication of such information reflected the stand taken by Church of England clergy and others, led by her husband, who aligned themselves on the side of native rights against the actions of Governor Gore Browne and land hungry settlers.

Apart from five letters from Sarah Selwyn, *Extracts of Letters from New Zealand on the War Question*. . .<sup>3</sup> (discussed in more detail later) contains three letters from Mary Ann Martin, wife of New Zealand's Chief Justice, Sir William Martin, and one from Caroline Abraham, whose husband Dr Charles Abraham was Bishop of Wellington. Mary Ann, the daughter of the Rev. W. Parker, prebendary of St Paul's, had married William Martin, Selwyn's friend and contemporary at St John's College, Cambridge, shortly before he embarked for New Zealand in April 1841 to prepare a home for his invalid wife. Mary Ann followed in the care of Bishop and Mrs Selwyn on the *Tomatin* which sailed from Plymouth on 26 December 1841. Almost a decade later in 1850 Dr Charles Abraham, assistant master at Eton, fulfilled a longstanding promise to Selwyn when he accepted the post of chaplain and principal of St John's College, Auckland. The Selwyns' joy was compounded by his marriage to Sarah's cousin, Caroline Palmer. These three