

Sir Frederick Weld: pastoralist, politician, painter

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The next morning we had with much sorrow to say goodbye to Mr Weld, whose course no longer lay with ours, as he was going to walk up the coast to his station, Flaxbourne, nearly opposite to Wellington. It was a great undertaking, about 150 miles, that had scarcely *been walked* before, several rivers to cross, and 19 miles running by the beach, along the rocks where you must hang on by your hands to the rocks above, and so on; but he wanted to see the country and to get back to his station. . . .

We like Mr Weld so much . . . and he is so good-natured that at last I asked him to call on you and tell you *all about us* . . . and if he does come, pray seem as if you expected him, for he is very shy, and it is an exertion to him to go to new people, though I am quite certain you would *all* like him.¹

So Charlotte Godley's pen recorded the end of an important period of contact between the gentle and impressionable young pastoralist and the more sophisticated and influential Godleys. They had first met in July 1850 during the Godleys' eight-month stay in Wellington. A mutual interest in Tennyson and Ruskin was only one feature which they found they had in common. A concern for colonial self-government was another. In the ensuing months, whenever the opportunity presented itself, Weld had clarified many of his own ideas in the lively political discussions that were prompted by John Robert Godley's presence in the settlement. When they returned to Lyttelton to meet the first four emigrant ships due to arrive in December, Weld accompanied the Canterbury Association's chief agent and his family to Port Cooper. Then it became clear that in pioneering circumstances, the skills of the practical colonist were of far more immediate value than any knowledge of politics and responsible government.

As he helped them cook potatoes and rice for their first dinner (13 December) and 'did all kinds of things . . . better than anyone else', Weld could well have reflected on his own initiation into the art of camping out. Then very much a new chum, for he had only been in the colony a few weeks, Weld had celebrated his coming of age in May 1844 by the side of Lake Wairarapa, under a makeshift shelter of blanket, sticks and flaxleaves, surrounded by sheep. It was a stormy night. A sudden gust of wind accompanied by a storm of rain tore off the blanket and wet Weld to the skin. The two dogs tethered to the supports reacted. 'Each dog thinking the other had