

FRANCES ELLEN COLENZO, 1849–1887
Her Life and Times in Relation to the Victorian Stereotype
of the Middle-Class English Woman

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Stereotype of the Middle-Class English Woman*

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOOTNOTES

ASS	Anti-Slavery Society Papers
BPP	British Parliamentary Papers
Col Col	Colenso Collection
KCAL	Killie Campbell Africana Library
NA	Natal Archives

FRANCES ELLEN COLENZO'S IMMEDIATE FAMILY

John William	b. St Austell, Cornwall, 24 January 1814 d. Pietermaritzburg, 20 June 1883 (aged 69)
Sarah Frances (née Bunyon)	b. Blackfriars, London, 3 June 1816 d. Pietermaritzburg, 23 December 1893 (aged 77)
Harriette Emily	b. Tharston, Norfolk, 30 June 1847 d. Pietermaritzburg, 2 June 1932 (aged 84)
Frances Ellen (Fanny)	b. Forncett St Mary, Norfolk, 30 May 1849 d. Ventnor, Isle of Wight, 28 April 1887 (aged 37)
Robert John (Robin)	b. Forncett St Mary, Norfolk, 1851 d. Kensington, London, 1926 (aged 74 or 75)
Francis Ernest (Frank)	b. Forncett St Mary, Norfolk, 9 April 1852 d. Amersham, Buckinghamshire, 30 June 1910 (aged 58)
Agnes Mary	b. Pietermaritzburg, 29 September 1855 d. Pietermaritzburg, 23 July 1932 (aged 76)

Information based on Shelagh O'Byrne Spencer, *British Settlers in Natal, 1824–1857: A Biographical Register* volume 4 (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1987): 137, 140–141.

FOREWORD

Pat returned to Pietermaritzburg in mid-1975 from Durban and became one of the first subject librarians at the university (UNP) library. Given close contact with members of the history department, the idea of a writing a thesis towards a masters degree took form during 1976 emerging from Pat's friendship with Ruth Edgecombe and came to fruition in 1980 with the award of an MA by the University of Cape Town (UCT).

Like most postgraduate research projects this one had ups and downs. Its initial title was 'The life and letters of Frances Ellen Colenso, 1849–1887' and this caused conflict with Brenda Nicholls at Rhodes University who appeared to assume she had a franchise on Colenso family research. After it was established that Nicholls was working primarily on Harriette Colenso, Rhodes cleared the topic. Mark Prestwich was the nominal original supervisor, but he retired; while Ruth left for Unisa. Pat then liaised with John Benyon and Bill Guest, both new to Pietermaritzburg.

Research proceeded with the assistance of a Human Sciences Research Council ad hoc grant for 1977–1978 while Pat carried on with her job at the UNP library; but in late 1977 I was offered a post at UCT, a move that opened up the possibility of Pat working full-time on her thesis. On 1 November 1977, she wrote to her former history lecturer Colin Webb asking him to supervise her if she transferred her registration to UCT; and he immediately replied, 'Of course'. The move led to a change of thesis title, so that Frances would now be compared with various stereotypes and with British and Natal contemporaries.

The final writing took place back in Pietermaritzburg in early 1980 and Colin Webb then required considerable revision of the second half of the thesis. This caused a crisis of confidence and a letter of 2 May 1980 addressed to 'My dear Pat' and ending 'Warm good wishes'. It seemed to work wonders and led to a distinction for a bold approach to the topic; and a recommendation from the examiner that the thesis be published. This never happened; although another historian commented on the sophistication of the research and writing.

In the same year that Pat's thesis was submitted, Jeff Guy delivered a lecture at UCT to the Arts Students Council. He describes 1980 as 'a time when historians of southern Africa were first trying to incorporate women, with their own dynamic and within the social context created by their being women, into historical research and writing.'¹ So this work represents an early example of South African women's history.

Fanny Colenso had a very short life (30 May 1849 to 28 April 1887): she was still only 37 when she died. As this book shows, she had a public profile as an artist, writer and political campaigner, yet very little was written about her when this research started in 1976. This is in part due to the fire at Bishopstowe in 1884 in which she lost most of her possessions, so source material is scattered. In the early stages of research Pat communicated with Olive Turner of Gillitts who was clearly very familiar with the Colenso archive and had read many of the letters. She described Frances as a 'vividly individualistic writer' and more impressive than her 'garrulous' sister-in-law Sophie; and goes on to say that Frances was a complex personality needing careful psychological analysis. Intriguingly, Turner ventures the opinion that the Durnford brothers both treated Frances poorly; and the startling thought: 'I am glad she died when she did.' This presumably refers to the fact that she was unaware of any betrayal.

Brenda Nicholls presented a paper at the Anglo-Zulu War Centenary Conference in 1979 and then wrote extensive biographical notes about Fanny in her thesis, which covered what she termed the Colenso endeavour over the ten years after Fanny's death.² Then, Fanny's pseudonymous work *My Chief and I* was republished in 1994 and edited by Margaret Daymond.³

Nicholls notes that Fanny was 'physically beautiful and emotionally intense' and that her doomed love affair with Anthony Durnford left 'posthumous pathos'.⁴ Both Nicholls and Daymond judge her writing to be of historiographic significance, although her books did not sell well in her lifetime. Fanny coined the phrase 'the ruin of Zululand' echoed by many authors. A distant descendant and historian, Gwilym Colenso, noted the 'extensive chain of influence' exercised by the Colensos; of which Frances was a significant part.⁵ And Daymond sees Fanny as an important woman writer, confident in a male preserve, who was a 'feminist by assumption rather than argument.' Oddly given her literary and political output, she was the only member of the Colenso family who was not given a Zulu name.⁶

Daymond considers Fanny not as an historian, but from the viewpoint of a literary critic.⁷ In her introduction to the republished *My Chief and I*, she points out that Fanny was only 26 when she wrote it and describes her as 'one of the most important pioneers of political fiction by women writers in South Africa.' It was an extraordinary intervention in public life, a sphere particularly in colonial society then dominated by men although she had to pass herself off as a male writer, in part to disguise her affections for Anthony Durnford. She did have one major advantage: all the Colenso women played an active role one way or other in the bishop's political causes and they had grown

up in a household imbued with the ‘intellectual world of the metropole’.⁸ Daymond suggests that she was an earlier version of Olive Schreiner and thus an historical literary figure in her own right. For a person of great emotional intensity and creative impulse, writing was a significant safety valve.

However, Daymond admits that personal passion did subvert her writing up to a point, a fact that was used by some to dismiss her relevance as a writer. But Daymond concludes that her determination not to be constrained by custom marked her out as a ‘remarkable proto-feminist’. Her blending of the personal and the political indeed identify her as a woman far ahead of her time. In this light her early death looks even more tragic.

Donald Morris denigrates Fanny as ‘impatient and frequently allow[ing] her emotions to tinge her writing.’ Thus, she failed ‘to reach even [the bishop’s] occasionally dubious level of objectivity.’ Describing Fanny at 25 as ‘frail and beautiful’, Morris describes her as ‘leap[ing] like a tigress to the defense [of Durnford]’; ‘reckless in her accusations, fastening on every chance remark’.⁹ He also casts aspersions on the historical value of her writing and shows himself to be a follower of Victorian convention: women were too emotional to be reliable observers and commentators. However, Morris was just an American amateur historian who barely knew South Africa.

Conversely, the eminent South African historian Jeff Guy, like Daymond, regards Fanny as a significant historical figure. From 1862 to 1865 the entire Colenso family moved back to England and the two older girls went to school at Winnington Hall in Cheshire run by a friend of their mother Sarah Frances. It was open to progressive thought such as that expounded by John Ruskin, and Fanny, in her mid-teens, flourished. Her mother worried about her daughter’s confidence and forthright nature; and a brightness and passion amounting to rebelliousness that at the end of her life turned to radicalism.¹⁰ Presumably these were not necessarily seen as assets in a young woman in the 1860s. Guy notes that Frances’s novel *Two Heroes* (1873) is in part self-descriptive. She returned to Britain in 1868 with her younger brothers, ostensibly for her eyes to be checked, but because she needed to broaden her horizons. She wanted to remain, but was back in Natal in 1870.¹¹

Fanny was an attractive woman who got on well with both her own gender and with men. Guy also notes the ‘confidence she had in her relations with men’ and they found themselves drawn to her; often resulting in jealousy from other women.¹² The dearth of surviving correspondence and photographic evidence, and the conventions of the time, mean that a great deal is conjecture based on allusion. But there was a relationship with Louis Knollys in the early 1870s;

and then she fell in love with Anthony Durnford, a married man (although separated) twice her age. In the 1880s she formed a working relationship, and perhaps something more, with Edward Durnford; and a constructive friendship with Frederick Chesson.¹³ It was this period of her writing career that Guy notes as anti-imperialist and, again, significantly ahead of her time. She was particularly angry about injustice and frustrated about social custom and propriety that prevented her expressing her feelings and frustrations as a woman.¹⁴

The last eight years of Fanny's life were painful. Shattered by Durnford's death and the blame laid upon him for the disaster at Isandlwana, she left for England with Frank in October 1879. She was 'to mourn for [Durnford] for the rest of her life', grief mixed with anger at the duplicity of civil and military authorities.¹⁵ In 1881 tuberculosis was diagnosed in her right lung, which added to her emotional state. She wrote about death, sometimes with an acerbic twist, and its imminence lent urgency to her various causes: the vindication of Durnford; the position of the Zulu people; her father's biography; and the injustices of imperialism. Her high state of emotion created a fear within her extended family of scandal. She returned to Natal and was living in Durban for health reasons when her father died in 1883; but was back home when Bishopstowe was consumed by a veld fire in September 1884.

Having lost almost everything, she went down with shingles at Seven Oaks, the nearby cottage where the Colenso women rebuilt their lives. Frustrated by failing health, a bitter sense of personal loss and general injustice, and a need to pursue her causes she was a disruptive influence at Seven Oaks especially during the cold, wet summer of 1884–1885 when she was getting thinner and struggling to breathe. Her solution was to leave Natal and she wanted the rest of the family to do likewise.

The final straw was the exoneration of Offy Shepstone in an official inquiry into Isandlwana, which meant that the accusations against Durnford were left standing. She left Natal for the last time on 9 June 1886. In London she met Knollys again and reconciled with him; but her TB had spread to the other lung. Spurned by her mother's family the Bunyons, she became dependent on the friendship of Georgie Burne-Jones (née MacDonald) and became part of a distinctly radical world. But her health continued to deteriorate and in November 1886 she moved to the Royal National Hospital in Ventnor on the Isle of Wight, which provided specially heated and ventilated rooms for consumptives.¹⁶

She resented hospital regulations but continued to work, corresponding in particular with Chesson at the Aborigines Protection Society and planned a return to Natal in the summer of 1887. But the hospital was not geared to terminal illness and regarding her as a hopeless case she was required to leave in late March 1887. She was nursed in lodgings by Esther Clarke and died on the morning of 28 April. The description of her last moments suggests that she suffered a heart attack. Chesson regarded her as enormously brave and dutiful to the end. The inscription on her grave reads: 'Following her father's example she sacrificed her life on behalf of the helpless and oppressed.' Harriette Colenso hoped for something more nuanced, but no one obliged.¹⁷

Jeff Guy sums up the lives of all three Colenso daughters (*amadodakazi ka Sobantu*, daughters of the father of the people) as tragic and inspiring, caught up in multiple contradictions including those of liberals in colonial society and women in the Victorian age. All of them in their different ways carried forward the bishop's legacy with grim determination, although ultimately to no end.¹⁸ As Guy concludes

Society frowned upon women who stepped beyond the bounds of the home ... and who challenged any part of the structure, whether political or personal. The lives of the Colenso sisters show that in human affairs there is a direct and intimate link between the intensely personal and the broadest forces of the age. And this of course is one of the most important messages of women's studies.¹⁹

The verdicts of Daymond and Guy were delivered long after Pat had completed her thesis. Disappointingly neither made reference to it; nor has anyone else. But this is of small importance compared with the fact that Pat undoubtedly chose her subject well with a sense that her work would stand the test of time.

Frances, perhaps to a greater extent than any other member of her family except her father the bishop, was a pioneer (in Afrikaans a *baanbreker*, an expressive term Pat used in conversation to describe Fanny) and a woman far ahead of her time, one that has relevance 138 years after her death. At the end of her life, she was stoutly maintaining her patriotism while denouncing imperialism and the actions of its agents. As a typical Colenso she was an upholder of human rights for all. But perhaps her single most notable characteristic was outspokenness and a resentment of stultifying convention that restricted her ambitions.

Fanny's birthplace was Forncett St Mary in Norfolk where her father was rector from 1846 to 1853. The parish of Forncett was subdivided in order to provide a living and a new rectory was built for the Colenso family.²⁰

Ironically, rural depopulation resulted in the closure of his church in 1980 and for a quarter of century the building and property deteriorated. In 2007 a restoration project was initiated by local residents and St Mary's is now a community centre.²¹

Fanny's other permanent home was Bishopstowe farm, about ten kilometres from Pietermaritzburg looking across the Umngeni valley towards Mkambathini (Table Mountain), which the bishop called his magnificent altar.



Mkambathini, September 2024

The property also had a chapel and schoolroom and outbuildings that accommodated, among other activities, a printing press. Bricks were made on site. The farm was also the location of Ekukanyeni (home of light) mission station dedicated to the general and religious education and industrial and agricultural skills training of selected Zulu boys; but it was shortlived and closed after five years in 1861. Some of the Fornsett villagers had been persuaded to accompany the Colensos to Natal.²²

The original land grant was an area of 8 500 acres, for which the bishop had grand plans formulated during his initial visit of 1853. He emphasised the undoubted virtues of concentrating limited resources aimed at white congregants and potential black converts by placing the bishop's house and mission station on the same site where the temptation might have been to locate the latter further from the city. Apart from the buildings noted above, Colenso had ambitiously hoped for a hospital, orphanage and theological college. His plans also included a village for Africans working in Pietermaritzburg. This was not built until the mid-1920s and although initially called the native village it would eventually be named Sobantu – in fitting memory of Colenso.²³

The imposing house, also known as Bishopstowe, was destroyed in a veld fire on 3 September 1884, partly rebuilt, and then repossessed by the Church of the Province of South Africa in 1910 in terms of the Church Properties Act, one of the last laws enacted by the colony of Natal, after which it was sold. This may have been an act of colonial revenge against the Colenso family and acknowledgement of the effectiveness of their politics. The residents were dispersed and the surviving Colenso women, Harriette and Agnes, moved into the city and later to Sweetwaters where they died. The Bishopstowe site was later re-acquired for the Colenso Homestead Restoration Project after the original foundations had been unearthed by the archaeologist Gavin Whitelaw in 1997. The project was wound up in 2009 after restoration of the main building, which bears a number of commemorative plaques. Further plans were shelved and the house is now leased.²⁴

The Bishopstowe fire, a year after the bishop's death, effectively meant the end of the Colenso imprint on Pietermaritzburg. The daughters would fight on in their different ways to continue his legacy, but this was largely a matter of lost causes and left to the emphatic vindication of history. One hundred and forty years later Bishopstowe is a semi-rural suburb of Pietermaritzburg – smallholdings with a farmers' club and a polo ground. The distant daytime view of Mkambathini would be familiar to the Colenso family (the mountain now has electricity so twinkles in the dark) but the immediate surroundings of Ekukanyeni are farmed, much of the land under sugarcane. The only physical marker of a Colenso history is a predictably weatherbeaten sign leaning at an increasingly drunken angle on the district road. The house built on the site is nondescript, let out and inaccessible. There is no way of knowing how far the property extended or the exact location of the mission station within it. The city, like much of South Africa, has little regard for its history except where political excuses or propaganda are needed. An audit of historical sites would show that Bishopstowe is not unique; but its neglect is highly symbolic of the city's loss and the poignancy of the Colenso family's 75-year association with it.

In the post-apartheid dispensation, Harriette Colenso had a road, formerly Bishopstowe Road, fittingly named after her. John Colenso left his cathedral of St Peter, now in the grounds of the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity and still in occasional use, and his name in the African suburb founded in 1927 – Sobantu (father of the people). Frances, perhaps inevitably given her character, appears only courtesy of the creative arts. She has a brief appearance in *Zulu Dawn*,



Anna Calder-Marshall as Fanny Colenso in Zulu Dawn, 1979

a 1979 film about the Anglo-Zulu War, and was played by Anna Calder-Marshall. She was well-cast in terms of appearance and age.

There is also a semi-fictional work written by Peter Cleary, which is about Anthony Durnford and the three women in his life, all named Frances: his wife, his daughter and finally Fanny.²⁵

Photographs of Fanny are few and far between, presumably as a result of the Bishopstowe fire of 1884. Pat believed there was only one, which she tracked down in the British Library in 1980.²⁶ But the Internet has subsequently thrown up others and Jeff Guy clearly unearthed more, which appear in his book *The View across the River*.

Pat's thesis has been edited to conform with the requirements of the Natal Society Foundation, but otherwise it is as submitted to UCT in 1980. It was written fifty years ago and must be read in that light. Conformity aside, the main change is the addition of another section to the bibliography to cover relevant work published from 1980 onwards. I am enormously indebted to Michelle Bartlett, a trustee of the Natal Society Foundation, who undertook the arduous task of recapturing the 1970s typescript for the computer age, a particularly challenging job in view of the complexity of the references that she completed with aplomb. I am also grateful to Gwilym Colenso for the photograph of Fanny's grave; and to Stephen Coan and John Deane for details about the Bishopstowe property.

To end on a personal note, the research for this thesis dominated the first few years of our married life in Pietermaritzburg and Cape Town from 1975 to 1979. The year after it was accepted, we moved to a house where Pat died



Fanny Colenso, 1881

sixteen years later within walking distance of Bishopstowe with an excellent view of Mkambathini. Twenty-eight years after Pat's death and editing this book in that same house, a number of issues and questions have invaded my thoughts. She and Frances Colenso, in spite of Pat's regular exasperation with her subject, shared several significant characteristics. And in successive centuries they lived through much the same span of years. Pat warned me just before we married that she would not 'make old bones' as she chose to put it. Did this acute awareness of her own mortality draw

her to Fanny who died tragically young also of inexorable disease? She alluded to impending death in correspondence about Durnford to her family two years before she died; just as Pat spoke directly to me with only a couple of years left. Both knew the end was near and unavoidable, but met it with courage making plans for the future. Perhaps such similarities and parallels are entirely speculative. But on the other hand, maybe they are not. Did Pat in her dire circumstances find some inspiration, conscious or subconscious, in what she knew of Fanny and how she faced terminal illness committed to her causes and interests to the very end? It's impossible to know – but I would like to think so.

NOTES

- 1 J. Guy, 'The Colenso daughters: three women confront imperialism' in *The Eye of the Storm: Bishop John William Colenso and the Crisis of Biblical Inspiration* edited by Jonathan A. Draper (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003): 345.
- 2 B.M. Nicholls, 'The Colenso endeavour in its context, 1887–1897' (PhD, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1997).
- 3 Fanny Colenso, *My Chief and I or Six Months in Natal after the Langalibalele Outbreak* (originally published under the pseudonym Atherton Wylde) and *Five Years Later: A Sequel* edited and introduced by M.J. Daymond (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1994).
- 4 By the end of her four years of research and writing Pat declared emphatically that she'd had enough of Fanny's emotions and emotionalism.
- 5 S. Coan, 'In defence of an "important" nkosi' *Witness* 28 September 2011.

- 6 Nicholls, 'The Colenso endeavour in its context, 1887–1897': 8–10; M. von Klemperer, 'Setting the record straight' *Natal Witness*, 28 November 1994.
- 7 M.J. Daymond, 'Introduction' in Fanny Colenso, *My Chief and I or Six Months in Natal after the Langalibalele Outbreak*: [11–45].
- 8 Guy, 'The Colenso daughters': 346.
- 9 D. Morris, *The Washing of the Spears: A History of the Rise of the Zulu Nation under Shaka and its Fall in the Zulu War of 1879* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966): 214, 226, 438, 439, 508, 593. Morris was an American naval officer, but behind the scenes a CIA operative from 1956 to 1972. This covers the period when he wrote his Anglo-Zulu War book, which he claims came about after an encounter with Ernest Hemingway in Cuba. He later consorted with Ian Player and Mangosuthu Buthelezi and died aged 78 in 2002. His book lacks footnotes and his views of the Colensos raise further questions about his authenticity as an historian.
- 10 Guy, 'The Colenso daughters': 355.
- 11 J. Guy, *The View across the River: Harriette Colenso and the Zulu Struggle against Imperialism* (Cape Town; David Philip, 2001): 26–27, 32–33.
- 12 *ibid*: 122, 139.
- 13 *ibid*: 33, 46–47.
- 14 *ibid*: 121, 168.
- 15 *ibid*: 56–59. Sadly, Durnford was not entirely the paragon Fanny imagined. He had approached Theophilus Shepstone for a post in native administration and been accepted with reservations. Fanny never knew this; although Harriette and Frank did and withheld the information.
- 16 *ibid*: 149, 154–158.
- 17 *ibid*: 166–168.
- 18 Guy, 'The Colenso daughters': 349, 352, 353.
- 19 *ibid*: 362.
- 20 P. Hinchliff, *John William Colenso: Bishop of Natal* (London: Nelson, 1964): 35–36.
- 21 A. Gretton, 'Villagers breathe new life into their historic church' *Eastern Daily Press*, 18 May 2010.
- 22 W. Rees, *Colenso Letters from Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1958): 40. Thanks to John Deane for clarification about the layout of Bishopstowe farm (email, 17 July 2024).
- 23 John Colenso, *Ten Weeks in Natal: A Journal of a First Tour of Visitation among the Colonists and Zulu Kafirs of Natal* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1855): 70–71, 74–75.
- 24 Guy, *The View across the River*: 447. S. Coan, 'A home fit for a bishop' *Witness*, 26 October 2009. A photograph accompanying this article shows the schoolroom and chapel, but these cannot have been the originals as they were destroyed in the fire of 1884. The fig tree named after the bishop's grandson, Eric, seems however to have survived.
- 25 P. Cleary, *For the Love of Frances: A Romantic View of Colonel Durnford of iSandhlwana*. (Mtunzini: Peter Cleary, 2015).
- 26 BL C1093, 912C.

INTRODUCTION

The stereotype of the Victorian middle-class woman, which generally characterised her as a passive, ornamental, helpless and dependent creature, has been one of the most popular caricatures from the nineteenth century. Recent research into this hitherto largely ignored social class has begun to re-adjust this image.¹ The stereotyped distressed gentlewoman who emigrated to Australia and New Zealand, for instance, has recently been critically examined, but so far the female emigrant and settler in colonial South Africa has been ignored.² It is only since the early 1970s that academic research into feminism began to appear. The influence of the women's liberation movement and the increasing interest in social history, while stimulating research into Victorian women in Britain and her colonies, has only penetrated historical research within South Africa in the last decade.³ There are three notable works in this respect. The first is Sylvia Vietzen's history of female education in Natal, which appeared in 1973 and was a pioneer work in the history of women in this country. The other two are by Cherryl Walker. One examines the extension of the franchise to white women; the other explores the role of the Federation of South African Women.⁴

These three works are, however, traditional in their approach to the woman question in that they focus on the reform aspect; the first work through institutional educational changes in Natal, and the last two through the political struggle of women.⁵ Other works on individual South African women exist, and also reflect a traditional approach to women in history through biography.⁶ The approach that seeks to typify the average nineteenth-century middle-class woman's lifestyle, her status and role within the family and society, and her attitudes and behaviour, has yet to appear in South African historical research. There is also a need to relate these aspects to wider socio-economic changes.⁷

This thesis is a study of one Victorian woman in a colonial environment – Frances Ellen Colenso – and an attempt to examine her background, education, career, attitudes and behaviour in terms of the popular stereotype of the middle-class Victorian woman. Briefly, this thesis maintains that the popular image of feminine behaviour and qualities of the nineteenth-century middle-class woman was highly idealised and unrealistic. For various reasons this myth became stereotyped and has persisted unchallenged until the last decade.

The first chapter discusses the various elements of the stereotype, their origins and pervasiveness, the underlying socio-economic, legal and political restrictions on women, and the gap between myth and the reality. The middle

three chapters are devoted to the life and career of Frances Ellen Colenso, or Fanny Colenso as she will be called in this thesis.⁸ The fifth chapter examines eight other women writers associated with Natal, for the purpose of placing Fanny Colenso in better perspective.⁹ Since these women writers are seen as a distinct group in colonial Natal, a sub-theme of this chapter is an attempt to draw out their common characteristics. Their possible motives in writing, the subject they chose to write about, and their attitudes to wider issues are briefly discussed. The final chapter is an assessment of Fanny Colenso in terms of the stereotype and her literary contemporaries associated with Natal.

Because these women were articulate, well-educated and achieved some eminence as writers, they fall outside the category described by one historian as the 'multitude of mute inglorious females of whom no biography was ever written, who never did or said or thought a thing that would distinguish them from the mass of women of the day.'¹⁰ The history of women, Branca continues, is, or ought to be, the history of the inarticulate. It is hazardous, she wrote, 'to relate the experience of a few individual women to that of the average woman of the day.'¹¹ For this reason, it is clearly stated that the tentative conclusions of this thesis relate only to a small group of Natal women and are based largely on their published writings. There remains a great need for the experiences of the inarticulate mass of colonial women to be investigated.¹²

These conclusions may, however, have some relevance for the average Natal woman since it is maintained by another writer that the basic situation of the less typical woman rarely differed fundamentally from the lives of more ordinary women. The relatively exceptional and better-known may, therefore, illuminate the lives of more typical anonymous women because, at the very least, they shared the same problems of women in the same society.¹³

Finally, it must be explained that Fanny Colenso was chosen as the central figure for analysis not primarily because she was considered a particularly representative or outstanding woman, but because she was a Colenso. First, the Colensos were a 'vital, talented and controversial family whose impact and achievements on the development and history of the colony of Natal, has provided, and continues to provide, a peculiarly fertile field for historical research.'¹⁴

Second, apart from an unpublished paper presented at the Anglo-Zulu War Conference held in Durban in 1979, there has been no detailed study of Fanny Colenso's life and career. She became a minor public figure largely because of her two substantial histories of Zululand published in 1880 and 1884-1885. Insofar as these books presented an interpretation of Zulu history

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that challenged the white colonial or Shepstonian view – a view that became in some respects the policy of the imperial government – Fanny Colenso deserves some recognition as a writer and Zulu apologist in her own right.

Third, insofar as the main theme of this thesis is concerned, Fanny Colenso falls into an important subgroup of the women writers associated with Natal, who very effectively challenged one important element of the Victorian stereotype. Political influence by women was denied in theory and in practice, and what efforts were made to have the franchise widened so as to include women were consistently foiled. Notwithstanding this, however, a number of nineteenth-century English women came to exercise effective and remarkable influence on policy and administration through personal influence and the power of the pen.¹⁵

Of the women considered in this study, Fanny Colenso, her sister Harriette and Lady Florence Dixie all moved out of the purely domestic sphere and attempted to influence native, and particularly Zulu, affairs. If one accepts that their actions implied a belief in political equality between the sexes, it follows that these three women did not subscribe to the image of the intellectually weak and irresponsible female, and that they themselves were a contradiction to that image. Even if this belief was not explicit in their writings, the Misses Colenso and Lady Florence could well be considered as the forerunners of a more explicit emancipation movement in South Africa. In this sense, Fanny Colenso was a significant personality in the history of women in Natal.

It should also be noted that since this thesis attempts to examine one aspect of the woman question in Natal history, no detailed analysis of Fanny's contribution to Zulu historiography has been undertaken. In view of current revisionist research into Zulu history, such an analysis is overdue.

NOTES

- 1 See, for instance, P. Branca, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home* (London: Croom Helm, 1975): 17–18; A.J. Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830–1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1979): 12–13; and M. Vicinus, 'Introduction: new trends in the study of the Victorian woman' in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, edited by M. Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977): ix.
- 2 See, for instance, C.J. Walker, 'Women in twentieth century South African politics: the Federation of South African Women: its roots, growth and decline' (MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1978).
- 3 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 5. See also R.J. Evans, *The Feminists: Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australasia, 1840–1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1977): 7.

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- 4 Sylvia Vietzen, *A History of Education for European Girls in Natal with Particular Reference to the Establishment of some Leading Schools, 1837–1902* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1973); C.J. Walker, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in South Africa* (Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1979).
- 5 For discussion of the various approaches to the study of women in history, see Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 9–10 and Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 17.
- 6 See, for example, V. Allen, *Lady Trader: A Biography of Mrs Sarah Heckford* (London: Collins, 1979); J. Fisher, *That Miss Hobhouse* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1971); Ruth E. Gordon, *Dear Louisa: History of a Pioneer Family in Natal, 1850–1888* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1985); Thelma Gutsche, *The Bishop's Lady* (Cape Town: Timmins, 1970) a biography of Sophie Gray; and Brian Roberts, *Ladies in the Veld* (London: John Murray, 1965).
- 7 M. Vicinus, 'Introduction: the perfect Victorian lady' in *Suffer and be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, edited by M. Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972): vii–viii.
- 8 Frances Ellen was known by various names. To her Natal family, she was F or Frances. Mrs Colenso referred to her as Fanny for many years in her correspondence to the Lyells, but from about 1880 she reverted to Frances. Louis Knollys, a close friend at one time in Natal, addressed her as Fanny, while Helen Shepstone called her Elinore. (See for example Wyn Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1958): 112, 133, 142, 350, 367, 393, 403; NA Col Col, box 6, Sarah Frances Colenso to Fanny Colenso, n.d., [1884?]; H. Shepstone to Fanny Colenso, 9 October [1884]; *ibid*, box 7, L. Knollys to Fanny Colenso, 17 January 1886[?]; RHL, Mss. Afr. s.1284, Sarah Frances Colenso to Frank Colenso, 26 February [1882?]. Frank and Sophie Colenso preferred the names Nelly or Nell (Fanny's favourite name) and Nelly or Nellie was the accepted name among her British friends (see, for instance, RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 18 August 1885; Mrs K. Lyell to Sophie Colenso, 2 May 1887; NA, Col Col, box 6, Sophie Colenso to Fanny Colenso, 21 August 1884; E. Durnford to Fanny Colenso, 27 August [1884]; D. Lees to Fanny Colenso, 19 November 1884; *ibid*, box 7, G. Burne-Jones to Fanny Colenso, 21 December 1886). Secondary sources also vary in this respect. Rees, in *Colenso Letters*, calls her Frances (32, 330); Donald R. Morris, in *The Washing of the Spears* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), calls her Fanny (214 and the index); Brenda Nicholls, in 'Frances Ellen Colenso and the Zulu War', an unpublished paper presented to the Anglo-Zulu War Conference held in Durban in 1979, prefers Nell (1); while Jeff Guy, in *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: The Civil War in Zululand, 1879–1884* (London: Longmans, 1979), calls her Frances (91, 197, 235). The name Fanny was chosen for this thesis in preference to either Frances or Nell as the former would have confused her with her mother Sarah Frances Colenso, who called herself Frances, while the name Nell is not obviously derived from Frances. Fanny is an obvious derivation; there are sufficient instances of her being called that name by contemporaries; and at least two recent historians have used that name (see Morris, *The Washing of the Spears* and a letter from Jeff Guy to the writer, 21 January 1979 [1980]).
- 9 The eight women chosen are the best-known writers associated with Natal and Zululand. Other works that could have been consulted, but which were omitted in the interests of brevity, were: Anne Mackenzie, *Seeing and Hearing, or, First Impressions of Natal* by A.M., reprinted, (in 1858), with additions, from 'The mission field' (Edinburgh: R. Grant, 1857; Caroline Boyd Mann, *A Sketch of the Life and Work of Robert James Mann, M.D., F.R.C.S.*, by his wife (L. Edward Stanford, printer, 1888); and Frances Awdry, *An Elder Sister: A Short Sketch of Anne Mackenzie and her Brother the Missionary Bishop* (London:

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Bembrose, 1878). Despite their titles, the following two novels fall outside the scope of this thesis: I.D. Fenton, *Bush-life in Zulu-land, or, Adventurers among the Caffres* by Mrs Fenton Aylmer (London: John & Robert Maxwell, 1879), which is set in the eastern Cape; and Louise Vescelius-Sheldon, *Yankee Girls in Zululand* (London: Trübner, new ed., 1890) whose heroines pay only a very brief visit to Durban and Pietermaritzburg and never reached Zululand.

- 10 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 11.
- 11 *ibid*: 10.
- 12 For a discussion of the sources that can be used to study women, see Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 11–19; and Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 14–16.
- 13 *ibid*: 13.
- 14 L. Swart, ‘The work of Harriette Emily Colenso in relation to Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo culminating in the treason trial of 1908–09’ (MA, University of Natal, 1967): v.
- 15 Two such British women were Florence Nightingale (1820–1910) and Harriet Martineau (1802–1876). For a discussion of their achievements, see the following: C. Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale, 1820–1910* (London: Constable, 1950): especially 238–259, 264–273, 288–289, 326–327, 365–369, 391–392, 394–395; M. Walters, ‘The rights and wrongs of women: Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau, Simone de Beauvoir’ in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, edited by J. Mitchell and A. Oakley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976): 330; ‘Harriet Martineau’ *Dictionary of National Biography*, 36 (1944): 42, 45–46, 67, 95, 106–107, 114; and see also British Museum, *General Catalogue of Printed Books* for a complete list of her publications.

1

NINETEENTH-CENTURY VICTORIAN STEREOTYPES OF THE MIDDLE-CLASS ENGLISH WOMAN

IN a letter written in 1869, John Stuart Mill wrote:

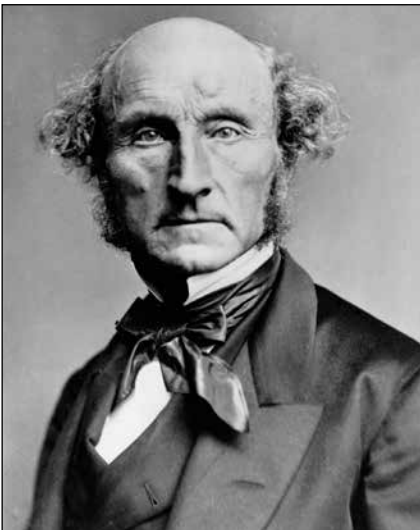
in all societies which are not wholly demoralised, there is no occasion to fear that man will not try to idealise Woman. Nature will always contrive that he does so. But in this matter, as in all others, the ideal must not stand too far off from real conditions ... but so it is with the ideal which many poets have sought to establish for women.¹

The nineteenth century produced certain highly idealised images of womanhood and as Mill intimated, these ideals had little connection with the reality of women's lives, attitudes or behaviour. Frances Power Cobbe, the religious writer, philanthropist and feminist, noted in a publication of the same year how strange it was that women should be expected to conform to an ideal when men managed without one.² She may have been wrong in claiming that there was no idealisation of manhood by the Victorians, but her comment indicates the prevalence and popularity of ideals of womanhood. Every age has had a set of values that define woman's social role, characteristics and psychological traits, and until the first attempts at scientific study of female characteristics in 1894 with Havelock Ellis' *Man and Woman*, these images or ideals were based largely on prejudice, opinion and contemporary social values.³ As one sociologist has observed, in a society where the standards are predominantly masculine, women form an out-group in the same way that Jews and blacks form distinctive groups, and they become characterised or stereotyped according to preconceived opinions.⁴ The nineteenth-century middle-class Englishwoman, for a number of reasons, became a highly idealised creature and the belief that these images were a true reflection of the reality led to a popular stereotype.

This first chapter is concerned with the origins of the ideal of middle-class womanhood, its main elements, and the underlying socio-economic and legal status of nineteenth-century women. The gap between the myth and reality of which Mill spoke will be indicated, particularly in relation to certain groups

of nineteenth-century women – such as the early feminists or social reformers, writers and travellers – and in the light of recent research that challenges elements of the stereotype. The reasons for the persistence of the stereotype will also be discussed. However greatly research may modify the stereotype in accordance with what is discovered about middle-class women's attitudes and behaviour, the pervasiveness of the ideals of womanhood would appear to have been considerable. The middle-class woman could not entirely escape contemporary social values.

There are many facets to the Victorian ideal of womanhood, most of which simply reflect a change in emphasis. There was, however, one image which conflicted with the basic concept of the ideal and whose roots were early Christian. St Paul had preached the ontological inferiority of woman: woman was seen in the image of Eve and she was therefore corruptible and corrupting. Furthermore, since woman had been created after Adam and from Adam, she should be subject to man's authority and confined to the home where she could be sheltered and controlled: 'Until the seventeenth century the Pauline conception of the tempting and sinful woman, a permanent threat to spirituality and mysticism, was more or less universal.'⁵ It was still evident in the nineteenth century. Mrs John Sanford, who wrote a book on the social and domestic character of women in 1831, stated that woman was weak, unstable, vain and lacking in judgement, and should therefore be confined to the house for her own protection. Again, in 1866, John Maynard's book on marriage upheld man's authority over woman as Adam had been created



before Eve. Although this image of woman was on the decline in the latter half of the century, John Stuart Mill felt it was worth attacking in his book *The Subjection of Women* (1869).⁶ It was, however, gradually superseded by ideologies that had gained ground with the rise to numerical, social and economic prominence of the middle classes and, as one writer has observed, it was 'the middle class orientation and code of values that lent the Victorian climate its distinctive flavour.'⁷

John Stuart Mill

This orientation was primarily a strong evangelical moral and religious fervour, whose basic conviction was that society was nothing more than the individuals who composed it, and its achievements and values were simply theirs ‘reflected on a larger screen’.⁸ The evangelical middle classes strove therefore with considerable zeal to impose their moral code on society, and strict conventions governed social behaviour, conversation, thought and action. The essence of Victorian morality can be summed up in one word: respectability. The attributes of respectability included sobriety, thrift, cleanliness of person and home, good manners, respect for law, honesty in business affairs, a preference for didactic literature and novels, and above all chastity. It also included religious observance through regular Sunday church attendance, Bible reading and organised prayers in the home, and listening to and reading sermons. One perpetuator of Victorian stereotypes has declared that this strict Sabbatarianism turned Sundays into ‘a purgatory of boredom and frustration’.⁹ Etiquette became the barrier behind which refined society sheltered from impropriety and vulgarity, but it was also viewed by some critics as a dead weight. Thus, wrote Mill in 1859, ‘In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, every one lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship.’¹⁰

Alongside this moral ideology, and as a reinforcement of it, there also developed a pervasive idealisation of the home, marriage and family, all of which underlay the idealisation of womanhood. A recent study of the Victorian ideal of ‘home’ and ‘community’ has indicated that the patriarchal family had been considered the ideal basic unit of both State and Church since the rise of Protestantism. The onset of industrialisation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries posed a threat to the previous social and economic hierarchy and its traditional structure of personal relations and authority. Thus, the home became a symbol of organic stability and traditional authority.¹¹ Furthermore, as a result of the religious revival of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the temperance movement and the moral transformation of the period, the belief that the home was the source of morality and virtue became more widely diffused.¹² John Ruskin expressed this idea in the following words: ‘This is the true nature of home – it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division.’ It is ‘a sacred place, a vestal temple’.¹³ In the eyes of many Victorians, the home became invested with the moral authority and inspiration of the Church. For Baldwin Brown, the home, like Adam, was made by God after a divine original, and Charles Kingsley saw family relationships as an image of divinity

(God the Father, God the Son). For agnostics too, the home was revered as a secular temple.¹⁴

The Victorian family 'was indeed a kind of estate, like, say, the British Empire, and subject like it to the benevolent despotism of its lord and master.'¹⁵ The traditional, pre-industrial authority of the husband was only gradually eroded by the social, economic and demographic upheavals caused by industrialisation, and there were potent laws that enshrined this authority over the wife. Most Victorians accepted the view expressed in Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765) that by marriage, 'The very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended, or at least it is incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection or cover she performs everything'.¹⁶ In the union of man and wife in marriage, a woman lost her freedom and identity in law and was thus classed with criminals, lunatics and minors. As a minor in law, she could not own property or retain her own earnings, she could not take legal steps such as to sue someone, nor could she be sued. The husband had rights over the body of his wife, which, especially among the working classes, led to accepted physical abuse. Children were directly under the father's authority and could be removed by him from the mother's care and given to his mistress, regardless of the moral character of either woman. Although in theory both partners could bring an action for divorce before 1857 (the year of the Marriage and Divorce Act), it required an Act of Parliament and was seldom resorted to.

The understood corollary of female subjection was that the husband was responsible for his wife's welfare, and that he would give her a home and supply her with the essentials of life, but this was not legally defined. The popular characterisation of the Victorian family has assumed the functioning of strong patriarchal authority.¹⁷ The role of the husband, according to one nineteenth-century writer, was seen in the following terms:

The Master: the Husband, the Father, the Head of the House, the Bread-Winner is the responsible individual whose name and power upholds the household ... He holds the place of highest honour; he is the supporter and sustainer of the establishment. He is also legally and politically responsible for all the other members of the family ... such are the duties of a master, a husband and a father.¹⁸

A corollary of the idealisation of the home and family was the idealisation of marriage. As an author of a book on feminine perfection in 1840 so succinctly declared, 'A female's real existence only begins when she has a

husband.' Marriage was therefore the only 'career' towards which a Victorian middle-class woman's education and existence was geared, and marriage was accepted as conferring status, dignity and authority on women. In Charlotte Brontë's novel *Shirley*, a passionate plea for profitable employment for single, middle-class women is made by one of the female characters. The women of her acquaintance, she said, all desired one thing, namely marriage; and yet few of them would have the chance of marrying. They were all 'reduced to strive, by scarce modest coquetry and debasing artifice, to gain that position and consideration by marriage, which to celibacy is denied.'¹⁹ Many were the manuals and magazine articles advising young women how to attract a husband and how to deal with him. Mrs Sarah Ellis, who wrote a number of popular books on the women of England and their duties, advised wives in 1839 to retain their husband's interest by a series of tactics, including liveliness, a piquant manner, a little raillery and a discussion of deep subjects and amusing anecdotes. *Punch* retaliated by advising women to hide blemishes and such habits as overeating so as to attract the male and to let him find out about them after marriage.²⁰



Charlotte Brontë

The Victorian attitudes to love and sex were closely related to the idealisation of the family and marriage. Sex was looked on with revulsion as a yielding to base instincts which were an unfortunate inheritance from a savage past. Women were commonly believed to be entirely devoid of any sexual impulses, a theory propounded by William Acton whose works are generally cited as indicating Victorian attitudes to sex. Sex outside the sanctity of marriage was seen as a threat to the fabric of the family and society. It was therefore a taboo subject in polite society, the home and in the education of the young. It also led to a double standard in Victorian morality; not only were women denied what was permitted to men, but the tacit acceptance of prostitution, which was regarded as 'the Great Social Evil', created a deep gulf between 'pure' women and 'fallen' women, and the latter were treated as beyond the pale of respectable, civilised society.²¹

Sex was quite distinct and separate from love, therefore, and it is evident from the poetry of Robert Browning, Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and from contemporary novels, that love was seen as the supreme experience of life, its end and object, to be sustained beyond death. Taine apparently cited Major Dobbin, who loved Amelia for fifteen hopeless years, in *Vanity Fair*, as typical of Englishmen he had observed.

The reason for this idealisation of love can be traced to a number of origins, one of which was the Romantic movement. The study of Victorian love is the study of how this tradition, embodied mainly in the works of Rousseau, Shelley and George Sand, was domesticated under the powerful influence of evangelical and family sentiment, and then emphasised, as a protection against, or solution for, some major concerns of the time: sensuality, the marriage market, the painful mood of baffled thought, and the decline of religious faith.²² The love poetry of that time talks of love as something pure and beautiful, and Ruskin called it 'the source of the highest and purest mortal happiness'. He also called it 'the *purifying* passion of the soul'; that is, the source of protection against the promiscuity that Victorians believed was threatening the accepted morality and the very fabric of society. There was in fact widespread fear of the undermining influence of French literature, the social theories of free love of the Utopians and Saint-Simonians, and the increasing incidence of prostitution in English society.²³

This was the ideal of home, family and marriage, but the reality was very different. The position of the working classes is not under discussion, but it is immediately apparent that the middle-class ethos was wholly inappropriate and mythical when applied to the nineteenth-century British proletariat and peasantry. But even when applied to the middle classes, the ideal, in the works of Mill, stood 'too far off from real conditions.'²⁴ Some historians have claimed that despite the idealisation of the home and family, the commercial spirit in Victorian life was intrusive. The social imperatives of respectability, which implied a certain standard of living, meant that there were strong pressures on couples to marry at the 'right time' and to make socially acceptable unions. Elizabeth Barrett Browning called such marriages '*legal* prostitution' and Tennyson in the 1860s was voicing a traditional literary criticism when he wrote of 'the woman-markets of the west, where our Caucasians let themselves be sold'.²⁵

The effect on family relationships of this ideal was not always harmonious, nor healthy. The fact that no other external relationships were sanctioned for its inmates, at least below the rank of master, could make men tyrants

over their wives, mothers over their daughters and both over their younger children and servants. The home could be not only a walled garden but also a stifling menagerie of evil forces unchecked by interference from any higher authority.²⁶ The autocratic role of the husband could lead to physical abuse, economic hardship caused by parsimony, unhappiness and humiliation. The case of Mrs Caroline Norton is frequently cited as such an example. Her husband was an uncongenial character who refused to support her, kept for himself her personal belongings and earnings, and removed their children forcibly from her care. Another popular example is Mrs Annie Besant, who was legally separated from her husband in 1873, was given the custody of her daughter only, lost home, friends and social position, and was reduced to working as a governess-cook-nurse.²⁷

Florence Nightingale experienced authoritarianism and emotional clinging from her mother and sister to such a degree that she wrote bitterly of the 'petty grinding tyrannies' of a 'good English family.'²⁸ Elizabeth Barrett's father is often cited as an example of the dominating, repressive Victorian patriarch. The stresses and strains of the average middle-class Victorian family (consisting usually of between five and six members in the 1850s), included jealousies, rivalry, 'routinized boredom', and the problems of harmonising sexual relations. Writers such as Cunningham and Beales have claimed that the intense and grandiose conception of 'the family' could lead to the distortion of normal sexual instincts. They concluded that the major defect of the Victorian family was that it was too strongly rooted in a tradition that allowed no room for the development of new ideas and attitudes. It perpetuated family traits because it encouraged imitative habits and checked originality.²⁹



Florence Nightingale

It was against this ideological background that certain ideals of womanhood emerged. The doctrine of the inferiority of the temptress which was, as one writer has observed, 'based on biological arguments and the literal interpretation of Genesis' had superimposed upon it 'a theory of the different aptitudes and roles of the two sexes.'³⁰ Tennyson in his romantic poem 'The Princess' (1847)

identified some of the more important of these varying aptitudes and roles in the following passage:

Man for the field and woman for the hearth;
Man for the sword, and for the needle she;
Man with the head, and woman with the heart;
Man to command, and woman to obey;
All else confusion.³¹

Man was thus seen as physically active, aggressive, intellectual and authoritarian. Woman, by contrast, was home-based, domesticated, emotional, submissive and passive. The underlying assumptions were that woman, by virtue of her sex, was physically and mentally inferior to man. Thus, she was only capable of doing menial tasks such as were to be found in the home, and she did not have the intellectual ability to comprehend anything beyond the limits of domesticity. It is on these grounds that women were denied legal, political and educational equality. Mr Brook, in *Middlemarch*, was a firm believer in women's intellectual inferiority. Mrs Cadwallader, the rector's wife, attempted to argue politics with him, whereupon he admonished her thus: 'I don't pretend to argue with a lady on politics ... Your sex are not thinkers, you know – *varium et mutabile semper* – that kind of thing.'³² Similarly, Mr Stelling, Tom Tulliver's teacher in *The Mill on the Floss*, denied Maggie the chance to learn about Euclid on the grounds that women have 'a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow.'³³

Women, therefore, were seen as helpless, delicate and timid creatures whose sole excuse for existing was to love, honour and obey their lord and master. Thackeray supports the evidence for this stereotype in literature: 'Take Scott's ladies, and other writers: each man seems to draw from one model. An exquisite slave is what we want for the most part; a humble, flattering, smiling, tea-making, pianoforte-playing being, who laughs at our jokes however old they may be, coaxes us and wheedles us in our humours, and fondly lies to us through life.'³⁴

Mrs Sarah Ellis in 1839 used the phrase 'relative creatures' to describe women; that is in themselves they are nothing and can only justify their existence by dedicating themselves to husband and family. W.R. Greg, a minor social prophet, held the same view in 1869. Female servants, he said, 'are attached to others and are connected with other existences, which they embellish, facilitate and serve. In a word, they fulfil both essentials of a

woman's being: they are supported by, and minister to, men.'³⁵ Mill confirmed the prevalence of the ideal:

All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections.³⁶

George Eliot embodied this attitude in Mr Casaubon, when he said to his fiancée Dorothea Brooke:

'You have all – nay, more than all – those qualities which I have ever regarded as the characteristic excellences of womanhood. The great charm of your sex is its capability of and ardent self-sacrificing affection, and herein we see its fitness to round and complete the existence of our own.'³⁷

Paradoxically, woman's influence and role took on a new significance in the light of her intellectual and creative inferiority. As one writer has explained it, the myth of 'Mary' was superimposed on the myth of 'Eve': 'when woman is denied all capacity for creation, action and authority her contribution in the masculine world becomes the emotional and moral guidance which are her vocations as a wife and mother. On the basis of her physical and intellectual weakness, a theory of her power was constructed which commanded general assent perhaps just because of the paradox.'³⁸

In 1842, a work of 'great significance' according to Killham was published in England under the title *The Education of Mothers of Families*.³⁹ The French author, Louis Aimé-Martin, paid tribute in it to Rousseau (and to the even earlier Fénelon), as being the first to emphasise the importance of woman's influence in inculcating virtue in the State. Aimé-Martin claimed that woman's influence was 'exerted over the whole of life by means of filial piety, pleasure and love.' He argued that since society equalled an aggregate of families, woman's influence in the home would be extended to society through men's actions. This concept had, however, been expressed in England as early as 1799 by Hannah More and it became one of the most pervasive of the elements in the Victorian female stereotype.⁴⁰ There is ample evidence of this ideal in Victorian literature. Kingsley wrote that woman is 'the natural, and therefore divine, guide, purifier, inspirer of the man.'⁴¹ The Prince in Tennyson's poem 'The Princess', says of his mother:

No Angel, but a dearer being, all dipt
In Angel instincts, breathing Paradise,
Interpreter between the Gods and men ...⁴²

Historians have accounted for the emergence of this image or myth in a number of ways. Arthur Hallam traced it to an earlier trend in history. At the root of the ideal lay Plato's 'sublime principle of love', which, when it reappeared in the classical revival, 'the difference of social manners, which had been the gradual effect of Christianity, led men naturally to fix the reverential and ideal affection on the female character.' It was the Catholic worship of the Virgin Mary and the female saints which 'soon accustomed Catholic minds to contemplate perfection in a female form.' He asks if this worship of woman is not basically

but the exponent of a restless longing in man's unsatisfied soul, which must ever find a personal shape, wherein to embody his moral ideas, and will chuse [*sic*] for that shape, where he can, a nature not too remote from his own, but resembling in dissimilitude, and flattering at once his vanity by the likeness, and his pride by the difference?⁴³

The nineteenth century gave great impetus to this ideal. The Victorian era was, in Christopher Dawson's words, 'a great revolutionary age', and in economic terms and religious thought there were disruptive changes that led to insecurity and uncertainty. Religion and moral values were seen to be under attack: 'Experiencing at once the breakdown of faith and the dehumanizing pressure of the marketplace, many Victorian writers relocated those values in the home and in the woman who was its center.'⁴⁴ It therefore became woman's duty to counteract the debasing influence of the competitive world of business and industry. Mrs Ellis urged women in her book, *The Women of England, Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (1839), to fight the selfish, debased influence of the outside world by raising the tone of their husbands' minds from 'low anxieties and vulgar cares'. James Baldwin Brown in his sermons (1866) went so far as to blame women for the moral deterioration of businessmen.⁴⁵

Various Christian symbols were used to describe this stereotype: Ruskin's Madonna, the Virgin Mary of Mrs Ellis, and Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House*. The last image was powerful and if literary evidence is reliable, it persisted well into this century. In Joyce Carey's novel of 1939, *Mister Johnson*, for instance, there is a working-class ex-sergeant who lives in a remote Nigerian district as local storekeeper, and during a drunken reminiscence about his wife and family in England, he refers to her as 'The angel in the 'ouse ... The light

of the 'ousehold – making little 'eavens'. Furthermore, he announces proudly that she's not one of the 'churchy' women either – 'it's all 'er own – out of 'er nature.'⁴⁶

An analysis of Patmore's poem *The Angel in the House* and of Tennyson's poems, has led one writer to postulate another explanation for the emergence of the ideal of female passivity and purity; that it displays an ambivalence in the Victorian male attitude to male achievement or action, and male sexuality, induced by the social climate. Women were seen as being free of these conflicts, and, by worshipping her, man could achieve some salvation from them. Simone de Beauvoir has indicated that very often societies and individuals project into myths the values they seek.⁴⁷

John Ruskin was a major influence on Victorian attitudes and ideas, and in two of his well-known public lectures he promoted this ideal and gave it a popular definition. In his lecture 'Of queens' gardens' (1865) he denounced the idea that woman was 'only the shadow and attendant image of her Lord, owing him a thoughtless and servile obedience'. One could not talk of the superiority of one sex over the other, he said, as they were not comparable. Their characters were different and women's special qualities included incorruptible goodness. Their power therefore was to heal, redeem, guide and guard; to be in fact 'queens of higher mystery to the world beyond, which bows itself, and will forever bow, before the myrtle crown and the stainless sceptre of womanhood.' Nevertheless, woman's role as spiritual guide and inspirer of man was quite compatible with 'true wifely subjection' since it was a guiding influence only. Both theories, namely, that a woman had a pure and spiritual influence over man but that this complied with her submission, were developed by Ruskin in his lecture 'The crown of wild olive': 'a true wife, in her husband's house, is his servant; it is in his heart that she is queen.'⁴⁸ Writers as diverse as Mrs Ellis and Auguste Comte shared this view, and emigration propaganda in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries stressed the moral regeneration that respectable female emigrants would effect on the male-dominated colonies.⁴⁹

The image of woman's moral force in society, while raising woman's status considerably, maintained her inferior relationship to man. As a writer has recently explained:

It is no accident that efforts to get the position of women improved by praising their special, womanly qualities usually end up in a position very similar to that of the opposition, with merely a difference of emphasis. This is because ... the special qualities that are ascribed

to women, and for which they are praised, are created within a male-dominated society, and it is very unlikely that the roles that give them content can within that society achieve a genuinely high value. Their qualities are the qualities of the inferior, and praising them will not make their owners equal.⁵⁰

It is noticeable, for instance, that apart from the question of moral purity, the special qualities ascribed by Ruskin to woman were those that deprived her of intellect and creativity and which fitted her best for domesticity; or in his words, 'for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision.' Moreover, as Simone de Beauvoir has pointed out, the mythologising of woman has been largely guided by utility, and in this case it would be the enforcement of patriarchal domination.⁵¹ Nevertheless, it had one important influence on woman's sphere of activity. Moralists came to accept the fact that the moral influence woman exerted in the home could be extended to society as a whole in philanthropic activities and this became a second 'legitimate' sphere of activity for her. It fitted in with the cult of self-help and the urgings of moralists like Mrs Beeton and Mrs Ellis against idleness, and it was also compatible with the Christian and aristocratic tradition of philanthropy strenuously promoted by middle-class evangelists. Most important, this new sphere of work was not a male preserve and therefore did not challenge male superiority or privilege.⁵²

Attitudes towards middle-class women were also influenced by the changes in social structure caused by the process of industrialisation. As a result of this process, the economic role of the middle-class woman changed. Before the Industrial Revolution, the basic economic unit of society was the family and all members of the family, including wife and children, were involved in production. There were not many jobs in English society in which women were not engaged. But when production moved into factories, machines began to replace domestic work, and schools gradually began to take over woman's educational function, the middle-class woman's economic value as a contributor to the family income declined. Viola Klein, writing in 1946, claimed that after the Industrial Revolution, women and children became economic liabilities and marriage was looked on as granting woman 'a life insurance for a minimum premium'.⁵³ The powerful idealisation of the home and family and the social ideologies relating to womanhood restricted woman's legitimate sphere of activity to the home or to casual philanthropic work, and she had no means of contributing to the family income. The result was, according to Klein, that women lost their self-respect and status, and thus developed

the ‘clinging vine’ stereotype which was calculated to appease men. Another earlier writer has described the change in women’s role as being one from ‘partners to parasites’ and accompanied by ‘demoralisation and discontent.’⁵⁴

With the rise in living standards, the middle-class woman’s social role took on a new emphasis. Increasing affluence produced aspirations to gentility and refinement as outward symbols of prosperity and wealth. One aspect of this ‘drive for social esteem’ was the formal code of etiquette that governed social intercourse. Another was what has been called the ‘paraphernalia of gentility’; that is, large houses, retinues of servants, expensive dinner parties, carriages and horses, and the annual holiday. The concept of the Perfect Lady was an important element of the stereotype, and her education was designed for the drawing room and elegant, genteel society.⁵⁵ Thus she learnt embroidery, fancy needlework, dancing, music, singing and French. In 1847 a contemporary advocated four cardinal points to female education: inculcation of moral and religious feelings, domestic duties, social accomplishments and general knowledge. The last often consisted of learning a hotch-potch of facts by rote, and in Frances Power Cobbe’s experience at a select boarding school in Brighton in 1836, social accomplishments were stressed above religion, morals and languages.⁵⁶



Frances Power Cobbe

Contemporary comments tend to support this ideal of female education. T.H. Huxley declared that ‘Girls have been educated to be either drudges or toys beneath man, or a sort of angel above him’, thus pointing out the basic contradiction in the ideal. Cobbe herself suffered from this system of education:

Nobody dreamed that any of us could, in later life, be more or less than an ornament to society. That a pupil in that school should become an artist or authoress would have been regarded as a deplorable dereliction. Not that which was good and useful to the community, or even that which would be delightful to ourselves, but that which would make us admired in society was the *raison d’être* of such requirement.⁵⁷

As Mill observed in 1869, sexual attractiveness to man became the ‘polar star of feminine education and formation of character.’⁵⁸ To her admirer, Dr Lydgate, Rosamond Vincy in *Middlemarch* personified distinctive womanhood: her intelligence was ‘polished, refined, docile, lending itself to finish in all the delicacies of life’; and her accomplishments such that she ‘would create order in the home and accounts with still magic, yet keep her fingers ready to touch the lute and transform life into romance at any moment’.⁵⁹

Contemporary journals and manuals tended to project the idea that most middle-class girls were sent to boarding schools, where, as in Miss Pinkerton’s Academy in *Vanity Fair*, they learnt the frivolous accomplishments attested to in the above quotations.⁶⁰ A history of secondary education in the nineteenth century published in 1921, projected an extreme version of the stereotyped education offered:

to produce a robust physique is thought undesirable, rude health and abundant vigour are considered somewhat plebian [*sic*] ... a certain delicacy, a strength not competent to walk more than a mile, an appetite fastidious and easily satisfied joined with that timidity which commonly accompanies feebleness ... all are held more ladylike.⁶¹

A recent study by Peterson implies that governesses were frequently employed to educate young middle-class and upper middle-class girls in the home, and that they became another element in the middle-class ‘paraphernalia of gentility’. She points out that literary models are often cited as typical of the class, such as *Jane Eyre* and Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s novel *Aurora Leigh*.⁶² In Jane Austen’s novel *Emma*, the reaction of Jane Fairfax and Emma towards Jane’s destined future as a governess indicates the way this profession was seen by well-connected, refined women of the middle and upper-middle classes. They felt that entering into such service would be a ‘penance’ and a ‘sacrifice’ of ‘pleasure’, ‘rational intercourse’ and ‘equal society’, and Jane’s plight could only be viewed with ‘compassion’ and ‘respect’.⁶³ The Victorians themselves spent a great deal of time and space in journals, newspapers and serious works on the topic of that downtrodden creature, the governess, who is popularly seen as ill-paid, employed on constant duties that left little time for leisure, and often physically abused by her charges. Peterson has indicated the deep sense of conflict the governess could experience. This was basically because her role and status within the family were undefined, and she herself was a contradiction of some of the values she was employed to instill. She was, for instance, supposed to be a ‘lady’ and to inculcate the qualities of a

‘lady’ into her charges, yet ‘ladies’ did not earn their living; and, if they did, it implied loss of status.⁶⁴

Armed with this superficial education to occupy a purely ornamental role in the home, the Perfect Lady employed governesses to teach her children, and a host of servants to do all the manual domestic work, which she had done in pre-industrial times and which was now considered beneath her. Her duties were confined to bearing children, supervising servants, practising the social accomplishments, short walks, short drives, strictly codified social visits and conversation, and the daily religious observances so essential to complete the picture of complete gentility and respectability. In fact, the ‘oblivion of domesticity was the lot of most ladies’.⁶⁵ Naturally she did not work for gain: that was a working-class attribute and it implied loss of gentility. As one magazine article in the 1850s stated, ‘it is a Woman’s mission to save – rather than to make – money.’⁶⁶

The desired personal attributes of this creature were innocence, inexperience and fragility; or, as one woman’s magazine described her in the 1830s, a ‘being of delicate perceptions ... commanding all sorts of attention by her retiring and unasking lowliness, and with a humble, heartfelt piety.’⁶⁷ Hence the popularity of consumption and ‘going into a decline’; their symptoms fitted the desired image.⁶⁸ As one historian has written, ‘in her most perfect form, the lady combined total sexual innocence, conspicuous consumption and the worship of the family hearth’.⁶⁹

Florence Nightingale, who came from a socially active gentry family, found the vacuity and boredom of this life deeply frustrating, and reacted bitterly against the lack of solitude, the aimless visits and drives, and the constant flow of trivial conversation. The daily routine of being read to aloud by her father she described as the ‘most miserable exercise of the human intellect. It is like lying on one’s back with one’s hands tied and having liquid poured down one’s throat.’ On other occasions she lamented:

What on earth have I done this last fortnight? I have read the *Daughter at Home* to father, and two chapters of Mackintosh; a volume of *Sybil* to Mama. Learnt seven tunes by heart, written various letters. Ridden with Papa. Paid eight visits. Done company. And that is all ... O weary days, O evenings that seem never to end! ... And for twenty or thirty years more to do thus!⁷⁰

In 1853 Margaretta Grey also voiced her discontent with the lack of employment opportunities open to women:

What I remonstrate against is the negative forms of employment: the wasting of energy, the crippling of talent under false ideas of station, propriety and refinement, that seems to shut up a large portion of the women of our generation from proper spheres of occupation and adequate exercise of power.

She also testified to the ‘morbid listlessness and insipidity’ of some Victorian families under this powerful image.⁷¹

The supposedly realistic image of the middle-class woman as the idle, frivolous Perfect Lady, came under considerable attack in the nineteenth century, particularly from nonconformist Protestants who upheld the ethic of work and the image of the virtuous woman as the women who ‘eateth not the bread of idleness’.⁷² The ideal of the woman as helpmeet of the husband had again been given a popular definition by Ruskin. Her special power, he said, was for ‘sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision’; that is, to create order and maintain the smooth functioning of the multiple daily activities within the sacred confines of the home. This element in the stereotype was apparent in Dr Lydgate’s reflections on Rosamond Vincy quoted earlier.⁷³ In the 1880s Mrs Eliza Lynn Linton attacked the idle and frivolous Dora Spenlows and Rosamond Vincys of Victorian society when she bemoaned the snobbish woman’s contemptuous attitude to housekeeping.⁷⁴

The helpmeet concept could also be extended into the image of the Perfect Lady in her role as moral uplifter and guardian of respectability for her husband. In this sphere, her function as helpmeet implied that she should be righteous, sympathetic, gentle and submissive. In both senses of this concept, however, her fundamental inferiority to her husband was ensured.

There were thus a number of elements to the popular ideal of the married middle-class woman in the nineteenth century. She was a being with different but special attributes, who achieved her natural destiny in the home as wife, mother and helpmeet. She was the ‘angel in the house’ who upheld the sacredness and stability of the home (the ‘vestal temple’) and society, through her responsibility as moral guide to husband and children. She was helpmeet to her husband in a practical and moral sense. She was also the embodiment of the wealth, social prestige, respectability and gentility of her husband – the Perfect Lady. Her special attributes were timidity, passivity, submission, physical delicacy, helplessness, intellectual weakness and sexual innocence. Her education equipped her solely for her role as wife, mother, helpmeet and Perfect Lady and she was therefore entirely dependent on men for her

economic survival. In every sphere, except the moral one, she was inferior to the man and legally subject to her husband.

The stereotype of the unmarried middle-class woman included many of the features of the married woman, such as timidity, passivity, superficial and frivolous education, limited outlook, economic dependence on men, and so on. But in a society where marriage and child-rearing were venerated and idealised as the highest and most noble career for a woman, and where a woman's natural and legitimate sphere of activity was in the home and not in gainful employment, the role and status of the single woman was socially inferior and could be miserable indeed. Legally she suffered from none of the restrictions on married women, and could own property, retain her own earnings, sue and be sued. But she was looked on as an unsuccessful human being, was treated with pity and condescension, and her very personal existence was denied. Her role became that of confidante, aunt, private nurse and companion; or, as one contemporary said of her, she became 'a sad shadow who, having renounced all personal existence, consoled, listened, helped and resigned herself to living through others and then effaced herself more and more, as if to excuse her existence.'⁷⁵ If by some economic misfortune, she should lose the financial support of father or brother, she then fell into the category of the 'distressed gentlewoman'.

As one writer has stated, 'few Victorian stereotypes have endured so thoroughly as that of the distressed gentlewoman.' She came to be seen as a pathetic, timid creature who was forced 'to barter her gentility for a meagre subsistence as a governess' where she was downtrodden and humiliated.⁷⁶ The treatment Jane Eyre received as a governess reflected this image, as did Anne Brontë's Agnes Grey. Apart from governessing, the only other occupations believed by some writers to be open to a genteel woman were those of seamstress and woman of letters (both of which could be done in the home); and when these failed, prostitution. Amelia Sedley in *Vanity Fair* is typical of the image of a widowed gentlewoman, timid and helpless, who vainly attempted governessing and card painting to support herself.⁷⁷

The question of the relationship between the prescribed ideal of Victorian womanhood and the real behaviour, attitudes and activities of women in the last century came under attack as early as the 1830s. By that decade, certain pioneers in the emancipation movement had begun to question woman's role and function in society by working for change in certain legal and educational restrictions. Their early legal successes included the Infants Custody Act (1839), the Matrimonial Causes Act (1857) and the Married Woman's Property

Act (1870). Significant changes occurred to female secondary education with the establishment of Queens College in 1848, Bedford College in 1849 and Dorothea Beale's appointment to the headship of Cheltenham Ladies College in 1858. London University opened its degrees to women in 1879.⁷⁸ By the 1860s many more Victorian women were beginning to question seriously the limitations on their legitimate sphere of activity, as well as their legal non-existence, the quality of their education and their political powerlessness. The early feminists were questioning the gap between the ideal and the reality when they began to agitate for certain reforms, and it is significant that many of those pioneers were activated by their helplessness to improve the plight of the working-class woman whose poverty and degradation was a glaring contradiction of the myth.⁷⁹ Many of these women reformers came from the educated upper-middle classes, from unitarian, evangelical or nonconformist religious backgrounds, or from families with radical political connections, and the combination of democratic, individualist and philanthropic ideologies was also a strong motive in their agitation.⁸⁰

Patently these women did not conform to all elements of womanly ideals, and indeed, some of them explicitly attacked certain elements in the stereotype. Harriet Martineau and Mrs Hugo Reid denied the theory of woman's moral influence, and Martineau agreed with John Stuart Mill that the theory of women's legitimate sphere of action being in the home was too restrictive and narrow.⁸¹ But it is certainly true that what was thought of as the ultimate feminist demand, that is, the radical claim to political equality, which was given its first modern articulation in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), had few echoes in the early decades of the nineteenth century. There were two notable exceptions: one was William Thompson's *Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them in Political, and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery* (1825); and the other was Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Even after Mill's election to Parliament in 1865, his advocacy of female suffrage in the House, and the formation of the first women's suffrage society in 1867, the number of women making explicit claims to the vote was never very considerable. It was not until the early 1900s that the radical movement for female suffrage began to attract wide public attention and a greater number of adherents.⁸²

Even certain nineteenth-century women such as Martineau, who supported universal suffrage, either would not associate themselves with the women's movement, or like Mrs Hugo Reid, supported it for purely utilitarian purposes.⁸³

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Harriet Martineau



Mary Wollstonecraft

Many women who campaigned for property rights, equal education, training for occupation, custody of children and so on, never disputed the fundamental belief that women were inferior to men and that the female sex held a morally idealistic position in society. The helpmate theory in its moral connotation was a very powerful one and explains a lot of the opposition to feminist claims. Women like Mrs Humphrey Ward, Beatrice Potter Webb and Caroline Norton, who campaigned for specific rights, all believed that women would lose their moral power in society if they should interest themselves too greatly in extra-domestic affairs. They probably would have supported Gladstone's comment about why he disapproved of the franchise for women: 'it would trespass upon their delicacy, their purity, their refinement, the elevation of their whole nature.'⁸⁴ Frances Power Cobbe, although an ardent and radical feminist, nevertheless believed in woman's special moral and spiritual role in society.⁸⁵

While Caroline Norton fought to change the custody laws relating to children, she still believed that men were naturally superior, by divine appointing. Similarly, Hannah More, a very successful writer, dramatist and poet, believed that women were characteristically unstable and capricious and should be under a man's authority. Anna Jameson, although she pleaded for education for employment in 1832, conceived of this education as only suited to 'the mothers and nurses of legislators and statesmen.'⁸⁶ In 1843, however, she did take a more liberal stand, and demanded employment of a wider nature; for, as she pointed out, the image of the happy wife and mother was not only untrue

for many thousands of women, but more thousands of women never had the chance to marry. In an age when the *sine qua non* of a woman's existence was marriage, the fact was that the combined effect of delaying marriage, the massive emigration of about five million men between 1830 and 1875, and the permanent absence abroad of the armed forces and navy meant that there was a large surplus of unmarried women, most of whom were unqualified to support themselves.⁸⁷

As Basch has commented, 'The feminism of the years 1830–70 aimed less at elaborating a new female image than remedying certain particular injustices, essentially those concerning the spinster without means of support and the unhappily married.'⁸⁸ Nevertheless, however moderate their claims, the number of women who in fact, if not explicitly, challenged the role and status of the Victorian woman through their work in the various branches of the women's movement – educational, legal, and economic – were sufficient in numbers to form an obvious group that cannot be described as wholly typical of the popular Victorian stereotype.

Another group of women, who in varying degrees can be considered as not conforming to all elements of the stereotype, was the large number of women writers. This group has special significance for the women in this thesis. The reason why so many nineteenth-century women took up writing as an occupation can be attributed to the lack of adequate education for employment and of employment opportunities, the social stigma attached to a career, and the resultant economic hardship and mental stagnation. As Lady Theresa Lewis observed in 1865, 'to the ambitious woman, in this country at least, there is rarely the power of earning distinction but as a reflection of the stronger, greater light of man.'⁸⁹

Writing offered women clear advantages. It gave them a personal challenge and occupation for idle hours. It could be very remunerative. Frances Trollope, for instance, was able to support her family in the 1830s and 1840s on her literary earnings. Harriet Martineau's books on political economy, and articles in the press, earned her a comfortable salary. Laetitia Elizabeth Landon, a prolific writer and poet in the 1830s also enjoyed a highly successful literary career. Writing could also be done at odd moments within the home and without conflicting with a woman's domestic and family obligations. It could, moreover, be seen as a powerful moral agent in society, and in this respect, the achievement of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* was considerable.⁹⁰

By the 1870s, literature was generally viewed as a respectable occupation for women. But attitudes change slowly, and the prejudices against women

writers lingered on. The nature of these prejudices in the first half of the century can be gauged from the following comments, and were sufficiently evident to have persuaded the Brontës and George Eliot to have assumed masculine pseudonyms in the forties and fifties. As late as the 1880s, Olive Schreiner felt unable to publish under her own name.⁹¹

Robert Southey, the poet, once informed Charlotte Brontë that 'Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be.' In a book entitled *Female Writers: Thoughts on their Proper Sphere and on their Powers of Usefulness* (1842), Miss Stodart indicated one reason why this prejudice existed. Male vanity, she wrote, could not tolerate intellectual superiority in women. Laetitia Elizabeth Landon maintained that she experienced malice and 'uncharitableness' as a result of her literary success because she was a woman. A male critic, writing in the radical literary journal *The Leader* in 1850, evinced a nostalgic regret that women were displaying their undoubted and considerable literary talents:

It is a melancholy fact, and against all political economy, that the group of female authors is becoming every year more multitudinous and more successful ... Wherever we carry our successful pens we find the place preoccupied by a woman. How many of us can write novels like Currer Bell, Mrs Gaskell, and fifty others, with their shrewd and delicate observations of life? What chance have we against Miss Martineau, so potent in many directions? Women have made an invasion of our legitimate domain; they write dramas, they write treatises. This is the march of mind, but where, oh where, are the dumplings? Does it never strike these delightful creatures that their little fingers were meant to be kissed, not to be inked? Women's proper sphere of activity is elsewhere. Are there not husbands, brothers, lovers to coddle and console? Are there no stockings to darn, no purses to make, no braces to embroider? *My* idea of a perfect woman is one who can write, but won't.⁹²

This male critic acknowledged, and deplored, the clear evidence of the intellectual equality of certain female writers. Any woman, in fact, who took up the pen, was making a claim to individual intellectual ability, to an occupation (whether gainful or not), and to personal status. For many women writers, these claims were implicit. Mary Somerville (1780–1872) for instance became a distinguished and highly respected scientist in the largely masculine academic world, and was made an honorary member of the Royal Astronomical Society.

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Her writings were, however, confined to scientific topics.⁹³ The writings of certain intrepid Victorian women travellers, while generally confined to non-controversial accounts of travel, were nevertheless powerful – though implicit – evidence that this group of women varied considerably from certain elements of the stereotype.



Mary Somerville



Isabella Bird

One such traveller was Isabella Bird (later Mrs Bishop). She clearly reacted against the frustrations of a narrow environment. Until her 41st year in 1872, she suffered from a variety of illnesses which miraculously disappeared when she set off that year on the first of a number of remarkable journeys, mostly on her own. She visited Australia, the Sandwich Islands (where she rode up volcanoes and shared a tent with a male companion and native guide), the United States in 1873, and later the Far East. In Japan she lived among what were called the Hairy Ainu, local aborigines, and displayed complete sangfroid in the most primitive living conditions. She travelled through India, Turkey, into Tibet, and Persia, and in her sixties went off to the Far East again. She wrote a number of travel books including *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* (1879) and *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1880). As a mark of respect for her enterprise and courage she was made a member of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society and in 1892 was one of the first women to be elected a fellow of that august and conservative body, the Royal Geographical Society.

Another well-known adventurous Victorian was Marianne North who was

also an artist with a great interest in the natural world. She travelled widely, to the Americas, the East, and to South Africa where she stayed with Bishop Colenso's family and gave Fanny Colenso artistic advice. At the age of 54 and despite poor health, she travelled to Chile via the Straits of Magellan solely for the purpose of painting a particular tree. North's recollections were edited and published in 1892 and 1893 after her death.⁹⁴



Marianne North

In many respects, according to Middleton, Victorian women travellers shared characteristics that belong specifically to the social ideologies of that period. They all had high moral standards, particularly sexual standards, they believed in the civilising mission of women, they were generally conventionally religious, and they insisted on 'respectable' attire regardless of their surroundings. Their books were full of observations on the peoples, plants and animals they encountered. As Middleton has observed – and this may well be linked to the Victorian ethic of work – 'It is almost as if they feared it was wrong to travel for pleasure, and that to bring back note-books of statistics and pages of drawings was necessary to justify the frivolity of bicycling across Java or living among the Haury Ainu of Japan.'⁹⁵ The strangeness of subject matter, the high moral tone and educative content of their travel books, as well as the general lack of interest in politics, no doubt lessened any latent hostility towards this group of intellectually and physically active women.

Nevertheless, almost without exception, these women travellers were a striking challenge to elements of the Victorian stereotype. Their motives for travelling to distant and primitive countries were many, but two possible reasons were directly contradictory to the image of the passive, helpless, home-based female. One was a sense of adventure and a desire for new and exciting experiences. Even today the belief that women lack the spirit of adventure prevails among certain individuals, yet in the last century there were many women who obviously possessed this quality.⁹⁶

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The other possible motive was more directly linked to woman's inferior and restricted social role. As one writer has said:

Travel was an individual gesture of the housebound, man-dominated Victorian woman. Trained from birth to an almost impossible ideal of womanly submission and self-discipline, of obligation to class and devotion to religion, she had need of an emotional as well as of an intellectual outlet. This she found, often late in life, in travel, and ... she was able to enjoy a freedom of action unthinkable at home.⁹⁷

Certain Victorian female writers made much more explicit attacks on aspects of contemporary ideals of womanhood, however. Charlotte Brontë made a passionate plea for wider employment for single middle-class women in *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, having suffered personal failure in teaching and governessing when she really desired a career in business.⁹⁸ It has in fact been pointed out that woman's work and woman's writing were closely allied in the last century, as was social reform and female writing. This is clear from the novels of Frances Trollope, Mrs Gaskell, George Eliot and Charlotte Yonge. Harriet Martineau and Frances Power Cobbe both turned to writing when, in the absence of direct political power, they perceived that it would be their only means of influencing social reform.⁹⁹

Yet despite considerable evidence to the contrary, the stereotype has become the popular characterisation of the middle-class Victorian woman.¹⁰⁰ The reasons for its persistence are many. Historians have tended to accept



Frances Trollope



George Eliot

literary models as reflections of reality. Thus have Jane Eyre and Agnes Grey become examples of the typical downtrodden and humiliated governess, and Amelia Sedley in *Vanity Fair* an example of the typical gentlewoman educated for an ornamental role and left in distressed and helpless circumstances. Dora Spenlow and Rosamond Vincy typify the superficially educated and the idle, delicate and genteel Victorian middle-class woman of popular imagination.

Current critics of the reality of certain elements of the stereotype have pointed out the danger of using fictional characters as if they were typical examples of the period. It frequently happens that the 'entirely exceptional' becomes accepted as the 'perfectly normal.'¹⁰¹ Another historian has taken the opposite view: 'the work of the novelist in particular is not only an individual creation *ex nihilo* but comes from deep within the culture and ideology of a period; and the ideology is in part determined by the economic and social infrastructure.'¹⁰² Literature will continue to provide historians with historical evidence but this material should be balanced with non-literary, economic, social and statistical sources. Furthermore, the prevalence of the stereotype in Victorian literature has caused later historians to take a critical and patronising attitude towards the role and behaviour of Victorian women, which has in turn helped to perpetuate the extreme image.¹⁰³

The early feminists also tended to encourage the image of the popular stereotype in their earnest endeavours to rectify certain injustices such as the inadequate education and employment prospects of economically ruined middle-class women. They tended to dramatise the plight of such persons and thus projected 'a dehumanised image of helpless frivolous women'. Hammerton asserts that this has led to an unrealistic generalisation of an entire class, namely the distressed gentlewoman.¹⁰⁴ The objective data used by the feminists to support their campaign, such as poor education, inadequate employment opportunities, middle-class economic insecurity and impoverishment, are certainly reliable evidence of the condition of life for many middle-class women, but it is the behavioural reaction of women to these conditions which is the point at contention.¹⁰⁵ Too often the middle-class woman has been grossly caricatured.

The whole question of female education in the nineteenth century requires reassessment, and there are many well-known examples of women who escaped an educational system that was restricted to the ornamental and social accomplishments, a smattering of unrelated facts, religion and a little French. Florence Nightingale was taught by her father and received an excellent education in the classics, modern languages, history and philosophy. Barbara

Leigh Smith and her sisters were given an education as good as that of their brothers. Harriet Martineau's parents took a similar attitude, and her later political and journalistic career was highly distinguished. Many women also had access to good private libraries and institutions such as museums, and some of the private boarding schools gave a relatively high-quality education to girls. Sarah Frances Bunyon (later Bishop John Colenso's wife) received an excellent education at an academy in Cheltenham as early as the 1830s.¹⁰⁶ One could say that all these women were exceptional rather than typical, and perhaps they were. But their example nevertheless means that some adjustment to the popular stereotype of the poorly educated nineteenth-century middle-class woman is necessary.

Another distortion caused by the feminists was their emphasis on the inferior position of the married woman in law. Branca claims that many of the legal rights of the husband were 'merely theoretical' and never exercised by most middle-class men, and that certain unequal laws such as the divorce laws were seldom resorted to since divorce was not considered an acceptable alternative for middle-class women. Branca's position is that while there were certainly despotic husbands and inequities in the system for women, these were not necessarily either dominant or widespread, and much more detailed research is required into the role of the middle-class married woman such as she has undertaken.¹⁰⁷

In fact, the image of the Victorian family as a stultifying prison ruled by an autocratic father and wracked by the stresses mentioned earlier, although supported by some contemporary evidence, is probably more mythical than real. There are many examples of a more relaxed and enlightened patriarchal rule, and of happy and affectionate family life, such as is evident from the biographies of Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing, and in the lives of Barbara Leigh Smith and Beatrice Potter Webb. According to the last, for instance, her father not only believed that women were superior to men, but he acted as if they were, and readily and frankly discussed with his wife and nine daughters, business, politics, religion and sex. The marital relationship between her parents was based on love and gives the impression of harmony, as was the case in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's marriage.¹⁰⁸ The examples of happy marriages in novels, according to one writer, give far more evidence of spirited, non-submissive women than otherwise, and Branca believes that family rule was more a mutual function between man and wife than a function monopolised by a despotic husband. As for the belief that women were devoid of sexual desires (the theory propounded by Acton), she also produces contemporary

evidence to show that there were a number of Victorians who repudiated it in print.¹⁰⁹ These elements of the stereotype therefore also require adjustment.

One of the most popular sources for evidence of the stereotype of the domestically idle, frivolously educated Perfect Lady, was the multitude of nineteenth-century household manuals and women's magazines. These journals were consistently critical of the stereotype and became particularly intense in the second half of the century. The reasons for this are difficult to identify, but one writer believes it reflected change in the lifestyle of the middle classes and problems that the class experienced adapting to change.



Beatrice Potter Webb

Yet this writer maintains that most of the criticism was aimed at the upper classes rather than the middle classes, and the manuals therefore form an inaccurate picture of middle-class life.¹¹⁰

Branca continues to explode some of the myths of the middle-class housewife by an analysis of what she calls her 'material base', or the economic conditions of middle-class life. The belief that most middle-class girls attended boarding school is unrealistic in view of the expense involved. It was more likely of the upper and upper-middle classes.¹¹¹ The idea that middle-class girls were usually educated by governesses is also discounted on the grounds of cost and of insufficient numbers of governesses. There were simply not enough to go round and they were more an upper-class phenomenon.¹¹² In fact most middle-class girls were brought up in the home and educated by parents, and the domestic skills were therefore more available to them than the social accomplishments.

The belief that most middle-class women employed at least three servants (cook, parlour maid, nurse or housemaid) is again probably false because the expense would have been too great. Contrary to the stereotype, the middle-class woman grew up accomplished in domestic skills and spent a great deal of her time doing demanding household chores. Branca maintains that historians have focused mainly on the upper classes who were able to maintain the traditional lifestyle for much longer than the middle classes, and it was among

this class that the ideal of the Perfect Lady had more reality.

In short, the stereotype of the Perfect Lady whose daily activities revolved around social visits, walks, practising genteel accomplishments, supervising a retinue of servants and entertaining on a lavish scale, was more typical of the upper classes than the middle classes.¹¹³ Some prosperous upper-middle-class families allowed women a more leisurely lifestyle than Branca admits, as is clear from the diaries of two daughters of a well-to-do provincial family. Ellen and Emily Hall, for instance, spent their days entertaining, visiting, going on picnics, riding, courting, teaching in Sunday school and doing minor domestic chores.¹¹⁴

Even if some upper-middle-class women matched up to the ideal of the Perfect Lady, they were not necessarily embodiments of all the other elements in the stereotype of the Victorian women – elements such as timidity, delicacy and inability to cope with unusual and perhaps very difficult circumstances in the world beyond the sheltered home domain. Hammerton's study of impoverished gentlewomen and emigration makes it obvious that the women who emigrated to the colonies were very far from the image of simpering, helpless gentility. Emigration, particularly in the early years of its organisation (after 1830), was an extremely daunting prospect for single women. Not only was the sea voyage hazardous to life and reputation, but employment prospects in the colonies were uncertain. Yet many distressed gentlewomen undertook the gamble, and, once in the colonies, proved themselves remarkably adaptable, resilient and enterprising. Their behaviour patterns, from the willingness to risk the hazards of emigration to their capacity to exploit it, reveal human characteristics of enterprise and courage that are quite inconsistent with the abstract incapacity of the distressed gentlewomen stereotype.¹¹⁵ Hammerton's evidence has relevance to the behaviour of Natal emigrants and travellers and will be considered more fully in the penultimate chapter.

Even for the impoverished middle-class woman who did not opt for emigration, it is maintained by Hammerton that there were more employment opportunities open to her than the few mentioned earlier – sewing, governessing, writing and prostitution. Millinery, dressmaking and confectionery are some of the areas where certain women made an adequate, if not prosperous, living, and more research would perhaps reveal further possibilities. A women's magazine in the 1850s proclaimed that to 'keep shop' was equally permissible for the 'women of England' alongside teaching, writing books, needlework and drawing.¹¹⁶

It has in fact been claimed that the Victorian middle class has as a whole

been more stereotyped than studied, and it remains an unknown quantity. The Victorian middle-class woman is even more obscure, in contrast with her upper-class and working-class contemporaries, whose lifestyles were more publicised in nineteenth-century literature and journals, and in the activities of reform and philanthropic movements. The claim is made that 'Too many of our images of Victorian women assume a settled state, a complacency, whereas in reality the dominant problem was assimilation in a very new life-style.' The dynamic changes that accompanied industrialisation and urbanisation greatly affected the middle-class woman's daily life.¹¹⁷ This new lifestyle increased her influence, responsibility and physical labour:

Her personal influence grew greatly, as overnight she became an important decision-maker in her realm of home and family. Instead of obeying orders, the middle class woman now gave directions to servants and tradesmen. For the first time in her life she was responsible for very important sums of money. Her power lay in her control over the household budget ... Direction of the household also included a number of demanding physical tasks and, usually, the employment of a servant. The middle class housewife was thus an active agent in the family, not a pampered woman of leisure.¹¹⁸

Moreover, another writer has claimed that woman's status was in fact considerably enhanced by the idealisation of family life and that the care and education of the children, which was a central element in the ideal, created a unifying force within marriage. Marriage was viewed as a partnership.¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, the pervasiveness of the stereotype must not be underestimated. The fact that many aspects of this ideal such as premarital chastity and marriage centred in the home, became admired and aped by women of the working class is evidence of the dominance of this stereotype in Victorian society.¹²⁰ Ray Strachey, an active suffragist in the early decades of this century, has recorded that it was the force of this ideal in society that so distracted the suffrage movement in the 1860s. The sanctification of the home and women's role in the home, and the overriding fear of being 'unmaidenly' or 'unladylike', paralysed many women and was a serious factor in society until the post-World War I era. There were still many women by the 1860s, she writes, who had not even absorbed Ruskin's sanctification of philanthropic work as a legitimate sphere of activity for women.¹²¹

As late as 1881, Molly Hughes (then sixteen years old) was given the option by her widowed, impoverished mother, and on the suggestion of her brothers,

of a life of leisure – studying literature privately, reading French, sketching and so on – or of earning her living. She chose the latter and was fortunate to receive the wholehearted support of her family. Yet earning a living outside teaching, she wrote, was not considered ‘the thing for a girl’ and in her social circle was almost unknown.¹²² As one historian has recently written:

Nineteenth-century women were not always the passive, submissive and pure creatures of popular idealizations, but neither were they ever completely free from this stereotype. Its most pervasive and effective form of control was through the social and individual demand for respectability. While we can now judge Victorian women to have been more varied, active and complex than previously considered, we must not create a new stereotype that ignores the limits within which Victorians lived and changed. Rather, we should recognize the struggle to achieve independence – economic and personal – within the framework of traditional social values as being a hallmark of the times.¹²³

The chapters that follow are an attempt to assess the validity of the stereotype, in all its elements, against the activities, behaviour and attitudes of certain Victorian women writers associated with colonial Natal, with special emphasis on the life and career of Fanny Colenso.

NOTES

- 1 J. Killham, *Tennyson and ‘The Princess’: Reflections of an Age* (London: Athlone Press, 1958): 89.
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 H. Ellis, *Man and Woman: A Study in the Secondary and Tertiary Sexual Characteristics* (Newcastle: Scott, 1894).
- 4 V. Klein, *The Feminine Character: History of an Ideology* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1946): 1, 4, 6. See also E. Vallance, *Women in the House: A Study of Women Members of Parliament* (London: Athlone Press, 1979): 3.
- 5 F. Basch, *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel, 1837–67* (London: Allen Lane, 1974): 4.
- 6 J.S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, 1869).
- 7 R.D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (New York: Norton, 1973): 28.
- 8 H.G. Nicholas, ‘The new morality’ in BBC, *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians: An Historic Revaluation of the Victorian Age* (London: Sylvan Press, 1949): 137–138.
- 9 D. Crow, *The Victorian Woman* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971): 56.
- 10 W.E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957, 1973 reprint): 397. See also Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas*: 185; and C.W. Cunningham, *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Heinemann, 1935): 120.
- 11 L. Davidoff et al., ‘Landscape with figures: home and community in English society’ in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, edited by J. Mitchell and A. Oakley (Harmondsworth:

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- Penguin, 1976): 142, 144, 157. See also H.L. Beales, 'The Victorian family' in BBC, *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*: 343.
- 12 Davidoff, et al., 'Landscape with figures': 152.
 - 13 J. Ruskin, 'Of queens' gardens' in *Works*, edited by E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, v. 18 (London: George Allen, 1905): 122.
 - 14 Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870*: 346–347.
 - 15 Beales, 'The Victorian family': 344.
 - 16 J. Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman: Some Aspects of her Life, 1837–57* (London: Harrap, 1953): 25.
 - 17 See, for instance, Davidoff et al., 'Landscape with figures': 152–153; and Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 7–8.
 - 18 Davidoff et al., 'Landscape with figures': 152–153.
 - 19 A. Zeman, *Presumptuous Girls: Women and their World in the Serious Woman's Novel* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977): 51. See also Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman*: 17.
 - 20 *ibid*: 18–20. See also, for example, Cunningham, *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century*: 157.
 - 21 Davidoff et al., 'Landscape with figures': 157–158. See also Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 124.
 - 22 Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870*: 374, 375.
 - 23 *ibid*: 359–365, 380.
 - 24 Killham, *Tennyson and 'The Princess'*: 89.
 - 25 Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870*: 384. See also Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 27.
 - 26 Davidoff et al., 'Landscape with figures': 163.
 - 27 Beales, 'The Victorian family': 344–345. See also R. Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Woman's Movement in Great Britain* (London: Virago, 1978): 34–36.
 - 28 Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale, 1820–1910*: 93.
 - 29 Cunningham, *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century*: 212; Beales, 'The Victorian family': 343, 347. See also Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman*: 30–31; Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 37; and Davidoff et al., 'Landscape with figures': 163.
 - 30 Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 4–5.
 - 31 A. Tennyson, *'The Princess', 'Maud' and other Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1910): 100.
 - 32 G. Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965): 77–78.
 - 33 G. Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (London: Pan Books, 1973): 141.
 - 34 Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman*: 22.
 - 35 Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 5.
 - 36 Mill, *The Subjection of Women*: 43.
 - 37 Eliot, *Middlemarch*: 73.
 - 38 Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 5. See also Davidoff et al., 'Landscape with figures': 153, 155.
 - 39 Louis Aimé-Martin, *The Education of Mothers of Families* (London: Whittaker, 1842).
 - 40 Killham, *Tennyson and 'The Princess'*: 100–101; Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 23–24.
 - 41 Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 5–6.
 - 42 Tennyson, *'The Princess', 'Maud' and other Poems*: 136.
 - 43 Killham, *Tennyson and 'The Princess'*: 76–79.
 - 44 C. Christ, 'Victorian masculinity and the Angel in the House' in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, edited by M. Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977): 146. See also BBC, *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*: 27.
 - 45 Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870*: 351.

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- 46 J. Carey, *Mister Johnson* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962): 142.
- 47 Christ, 'Victorian masculinity and the Angel in the House': 147, 152, 159; S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972): 284.
- 48 J. Ruskin, 'The crown of wild olive' in *Works*, edited by E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, v.18 (London: George Allen, 1905): 491. See also Ruskin, 'Of queens' gardens': 111, 121–122, 137, 139.
- 49 See for instance, Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 45–46, 161–162; and Killham, *Tennyson and 'The Princess'*: 121.
- 50 J. Annas, 'Mill and the subjection of women' *Philosophy* 52(200) 1977: 186.
- 51 Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*: 289–290. See also Ruskin, 'Of queen's gardens': 122.
- 52 See Ruskin, 'Of queen's gardens': 136–137; Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 7; and Davidoff et al., 'Landscape with figures': 159.
- 53 Klein, *The Feminine Character*: 9, 10. See also R.J. Evans, *The Feminists: Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australasia, 1840–1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1977): 23–25.
- 54 Strachey, *The Cause*: 52. See also Klein, *The Feminine Character*: 10–11.
- 55 See Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 6; and J.A. Banks, 'The paraphernalia of gentility' in *Prosperity and Parenthood: A Study of Family Planning among the Victorian Middle Classes* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954).
- 56 Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman*: 136–137; Cunningham, *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century*: 115.
- 57 V. Klein, 'The emancipation of women: its motives and achievements' in BBC, *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*: 264. See also R.G. Grylls, 'Emancipation of women' in BBC, *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*: 256.
- 58 Mill, *The Subjection of Women*: 43.
- 59 Eliot, *Middlemarch*: 193, 387.
- 60 See, for example, Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman*: 135–136; and Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 45.
- 61 P. Marks, 'Femininity in the classroom: an account of changing attitude' in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, edited by J. Mitchell and A. Oakley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976): 182.
- 62 See M.J. Peterson, 'The Victorian governess: status incongruence in family and society' in *Suffer and be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, edited by M. Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972): 3, 5. See also Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 46.
- 63 J. Austen, *Emma* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1938): 164, 167.
- 64 See Peterson, 'The Victorian governess': particularly 9–10.
- 65 E.C. Black, *Victorian Culture and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1973): 186. See also Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 6–7.
- 66 Cunningham, *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century*: 146. See also Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas*: 51.
- 67 Cunningham, *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century*: 90–91.
- 68 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 8.
- 69 M. Vicinus, 'Introduction: the Perfect Victorian Lady' in *Suffer and be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, edited by M. Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972): ix.
- 70 Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale, 1820–1910*: 95. See also Strachey, *The Cause*: 22.
- 71 Black, *Victorian Culture and Society*: 188–189.
- 72 Quotation from Mrs Beeton's *The Book of Household Management* (see Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 16).
- 73 Ruskin, 'Of queens' gardens': 122; Davidoff et al., 'Landscape with figures': 155.

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- 74 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 7, 22–23.
- 75 Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 105. See also Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman*: 22.
- 76 Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 11.
- 77 *ibid*: 11, 20. See also Basch, *Relative Creatures*: chapter 6 and Crow, *The Victorian Woman*: 68.
- 78 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 8–9; Grylls, ‘Emancipation of women’: 256–258.
- 79 See, for instance, Frances Power Cobbe’s initial reason for taking up the cause of female emancipation in *The Duties of Women: A Course of Lectures* (London: Williams and Norgate, 2nd ed., 1882): 6–7.
- 80 Klein, ‘The emancipation of women’: 262, 265. See also Strachey, *The Cause*: 12–13, 44; and Evans, *The Feminists*: 17–18, 31.
- 81 Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 11, 12.
- 82 See Strachey, *The Cause*: chapters, 14–16. See also Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 13–14; and Evans, *The Feminists*: 34.
- 83 Mrs Hugo Reid wrote *A Plea for Women* in 1843, in which she claimed the vote for women, but simply as a means to revoke the unjust civil and educational restrictions applicable to them (see Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 13–14).
- 84 Klein, ‘The emancipation of women’: 267. See also Strachey, *The Cause*: 285.
- 85 Cobbe, *The Duties of Women*: 7.
- 86 Killham, *Tennyson and ‘The Princess’*: 112; Beales, ‘The Victorian family’: 344; D.M. Stenton, *The English Woman in History* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957): 313.
- 87 Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 28.
- 88 Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 10.
- 89 Stenton, *The English Woman in History*: 325–326. See also Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman*: 118.
- 90 M. Laski, *George Eliot and her World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973): 95. See also Zeman, *Presumptuous Girls*: 42; Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 107; Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman*: 118, 124–125; and A. Adburgham, *Woman in Print: Writing Women and Women’s Magazines from the Restoration to the Accession of Victoria* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972): 245–246.
- 91 O. Schreiner, *Woman and Labour* (Marshalltown: Cosmos, 1975): vi. George Eliot had another reason for writing under a pseudonym: she feared that her relationship with George Lewes might adversely affect sales (see Laski, *George Eliot and her World*: 59). See also Basch, *Relative Creatures*: 107–108; and V. Sackville-West, ‘Women poets of the seventies’ in *The Eighteen-Seventies: Essays by Fellows of the Royal Society of Literature*, edited by H. Granville-Barker (Cambridge: CUP, 1929): 111–113, 119).
- 92 Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman*: 117–118, 132. See also J. Cunliffe, *Leaders of the Victorian Revolution* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1934): 106; and Adburgham, *Woman in Print*: 248.
- 93 Stenton, *The English Woman in History*: 328–332.
- 94 D. Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965): 11, 20–22 and chapter 2. See also Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 399. For a list of Mrs Bishop’s books, see Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers*: 177.
- 95 *ibid*: 5.
- 96 For recent evidence of this stereotype see B. Farwell, *Burton: A Biography of Sir Richard Francis Burton* (London: Longmans, 1963): 1: ‘the spirit of adventure that leads to exploration is primarily a masculine trait; women, being more sensible and their curiosity being confined to more personal and realistic matters nearer home, are less afflicted by the desire to see what lies beyond the seas and the mountain ranges.’

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- 97 Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers*: 4.
- 98 Zeman, *Presumptuous Girls*: 46, 50–53. But see also the response of a far more radical Victorian feminist to Charlotte’s stance in Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 75–76.
- 99 Cobbe, *The Duties of Women*: 6–7; E. Moers, *Literary Women* (London: W.H. Allen, 1977): 20. See also Zeman, *Presumptuous Girls*: 55–56.
- 100 See for instance the following twentieth century histories: Crow, *The Victorian Woman*; H. Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780–1880* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); S.G. Checkland, *The Rise of Industrial Society in England, 1815–1885* (London: Longman, 1971); and J.F.C. Harrison, *The Early Victorians, 1832–1851* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971). See also Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 6, footnotes 18–19. Certain elements in the stereotype are still the subject of serious academic research such as Peterson, ‘The Victorian governess’ and Davidoff et al., ‘Landscape with figures’.
- 101 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 11; Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 20.
- 102 Basch, *Relative Creatures*: xviii.
- 103 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 6.
- 104 Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 20, 21.
- 105 *ibid*: 23.
- 106 Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale, 1820–1910*: 11; L. Holcombe, ‘Victorian wives and property: reform of the Married Women’s Property Law, 1857–1882’ in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, edited by M. Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977): 9; ‘Harriet Martineau’ *Dictionary of National Biography*, 36: 309–313; Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 182; Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 19.
- 107 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 8–9.
- 108 B. Webb, *My Apprenticeship* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971): 35. See also Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman*: 29.
- 109 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 123–126. See also Vicinus, ‘Introduction: the Perfect Victorian Lady’: x.
- 110 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 12–16, 22, 34–35.
- 111 *ibid*: 45–46. See also Marks, ‘Femininity in the classroom’: 181.
- 112 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 46. But see, for instance, Peterson, ‘The Victorian governess’: 5.
- 113 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 17–18, 46–47, 54–55, 145.
- 114 Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 24. See also Vicinus, ‘Introduction: the Perfect Victorian Lady’: ix.
- 115 Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 12.
- 116 Cunningham, *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century*: 146. See also Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 43.
- 117 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 2, 17–18.
- 118 *ibid*: 22.
- 119 P. Grimshaw, ‘Women and the family in Australian history: a reply to “The real Mathilda”’ *Historical Studies* 18(72) 1979: 414–416.
- 120 Vicinus, ‘Introduction: the Perfect Victorian Lady’: xii–xiii.
- 121 Strachey, *The Cause*: 78–80.
- 122 M.V. Hughes, *A London Girl of the 1880s* (Oxford: OUP, 1978): 6–7.
- 123 M. Vicinus, ‘Introduction: new trends in the study of the Victorian woman’ in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, edited by M. Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977): xix.

2

FRANCES ELLEN COLENZO: THE FORMATIVE INFLUENCES OF HER LIFE AND CAREER UP TO 1875

Fanny Colenso was the second child of John William Colenso, Bishop of Natal. She was born in 1849 in the small, rural parish of Forncett St Mary, in south Norfolk, where her father had been rector since 1846. She lived there until late 1853 when the new Bishop of Natal took his family out to the Colony. Except for four short periods when she returned to England (1862–1865; March 1869–1870; October 1879–October 1881; and July 1886–April 1887), Fanny spent the rest of her life in Natal. She died of tuberculosis at the age of 37 at Ventnor, Isle of Wight, in April 1887.



Rectory at Forncett St Mary, birthplace of Fanny Colenso

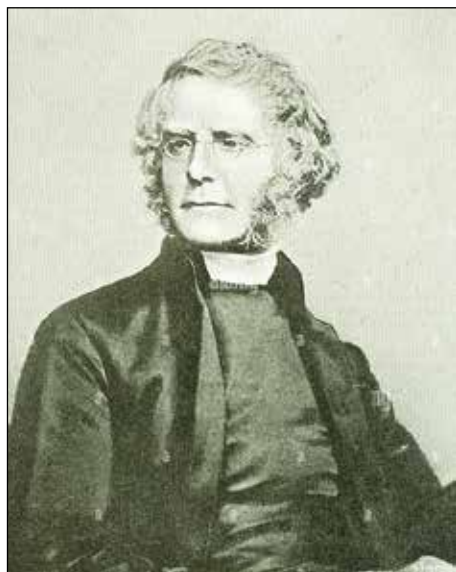
Until her thirtieth year, Fanny appears to have led a private life not untypical of women of her class in colonial, Victorian society. Her activities were largely confined to her home at Bishopstowe and its adjacent mission station, Ekukanyeni, which lay about six miles from Pietermaritzburg. Her tastes were artistic and literary – both acceptable Victorian accomplishments – and until 1875 she confined herself to creative writing. In 1879 she travelled to England where two of her books were published the following year, one of them under a pseudonym. These two books – *My Chief and I; or, Six Months in Natal after the Langalibalele Outbreak* which appeared under the name Atherton Wylde, and *History of the Zulu War and its Origin* – marked the start of an intensive seven-year career of political writing, most of it controversial and anti-establishment, conducted in semi-invalidism, and ending only with her death. Her publications, and her letters and articles to the press, established her reputation in England and South Africa as a ‘true and sincere friend’ of the Zulu nation, and one who ‘fearlessly trod in her father’s footsteps’.¹

Less well-known was her role as a staunch defender of Colonel Anthony William Durnford, Royal Engineers, whose controversial career in Natal was to end in the disaster at Isandhlwana. Her pseudonymous work, *My Chief and I*, although published only in 1880, was written in 1875, as a tribute to Durnford after he had incurred criticism for his conduct of military operations at the Bushman’s River Pass during the so-called Langalibalele disturbances of 1873–1874. Behind her fight to exonerate him lay her frustrated love for this officer. Durnford was a married man, although separated from his wife, but middle-class morality, both military and civilian, frowned on divorce and their relationship was kept from public knowledge as far as possible. Her deep interest in Durnford became known to a small circle of friends and relatives and to the military authorities, but it was not until a notorious military court of inquiry held in Natal in 1886, that her involvement in the case became public knowledge. It is significant, however, that when she died none of the obituaries explicitly mentioned this aspect of her career, which was in fact pursued with passionate intensity.

Thus did Fanny Colenso join the small band of nineteenth-century women who were writing about Natal and Zululand, and achieving a certain prominence. These women included Lady Barker, Miss Barter, Eliza Feilden, Mrs Wilkinson, Henrietta Robinson, Lady Florence Dixie and, of course, Harriette Colenso. Fanny’s achievements have always been considered less significant than those of her sister, who paradoxically seldom left Bishopstowe and only ever wrote pamphlets. Harriette lived well into the twentieth century

whereas Fanny's career as a writer lasted only eight years. While she was alive, Fanny's writings were often attributed to her youngest brother Frank whose initials were the same as Fanny's and who was also active in England in the Zulu cause.² This never troubled Fanny since her main aim was publicity and success for the cause, and she saw herself merely as an instrument to that end. But whereas Harriette's life was dedicated to two public issues – the continuation of the Church of England in Natal and the securing of justice for the Zulu people – Fanny showed equal, if not more passionate zeal, towards exonerating Anthony Durnford of blame for the British defeat at Isandhlwana. Fanny's motives for embarking on a literary career were personal and emotional, and her convictions were passionate and uncompromising. Both her motives and her convictions were influenced as much by her family relationships and environment, as by her personality and emotions.

The most abiding influence on Fanny's life was her father: her love and devotion to him bordered on worship. From contemporary accounts it would appear that the bishop was a man of charm and force of character.³ To Fanny, he was 'the most Christ-like man of modern times.'⁴ In a letter to Frank's wife Sophie in 1885 she made an obvious reference to the bishop, and obliquely to Anthony Durnford, when she referred to men who were 'more nearly divine than all the rest of the world put together.'⁵ When the bishop died in 1883 she told Frank that 'he has been the very light of our existence for years. Harrie & Agnes [her sisters] have never had any interest in life apart from him, while to me my Father has been the great comfort of my life & for his sake I have cared to live.'⁶



John William Colenso

John William Colenso was a remarkable man – tutor, clergyman and bishop, an outstanding scholar who wrote and published books on classics, mathematics, biblical studies, theology and Zulu grammar. He is chiefly remembered for his advanced, controversial theological ideas which split the Anglican Church in South Africa, and for his political involvement in Zulu

affairs for which his name is still revered among the Zulu people. He was born in 1814 into a probably lower middle-class family that suffered permanent financial ruin at some time between the 1820s and 1834. He struggled to obtain a secondary education while helping to support his brothers after the death of his mother in his mid-teens.

From an early age he had been converted to Christianity, probably by his nonconformist mother, and he developed a deep faith and a desire to devote his life to God. While working as an usher in a school at Dartmouth he decided to go to Cambridge University to become an Anglican minister. With the partial financial aid of two relatives, he entered St John's College in 1832. Here his superior intellect and determination to succeed ensured an academically brilliant career as a mathematician despite grave financial problems. By 1833 he had published a translation of Homer and *Annotations on St Matthew's Gospel*, and while teaching at Harrow between 1837 and 1841 he wrote an algebra book to raise money to pay off his debts. In 1842 he was forced to return to Cambridge as tutor because of financial problems, and here he gained a local reputation as a preacher. A successful *National School Arithmetic* in 1843 improved his finances considerably and that year he became engaged.⁷ In 1846 he was offered, and accepted, the living at Fornsett St Mary in Norfolk and married shortly before leaving to take up this living. Eight years later at the age of 39 he was consecrated Bishop of Natal.

Sarah Frances Bunyon, Colenso's wife, came from a wealthy middle-class evangelical family in London, which was impoverished in the 1840s. From an early age, Frances (as she called herself) rebelled against her evangelical upbringing and began to question her religion.⁸ The Bunyon girls had been given a superior type of education to that deemed suitable for young ladies at that period. At a select Academy for Young Ladies at Cheltenham in the early 1830s, Frances acquired, over and above the usual accomplishments of singing, music and painting, a knowledge of French, German, Latin and Greek, and of metaphysics.⁹ The last enabled her to explore the writings of the leading theologians of the day, and she came under the influence of S.T. Coleridge and Frederick Denison Maurice, a leading low-church social theologian. Her deep interest in matters spiritual is shown in a letter she wrote to Maurice when a reprint of his book *The Kingdom of Christ* appeared in 1842. The letter displays a shy hesitancy and a respectful tone, but it also shows the courageous spirit of the young woman who was obviously aware of the possible impropriety of writing thus, as a stranger and a woman, to the great man.¹⁰ This correspondence led to closer friendship. When she and Colenso met that

same year, she probably introduced Colenso to Maurice and the couple mixed with the latter's intellectual circle in London.

Maurice's theology was generally considered unorthodox and in 1853 he was to lose his professorship at King's College, London University. Until he met his future wife, Colenso's theology was based on his personal religious experience rather than on any formal theological school, but under her influence he read more widely and became a follower of Maurice.¹¹ It was on Maurice's ideas that Colenso later developed his



Sarah Frances Colenso

so-called heretical theology and his controversial biblical criticism.¹² The Colensos' lifelong interest in theology was not shared to the same extent by their daughter Fanny, although she occasionally discussed aspects of Christian thinking in her correspondence and, for instance, in a review she wrote of Fitzjames Stephen's book *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity*.¹³ But she displayed a deep faith, without which, she wrote

I do not believe I sh[oul]d have lived til now, & for years past it only has been a far away light upon my path ... Without the continual thought of God ... I never could have endured the pain & sorrow wh[ich] have been my lot. ... but for the strong faith in the Fatherhood of God wh[ich] my own father taught us, & wh[ich] every year of his beautiful life helped me more & more to realise, my whole soul would have risen up against the seeming injustice of my lot.¹⁴

The life the Colensos lived at Fornsett was probably typical of the poor, rural clergyman's family in mid-nineteenth century England. It was a small parish, so Colenso's parochial duties could not have been too arduous. Besides teaching his own children and teaching in the parish school of St Mary where he introduced scientific subjects, he also took in boarding pupils. Frances was always a devoted wife with a strong sense of duty, perhaps inculcated by her evangelical upbringing. She appears to have worked in harmony with her husband's chosen profession however much she may have regretted the loss

of their cultured circle of friends in London. We do not have any evidence of her daily life at Forncett, but it was probably similar, for instance, to that of Maria Hare who lived in a remote Wiltshire parish in the 1830s. The latter's journal records the daily duties that she and her husband were involved in: a night school, a clothing club, cottage meetings, feasting of schoolchildren in the vicarage in summer, and visiting the sick.¹⁵ Sarah Frances Colenso also ran a household of four children (Harriette Emily, Frances Ellen, Robert John and Francis Ernest or Frank) plus boarders. It was certainly not the sheltered, quietly domestic haven for the delicate, fragile woman of popular image, who was supposedly incapable of physical effort or mental agility.



Harriette Emily and Francis Ernest (Frank) Colenso

Both John and Sarah Frances Colenso were imbued with a strong sense of duty to the poor. Colenso had actively interested himself in the working classes near Harrow in the late 1830s. Maurice's teachings on the common fellowship of man, including the heathen, and on the need for missionaries to give a Christian meaning to the longings and aspirations of the heathen, awakened his interest in the missionary field. In 1853 he wrote a book, *Village Sermons*, which expressed his views on mission work and he courageously dedicated it to the now-deposed Maurice, thus publicly asserting his unorthodox views. It was as a missionary bishop that he accepted the see of Natal.¹⁶ The Colensos'

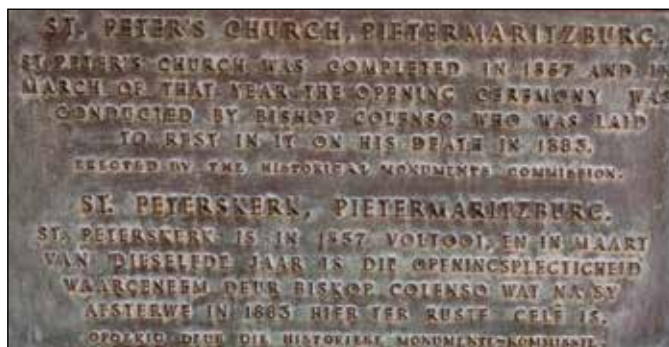
*FRANCES ELLEN COLENZO: THE FORMATIVE INFLUENCES
OF HER LIFE AND CAREER UP TO 1875*

experiences in Forncett among poor, ignorant and superstitious English rustics, must have been a useful apprenticeship for their work among the Zulu in Natal.

By the time they left for Natal in 1853, the bishop and his wife thus displayed certain characteristics, interests and convictions that were to affect considerably the circumstances and character of their children's upbringing. They were also a close-knit family. This was undoubtedly due to the love between the parents – their marriage had been a love-match – and between them and their children, in whose upbringing both parents were closely involved. Their closeness was probably heightened by their physical isolation first at Forncett and then at Bishopstowe, and by the bishop's personal loneliness, which was probably due to a number of factors such as his scholarly pursuits and recurrent financial difficulties, and later in Natal, his controversial theological and political writings and activities.¹⁷



St Peter's Cathedral, Pietermaritzburg (taken December 1974)



Commemorative plaque at doorway

*FRANCES ELLEN COLENZO: THE FORMATIVE INFLUENCES
OF HER LIFE AND CAREER UP TO 1875*

Bishopstowe and its mission station Ekukanyeni occupied 8 500 acres of Crown Land. Its complex of buildings eventually consisted of a thatched house for the bishop's family, simple dwellings for the mission and farm workers, a yellowwood chapel, a printing office, blacksmith's forge, carpenter's shop, a mill and a brick shed.¹⁸ A school for the training of converts in a variety of practical skills was planned by the bishop on an ambitious scale, but due to lack of funds, the prejudice of local whites against trained blacks, the inability of blacks to remain for long on the station, and the bishop's increasing interest in other fields such as biblical criticism, translations into Zulu and the social development of the Natal natives, the school never achieved substantial success.¹⁹ It closed in 1861 when a Zulu invasion scare dispersed the mission natives, and from 1865 it was the bishop's daughters who attempted to carry on his educational ideals on a more modest scale through their school.



Colenso house, Bishopstowe

Sarah Frances Colenso's contribution to the running of the mission was on a more mundane level. It is clear from her correspondence from this period of her life that she had the tastes and interests of an educated, cultured woman. But, as a missionary's wife, her daily life tended to be dominated by domestic tasks, at least until Fanny and Harriette, her two eldest daughters, were old enough to help her. Her interests included painting (particularly of flowers), music and poetry, and a wide range of literature including Thackeray, George Eliot, Charles Reade, Froude, Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, and of course books on theology and metaphysics.²⁰ She had developed these tastes early in life,

whereas she had never enjoyed ‘any kind of needle, or knitting or knotting or nothing’.²¹ But at Bishopstowe she sewed endlessly. There were no ready-made clothes for sale in Natal shops at that time, and she could not rely on her black maids to sew even simple garments. Not only her own five children had to be clothed (Agnes, the fifth child, was born in 1855), but the mission natives had to be supplied with trousers and blouses. Even though she had a sewing machine by 1865, providing clothing was a constant problem. She also supervised the black women on the station, acted as amateur doctor to all the blacks in the area, and probably carried the main burden of teaching the children.²²



Bishopstowe: road to Eastwood, May 2024

The power of education to improve was a strong tenet of faith in the Colenso household, and the bishop and his wife were closely involved in the education of their children. Frances frequently expressed concern over their lack of time for study, and the dearth of intellectual companionship for them.²³ The educational opportunities for girls in Natal in the late 1850s and 1860s were not such as to encourage the bishop and his wife to make use of them. Apart from questions of finance (a constant problem), and geography (six miles from Pietermaritzburg), the local government school offered only a rudimentary education for less-privileged children; and in fact it attracted few girls because of the social stigma attached to this type of school. There were a number of private ‘seminaries’ or ‘ladies academies’ in town that hoped to attract the more socially respectable, but these were ‘more impressive in quantity than quality.’²⁴ Girls’ education in Natal, under the influence of early nineteenth-

century English education, was firmly based on a practical foundation of sewing, music, drawing and reading, with the addition of Holy Scripture, and, in varying degrees of depth and availability, arithmetic, geography, history, English and French. According to one historian, governesses were an accepted institution in Natal, but the Colensos were no doubt aware of the doubtful quality of this class of woman. The bishop placed the need for girls' education in the Colony on a par with boys', but in keeping with the age, he felt this should be of a different type, namely a ladies' education, of the domestic type, and supported by the mission station at Ekukanyeni.²⁵

In July 1855, Marianne Churchill wrote that, 'Mrs Colenso is having ... a school in her house, a number of young ladies to be educated with her own children, at moderate charges with the advantage of obtaining a superior education.'²⁶ She also mentioned the possible presence of a music master. In 1859 Alice Mackenzie's journal records the presence of a household of black and white children at Bishopstowe, and a number of unmarried young women who helped teach the black children and who in turn were taught with the white children.²⁷ We do not know what the curriculum was, but the evidence is that Fanny, Harriette and Agnes were taught the usual accomplishments without which a Victorian woman's education was incomplete, such as drawing and painting, music, and functional sewing at least. But their education also included more 'advanced' subjects for girls such as mathematics (for which Fanny had an aptitude) and classics, and the conventional ones such as French, bible and religious instruction, and English literature. Harriette became something of an amateur botanist.²⁸ Like many Victorian families they read aloud to each other, for instance from Froude's 'history' (probably a volume of his *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, 12 volumes, 1856–1870), and Kingsley's *Town Geology*.²⁹ Thus Fanny's education can be said to be typical of the more privileged colonial girl in many respects, but, given her parent's intellect and interest in their children's education, it was probably of a higher quality and less conservative.

Fanny appears to have had one experience of formal schooling. Between May 1862 and mid-1865, the bishop returned to England to answer charges of heresy, and took his family with him. From letters that Frances Colenso wrote to Miss Bell, the principal of Winnington Hall School in Cheshire, it appears that Fanny and Harriette attended the school. Miss Bell, according to one contemporary, was a clever, strong-minded woman, and her ideas of woman's education were advanced.³⁰ She invited Ruskin to visit the school and

he became a regular visitor, giving lessons in geology, art and bible studies. Miss Bell's pupils appear to have been encouraged to read the leading thinkers of the day, such as Carlyle; and Fanny was obviously impressed by Miss Bell and her opinions.³¹

When they returned to Natal in 1865, Fanny and Harriette started a Sunday school for black children, which by 1866 had 22 pupils. Whether or not Fanny saw this as a duty, her mother saw it as a sacrifice that she and her sister made for 'the cause', this being perhaps the bishop's missionary ideals which he had been unable to pursue for reasons already mentioned.³² Colenso managed to get a grant of £250 per annum for native education at Ekukanyeni from Lieutenant-Governor Keate, and by 1867 Fanny's school was operating every afternoon and now included white tenants' children. At first she was assisted by Agnes and Grace Murray, who lived with the Colensos in an ambiguous role of servant-cum-friend, but by December 1867 she was being assisted by the Reverend de La Mare's nephew.³³ Fanny had a year in England between 1869 and 1870, partly to spend some time with a close friend and partly to have her eyes tested, but the bishop hoped she would spend some time profitably at Winnington Hall.³⁴ While in England she obtained a grant of £20 per annum from a society for her school, and on her return to Natal plans were made to obtain the assistance of a native teacher to help her with the boys. The school was regularly inspected by Thomas Warwick Brooks, Superintendent of Education.³⁵

Apart from her duties as a mission teacher, Fanny also acted as a housekeeper at Bishopstowe for fifteen years and pursued her ambition to become a professional artist, being at one time secretary of the Natal Sketching Society and participating in local art exhibitions. Her mother, being an amateur painter herself, encouraged Fanny's artistic ambitions and lamented the fact that they never had the means to give her a proper education.³⁶ Fanny spent some weeks in Rome in 1881 partly for the purpose of studying art, but was not impressed by the standard of art teaching that she encountered there, and she could not benefit from the art galleries because cold weather kept her indoors to protect her delicate health.³⁷

For relaxation Fanny read novels, and in moments of enforced idleness, such as on sea voyages, she would even read 'sensational stories'.³⁸ She was known as the 'letter writer of the family' and, like many of her contemporaries, took up creative writing. According to her mother, Fanny wrote 'little stories', which the bishop methodically corrected.³⁹ Two of these short stories were printed in the *Natal Colonist*. One of them, entitled 'Playing with edged tools;

a New Year's tale' appeared on 5 January 1875; and the other, 'Too late! – fortunately' was printed as a serial in a number of issues of the *Natal Colonist* between 11 January and 1 February 1876. The latter story was published anonymously by P. Davis & Sons, Durban in the same year, as a pamphlet.⁴⁰ Fanny also wrote a short novel which she called 'A little orphan', but she failed to find a publisher willing to accept it.⁴¹

There are certain common features to the plots and characters of these three stories that tell us something about Fanny's emotional life. They are highly romantic tales and all concerned with love affairs. In the two short stories the affairs end happily after some rather contrived near-disasters. In the novel, however, the romance ends in tragedy and a melodramatic deathbed scene. The heroes in each tale are military men of the same idealised type – manly, chivalric gentlemen fully of noble sentiments and Victorian virtues.⁴² Their only failing seems to have been a hesitation to declare themselves as lovers at the right time, thereby laying the foundation for a series of misunderstandings. The similarity between these heroes and the picture of Anthony Durnford that emerges from the pages of Fanny's memoir of that officer – *My Chief and I* – is unmistakable.⁴³

An appreciation of why Fanny took up writing may be gained from an examination of her daily life, social environment and character. Her daily life of domestic chores, teaching the mission natives, and when she had time, writing, painting and playing music, was typical of many middle-class Victorian women. Her teaching activities were a natural outlet for her energies and educational qualifications. Many of the new settlers who arrived in Natal in 1849–1851 set up school as a means of earning a living, and some of them were experienced teachers.⁴⁴ Fanny's school was founded on different motives – to Christianise the natives and to improve their social conditions through education. These were two of the aims behind the bishop's missionary ideal, but the level of education she offered was probably rudimentary and never aspired to the heights of the local academies that in various terms offered what one of them called 'every branch of a sound English education'.⁴⁵ Most missionary women ran schools. Henrietta Robertson, wife to the Reverend Robert Robertson, first at the Umlazi Church Mission Station and then at KwaMagwaza, in the early 1860s, was typical in this respect: 'We are all working hard on our Kafir School every night,' she wrote; 'The people are taught reading, writing, singing and chanting, concluding with direct religious instruction and catechising and prayers.' She also taught sewing and was equally burdened with providing clothes to the mission natives as were the

Colenso women.⁴⁶ Mrs Wilkinson, the bishop's wife, continued a school at KwaMagwaza in the 1870s, and taught music to certain Christian converts. Umkungo, Mpande's son, was also taught music at Ekukanyeni.⁴⁷

None of the activities in which Fanny indulged, at least until 1875, conflicted with contemporary ideals regarding women's role in society. They could all be carried out within the confines of the home; they were all respectable occupations; and her teaching duties fell into the acceptable field of female philanthropic activity. Far from being idle and frivolous, however, Fanny was inevitably drawn into domestic chores because of her missionary environment. There were no trained white servants to help the Colenso women run the mission, and they experienced the same problems with untrained black servants as most colonists.⁴⁸ Moreover the quality of her education and the cultural activities of her family, combined with her literary and artistic ambitions, meant that Fanny (and Harriette) did not grow up in an environment that encouraged the development of a mentally limited, poorly educated and frivolous woman. Nevertheless, the physical limits of her environment were narrow and although she enjoyed more of a social life than most women who grew up on mission stations, there were circumstances which made the Colensos comparatively isolated in the social life of Pietermaritzburg.

First, the road between Bishopstowe and the town must have been poor as a return trip took a whole day.⁴⁹ The bishop and his children usually rode on horseback, but summer heat and rainfall often prevented even that mode of transport.⁵⁰ Second, Mrs Colenso considered Bishopstowe an ideal place for her family to grow up in; it was healthy, economical and very beautiful, but she often regretted their isolation from European intellectual and social life, and the 'colonial metropolis' of Maritzburg was no substitute.⁵¹ The white population of the capital in 1852 amounted to 1 508 and had risen to 6 196 in 1875. From early days the Colony 'gave evidence of class distinction'.⁵² This distinction came to be based on colonial criteria rather than on conventional Victorian social criteria, so that privilege was equated with the military and official classes and with the wealthy businessman, while the civilian and 'mere colonist' occupied the socially inferior ranks.⁵³ John Robinson, alias A Lady, wrote in 1864: 'Maritzburg is the most clique-ridden town it has been my lot to dwell in.'⁵⁴ Frances Colenso wrote to her lifelong correspondent Katherine Lyell in 1870 on the subject of the social inferiority of the capital:

The more I hear of P.M.B. society the more I congratulate myself that
I am out of it, but it is a place of banishment for young people, ours

have really scarcely a friend. You have no idea what life in a colony is in that respect. Everybody here has something queer about them, or else they are mere colonials, born and bred in the place, without an idea. There are some superior people, but they are scattered about over the colony, and very glad to receive and entertain the Bishop when he is out on his travels.⁵⁵

The town was moreover a hotbed of gossip, the colonial girls were ‘too womanly by half’ to mix with her girls, and in fact they had few friends among the colonists.⁵⁶ She also felt that Natal society was intellectually barren, and that her two sons must have the benefit of an English university education so as to ‘determine their sphere in life’, otherwise they would ‘sink into mere colonists’.⁵⁷ Frances Colenso therefore held herself aloof from Natal society except for a socially acceptable minority, and she seldom left Bishopstowe. There were however occasional visitors to Bishopstowe – all important newcomers were taken to meet the Colensos – and sometimes visitors stayed days and even weeks because of the travelling involved.⁵⁸

The third factor which tended to isolate the Colensos was the bishop’s unpopularity. Of the many cliques found in Natal society were the two fiercely opposing religious factions, the pro-Colensos and the pro-Dean Green group. This situation had arisen as a result of the bishop’s so-called heretical writings and his excommunication by Bishop Gray in 1866. The Colenso family found themselves socially excommunicated. Furthermore, the bishop’s controversial views on the black question and his involvement in native affairs alienated large sections of colonial opinion.⁵⁹

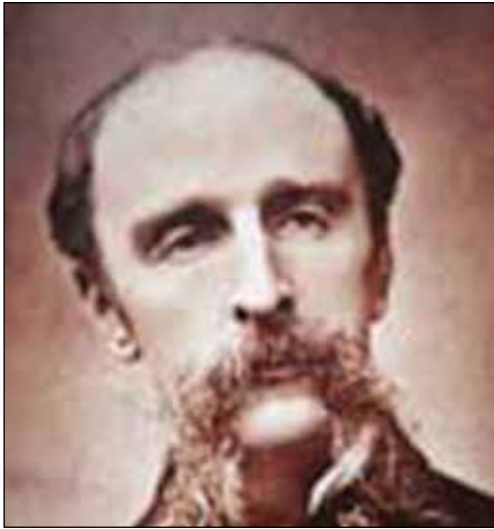
The social life of the small capital was limited to such functions as picnics, bazaars, military entertainments (musical and dramatic), going to hear the Legislative Council, and occasional balls and banquets organised by either the governor or the military.⁶⁰ As John Robinson commented in 1865, ‘Life is not eventful in these third-rate little colonies. Though Natal is often called with pardonable pride, by patriotic residents, “the brightest jewel in the British Crown”, its social attractions are not yet very apparent to strangers.’⁶¹ There was little opportunity for cultural and intellectual stimulation at a level the Colensos would appreciate, when there were no museums or concert halls, no proper theatre (there was only St George’s Theatre, a large room at Fort Napier, and an auctioneer’s room in the town called the Dramatic Hall), a small public library where there was great competition to be the first to read new acquisitions, and a smaller private library, and only occasional lectures.⁶²

On occasions Fanny and her siblings went in to town to hear the regimental band play in the park on Saturdays, or enjoyed picnics with friends, like Mrs Keate and Canon Gray and his wife.⁶³ But they did not often go into town. As Fanny wrote to her future sister-in-law, Sophie Frankland (Frank's fiancée) in 1876, they seldom went there 'except to church on Sundays, or to balls of wh[ich] the town is very fond, as it is a military station - & we usually have pleasant friends amongst the officers & their wives.'⁶⁴ Although Harriette 'dearly' loved dancing for its own sake, Fanny was 'not of the same mind and gladly escapes a dance.'⁶⁵ She made particular friends with Helen Shepstone, Offy's wife, a well-known hostess in the 1870s, and with a small number of the more educated colonial women, such as Mrs Gray, the wife of the canon, Mrs Boyes whose husband was a captain in the 75th Regiment, and who took 'a great fancy' to Fanny; and Katie Giles who lived with them, sharing domestic duties with Fanny and Harriette and who was called by Mrs Colenso 'quite the lady'. Mr Sanderson, editor of the *Natal Colonist*, and his wife, were particular friends of the Colensos, and Fanny used to stay with them in Durban.⁶⁶

Fanny was also not entirely lacking in masculine companionship. Apart from the military officers at Fort Napier, there was also Mr Hughes, who, according to Mrs Colenso, was 'just what you expect from the son of an English clergyman of the right stamp, brought up at home, thoroughly refined but full of life and spirit.'⁶⁷ He went riding with Fanny and escorted the Colenso daughters to town to hear the band play.⁶⁸ There was also Louis Knollys, whom Fanny met again in 1886 in London, not having seen him for fifteen years. There is some evidence that she had been emotionally involved with Knollys in the past; to her mother she wrote on the occasion of their meeting in 1886:

The friendship between Louis & me has, in this one afternoon, become so perfectly frank & open that all awkwardness is removed between ourselves. There was no embarrassing allusion made to the past – we just met as warm friends, & so parted. I am truly glad of this ... this one pleasant afternoon has set at rest the uncomfortable feeling I have had since I ceased to feel something more than discomfort on his account.⁶⁹

Major Knollys, CMG, had just been appointed inspector-general of police in Jamaica, having left the army, and Fanny had hoped that he would be sent to Natal. She thought there had been 'some idea' at Government House that he should be appointed colonial secretary, but nothing seems to have come of this.⁷⁰ In 1873 Fanny met Major (later Colonel) Anthony Durnford. He became



Anthony Durnford

a frequent and welcome visitor to Bishopstowe, and formed a close friendship with the bishop.⁷¹ He and Fanny fell in love.

Fanny was a woman of an 'ardent disposition' who, as her mother observed in 1867, needed 'some object to expend herself on', such as her school which apparently gave her great satisfaction. Harriette's heart, on the other hand she continued, 'is at home, and she has plenty to do with home objects, including the garden and planting'.⁷² Fanny's emotional attachment to mem-

bers of her family and to certain close friends could be very strong indeed, as is clear from her correspondence as well as from her reaction to Durnford's fate at Isandhlwana in 1879. In 1870, while she was in England, Mrs Colenso wrote the following about her second daughter:

Fan has a keen appreciation of persons, and estimates them as young people do, by their worth as far as she feels it, and not by their power to be useful to her. As one grows older, one learns tolerance, and to be grateful for goodwill shown even by coarse natures, but such goodwill is only a burden to young enthusiasts. F's devotion to her friend Dora, is something quite exceptional, and which needs a little indulgence. To see D. again was really F.'s reason for her to return to England, though we sent her for more solid ones ... If only we could have Dora here!⁷³

In view of Fanny's ardent nature, and her intense feelings for Durnford (which would clearly remain unfulfilled as long as his wife lived) one could perhaps speculate that she found some fulfilment of her yearnings through the romantic and melodramatic stories which were written in the early 1870s. This could be accepted as sufficient explanation for why she turned to writing. It may well be, however, that her particular environment, and contemporary conventions, were an added motivation.

For a woman with such intense feelings, who was well-educated and who had intellectual interests, it could well be that the cultural and emotional environment at Bishopstowe was potentially, if not actually, frustrating. While both Harriette and Agnes seem to have found personal satisfaction from pursuing their daily activities on the mission station, and in Harriette's case from helping the bishop in his work, Fanny had wider ambitions. In her early twenties she hoped that the Colensos would return to England to live, and in later life, after Durnford's death, her emotional ties with England became stronger.⁷⁴ Furthermore, although there is no evidence that Fanny felt restricted by the lack of educational opportunities for women, her ambitions to be a writer and artist display aspirations that went beyond the conventional role assigned to women. These accomplishments were acceptable as long as they were drawing room activities and not full-time occupations. Fanny took her art seriously and was to attend the Slade School of Art in London for a short while, but she achieved no outstanding success in this field. At some point in the early 1870s, Fanny contracted tuberculosis, and she eventually became such an invalid that she had to hand over to Agnes the duties of housekeeper at Bishopstowe. This illness, combined with lack of money, put an end to her artistic ambitions.⁷⁵ Writing, however, continued to provide an obvious outlet for her mental and emotional energies. As the first chapter indicated, in taking up this occupation, Fanny was displaying a familiar response of nineteenth-century women to the role assigned to them by social convention.

When in 1875, Fanny turned from fiction to writing about local politics and military affairs, she entered a realm of concern still regarded as masculine and beyond a woman's sphere of interest or intelligence. This was an unusual action for a Victorian woman, and in the years ahead Fanny's involvement in public affairs was to become an exceptional occurrence in colonial Natal, rivalled only by her sister at a later stage. The political event which had such a significant influence in Fanny's life was the Langelibalele affair of 1873–1874. Underlying her reaction to this event lay her interest in native affairs and primarily her love for Anthony Durnford.

Fanny's attraction to members of the opposite sex and her involvement in what later became the Durnford case appears to have created some tension between her and her two sisters, particularly with Agnes. There were certain personal differences of opinion between them. Agnes cared little for her appearance or her dress which the more feminine Fanny deplored, and Agnes would accept no help or advice from anyone except Harriette, and certainly not from Fanny.⁷⁶ More significantly than that, their personalities

and emotional experiences created a gulf between them. In a fragment of a letter, written probably sometime in July or August 1885, Fanny wrote to her mother obliquely of how much she missed Durnford and of their love for each other: 'I think I feel its loss,' she wrote, '& regret more passionately the days when I had it, & only half prized it, every year I live, as I grow older, & realise more fully what life might have been to me by this time but for the loss of a noble life, & the preservation of an unworthy one.' She continued to say that in describing her life as a failure she was not

saying what is *infra dig* for H. & A. [that is, Harriette and Agnes]. But it seems to me so different. Neither of them have [*sic*] had my particular experience & grief, & they cannot bitterly regret (as I do) the loss of what they have not tried. And they have each other, wh[ich] is not saying little. I think few sisters are so entirely one as they are. They really are like husband & wife.⁷⁷

Even though she had a warm and close relationship with her mother, and even though Harriette showed some sympathy in the Durnford case by supporting Fanny's actions to a certain extent, Fanny seems to have been the odd one out at Bishopstowe after the bishop's death in 1883. They all shared a deep concern and involvement in Zulu affairs, and a great sense of loss in the bishop's death; and they worked together to help Sir George Cox to write the bishop's biography. But Fanny's overriding commitment to the Durnford case set her apart. Some of the resentment Harriette and Agnes apparently directed against the Durnford case might have been because they felt it detracted from the family commitment to the bishop's main concerns, namely the Zulu and Church causes.

Fanny was, however, very close to her youngest brother Frank, with whom she felt an affinity, as they had suffered 'troubles' and 'sorrows' together in 1879 and 1880.⁷⁸ This was probably a reference to Durnford's death (he and Frank had been friends) and to the fact that Frank's fiancée Sophie refused to come out to Natal to live. Frank therefore gave up his promising legal practice in Pietermaritzburg and returned to England at the end of 1879. He accepted a post with the Norwich Union, perhaps through the influence of Charles Bunyon, Mrs Colenso's brother, and in 1881 he and his wife were sent to Norwich by the Bunyons.⁷⁹ Frank was more sympathetic towards Fanny's dedication to the Durnford case and offered her practical assistance.

The relationship that developed between Fanny and Durnford from 1873, when he arrived in Natal, was to have an important influence on her interest

in local politics and in native affairs. Her interest in such matters probably arose quite early in her life, to judge from a statement she made to Frederick Chesson, secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society, in 1887. In this she refers to a period '20 years ago, before I began to take an interest in nations above picnics & balls.'⁸⁰ Moreover, the bishop seems to have had a sufficiently high opinion of his wife's and his children's intelligence to discuss aspects of his business and of local affairs with them.⁸¹ The bishop's interest and involvement in native affairs were also to influence Fanny, particularly when these coincided with Durnford's career and activities late in 1873 and 1874. The events of this period were to be crucial in the bishop's life, and highly significant in Durnford's and Fanny's careers.

Colenso's broad interpretation of his role as a missionary bishop, as is clear from *Ten Weeks in Natal* (1855), was threefold: to spread Christianity among the blacks; to improve their social conditions through education so that they might be raised out of barbarism into Christian Western civilisation; and to obtain justice for the African who so far had suffered nothing but 'criminal neglect' from the British government. He believed in the worthy and good qualities of the natives, finding in them honesty, charity, a moral way of life, and a respect for justice and kindness in the whites. He called them 'these poor heathen children' who showed evident signs of human feelings and were therefore capable of salvation.⁸² Above all, the blacks were deserving of justice. As Mrs Colenso remarked in 1874: 'It is all nonsense to accuse us of "negrophilism" etc. etc. we can only want simple justice, and believe that with that and with time and patience all things would come right'.⁸³

This was the foundation of the Colensos' attitude to the blacks, the basic Christian concept of 'doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.' They did not desire political equality, but they were completely lacking in the social and racial prejudices of the average colonist. They looked on the black man and woman as fellow British subjects 'to be guided to higher ideals by patience and especially justice.'⁸⁴ The bishop thus took an active and controversial interest in many issues concerning Natal native policy, such as the question of polygamy, Zulu refugees, a government scheme to finance native education, and the financing of native reserves.⁸⁵ He also took an interest in wider political issues such as the Sotho War with the Boers (1868–1869).⁸⁶

But although he was concerned about local native policy, the bishop was content to leave this problem in the hands of Secretary of Native Affairs Theophilus Shepstone, whom he looked upon not only as a capable and just native administrator, but as a close personal friend. Shepstone had impressed

Colenso in 1854 with his 'wonderful' influence over the Natal natives, and with his 'perfect knowledge' of their language and way of thinking. He had also approved of, and agreed to participate in, Shepstone's grandiose plans to create south of the Umzimkulu a Black Kingdom with himself as supreme chief. The purpose of the scheme was to improve social conditions while civilising and converting people – ideas very similar to the bishop's missionary ideals. In 1859 Colenso informed Bishop Gray and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel that he was willing to resign his see for that of Zululand, and that Shepstone was prepared to go with him for the 'raising of the Zulu people'.⁸⁷ He and Shepstone had collaborated to the extent that colonial opinion linked their names and deplored the relationship. The *Natal Mercury* in an editorial of 12 September 1856, claimed that the bishop was the unseen and all-pervading power behind the throne, and the government his 'subservient tool'.⁸⁸

Yet it became clear to the bishop late in 1873 that there were not only fundamental differences of opinion between him and Shepstone on the question of native policy but that he would have to do his 'duty as a man, an Englishman, and a minister of Christ, in standing for the defence of any whom I believe to have been down-trodden and oppressed'.⁸⁹ In so doing, the friendship between him and Shepstone was destroyed. Henceforth the bishop was involved in an uncompromising battle, which absorbed him until his death in 1883, and which was taken up to varying degrees by his whole family.

The events of 1873–1874 which caused this crisis in the bishop's career were the so-called Langalibalele rebellion and the subsequent trial of that chief. The Hlubi people under Langalibalele, their hereditary chief, were a remnant of a larger Nguni group dispersed during the Mfecane. In 1849 they had been settled by Shepstone on a location south of the upper Tugela, where they were to act as a buffer against Bushmen raiders. In this they were reasonably successful, but relations between Langalibalele and the local white authorities were often strained, and he developed a reputation for independence and restlessness.⁹⁰ In 1873, Langalibalele was repeatedly summoned by the resident magistrate to register firearms his tribesmen had secured by labour on the Diamond Fields. He temporised and finally ignored a summons from the Supreme Chief, Sir Benjamin Pine the lieutenant-governor. Rumours that the Hlubi chief was negotiating with certain Basotho chiefs for a safe refuge in their country, reached the Natal government in September and the authorities decided that firm action should be taken to suppress such treasonable actions. Colonial opinion in this frontier community, under the influence of a deep-seated sense of insecurity, supported the government. In the face of an expeditionary force

of 300 white volunteers, 200 regular British troops and a large force of African militia, Langalibalele fled into Basutoland with the majority of his people, thus incurring the doubtful charge of rebellion.⁹¹

In an attempt to prevent this mass exodus, Major Durnford, chief-of-staff for this expedition, was instructed to ascend Giant's Castle Pass and then to proceed to the head of the Bushman's River Pass through which the Hlubi were expected to escape. In the subsequent disastrous encounter, three white volunteers and two blacks in the colonial forces were killed, and Durnford was severely wounded. The colonists reacted violently. Not only had government authority been flouted and colonial troops been humiliated, but 'English blood' had 'been shed in defence of the country' as the *Natal Mercury* lamented, and both colonists and government thirsted for revenge.⁹² The Hlubi and their neighbours, the Phuthini, were broken up, their livestock and land were confiscated, and their women and children were first indentured to the colonists and then released and dispersed among other loyal tribes.⁹³ The remnants of the Hlubi people, mainly women, children and the elderly, were flushed from the mountain caves where they had hidden themselves when Langalibalele and his main force fled, and they were treated with great severity.

Stories of atrocities against them appeared in the Natal press in November, and immediately roused the indignation of the bishop, John Sanderson of the *Natal Colonist* and certain British philanthropic societies. At first the bishop had defended Shepstone against the attacks by the colonists who blamed his native policy for the Langalibalele 'rebellion', but when the bishop approached Shepstone on the subject of the atrocities, he found the Secretary of Native Affairs (SNA) truculent and prepared to vindicate the troops' actions. The bishop's final disillusionment and break with Shepstone occurred over the travesty of a trial afforded Langalibalele in January 1874, as a result of which the Hlubi chief was banished to Robben Island for life. Colenso took up the chief's defence himself and contributed towards provoking the Colonial Office into actively intervening. He travelled to England in August 1874 to continue the fight. In December, Pine was recalled and Sir Garnet Wolseley sent out as temporary administrator of Natal.⁹⁴

The bishop suffered a great deal of abuse and unpopularity as a result of his activities on the Hlubi's behalf. He had heard of the events at the Bushman's River Pass from Durnford, and accused the volunteers of cowardice.⁹⁵ In January he was forced to retract this accusation in the face of strong public reaction, but his subsequent defence of Langalibalele and his role in Pine's recall alienated large sections of colonial opinion.⁹⁶ Durnford shared a similar

fate, a circumstance which probably added to his attraction to Fanny Colenso.

Anthony William Durnford was born into a military family in Ireland in 1830. He spent two years in Germany in his early teens, was trained at the Royal Military Academy and received a commission in the Corps of Royal Engineers in 1848.⁹⁷ Between that year and 1873 when he arrived in Natal, Durnford served in Britain, Ceylon, Malta and Gibraltar, and although he gained experience as an engineer and was promoted to major in 1872, he had not seen active service.⁹⁸ This is an important factor in Durnford's career, for not only had most of his contemporaries been in action, but he was intensely keen to be personally involved in combat.⁹⁹ His first experience of an aggressive encounter ended in disaster, in November 1873 at the Bushman's River Pass. This simply served to increase his desire for active service. In 1877, he was 'longing for a summons to a European war!' and in July 1878 he told his family that as a soldier he would 'delight' in a war with the Zulu even though as a man he condemned it.¹⁰⁰

Durnford's keenness for military service was complemented by great courage, energy and determination, qualities that made him universally respected as a soldier. He was, in Sir Henry Bulwer's words, 'a soldier of soldiers'.¹⁰¹ These qualities were not unusual in British officers, but Durnford possessed added attributes that made him a memorable character in Natal history, however minor his achievements may have been. They also made him a potentially controversial figure. He had a particularly high ideal of British imperial greatness and prestige. In April 1877 he volunteered to undertake a secret mission to the Transvaal to find out whether Shepstone would need military support for his recently accomplished annexation of that territory. His reason for going was 'lest England's prestige should suffer'.¹⁰² To Durnford, 'Duty is duty. That is all that is clear to me', and he proved at the Bushman's River Pass how strong that sense of duty was.¹⁰³ Yet Durnford's concept of British imperial prestige was based on a deep devotion to English justice, fair dealing and honesty. As one writer has put it: 'His stern concept of justice is crucial in comprehending Durnford's cross-grained character; it is the pivot around which all his actions turned.'¹⁰⁴

Moreover, Durnford appears, from the evidence, to have been an impulsive character, both in action and word. He had been a heavy gambler in his youth although he managed to give it up in the 1860s, and he had defied convention by marrying while still a lowly paid lieutenant.¹⁰⁵ In his role as acting Colonial Engineer in Natal (1874–1875) he earned the reputation of reckless spending.¹⁰⁶ As far as the military authorities were concerned, Durnford displayed an over-

keenness for responsibility and for action, which made them wary of him, particularly in the early movements of the Anglo-Zulu War.¹⁰⁷ According to Wolseley's journal, Durnford was hasty in giving his opinion on people and their actions, and did so in 'alarmingly strong terms', particularly when those actions were at odds with his own opinions.¹⁰⁸ These two qualities, his strong sense of justice and duty, and the forthright expression of his views, inevitably brought Durnford into conflict with the local government. Similarly, his attitude towards the black population of Natal was to make him extremely unpopular in Natal and a natural ally of the Colensos. In these conflicts he always held himself to be in the right, in a manner reminiscent of the bishop, but being a minor military officer and a servant of the government, his brushes with the authorities did not become public.

In his manner towards blacks and in his actions on their behalf, Durnford showed himself to be free of the racial prejudice of the average Natal colonist. The fact that he was in his early forties when he arrived in Natal, and never expected to settle there, may have had something to do with this. He is supposed to have told Hlubi's Tlokwa-Sotho (with whom he had a special relationship) that 'A man's colour is nothing if his heart is right.'¹⁰⁹ But his attitude was paternalistic nevertheless. He believed that the natives would be better off under British rule, which should be firm rule, and he hated to see British supremacy and the white man's authority flouted.¹¹⁰ While looking on the blacks as 'barbarians', he also recognised certain admirable qualities in them – honesty, chivalry, hospitality, gallantry and bravery.¹¹¹ As far as Hlubi's Tlokwa-Sotho and the Phuthini were concerned, he always treated them as men, never failing to show them consideration and sympathy. Durnford believed that they were fully deserving of British justice, and when he found them being treated otherwise, he took the cause of 'right against might' into his own hands.¹¹² In this respect, therefore, he and the bishop had a great deal in common.

The combination of these characteristics spelt controversy and unpopularity for Durnford, official and public. On top of this, his military exploits were to be marked by misfortune and disaster and even his achievements in his capacity as acting Colonial Engineer and as a minor administrator were to be hampered by his reputation and by events beyond his control.¹¹³ He was therefore no run-of-the-mill officer, and the very qualities which led to his unpopularity were those Fanny Colenso came to admire.¹¹⁴

Soon after his arrival in Natal in May 1873, Durnford was taken to meet the Colensos by Thomas Warwick Brooks. Between Durnford and the bishop

there developed a strong bond of affectionate friendship and respect. 'The Bishop,' said Durnford, 'is a man of men – would go to the death for the right.' In 1876, he spoke of the bishop as 'the man I respect and reverence most in the world.'¹¹⁵ According to Fanny, the bishop loved Durnford and his soldierly qualities.¹¹⁶ During his second term of office in Natal, 1877–1879, Durnford also became good friends with Frank Colenso when the latter set up house in Church Street, Pietermaritzburg, in 1877.¹¹⁷ Edward Durnford, Anthony's brother, and Fanny, both spoke of Durnford's old-fashioned courtesy which no doubt commended him to feminine company. By 1875 he was 'our' colonel to Mrs Colenso.¹¹⁸

Fanny's attitude to Durnford can be gauged from her account of his career in Natal in 1873–1874, which was published in 1880 under the title *My Chief and I*. In this work, which she wrote in 1875, Fanny dealt with Durnford's conduct of the military operations at Bushman's River Pass and his subsequent attempt to gain justice for the Phuthini people, who had been closely associated with Langelibalele's Hlubi and harshly treated by the colonial authorities in the aftermath of the disturbances. Atherton Wylde, the pseudonymous author of the book, was supposed to have been a young ex-soldier who met up with Durnford in 1874 and was invited to work with him on various assignments, including one for the blowing up of the Drakensberg passes so as to reduce movement between Natal and Basutoland. Wylde's account purports to have been culled from the experiences of a number of men who knew Durnford and who had accompanied him. The text was read and corrected by Durnford himself.¹¹⁹

Through Wylde's comments, we read that Durnford was strong and broad, a 'tall upright figure', and a kind and courteous gentleman, with a brisk, businesslike manner, capable of great sternness and 'fiery indignation' but also of self-control and even of self-repression.¹²⁰ Fanny also discovered that he was kind and sympathetic; and in turn, she responded sympathetically to his unfortunate, and at times, unhappy career. His marriage to a woman who proved to be, according to the bishop's enquiries, a 'profligate spendthrift', ended in separation and only one child survived this union.¹²¹

In 1865 Durnford is supposed to have suffered a nervous collapse en route to China, and so to have met Charles (Chinese) Gordon.¹²² This relationship between Gordon and Durnford became highly significant to Fanny. Gordon personified certain heroic qualities, which were particularly 'English', and which Fanny and her mother admired and respected. He and Durnford, she said, 'were great friends when young men', and Durnford apparently used

to say when he felt he was being thwarted in his attempts to help the Natal natives that he could always go and join Gordon in central Africa.¹²³ Gordon had been employed by the Cape government for a short while in the early 1880s for service in Basutoland. Fanny believed that he would have been on their side in the Zulu cause, and his death was a serious loss to them.¹²⁴ Furthermore, she came to believe, after reading Gordon's journals, that the spirit of his religion was the same as her beloved father's and thus she evolved an image of a glorious triumvirate, consisting of the bishop, Colonel Durnford and Chinese Gordon. In 1885 she went as far as accusing South Africa of the following crime: 'She killed my Father & Colonel Durnford, & she forced Chinese Gordon to shake off the dust of his feet against her. What might these three not have done for her, but she would not'.¹²⁵

The incident which brought Durnford to public attention and which, in Fanny's eyes, revealed his most admirable qualities, was the Bushman's River Pass affair. The events of that encounter have already been touched on, and are too well known to be repeated here.¹²⁶ Personally, Durnford suffered wounds that permanently disabled one arm and which caused him pain and discomfort for the rest of his life. He refused to rest or recuperate, and to Fanny his sufferings made him 'but the shadow of his former self'.¹²⁷ In his official report of the affair, Colonel Milles, who was in charge of the field forces, commended Durnford for acting on instructions which were 'not to fire the first shot', and for his gallant conduct. Sir Benjamin Pine on the other hand, in his dispatch to the secretary of state for war, also dated 13 November 1873, contrived to express approval of Durnford's actions, but in a thoroughly ambivalent manner, which Durnford's supporters were quick to notice.¹²⁸ Pine pointed out that Durnford had orders not to fire the first shot, and even without those orders, firing first would have been contrary to the spirit of the proceedings. However, he then added the statement: 'how far Major Durnford might have considered himself justified in disregarding the letter of the orders he had received, had he understood the threatening language used by the rebel tribe, I cannot say'.¹²⁹

The question of whether or not Durnford was justified in obeying his orders cannot be discussed here.¹³⁰ As far as the general public was concerned, Durnford became the scapegoat. In his official report of the affair, Durnford stated that he had been forced to retire having been told that the Volunteers could not be relied upon, that he had been given 'no support', and that the Carbineers had been 'seized with panic' and fled, followed by the Basotho.¹³¹ This was tantamount to accusing the Volunteers of cowardice and he offered

no extenuating circumstances. Being new to the Colony, and a friend of the Colensos, as well as being bound by military etiquette from defending himself in public, he became an easy target of abuse, and the 'best-hated man in the colony', as he wrote home to his family.¹³² To Fanny, the question of the Carbineers behaviour was a simple one; they had no conception of military discipline or of what was required of regular soldiers, and were therefore to blame for the fiasco.¹³³

Public opinion was so sensitive on this point of the integrity of the colonial volunteers, as Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Cunynghame concluded, that Pine was induced to open a court of inquiry into the conduct of the Volunteers at Bushman's River Pass in November 1874.¹³⁴ The court found that, despite mitigating circumstances (such as lack of discipline, exhaustion and the bad example of their drill-instructor), they had retired in a 'disorganized and precipitate manner' and failed to respond to Durnford's efforts to rally them.¹³⁵ Durnford emerged officially unscathed, received the formal thanks of the government for his services and was granted a pension for wounds. Fanny considered this totally inadequate. As the fictitious Wylde, she commented thus:

Yet I venture to say that few will realise the facts of the case without appreciating the indomitable courage and perseverance with which my Chief pushed on to his assigned post, regardless of himself, of his own severe suffering and extreme exhaustion. He cared only for his duty, and did that with a noble fortitude which should be an example to all. In setting such an example he has done the state a service which should not be overlooked.¹³⁶

In this belief, Fanny appears to have had the support of certain British officers. To Sanderson, who was one of the few public supporters of Durnford, she wrote in 1879:

Two of the officers who sat on the Bushman's River Pass Commission told me, some others being present, that if their representations had any effect, he w[oul]d have the V.C. for his gallantry in that affair – more especially for going out again to find Capt. Boyes, the same night of his return to camp, altho' in so wounded & injured a condition that he had to be lifted upon his horse ... Well – of course he did not get the V.C. nor anything else that he thought worth having, & the report of the Commissioners was never published in its entirety. But

this I suppose I ought not to tell you – I knew it confidentially fr[om] themselves, Col. Walker you know, was one, & he never scruples to say that our Colonel was treated shamefully in that affair. The authorities wanted to conciliate the colonists.¹³⁷

Durnford returned to Pietermaritzburg from the Bushman's River Pass engagement in December 1873. He was now a lieutenant-colonel, but he had failed to avenge the deaths of the Volunteers and the white man's prestige, by engaging the Hlubi. The volume of abuse in the local press and the poisoning of his dog probably decided him to move into Fort Napier to live. Up until this time, he had not been greatly interested in native affairs, but during November and December he became aware of the atrocities committed by the government forces on the Hlubi remnants in the mountains, and above all, of the destruction of the Phuthini.¹³⁸ Some of the Phuthini women who had married into the Hlubi had returned to their own people during the disturbances, for refuge. This supposed crime, plus the failure of the Phuthini to supply sufficient slaughter cattle to the government forces in the field, led the authorities to conclude that they had been implicated in the Hlubi 'revolt'. Late in December, their kraals were destroyed, their acting chief was deposed and imprisoned, their cattle confiscated and their women and children distributed among 'loyal' tribes.¹³⁹ Durnford was convinced of the injustice and iniquity of the government's actions against the Phuthini, and these events, as in the case of the bishop, led him to involve himself actively in native affairs, though in a manner different from that of Colenso.¹⁴⁰

In 1874, as acting Colonial Engineer, Durnford was entrusted with the assignment, already referred to, of blowing up the mountain passes in Weenen County. The whites there were in a state of panic following the Langalibalele affair and certain attacks on them that had occurred since the 'rebellion'. It was felt that marauders might be entering the Colony from over the Drakensberg and that blowing up the passes would restore confidence.

Durnford decided to try to obtain the pardon and freedom of the Phuthini people by taking ninety of them with him on this arduous expedition. He hoped that their good behaviour and hard work would give the government a useful excuse to extricate themselves from what he felt was 'a difficulty, the importance of which has only just dawned upon them.'¹⁴¹ Fanny felt this was another example of Durnford's true and energetic service to the colonial government and of his concern for the honour of that government. It was, she wrote, but another noble aspect to the expedition, founded as it was on

Durnford's desire to obtain freedom for the Phuthini, peace for the country, and the calming of fears for which he had a lively contempt.¹⁴² Wylde recounts numerous instances of Durnford's thoughtfulness and concern for the welfare of the Phuthini on this expedition, of his stern sense of justice, and of his desire to build up the confidence of the Natal natives in the good faith of the government. This confidence, 'which is so necessary in ruling a savage nation', they had lost in the bitter experiences of the Langalibalele affair.¹⁴³

Durnford had not obtained a written guarantee that the Phuthini would be pardoned in the event of his being able to submit a report testifying to their good behaviour. All he got was the acting governor's permission to take the Phuthini with him.¹⁴⁴ When he returned on 30 July, it took him five days of 'urging, exhorting, warning, and explaining' to get the 'undecided' governor (Pine) and his 'crafty unscrupulous' advisers to agree to a pardon not only for the ninety men who went on the expedition, but for the entire Phuthini people.¹⁴⁵ Three weeks after this pardon was agreed upon and given verbally to the ninety Phuthini men, Durnford discovered that an order contradicting the pardon for the entire clan had been issued. He was furious but had to wait for the acting SNA, John Shepstone, to return to Pietermaritzburg before he could tackle him and obtain a final written guarantee of full pardon. Durnford's opinions on this episode must have led to a greater feeling of sympathy between him and the Colensos. In a letter home he wrote: 'Such a government as it is! Imbecile and useless! Since I have been behind the scenes I find all corrupt and lying from one end to the other.'¹⁴⁶

In the meantime, Bishop Colenso was in London to defend Langalibalele and the Hlubi, and as a result of information he received from Durnford and others via Bishopstowe, he was able to complain to Carnarvon about the treatment of the Phuthini and to warn about the dubious promises of the Natal government. Carnarvon wrote to Pine and warned him to make good any promises he had made with 'scrupulous fidelity'. Again, in November, the bishop wrote to Carnarvon giving him information on the condition of the Phuthini.¹⁴⁷

Durnford's next, and more difficult, move was to force the government to make partial restitution to the Phuthini, but here he was less successful.¹⁴⁸ However, the bishop's representations to Carnarvon resulted in a dispatch dated 3 December 1874, which declared that no grounds for the punishment of the Phuthini had been discovered, that they must be restored without delay, and reparations must be effected as far as possible without compromising the authority of the local government. At the same time, the severity of Langalibalele's punishment was condemned, his sentence commuted to

imprisonment on the mainland of the Cape, and the treatment of the Hlubi was equally criticised. Finally, Pine was recalled.¹⁴⁹ There was almost universal indignation at the contents of the dispatch; Pine was lauded as a hero and the bishop as a villain.

By the end of 1874, Durnford had emerged as the champion of the Phuthini, whom he called 'my people'. They in turn called themselves his children, and voluntarily offered themselves for road work at a time when this task was forced labour.¹⁵⁰ His role in their pardon was not widely known. Even Frank Colenso was not fully aware of his success on their behalf.¹⁵¹ Fanny was convinced that Durnford was largely responsible for the aid rendered to the Phuthini, and maintained that the bishop had left the Phuthini to the colonel 'knowing that they were in good hands, & his own being quite full with the Langa's'.¹⁵² It was only after Wolseley arrived in succession to Pine that some measures, however inadequate, were taken to effect reparations. W.A. Thompson concludes that it was likely that the combined efforts of the bishop and Durnford were partly responsible for Wolseley's initial action on the matter of compensation for the Phuthini.¹⁵³

In her defence of Durnford, Fanny had to discuss current events insofar as Durnford was involved in them, and thus she became deeply interested in such issues as the Langalibalele affair, the Bushman's River Pass incident, and the expedition to the Drakensberg to blow up the passes. Her attitude to the last two events has been discussed. As for her views on Langalibalele, she again gave them through the fictitious Atherton Wylde, who said that although he had heard violent threats made against the chief by colonists, in the six months he was in the Colony no one ever gave him a satisfactory reason for the chief's trial and conviction, except that of having run away when he was told to come.¹⁵⁴ The evidence for this view would have come from the bishop's researches into the Langalibalele affair, which largely engrossed him in 1874.

In her first published work there thus emerged the two main themes which so absorbed Fanny's emotions and time from 1873, and which were to be more thoroughly developed from 1880 until her death in 1887. These were the cause of justice to the blacks, which later became specifically the cause of justice to the Zulu people, and the exoneration of Durnford and his re-instatement as a noble, heroic figure in Natal history. It seems certain that the latter was the initial impulse for the former, thus indicating the relevant importance of these two issues in Fanny's heart and mind.

The underlying themes of colonial racial prejudice and official double-dealing and expediency were also present. For instance, we are told in *My*

Chief and I that the real reason for the unrest and violence of late 1873, was ‘the old story’, namely, the blacks not caring to be the white man’s slave, and the white man not enduring the black man in any other position.¹⁵⁵ This feeling, she continued, would very soon result in war with the Zulu were it not for the ‘vigilant watch’ of the British government:

Otherwise, the very existence upon our borders of a large body of natives who we cannot tax, who are not our servants, nor obliged to treat us with any special respect, would certainly sooner or later bring about aggressive acts on our part, which in their turn would irritate our neighbours into giving us some handle for undertaking a war of invasion against them.¹⁵⁶

This particular problem – relations between Natal and Zululand and the role of the Imperial government – was to be the subject of Fanny’s next book.

As for the officials in the Natal government, Fanny’s suspicions of their vacillating and incompetence concerning native policy, are explicit. Her opinion of Sir Benjamin Pine and his unscrupulous advisers has been discussed in connection with Durnford’s attempts to gain the pardon of the Phuthini. Theophilus Shepstone, the SNA, came off no better. Through Wylde, she commented on his manner of dealing with the natives in a highly unfavourable light. Shepstone had an ‘indaba’ with the Phuthini before they set off on the Drakensberg expedition in 1874, and Wylde reports:

It seemed to me that I was in the midst of an assemblage of savages only, whose modes of thought and ideas were different from anything to which I had been accustomed. I could hardly believe that I saw before me the man who has for so many years controlled, in England’s name, the destinies of the native races of Natal. I felt, rather, that I saw the Zulu despot in the midst of his savage retainers, and to me it has long been inconceivable that England’s honour should have been entrusted, since the birth of this her colony, to one who at heart was but a Zulu chief.¹⁵⁷

What were Fanny’s motives in writing *My Chief and I*? In the preface to the book, Wylde offers the work to his Chief as a ‘poor tribute of affection and respect from the humblest of his friends to one whose truly Christian life was as much honoured by those who came within its influence, as his heroic death by the world at large.’¹⁵⁸ The book is eulogistic, partisan and at times charged with emotion, and it is evidently not written by an objective, disinterested

observer.¹⁵⁹ Her motives would appear to have been an emotionally inspired desire to publicise the true character and achievements of Durnford, between 1873 and 1874, as she and his friends and followers perceived them to be, and in so doing to criticise the local government and the colonists.

The fact that the very events in which Durnford achieved notoriety and unpopularity were the events that propelled the bishop into active political involvement and into similar unpopularity, probably endowed Durnford's career with added glamour, the glamour of a noble, self-sacrificial life. Durnford, she believed, had proved that he held ideals of justice and fair play far superior to those of the local government and the average Natal colonist, and yet he had received nothing but half-hearted official recognition and whole-hearted colonial abuse. Moreover, the fact that Durnford was a servant of the despised government, was perhaps a source of pain to Fanny. In *My Chief and I*, she said of the Langalibalele expedition:

The more I heard of the expedition of 1873, of the reasons for it, and of the way in which it was carried out, the more did I hate to think that in such a cause, and in company with such men, was my Colonel sent to fight, and receive the wounds, one of which permanently disabled him. He simply did his duty.¹⁶⁰

Durnford, as a military officer, could not defend himself, so she rose to his defence in the only means open to her.

Fanny was quite prepared to publish *My Chief and I* in 1875, but under a pseudonym. It could be that it was her emotional relationship with Durnford that necessitated anonymity, rather than qualms about venturing into alien fields. Later events bear out this statement, for although Fanny never showed any hesitation in publicly criticising government affairs, in her involvement in Durnford's fortunes she was to experience considerable social problems.

After reading the manuscript of her book, and correcting it, Durnford asked that publication be delayed until after his death.¹⁶¹ As far as Fanny was concerned, his misfortunes and deliberate ill-treatment went unavenged. If, thereafter, Durnford had had a long and moderately successful career, and received visible tokens of esteem from the authorities and colonial opinion, it might well be that *My Chief and I* would not have found a publisher; or further, that Fanny might not have felt compelled to embark on further controversial writings and activities.

But fate decreed otherwise. In January 1879, Durnford's role in the military disaster at Isandhlwana stained his reputation irreparably in what Fanny came

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to believe was a deliberate attempt to save the reputation of senior officers; and moreover, in a war she condemned as utterly unjust and immoral. She had felt compelled to rise to Durnford's defence after the politically disreputable events of 1873 and 1874. The dramatic events of the Anglo-Zulu War, which were highly significant for her personally, more damaging to Durnford's reputation, and politically more devastating, were to prove far more provocative to the consumptive, fervent Fanny Colenso.

NOTES

- 1 *Natal Mercury*, 9 May 1887; *Times of Natal*, 9 May 1887.
- 2 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mrs Lyell, 14 August 1881.
- 3 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 28.
- 4 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 28 April 1884.
- 5 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 14 October 1885.
- 6 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 24 June 1883.
- 7 S.R. Barber, 'The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879' (MA thesis, University of Natal, 1975): 1–2, 3, 8, 19; Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 30.
- 8 *ibid.*: 18–19.
- 9 Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 182.
- 10 This letter is reprinted in Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 27.
- 11 Barber, 'The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879': 20.
- 12 P. Hinchliff, *John William Colenso, Bishop of Natal* (London: Nelson, 1964): 24.
- 13 See, for example, NA, Col Col, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, n.d. [mid-1885?] for discussion of Charles Gordon's theology; and *ibid.*, box 8, Fanny Colenso, Fragments (Misc. subjects).
- 14 *ibid.*, box 8, Fanny Colenso to H. Shepstone, 22 July 1885.
- 15 M.H. Watt, *The History of the Parson's Wife* (London: Faber, 1943): 74.
- 16 Barber, 'The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879': 16, 21–22, 24.
- 17 *ibid.*: 14.
- 18 *ibid.*: 63; Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 38–39.
- 19 Barber, 'The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879': 43.
- 20 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 28 April 1884; Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 41 (Alice Mackenzie's journal), 71, 136, 180, 217, 249, 272.
- 21 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 394.
- 22 B. Buchanan, *Pioneer Days in Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter, 1934): 10; Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 41 (Alice Mackenzie's journal), 96, 101, 111, 174.
- 23 Barber, 'The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879': 25; Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 118, 194.
- 24 Vietzen, *A History of Education for European Girls in Natal with Particular Reference to the Establishment of some Leading Schools, 1837–1902*: 16, 22.
- 25 *ibid.*: 19, 23, 56–57.
- 26 *ibid.*: 57.
- 27 *ibid.*: 58.
- 28 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 94, 107, 127, 129, 250.

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- 29 *ibid*: 134, 250.
- 30 Said by Lady G. Burne-Jones, *ibid*: 70.
- 31 *ibid*: 71, 79.
- 32 *ibid*: 118, 134.
- 33 Barber, 'The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879': 106; Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 134, 143–144, 154, 175.
- 34 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 192–193, 220.
- 35 *ibid*: 227; Barber, 'The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879': 106.
- 36 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 13 March 1883, 28 April 1884; *ibid.*, s.1284, Sarah Frances Colenso to Sophie Colenso, n.d. [1879/80?] and [April 1882?]; NA Col Col, box 6, Dr H.S. Taylor to Fanny Colenso, 26 December 1884.
- 37 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mrs Lyell, 1 February 1881.
- 38 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, general letter from Fanny Colenso, 26 November 1881.
- 39 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 129, 418.
- 40 *A South African Bibliography to the Year 1925* (London: Mansell, 1979) attributes *Too Late! – Fortunately* (Durban: P. Davis & Sons, 1876) to Fanny Colenso on the evidence of Sydney Mendelssohn's inscription on the copy found in his collection. The title page of this pamphlet attributes the story to 'The author of "Playing with edged tools"'.
41 NA, Col Col, box 9, Ms of 'A little orphan'. See also Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 319; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/29, Fanny Colenso to Frederick Chesson, 11 July 1881; and NA, Col Col, box 7, W. Ridgeway to Fanny Colenso, 30 November 1886.
- 42 See, for example, *Too Late! – Fortunately*: 15, 47; and 'A little orphan': 82.
- 43 See, for example, A. Wylde [Fanny Colenso], *My Chief and I, or, Six Months in Natal after the Langalibalele Outbreak* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1880): 2, 63–64, 263.
- 44 Vietzen, *A History of Education for European Girls in Natal*: 17.
- 45 *ibid*: 11 (advertisement for Mrs and Miss Barrett's school); J.W. Colenso, *Ten Weeks in Natal* (London: Macmillan, 1855): xxix.
- 46 H. Robertson, *Mission Life among the Zulu-Kafirs* (London: Bemrose, 1875): 3, 19, 152.
- 47 A.M. Wilkinson, *A Lady's Life and Travels in Zululand and the Transvaal during Cetewayo's Reign* (Pretoria: State Library, 1975; reprint of London: J.T. Hayes, 1882 edition): 83; Vietzen, *A History of Education for European Girls in Natal*: 58 (Alice Mackenzie's journal).
- 48 See for example Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 174. The Colensos employed a white servant/companion on one occasion, but she was not a success (*ibid*: 143–144).
- 49 *ibid*: 248.
- 50 *ibid*: 229.
- 51 *ibid*: 96, 107, 248.
- 52 Vietzen, *A History of Education for European Girls in Natal*: 3.
- 53 A.F. Hattersley, *Portrait of a Colony: The Story of Natal* (Cambridge: CUP, 1940): 76–77.
- 54 A Lady [J. Robinson], *Life at Natal a Hundred Years Ago* (Cape Town: Struik, 1972): 67.
- 55 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 217.
- 56 *ibid*: 123, 232.
- 57 *ibid*: 194.
- 58 *ibid*: 130, 248.
- 59 E. Brookes and C. de B. Webb, *A History of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1965): 108; Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 112–113, 285–286, 370.

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- 60 A Lady [Robinson], *Life at Natal a Hundred Years Ago*: 22, 48–53, 71.
- 61 *ibid*: 97.
- 62 Hattersley, *Portrait of a Colony*: 140–141; A Lady [Robinson], *Life at Natal a Hundred Years Ago*: 91–92, 128.
- 63 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 148, 229.
- 64 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Frankland, 19 August 1876.
- 65 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 142.
- 66 Hattersley, *Portrait of a Colony*: 92; Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 133, 144, 150, 241.
- 67 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 225.
- 68 *ibid.*, and 229.
- 69 NA, Col Col, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, 1 August 1886.
- 70 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/69, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 15 December 1886. Louis Knollys (1847–1922) was a colonial administrator who served in Fiji, New Zealand, Jamaica and Ceylon.
- 71 E. Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879: A Memoir of the Late Colonel A.W. Durnford, Royal Engineers* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1882): 112.
- 72 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 180.
- 73 *ibid*: 220.
- 74 *ibid*: 223.
- 75 *ibid*: 311; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 13 March 1885; NA, Col Col, box 6, Dr H.S. Taylor to Fanny Colenso, 26 December 1884.
- 76 NA, Col Col, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, n.d. [1885?]; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 13 March 1883, 9 March 1886.
- 77 NA, Col Col, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, n.d. [July/August 1885?] (fragment).
- 78 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, n.d. [1885?]; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 23 March 1885.
- 79 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 341, footnote 1; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mrs Lyell, 15 July [1881?].
- 80 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/76, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 10 February 1887.
- 81 See, for example, Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 145.
- 82 Colenso, *Ten Weeks in Natal*: xxix–xxx, 11, 25; Barber, ‘The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879’: 28–29.
- 83 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 282.
- 84 L. Swart, ‘The work of Harriette Emily Colenso in relation to Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo’ (MA, University of Natal, 1967): ix.
- 85 Barber, ‘The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879’: chapter 3.
- 86 *ibid*: 109–110.
- 87 P. Kennedy, ‘The fatal diplomacy: Sir Theophilus Shepstone and the Zulu kings, 1839–1879’ (PhD, University of California, 1976): 180–181. See also Colenso, *Ten Weeks in Natal*: 147–148.
- 88 Quoted in Barber, ‘The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879’: 70.
- 89 W.R. Guest, *Langalibalele: The Crisis in Natal, 1873–1875* (Durban: Department of History and Political Science, University of Natal, 1976): 60, 88.

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- 90 *ibid*: 24–26.
- 91 *ibid*: 39.
- 92 *ibid*: 43–44.
- 93 Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*: 116.
- 94 Barber, ‘The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879’: 159.
- 95 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier’s Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 51–54.
- 96 Barber, ‘The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879’: 129.
- 97 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier’s Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: vii–viii.
- 98 Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 215.
- 99 *ibid*.
- 100 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1285, Frank Colenso to Sophie Frankland, 28 August 1877; Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier’s Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 184.
- 101 *ibid*: 200.
- 102 *ibid*: 140.
- 103 *ibid*: 91.
- 104 J. St C. Man, ‘Colonel Anthony William Durnford in the history of Natal and Zululand, 1873–1879’ (History Honours essay, University of Natal, 1970): 62.
- 105 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier’s Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 112–113; Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 215. See also *ibid*: 322 and Man, ‘Colonel Anthony William Durnford in the history of Natal and Zululand, 1873–1879’: 65.
- 106 G. Wolseley, *The South African Diaries, 1875 (Natal)*, edited by A. Preston (Cape Town: Balkema, 1971): 245, 248; Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 322.
- 107 See, for example, his actions at Krantzkop, January 1879, in Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 322.
- 108 Wolseley, *The South African Diaries, 1875 (Natal)*: 159.
- 109 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier’s Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 31. See also Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 272.
- 110 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier’s Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 125. After the Bushman’s River Pass fiasco, Durnford defended his urgent desire to have a fair fight with the Hlubi not only to avenge the deaths of the three volunteers, but also because, as he wrote, to think ‘that the white race has fled before the black is hateful to me’: 56.
- 111 *ibid*: 4, 43.
- 112 *ibid*: 31, 89, 125.
- 113 See Man, ‘Colonel Anthony William Durnford in the history of Natal and Zululand, 1873–1879’: 30–32.
- 114 Wylde [Fanny Colenso], *My Chief and I*: 82.
- 115 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier’s Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 11, 133.
- 116 NA, Col Col, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, 6 October 1886.
- 117 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1285, Frank Colenso to Sophie Frankland, 21–29 August 1877.
- 118 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier’s Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 11; Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 312; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 23 March 1885.
- 119 Wylde [Fanny Colenso], *My Chief and I*: vii.
- 120 *ibid*: 2, 8, 18–19, 53, 325–326.
- 121 Man, ‘Colonel Anthony William Durnford in the history of Natal and Zululand, 1873–1879’: 2; Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 215.
- 122 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier’s Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: xii; Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 215.

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- 123 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 23 March 1885.
- 124 M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa* volume 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975): 270; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 21 April 1885.
- 125 NA, Col Col, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, n.d. [1885?]; *ibid.*, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mr Marquard, 16 April 1885.
- 126 See also Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 24–47; Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 218–221; and R.O. Pearse, *Barrier of Spears: Drama of the Drakensberg* (Cape Town: Timmins, 1973): 233–241.
- 127 Wylde [Fanny Colenso], *My Chief and I*: 8.
- 128 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 48, 68.
- 129 BPP, 1874, C-1025, XLV, *Papers Relating to the Late Kafir Outbreak in Natal, 1873–4*, no. 11, 13 November 1873.
- 130 See Man, 'Colonel Anthony William Durnford in the history of Natal and Zululand, 1873–1879': 15; and Pearse, *Barrier of Spears*: 243 for conflicting views. See also Fanny Colenso, *History of the Zulu War and its Origin* (Westport, Conn: Negro Universities Press, 1970, reprint of London: Chapman and Hall, 1880 edition): 26.
- 131 BPP, 1874, C-1025, XLV, *Papers Relating to the Late Kafir Outbreak in Natal, 1873–4*, no. 11: Enclosure: Memorandum on the disaster by A.W. Durnford, 30 November 1873.
- 132 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 66.
- 133 Wylde [Frances Colenso], *My Chief and I*: 117–118.
- 134 Sir Arthur Cunynghame in a memorandum, quoted in Man, 'Colonel Anthony William Durnford in the history of Natal and Zululand, 1873–1879': 17–18.
- 135 BPP, 1875, C-1342-1, LII, *Correspondence Relating to the Colonies and States of South Africa, Part II, Natal*, no.19, Enclosure 4: Report of court of enquiry, 12 December 1874.
- 136 Wylde [Fanny], *My Chief and I*: 242–243.
- 137 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mr Sanderson, 3 July 1879. The three officers who sat on the board of inquiry were Lieutenant Colonel F.W. Walker, Major J.D. Brocham and Captain G.C. Swiney.
- 138 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 58.
- 139 Guest, *Langalibalele*: 47.
- 140 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 61.
- 141 *ibid.*: 78.
- 142 Wylde [Fanny Colenso], *My Chief and I*: 63.
- 143 *ibid.*: 174–175.
- 144 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 78. But see Fanny Colenso, *History of the Zulu War and its Origin*: 65.
- 145 Wylde [Fanny Colenso], *My Chief and I*: 64, 277.
- 146 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 94.
- 147 BPP, 1875, C-1121, LIII, *Further Papers Relating to the Kafir Outbreak in Natal, 1873–5*, no.17, 16 October 1874; no.21, 26 October 1874; no.23, 13 November 1874.
- 148 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 96.
- 149 BPP, 1875, C-1121, LIII, *Further Papers Relating to the Kafir Outbreak in Natal, 1873–5*, nos 26 and 28, 3 December 1874.
- 150 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 95–96; Wylde [Fanny Colenso], *My Chief and I*: 314.
- 151 NA, Col Col, box 6, Frank Colenso to Fanny Colenso, 17 September 1884.

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- 152 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 16 August [1884?].
- 153 W.A. Thompson, 'Wolseley and South Africa: a study of Sir Garnet Wolseley's role in South African affairs, 1875–1977' (PhD, Vanderbilt University, 1973): 168.
- 154 Wylde [Fanny Colenso], *My Chief and I*: 36–37.
- 155 *ibid*: 113–114.
- 156 *ibid*: 114.
- 157 *ibid*: 71–72. Rider Haggard made a similar observation about Shepstone having acquired some of the characteristics of the Zulu. See Guest, *Langalibalele*: 16.
- 158 Wylde [Fanny Colenso], *My Chief and I*: ix.
- 159 See, for example, when Wylde takes leave of his chief, *ibid*: 320–327.
- 160 *ibid*: 115.
- 161 *ibid*: vii.

3

FRANCES ELLEN COLENZO: HER RESPONSE TO THE ANGLO-ZULU WAR AND HER DEFENCE OF COLONEL ANTHONY DURNFORD, 1879–1887

On 11 January 1879, three columns of British and colonial forces, under the command of Lord Chelmsford (Frederic Thesiger), invaded Zululand. The invasion occurred at the expiration of an ultimatum which Sir Bartle Frere, as high commissioner of southern Africa, had issued to Cetshwayo, through the SNA John Shepstone, on 11 December 1878. The ultimatum consisted of thirteen clauses which have been well described as ‘intractable demands’. Frere was virtually demanding, within thirty days, ‘the repudiation of the Zulu traditions and the surrender of the independence of the Zulu nation.’¹



Sir Bartle Frere

The ultimatum was presented to the Zulu on the same day as the announcement to them of the terms the high commissioner intended to implement for the settlement of the boundary dispute between the Zulu kingdom and the Transvaal. These terms were based on the findings of a commission that had been appointed in 1878 and consisted of John Shepstone, Michael Gallwey the attorney-general and Colonel Anthony Durnford. The commission had presented its report on the question of the sovereignty of the disputed territory to the high commissioner on 20 June of that year and five months had elapsed before the Zulu were told that the decision was in their favour. But Frere practically nullified this award by announcing to the Zulu that the individual rights of property of the Boers in that area were to be recognised and guaranteed by the British government and that the Zulu would have to compensate any Boers who decided to leave.² The linking of these two announcements, the boundary award and the ultimatum, was a significant

indication of the importance of the Transvaal border issue to the wider imperial aims of the high commissioner; and the outcome of that day was to have a dramatic effect on the lives of thousands of Britons, colonials and Zulu, and no less on the life and career of Fanny Colenso.

Frere had far-reaching imperial ambitions. He had been sent out to achieve the confederation of the southern African colonies and republics, but he looked beyond even this ambition to British hegemony as far north as the Zambesi and beyond: 'To read Frere is to discover the essential unoriginality of Rhodes.'³ It seemed inevitable to him by May 1878 that it would be 'found necessary sooner or later, to extend the British Protectorate in some form or other over all the tribes ... between the sea and the present Transvaal frontier, and the longer it is deferred', he concluded, 'the more troublesome will the operation become.'⁴ However peaceful he may originally have intended this expansion to have been, by May 1877, shortly after his arrival in Cape Town, he was already convinced that force would have to be employed against the Zulu.⁵ Events and the influence of certain personalities in South Africa were to reinforce that conviction.

In the month following his arrival at the Cape came the news of Sir Theophilus Shepstone's annexation of the Transvaal, on 12 April. It is commonly held that Frere was taken by surprise. He certainly foresaw the financial difficulties of administering the bankrupt ex-republic, and the problems of furthering the cause of confederation when Boer opinion in South Africa was so widely opposed to the annexation. Moreover, the long-standing dispute between the Transvaal and Zululand had now become a British dispute, and Frere came to see that there would be little hope of justifying annexation to the Boers of the Transvaal if their land claims in the disputed territory were not upheld. At the same time, elements of Cape opinion were distrustful of Carnarvon's Permissive Federation Bill, which was planned to be the constitutional basis of confederation. John Molteno, the Cape prime minister, made it clear that as long as the Transvaal remained in a parlous financial state, the Cape would never assume responsibility for it in such a confederation. Frere realised that confederation had received a severe check, but gave his loyal support to the annexation nevertheless.⁶

The situation in the Transvaal declined rapidly. Shepstone's administration became increasingly repressive, weak and financially disastrous, and he also failed to satisfy the Boer population in one important respect – the suppression of Sekhukhune, the Pedi chief. Boer opposition to the annexation began to harden. Shepstone met the Zulu *izinduna* at Blood River in October 1877 and

suffered a shock at his hostile reception. Whereas previously Cetshwayo could look to the Natal government and to Shepstone as security against the advancing claims of the Boers to land in the disputed area, now he found himself opposed by British interests in this potentially explosive issue. Shepstone suddenly reversed his support for Zulu claims to the disputed territory and claimed that Boer titles were indisputable.

The standard interpretation of this volte-face is based on Shepstone's writings in which he began to advocate the complete subjugation of the Zulu kingdom. This would placate the Boers of the Transvaal, and effect a bloodless suppression of Sekhukhune and other troublesome native chiefs who, in his opinion, were influenced by the independent and recalcitrant Zulu chief. As his impressionable chief Frere also claimed, it would start revenue flowing back into the depleted Transvaal exchequer.⁷

Shepstone's role in the events leading up to the declaration of war against the Zulu has recently been investigated more thoroughly. It is well known that, for many years, he had dreamed of establishing a black kingdom in which he could put into effect his concept of native administration. One writer has recently claimed that by the early 1860s, Shepstone had decided on the disputed territory as a suitable area for this experiment. Such a state would moreover act as a repository for the alleged surplus black population of Natal, and act as a buffer against Transvaal ambitions for a route to the sea. The discovery of diamonds in Griqualand West in 1867 aroused his ambitions to make Natal the gateway to the wealth of the interior and the outlet for that wealth. The subsequent labour drain towards the diamond fields emphasised the importance of the migratory labour routes through Zululand and the disputed territory. The latter area was therefore more attractive as a sphere of British; that is Shepstonian influence.

Shepstone also hoped that by participating in Cetshwayo's coronation in 1873, he would gain 'additional influence and real power, not only over the Zulu, but over all other native powers of South Eastern Africa, for the power to control the Zulu includes that of controlling all the rest.'⁸ Thus the ultimate subjugation of the Zulu became essential to his ambitions and prestige.

In 1874, when he was sent to England to explain the Natal government's handling of the Langalibalele affair, Shepstone promoted his idea of solving the black problem of Natal partially through the expedient of annexing the disputed territory. It is also claimed that his views considerably influenced Carnarvon in the shaping of his confederation scheme, and that other officials such as Wolseley and Herbert, the permanent undersecretary at the Colonial

Office, advocated the annexation of Zululand.

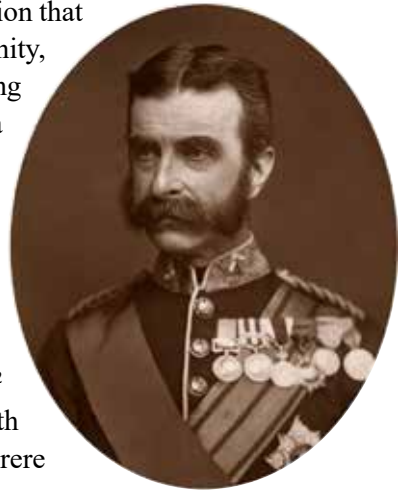
Another writer has claimed that Shepstone returned to South Africa in 1876 as a KCMG, on the understanding that he would effect the annexation of certain crucial areas – Zululand, Swaziland, Sekhukhuneland and the Transvaal – but that this should be done without the use of force and thus added expense. The annexation of the Transvaal was accomplished on those conditions in the initial stages at least, but Shepstone was aware of the impossibility of appropriating the other regions. In October 1877 he reversed his decision regarding the right of the Zulu to the disputed territory not merely to placate the Boers, but more importantly, to obtain ‘legal right’ to that area, thereby gaining control of one of the migratory labour routes into Natal. The one threat to this scheme was Zulu power and its destruction was therefore necessary. To force Britain to this decision, Shepstone was prepared to exaggerate the militarism of the Zulu, the barbarity of the Zulu king, and the divisive tendencies of the Zulu state, which would ensure that there would be little resistance to British interference.⁹

It has been claimed that Shepstone’s ultimate ambition was to control the resources of the subcontinent for the benefit of the whites, using black labour. The standard interpretation of Sir Bartle Frere’s motives is that he was driven by the ambition to construct ‘a great new British Dominion in South Africa’, but his motives were not, in the final analysis, greatly dissimilar from Shepstone’s.

First, both men subscribed to the contemporary belief of the British colonial ruling class that Anglo-Saxon civilisation and justice were superior and therefore highly beneficial to African cultures. Second, Frere believed that the Zulu would benefit from British rule by becoming peaceful, industrious and docile labourers, instead of being a ‘man-slaying military machine’. It has also been a standard interpretation that Frere was the principal instigator of the Anglo-Zulu War, but a recent writer has claimed that if any one man was responsible for the destruction of the Zulu kingdom, it was Shepstone.¹⁰

Shepstone’s reputation in South Africa and the Colonial Office was unassailable, and his influence over Frere was considerable. The latter accepted Shepstone’s stereotyped image of Cetshwayo as a cruel despot intent on annihilating his white neighbours, and with wide and disruptive influence among the native peoples of South Africa. He also supported Shepstone’s assertion that the Zulu state was essentially a military machine, that it must be destroyed before there could be peace in that corner of the Empire, and that ‘considerable power’ would have to be employed to achieve this, despite the fact that not much resistance was expected.¹¹

Both Frere and Shepstone came to the conclusion that a pre-emptive strike, at the earliest opportunity, would be the most effective means of destroying the Zulu kingdom. All they needed was a suitable pretext. According to one writer, Frere expected the report of the boundary commission to furnish such a pretext, for he was persuaded, on Shepstone's firm assurance, that the recommendation would go against the Zulu, whereupon force would be necessary to implement a settlement.¹² When the commissioners came forward with findings that, on balance, favoured the Zulu, Frere was dismayed. Not only would this most likely cause a Boer revolt, it would also ruin his excuse for invading the independent



*General Frederic Thesiger
(Lord Chelmsford)*

Zulu kingdom. He suppressed the report for five months, sent General Frederic Thesiger (Lord Chelmsford) on a military survey of Natal, pressed for reinforcements, and searched for another pretext.¹³ Frere's actions and despatches between July and December 1878, and the incidents he used to provoke war through the ultimatum of 11 December, are well known and need not be repeated here.¹⁴ What does need examination is the role of the Colonial Office in the events leading to the war of 1879, for Fanny Colenso was deeply influenced by the conviction that Frere had precipitated hostilities without regard for the wishes of his superiors in London.

Views similar to Fanny's have been held by a number of historians, whose studies of British colonial policy in South Africa have led them to the conclusion that the basic dictates of British security and supremacy in southern Africa were curbed by the equally important dictate of economy. Acquisitions of additional territory were repeatedly discouraged by the Colonial Office if such annexations were likely to place demands on the Treasury. Thus, although Colonial Office opinion on the Zulu question was influenced by Frere's and Shepstone's barrage of despatches in the late 1870s, the senior officials clung to their determination not to endorse action that might entail extra expenditure.

Some historians have argued, however, that there was, in the specific circumstances of 1878, one crucial factor which compromised this apparently single-minded policy, and that was 'the ineptitude and indecision of the Colonial Secretary.'¹⁵ Thus, Cornelis de Kiewiet asserts that Michael Hicks

Beach tended to defer to Frere, the older statesman, and that his responses to the latter's despatches were indecisive and lacked conviction.¹⁶ The proponents of this view go on to argue that although the officials were aware of the drift to war, they were powerless to avert it because of poor communications with South Africa, and because the authority vested in Frere virtually gave him *carte blanche*.¹⁷

This well-established interpretation of the role of the Colonial Office has recently been challenged by a new generation of historians who argue that although the published correspondence between Frere and Hicks Beach implied that the Colonial Office was guiltless in precipitating the war, nevertheless from the time of Shepstone's visit to London in 1874, 'war was accounted an overwhelming probability.'¹⁸ Herbert, for instance, expected war from 1873 onwards, and in a confidential note to Lord Carnarvon (Henry Herbert) in July 1877 he wrote that despite the fact that they could not at that time annex Zululand, public opinion being averse to such a move, it was certain that annexation would occur before long. To Shepstone he wrote privately on 6 December 1877 that 'forcible measures' against the Zulu must be postponed, but he nevertheless expressed confidence in that official's actions whatever they might be. Lord Carnarvon's resignation from the secretaryship of state at the end of 1877 is seen as disastrous by some of the new revisionist historians, for while he might have been able to control Frere and Shepstone, his successor Hicks Beach could not. (In view of the distance and communication factors, this argument is perhaps debatable.) He acted on the assumption, fostered by Shepstone, that a show of strength would be sufficient to effect annexation, and that a costly war would not be necessary to subjugate the Zulu.¹⁹

Thus, when the middle column of the invading forces under Colonel Richard Glyn and Lord Chelmsford suffered a devastating defeat at Isandhlwana, within two weeks of the expiration of the ultimatum, and contrary to the military prediction that the war would be a short affair, the Colonial Office defended itself by making Frere the scapegoat. This was not very difficult as the published correspondence seemed to prove Frere's culpability and the Colonial Office's innocence. It was this last argument, that Frere was primarily responsible for the war, which was to be pursued by Fanny Colenso when late in 1879 she took up the Zulu cause. Once again, as in 1873 and 1874, the roles of Durnford and her father in these events dramatically influenced her career.

Anthony Durnford had returned to Natal in March 1877 and immediately became involved in the events that finally led up to the war. In April he travelled to Pretoria incognito, to establish communications with Shepstone.

Later that month he marched up a force from Newcastle, intending to strengthen Shepstone's forces against a possible Boer revolt, but no doubt to his disappointment, he was sent back to Natal before arriving in Pretoria, as no such revolt was anticipated. In Pietermaritzburg he temporarily assumed command of all Natal troops. In February 1878 he was appointed one of the members of the boundary commission, probably because he was an engineer with personal knowledge of the disputed border he had reconnoitred in June 1877.²⁰ He was satisfied with the findings of the commission, but was stunned to be told by John Colenso in December that Frere had published a memorandum in the local press that largely nullified the decision of the commissioners. He spent two days trying to obtain an interview with the high commissioner, but managed only to see Lieutenant-Governor Henry Bulwer, who satisfied him that the memorandum was not final and that he, Bulwer, agreed with Durnford and the bishop on the matter of honoring the award to the letter.²¹ With that Durnford perforce had to be content, for he was almost immediately drawn into the military operations. On or about 26 December he was ordered to march to Krantzkop with a force of natives, where, as commander of No.2 Column, he was to cover the middle Tugela, and co-operate with Colonel Charles Pearson, who was in charge of the coastal invading column.²²

Earlier, in August 1878, when Chelmsford had arrived in Natal to assume supreme command, Durnford had presented him with a memorandum proposing the raising of a force of 7 000 Natal natives with European officers. This proposal Chelmsford had approved, at the same time indicating that he intended giving Durnford overall charge of this force. Later, however, he had modified his decision, and Durnford was given the command of only the first of the three Natal Native Contingent (NNC) regiments that had been raised. His force on the Tugela also included 315 Natal Native Horse and one company of Natal Native Pioneers, all of which had been raised by him, and which included many of his loyal (Hlubi) Tlokwa-Sotho horsemen and a mounted contingent from Edendale under Langalibalele's brother.²³

Durnford was not left in independent command for very long. On 14 January, acting on vague rumours that there was to be a Zulu strike against the Middle Drift on the Tugela, he moved his force to take up a defensive position over the border and was instantly rebuked by Chelmsford and ordered back. Chelmsford thereupon split Durnford's force and ordered him up to Rorke's Drift, placing him directly under Glyn's command. On 22 January 1879, Lieutenant-Colonel John North Crealock, Chelmsford's military secretary, sent a note to Durnford from Isandhlwana, ordering him to move to that camp

at once and saying that Glyn and the general were moving off to attack a Zulu force ten miles away. Durnford arrived at Isandhlwana at 10 a.m. where Colonel Henry Pulleine, junior to Durnford by four years' command, told him that his orders were to remain in the camp, to defend it if attacked, to draw in the infantry outposts, but to leave the cavalry vedettes advanced.

Reports had been received of Zulu impis on the Nqutu range. A further report arrived and was handed to Durnford, saying that the Zulu were retiring to the east. He decided to make a sortie and prevent the Zulu from connecting with what the commanders all assumed was the main impi. Either Pulleine or Durnford decided to send out a stronger outpost force to the rim of the Nqutu range, 1 500 yards from the camp, thus further depleting the forces in the camp, and Durnford sallied forth at 11 a.m. with his native force. When the main Zulu impi appeared suddenly over the Nqutu plateau at about noon, Durnford and the outposts were gradually forced back into the camp.

The Zulu were at first held at bay by the firing power of the British and colonial forces, but when this began to abate due to lack of ammunition, the impis to the left of the camp pressed forward and caused the NNC on that flank to flee in panic, thus opening a fatal breach in the defences of the British. This is the standard interpretation of how the breach occurred, but it has been questioned.²⁴ Whatever the reason for the breaking of the defences, from this point the battle was lost. Durnford finally withdrew to the saddle of Isandhlwana and with about seventy Carbineers fought to the last man. Fifty-five whites escaped. By mid-afternoon there were 895 British dead,



Isandhlwana (taken December 2017)

including six companies of the 2nd Warwickshire Regiment and over 100 European volunteers. Approximately 2 000 Zulu died.²⁵

The news of this disaster reached Pietermaritzburg on 24 January and caused a sensation. The initial optimism of the campaign suddenly evaporated and was superseded by widespread panic and despondency unparalleled in Natal's history. It was believed that the victorious Zulu would sweep down into Natal and massacre everyone. The proportionately heavy loss of Natal lives led to a conviction that the war was a strictly imperial affair and that the volunteers should have been left in Natal to act as a defensive force only.²⁶

The question of prime responsibility for the tragedy inevitably became a matter of speculation and received attention in newspaper editorials. According to the *Natal Witness*, one body of colonial opinion blamed Chelmsford for being unaware of the proximity of a large Zulu force – a criticism of his ineffective reconnoitring – and for leaving the camp inadequately protected. But, said the *Witness* leader, Chelmsford *had* known of the existence of the Zulu impi. The nature and strength of the force left in the camp proved that fact. It was strong enough to defend itself provided it acted on the defensive, and the cause of the disaster was clearly the fault of the officer who acted on the offensive. This was an oblique reference to Durnford. On 1 February, the *Witness* again took up this theme, referring to the 'misguided and headstrong folly of one man'; that is, Durnford. The *Times of Natal* took a similar view.²⁷ Later in May an outspoken criticism of Durnford



*Grave of Anthony Durnford and
inscription, Fort Napier Military Cemetery,
Pietermaritzburg*

appeared in the press, calling him ‘headstrong, obstinate, and totally unfit for command’, of which he had given proof at Bushman’s River Pass in 1873. The writer of this letter nevertheless acknowledged Durnford’s bravery.²⁸

The official attitude was equally critical, though not so outspoken. On 27 January, Chelmsford had sent off a dispatch on the disaster, in which he said that he found the defeat ‘incomprehensible’, and that he firmly believed that if the force left in the camp had taken up a defensive position ‘and utilized there the materials for a hasty entrenchment which lay ready to hand’, the whole Zulu army would not have been able to break their defence. Publicly Chelmsford did not blame Durnford, but his staff apparently automatically assumed that, as senior officer, Durnford had assumed command from Pulleine and that he had disobeyed the orders to remain in camp and defend it by going out on his sortie. Rumours reflecting this view gradually filtered through to the public and to the Colensos. Even Frere, before he had full details of the disaster, referred in a cable to ‘poor Durnford’s misfortune’.²⁹

The news of the tragedy reached Bishopstowe on 24 January. Fanny later wrote that she drove into town with a feeling of ‘terror’ and ‘certainty of the worst, yet clinging desperately to one gleam of hope.’³⁰ The absolute certainty of Durnford’s death was not known for two months, yet no one held out much hope for his survival. The exact circumstances of his death remained unknown for even longer and there were rumours of cowardice. These were only dispelled when General Frederick Marshall received permission to visit the battlefield on 21 May. The rumours probably arose because it was known that Durnford was fighting alongside colonial volunteers whom he had criticised for the Bushman’s River Pass fiasco.³¹

In her grief over his death, and in the knowledge of his unfortunate career, the accusations against him of responsibility for the disaster were a bitter blow to Fanny. We have seen in the previous chapter how she reacted to Durnford’s being made the scapegoat for the Bushman’s River Pass incident. She had also convinced herself that there were many other instances when he had been unfairly treated. In 1875, for instance, Wolseley had deliberately snubbed Durnford because, so Durnford surmised, he was a close friend of the Colensos. When he was superseded as colonial engineer by a junior officer, the Colensos believed this was Wolseley’s doing. (In fact, Wolseley had disapproved of this appointment as he considered it unjust to Durnford.)³²

Following upon this were other, more recent cases of injustice, where she said, he ‘had the fate of being the one to do the work, while others gained the credit or reward.’³³ Chelmsford had not carried out his original intention to give

Durnford overall command of the NNC because of objections from his staff that Durnford lacked experience and rank for so large a force. Crealock was responsible for changing the general's mind, so Fanny claimed. Furthermore, in the relevant Blue Books, Chelmsford never once mentioned Durnford's name in connection with the raising of the NNC and its organisation, and Fanny accused Crealock of being 'at the bottom of everything'. His jealousy of Durnford kept the latter away from Chelmsford and 'thereby to a g[rea]t extent deprived L[or]d C[helmsford] of the benefit of the experience of the one military man in the country who had studied the Zulu question, & who *knew* the difficulties before us.'³⁴ The Natal Native Horse, which Durnford had raised and organised as early as 1877, had become known loosely as Durnford's Horse, yet in 1879 Fanny was complaining bitterly to John Sanderson that they were now being called Shepstone's Horse.³⁵

Fanny's response to the accusations against Durnford was also influenced by the attitude of the Colenso family to the Anglo-Zulu War. Although the bishop never denied that Zulu militarism was a 'standing menace', and that the demands in the ultimatum concerning the dismantling of the Zulu army and the right of young warriors to marry were not unjustified, he nevertheless did not approve of the way in which these demands had been forced upon the Zulu. Although Mrs Colenso appears to have been sceptical about the moral benefits of western civilisation to the Zulu way of life, the bishop, in his sermon on the war in March 1879, displayed the underlying nineteenth-century belief in the superiority of British justice and civilisation. But while he believed that a great deal could have been done to improve the social and moral conditions of the Zulu, this should have been attempted peacefully through a British resident, and if it was decided to force the issue (an unwise move in his opinion) it should have been done by a slow, non-aggressive invasion of Zululand. The manner in which the war had been manipulated was deeply unjust.³⁶ Mrs Colenso called it 'the most enormous piece of wickedness that I have lived to witness' and, she continued, 'the only guiding idea of our politicians is expediency.'³⁷

From his correspondence it seems that the bishop believed by January 1879 that it was the intention of British policy to subjugate Zululand for the purposes of confederation, that the boundary commission might well have been simply a device to gain time for military preparations, and that the desire to pacify the Boers of the Transvaal for the purpose of confederation had led directly to the Anglo-Zulu War.³⁸ The Colensos had strong convictions regarding the character and policy of Cetshwayo, believing him to be a faithful and humble

ally of England. Mutual trust and respect had developed between the bishop and the Zulu king over matters such as the Langalibalele affair, and the bishop did his best to disprove the accusations against Cetshwayo that proliferated from 1877. He had little success.³⁹ Once again he was in the lonely position of defending a native chief and his people against the calumnies of the Natal colonists and missionaries, and this time, against the iniquities of British imperial policy in the field.

The bishop's intense involvement in, and concern for, the fate of the Zulu kingdom, was shared in a practical way by Harriette and supported wholeheartedly by Fanny and all members of the family. Their conviction that the war had been provoked on grounds of expediency by dishonourable men must have caused some pain to Fanny, for Durnford, as a military man, was an instrument of that policy, albeit a disapproving one. She believed that he had done more than anyone to prevent the war, and knew that he disapproved of the war policy, but once his political influence came to an end with the report of the boundary commission, he became a soldier once more and threw himself into war preparations with energy and enthusiasm.⁴⁰

The emotional crisis that Fanny suffered as a result of Durnford's death was compounded by her belief that the war was unjust and unnecessary, and that the men who had instigated the war and who were directly responsible for the disaster that caused his death were now blaming him so as to protect their reputations. Fanny never overcame her sense of loss over Durnford's death, nor her burning sense of the injustice done to his reputation, and her desire to exonerate him by some means, consumed her energies for the last eight years of her life. She well knew, she wrote in 1882, 'what sorrow beyond earthly help is.' Moreover, by a curious twist of fate, so she wrote to Frank in 1884, on the very day that Durnford died, she was rebelling against his influence over her. She was contemplating something directly opposed to Durnford's wishes, something she had not done for years. For this momentary 'betrayal' against an influence she acknowledged as always 'most wisely & tenderly for my good', she thereafter celebrated 22 January each year as a day of humiliation and fasting.⁴¹ One is tempted to speculate on the role this possible guilt complex may have played in Fanny's determination to defend Durnford, but it would remain mere speculation. Her personality and emotional relationship to Durnford, plus the prevailing sentimentality of her age, are perhaps sufficient explanations for both reactions.

In March 1879, Fanny was writing to Sanderson, editor of the *Natal Colonist*, that she would do all in her power 'to right our dear friend however

much blame might be cast on the General in doing so.’ Her father, she said, believed that eventually justice would be done to Durnford’s memory, but she was less sanguine: ‘I have never yet seen the right triumph in this world, nor truly worthy men successful. I hope things are set right in another world, but here fraud and dishonour triumph. The innocent suffer, they die & their memory is reviled.’⁴²

She wrote frequently to Sanderson. He was a close friend of the Colensos, an early supporter of Durnford in the Colony, and a critic of Frere and was thus disposed to defend Durnford publicly. Through him Fanny hoped to publicise what she thought was the true interpretation of events on that fateful day. She could not do this publicly herself or embarrassing questions about her relationship with Durnford would have been asked. At this stage therefore she left the main defence of Durnford in the hands of his brother, Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Congreve Langly Durnford, who had determined to clear his brother’s name and to obtain public recognition of him by the military authorities. Edward had been closely examining the available evidence for the events of the 22 January, and had come to the conclusion that some of it had been suppressed. In April he published a pamphlet giving the ‘true’ account of those events, and he and Fanny became close friends and allies.⁴³ The one action Fanny could take immediately was to publish *My Chief and I*. She sent it to Edward Durnford and he had it published early in 1880. Later he claimed that the book had been responsible for refuting many of Chelmsford’s accusations against Durnford simply by portraying the latter’s true character. Financially, the book never proved a success.⁴⁴

In January 1880, the *Natal Witness* reprinted a review of *My Chief and I* that had first appeared in the *South African Mail*. The reviewer felt that the book would be controversial and would arouse opposition in Natal because of recent events, and accused the author of using over-emotional language. Another more perceptive, and presumably local, reviewer in the same paper in February guessed the sex of the author. This reviewer noted that the book was ‘feminine’ in tone, the language ‘gushing’ and ‘sentimental’. But despite the obvious prejudice of the author, continued the reviewer, the book could be recommended to readers because of its ‘charm’ and because of the good, kind and brave officer who formed the subject of the work.⁴⁵ Subsequent writings by Fanny and Edward Durnford were to publicise Anthony Durnford’s career and raise considerable public support for that officer in Natal.

In September 1879, Frank and Fanny travelled to England. Frank was going to England to start a new profession and to marry his fiancée, and this was an

opportunity for Fanny to have an escort on the journey. Her motives for going to England are not precisely known, but probably a combination of factors was responsible, such as her health, her desire for art lessons in a more stimulating environment (she considered Natal ‘one vast graveyard’ in that respect), and a feeling of revulsion against the Colony because of Durnford’s fate.⁴⁶ She apparently had some idea of writing a magazine article on the causes of the Anglo-Zulu War before she left Natal, but during the voyage she found that she had sufficient material for a full-scale book. Before leaving, she had collected printed and manuscript material, including copies of the bishop’s pamphlets on native affairs and she obtained the relevant blue books from someone she met on board the steamer. By the time she arrived in England, the first few chapters of the book had been written and it was natural that she should ask Edward Durnford to write the military portions. The book was completed with the aid of the bishop’s *Digest on Zulu Affairs* (a compendium of extracts from the Blue Books and other contemporary sources, analysed and annotated by the bishop), which she borrowed from Frederick Chesson of the Aborigines Protection Society. To the apparent surprise of the bishop and his family, the book was published in either March or April 1880 as *History of the Zulu War and its Origin*. Edward was mentioned on the title page as the writer of the military section.⁴⁷

To Chesson, Fanny outlined their motives in writing the book. Edward wished to prove the heroic character and good generalship of his brother, and the ‘baseness’ of the blame Chelmsford and his friends had attached to Durnford’s name. Fanny’s account of the causes of the war was written to prove the unnecessary and iniquitous nature of the war; or, as she wrote later to someone else, in support of her father’s cause, that is, the Zulu cause.⁴⁸

Fanny’s main argument in this book was that Britain had been carried into war with the Zulu because of the desire of certain individuals to further the confederation of the southern African states and colonies. This belief had been expressed by the bishop in a letter to Frere in January 1879: ‘It may be, indeed, as some think, that it has been intended from the first to annex or subjugate Zululand, with a view to Confederation or to the advancement of Civilisation and Christianity, that this has been the policy of the British Government and the real object of these proceedings’.⁴⁹ Fanny argued that Frere had engineered the war, with the ill-informed and malevolent advice of Shepstone and certain Zululand missionaries, an interpretation that as we have seen, has become well-established in the historiography of the war. Briefly her outline of events is as follows.

Fanny purported to trace the emergence of the confederation policy to 1873 when Shepstone went into Zululand to crown Cetshwayo.⁵⁰ By this act she decided, Natal assumed the right to interfere in the internal affairs of that country.⁵¹ The Langelibalele affair offered another pretext for the furtherance of Carnarvon's confederation scheme. Although the secretary of state had initially agreed with the bishop in condemning the Natal officials for that affair, by 1876 he had come under Shepstone's influence. The latter official, despite being implicated in the Langelibalele affair was pardoned and made a KCMG on the understanding that he would annex the Transvaal. Shepstone's reputation remaining unsullied was particularly bitter to the Colensos, for the bishop's involvement in the Langelibalele trial had led to deep animosity between the two families.⁵²

Like her father, Fanny believed there was a direct link between Shepstone's annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 and Frere's assault on Zulu independence in 1879. In a letter to Frere after the outbreak of hostilities, the bishop put the case thus: 'It is very plain that the desire to pacify the Boers so as to get them to settle down under British rule and thereby advance the scheme of "Confederation" led to the policy of the Zulu War.'⁵³

In advancing such views, the bishop was anticipating the findings of later generations of historians. Fanny, too, was far ahead of most of her contemporaries in the conclusions she reached. She emphasised that Shepstone had led Frere to believe that the boundary commission could not fail to award the border area to the Boers, and that the high commissioner had intended using this as a pretext for military coercion against the Zulu, their subjugation being his objective 'from beginning to end'.⁵⁴ When this course was closed by the boundary commission finding in favour of the Zulu, Frere, she argued, was forced to delay announcing the decision while he searched for, and eventually obtained, other pretexts for war. In chapter eleven of her *History*, Fanny proceeded to marshal the necessary supporting evidence, by examining all the incidents that Frere used between July and December 1878 to provoke conflict. The so-called Sirayo and Smith and Deighton incidents, Cetshwayo's non-fulfilment of his coronation promises, his alleged hostility towards missionaries, and the killing of girls under Zulu marriage laws, were all carefully scrutinised. Except for the last charge, she refuted them all, quoting as evidence Bulwer's statements as opposed to Frere's, and Cetshwayo's statements compared to those of the missionaries.

Her argument basically was that Frere's actions were entirely expedient, that he had decided on war as early as December 1877, that he deliberately

lied to Cetshwayo, and that his accusations against the king were exaggerated, one-sided and imaginary. Frere's main motive in instigating war was to further confederation, but a secondary motive, so Fanny maintained, was the basic belief that a small, peaceful English community could not survive in close proximity to a warlike independent native state. This belief was condemned by Fanny in Lord Blachford's words, as a reversion to brutality.⁵⁵

While Fanny acknowledged Carnarvon's responsibility for initiating the confederation policy and for using Frere and Shepstone for that purpose, she did not explore his role in the events leading to war; nor did she discuss the role of the Colonial Office after 1878 in any detail. Implicit throughout was the assumption that Frere was acting unilaterally, and his role is contrasted with that of Bulwer who tried to defuse the situation. In dealing with Shepstone, Fanny was highly critical, drawing attention to his complicity in the Langalibalele affair, his mishandling of the Transvaal annexation and of its subsequent administration, and his expedient change of policy with regard to the disputed territory. But although Fanny indicated Shepstone's influence in events that contributed to the situation Frere was able to exploit, she nevertheless assigned him a secondary role. She considered him devious, but did not suspect him of being as machiavellian as recent writers have claimed. Many of his utterances about the Zulu she accepted at face value, and in dealing with his assertion of November 1878 that the Zulu power would collapse at the first sign of British interference, she merely accused him of being ill-informed and ignorant.⁵⁶

In her account of the events leading up to the outbreak of the Anglo-Zulu War, Fanny never missed an opportunity to mention Durnford's role. His services in the Langalibalele affair, in defence of the Phuthini, in the boundary commission, and in the raising of the NNC and the Natal Native Horse and Pioneers, were all re-examined. She thus assigned him a significant, though minor, role in Natal history, and clearly indicated the qualities she felt were embodied in his character: nobility, integrity, heroism, great energy and efficiency in military organisation, and compassion towards the natives. She gave some prominence to his raising of the NNC, pointing out that the authorities had not given him the credit for doing so, and she also indicated that the appointments of some of the white commanders who were of very dubious character, were made by Crealock and not Durnford. She continually emphasised the fighting qualities and loyalty of the NNC under just and able command as this reflected favourably on Durnford and was something he had felt strongly about. It is noticeable however that her references to Durnford were restrained, in direct contrast with *My Chief and I*.⁵⁷

Other themes that emerged in the latter book were re-emphasised in the *History*. The attitude of the colonists to the Zulu, for instance, had been mentioned in the earlier work as being based on a desire to increase revenue by taxing them and obtain their labour, and this had been seen as a likely source of conflict between Natal and the Zulu kingdom. In the *History*, this attitude of the whites was used to explain the pro-war reaction in Natal in 1878. Once again, the local officials were accused of placing expediency above justice and truth.⁵⁸

Contrary to the popular image of Cetshwayo as a savage, coarse, ignorant and cruel despot, an image fostered by Shepstone, Frere and certain missionaries, Fanny described him as a peace-loving, much-wronged monarch, who led a 'simple, moderate, and useful kingly existence'. In the words of her father, he ruled his people well according to his lights.⁵⁹ The Zulu people also emerged as an 'intelligent people' and not as the warlike military machine bent on destroying their white neighbours, an image that has persisted in Zulu historiography to this day.⁶⁰

When the *History of the Zulu War and its Origin* came out in 1880, a second edition was immediately planned to incorporate criticisms made by the bishop. This edition had appeared by May 1881 and was published on a shareholder basis as the publishers would not accept it without financial guarantees. Fanny and Edward Durnford did their best to publicise their book by sending copies to sympathetic people, such as William Fowler, Liberal MP for Cambridge, and Sir David Wedderburn; and when Fanny sailed home in November 1881, she managed to make it the most popular book on board.

A complimentary review of the *History*, which first appeared in the *World*, was reprinted in the *Natal Witness* in July 1880. The book was called 'the most thorough and graphic account of the Isandhlwana disaster' and an 'elaborate indictment' against Frere, Shepstone and Chelmsford. The 'remote' influence of the bishop was perceived and the book's pro-Zulu bias acknowledged. Despite this review, however, the book was not a financial success.⁶¹

In contrast to *My Chief and I*, which was eulogistic and emotional, the *History* was restrained. Fanny claimed that the authors made a special effort to make their statements 'calm' and 'dispassionate', as they felt this would make it more convincing. Fanny was probably influenced in the writing of this book by the realisation that she was publicly taking up her father's cause, and that her book would be judged as being directly influenced, if not written, by the bishop. In her preface she stressed that although there would be nothing in the book at variance with the bishop's views, and although his research had provided the basic material for the book, it was nevertheless her own effort

entirely. He had not even known she would embark on a full-scale book when she left Natal.⁶²

Fanny nevertheless sacrificed clarity of argument to needless detail and discussion, and to tortuous style. This fault was accentuated in her later book and is present in her correspondence. She has been criticised for giving too much attention to the Colenso involvement in the events she described. It was inevitable that the bishop's involvement in, and writings on, Zulu affairs should dominate the *History*. Certainly, by starting her account in 1873 she reflected the bishop's involvement, but one writer has recently claimed that 1873 is a 'convenient mile post in the course of Anglo-Zulu relations.'⁶³ Fanny was a woman with a sense of mission; she wrote out of a passionate desire to obtain justice both for the man she loved and for the Zulu people, and thus her work suffered from an inevitable bias. It has recently been pointed out, however, that in so far as her book is pro-Zulu, 'it presents arguments and explanations which are now gaining more credence.'⁶⁴

The defence of Durnford's actions at Isandhlwana in the *History of the Zulu War* was expanded on by Edward Durnford in a pamphlet, which appeared in 1880 entitled *Isandhlwana: Lord Chelmsford's Statements Compared with Evidence*. Neither of these publications attracted much attention to the Durnford cause. Fanny commented to Chesson on this failure, and added: 'England seems to have made up its stupid mind that L[or]d C[helmsford] is to be whitewashed, & that it is not necessary to do justice to the noble dead.'⁶⁵ Briefly, their defence of Durnford rested on certain accusations against Chelmsford: that he had chosen an indefensible site, had failed to entrench the camp despite warnings from the Boers that this was vital, had not reconnoitred the Nqutu plateau well enough, had divided and therefore weakened his force, and had ignored repeated warnings that the camp was under attack. Edward and Fanny maintained that the basic question concerned the orders issued to Durnford. These, they claimed, had not included the injunction to assume command of the camp. Since he was only passing through the camp to connect with the general's force ten miles away, he had not in fact taken command. Durnford had not therefore disobeyed orders and was not responsible for the disaster. Chelmsford was directly responsible for the tragedy, although Fanny considered Major Dartnell as one of the 'minor blunderers' since he had influenced Chelmsford to leave the camp on what she called a 'wild goose chase'.⁶⁶

The question of the responsibility for the disaster at Isandhlwana was, and still is, a controversial one and cannot be fully discussed here. It would

appear fair to say, however, that Durnford cannot be solely blamed, and that Chelmsford and Pulleine must bear partial responsibility. Certain of Fanny's and Edward's accusations against Chelmsford appear to have had some justification, and at least one military writer has supported their contention that Durnford had been ordered to support the general's force beyond the camp and not to assume command of it.⁶⁷ But as Coupland has pointed out, 'to narrow the issue to the question of the responsibility for the disobeying of the orders is to evade a more decisive question.' This question is simply whether the British officers can be blamed first for overconfidence, and second for not realising how unobtrusively very large numbers of Zulu could move. He concluded that although they probably can be blamed for overconfidence, the second factor was not appreciated by anyone at the time, not even the Boers.⁶⁸

Fanny had cause to be extremely dissatisfied with the use made of the *History* by at least three writers in the next three years. In 1880, Captain Henry Hallam Parr, Frere's military secretary, wrote a book which Fanny attacked in a review for the *Academy*. She accused it of being not just politically pro-Frere, which she had expected, but also of being an implied criticism of Durnford for disobeying orders. It also failed to mention the gallant stand of the 'hero' of the day.⁶⁹ Her next clash was with Frere. Certain documents under his name, which were published in a Blue Book, contained misquotations of statements by Cetshwayo that she had published in her *History*. She accordingly wrote to Frere in February 1881 pointing out his errors. She received no reply, so sent copies of her correspondence to Lord Kimberley (John Wodehouse), secretary of state for colonies, in April, expecting him to print her objection. When all she received was an acknowledgement, she wrote to several newspapers in July asking for publicity for this act of injustice. But to her frustration, no paper would print the lengthy correspondence.⁷⁰ She was equally incensed when R.W. Leyland, a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, published a book in 1882 in which he gave the impression that she concurred with Lord Chelmsford's attacks on Durnford.⁷¹

Fanny remained in Europe until October 1881, staying with relatives and friends, including Edward Durnford, the latter's parents General E.W. Durnford and his wife (with whom she was on very close terms), and regularly visiting Georgiana Burne-Jones, wife of the painter, who was one of her closest friends. In 1880, while in London, she attended the Slade School of Art, and spent January to March 1881 in Rome, to escape the harsh English winter and to study art.⁷²

During this period, Fanny continued to defend the Zulu cause in public, and fought it actively and with dedication until her death in 1887. The anarchy that followed Cetshwayo's banishment and Wolseley's 'settlement' in Zululand caused Fanny much pain and disillusionment. From 1880 onwards she established contact with Chesson of the Aborigines Protection Society (APS) and in collaboration with him became an avid correspondent and contributor to the press. In 1883, she was persuaded by the bishop to write another book on the iniquities of British policy towards Zululand. Whereas in the *History of the Zulu War* Fanny had been able to defend both causes dear to her heart in a logical and harmonious study, from 1880 onwards, the two causes diverged, but were fought simultaneously. Fanny's commitment to both causes remained deep and passionate, for although the Durnford cause was more personal and emotional, the Zulu defence was her beloved father's cause, and Durnford had espoused it as well. Fanny's career as a writer on Zulu matters will be pursued in the next chapter.

Until 1882, Fanny's defence of Anthony Durnford was private and conducted largely by Edward Durnford. After the publication of their book and Edward's two pamphlets (1879–1880), the Durnford case lay dormant. Their evidence was largely circumstantial and based on Durnford's actions and orders on 22 January 1879. They believed that the order Chelmsford had produced to prove that Durnford had been explicitly ordered to 'take command of the camp' was a forgery, but so far they had no proof. During 1882, however, events occurred which were to give Fanny and Edward the opportunity to take up the case once more. This led Fanny into an increasingly controversial aspect of the case, which culminated in publicity about her involvement in Durnford's defence.

In 1881, Edward decided to publish a memoir of his brother, which appeared as *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*. He took this step as neither the *History* nor his two pamphlets had led to an official vindication of Durnford's actions on 22 January 1879, particularly on the vital question of the order issued to him. Chelmsford's accusations against Durnford became explicit in a letter he wrote to the *Times* on 25 August 1880. In his second pamphlet, Edward had attempted to disprove the accusations made by Chelmsford in Parliament in August and September 1880 that Durnford had disobeyed a direct order and thus lost the camp. This claim concerning the wording of the order had been repeated in the official version of the events of that day, as published by the War Office under the title *Narrative of the Field Operations Connected with the Zulu War of 1879*.⁷³ Edward hoped to convince

the public and the authorities that Durnford had not disobeyed any order, and thus to obtain a public vindication of Anthony through a revised version of the official account of Isandhlwana.

Both Edward and Fanny believed that a memoir consisting of excerpts from private letters written by Anthony to his family, and of personal and trivial anecdotes, would attract the general public in a way that the *History* could not, and that it would also convince people that the nobility of Durnford's character would have made disobedience to orders impossible. Fanny undertook to connect the letters with suitable narrative and anecdote, and for this purpose she wrote to friends of Durnford in Natal for personal reminiscences. She maintained that her contribution to the memoir was small, despite the fact that it kept her wholly occupied for some months in early 1882. She was also concerned to keep her contribution secret from the public. Later, when her involvement in the Durnford case became public, she was suspected of being the author of the memoir and of hiding her identity behind Edward's name, as he appeared on the title page as the editor. Fanny considered her efforts for the memoir her 'most sacred duty', for the performance of which she had not been 'permitted' to die the previous year.⁷⁴

One military writer has claimed that the section on Isandhlwana in the memoir of Anthony Durnford is a valuable source of original secondary material.⁷⁵ It is an essential secondary source for research into Durnford's career, and an informative one for events in which he was involved. It contains the only extant copies of Durnford's correspondence with his family. The majority of his personal papers in Natal were destroyed after his death by the Committee of Adjustment in what Edward claimed was a precipitate and indiscriminating manner.⁷⁶ It is, however, a biased interpretation of Durnford's character and motives, understandably so when one considers the relationship of the editors to the subject.

Some time in either late 1881 or early 1882, Edward had heard rumours through one of the members of Chelmsford's staff that the genuine order sent to Durnford on the 22 January 1879 had been recovered and concealed. The notebook containing a copy of the order had been lost on the battlefield and recovered a few months later. It was returned to Crealock. Edward approached Crealock and managed to obtain a copy of this order, which read:

22nd, Wednesday, 2 a.m.

You are to march to this camp at once with all the force you have with you of No. 2 Column. Major Bengough's Battalion is to move

to Rorke's Drift as ordered yesterday.

2–24th Artillery and mounted men with the General and Colonel Glyn
move off at once to attack a Zulu force about ten miles distant.

[Signed] J.N.C.⁷⁷

This order proved conclusively that Durnford had not been ordered to assume command of the camp. Chelmsford, it now appeared, had deliberately concealed it when he attacked Durnford in parliament in late 1880 and had also made no attempt to correct the official version of the events of Isandhlwana. Fanny and Edward at this stage considered this order crucial to their cause and published it in the memoir in the hope that it would achieve an official vindication of Durnford.⁷⁸ When the book appeared later that year, Fanny wrote a review of it, and asked Frank, Sir George Cox and the editor of *Macmillan's Magazine* either to write reviews themselves or find someone else to do it. As with her other publications, she sent copies to influential people, in one instance to Sir Arthur Havelock in 1885, six months before he took office as governor of Natal.⁷⁹

During 1882, Edward corresponded with the War Office, and with the secretary of state for war and the Duke of Cambridge, in an attempt to obtain an official vindication in the light of the genuine order, but he failed.⁸⁰ Although the charge of disobeying an explicit order had to be dropped, the authorities could still claim, and with some justification, that as senior officer to Pulleine, Durnford was nevertheless in command of the camp at Isandhlwana.

In Natal, however, Durnford's defence had found some public support. The visit of General Marshall to the battlefield on 21 May 1879 to bury the bodies, had at last thrown some light on the events of that day. The *Natal Witness* changed its opinion about Durnford and carried a eulogy of his heroic behaviour in its issue of 29 May. It asserted that the responsibility for the loss of the camp obviously rested with Chelmsford as he had not entrenched the camp and had ignored the messages sent from the camp that the Zulu were attacking in force. In January 1881 the *Witness* reviewed Edward Durnford's second pamphlet as a 'fearless statement of the truth'. When the memoir appeared, this paper gave it a substantial review in its leader, supporting its entire message, and a few days later it made an attack on Crealock.⁸¹ The following year, in July 1884, the *Times of Natal*, in response to a circular letter from Edward concerning the injustice done to his brother, also attacked Chelmsford and called for the public exoneration of Durnford.⁸²

But the military establishment stood firm in its refusal to retract the implied criticism of Durnford in the official account. There was one way in which to disprove their assertion that Durnford had assumed command, and that was to find proof that Durnford had been given an order, antecedent to that of 22 January, to follow Lord Chelmsford with his cavalry support. In the light of the circumstantial evidence already available to them, both Fanny and Edward were convinced this second order existed. When certain information came to light on this matter in 1882, Fanny began relentlessly to pursue the proof of its existence.

In approximately March of that year, Edward Durnford obtained a signed letter from a Mr Longhurst, veterinary surgeon to the King's Dragoon Guards in 1879, stating two vital facts: first, that on 21 May 1879, when the force under General Marshall went to Isandhlwana to bury the dead, he had seen first, that Offy Shepstone had taken from Durnford's body a 'packet of letters'; and second, that these were taken from a 'coat-pocket'. The first claim was one Fanny and Edward had heard independently of each other in 1879, Fanny through a telegram printed in the *Natal Witness* on 27 May mentioning 'papers' being taken from Durnford's body; and Edward from a letter written by Longhurst to his family, which letter had been sent to him by Longhurst's family. At the time, Fanny accepted Offy Shepstone's denial that letters had been found and also his claim that there had in fact been no coat from which to take papers. For that reason, she had dropped the matter.

Edward Durnford, however, had persisted in trying to obtain confirmation from Longhurst, but Longhurst had gone to India and it was not until February 1882 that he was forced by his commanding officer, Colonel Marter, to write to Edward. Edward sent a copy of this letter to Fanny and she reacted to his two claims with great excitement. She concluded that if there were a coat on the body, then there *could* have been an order proving their case, and it seemed as if there was a strong possibility that this order had been removed by Offy Shepstone and deliberately concealed by the military authorities. Although this issue awakened very painful memories for Fanny, now a frail semi-invalid, and although it caused her mental anguish, she nevertheless pursued further evidence with unrelenting determination and with a deep emotional commitment.⁸³ In the matter of Durnford's defence, she was prepared to sacrifice her health and her life, every friend she had, including her dearest and most intimate friend Helen, Offy Shepstone's wife, and even the trust put in her by a colleague and friend in the case.⁸⁴

The events leading up to the military court of inquiry in Pietermaritzburg in 1886 are involved and need some condensation for the purposes of this study.⁸⁵ In 1881 Offy Shepstone had written to Edward denying that he had found papers on Durnford's body. After the receipt of Longhurst's letter, Edward asked the bishop to approach Offy once more, and on this occasion, Offy sent Edward three sworn affidavits by witnesses to prove his innocence.⁸⁶ Edward and the bishop accepted Offy's denial, but Fanny was not satisfied for she felt that Offy's behaviour on 21 May when the bodies had been found was suspicious; he had appeared too eager to find Durnford's body, even to the extent of not searching for his brother George's body first. Moreover, early in 1881 Offy had made a mysterious remark to Fanny, in which he said that Chelmsford had not stood by him and he did not see why he should stand by the general. He also said that he had certain important information to give Edward about Isandhlwana, but he had never divulged this information. From this Fanny concluded that Chelmsford had asked Offy to find vital papers on Durnford's body and to keep silent on the matter so as to protect the general's reputation.

She was determined to expose Chelmsford's crime of calumniating the honour of the 'noble dead' and of permitting the fabrication of false orders and the theft of the real ones. The exposure of what she thought of as official duplicity and obstruction made her deeply embittered. At first, she sought only the limited aim of the revision of the *Narrative of the Field Operations Connected with the Zulu War of 1879*, but later her aim became more ambitious, vengeful and, one might add, more hopeless.

She soon convinced Edward that there were legitimate grounds for her accusations against Offy Shepstone and he gave her his wholehearted support. At the end of 1882, Fanny asked Colonel Robert Hawthorn, commanding officer of the Royal Engineers in Natal, to assist her in her investigations. He agreed to do so, but expressed doubt about her case. Within a year, however, he fully supported Fanny's suspicions and when he left Natal in December 1884 wrote: 'I am left with the impression that something has been done which it is desired to conceal'.⁸⁷

In 1884 Offy was made a CMG. This immediately aroused Fanny's suspicions, but Edward wrote that although the honour had been recommended by Chelmsford, there was no more significance in the matter than that it was awarded for his service during the Anglo-Zulu War when he raised a corps of mounted natives. However, Edward did add: 'He would be one of the Colonials naturally selected for the decoration.'⁸⁸ They were all aware of the

fact that the house of Shepstone was a powerful one in Natal, to which not only honours accrued, but to which also was extended the full protection of established authority. This became clear in subsequent events.

Hawthorn's successor as commanding officer of the Royal Engineers in Natal, Colonel Charles Luard, RE also became deeply involved in the Durnford case solely for the purpose of vindicating the reputation of a fellow officer. He decided, in 1886, that the evidence they had accumulated should be laid before his superiors in England and when Offy heard this, he demanded a court of inquiry into the matter. The inquiry was held at Fort Napier in April of that year, much to Durnford's defenders' disappointment as they felt their case would have a greater chance of success in England far from the influence of the Shepstones. When they heard that General Henry Torrens, the commander of the imperial forces in South Africa, had taken steps to limit the proceedings of the court so as to prevent any more names, distinguished or otherwise, from being dragged into it, they realised that their case would be severely hampered.

This emerged in the courtroom when Luard was permitted only to prove the removal of papers; and not to give his evidence that first, there had been a coat, second, that the existence of papers was therefore more likely, third, that Offy had 'tampered with' his witnesses, and fourth, that Offy had based his defence on misstatements. Three of Luard's witnesses who managed to attend the inquiry were hesitant in giving evidence they had sworn to in affidavits and they created a bad impression. Luard was sure that they had been intimidated. Three other witnesses either refused or were prevented from attending the inquiry. The court was hostile to Luard and Offy appeared to be on close terms with the members of the court. Fanny's evidence was dismissed outright. She considered the inquiry a farce and called it the 'court of iniquity'.⁸⁹ Luard had to withdraw and the decision of the court, given to him in June, cleared Offy of the charge of taking papers from Durnford's body. Torrens directed Luard to apologise to Offy and the latter published this apology in the local press.

It seems that there was some foundation for the belief that there had been a coat on Durnford's body when it was identified on 21 May 1879, that the witnesses found by Fanny and Luard to swear to this were intimidated either directly or indirectly by Offy, and that the military authorities were determined to quash the charge against Offy. The abstraction of papers was, however, more difficult to prove. The conflicting evidence of Luard's and Offy's witnesses as to the events of that day, indicate the extreme difficulty of establishing what actually happened after a gap of from three to five years.

Fanny went to England in mid-1886, having obtained the opinion of Charles Fairbridge, a Cape Town lawyer, that their evidence was sound and perfectly legitimate, and having ‘borrowed’ Luard’s confidential proceedings of the court of inquiry, thus breaking their friendship permanently.⁹⁰ In London, she promptly contacted Chesson, Louis Knollys and Edward Durnford as to the best means of continuing the fight. They advised her to see certain senior military officers. Colonel R.H. Vetch, RE, who was on the War Office staff, and Colonel Lothian Nicholson, inspector-general of the Royal Engineers, received her application for further investigation coolly. The former told her that the RE Corps would be quite satisfied with a revision of the official *Narrative* on the point of the genuine order sent to Durnford and they both advised her to drop her case against Offy.⁹¹

Fanny refused to accept the mere vindication of Durnford. She now wanted the facts of the case fully publicised, not for the sake of revenge (so she claimed), but so that the truth might be known, for it was a wrong to the whole army, the whole nation and to the Colony of Natal, that the perpetrators of such iniquity should still hold high and honourable office. The main object of her ambition was the downfall of Chelmsford and Offy Shepstone. Nothing would deflect her from this course. As she explained in September of 1886, she could not afford to wait to do her work, as her doctors had given her only a few months to live.⁹² A knowledge of her mortality may have contributed to Fanny’s intense and overwhelmingly ambitious drive to obtain justice for Durnford.

In Chesson and Sir Andrew Clarke, recently retired from the Royal Engineers, Fanny received warm approbation. At first, they agreed to help her with her case against Offy. Chesson, she wrote to her mother, wanted to form a Durnford defence committee and to find an MP to raise the whole case in parliament. Clarke suggested that Edward Durnford write to Lord Chelmsford asking for a public retraction of his charge against Durnford. Edward did so, but Fanny became worried that Clarke and even Chesson would feel that a public vindication would be sufficient and that they would not strive for publication of the case against Offy. Luard arrived in England, refused to see Fanny, and persuaded Edward to drop all action for the moment or his career would be ruined. Fanny was angry that they should submit to tyrannous threats from the military authorities, and she threatened to publish the whole case on her own responsibility.⁹³

But the weight of opinion was against her. Edward told her plainly that he did not accuse Chelmsford of duplicity in the theft of papers, but only of false

accusation against his brother. Moreover, in January 1887 he told Fanny that he and his family would object to the publication of anything relating to the Durnford case.⁹⁴ George Howard, MP for East Cumberland until 1885 and later ninth Earl of Carlisle, to whom she wrote for advice, told her bluntly that the public would not be interested in a pamphlet on the case and yet would not find a short newspaper account credible. There was no point in accusing Chelmsford of a ‘hideous crime’, Howard continued, particularly when this could not be easily proved, and no one in England was the least interested in Offy Shepstone.⁹⁵ The Royal Engineers Corps had meanwhile decided to drop the whole matter when Chelmsford failed to make a public confession that he had erred in accusing Durnford.⁹⁶

Fanny knew in December 1886 as she lay in Ventnor Hospital for Consumptives that Clarke was planning a move in parliament in the coming spring session and she looked forward hopefully to this event, and to the possible publication of a second edition of *My Chief and I*. She died in April the next year before action could be taken.⁹⁷ In August 1887, Edward wrote to Frank Colenso that, as a result of Clarke’s representations, General Henry Brackenbury, head of the Intelligence Department, had indicated that he was prepared to have the official *Narrative* revised, but Edward Stanhope, the secretary of state for war, would not re-open the question as he did not consider it desirable and as his predecessor had decided similarly in 1882. Edward then decided to publish a true account of the events of 22 January 1879 alongside the version in chapter 4 of the official *Narrative*, but he would have to wait until he could afford to finance this venture.⁹⁸ No such publication seems to have appeared.

Although Fanny and Edward failed to achieve either an official vindication of Durnford or a revision of the *Narrative*, publicity about the inaccuracy of the latter, both in the memoir and in their letters to the press, made it a well-known fact.⁹⁹ Without their determination, the correct order might have been permanently suppressed. In many historical studies of the battle of Isandhlwana, the fact of the genuine order is not considered as exonerating Durnford from blame. As senior officer, it is maintained, he automatically superseded Pulleine and did in fact assume command. Though Durnford is not generally considered solely to blame, Fanny’s efforts to prove that there was an earlier order to pass through the camp and to meet Chelmsford have been accepted by only one writer.¹⁰⁰ The issue of Durnford’s role in the battle remains a controversial one. As for the accusations against Offy Shepstone and the role of the military authorities in the court of inquiry, both matters still

await thorough investigation, and it may well be that no satisfactory answer will ever be found to the mystery.

In her fight to defend Durnford's reputation, Fanny displayed unbridled faith in the justness of her cause, which ultimately she saw as a fight for truth and justice. This perception of her aim and motivation was equal to that of the bishop. He undertook to fight for the Hlubi, Phuthini and the Zulu on the side of truth and justice against the Natal government, the colonists and the British government.¹⁰¹ Neither the bishop nor Durnford, the two men Fanny loved most in the world, ever shirked their duty as they perceived it to be, and Fanny truly upheld this standard.

Whether one considers her ambitions in the Durnford case unrealistic, or her theories unjustified, one cannot but admire the courage and tenacity with which she fought against the highest military authority in Britain, the powerful Shepstone family in Natal, public indifference, failing health, and Victorian conventions of respectability. She was prepared to sacrifice all for this cause, and indeed lost friends and peace of mind. Perhaps she injured her health, but it is equally possible that her obsession kept her alive longer than was anticipated. Fanny never lost courage or hope. When she read the decision of the court of inquiry, she wrote to Chesson that though it had given her a death blow, it nevertheless 'rouses my spirit of resistance more than ever.'¹⁰²

Certain sections of the public of Natal became aware of her involvement when the case was publicised in 1886, and no doubt interested speculation was provoked. One writer has asserted that this gave rise to the legend that Fanny and Durnford had been engaged, Durnford's marriage having been either forgotten or never known.¹⁰³ Be that as it may, to the contemporary public at large, Fanny Colenso's reputation remained that of a writer and staunch defender of the Zulu people and their king, and the newspaper obituaries remained silent on her equally passionate defence of Durnford.

Insofar as publicity of her involvement would probably not have benefited her case, Fanny would have approved of this. She never wanted her interest in Durnford publicised, but when it became obvious that she would have to give evidence at the court of inquiry, which she desired to do, she wrote to Sophie Colenso asking if she and Frank would not call their expected third child Durnford. The case would publicise the warmth of her friendship with that officer, and having her brother give evidence of a family friendship with Durnford would justify her concern. This, she said, would 'entirely protect me from the shafts of the world.'¹⁰⁴ By September 1886, however, she was so embittered by the farcical inquiry that she was prepared to risk her reputation

to publicise the authorities' iniquity: 'The world – I hope – will say that I am a Colenso, implying sympathy or contempt according to their own views of life etc., &, if not, the world must think what it pleases!'¹⁰⁵

NOTES

- 1 Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*: 134–135; Fanny Colenso, *History of the Zulu War and its Origin*: 237–238.
- 2 Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 287.
- 3 C. de Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor in South Africa: A Study in Politics and Economics* (London: Cass, 1937; reprint 1965): 128.
- 4 *ibid*: 222.
- 5 P.J. Colenbrander, 'An imperial high commissioner and the making of a war' *Reality* 11(1) 1979: 16.
- 6 C. de B. Webb, 'Lines of power: the high commissioner, the telegraph and the war of 1879' *Natalia* 8 (1978): 32–33; Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 253; De Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor in South Africa*: 136.
- 7 *ibid*: 145, 215; Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 270–271.
- 8 N. Etherington, 'The meaning of Shepstone's coronation of Cetshwayo', paper presented at the Conference on the Anglo-Zulu War 1879, Durban, 1979: 5, 10–13, 19.
- 9 *ibid*: 24, 25–26, 29–30; Kennedy, 'The fatal diplomacy': 9; J. Guy, 'The British invasion of Zululand: some thoughts for the centenary year' *Reality* 11(1) 1979: 9.
- 10 *ibid*. But see Webb, 'Lines of power': 33–34 and Colenbrander, 'An imperial high commissioner and the making of war': 18–19. See also P. Maylam, 'The official mind and the war: the view from the Colonial Office', paper presented at the Conference on the Anglo-Zulu War 1879, Durban, 1979: 10; and De Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor in South Africa*: 223.
- 11 Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*: 129; Maylam, 'The official mind and the war': 5–6.
- 12 Colenbrander, 'An imperial high commissioner and the making of a war': 18.
- 13 Etherington, 'The meaning of Shepstone's coronation of Cetshwayo': 30; Webb, 'Lines of power': 33–34.
- 14 See Colenbrander, 'An imperial high commissioner and the making of a war' for discussion of the ultimatum clauses.
- 15 Maylam, 'The official mind and the war': 9.
- 16 De Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor in South Africa*: 228, 230.
- 17 Webb, 'Lines of power': 31, 34–36. See also Maylam, 'The official mind and the war': 7–8.
- 18 Etherington, 'The meaning of Shepstone's coronation of Cetshwayo': 23.
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- 20 Man, 'Colonel Anthony William Durnford in the history of Natal and Zululand, 1873–1879': 43.
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- 27 *Natal Witness*, 28 January 1879, 1 February 1879; *Times of Natal*, 29 January 1879.
 - 28 *Times of Natal*, 16 May 1879.
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 - 30 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 24 June 1883.
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 - 32 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa*: 121; Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 322; Thompson, 'Wolseley and South Africa': 172.
 - 33 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mr Sanderson, 3 July 1879.
 - 34 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Mr Sanderson, 5 March 1879, 21 July 1879. See also Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 305.
 - 35 *ibid.*: 272, 327; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mr Sanderson, 3 July 1879.
 - 36 Coupland, *Zulu Battle Piece*: 42; Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*: 129; Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 34; John W. Colenso, 'A sermon of 1879: "What doth the Lord require of us"' *Reality* 11(1) 1979: 6–7.
 - 37 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 340.
 - 38 Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*: 128, 129.
 - 39 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 345; Barber, 'The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879': 172, 176.
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 - 41 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 22 January 1884. See also *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 8 November 1882.
 - 42 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mr Sanderson, 5 March 1879.
 - 43 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Mr Sanderson, 2 August 1879; Durnford, *Isandhlwana, 22nd January 1879: A Narrative, Compiled from Official and Reliable Sources* (London: P.S. King, 1879).
 - 44 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa*: 282; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 22 May 1882.
 - 45 *Natal Witness*, 29 January 1880, 12 February 1880.
 - 46 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 2 June 1880 and Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 10 June 1881.
 - 47 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa*: 251–252, footnote; Fanny Colenso, *History of the Zulu War and its Origin*: vi; RHL, ASS, Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/12, C 130/16, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 27 January [1880?], 4 July 1880. For a description of the bishop's *Digest* see Fanny Colenso, *The Ruin of Zululand* volume 1 (London: Ridgeway, 1884): 157.
 - 48 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/16, Fanny Colenso to Mr Chesson, 4 July 1880; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mr Leyland, Letters despatched, [n.d.].
 - 49 Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*: 128.
 - 50 In this she was incorrect. Although the Earl of Kimberley inaugurated a policy to encourage the South African colonies towards confederation in 1871, it was not until 1875, a year after Carnarvon became colonial secretary, that a definite policy of confederation was initiated. See Thompson, 'Wolseley and South Africa': 69, 73–77.
 - 51 Fanny Colenso, *History of the Zulu War and its Origin*: 7.
 - 52 *ibid.*: 67–77, 110–111. See also *ibid.*: 53–54.
 - 53 Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*: 129. See also Fanny Colenso, *History of the Zulu*

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- War and its Origin*: 128–129; and Etherington, ‘The meaning of Shepstone’s coronation of Cetshwayo’: 28.
- 54 Fanny Colenso, *History of the Zulu War and its Origin*: 179, 187.
- 55 *ibid*: 143, 167, 187 and chapter 11 especially 201, 232–234 and 245–246.
- 56 *ibid*: 223.
- 57 *ibid*: 64–66, 71, 180, 251–254.
- 58 *ibid*: 6, 74.
- 59 *ibid*: 162; C.T. Binns, *The Last Zulu King: The Life and Death of Cetshwayo* (London: Longmans, 1963): 214.
- 60 Fanny Colenso, *History of the Zulu War and its Origin*: 72; J. Wright, ‘Beyond the Washing of the Spears’ *Reality* 11(1) 1979: 3.
- 61 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/16, 25, 30, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 4 July 1880, 18 May 1881, 15 July 1881; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 16 February 1881, 22 May 1882; *ibid.*, general letter from Fanny Colenso, 26 November 1881; *Natal Witness*, 22 July 1880.
- 62 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/16, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 4 July 1880; Fanny Colenso, *History of the Zulu War and its Origin*: v.
- 63 Etherington, ‘The meaning of Shepstone’s coronation of Cetshwayo’: 33. See also B. Nicholls, ‘Frances Ellen Colenso and the Zulu War’, paper presented at the Conference on the Anglo-Zulu War 1879, Durban, 1979: 9.
- 64 *ibid*.
- 65 RHL, ASS, Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/16, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 4 July 1880.
- 66 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mr Sanderson, 1 May 1879. See also Fanny Colenso, *History of the Zulu War and its Origin*: 274, 277, 279, 281, 294–300; Durnford, *Isandhlwana*: 3–4, 10–11; and Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 439.
- 67 Jackson, ‘Isandhlwana’: 40–41.
- 68 Coupland, *Zulu Battle Piece*: 114–120 and note A 135–136; Man, ‘Colonel Anthony William Durnford in the history of Natal and Zululand, 1873–1879’: 55–58; Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 439–440.
- 69 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/21, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 7 August 1880.
- 70 *ibid.*, C 130/24, 33, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 7 May 1881, 3 August 1881; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 10 February 1881.
- 71 R.W. Leyland, *A Holiday in South Africa* (London: Sampson Low, 1882); Nicholls, ‘Frances Ellen Colenso and the Zulu War’: 12; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 9 April 1882.
- 72 NA, Col Col, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, 1 August 1886; *ibid.*, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mrs Lyell, 21 August [1880?]; RHL, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/15, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 29 April 1880. During these months in Europe, Fanny painted portraits and screens, and she and her mother sent Christmas card drawings to an exhibition. See NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mrs Lyell, 14 August 1881; and KCAL, Colenso Papers, Ms. Col. 9.04, KCM 1846, Fanny Colenso to Charles Bunyon, 10 March 1881.
- 73 Great Britain, War Office, *Narrative of the Field Operations Connected with the Zulu War of 1879* (London: HMSO, 1881, reprint 1907). See Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier’s Life and Work in South Africa*: Appendix E: 361–364 and 372–375 for Chelmsford’s speeches and letter to the *Times*.
- 74 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 1 January 1882, 9

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- April 1882, 8 June 1885 and Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 17 January 1882; NA, Col Col, box 6, Mr Mansel to Fanny Colenso, [20?] March 1882; Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa*: vi.
- 75 Jackson, 'Isandhlwana': 32, footnote 6.
- 76 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa*: 261–262.
- 77 *ibid.*: 222–223, second footnote on 222; Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 338.
- 78 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso (1881, no. 53) [probably March 1882] and Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 8 November 1882.
- 79 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 8 November 1882; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to E. Durnford, 31 August 1885.
- 80 Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa*: Appendix F: 400–402, Appendix G: 403–406.
- 81 *Natal Witness*, 29 May 1879, 25 January 1881, 29 January 1883, 7 February 1883.
- 82 *Times of Natal*, 15 July 1884.
- 83 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, (1881, no.53), [probably March 1882] and Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 13 March 1883.
- 84 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Frank and Sophie Colenso, 2 March 1886 and Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 13 March 1883; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. 18, C 130/59, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 14 September 1886; NA, Col Col, box 7, C. Luard to Harriette Colenso, 2 September 1886.
- 85 The following outline has been taken from two sources: NA, Col Col, box 8, 'Documents re alleged theft of papers from the body of Col. A.W. Durnford by Offy Shepstone'; and R.W.F. Droogleever, 'The role of Offy Shepstone in Swaziland, 1886–1895' (MA, University of Natal, 1976): Appendix A: 265–273.
- 86 Offy's witnesses were Trooper Cook, Lt Royston and Jabez Molife, Anthony Durnford's after-rider.
- 87 Droogleever, 'The role of Offy Shepstone in Swaziland, 1886–1895': 269.
- 88 NA, Col Col, box 6, E. Durnford to Fanny Colenso, 27 August 1884.
- 89 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 27 July 1886.
- 90 NA, Col Col, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, 17 August 1886, 10 November 1886; *ibid.*, box 7, C. Luard to Harriette Colenso, 2 September 1886.
- 91 *ibid.*, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, 1 August 1886; *ibid.*, box 8, Fanny Colenso to L. Nicholson, 13 August 1886; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18 C, 130/55, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 11 August 1886.
- 92 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/59, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 14 September 1886; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Sir A. Clarke, 2 September 1886.
- 93 *ibid.*, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, 17 August 1886; *ibid.*, box 8, Fanny Colenso to E. Durnford, 6 September 1886; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/57, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 23 August 1886.
- 94 NA, Col Col, box 7, E. Durnford to Fanny Colenso, 18 October [1886?], 21 January [1887].
- 95 *ibid.*, box 7, G. Howard to Fanny Colenso, 20 October 1886.
- 96 *ibid.*, E. Durnford to Fanny Colenso, 23 November 1886.
- 97 See NA, Col Col, box 9, ms. copy 'My chief and I – 5 years later'. See also RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/67, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 6 December 1886.
- 98 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1293, E. Durnford to Frank Colenso, 5 August 1887.
- 99 The incorrect version of the order, which appears on page 31 of the *Narrative of the Field Operations Connected with the Zulu War* influenced certain nineteenth-century histories. See, for example A. Wilmot, *History of the Zulu War* (London: Richardson and Best, 1880): 54 and J.P. Mackinnon and S. Shadbolt, *The South African Campaign 1879* (London: Eyre

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& Spottiswoode, 1973; reprint of 1882 edition): 8. One account that differed was that of Col. Vetch, who wrote Durnford's biography for the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1887). He pointed out that Durnford had not been ordered to assume command and said that Durnford acted for the best. Recent accounts, however, give the correct version. See, for example, Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 338; D. Clammer, *The Zulu War* (London: Pan, 1975): 50; and G.A. Chadwick, 'The Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, Isandhlwana and Rorke's Drift' *Military History Journal* 4(4) January 1979: 120.

100 Jackson, 'Isandhlwana': 40–41.

101 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 273, 283, 340.

102 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/58, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 28 August 1886.

103 Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*: 226.

104 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 23 March 1885.

105 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/59, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 14 September 1886.

4

FRANCES ELLEN COLENZO: HER
DEFENCE OF THE ZULU PEOPLE,
1880–1887, AND ASSESSMENT OF HER
CHARACTER AND CAREER

The publication of the *History of the Zulu War* in 1880 marked Fanny Colenso's entry into the arena of public debate on British imperial policy, and Natal government actions, in Zululand. Although one of Fanny's main objects in going to England in late 1879 was to further her art studies, she nevertheless began to devote a great deal of her spare time to journalism. While resident in England she became an avid correspondent in such papers as the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Spectator*, and a contributor to literary journals like *Macmillan's Magazine*.¹ She would have liked to be appointed the Natal political correspondent to a British paper, but her offer to the *Daily News* was ignored. In 1882 she was asked to write the leaders for the *Diamond News*, but nothing came of this arrangement as she differed radically from the paper on the Boer question.² At one time Frank Colenso accused her of neglecting her art for writing, but she defended herself on the grounds that her health restricted her outings, and her writing only occupied her evenings. This exchange occurred when Fanny was in Rome, both to escape the English winter and to study classical art. Here her daily routine was regular: painting in the morning, going out in the afternoon – weather permitting – and writing in the evenings, which included private correspondence as well as articles on Zulu affairs.³

Fanny had, as has been mentioned in the previous chapter, made contact with Frederick Chesson of the Aborigines Protection Society (APS) when she arrived in England in late 1879. As secretary of that body, he was sympathetic to the Zulu cause and he carried some weight in public affairs. The APS had approached the British government on more than one occasion on behalf of the black peoples of Natal and Zululand, notably on issues in which Bishop Colenso had been involved, such as the atrocities committed by white volunteers after the Langelibalele affair and the question of compensation to the Phuthini in 1874. The Colensos could also expect to be sympathetically received when they appealed to the society for subsidies on special occasions, such as the visit to Bishopstowe of the Zulu embassy or delegation of May 1880, which included 200 Zulu and for which the Natal government's allowance was

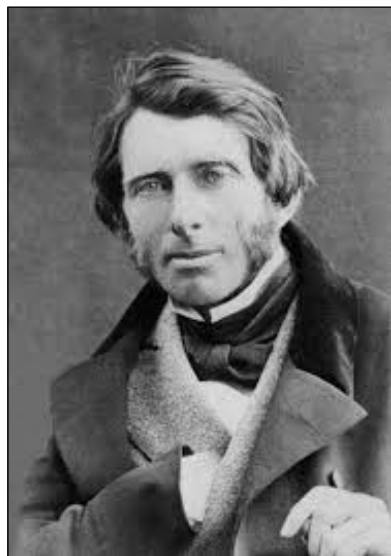
inadequate.⁴ Fanny usually sent copies of her articles and letters to Chesson for approval and correction in an attempt to unite their efforts on behalf of the Zulu. Most of her information on events in South Africa came from her family at Bishopstowe, but she also received Natal newspapers, read the English papers, and was sent information by Chesson. She only met him for the first time in June 1881, but by then their friendship was firmly established and it remained so up to her death in 1887.⁵



Frederick Chesson

Not all Fanny's contributions to the press were printed. The problems of Ireland, she knew, were of more interest to the British public than Zululand, and sometimes her writing was too long and verbose. But failure to achieve publication did not deter her. She looked on her and Chesson's efforts as a struggle for truth and justice, which they could not neglect despite ill-health and lack of success.⁶ Apart from her review of Parr's book and her reply to Frere concerning the misquotations from the *History*, dealt with in the previous chapter, Fanny also wrote the following: a paper on the Zulu embassy and on the justice of restoring Cetshwayo to the throne; a review of Edward Durnford's second pamphlet on Isandhlwana which she called a 'perfect' piece of work; a letter that appeared in the *Standard* of 28 January 1881 concerning the reply by Under-Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs Mountstuart Grant Duff to Sir David Wedderburn's question in the House of Commons on the Zulu embassy (a question based on information supplied by Fanny); an article entitled 'A royal Zulu progress over Bishopstowe' that appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine*; a paper on the Transvaal, part of which was printed in the *Spectator*; and a short letter on Cetshwayo and Langalibalele, printed in the *Daily News* and *Echo* in August 1881.⁷ In September of that year, she replied to a letter by John Robinson, editor of the *Natal Mercury*, which appeared in the *Times*, and which had apparently denounced the restoration of Cetshwayo and attacked the bishop. Of Robinson, she wrote to Chesson: 'Of course it is amazing to have to take any notice of such a contemptible little person, but I do not think I ought to let his accusation against my Father pass unnoticed.'⁸

Early in 1880, Fanny had visited John Ruskin, the leading art critic and social reformer, at his home Brantwood in the Lake District. Ruskin was a public supporter of Edward Burne-Jones, one of the last of the Pre-Raphaelite artists, whose wife became one of Fanny's most intimate friends. Fanny later called herself one of Ruskin's pupils, and valued his influence on behalf of the Zulu. In January of that year she had written to Chesson, on Ruskin's behalf, asking him for reliable details about the blowing up of either Sekhukhune's or Moorosi's stronghold by Sir Garnet Wolseley. She was not prepared to rely on her own knowledge of the incident as she felt that a man of Ruskin's



John Ruskin

influence must have facts 'accurate beyond the possibility of question.'⁹ When the first volume of her next book (on the post-1879 history of Zululand) was published, she arranged for its preliminary sections to be sent to Ruskin. This presumably consisted of the preface and introduction, which outlined her aim to undertake a critical account of events in Zululand from 1879 to 1883, and possibly also the annotated contents pages.¹⁰

On her journey back to Natal, during October and November 1881, Fanny found herself a well-known writer on Zulu affairs and defender of Cetshwayo. Reactions to her work varied from admiration and approval to violent criticism. In Cape Town she visited the exiled Zulu king and was given touching proof of the warmth of his regard for the name of Colenso.¹¹

Once back in Natal in late 1881, Fanny became totally involved in her contribution to Edward Durnford's memoir of Anthony Durnford, and in April 1882, began her quest for evidence to prove the latter's innocence. For some months she had no time for painting, to her mother's concern, but Mrs Colenso nevertheless observed that it was important that Fanny should be 'comparatively' happy, as no doubt she was while working on Durnford's defence.¹² Fanny soon returned to her art, however. While staying with Robert Colenso and his wife Emily in Durban in August 1882, a regular winter sojourn for her health's sake, she was painting once more and the following year she contributed three oil paintings and a water colour to the third annual

art exhibition in Natal. She felt that at last she was making progress as an artist, but by the end of 1884 she had apparently come to the conclusion that her health had destroyed her chance of becoming a professional. She continued painting, nevertheless, and in mid-1885 was discussing setting up a studio at home to work in.¹³

Fanny had consulted doctors in England in 1881 and been told that she had chronic consumption in the right lung. She told her brother Frank, but insisted that her family at Bishopstowe be spared the worst. As a semi-invalid, she was confined to her room with a fire from 4 pm until 11 am during the winter months, and had to hand over to Agnes her housekeeping duties.¹⁴ Fanny believed that she still had a chance of living a long life, but wrote of her possible death with calm stoicism, an attitude no doubt induced by the unhappy circumstances of her relationship with Durnford and his death, and by her strong faith. To Frank she wrote, 'Oh! My dear Boy – if you were in my place, w[oul]d you desire a long life? If I have to live it, please God it shall not be useless, but ...'¹⁵

On 20 June 1883, Bishop John Colenso died at Bishopstowe. Fanny was in Durban when he fell ill and missed seeing her father for the last time by two hours. To the four grieving women at Bishopstowe, it was as if the light of their lives had been extinguished. Fanny wrote to Frank that she would have given the rest of her life to be able see her beloved father for the last time. It was after all for his sake that she cared to live. She was later to tell Canon Basil Wilberforce that, to his family, the bishop was 'sacred', and he is often referred to in their letters as 'He' and 'Him'.¹⁶

Three weeks before he died, and on the last occasion that Fanny talked to him, the bishop had suggested to her that she write a sequel to the *History of the Zulu War* to bring the tragic events in Zululand up to date, and he had left a listing of headings to give her guidance. Fanny was greatly pleased that her literary efforts had been approved by him, and felt particularly anxious to do this project well since it was his last request to her. But she found it extremely difficult to start work, mainly because of the grief and 'mental prostration' she suffered after the bishop's death.¹⁷ She also experienced difficulty in planning the work as her idea of its dimensions differed from those of Frank and Chesson. Frank wanted it to appear as a pamphlet. Fanny agreed that the bishop probably meant her to write an article; but before he died, she wrote, he had known that she intended a more ambitious project. An article would have to appear immediately, and she did not have the strength to work so quickly, so she planned a full-scale, two-volume history of Zululand from the end of

1879. She felt very discouraged by Frank's attitude, particularly in her weak state of health. But her mother had once observed: 'I suppose those who know F[rances] are inclined to let her have her own way', and in this instance Fanny held out against Frank's advice and proceeded to write a two-volume work.¹⁸

Fanny wanted Edward Durnford to collaborate with her in the writing, but Edward was too ill to help her. Frank offered himself as collaborator, but Fanny rejected this suggestion as it needed, she wrote, a special relationship between authors to make collaboration at such a distance successful, and she and Edward had achieved success through long practice. But she did accept Frank's offer of revision and criticism, and was prepared to let him have the relevant Blue Books from which she would be working, if he felt an article was necessary.¹⁹ She also consulted Harriette frequently, and sent Frank the completed manuscript of each chapter, which he, and sometimes Edward, then checked and corrected.

For the first volume, Fanny gave Frank strict instructions not to alter certain statements, such as repetitions regarding Chelmsford, Isandhlwana, and the disputed territory. After reading the proofs, she regretted not having given Frank greater freedom to alter her text, particularly with regard to her numerous italics. She was also aware of many repetitions. But she still insisted that all references to Anthony Durnford, and critical statements about the Boers in the second volume, were to remain unaltered. Frank was responsible for finding the frontispiece for both volumes, one of each of the bishop and Cetshwayo, and for compiling the index and list of contents.²⁰

By January 1884, Fanny had sent to Frank the final chapters of the first volume. Frank had difficulty in finding a publisher, and started printing at his own risk to ensure that the book would not be too outdated before it appeared. By mid-year he had found a publisher, and the first volume appeared under the title *The Ruin of Zululand: An Account of British Doings in Zululand since the Invasion of 1879*.²¹

Fanny worked under considerable disadvantages in writing the *Ruin*. She acknowledged that the state of her health had been detrimental to the first volume and that her absence in Durban at a certain time had prevented her from consulting Harriette and from having access to necessary reference sources. She also worked hard on other literary projects: a couple of articles on Zulu affairs (one of which never arrived in England), and proofreading the bishop's Zulu dictionary which was being published by Peter Davis and which proved a tiring and demanding task. She was also busy on the Durnford case,

and preparing for the art exhibition.²² For a semi-invalid it was a remarkable performance.

In September 1884, when she was well advanced in writing her second volume of the *Ruin*, disaster struck. A veld fire destroyed Bishopstowe. Fanny lost the furniture Anthony Durnford had made for her, all her letters, photos, art materials and paintings, as well as four genuine Burne-Jones drawings. By chance, her evidence against Offy Shepstone in the Durnford case was saved, but her material for the conclusion of volume two of the *Ruin* was destroyed. She therefore decided to finish the second volume at that point, and re-collect her material for a third volume. Deteriorating health prevented this volume from being completed, however.²³



Garnet Wolseley

The second volume was published in 1885, but the book did not sell and proved a financial burden. Friends such as Katherine Lyell helped with costs, but Dora Lees, to whom Fanny appealed for help, was unable to contribute. Harriette decided to spend some of the money which came to the Colensos after the fire through the Colenso Sympathy Fund on publication costs, but it has been pointed out that it was probably the English relatives who ultimately paid for the *Ruin*.²⁴

The *Ruin* is a record of events in Zululand from Wolseley's settlement of September 1879 to July 1883 when the royal umunzi Ulundi, was sacked by Cetshwayo's rival Zibhebhu. The work concludes with a summary of subsequent events to the time of Cetshwayo's death in February 1884. It was the summary that was to have been expanded in the projected, but never completed, third volume.

As might be expected from the pen of this author, the account of events in the *Ruin* is based on two strongly held and uncompromising convictions. The first is that the majority of Zulu were deeply loyal to Cetshwayo and that Wolseley's settlement (which deposed and exiled the king, divided the country into thirteen independent kingdoms, and ignored the king's relatives), had been forced on the Zulu people with a reckless disregard for their deep-rooted national sentiments and prejudices. As for the architect of the settlement,

Fanny's opinion was blunt: 'Having thus crushed the Zulu nation beneath his iron heel, Sir Garnet Wolseley passed on to find fresh fields for his favourite occupation of creating a striking effect.'²⁵ The Colensos believed that the settlement was an attempt to destroy the political influence of the House of Shaka, by placing Cetshwayo's relatives under anti-royalist chiefs such as Zibhebhu and John Dunn, and by stripping them of all means of supporting themselves.²⁶

The second main argument in the *Ruin* is that there was a small group of influential officials in Natal who were determined, out of self-interest, to hide the fact that the Zulu desired the king's restoration. They deliberately supported, directly and indirectly, the ambitions and aggressions of leaders like Zibhebhu, Hamu and John Dunn who were the main antagonists of the king and his loyalist uSuthu. These officials thus fomented the civil war that eventually brought ruin to the Zulu people. Moreover, to justify their dishonest and expedient policy in Zululand, these officials had concocted a 'mass of misstatements, imaginary promises, and false deductions' to deceive the British government.²⁷ Fanny could not of course resist linking up post-1879 events with the preceding seven years that had been so crucial to the bishop and so important to Fanny personally: the self-interest and dishonesty of Natal officials, she stressed, was equally responsible for all the past disasters in the history of that colony, such as the Langalibalele affair, the Transvaal annexation and the Anglo-Zulu War.

Among the officials selected for special criticism were of course the two senior members of the Shepstone family. Sir Theophilus had vowed to punish Cetshwayo for his refusal to cede the disputed territory to the Transvaal, and to prove to the king and his people that except as Shepstone's humble servant, he could not live or reign. A recent paper has upheld the view that Shepstone suffered loss of face in his attempts to influence Zulu affairs in 1861 and 1873, and that he was frustrated in his attempts to gain control of the disputed territory and to enhance his prestige.²⁸ John Shepstone, who followed his brother as SNA, had proved how untrustworthy he was in an incident in 1858, known as the Matyana [Matshana] affair, and her criticism of these two men was made explicit in the *Ruin*. The SNA's office, she wrote, 'through its misrepresentations, either from carelessness or else from interested motives, and through its utter ignorance of the value of truth and justice, has for many years been at the root of all the misery wrought in this part of South Africa.'²⁹ Melmoth Osborn, who was appointed British resident in the south of Zululand at the time of Cetshwayo's restoration in the central portion of his former



Henry Bulwer

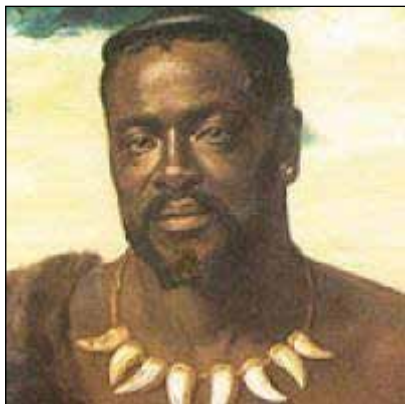


Theophilus Shepstone

kingdom was, in Fanny's opinion, equally culpable. He was obstructive to the uSuthu, was obviously disposed to favour the anti-royalists, and was merely the tool of Sir Henry Bulwer, who in turn was in collusion with the Shepstons.³⁰ Bulwer, so Fanny's argument went, was inveterately prejudiced against Cetshwayo, and had made no attempt to meet the king. His informants, the Shepstons and Osborn, had purposely deceived him and allowed him to deceive himself. Sir Evelyn Wood, another government official, had compounded the damage. At a meeting with the Zulu leaders at Inhlanzatshe in August 1881 he had flouted Zulu custom, permitted a gross insult to be paid to the exiled king, and had proved by his deliberations that Britain could not and would not intervene in Zulu inter-chiefdom rivalries. As a result of this meeting, the uSuthu were attacked by Hamu and Zibhebhu.

In fact, Fanny concluded, the violence committed against the uSuthu was with the direct and indirect connivance of local whites, as the anti-royalists themselves claimed, and this despite the fact that the taking up of arms was against one of the conditions under which the appointed chiefs had been granted their authority. These officials she called 'the evil geniuses of Zululand'.³¹

There was one other major source of disruption and anarchy, and this was the white adventurer and trader, John Dunn, who had formed a close relationship with Cetshwayo in the years before the war. Fanny maintained that he had commended himself to Wolseley as a suitable candidate for a kingdom because of his treachery to Cetshwayo, and that he was widely distrusted by the Zulu



Cetshwayo kaMpande

because of his earlier connections with the British government as an emigration agent, as a British spy during the Anglo-Zulu War, and as the appointed agent at the end of the war to collect the royal cattle. It was Dunn, she claimed, who brought Cetshwayo's cousin Zibhebhu into prominence; he who indoctrinated that chief into betraying the king; and he who influenced the appointment to one of the thirteen kingdoms of the Sotho chief Hlubi, a known antagonist to the Zulu. Fanny quoted from a report

of W.Y. Campbell, special correspondent to the *Natal Advertiser*, to support her contention that Dunn was believed by the Zulu to be the centre of anti-Cetshwayo opposition in the southern reserve, over which Osborn presided, and that his reports to the Natal government were sent on unquestioned to the British authorities. Dunn's influence in the appointment of the chiefs, particularly Zibhebhu, has been recently corroborated.³²

Fanny naturally considered that the restoration of Cetshwayo was the only just and honorable course open to the British government, but her jubilation that this was to be arranged was short-lived, for the way in which it was implemented by the Natal officials doomed it to ignominious failure. The reasons for this failure, as given by Fanny, can be summarised briefly as follows. First, the man under whose supervision the restoration took place, Natal's governor, Henry Bulwer, was not only deeply opposed to such a policy, but carried it out under protest and with the firm belief and intention that it could not and would not succeed. That circumstance was the direct cause of the wretched state of anarchy and destitution into which Zululand was plunged after the king's return. She added that Bulwer should have done the honourable thing and either resigned or carried out the policy loyally; but he did neither.³³

Second, the territorial arrangements were inequitable and unworkable. The setting aside of a reserve for the resettlement of Zulu who did not desire to come under Cetshwayo's authority was defensible only if the area were very restricted (the Colensos stuck to the belief that the number of anti-royalists was very small) and if it were free of white, particularly colonial, influence. Instead, the whole of southern Zululand, including Dunn's territory, had

been incorporated into the reserve. Fanny saw the arrangement as a modified version of Shepstone's long-cherished desire for a black kingdom, which she distrusted and which she claimed was based on the implausible argument that Natal was overcrowded with blacks. Furthermore, it was, she believed, implemented with the deliberate intention of reducing Cetshwayo's area of authority as much as possible. Elsewhere the arrangements were no better. In the drawing of boundaries in the north between the king and Zibhebhu (who was to remain independent), loyal uSuthu were left under the latter's rule; and to compound the confusion, three different boundaries were fixed and communicated to the Zulu. As Fanny said, 'it is hard to see how a better plan for making war in Zululand inevitable could have been adopted.'³⁴

Third, the conditions under which Cetshwayo was restored, and the manner in which these conditions were presented to the Zulu, were not conducive to strong, effective government nor to strengthening the bonds of loyalty of the weaker chiefs. Those who were present when the king was brought back to Zululand saw him being treated with suspicion and insult by the whites and he was not permitted to announce the conditions to the assembled uSuthu himself; this was done by his ex-captors. Moreover, the conditions of his restoration were such that he was deprived of effective legislative, executive and judicial authority. Particularly critical was the prohibition on the resuscitation of the military system, for this 'abolished not merely the fighting power, but also the equivalent of the whole civil service of a civilized country.'³⁵ The entire structure of law and order was thus undermined and nothing put in its place.

Since the Shepstones and Osborn were familiar with Zulu custom, they were, in Fanny's opinion, directly responsible for this travesty of a restoration policy, and for its tragic results. Though she was to alter her opinion later, she still at this point believed that the British government's intentions were just and wise and argued that it had never anticipated or intended that the restoration would be so engineered. Commenting on the policy of the local officials, in the light of Shepstone's report to Bulwer on the terms of restoration, Fanny wrote: 'The Zulu people's personal interests were to be enlisted against the King; his power and influence were to be lowered as much as possible; his territory curtailed; Zibebu [*sic*] set to oppose him on one side, the Reserve to entice and draw away his people from him (if possible) on the other'. The conditions by which he was to rule, she continued, made him a mere puppet, for they prevented him from exercising effective authority. Furthermore, the 'self-adjusting machinery' of disorder and misrule was to 'act in the direction of ultimately securing peace to the country by – bringing about Cetshwayo's

death, the division of Zululand between ourselves and the Dutch Boers, and the utter destruction of the Zulu nation!’³⁶

This is in effect what happened by the end of 1887, three years after the *Ruin* was written. The return of Cetshwayo simply plunged the country into increased violence and by the end of February 1884 the king was dead. His successor, Dinuzulu, turned in desperation to the Boers for help against Zibhebhu, the north of Zululand experienced bloody anarchy, and the Boers set up the New Republic as a reward for services rendered. By 1887, ‘the Zulu nation in its old form had practically ceased to exist’.³⁷ At this point Britain stepped in, negotiated with the New Republic over its boundaries late in 1886, and in the following year annexed the rest of Zululand to the Crown.

In the light of recent published and unpublished research, it is possible to attempt a brief assessment of the accuracy of the *Ruin*. Fanny’s assertion that there was a Bulwer-Shepstone clique in Natal, with influence in London, that this clique played a crucial role in events in Zululand in the 1880s, and that the interests of this local group were distinct from those of imperial Britain, has received broad confirmation. Her most serious misjudgement, it seems, was that she overrated the influence of the Natal officials in England. The same research has also confirmed her general claim that the restoration policy was adapted to suit Natal’s interests, that it became a policy of partition, and that anarchy was a direct result.³⁸

What she failed to take sufficient account of were strong fissiparous tendencies in Zulu society, which acted against the national interest and found expression under the conditions created by the Wolseley settlement.³⁹ The Colensos were deeply loyal to the House of Shaka and Fanny, it seems, either ignored or was unable to see the structural weaknesses inherent in that society. She tended to accept uSuthu claims uncritically and her analysis of the British Blue Books, though useful, was not always accurate. Nevertheless, without the *Ruin*, its transcripts of Zulu evidence and its interpretations from the uSuthu point of view, our knowledge of Zululand in the early 1880s would be far less complete and more one-sided. Fanny indicated the extreme complexity of the post-war situation in Zululand, which her contemporaries were disposed to disregard, and which has only recently begun to receive attention again.⁴⁰

Despite its achievements, the *Ruin* is open to serious criticism. By the time she started writing it, Fanny was no longer capable of restrained opinion. The bloodshed and anarchy in Zululand, and the sufferings of the uSuthu and Cetshwayo particularly, were deeply painful to the Colensos. Not only did Fanny view those events as tragic and entirely avoidable, she also believed

that the iniquities committed against the Zulu had shortened her father's life. The title of the book sufficiently indicates the feelings of the author. She made it clear in the preface to the *Ruin*, and in her correspondence, that her object was not to achieve literary perfection, but to achieve a higher end, which was twofold: to carry on the bishop's Christian moral crusade and to produce a crushing indictment of British policy in Zululand. Fanny wanted her book to result in immediate remedial action and she hoped for the resignation of at least one local official; but she was to be disappointed.⁴¹

By sacrificing literary standards to emotional objectives, Fanny produced a thoroughly indigestible book. One of its major failings was repetition. This was partially due to the fact that she posted off chapters to Frank as they were finished without retaining copies. She was aware of the risks, but told Frank that she would rather err on the side of repetition than omission. Furthermore, she could not resist mentioning earlier events in Natal and Zulu history which deeply concerned her personally. Durnford's career, and the controversial events at Isandhlwana on 22 January and 21 May 1879, were reviewed repeatedly in copious footnotes. Whereas her references to Durnford had some relevance in the *History of the Zulu War*, in the *Ruin* her personal bias became obvious.⁴²

Besides repetitiveness the book was marred by Fanny's tortuous style. Many of her arguments became lost in a welter of detail that effectively sidetracks the reader. It is not surprising that it sold poorly. The average English reader, even if he or she had been acquainted with Zulu affairs, would have been overwhelmed by the detailed arguments and multiplicity of Zulu names. Most English people, however, were not only unfamiliar with the affairs of that small corner of the empire, but they were largely uninterested. Fanny often heard educated people say that with Ireland, a threatened war in Europe, socialism and the unemployed, they could not give much attention to Zululand.⁴³

The same thing applied to British politicians. When the first volume came out in 1884, William Gladstone was in power and adamant about non-extension of empire. Fanny sent a copy of the *Ruin* to the secretary of state who had restored Cetshwayo, Lord Kimberley (John Wodehouse), as a mark of appreciation only, as he was no longer in power. She considered his policy 'honest' in intention, not suspecting that he considered it a political move to solve the problems of Zululand without expense to Britain.⁴⁴ Britain's gradual acceptance of responsibility for Zululand came tentatively with the return to power of the Conservatives for six months in 1885 and again in August 1886. By then the *Ruin* was three years out of date, and the situation in Zululand had

worsened and become more complex with the setting up of the New Republic by freebooting Boers. Fanny sent a copy to Edward Stanhope, the new secretary of state, in December 1886, which was quite wasted as he was succeeded the following month by Sir Henry Holland. Holland was immediately sent a copy, and this was followed by a lengthy letter from Fanny in which she drew his attention to the main arguments in the book. She also warned him about using official accounts as his sole sources of information, and directed his attention to the dangers of the boundary negotiations then in progress with the Boers. She made no impression, however. He replied politely but briefly, declining to enter into argument with her, and regretting that two people who had the interests of the Zulu at heart could differ so widely. Fanny was greatly discouraged that her crusade should be so completely ignored by the government.⁴⁵

What finally influenced Britain's intervention in Zululand was probably the wider imperial concerns of security and supremacy in southern Africa. Fears of foreign intervention, the presence of German agents in Zululand, the anarchic state of that country and the existence of the New Republic played a greater role than a sense of moral responsibility to the Zulu people as a whole, or more specifically to the royal house.⁴⁶

When agreement was finally reached between Britain and the New Republic late in 1886, by which time Fanny was in England, she prophesied that the Zulu would never submit peacefully to losing their best land and the burial places of their kings. Her opinion of the British government had, by this time, undergone a considerable change. She considered the settlement 'wretched'. It was, she believed, the outcome of a conspiracy between the British and the Boers to crush the Zulu and share the spoils, a viewpoint shared by Harriette. As for the Home government, it was a 'pack of heartless, cowardly curs.' For the first time, wrote Fanny, she disagreed with Harriette and the bishop's policy on the question of peace; it would be far better for the Zulu to fight to the death than submit either to Boer or colonial control.⁴⁷ She denied categorically, on Harriette's evidence, that the uSuthu had prepared the way for the New Republic by calling in the Boers to help against Zibhebhu in 1884. Their land claims therefore had no legal substance and she recommended a royal commission to draw the boundaries so as to give back to the Zulu their traditional burial grounds. This she felt, would be the only means of inducing them to submit without force.⁴⁸

On the proposal that Britain should annex the rest of Zululand, she disagreed with Chesson, for this implied too fundamental an attack on the independence of the royal house. The scheme she recommended was similar in most points

to that of the bishop, which had been published as appendix E of volume one of the *Ruin*; namely, that a British protectorate of a limited nature be extended over Zululand and that Dinuzulu, Cetshwayo's heir, be crowned and restored to power. However, there should be a resident with strong control so that 'many salutary laws' could be gradually introduced. Naturally, the nefarious influence of Shepstone, Osborn and the Natal colonists – all of whom she labelled as robbers and tyrants – was to be totally eliminated from the protectorate. She argued that to establish this state, the Boers would have to be forcibly evicted, at British expense and with British troops.⁴⁹

Fanny's worst fears were realised in subsequent events and it is as well, perhaps, that she did not live to witness them. The British government still hesitated to commit itself to full intervention, and it was Osborn who, on his own initiative, announced that British Zululand would be annexed to the Crown in February 1887. It was to be administered on lines similar to those in British Bechuanaland; that is, ruled by proclamation by the governor of Natal. Osborn was to be resident commissioner and the influence of the hated Shepstone family remained. Determined as ever to reduce the authority of the royal house, Sir Theophilus recommended the return of Zibhebhu and the predictable result occurred. Civil war broke out once more, and in 1888 and 1889 the uSuthu leaders were imprisoned or exiled for rebellion.⁵⁰

The response of the British government to the *Ruin* was therefore negative. Fanny claimed that Sir Arthur Havelock, governor of Natal (February 1886–June 1889), had had the *Ruin* read to him during a convalescence, and that it had made him wary of the office of the SNA and determined to control the actions of that office. But she realised that his hands were tied by his instructions from the British government, and decided that he was not strong enough to act independently of those instructions and to the benefit of the Zulu.⁵¹

The response of literary reviewers is more easily established. Lady Florence Dixie, who reviewed the *Ruin* in *Vanity Fair*, privately objected to the fact that the campaign which she and that paper had pursued for Cetshwayo's restoration, had not been mentioned at all. Fanny wrote to the publicity-conscious lady explaining that as a matter of policy, she had omitted tributes to the king's white supporters as the Zulu question was complex and long enough without such extras. There were two exceptions to this principle. The one mention of the APS had been inserted by her brother without her knowledge; and the other exception was Reginald Statham of the *Natal Witness*. His defence of the Zulu was crucial, she explained, as his contributions to the British *Daily News* had been a notable answer to the flood of official 'fiction' produced

by the local officials in Natal. As a result of this defence, Statham had been attacked by local authorities, who had exerted pressure to have him sacked as correspondent for the *Daily News*, and which had resulted in a libel action against him, through the *Witness*, by John Shepstone. He lost the case on a technical point and since he had suffered personally, he deserved to be publicly defended.⁵²

The press reviews which appeared all agreed in their criticism of the intemperate language and accusations in the *Ruin*, but varied in their appreciation of Fanny's political creed, the majority of them being unsympathetic. Fanny was sure that the Natal papers would wait until Bulwer had left in October 1885 at the end of his period as governor before reviewing her book, and in this she was proved correct. The *Times of Natal* discussed it in the leader of 12 November. It pointed out that it was too out of date to influence current events, but that as an historical and critical work it was as good as could be expected coming so soon after the events with which it dealt. It criticised the book for a 'tendency to quibble' and a 'disposition to animus', but nevertheless it sympathised wholly with the author's 'noble work', and hoped it would result in a royal commission to set things right in Zululand.



John Robinson

John Robinson reviewed the book in December in the *Natal Mercury*, and naturally took the opposite view, having been one of the subjects of criticism in the *Ruin*. Fanny had called him a negrophobist, whose attitude represented the half-educated section of Natal opinion. Robinson also pointed out that it was out of date, and criticised it for being too long and complex. As an indictment of Frere's policy, he wrote, it would not shake the evidence of facts which were justifying that policy. 'As an effort of partisanship', he continued, 'these volumes are interesting; as a record of fact they are valueless.' He called Fanny's criticisms 'virulent' and pointedly

mentioned that her virulence was directed against the Natal colonists. To this Fanny replied the following month, denying the accusation and referring her readers to specific pages to support her denial.⁵³

The *St James Gazette*, whose review of the first volume of the *Ruin* had been reprinted in the *Times of Natal* in October 1884, while acknowledging the ‘chivalrous’ and ‘beautiful’ sympathy of the Colensos for the Zulu people, accused them of exercising the same baneful and informal influence over Zulu affairs that Bulwer had complained of, and which Fanny had publicised in the *Ruin* in an attempt to refute Bulwer’s accusation. The *Gazette* also accused Fanny of coming close to Anglophobia. Fanny resented this accusation, for she claimed to be, and was, deeply patriotic to Britain. She defended herself in the preface to volume two, in which she gave her definition of patriotism: if patriotism meant to love and honour one’s country, to rejoice in its virtues and blush for its wrongs, then she was patriotic. But if it meant ‘one’s country right or wrong’, then she was no patriot. The depth of her emotional attitude to England is clear in the correspondence between her and Frank over Frank’s critical opinion of England. To Fanny, England was ‘the sweetest, & noblest & best of countries in all the world’, and it was the only country that could have been honoured by the birth of her father, who personified the highest type of Englishman.⁵⁴

The *Westminster Review* was particularly opposed to Fanny’s political stance, and critical of her style. Volume one, it wrote, appeared to have been written under great mental excitement, and it was a pity that the bishop was no longer alive to guide the author into ‘more temperate language’. This reviewer, while deploring the Anglo-Zulu War and the later influence of John Dunn, was convinced that Wolseley’s settlement had been based on sound principles, that the uSuthu had been defiant towards the resident, and that Cetshwayo was an aggressive ruler of a ‘tribe of blood-thirsty savages’. It concluded with the statement: ‘It is impossible that a book of this kind can do anything but mischief.’⁵⁵

The *Saturday Review* accused Fanny of objecting to the alliance between Zibhebhu and white adventurers while approving of the Boer and uSuthu alliance of 1884. The statement upon which the *Review* made this claim appeared in an appendix which Frank had inserted and which mentioned the Boer-uSuthu alliance without condemning it. Privately Fanny regretted the appendix, and was incensed that she, who was so bitterly prejudiced against the Boers, should be accused of approving their interference in Zulu affairs. Again, in the preface to volume two, she set the record straight, deploring Boer action in Zululand and advocating their being forced out by Britain and being compensated in cattle and money, not land. In private letters she used stronger language. The Zulu would be better dead than ‘under the grinding tyranny of

the Boers ... [They are] greedy, selfish, brutal land-grabbers.’⁵⁶ On another occasion she predicted the future of South African blacks under Boer power:

I look upon the spread of their [Boer] power in S.A. as the very worst thing that could happen for the natives ... I see at no g[rea]t distance the advance of an awful day for the aborigines of S.A., when the whites, a mixed race of degraded Dutch & of the dregs of every nation in Europe, shall at last really gain the upper hand, &, independent of European control, of wh[ich] even young Natal is so anxious to get rid, shall establish a slavery so much worse than that of America that 9/10 of the masters will be Legrees.⁵⁷

Frank and Harriette did not share Fanny’s extreme detestation of the Boers, although they deplored the Boer presence in Zululand. Harriette, as Fanny explained, tended to condemn British policy more strongly than Boer policy. This was a viewpoint apparently shared by the bishop, for in 1881, when Fanny wrote a critical article on the Transvaal Boers for the *Spectator*, the bishop had written to Dr Jorissen dissociating the Colenso family from Fanny’s remarks. He pointed out that Fanny had been prejudiced against the Boers years earlier and was out of touch with events in South Africa. Condemnation of the Boers was one point on which Fanny would not compromise with anyone, not even her family, and it was largely on the Boer question that she and Statham came to the parting of the ways.⁵⁸

The alliance between Fanny and Reginald Statham had been cemented by Statham’s leader in the *Natal Witness* of 29 May 1879 in which he had taken up the defence of Durnford’s actions at Isandhlwana, extolling his heroism and blaming Chelmsford for the disaster. Fanny had rejoiced over the leader but had quibbled with Statham over one point in which he had implicitly conceded to colonial opinion about Durnford’s behaviour at the Bushman’s River Pass affair of 1873. Statham maintained that it was necessary to do that in order to sway public opinion towards the defence of Durnford’s actions in the recent disaster, but to Fanny this sacrifice of the smaller point for the greater was odious, and a denial of the ‘actual truth’. However, Statham had not only become a Durnford defender, but had also taken up the Zulu cause in August 1882; hence his special mention in the *Ruin*.

He was, however, about to blot his copybook. In 1883, he took up the Boer cause. Fanny so completely failed to comprehend how anyone could defend Boer claims in Zululand that she wondered if Statham was in the pay of the Boers. (This was a prophetic speculation, for in 1895 Statham became a paid

agent of the Transvaal Boers and continued in that capacity until 1899.)⁵⁹ When he became aware of his inclusion in the *Ruin* and aware of the anti-Boer approach of that book, he asked Fanny to include in the work a letter from him giving his views on the Boer question. She adamantly refused to include any pro-Boer statement in her book, whereupon Statham asked to be omitted entirely from the *Ruin*. Again, she refused his request. They exchanged some acrimonious correspondence and, as she explained to Chesson, became ‘at daggers drawn’. Moreover, Fanny had also come to suspect Statham of being bought by the Shepstones so as not to give evidence, which she was sure he possessed, against Offy Shepstone in the Durnford case at the court of inquiry of 1886. He was, she concluded, a morally weak man.⁶⁰

In 1885, it was decided that Fanny should go to England the following year to help Sir George Cox (1827–1902) write the biography of the bishop.⁶¹ Early that year she had come to hope that the case concerning Offy Shepstone would be heard in England and that this would give her a reason for returning to the country to which she was so deeply attached. When, instead, it was taken before a military court in Natal in April 1886, Fanny delayed travelling to Britain as long as possible in order to hear the decision of the commander-in-chief. Throughout this period, she was in a state of anxiety and indecision. On the one



George Cox

hand, she might be needed in South Africa for possible developments in the Durnford case; on the other hand, the biography might be suffering because of her continued absence. She wrote to Frank asking him to ensure that if Cox were proceeding with the writing, the friendship between Durnford and the bishop should not be omitted.⁶²

Fanny’s main role in the biographical enterprise was to help write the Zulu portion of the bishop’s career. On this point she disagreed with Cox whose attitude was that the bishop’s political career was unimportant, a ‘preposterous’ notion she said. She was to act as the agent of her mother and Harriette in this delicate and sacred duty. For their sake, Fanny swallowed her antipathy to Cox which went back some years. She never forgave him for refusing to go out to

Natal in 1880 to assist the bishop, for she believed that this refusal had cost her father his life. She felt that Cox was motivated by personal ambition and that he was utterly incapable of appreciating the bishop's supreme dedication to the cause of justice and truth. Except for the theological sections of the biography, she felt that Cox was unsuited to the assignment he had taken on. Particularly inappropriate was his writing of the political sections, given his lack of interest in Zulu affairs.

Once in England, however, Fanny kept to her work and spent some weeks at Cox's home in Yorkshire, helping him and trying hard not to quarrel with him. Cox was equally desirous to avoid friction, and even agreed to include an appendix on the Durnford case, provided Fanny kept it short. This did not appear in the book when it was published, however.⁶³

The *Life* of the bishop was very much a family affair. Frank also contributed by collecting material and reading and approving the manuscript. In November, Fanny entered the Royal Hospital for Consumptives near Ventnor on the Isle of Wight on the advice of her doctors who had warned that she would not otherwise survive the winter. Here she continued copying Cox's manuscript and was doing so up until a few weeks before her death in April 1887. Despite her annoyance over Cox's approach to the biography she nevertheless found it a source of comfort to be working daily on her father's life and writings. As



Ladies' Block, Royal National Hospital, Ventnor, I.W.

Royal National Hospital, Ventnor

she wrote to her mother, ‘in all I do I think of that first – that I am his child. It must be very good for one’s mind & soul to be occupied as I am daily now’.⁶⁴

The *Life* was published in 1887 after Fanny’s death. In the preface, Cox paid tribute to the aid Fanny had given him in preparing the chapters on native affairs. Fanny’s influence is obvious in the references to Durnford. Cox, Fanny maintained, hated soldiers and war, and could not appreciate the close and affectionate relationship between the soldier and the bishop. In the face of Fanny’s determination, and her role as agent for Mrs Colenso and Harriette, Cox obviously overcame his inclination to largely ignore the bishop’s political career, and a third of the two-volume work dealt with this aspect of Colenso’s life. Thus, the *Life* included references to the friendship between the bishop and Durnford, to the latter’s character and career, and hints at the duplicity of officials in assigning blame for Isandhlawana. One feels that it was also Fanny’s influence which ensured the inclusion of a highly complimentary opinion on Durnford held by James Anthony Froude, the historian, who had visited Natal in 1875 and met Durnford. This quotation had also been included in the memoir on Anthony Durnford.⁶⁵

During these last nine months of her life in England, Fanny worked as hard as ever. Besides her unsuccessful efforts to get the Durnford case taken up in parliament, and her work on the *Life*, she was busy on numerous literary projects. She made another unsuccessful bid to find a publisher for her novel. From the time that she entered hospital, working became more difficult due to the hospital routine, and the debilitating effects of late nineteenth-century medication and diet. She also had to contend with bouts of loneliness and homesickness. She managed to inveigle some of the more educated patients to help with her copy work, and became concerned about the republication of the bishop’s *First Lessons in Science, Designed for the Use of Children and Adult Natives*, originally published in 1861. Fanny had been responsible for arranging this project when she first arrived in England, specifically with regard to finding someone to revise the text. Cox eventually undertook to edit the book, but by then Fanny had had to enter hospital and she had given the task to Frank. A delay over getting the diagrams redrawn caused Fanny, in her weak state, to react excitedly and pettishly, for she wanted the book published by the end of 1886. It finally came out the following year, long after her death.⁶⁶

In October 1886, the *Times of Natal* had published the findings of the court of inquiry into the Durnford case and Fanny was mentioned and accused of withholding vital evidence. The tone of the report was pro-Offy and it implied

that the whole case was an irresponsible fabrication. Fanny replied to this attack in early December, having had trouble getting a copy of the report in hospital. She reiterated her belief that Durnford's final orders had been on his body when found, and that his coat was intact and unsearched by the Zulu. She concluded with an avowal of her intention to write further on the so-called court of inquiry, and did so in reply to a letter that appeared in the *Times of Natal* in October after the above report. But this letter was not published.⁶⁷

Zulu affairs continued to occupy her interest and time and she wrote a number of articles in these final months, some of which were not printed. She felt unable to write entirely on her own responsibility and sent copies of her Zulu articles to Chesson and copies of her correspondence with the *Times of Natal* to Frank for approval.⁶⁸

In early February 1887, an Arnold White had written an article for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in which he claimed, among other things, that the imbalance between the white and black population in favour of the latter in South Africa had been the cause of the endless wars in that country, as their superiority in numbers had been an encouragement to the natives to revolt. Fanny thought it a 'disgusting' article and replied to it to the effect that the real cause of every colonial war had been the injustice and oppression of whites over blacks, and the greed of the whites for land. Moreover, she continued, if the colonists had been left to manage their own wars instead of being egged on by imperial troops and imperial officials, there would have been no wars. It was clear by this time that Fanny had become as much a critic of British imperial policy as she was of Boer and white colonial policy. This letter was printed, and received a favourable response from Sir Fowell Buxton, the former Liberal MP.⁶⁹

Fanny wrote at least four other letters while she was in hospital. One was on a subject that she returned to often in her tirades against the failure of Cetshwayo's restoration, namely the double boundary fixed by Osborn between Cetshwayo and Zibhebhu in 1883. This letter does not appear to have been printed. Another letter dealt with a recent controversy over the refusal of the Zulu to send a representative to the boundary commission in late 1886; and this was followed by a lengthy letter on the general iniquity of British policy in Zululand since 1879. This last letter she sent to Chesson, asking him to send it on to a suitable paper. He wrote a letter himself on the injustice to the Zulu of the boundary agreement between Britain and the New Republic, and sent both letters to the *Times* which printed them alongside each other on 21 December.

One of Fanny's last letters was a reply to Sir Henry Holland's answer in parliament to a pertinent question regarding the deliberation of the New

Republic boundary commission and the Zulu involvement in that commission. She pointed out that Holland's information was incorrect and that the Zulu had not attended the commission. The Martin Luthuli who did attend was merely a servant scribe of the Zulu princes and not their official representative. The boundary commission's decision was therefore concluded without the consent of one of the contracting parties. This letter was not printed.⁷⁰

Her failure to achieve success in either the Durnford case or the Zulu cause made Fanny at times despondent, pessimistic, and, as she wrote (in 1881), 'convinced that truth & goodness do not "triumph in the end" in this world, that honesty is not the best policy' and that the only reward for sacrifice was the knowledge of having done right. The unhappy relationship between her and Durnford, his death, and the deaths of the bishop (1884) and her godson (Frank's first child Esmond in 1882), probably all contributed to what she called her world of 'pain and sorrow'. Yet she never gave up the unequal struggle and only once admitted that her work was grief to her, which was simply due to the physical weakness she suffered as a result of her disease.⁷¹

Eighteen-eighty-six was a bad year for Fanny. Early that year, the adored only son of Robert Colenso nearly died. Later that year she suffered an attack of typhoid, and this, combined with the bitter disappointment of the court of inquiry, caused the tuberculosis to spread to her second lung. The doctor told her she had not long to live. Yet despite all this, by September Fanny appeared to have achieved a remarkable acceptance of her fate and a contented frame of mind. She wrote to Sophie that despite the unhappiness of her life, 'yet now I would not have it different or exchange my past with the most contented woman living.'⁷²

In February 1887, Fanny suffered a crisis that left her very weak. She recovered slowly and the hospital doctors told her that as they had failed to cure her, she would have to leave. Normally this meant that the patient was a hopeless case as Fanny had observed soon after she arrived in the hospital; but in letters she wrote to her immediate family she remained confident that she would recover. She did not want the Bishopstowe family to know of her weakness needlessly. She made plans to travel by stages to the Burne-Jones' holiday home at Rottingdean, near Brighton, where she was sure she would improve instantly under the affectionate care of Georgiana, and with the aid of medicines she claimed had saved her life in 1881. If she should not recover, then she would travel home to her mother, for, as she wrote to Frank, 'that would mean going "home" for good within a few months.'⁷³ In reply to a kind letter and gesture from her uncle Charles Bunyon, however, she admitted that

she knew her days were numbered and that her sufferings in the last three months were such that rest (did she mean death?) would be a great blessing. But she was resigned to God's will whatever that might be.⁷⁴



Georgiana Burne-Jones

The weather proved too cold for Fanny to travel, so Georgiana offered to go to Ventnor to share lodgings with her for two weeks, by which time the weather hopefully would have improved. They lodged with a Mrs Gaskell, relative of the authoress, at the end of March. There Fanny wrote home of her plans to return to Yorkshire to continue her work on the *Life*. Another friend, a Miss Clarke, the sister of the soldier whom Fanny

and Helen Shepstone had nursed in 1879 until he died, spent some days with Fanny after Georgiana left, and Dora Lees was only prevented from going to Fanny on doctor's orders. Fanny died suddenly of heart failure on 29 April, shortly after Miss Clarke left her, and with just her maid in attendance.⁷⁵

The key to Fanny's endurance and extraordinary vitality perhaps lay in two facets of her personality. One was an indomitable spirit. She once admitted that she was a typical Colenso in that she never knew when she was beaten. The other facet was one which her mother had defined early on as Fanny's 'ardent' nature.⁷⁶ It was also this quality that enabled her to make warm and lasting friendships with men and women, such as Dora Lees, Georgiana Burne-Jones, Helen Shepstone (until the Durnford case came between them), Sophie Colenso, Edward Durnford and Louis Knollys. Her intense commitment to her causes drew mild criticism from her friends on occasion. Edward Durnford, a particularly close friend and colleague, warned her once that they were both too biased in the Durnford case, and on other occasions told her that she was too impetuous in attacking everything with which she disagreed. Chesson, making the same point more delicately, told her that she was an impractical enthusiast.⁷⁷

Among the letters of condolence written to Frank and Sophie after Fanny's death, were many tributes to her 'noble' and 'brave' spirit and 'self-sacrificing' nature; and many expressions of the love and respect in which she was held by her friends. Edward Durnford admitted that he had come to look upon Fanny

as a sister and that ‘hers was indeed a heroic nature – brave and unselfish.’⁷⁸

From her sister Harriette came the finest tribute that a Colenso could make: ‘she has been brave, & she has been allowed the blessedness of dying in harness like her Father, of keeping on at his work (both for the Zulus & for the Book [that is the *Life*]) & of thinking for others, to the last. And what better can one wish.’⁷⁹

It was as a friend of the Zulu that Fanny was to be remembered in public tributes. The *London Times*, the *Times of Natal* and the *Natal Mercury* all observed that she had fought the bishop’s cause fearlessly and sincerely, in letters to the press and in her books. She had thus won the respect of friends and foes alike. As the *Mercury* wrote, in somewhat flowery style: ‘In her removal, as in that of her late lamented father, the Zulu nation have [*sic*] lost a true and sincere friend, and the literary world a bright ornament. When the history of Zululand is written, if it is to be complete, the name of Frances E. Colenso must ever be associated with it.’⁸⁰ If this obituary was written by the editor John Robinson, it displays the generosity of spirit that has been attributed to him. As was mentioned earlier, his racial attitudes were severely criticised in the *Ruin of Zululand* and he in turn had attacked that book for its extreme views and style.⁸¹



Fanny Colenso’s grave (with cross), Ventnor, Isle of Wight

The last statement in that tribute appears to have been vindicated. The general opinion of Fanny's books is that although great caution must be exercised in using them because of her undoubted pro-uSuthu bias, they are nevertheless important records of a crucial period of Zulu history during which the economic power and political independence of the Zulu kingdom were destroyed. As a recent writer has pointed out, other African kingdoms suffered the same fate as the Zulu kingdom in the nineteenth century, but in most cases it was the interpretation of the conquerors that dominated contemporary records. Fanny Colenso, working in collaboration with other members of her family, was one of the instruments whereby the viewpoints of one of the major victims in that process of destruction were recorded and publicised. Her writings are therefore part of a unique body of historical sources.⁸²

NOTES

- 1 See, for example, RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 8 November 1882 and Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 1 January 1882; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/24, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 7 May 1881.
- 2 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/34–35, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 31 August 1881, [n.d., September 1881?]; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 24 December 1882.
- 3 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank and Sophie Colenso, 16 February 1881.
- 4 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 263, 291, 350–351.
- 5 See, for example, RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/22, 28, 33–34, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 6 February 1881, 22 June [1881], 3 August 1881, 31 August 1881.
- 6 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to K. Lyell, 1 February 1881; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/10, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 12 January 1880 [1881?].
- 7 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/17, 24, 26, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 13 July 1880, 7 May 1881, 21 May 1881; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to K. Lyell, 1 February 1881, 14 August 1881; Nicholls, 'Frances Ellen Colenso and the Zulu War': 3.
- 8 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/34, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 31 August 1881.
- 9 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/11, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 24 January 1880.
- 10 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 16 August [1884].
- 11 *ibid.*, general letter from Fanny Colenso, 26 November 1881.
- 12 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1284, Sarah Frances Colenso to Frank Colenso, 26 February [1882]; *ibid.*, s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 17 January 1882.
- 13 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 11 August 1882; NA, Col Col, box 6, H.S. Taylor to Fanny Colenso, 26 December 1884; *ibid.*, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, [mid-1885?].
- 14 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 10 June 1884; Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 13 March 1883.

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- 15 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, [1881]; see also Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 10 June 1881.
- 16 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 24 June 1883; Fanny Colenso to Canon Wilberforce, 1 January 1886 [1887].
- 17 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 9 July 1883; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/73, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 15 January 1887.
- 18 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1284, Sarah Frances Colenso to Frank Colenso, 17 July 1881.
- 19 *ibid.*, s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 6 October 1883; Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 10 December 1883.
- 20 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 20 May 1884 and 14 June 1884.
- 21 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 22 January 1884, 5 May 1884; NA, Col Col, box 6, Frank Colenso to Fanny Colenso, 29 May 1884.
- 22 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 22 January 1884, 14 June [1884] and Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 28 April 1884.
- 23 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 14 June [1884] and 9 September 1884; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/78, Fanny Colenso to Henry Holland, 12 February 1887. Rough ms notes for a third volume of *The Ruin of Zululand* are to be found in NA, Col Col, box 9, entitled 'The conquest of Zululand, vol. III'.
- 24 NA, Col Col, box 6, D. Lees to Fanny Colenso, 19 November 1884; Nicholls, 'Frances Ellen Colenso and the Zulu War': 21.
- 25 Fanny Colenso, *The Ruin of Zululand, Volume I*: 9, 10–11.
- 26 *ibid.*: 6–9.
- 27 *ibid.*: x–xi, 13–15.
- 28 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Major Lovegrove, 16 January 1885; Etherington, 'The meaning of Shepstone's coronation of Cetshwayo': 7–8, 19, 21.
- 29 Fanny Colenso, *The Ruin of Zululand, Volume I*: 264.
- 30 The friendly relationship between Shepstone and Osborn, and the influence of the former over the latter, has recently been corroborated. See J. Guy, 'The destruction of Zulu independence: the part played by the Natal officials', paper presented at the Conference on the Anglo-Zulu War 1879, Durban, 1979: 11.
- 31 Fanny Colenso, *The Ruin of Zululand, Volume I*: 49, 51–54, 105, 143, 155; *Volume II*: 233–234.
- 32 *ibid.*: *Volume I*: 6, 7, 220; *Volume II*: 473–474; C.C. Ballard, 'Sir Garnet Wolseley and John Dunn: the architects and agents of the Ulundi settlement 1879–1883', paper presented at the Conference on the Anglo-Zulu War 1879, Durban, 1979: 21.
- 33 Fanny Colenso, *The Ruin of Zululand, Volume I*: 292–293; see also NA, Col Col, box 8, despatched undated letters, Fanny Colenso to K. Lyell, [n.d.].
- 34 Fanny Colenso, *The Ruin of Zululand, Volume II*: 210–214, 225–226, 242, 254–258, 379.
- 35 *ibid.*: 370 and also 367–369, 409.
- 36 *ibid.*: 411 and also 372–373.
- 37 Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*: 152–155.
- 38 Guy, 'The destruction of Zulu independence': 2–3, 10–11, 14; J. Guy, 'The destruction of the Zulu kingdom: the civil war in Zululand, 1879–1884' (PhD, University of London, 1975): 2, 6.
- 39 C. de B. Webb, 'Great Britain and the Zulu people, 1879–1887' in *African Societies in Southern Africa*, edited by L. Thompson (London: Heinemann, 1969): 322–323; P.J. Colenbrander, 'The Zulu political economy on the eve of the war; some observations', paper

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- presented at the Conference on the Anglo-Zulu War 1879, Durban, 1979: 8, 10, 25–26, 28, 30.
- 40 J. Guy, 'Mandhlakazi and Usuthu: the civil war in Zululand from 1880–1884, and the reaction of the British officials' (History Honours essay, University of Natal, 1966): Bibliography, iii; P.R. Macmillan, 'Cetshwayo's restoration: the collapse of Zulu kingship' (History Honours essay, University of Natal, 1971): Notes on sources, iii. For further discussion on Zululand in the 1880s, see Webb, 'Great Britain and the Zulu people'; Guy, 'The destruction of the Zulu kingdom'; Guy, 'The destruction of Zulu independence'; Ballard, 'Sir Garnet Wolseley and John Dunn'; and Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*: chapter 15.
 - 41 Fanny Colenso, *The Ruin of Zululand, Volume I*: vii; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 24 February 1885; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Fowell Buxton, 10 February 1887.
 - 42 See, for example, Fanny Colenso, *The Ruin of Zululand, Volume II*: 10, 14; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 18 December 1883.
 - 43 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/69, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 15 December 1886.
 - 44 Webb, 'Great Britain and the Zulu people, 1879–1887': 313–314; see also RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 4 November 1885; and RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/47, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 2 March [1885].
 - 45 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to [Edward Stanhope], 18 December 1886, Fanny Colenso to Fowell Buxton, 10 February 1887; *ibid.*, box 7, H. Holland to Fanny Colenso, 23 February 1887; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/78, Fanny Colenso to H. Holland, 12 February 1887, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 24 February 1887.
 - 46 Webb, 'Great Britain and the Zulu people, 1879–1887': 319–321.
 - 47 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/68–70, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 10 December 1886, 15 December 1886 and 18 December 1886; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Gerald Browne, 19 December 1886.
 - 48 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/79, 82, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 16 February 1887 and 24 February 1887.
 - 49 *ibid.*, C 130/61–62, 70, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 7 October 1886, 13 October 1886 and 18 December 1886.
 - 50 Guy, 'The destruction of Zulu independence': 3, 17–20.
 - 51 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/69, 73, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 15 December 1886 and 15 January 1887.
 - 52 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to F. Dixie, 21 October 1885; Fanny Colenso, *The Ruin of Zululand, Volume II*: 427, 429, 474–477.
 - 53 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 30 September 1885; Fanny Colenso, *The Ruin of Zululand, Volume II*: 18, 22 footnote; *Times of Natal*, 12 November 1885; *Natal Mercury*, 23 December 1885 and 5 January 1886.
 - 54 *Times of Natal*, 23 October 1884; Fanny Colenso, *The Ruin of Zululand, Volume II*: vii–viii; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, [October 1884?].
 - 55 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, copy of review article from *Westminster Review* [January 1885?].
 - 56 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/41, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, [30?] September 1884; Fanny Colenso, *The Ruin of Zululand, Volume II*: vi–viii.
 - 57 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, [August 1884?].
 - 58 NA Col Col, box 1, John Colenso to Dr Jorissen, 8 May 1881.
 - 59 A. Davey, *The British Pro-Boers, 1877–1902* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1978): 44–46.
 - 60 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 22 September

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- [1884], 30 September 1885; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/38, 40, 60, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 27 November 1883, 28 July 1884 and 16 September 1886; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to R. Statham, 23 May 1885; Fanny Colenso, *The Ruin of Zululand, Volume II*: 114–115; *Natal Witness*, 29 May 1879.
- 61 George Cox (1827–1902), a clergyman and historian, was a logical choice. He had accompanied John Colenso on his first visit to Natal in 1853 and was the chosen successor to Colenso as bishop in 1886, but his appointment was vetoed.
- 62 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mrs Luard, 26 December 1885; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 24 February [1885] and Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 30 June 1886.
- 63 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 14 October 1885; and Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 8 November 1885; NA Col Col, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, 6 October 1886.
- 64 NA, Col Col, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, 26 November 1886; see also Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, 14 December 1886, 24 March 1887 and 5 April 1887.
- 65 G.W. Cox, *The Life of John William Colenso, D.D., Bishop of Natal, Volume 1* (London: Ridgeway, 1888): xii; *ibid.*, *Volume 2*: 320, 322–325, 424, 479, 507; Durnford (ed.), *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa, 1872 to 1879*: 124; NA, Col Col, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, 6 October 1886.
- 66 NA, Col Col, box 4, Fanny Colenso to Sarah Frances Colenso, 14 December 1886 and 9 March 1887 and box 7, W. Ridgeway to Fanny Colenso, 30 November 1886; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 30 November 1886 and 1 March 1887; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/80, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 17 February 1887.
- 67 *Times of Natal*, 2 October 1886, 10 December 1886; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to the editor, *Times of Natal*, 25 November 1886.
- 68 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 30 November 1886; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/65, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 10 November 1886.
- 69 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/74, 76, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 6 February 1887 and 10 February 1887; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to the editor, *Pall Mall Gazette*, [8 February 1887].
- 70 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/69–70, 83, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 15 December 1886, 18 December 1886 and 12 March 1887; *The Times*, 21 December 1886 and 25 February 1887; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to the editor, *The Times*, [February 1887].
- 71 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to K. Lyell, 14 August 1881; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/29, 73, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 11 July 1881 and 15 January 1887; Rees, *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 366.
- 72 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, September 1886, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 9 March 1886 and Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 9 August [1886]; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to A. Clarke, 2 September 1886.
- 73 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 19 March 1887, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 26 November 1886; RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/82, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 24 February 1887; G. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones, Volume 2* (London: Macmillan, 1912): 81.
- 74 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to C. Bunyon, 14 April 1887.
- 75 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Frank Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 1 May 1887,

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Dora Lees to Sophie Colenso, 30 April 1887; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to C. Bunyon, 14 April 1887.

76 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mrs Luard, 26 December 1885; Rees, *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 180.

77 NA, Col Col, box 7, E. Durnford to Fanny Colenso, 6 October [1886], 27 January 1887, 11 February [1887] and F. Chesson to Fanny Colenso, 16 February 1887.

78 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, E. Durnford to Sophie Colenso, 2 May 1887 and E. Durnford to Frank Colenso, 3 May 1887.

79 *ibid.*, s.1286, Harriette Colenso to Frank Colenso, 11 May 1887.

80 *Natal Mercury*, 9 May 1887; *Times*, 2 May 1887; *Times of Natal*, 9 May 1887.

81 Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*: 171–172.

82 Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom*: xiii, 91; see also Macmillan, 'Cetshwayo's restoration', Guy, 'Mandhlakazi and Usuthu' and Nicholls, 'Frances Ellen Colenso and the Zulu War': 25.

5

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EIGHT OTHER WOMEN WRITERS ASSOCIATED WITH NATAL IN RELATION TO THE POPULAR VICTORIAN STEREOTYPE

While nineteenth-century England produced a great number of women writers, the small colony of Victorian Natal boasted a mere handful of literary women. In an attempt to place Fanny Colenso in better perspective, this chapter will discuss the writings of eight other women of letters whose writings concerned Natal. As a preliminary to assessing Fanny in relation to the popular stereotype, these eight women will also be compared to that stereotype.

A striking feature of the group of women writers in colonial Natal was their obvious subdivision into 'political' and 'non-political'. Three of them, Fanny and Harriette Colenso and Lady Florence Dixie, became deeply involved in political issues, but the desire to influence public affairs was entirely absent in the writings of Miss Barter (1818–1895), Mrs Hutchinson, Lady Barker (1831–1911) and Mrs Eliza Feilden. The first two of these women wrote books that could be said to fall into the category of travel, while those of Mrs Feilden and Lady Barker were records of emigrants' experiences. The accounts of Mrs Robertson and Mrs Wilkinson were published with the aim of influencing the missionary cause, but had no political motive. Although the experiences described in the books by these six women span a quarter of a century, reflect different lifestyles, and were motivated by a variety of reasons, there were sufficient common characteristics in the background, experiences, and reactions of these women to the colonial environment for them to be considered a distinctive group.

It is difficult to establish what Barter, Hutchinson, Feilden and Barker hoped to achieve through publication, particularly when one relies almost solely on the internal evidence of their books. Without full information as to their social and economic status, and their aspirations, one can only make tentative assumptions as to why they chose to write and seek publication. Did any of them feel stifled by lack of career opportunities? Did they feel the need to assert their individuality, or to prove their intellectual and educational equality with men? Were they in financial straits and did they feel that writing, being a respectable occupation for a lady, would ease their economic lot?

Feilden and Hutchinson published only one book apiece, while Barter ventured once into a travel account and once into fiction. Barker was the only one who could truly be called a woman of letters as she published prolifically – travel, cookery and children’s literature – and in the early 1870s reviewed books for the *Times* as well as editing a magazine. She and her second husband, Napier Broome (future colonial secretary under Wolseley in Natal) returned to England in 1869 after three years sheep farming in New Zealand, which ended in economic failure, so it could well be that financial hardship was her initial motive in writing. She also became the first lady superintendent of the National School of Cookery on her return to England.¹

Whatever the specific individual motivation, it does appear that certain political events in Natal and Zululand, and an awareness of the contrast between life in South Africa and life in England, were common stimuli behind these four writers. The emigration of large numbers of British settlers to South Africa in the 1820s and from 1849 to 1850 led to the publicising of their experiences through private letters and in newspapers and books. These accounts often stressed the more sensational aspects of life in the colonies such as natural disasters, conflict with indigenous peoples and encounters with wild beasts, and must have stimulated interest in the unusual features of life in Africa.²

It was partly an awareness that their experiences were out of the ordinary for the average Victorian woman that prompted these four women to write accounts of their adventures in south-east Africa. Thus does Barter in *Alone among the Zulus* (first published in 1866) explain her motive in writing down, ten years later, her experiences in Zululand in the winter of 1855: her ‘path in life’, she wrote, ‘has been a strange one also; and the few incidents here recorded, being a narrative of some months spent among savages, being out of the common routine of ladies’ travels, may, perhaps, have interest for the reader.’³

Likewise, Hutchinson, in her book *In Tents in the Transvaal* (1879), made a modest claim to have no higher aim than to provide amusement for ‘an idle half-hour’. She continued, ‘Proud should I feel if I could hope that I have helped, even by a few faint touches, to render more distinct and clear that picture of a comparatively unfamiliar country which English men and women are trying to bring before their imagination at this moment.’⁴

The last oblique reference to the Anglo-Zulu War indicates the particular circumstance that provided an opportunity to publish. Events subsequent to the war, such as the Zulu civil war, Cetshwayo’s visit to England and his

restoration in 1883 followed shortly by his death, kept the affairs of Zululand in the public eye. Barter's book, although published initially in 1866, was reprinted in 1881 because of public demand for books on that country. Feilden indicated that she had been 'induced' to publish her letters and journal, as *My African Home*, in 1887 'in the hope that they may entertain many young friends'.⁵ Barker, on the other hand, was already a well-known author. The title page of her book *A Year's Housekeeping in South Africa* (first published in 1877, but reprinted in the 1880s) reminded readers that she was the author of *Station Life in New Zealand*, and she probably needed no excuse to write about her life in Natal from 1875 to 1876.

Barter and Hutchinson's books are travel accounts. Barter settled in Natal with her brother Charles in 1852 to act as his housekeeper and to satisfy her craving for missionary work.⁶ She accompanied her brother on a trading and hunting expedition into Zululand in 1855. During the trip, Charles went off to the Pongola with some friends to hunt, and left his sister with a handful of black attendants to continue bartering for cattle and for daily food. The major portion of her book *Alone among the Zulus* dealt with Barter's harrowing efforts to rescue Charles from certain death when he and his companions caught fever near the Pongola. Her accounts had many of the ingredients of the popular travel book set in the wilds of Africa – physical hardship, danger from wild animals, uncertain contact with 'savages', isolation and personal heroism.⁷ There was, however, no over-exaggeration in the book, or efforts to enhance her reputation as a brave, resourceful traveller.

Hutchinson's book, *In Tents in the Transvaal*, covered her arrival in Natal in February 1878 with her husband's regiment, the Perthshire Volunteers, their journey up to Utrecht where they encamped for a miserable five months through winter, her husband's recall to Pietermaritzburg, and her embarkation for home before the Anglo-Zulu War broke out. The circumstances in which she wrote were therefore different from those of Barter. Natal and Zululand were uppermost in the British public mind, and Hutchinson was obviously writing with this in view. Some of the descriptions of her experiences and surroundings were slightly exaggerated and gave a false impression. The hardships and discomfort which she and the other military wives endured were real enough, however, and were probably more extreme than those suffered by military wives in Britain.⁸

These two travel books were clearly aimed at merely entertaining their readers with the particular novelties of travel in Natal, Zululand and what was then southern Transvaal. In common with the majority of contemporary female

travel books, they observed little of the nature of the terrain, but described the problems of camp life and travel due to the climate and the wild animals, the unusual plant life and local crops, and to a lesser extent the customs and character of the indigenous people.⁹ Generally, however, the informative observations were subordinated to the narrative, and in Hutchinson's case were superficial.

Neither of these women had any political axe to grind and although one can glean Barter's attitude towards British imperial destiny and the so-called menace to Natal of the Zulu, these are minor themes. Having mentioned at one point the 'hostile intentions' of Natal's 'savage neighbours', she then belied her own words by travelling fearlessly and unchaperoned through Zululand.¹⁰ Hutchinson is a slight exception as she felt strongly about the fact that the Natal colonists were determined on war against the Zulu, and that they exaggerated what she called Cetshwayo's 'peccadilloes'. She gained the impression that the Zulu king had no intention of provoking war.¹¹ Her remarks were pointed in view of the contemporary controversy surrounding the outbreak of the Anglo-Zulu War, but her comments were incidental to the narrative.

There is another minor theme to Barter's book typical of nineteenth-century travel literature and this was her devotion to the conversion of the heathen. She believed that blacks were able to adapt to a more civilised way of life. The latter point was a controversial one and not held by all whites who came into contact with the Zulu and Natal natives. Hutchinson also took an individual line on the subject of missionary activity, and appears to be the only one who escaped this popular Victorian enthusiasm. We must hope, she wrote, that the 'Kaffirs' will accept 'our apparently violent methods of civilizing them in the spirit in which they are meant, and will cheerfully' submit to being 'missionized, shot and bayoneted into tail-coats, monogamy and trial by jury.'¹²

The books by Feilden and Barker, being accounts by settlers, albeit temporary ones, had a more domestic flavour. Barker's *A Year's Housekeeping in South Africa* appears to have been based on diary entries rewritten to conform to a more narrative style. It covered a year's residence in South Africa from 1875 to 1876, including the family's arrival in Cape Town, journey up to Durban and settling in the capital. The book was a conscious attempt, by an experienced writer, to entertain and inform. It is humorous and full of picturesque descriptions of scenery, contact with the natives, housekeeping problems and the vagaries of the climate. Barker had prospective visitors and emigrants in mind when she wrote, for she described the best clothing for the colony's climate, the high price of food and the cost of building.¹³ Feilden's

book was based on her journal and letters to her family during the 1850s, when she and her husband attempted, unsuccessfully, to make their fortune by farming on the Natal coast. It is in the form of a diary and is, therefore, a more realistic record of colonial life.

The observations of the two settler women, whose lives were more sedentary and domestic, included details not found in the travel accounts, such as comments on the undeveloped economy of the Colony and the problems this posed for the housewife, and in Barker's account for the mother. Feilden included details of the problems experienced by the emigrant farmer, such as climatic extremes, natural disasters, wild animals and labour problems. The Barker book, dealing with a period twenty years later, forms an interesting contrast. Although there were signs of a more advanced transport system, for instance, the Colony did not appear to have progressed much in those two decades and life was still full of discomforts even for the housewife of a senior colonial official living just outside the capital.¹⁴

Another feature common to these settler accounts and less evident in the travel books was the space devoted to comment on Africans. Both women experienced a closer mistress-servant relationship than Hutchinson for instance, and the topic was of great interest to them. As Barker observed, 'we grumbled at the weather and complained of our servants, according to the usual style of South African conversation.'¹⁵ All these women evinced a not unnatural ignorance of the character and customs of Africans and in Feilden, who lived in Natal the longest, this was pronounced. She displayed a strong fear of the 'savage' nature of the native and of his powerful physique, a deep prejudice against his traditional way of life, and a doubt as to the success of either christianising or civilising him. Yet she was also imbued with the missionary impulse, and this resulted in conflicting attitudes and a sense of insecurity common among Natal settlers.¹⁶

By contrast Barker at a later period, although aware of the 'precarious' position of the numerically weak settlers, noticed the adaptability of the natives to the trappings of civilisation and their superior intellect, and reacted to the unpredictable behaviour of her servants with humour tinged with exasperation. Nevertheless, she was equally maternalistic for despite the evident intelligence of black girls at Edendale, the highest training she recommended for them was that which would fit them to be 'domestic servants for us whites, and good knowledgeable wives for their own people.'¹⁷

Although these four women displayed different attitudes to such topics as the black question and missionary work, and had different emphases in their

books, they nevertheless shared certain common characteristics. They wrote to entertain first and inform second, and they did not descend into extreme didacticism or moralising. They observed and passed opinions on the climate, local plant and animal life, and on the indigenous people. They were no more than conventionally religious, except for Barter who made a point of converting her wagon driver and observing Sunday service regardless of where she was.¹⁸ Neither were they political. Consequently, their books were not likely to arouse undue hostility in terms of controversial subject matter and, except for Barter, they wrote under their own names. The characteristic that was most obviously common to these women is their reaction to the colonial environment. It is their behaviour, and sometimes conscious comment on their reactions, which make them all contradictions of certain elements in the Victorian stereotype.

These four women appear to have been not too dissimilar in terms of social class. Barker and Feilden appear to have been either upper-class ladies (by birth or marriage), or at least upper-middle class. Both women experienced financial hardship at various times in their lives, but in Natal they managed to maintain vestiges of a privileged lifestyle.¹⁹ Barter's family were 'landed gentlemen clergy'. Her brother attended Winchester and Oxford, maintained social links with aristocracy all his life, appeared to be financially well off, and was elected to the Natal Legislative Council in 1865.²⁰ Little is known about the background of Hutchinson. She called herself and her companions 'plain soldier folk' unaccustomed to exalted society. Yet she took a lady's maid with her to South Africa, could not sew and always left this for someone else to do, and her husband was an officer in a volunteer regiment.²¹ All this implies a well-to-do background.

If one accepts Branca's analysis of the lifestyle of the prosperous upper-middle and upper-class woman as being one of ease and idleness, one might feel sceptical about the chances of women such as Barker, Feilden, Barter and Hutchinson coping with the physical demands of colonial life.²² Furthermore, the idea of the popular stereotype – the passive, timid, weak, empty-headed creature – surviving life in nineteenth-century Natal is ludicrous. Only Barker appears to have lived for lengthy periods outside Europe before coming to South Africa, in Jamaica, India and New Zealand, so she was obviously better equipped to cope with colonial life.²³ Yet all these women showed remarkable degrees of physical toughness and endurance, psychological stamina, a readiness to do the most menial domestic chores, and a strong liking for this way of life despite its problems and hardships.

Hutchinson, for instance, was far from the 'ideal' Victorian woman. She left a very young child in Britain when she accompanied her husband to South Africa in 1878, thus breaking one of the sacred bonds of society by neglecting her role as mother. She wrote with gusto of her and her companions' enormous appetites, declared a lack of interest in the social accomplishment of sewing, and refused to allow a sunburned complexion and limited wardrobe to prevent her from attending a ball given in Bartle Frere's honour in Pietermaritzburg. Camp life at Utrecht was primitive, very uncomfortable and monotonous, and worsened by scarce food and bitter cold. Although she had a maid and a soldier servant, Hutchinson did many of the daily chores herself, out of necessity, and without undue complaint.²⁴ Perhaps these experiences were not uncommon for soldier wives, but they made few concessions to Victorian conventions regarding the ideal feminine type.

Of these four women, Barter appears to have summed up Victorian conventions, found herself wanting, and come to terms with it in her own individual style. She began her narrative by confessing to being a plain woman 'in every sense of the word', and to having a brusque manner and a partiality for plain speaking. 'After this preface', she wrote, 'it will be plain to the reader that my path has been a lonely one.'²⁵ It was indicated in the first chapter that nineteenth-century society regarded the unmarried woman as an unsuccessful human being. Marriage conferred dignity, social status and economic security on a woman, and the opposite was equally true of the unmarried. At a time moreover when women were not expected to appear too forthright, Barter's brusqueness would not perhaps have been viewed with much toleration. It is not surprising therefore that she was a lonely woman. One of the few occupations open to her was that of housekeeper for her brother, yet the qualities she displayed in Zululand showed that she was capable of a far more enterprising career.

During her solitary journey through Zululand, at no time did she comment on how unusual it was for a white woman to travel through that country unaccompanied by white companions of either sex. She seems to have been at ease with just her black attendants as company. The only time she experienced apprehension was when she visited a regimental kraal and found the soldiers insolent, and later when her servants left her alone in the care of a friendly kraal to try to rescue her brother. In this unhappy situation, Barter displayed courage, resourcefulness and great resilience, and a clear ability to stand on her own two feet. She asserted at one point that under pressure one's mental and physical powers increase to meet the challenge, and she bore this out

admirably.²⁶ Obviously her brother treated her as a capable and independent human being or he would never have abandoned her in a strange country, amid foreign people whom she called savages, to fend for herself.

In many respects, therefore, Barter was a contradiction to the popular stereotype. Of all these writers, she displayed the most awareness of her individuality as a woman who did not conform to certain elements of the contemporary stereotype. Whether she felt that her experiences in Zululand would be a convincing challenge to those elements, and that this was her reason for publishing her account, is a matter of speculation. In her second book we do not have a picture of the type of female qualities she considered would best survive the colonial experience. This was a novel, *Home in South Africa* (1867), which she wrote with the expressed intention of encouraging working-class emigrants to settle in Natal. The story concerns a labouring couple who gain assisted passages to Natal in the early 1850s and there, by dint of all the Victorian virtues of thrift, industriousness, sobriety and Christian feelings, make a success of their new lives and become landed proprietors. The heroine, Molly Dadge, is a sensible, cheerful, shrewd and honest woman, who admires education but who works hard and willingly at her domestic chores. She also loves and respects her husband and is shown to be a true and practical helpmeet to him. While Molly displayed certain typical features of the stereotype, she was nevertheless quite unlike its extreme elements, which portrayed women as helpless impractical creatures.²⁷ Barter obviously rejected the extreme elements of the stereotype, at least in a colonial environment.

Nevertheless, Barter was a product of her times. Although clearly suited to an independent career, she made no pleas for greater employment opportunities for women in her two books; nor is there evidence of dissatisfaction with social conventions regarding women's role in Victorian society. She appears to have felt it necessary to hide her identity behind a pseudonym, perhaps for the same reasons that prompted the Brontës and Olive Schreiner to use pseudonyms. As has been indicated, she also displayed a typically Victorian female enthusiasm – a deep interest in missionary work.

It appears from the writings of Barker and Feilden that as members of the privileged upper or upper-middle class, they were well-educated, used to cultured social intercourse, a high standard of living, and a certain degree of independent action and thought. Barker was able to revel in physical activities in a manner that would no doubt be considered unladylike, and she obviously took an unfeminine interest in wool farming because of her experiences in New Zealand. In Natal she rode hard and mixed with the military. She seems to

have been a more active person than her husband, the colonial secretary, who 'pined' when dragged away from his 'papers' and 'arm-chair' to accompany her on a riding expedition into the country.²⁸

Having lived in New Zealand where cheap labour was unavailable, Barker was used to doing domestic chores in a way that her upper-class contemporaries in British society would never have done. She deplored the idleness of the whites of South Africa, which she said was due solely to the presence of black labour, and in her own home showed a willingness to do menial chores. At first, she had a French butler and a white female cook but these were superseded by black servants. Despite the fact that this forced her to greater supervision, she much preferred native maids as they at least allowed her to be mistress of her own home. The hardships of colonial life she seems to have endured cheerfully, for she wrote about them with a sense of humour, and confessed in one of her books on life in New Zealand that she found 'this picnic life great fun.'²⁹

Feilden had a similar reaction to the physical demands of the colony:

I still think I prefer this active life to sitting at rug-work or making morning calls ... There is great satisfaction in feeling useful to someone, and that I have. I learn many a practical lesson, too, in cooking; I used to feel I was in the hands of my servants, but hereafter I shall be better able to direct them, so good springs out where it seems all evil.³⁰

When she compared her life in Natal to that of her female relatives in Britain with 'all the gaiety and balls ... great dinners ... consequent calls, and dressings, and rests, and fashions', it all represented to her a life of 'folly, dissipation, and loss of time.' She found pleasure in a simpler way of life and in 'more serious concerns'. These were simply the domestic duties and problems of running a home for her husband in an undeveloped colony and she did not feel 'degraded' by doing menial chores.³¹

Feilden was also capable of enduring, and enjoying, the rigours of a wagon trip to Richmond, where they stayed in a flea-infested cottage. Despite this willingness to endure discomforts and a less privileged lifestyle. however, the Feildens came to Natal to make their fortunes and when a flood destroyed their sugar farm in 1856, they returned to Britain. They had owned a number of properties in Natal and had invested money in commercial shipping, but these were obviously insufficient to sustain them at the material level to which they were accustomed. They were fortunate to be able to escape the depths of

privation suffered by other Natal settlers in that period, such as Ellen McLeod and her family.³²

Both Barker and Feilden seem therefore to have enjoyed the physical demands made on them by a colonial environment. In the colony they carried out an important economic function within the family unit, a function denied to most of their upper-middle and upper-class counterparts in the mother country. This seems to have given them a sense of purpose they valued despite the hardships they endured. By accepting the more active role thrust upon them, these women unconsciously challenged the restrictions imposed on women by Victorian ideals of feminine activities and functions: they accepted and shouldered responsibilities, they did not succumb under hard physical work, they had little time for the more refined social and domestic accomplishments, and they were certainly not sheltered from the unpleasant realities of life. A similar reaction by female emigrants to New Zealand has been observed:

life within the bounds of home and family and respectability was not as frustrating for women in New Zealand as it had become for women of Great Britain. The letters and diaries of women in New Zealand show that in the colonial context this role provided demands and challenges that held a high degree of personal reward and satisfaction. The colonial environment opened new doors. It gave, within the context of an accepted role, a sense of purpose, a feeling of usefulness and a greater degree of independence than the women migrants had experienced before. To reach the same end in England they would have had to break out of the shell of home and family and emerge into the world a rebel against position and role. Such escapes were often preceded by nervous breakdowns and illness and were accompanied by personal traumas. For colonial women, the breakthrough was accomplished by the migration process – an escape carried through in the bosom of the family, and which, although accompanied by discomfort, hardship and often personal misery, held in the end significant material and emotional rewards within an accepted framework.³³

Moreover, through their robust acceptance of the hardships and hazards of colonial life, these Natal women do not appear to have suffered a lowering of status within their marriages and family. Feilden told of how one morning her husband tried, ‘in sheer mischief’, to get a male visitor to see his wife in her dressing gown sweeping the living room floor. She added, ‘I have said,

in sheer mischief, but I believe in my heart, it was affection made him do it – pride in his wife, who was not above her duty, nor sinking under it in discontent.³⁴ Feilden and her husband appear to have enjoyed some degree of partnership in their marriage. Leyland Feilden often helped her with domestic chores, and they frequently spent the evenings together reading to each other.³⁵

In connection with family patterns in nineteenth-century Australia, Patricia Grimshaw has the following to say:

Ideas of partnership within marriage, and of women's enhanced status, were clearly flourishing among newly settled colonists – and, indeed, the very circumstances of pioneering life in some ways accelerated their absorption. Cynics said that, where a commodity was scarce, it went up in value, and women were certainly far outnumbered by men in frontier society ...The patriarchal subordination of wife to husband did not appear to be a general characteristic of nineteenth century pioneering society.³⁶

Even for the working-class wife, improved status could be enjoyed in the colonies. Barter appears to have supported this contention in the experiences of her labouring heroine Molly Dadge, in her novel *Home in South Africa*. Molly's husband is a devoted, faithful and industrious man, with none of the authoritarian or brutal qualities of the stereotyped working-class husband. Molly, a hard-working and honest wife and mother, earned her husband's respect. She also experienced another facet of colonial life that has been observed in other British colonies; a greater degree of social egalitarianism that would never have occurred in England.³⁷

Basically, as Grimshaw noted, women were essential to any colony and they had to be practical, hard-working and physically quite tough to survive and be economically useful. These qualities were often proclaimed as essential for prospective female emigrants, and offer one reason for their enhanced status in the colonies.³⁸ Thus does Feilden, and her brother Andrew, assess the value of the latter's future wife Georgina:

In a land like this, he will be happier and more comfortable with a wife than without. Andrew may in one sense be blinded by the little god, but in another he has his eyes open, and thinks he is prepared to meet everything. In reply to a question of mine as to the usefulness of the lady he has chosen, he said he never saw any one get through so much work as Georgina.³⁹

Neither Henrietta Robertson (d. 1864) nor Anne Wilkinson (d. 1878), the two missionaries, fall strictly into the category of women writers. Their letters and journals were published after their deaths, in the first case by Anne Mackenzie (sister to the Central African bishop) under the title *Mission Life among the Zulu-Kafirs: A Memoir of Henrietta, Wife of the Rev. R. Robertson* (2nd ed., 1875); and in the second case by Bishop Edward Wilkinson under the title *A Lady's Life and Travels in Zululand and the Transvaal during Cetewayo's Reign* (1882). The motive for publishing these writings seems to have been primarily to publicise the missionary endeavour in Zululand. As a contemporary noted, the political and ecclesiastical controversies of Zululand and Natal, to which Bishop John Colenso had largely contributed, had evoked much interest in England.⁴⁰ The publicising of the hardships, self-renunciation, faith and courage of missionary women was probably calculated to produce material support. Consequently, the themes of missionary achievements and difficulties were prominent in both books, but more so in the Robertson memoir.

She was an extremely devout and earnest missionary who wrote copiously on the successes and failures she and her husband experienced at their Zululand mission, KwaMagwaza. She commented frequently on the personal characteristics of the Zulu converts (generally favourably), and on the customs and form of government of the Zulu people (generally unfavourably). She found Cetshwayo an amiable man, less barbarous than his peers but caught up in a barbarous system of government.⁴¹ But in keeping with her more spiritual concerns, political comment was a minor theme.

Wilkinson's book contains less about the problems of educating and christianising the mission natives, which suggests a character less intensely involved in the spiritual aspects of mission work. She appears to have had excellent relationships with the maids and converts on the station. The Wilkinsons suffered deteriorating relations with the Zulu king over their missionary ambitions in his country, and they left in 1874. Consequently, Wilkinson's opinion of the Zulu polity and king was less charitable than Robertson's: the former she considered a military machine ruled by fear and bloodshed, and the latter a cruel tyrant full of hostility to the whites. There was more political comment in this book than in Robertson's memoir.⁴²

The themes of human endurance in an isolated and harsh environment, amid hostile 'savage' tribes, are common to both missionary accounts, but with less emphasis on the personal hardships endured and more on the irrepressible faith in eventually succeeding in taming those elements. The latter quality distinguishes these two books from all the other Natal books discussed, as does

the austerity, the sufferings and the courage of the 'heroines'. Wilkinson, for instance, only received fresh provisions twice a year and suffered numerous deprivations in consequence. Both women died as a result of their missionary work. Henrietta Robertson was killed in a wagon accident in 1864, while Wilkinson died of consumption in 1878 brought on, so it was believed, by a severe attack of pleurisy at KwaMagwaza during which she had no medical care.⁴³

The internal evidence from these two books supports certain of the assumptions made in this chapter about the unreality of the Victorian stereotype. First, the relationship between the missionaries and their wives, particularly in the Wilkinson's case, supports the theory of genuine partnership in marriage being common to the colonial environment. One feels that love and admiration for his wife was a strong inducement to Bishop Wilkinson to publish her writings. It is clear that he admired her physical resilience, independence and abilities, her cheerful and engaging manner with Africans, and her uncomplaining endurance of extreme hardship.⁴⁴

Second, the reaction of Wilkinson to the demands made on her as a missionary's wife in Zululand compared to her lifestyle in England, is similar to that of Feilden and Barker. Wilkinson's home in England was one of 'refinement and luxury', but despite warnings to the contrary from friends in England, she adapted to life in Africa without complaint. Commenting on the differences between her old and new modes of life she wrote:

You would look on and wonder at all the things I have learnt to do since I have been here. I often think how practically ignorant, if you know what I mean, one is at home, and how clever one would appear there now, and up to emergencies. Here, if you do not exercise your wits you have to go without many things, and truly experience is a good teacher.⁴⁵

Wilkinson responded energetically and enthusiastically to the demands of the mission station and seems to have found satisfaction there. Some of her activities were unremarkable. Her mornings were devoted to housework, her afternoons to learning Zulu, late afternoons to a walk or ride, and evenings to teaching. But she far preferred farmwork – making bricks and supervising the labourers – to housework. She was an excellent shot and horsewoman and displayed great powers of endurance on the long rides – sometimes covering hundreds of miles – which she and her husband made together.⁴⁶ She appears in fact to have been a remarkable woman, who despite a sheltered and refined

background, was ideally suited to the rigours of missionary life in Zululand in the 1870s.

Robertson on the other hand was not an outdoor type, and suffered from poor health. She took her role as educator and missionary seriously, confining her activities to the mission station and the home. Her duties to teach converts reading, writing, singing, chanting, the catechism, prayers and sewing were perhaps more typical of Victorian missionary women than the more masculine pursuits of Wilkinson.⁴⁷ There is a close similarity between Robertson's duties and those of the Colenso women at Bishopstowe, except that KwaMagwaza was very much more isolated, and living conditions there more rigorous.

The reality of the situation was such that no missionary could afford to take a woman who was anything but stouthearted, resilient and physically active into the wilds of Africa, for she was a vital unit in the mission station personnel, and could materially and psychologically influence the success or otherwise of the station. The popular stereotype of a Victorian woman would not only have been a hindrance to the work of the mission, but would not have survived its physical and psychological demands. The fact that so many Victorian women responded to the philanthropic and missionary call and even found fulfilment in this role, surely indicates the unreality of the popular stereotype for this group of women.

The three political writers among the Natal women of letters, the Colensos and Florence Dixie, form an interesting contrast to the six writers discussed so far. Their literary involvement in, and their intense personal commitment to, Zulu affairs was their most distinctive feature and set them apart from their local literary contemporaries. But in other respects, the Colenso sisters for instance shared certain characteristics with the non-political writers and differed considerably from Dixie.

Lady Florence Dixie (1855–1905) was an aristocratic Victorian whose significance in terms of the unreality of the Victorian stereotype appears to have been considerable. First, she was the only woman of the group under discussion who had anything approaching a formal career, however temporary it may have been. Algernon Borthwick, editor of the *Morning Post*, invited her to go out to South Africa as the first female war correspondent, to cover the Anglo-Boer War of 1880–1881. Second, she had already made a name for herself as an eccentric and vigorous lady traveller and writer. The Douglasses, titled Queensberry, were a robust, sporty family, much given to adventure and notoriety.⁴⁸ Florence grew up with her twin brother, participating in all his boyish sports and adventures. She did not outgrow these pursuits, which in

Victorian times were labelled as distinctly masculine, and her unconventional dress and behaviour in upper social circles made her a well-known eccentric.⁴⁹

She married Sir Alexander Beaumont Dixie in 1875; and after the birth of two sons, abandoned them in 1878 to explore Patagonia. The party included four men, one of whom was her husband who seems to have been a docile but willing satellite to his adventurous wife. Six months later they returned, having survived near-starvation, earthquakes, a pampas fire and extremely primitive living conditions. Lady Florence reappeared with a pet jaguar and publicised her



Lady Florence Dixie

adventures in *Across Patagonia* (1880). Her adventures were no more rigorous or extraordinary than those of Isabella Bird Bishop, for instance (discussed in the first chapter), but she does appear to have been less concerned to observe certain proprieties of behaviour than other women travellers. This will become more evident when her activities in South Africa are described. Borthwick's choice of Lady Florence as a war correspondent was therefore a clever move. Wherever she went, publicity, if not notoriety, followed. The fact that she was ignorant of South African affairs was not considered a disadvantage.

Her activities in South Africa merely confirmed her unconventional traits and proved that an upper-class Victorian woman could be physically tough and energetic, an avid hunting and riding enthusiast, a keen traveller, and altogether unconcerned about the proprieties of feminine behaviour. Far from having a dainty appetite, she wrote robustly of how she and her riding companions 'must have presented the appearance of sharks or famished wolves more than anything else in the greedy manner with which we begged to be at once introduced to our food.'⁵⁰ She went on long and tiring horseback expeditions, travelled via post-cart from Natal to Kimberley on an exhausting and hazardous trip, slept in bug-infested hotel beds, lived in camp with the British army which she enjoyed immensely, and on other occasions camped out in very primitive and uncomfortable conditions. She was usually the first to rise in the mornings and readily groomed and fed their mounts, spurning the help of black muleteers and groom for what would generally be considered

menial work.⁵¹ She thoroughly disconcerted the Boers by her bold and forceful manner, and the reaction of Victorian Natal to this unusually 'unfeminine' woman is perhaps exemplified in the following remarks that appeared in a local newspaper:

It is not often that the public have an opportunity of gazing upon a lady dressed in a man's hat and coat, a very short habit and wearing a pair of unmistakable but untanned Wellingtons ... It is said that she can play a decent game of cricket, write a capital newspaper letter, beat most men at billiards, and bivouac as well as any man.⁵²

Although Lady Florence was so untypical of the Victorian stereotype, in terms of behaviour and activities this is perhaps largely explained on the basis of her social class. Her apparent total disregard of conventional middle-class ideals regarding the sanctity of the home and motherhood, and of conventional modes of dress and behaviour, are perhaps more an indication of the absence of those ideals in aristocratic circles than an indication of the degree of Lady Florence's eccentricity. Moreover, the reaction of her male acquaintances and friends in South Africa to her behaviour, which indicated full acceptance and amused tolerance, is also indicative of the different set of social values that prevailed among the upper-class officer caste.⁵³ Branca has pointed out that the lifestyle of the upper-class woman is better known than that of the middle-class woman. But it would be interesting to know about the social ideals of that class, and if these values were influenced by middle-class ideals permeating upwards in society in the same way, it has been claimed, they permeated downwards towards the working classes.⁵⁴ Lady Florence's behaviour was perhaps that of a woman who, because of her inherited privilege and wealth, could afford to flout values that among the middle classes were imperative.

In terms of behaviour and social activities, there was little in common between Lady Florence and Fanny Colenso, whose non-political activities were, as we have seen, not untypical of middle-class Victorian women. But it was her response to certain experiences in South Africa that place Lady Florence in the same category as the Colenso sisters.

When Lady Florence and her husband arrived in Durban in March 1881, her political views were thoroughly conservative and establishment. She was an ardent, jingoistic imperialist with a deep prejudice against the Boers, and her reaction to the hasty peace terms that prematurely ended her career as war correspondent was typical of most Britons, military and civil. Her first book on South African affairs, *In the Land of Misfortune* (1882), began in this

chauvinistic fashion. She recorded how she and her companions – her husband and military officers – reacted with humiliation and disgust at the ‘shame and dishonour’ that had fallen on Britain, and at the government’s actions which had so ‘debased and lowered the glory and prestige of England’.⁵⁵

But her experiences in Kimberley and in Zululand transformed her jingoism. Evidence of the callous injustice of British officials towards native chiefs in Kimberley jail and of appalling conditions in the native hospital there began what one writer has called a growing ‘unease’ with the effects of British imperialism on South African blacks.⁵⁶ When she and her husband accompanied Sir Evelyn Wood to the meeting with the Zulu chiefs at Inhlazatshe in October 1881, her disgust deepened. She became, in fact, a passionate advocate for the uSuthu, and a stern critic of British policy in Zululand. Lady Florence met Bishop Colenso and Harriette before returning to England in late 1881; and apparently they agreed to mount supposedly independent campaigns for the restoration of Cetshwayo. Once back in London, Frederick Chesson of the Aborigines Protection Society (APS), and Frank Colenso, supplied her with information. Immediately on her return she became publicly embroiled in an argument with Lord Chelmsford on Zulu affairs, through the columns of the *Morning Post*. She also wrote a series of articles for *Vanity Fair*, in which she surveyed the history of the Zulu question, using well-known Colenso arguments. These were published as *A Defence of Zululand and its King: Echoes from the Blue Books* in 1882.⁵⁷

The reaction of British and Natal newspapers to Lady Florence’s political pronouncements indicate that she was thought to have considerable political influence. John Robinson of the *Natal Mercury* denounced her as an agitator and ‘Colenso’ Zulu partisan who made predictably feminine errors of deduction and assumption. Rider Haggard joined the attack on Lady Florence’s sex by accusing her of being over-enthusiastic; that is, emotional and subjective. In May 1882, she had written to the secretary of state bluntly warning him of the disastrous consequences to Zululand of British failure to redress wrongs done to that country, and reminding him of the promise made to Cetshwayo of a visit to Britain. This letter was published in a Blue Book that year; and when it was announced in July that Cetshwayo was about to leave Cape Town for England, it was widely assumed that what Rider Haggard called Lady Florence’s ‘backstairs authority’ had been largely influential. The *Natal Mercury* bemoaned the fact that ‘Once again in the world’s history have woman’s persuasions proved mightier than the counsels of statesmanship.’⁵⁸

It is impossible to gauge exactly how much Lady Florence influenced British policy, if at all; but two factors could be said to have made her attacks better-known than Fanny Colenso's for instance. One was her aristocratic connections and her reputation; the other, the greater brevity and popular style of her articles in *Vanity Fair*, which made more palatable reading than Fanny Colenso's *History of the Zulu War* (1880) and, in particular, *The Ruin of Zululand* (1884–1885).

Although Lady Florence was dissatisfied with the terms of Cetshwayo's restoration, she did not pursue the Zulu cause any further, and turned instead to a spirited and controversial defence of Home Rule for Ireland. From 1890 to 1891 she offered Harriette Colenso help in publicising the Zulu campaign in Britain, but her involvement in Zulu affairs effectively ended in 1882. Her brush with the affairs of Zululand had been decisive. In the words of one biographer, it changed her from a 'rampant Imperialist to a passionate Liberal'. Apart from the Irish question, she moved into philanthropy, opposed blood sports and cruelty to animals, advocated Rationalism, and above all, became a radical campaigner for sex equality.⁵⁹

Although Harriette Colenso shared Lady Florence's political involvement in the Zulu cause, and in fact exceeded her in dedication and length of service, she nevertheless differed considerably from the aristocrat in terms of birth, upbringing and career. She enjoyed an education and upbringing similar to Fanny's, first at Fornsett St Mary, Norfolk, and then at Bishopstowe. Most of her life was spent in Natal, except for three visits to England in the 1860s and 1890s. She and Agnes, the youngest sister, had a particularly close relationship, and they survived all members of the family. In 1910 they were forced to leave Bishopstowe and later settled at Sweetwaters, just outside Pietermaritzburg. There they died within months of each other in 1932.⁶⁰

Harriette's daily activities, until the 1870s, were similar to Fanny's and revolved round the mission station. They included sewing for the mission natives, supervising the black housemaids while in her late teens, teaching at Sunday School, playing the harmonium at church services at Ekukanyeni, and gardening. All her life she was a 'passionate' gardener, and derived 'great pleasure' from music and local parties. But home duties predominated over social activities. According to her mother, she was a home-loving creature, and she always thought of Natal as 'home'. Fanny's emotional experiences on the other hand, led her to reject Natal in favour of England. Although many of Harriette's activities and interests were not untypical of the stereotype, she obviously did not conform to its extreme elements. She played an active

economic and educational role on the mission station, she had enjoyed a superior education, and she sometimes took quite arduous horseback journeys with the bishop.⁶¹ But the most remarkable feature of this woman was the political role she began to assume from 1874.

An earlier chapter has indicated the significance of the Langalibalele affair in the Colenso family and the details need not be repeated here. Apart from the bishop, no one in the family became quite as deeply committed to the cause of justice in native affairs as Harriette. She became his secretary and interpreter, and after his death inherited the Zulu cause, which she looked on as a sacred trust. According to a close contemporary, of all the members of the family, Harriette possessed the intellect of her father, and the tenacity and forcefulness to pursue his causes with vigour. The other cause close to the bishop's heart was the continuation of the Church of England in Natal, and this Harriette fought for with equal determination. In the absence of both brothers, she also assumed the leadership of the Bishopstowe family in all legal, financial and domestic issues. A legacy gave Harriette the financial independence to pursue a career rather than being tied to the domestic and administrative functions of the mission station, and without this it is possible that her achievements would have been less extraordinary.⁶²

In both Church and Zulu affairs Harriette played an active and public role. Her involvement in Church matters was not successful, partly because of her great unpopularity in the Colony, but perhaps also because she was inhibited from more effective action by virtue of her sex. Her mother seemed to think so, for in 1884 she wrote the following of Harriette's efforts to persuade the churchmen to co-operate in the election of a new Bishop of Natal:

She has some weight as Her Father's daughter in talking to one and another and putting leading ideas into their heads, but being only a woman, she cannot openly take the lead, however competent to do so, and if she were to appear in the matter it would only injure the cause she has at heart.⁶³

Perhaps Mrs Colenso underestimated her eldest daughter, for she continued with the remark 'This, which was her Father's life-long object, she puts her little weak woman's hand to'; and in other areas she proved herself a formidable and competent adversary. Fanny acknowledged these qualities in her sister when she described how, behind the scenes, Harriette surreptitiously, but successfully, manipulated the clergy, churchwardens and lawyers who otherwise 'would do all sorts of foolish things without her.'⁶⁴ In this sphere,

Harriette displayed typical Colenso determination and boldness, appealing several times to the Privy Council and appearing before the bar of the House in Natal. Despite all her efforts, however, in 1910 she and Agnes were deprived of the property attached to the mission at Bishopstowe and the land was given to the Church of the Province of South Africa.⁶⁵

In the Zulu cause, Harriette achieved an extraordinary personal influence, unparalleled by any other white woman in the history of Natal and Zululand. One historian has claimed that she was probably responsible for preventing greater disturbance than actually occurred during the reign of Cetshwayo's successor, Dinuzulu, most notably in the unrest of 1888 and 1907, which resulted in the uSuthu chiefs being charged with treason. Harriette played a leading role in organising the defence of the chiefs and in getting Harry Escombe and W.P. Schreiner, two leading South African lawyers, to defend them in 1888 and 1909 respectively. Her influence among Africans was so great that at the turn of the century she even became identified with one of the goddesses in the Zulu mythology.⁶⁶

In 1909, an editorial in the Zulu/English newspaper, *Ilanga lase Natal*, paid tribute to her 'long and generous' service in Dinuzulu's defence, and remarked on the depth of gratitude felt by South African blacks towards Miss



Dinuzulu kaCetshwayo and Harriette Colenso

Colenso. Leading black politicians such as Martin Lutuli, Sol Plaatje and John Dube consulted her, and her consequent influence in the precursor of the African National Congress, the South African Native National Congress, and its policy of non-violence, has been acknowledged.⁶⁷

A recent study has indicated how Harriette, in her efforts to preserve the unity of the traditional lands of the Zulu under Shaka's heirs, carried the campaign right into the House of Commons and into the British press.⁶⁸ She achieved this largely through the influence of the APS, which had a parliamentary organisation and channels to

the press, and through Frank Colenso who continued to act as her London agent until his death in 1910. Furthermore, she went to Britain twice during Dinuzulu's first banishment, from 1890 to 1893 and from 1895 to 1898, to campaign personally for a reduction of his sentence and the most favourable terms for his restoration. In England she used techniques she had developed in Natal to influence policy. She wrote to the colonial secretary offering her views and warnings, published numerous pamphlets to accompany this correspondence, had personal discussions with Colonial Office officials, and worked closely with the APS in a concerted effort to promote the interests of the uSuthu against those of the Shepstone clique in Natal.⁶⁹

Harriette also attempted to gain direct parliamentary support through sympathetic MPs, and during sessions she sat in the gallery to be on hand in the event of a Zulu debate. She circularised MPs, and distributed leaflets, but without great success. Finally, she attempted to sway public opinion. She travelled throughout England, speaking at society meetings and in non-conformist pulpits, and having her lectures published in the press. She made longstanding contact with the leading Liberal newspapers and their editors, including the *Manchester Guardian*, and collaborated with them again in 1907–1908 during Dinuzulu's second trial.⁷⁰

It has been pointed out that Harriette's long battle for the Zulu was unsuccessful. By 1910, Dinuzulu was banished, the uSuthu scattered, Zululand was fragmented and the Natal governor was exercising what she considered to be arbitrary and autocratic rule over the Zulu in his role as supreme chief.⁷¹ Nevertheless, she did exert influence in specific, limited areas. She managed, for instance, to secure a reduction in Dinuzulu's sentences at both treason trials, and it has been claimed that it was her evidence on the illegal and political acts of the Natal government against the uSuthu chiefs which was probably partially responsible for the Colonial Office insisting on a fair trial. She was party to the campaign that secured the uSuthu chiefs' restoration in 1898 and modified some of the terms of the annexation of Zululand by Natal in 1897. Together, Harriette and the APS created what has been called a 'critical environment ... in which imperial and colonial policy had to operate.'⁷²

During the preparation for the second treason trial in 1908, and during the trial itself, Harriette exercised considerable influence. She worked untiringly to collect evidence, and acted as interpreter and interviewer, letter writer and co-ordinator for the counsel for the defence, which consisted of W.P. Schreiner, Eugene Renaud and R.C. Samuelson. It has been claimed that she was the main inspiration behind the strenuous and untiring efforts of the defence team.

Samuelson recorded later that he worked so hard that his physical and mental health was ruined.⁷³ During the trial, she was accorded a unique legal privilege; allowed to sit at a special table near the defence counsel in direct contradiction of normal court procedure and as proof of her unofficial role as assistant and adviser to the defence team.⁷⁴

Like Fanny, Harriette used the press to publicise Zulu affairs, but unlike her sister, she never attempted to write a full-length book.⁷⁵ She was primarily a pamphleteer. She wrote (and sometimes published at Bishopstowe) at least 22 pamphlets on Zulu and native affairs, and a couple on Church matters.⁷⁶ The bulk of the pamphlets appeared in the 1890s and early 1900s, the first one being printed in 1888, the year after Fanny's death. Whether or not there is any significance in that fact is not known.

The format and style of these pamphlets make them more readable and easily digestible than either of Fanny's two books. Their length varied from three pages to fifty. Those pamphlets, dealing with specific issues such as one entitled 'Mr. Commissioner Osborn as one cause of confusion in Zululand' (1892), presented the facts with brevity and in short paragraphs, thus facilitating the absorption of complex information. In typical Colenso style, there were copious quotations from official sources. The dates and references to these sources were footnoted in the margins, which proved an efficient method of indicating chronology and authority. Altogether one feels that the way Harriette presented her case was a far more effective method than that employed by Fanny.

Harriette made some interesting and advanced observations on the character of the Zulu and the Zulu polity, which were not widely held in the last century and are slowly gaining greater acceptance today. She disputed, for instance, the charge that Africans were idle, on the grounds that in traditional society the men played active economic, administrative and advisory roles. These activities may have been less onerous in the late nineteenth century, but she maintained that Africans still had the energy and capacity for work. Moreover, the 'social efficiency' of traditional native political systems was proof, she claimed, of the intelligence of the races of Africa. The gulf between black and white she perceived as being merely a cultural gap, which could be closed by civilisation and education; and thus equality, she wrote, 'must come'.⁷⁷ These views are far more liberal than those of any of the Natal writers discussed, with the exception of Fanny Colenso.

There were two particular themes that cropped up frequently in Harriette's pamphlets. One concerned the nature of Zulu kingship, in respect of which

she often quoted Harry Escombe's definition that it was 'a monarchy qualified by the control of the headmen'; that is, a constitutional monarchy. It was for this reason that Harriette attacked over and over again the autocratic powers vested in the lieutenant-governor of Natal in his role as supreme chief. The misconception that the Zulu king was an arbitrary despot has persisted in Zulu historiography, but is currently being challenged.⁷⁸

The other recurrent theme was the cornerstone of the Colenso defence of the uSuthu: that 'tribal sentiment' for the king was a powerful cohesive force in Zulu society. As was observed earlier when Fanny's *Ruin of Zululand* was being assessed, this belief of the Colensos that the Zulu nation was essentially united, is currently under criticism.⁷⁹

The response of public opinion to these views and activities was a mixture of suspicion, malice, grudging admiration and outright respect. It is believed that one of the reasons for the legislation that dispossessed the Colenso sisters of Bishopstowe in 1910 was the government's fear of Harriette's 'immense and unparalleled influence' over the Africans on the mission station and beyond its boundaries. The Shepstone clique regarded her as the main source of uSuthu intransigence and as an interfering meddler in native affairs. Some of the dislike was tinged with masculine condescension; Governor Henry McCallum called her 'an amiable but imaginative lady'. Malicious rumours were circulated about her treasonable influence over the mission, and about her relationship with Dinuzulu.⁸⁰ The latter insinuations by certain anonymous colonists, in the form of picture postcards depicting the stereotyped sexually frustrated spinster, indicate one colonial attitude to a single woman's involvement in politics.⁸¹ Harriette was neither married nor under the protection of either a father (since the bishop's death in 1883) or of her brothers (one of whom lived in Durban, the other in England). She was obviously the victim of the denigration of the social status of single women. Any involvement in politics, which was considered a major masculine preserve, by this type of woman was thought to imply sexual frustration.

A leader in the *Natal Witness* for 14 August 1883, when referring to a motion for female suffrage that had been introduced into the House of Commons on 6 July commented thus: 'The real feminine spirit does not seek to expend itself in public meetings, or in the elbowing and excitement of political issues.' These were masculine rights and privileges, the leader continued, which only a small group of spinsters and widows had assumed. But the 'bulk of mankind will none the less have the old reverence for the true domestic woman, upon whom rests in great measure the real strength and stability of every nation.'⁸² This is

in significant contrast to public reaction to Florence Dixie, whose behaviour was far more extreme than Harriette's and whose defence of Cetshwayo was equally spirited; but who had the advantage of being both aristocratic and married.

Nevertheless, Harriette also earned considerable respect and support from individual Natal colonists in her various battles for a just native policy and against illegal actions taken by government officials.⁸³ The *Natal Witness* was forced to admit her astonishing grasp of the intricacies of the law, and W.P. Schreiner told her that her 'noble example and clear vision' had been a strong influence on him, a fine tribute from an outstanding lawyer. In 1889 Harry Escombe defended her involvement in Zulu affairs against anyone who might accuse her of venturing outside 'the province of womanhood'. The history of Zululand, he said, was a shameful blot on England's history and he obviously felt that Harriette's sacrifices in the Zulu defence went beyond the narrow ideals of woman's sphere. The *Natal Witness* in 1908 publicly and admiringly attributed to Harriette qualities not usually associated with women in that era: 'Miss Harriette is more of a fighter, she has not only the keen instincts of the controversialist, but the strong will of the commander'.⁸⁴

The full extent of Harriette's contribution to the history of Natal and Zululand has yet to be written, but it seems clear that she was an exceptional example of what could be accomplished by a Victorian woman in colonial society and in the male-dominated spheres of public affairs. Her achievements were probably due to a number of factors, among which could be counted her education and training as assistant to the bishop from 1873 to his death ten years later. These equipped her with the ability and experience necessary to cope with complex administrative and legal affairs. The deep racial tensions of the frontier community of Natal created a climate of opinion that encouraged the blatant disregard of legal and just native administration; and given the character and idealism of the bishop and his family, it was inevitable that they should fight against such activities. Harriette's life on the mission station from the age of eight made her a fluent Zulu linguist with a first-hand understanding of Zulu customs and politics, although a strong bias towards the uSuthu cannot be denied. The legacy she inherited freed her from the necessity to earn a living after the bishop's death, a vital necessity for nineteenth-century women who were ill-equipped for employment.

Finally, Harriette's personal qualities of intellect, competence and deep commitment to the Church and Zulu causes made her a formidable opponent and crusader. While Fanny's commitment to the Zulu cause was a deep one,

she was equally, if not more emotionally, committed to Durnford's defence, and her career ambitions had at various times been directed towards creative writing and art. But Harriette's devotion to the Zulu was entirely single-minded and revealed a 'passionate intensity of purpose'. She often used the phrase 'we Zulus' in her correspondence.⁸⁵ In a letter in 1887 to Chesson, Fanny revealed the extent of Harriette's dedication to the Zulu and its effects on her life should some disaster befall them:

If anything very bad happens I do not believe that I shall ever see my dear sister again. She has strained every fibre of mind & body to the utmost to save her people, just as our Father did, & a great shock concerning them will kill her, as it did him. Many of you in England work as hard & as rightly – you yourself pre-eminently – but the difference is that you have, you must have, many interests. You cannot concentrate the whole powers of mind & body & heart (worst of all) on the one thing, as we do out there, & you are not likely to be disappointed in all your different interests. It is that concentration of the whole being which kills when it proves all in vain, tho' it would be the true way to success were it possible for more of us to practise it.⁸⁶

It was this total commitment to the Zulu and Church causes which possibly explains why Harriette displayed no active interest in any other contemporary issue such as the position and role of women in society. According to her mother, her sex proved a hindrance in the Church of England affairs, but it would be interesting to know what Harriette felt about this question.

It does appear as if Victorian conventions regarding what a respectable woman should not do made her public campaign in England more difficult. This concerned the question of public speaking, which was practically unknown for women until 1869. A national women's suffrage society had been formed in England in 1867, and one of its biggest problems was the reluctance of women to speak on political issues in public. This occurred for the first time in 1869 and it required great courage and commitment in subsequent pioneers to withstand the ridicule, the criticisms of 'disgraceful' behaviour, and the aspersions cast on their 'respectability' that resulted. More women took to public platforms, but prejudice died hard, and when Sarah Frances Colenso heard that Harriette (who was then 45) intended speaking in public in the election campaign of 1892, she asked anxiously: 'Do you mean actually to mount the platform and speak in public? Do, if you wish to, my precious child, but what would Uncle Charles say?'⁸⁷ We know from Harriette herself

that she disliked public speaking intensely. It was dedication to her cause alone that compelled her to overcome her personal reluctance, which was perhaps compounded by contemporary conventions.⁸⁸

The societies Harriette addressed seemed to bear no common characteristic except a willingness to listen to a dedicated Zulu crusader. They included many branches of the Women's Liberal Association, the National Liberal Club, the Tyneside Geographical Society, the Central Progressive Institute, the South Place Ethical Society and the Liverpool Peace Society.⁸⁹ Attempts to draw her into the 'woman question' do not appear to have been very successful. An invitation to chair a meeting of the Pioneer Reform Association in March 1892, at which female franchise was to be discussed, was declined, although we do not know the reason for the refusal. Nevertheless, a pamphlet issued by this body listed Harriette, alongside such well-known emancipationists as Annie Besant and Emmeline Pankhurst, as having delivered a lecture to its members. Moreover, according to Alice Werner, a close friend, Harriette sympathised with the cause of female suffrage.⁹⁰ What contact she had with certain women who were active in the emancipation movement, such as Frances Power Cobbe, Lady Florence Dixie and Olive Schreiner, was limited to brief correspondence on Zulu and other South African matters.⁹¹

One suspects that Harriette was prepared to use any means and anyone to publicise her Zulu cause, and that she was simply too deeply involved in this issue and in Church affairs to be able to spare time for other causes, although they may have had her sympathy. Even the one phase of the woman's movement in which Harriette expressed an active interest – the South African campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts – on closer investigation seems to reveal a similar bias.⁹²

It appears that while she was in England in 1892, Harriette agreed to correspond with the British, Continental and General Federation for the Abolition of the State Regulation of Vice, on the 'purity question'. Among her pamphlet collection in the Natal Archives are a number of publications on this subject, including two referring to the South African campaign. G. Emily Conybeare visited this country in 1891 and 1892 to set up a committee to agitate against the introduction of the contagious diseases Acts into Kimberley and the Transvaal, and for their repeal in the Cape Colony. One suspects that Harriette's interest in the campaign was mainly because of the implication of the Acts for black women. Conybeare's pamphlets indicated how the Acts encouraged the sexual exploitation of coloured and black women.⁹³ Harriette's concern for the welfare of black women as far afield as Bulawayo is indicated

in a letter in her correspondence from Sarah Heckford, dated 20 October 1896. This letter, and subsequent ones, show that Harriette was still interested in the campaign as late as 1896, but the depth of her commitment was probably limited because of her total involvement in the repatriation of Dinuzulu, which finally occurred in 1897.⁹⁴

Of all the women discussed in this chapter, Harriette appears the most exceptional. The writings of the non-political women of letters were non-controversial and therefore unlikely to arouse hostility. Harriette's career and writings provoked extreme hostility and prejudice simply because they were seen as a threat to current ideals of womanly behaviour, particularly as they applied to unmarried women. While Lady Florence's writing places her in the same category as Harriette, it did not provoke the same kind of reaction, and her involvement in Zulu affairs was of short duration. The extraordinary influence that Harriette wielded, or was thought to wield, in the masculine world of politics, places her in a category of her own.

It will be obvious that her stature was greater than Fanny's. This will be explored more fully in the next, and final, chapter, as will the extent to which Fanny conformed to the stereotype and was adversely affected by it.

NOTES

- 1 Lady M.A. Barker [Broome], *Colonial Memories* (London: Smith, Elder, 1904): xiii, xiv, xvii.
- 2 A.J. Christopher, *Southern Africa* (Folkstone: Dawson, 1976): 22.
- 3 Catherine Barter, *Alone among the Zulus* by a Plain Woman (London: SPCK, 2nd ed., [1880]): 4. Published sources, including the *British Museum General Catalogue of Printed Books*, refer to Miss Barter as Charlotte. She, however, signed herself Catherine and was called by that name by her brother (information supplied by Shelagh Spencer, from her 'Register of Natal settlers').
- 4 L. Hutchinson, *In Tents in the Transvaal* (London: Richard Bently, 1879): 224–225.
- 5 E.W. Feilden, *My African Home, or; Bush Life in Natal when a Young Colony, 1852–7* (Durban: T.W. Griggs, 1973; reprint of London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1887): preface; Barter, *Alone among the Zulus*: preface.
- 6 *ibid*: 9.
- 7 *ibid*: 47, 52, 94–97, 101–102, 132, 167, 182–183.
- 8 See, for example, the experiences recounted by Mrs Bowen, Eliza Feilden's neighbour, in Feilden, *My African Home*: 214–215. See also Hutchinson, *In Tents in the Transvaal*: 30–31 and 80–81 for typical exaggeration.
- 9 See, for instance, Barter, *Alone among the Zulus*: 29, 63, 65, 116–118, 160–162, 167, 174–175, 180; and Hutchinson, *In Tents in the Transvaal*: 20, 66, 70, 77, 85–87, 108, 117–122, 126–128.
- 10 Barter, *Alone among the Zulus*: 84; and see also *ibid*: 6, 37.
- 11 Hutchinson, *In Tents in the Transvaal*: 78–79, 158; and see also *ibid*: 30–31 and 126–128 for examples of superficial observations.

*A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EIGHT OTHER WOMEN WRITERS ASSOCIATED WITH
NATAL IN RELATION TO THE POPULAR VICTORIAN STEREOTYPE*

- 12 *ibid*: 125; Barter, *Alone among the Zulus*: 9, 340. Catherine Barter appears to have been actively involved in missionary work on her brothers' farms in Natal many years later. On one occasion she put into practice her belief that Africans could be civilised, by bringing up and educating a Zulu child in England (information supplied by Shelagh Spencer from her 'Register of Natal settlers').
- 13 See, for instance, M.A. Barker, *A Year's Housekeeping in South Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1886): 69, 70, 121, 122, 128–129, 226–230, 234–239, 270, 276–280, 288, 295–296, 329.
- 14 *ibid*: 69, 84, 296–297; Feilden, *My African Home*: 46–47, 121, 124, 138–139, 141, 283–285.
- 15 Barker, *A Year's Housekeeping*: 135.
- 16 Feilden, *My African Home*: 55; and see also 18–19, 103.
- 17 Barker, *A Year's Housekeeping*: 201; and see also 118, 128–129, 164, 182, 196.
- 18 Barter, *Alone among the Zulus*: 22, 128, 183.
- 19 See, for instance, Feilden, *My African Home*: 13, 30–31, 33, 64, 70–72, 306.
- 20 C. Rickard (ed.), 'Charles Barter: Natal diary, 14 August 1852–26 April 1853' (History Honours essay, University of Natal, 1975): 1, 12, 20.
- 21 Hutchinson, *In Tents in the Transvaal*: 10, 36, 123. See Great Britain, War Office, *The Official Army List* (London: HMSO, January 1878), which lists Geo.Wm. Hutchinson as a lieutenant in the 90th (Perthshire Volunteers) Regiment.
- 22 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 18, 145.
- 23 Barker, *Colonial Memories*: x, xii.
- 24 Hutchinson, *In Tents in the Transvaal*: 1, 25, 36, 63, 137, 174–175, 183–184, 218.
- 25 Barter, *Alone among the Zulus*: 3–4.
- 26 *ibid*: 9, 52, 103–107, 114, 119–122, 131–132, 144.
- 27 See, for instance, Catherine Barter, *Home in South Africa by a Plain Woman* (London: SPCK, 1867): 35–36, 50–55, 79–81, 88–92, 101, 111, 136–137 and 144–145; and see also 87–88 and 155–158.
- 28 Barker, *A Year's Housekeeping*: 23–24, 31, 295–296, 298–303, 316.
- 29 *ibid*: 62, 118, 137, 162. See also A.J. Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830–1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1979): 84.
- 30 Feilden, *My African Home*: 111, 290.
- 31 *ibid*: 95, 343; and see also, for instance, 30, 32–33, 39, 40, 44–45, 103.
- 32 *ibid*: 278, 285; and see also, for instance, 23, 57, 76, 77, 79, 213, 216; R.E. Gordon, *Dear Louisa: History of a Pioneer Family in Natal, 1850–1888* (Durban: T.W. Griggs, 2nd ed, 1976): 16, 21–23, 26, 30 and 40–41.
- 33 R. Dalziel, 'The colonial helpmeet: women's role and the vote in nineteenth century New Zealand' *New Zealand Journal of History* 11 (October 1977): 115, 117. For further comments by colonial women, see Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 84.
- 34 Feilden, *My African Home*: 113.
- 35 See, for instance, *ibid*: 95, 96, 107, 335.
- 36 P. Grimshaw, 'Women and the family in Australian history: a reply to "The real Mathilda"' *Historical Studies* 18(72) April 1979: 416. See also Dalziel, 'The colonial helpmeet': 113; and Evans, *The Feminists*: 26.
- 37 See, for instance, Barter, *Home in South Africa*: 97–98, 125–126; and see also 50, 116, 143–144 for the attitude of Molly Dudge's husband towards her. See also Hammerton's comments on the greater social egalitarianism in other colonies in *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 63, 113–114, 137–138.
- 38 See, for instance, quotations from T. Capper, *Emigrant's Guide to Australia* (1853) in Grimshaw, 'Women and the family in Australian history': 416. See also Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 113.

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- 39 Feilden, *My African Home*: 338.
- 40 E.R. Pitman, *Lady Missionaries in Foreign Lands* (London: S.W. Partridge, 1889): 125. See also H. Robertson, *Mission Life among the Zulu-Kafirs* (London: Bembrose, 1875): v, 5, 26; and F. Awdry, *An Elder Sister: A Short Sketch of Anne Mackenzie and her Brother the Missionary Bishop* (London: Bembrose, 1878): 250–251.
- 41 Robertson, *Mission Life among the Zulu-Kafirs*: 6–7, 32, 35–39, 63, 67, 71–72, 75, 88, 155, 166, 172, 192.
- 42 A. Wilkinson, *A Lady's Life and Travels in Zululand and the Transvaal during Cetewayo's Reign* (Pretoria: State Library, 1975; reprint of London: J.T. Hayes, 1882): 23, 45, 48–49, 50, 68–69, 146, 168, 224, 226, 244–246, 248–249.
- 43 *ibid*: 41, 53, 73, 103, 121–122, 147; Pitman, *Lady Missionaries in Foreign Lands*: 138–141; and Robertson, *Mission Life among the Zulu-Kafirs*: 68, 73, 75, 110, 205–206.
- 44 Wilkinson, *A Lady's Life and Travels in Zululand and the Transvaal during Cetewayo's Reign*: 31, 82, 108, 164, 239.
- 45 *ibid*: 163, and see also 147; Pitman, *Lady Missionaries in Foreign Lands*: 128.
- 46 Wilkinson, *A Lady's Life and Travels in Zululand and the Transvaal during Cetewayo's Reign*: 53, 72–73, 81, 82, 100, 105, 107.
- 47 Robertson, *Mission Life among the Zulu-Kafirs*: 1, 3, 19, 26, 88.
- 48 The father, the eighth Marquis of Queensberry, was killed in a shooting accident; the eldest son drew up the famous boxing rules; and his son, Lord Alfred Douglas scandalised society because of his relationship with Oscar Wilde; while another brother died on the Matterhorn (see B. Roberts, *Ladies in the Veld* (London: John Murray, 1965): 80).
- 49 *ibid*: 81–83.
- 50 F. Dixie, *In the Land of Misfortune* (London: Richard Bentley, 1882): 61.
- 51 *ibid*: 25, 41–48, 103–104, 107, 115–116, 150, 153, 183, 228–229, 249–276, 346.
- 52 Roberts, *Ladies in the Veld*: 90. See also Dixie, *In the Land of Misfortune*: 149, 170–171.
- 53 *ibid*: 191, 194, 216.
- 54 Vicinus, 'Introduction: the perfect Victorian lady': xii–xiii. But see Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 145.
- 55 Dixie, *In the Land of Misfortune*: 28. See also Roberts, *Ladies in the Veld*: 85.
- 56 *ibid*: 127. See also Dixie, *In the Land of Misfortune*: 108–109, 152, 172, 227, 236–237, 282, 286–287, 331.
- 57 Roberts, *Ladies in the Veld*: 156, 164; and see also 144–145, 151–154. Dixie, *In the Land of Misfortune*: 357, 385–386, 391, 400.
- 58 Roberts, *Ladies in the Veld*: 171; and see also 156, 163–166; BPP, 1882, C-3247, XLVII, *Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Zululand and Proposed Visit of Cetewayo to England*, no.74, Lady F. Dixie to Colonial Office, 11 April 1882.
- 59 Apart from books on women's issues, Lady Florence wrote against blood sports and published five novels, two dramas and poetry. See also Roberts, *Ladies in the Veld*: 171–172, 178–179; NA, Col Col, box 28, Lady F. Dixie to Harriette Colenso, 6 March 1890, 28 March 1890, 10 April 1891.
- 60 Rees, *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 377.
- 61 *ibid*: 96, 99, 101, 119, 142, 148, 151, 179, 180, 206; KCAL, Colenso Papers, C.1932, Typescript, A. Werner, 'Harriette Colenso': 8.
- 62 A. Werner, quoted in L. Swart, 'The work of Harriette Emily Colenso in relationship to Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo' (MA, University of Natal, 1967): vi; Rees, *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 320, 380, 395, 398; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 1 March 1887; D.R. Edgecombe, 'The influence of the Aborigines Protection Society on British policy towards black African and Cape Coloured affairs in South Africa,

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- 1886–1910' (PhD, University of Cambridge, 1976): 22.
- 63 Rees (ed.), *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 380–381.
- 64 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 9 July 1883.
- 65 S. Marks, 'Harriette Colenso and the Zulus, 1874–1913' *Journal of African History* 4(3) 1963: 404–405.
- 66 *ibid*: 406, 407; Edgecombe, 'The influence of the Aborigines Protection Society on British policy towards black African and Cape Coloured affairs in South Africa, 1886–1910': 171–172; Swart, 'The work of Harriette Emily Colenso in relationship to Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo': 74–75.
- 67 Marks, 'Harriette Colenso and the Zulus, 1874–1913': 409–411; Edgecombe, 'The influence of the Aborigines Protection Society on British policy towards black African and Cape Coloured affairs in South Africa, 1886–1910': 311.
- 68 The following outline is based largely on Edgecome, 'The influence of the Aborigines Protection Society on British policy towards black African and Cape Coloured affairs in South Africa, 1886–1910'.
- 69 Some of the pamphlets written by Harriette and enclosed with correspondence to Colonial Office officials included the following: 'The Zulu impeachment of British officials in 1887–8, confirmed by official records in 1892 (Parliamentary Paper, C 6684) and other results of the Zulu Boundary Commission of 1891' (1892); 'Mr Commissioner Osborn as one cause of confusion in Zulu affairs' (1892); and 'The present position among the Zulus with some suggestions for the future (1893); all printed by Burt & Sons, London.
- 70 Edgecombe, 'The influence of the Aborigines Protection Society on British policy towards black African and Cape Coloured affairs in South Africa, 1886–1910': 181–182, 222–236, 255 (footnote 2), 273; Swart, 'The work of Harriette Emily Colenso in relationship to Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo': 66.
- 71 Edgecombe, 'The influence of the Aborigines Protection Society on British policy towards black African and Cape Coloured affairs in South Africa, 1886–1910': 304. See also Harriette Colenso, 'The present position among the Zulus': 11–13; and H.E. Colenso, 'The reign of unlaw in Natal: Miss Colenso's second address on Natal native legislation' (S.l.: n.p., 1908): 3–10.
- 72 Edgecombe, 'The influence of the Aborigines Protection Society on British policy towards black African and Cape Coloured affairs in South Africa, 1886–1910': 310. See also Marks, 'Harriette Colenso and the Zulus, 1874–1913': 408.
- 73 R.C. Samuelson, *Long, Long Ago* (Durban: T.W. Griggs, 1974; reprint of Knox Printing & Publishing, 1929): 203. See also Swart, 'The work of Harriette Emily Colenso in relationship to Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo': 106.
- 74 *ibid*: 83–84, 118. It is interesting to compare Harriette's relationship with the defence team with that which existed between her illustrious contemporary Florence Nightingale (1820–1910) and the Royal Commission on Health of the Army, which was set up in 1857. Nightingale acted as fact-finder, collator of information and instructor to the commissioners who called her residence 'the little War Office'. See C. Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale, 1820–1910* (London: Constable, 1950): 288–289.
- 75 Three such press articles were reprinted from the *Reformer* (1897) as a pamphlet: Harriette Colenso, 'British troubles in South Africa' (London: A. Bonner, [1897?]). There are references to letters to the press by Harriette in Fanny's correspondence. See, for instance, RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/68, Fanny Colenso to F. Chesson, 10 December 1886.
- 76 A select list of Harriette's pamphlets is mentioned in the Bibliography. For a more comprehensive list, see *A South African Bibliography to the year 1925, volume 1* (London:

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- Mansell, 1979) and the index to the Colenso pamphlets in the Natal Archives.
- 77 Harriette Colenso, 'The problem of the races in Africa' (reprinted from *Asiatic Quarterly Review* July 1897): 3–5, 16.
 - 78 See, for instance, C.de B. Webb and J.B. Wright (eds), *A Zulu King Speaks: Statements by Cetshwayo kaMpande on the History and Customs of his People* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1978): xxiii. See also the following pamphlets by Harriette Colenso: 'The present position among the Zulus with some suggestions for the future': 9, 12; 'The problem of the races': 5–6; 'Memorandum communicated by Miss Colenso to her brother, Mr. F.E. Colenso' (1907): 3; 'Zululand: past and present' (reprinted from *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society* 1890: 4); 'The principles of native government in Natal: an address by Miss Colenso' (1908, reprinted from the *Natal Witness* and the *Times of Natal*): 6–9.
 - 79 See also the following pamphlets by Harriette Colenso: 'Zulu affairs: correspondence (December 1896–January 1897) between Sir John Robinson, K.C.M.G., (Premier of Natal) and H.E. Colenso' (London: A. Bonner, 1897): 10–13; 'Memorandum communicated by Miss Colenso to her brother': 3; 'The present position among the Zulus': 14–15; and 'The problem of the races': 7–9.
 - 80 Marks, 'Harriette Colenso and the Zulus, 1874–1913': 408; and see also 405. Swart, 'The work of Harriette Emily Colenso in relationship to Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo': 19; and Edgecombe, 'The influence of the Aborigines Protection Society on British policy towards black African and Cape Coloured affairs in South Africa, 1886–1910': 157, 255.
 - 81 NA, Col Col, box 80, postcards addressed to Miss Colenso, dated variously December 1907 and February 1908.
 - 82 *Natal Witness*, 14 August 1883.
 - 83 Harriette received a number of letters of sympathy and encouragement in her successful court action against Minister of Justice T.F. Carter; for instance, when she appealed against his refusal to allow her access to Dinuzulu when he was in jail. See Swart, 'The work of Harriette Emily Colenso in relationship to Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo': ix, 65.
 - 84 *ibid*: 107; Marks, 'Harriette Colenso and the Zulus, 1874–1913': 403.
 - 85 *ibid*: 409; Swart, 'The work of Harriette Emily Colenso in relationship to Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo': 17.
 - 86 RHL, ASS Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.18, C 130/76, Fanny Colenso to Chesson, 10 February 1887.
 - 87 Rees, *Colenso Letters from Natal*: 426. See also R. Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: Virago, 1978; reprint of G. Bell & Sons, 1928): 117–121.
 - 88 Harriette Colenso, 'The principles of native government in Natal': 3. See also Fanny Colenso, 'Miss Colenso as an aid to justice and peace in Zululand' (London: Author, 1908): 5.
 - 89 NA, Col Col, box 28, invitations to Harriette from the Southport, Liverpool, Bradford, Leeds and Portsmouth branches of the Women's Liberal Association and from other societies'; box 73, Harriette Colenso to Mr Mileman, 7 May 1890, in which she mentions her first speech – to the National Liberal Club.
 - 90 Werner, 'Harriette Colenso': 12. See also NA, Col Col, box 29, G.E. O'Del to Harriette Colenso, 30 March 1892.
 - 91 NA, Col Col, box 28, Lady F. Dixie to Harriette Colenso, 6 March 1890, 28 March 1890 and 10 April 1891; box 29, F.P. Cobbe to Harriette Colenso, 9 and 24 May 1892; box 73, Harriette Colenso to Olive Schreiner, 13 February 1897.
 - 92 The Contagious Diseases Acts introduced in the 1860s provided for the forced medical

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inspection of suspected prostitutes within prescribed areas, usually military and naval centres. Josephine Butler took up the fight against these Acts in 1870. Repeal was finally achieved in Britain in 1883. See Strachey, *The Cause*: 194–204, 216–217.

93 See NA, Col Col, Pamphlets (Misc.), C 1283/49, G.E. Conybeare, 'Womanly women and social purity: an address' (Cape Town: Townshend, Taylor & Snashall (printers), 1892): 4 and footnote; C 1287/7, 'Re-introduction of the C.D. Acts into Cape Colony: speech' (London: Moral Reform Union, [1892]): 2, 4. See also NA, Col Col, box 29, F. Forsnaith to Harriette Colenso, 30 May 1892 and Ellen Chapman to Harriette Colenso, 19 July 1892.

94 NA, Col Col, box 31, S. Heckford to Harriette Colenso, 20 October 1896; J. Levy to Harriette Colenso, 4 December 1896; F. Forsnaith to Harriette Colenso, 7 December 1896.

6

FRANCES ELLEN COLENZO IN RELATION TO THE POPULAR VICTORIAN STEREOTYPE AND HER LITERARY CONTEMPORARIES

In certain activities and attitudes Fanny Colenso displayed typical features of the Victorian stereotype of womanhood. Her daily activities, until 1879, were home-based – teaching, sewing, housekeeping, writing and painting. These did not conflict with the basic ideal of a woman's 'legitimate' sphere of activity. Even her philanthropic activities did not take her beyond the confines of the mission station. The economic necessity to contribute to the running of the home and station certainly conflicted with the extreme form of the stereotype, which portrayed women as domestically idle and totally frivolous. Branca has claimed that the latter image was largely true of the upper-middle and upper classes. Fanny's daily life until the 1880s was not too dissimilar to the lifestyle of the middle-class woman portrayed by Branca, which was a largely domesticated one.¹

Fanny was not educated for any particular career, and she was economically dependent on her father's income and estate all her life. These were typical features of the stereotype. Moreover, when she lived in England during her mature thirties, her uncle Charles Bunyon controlled her finances. He also assumed the mantle of patriarchal authority, left vacant by the bishop's death, by attempting to interfere in Fanny's plans. Fanny resented this mainly because the Bunyons had never shown sympathy or kindness to her, but also because she was unable to accept anyone's authority but that of her parents. She had always displayed a willingness to submit to parental authority.²

The attitude of Fanny (and all the Colenso women) to the bishop might be said to be typical of the traditional ideal of family submission to the patriarch. As has previously been indicated, she hero-worshipped her father, and his word was sacred. But the bishop was no arbitrary authoritarian and his 'rule' must have been a mild and affectionate one. However, apart from the bishop, Anthony Durnford and Charles (Chinese) Gordon, Fanny did not hero-worship the male sex in general. Colonel Luard, RE, earned her affectionate admiration (and the accolade of Sir Lancelot) only because of his courageous defence of Anthony Durnford and because he resembled the dead officer.³ For the moral

strength of men in general, she had little respect. There were two reasons for this. First, her efforts to find military officers willing to take up Durnford's defence in the face of considerable opposition from the establishment, made her contemptuous of masculine moral courage.⁴

Second, she was a self-confessed disciple of John Ruskin and advocated the special moral influence of women in society. As was indicated in the first chapter, Ruskin developed this belief in his lectures 'Of queens' gardens' and 'The crown of wild olive' in the 1860s. He popularised the concept of women presiding over homes, where they had the power to guide men into good and beautiful ways as an antidote to the corrupting influence of *laissez-faire* commercialism and industrialisation. These ideas emerged in Fanny's correspondence. To Sophie Colenso she wrote in 1885:

How different would it be if the young men knew that by aiming at the highest ideal they were raising themselves in the eyes of a queen (or many queens!) amongst them, a queen too who might eventually stoop from her throne to become even the hand-maid of the worthiest among them! If women's approval were more valued, & if it were only to be won by true worth, we should not have such men as Lord Wolseley and Lord Charles Beresford almost equally admired with a true hero like Gordon ... It does seem to me that very few men (so few as to be the exceptions that prove the rule) are worth much until the best is brought out of them by a woman, or for a woman's sake. But of course she must be a good woman to have the right influence ...⁵

Fanny was thus convinced that she was justified in trying to force Helen Shepstone to believe in Offy's guilt over the supposed removal of papers from Durnford's body in May 1879. She believed that Helen was true and noble and would be able to 'save' Offy from himself.⁶

Except for the men in her family, whom Fanny considered equal to their wives, most men, she believed, had a favour conferred on them by marriage, and were therefore under an obligation to place the woman first.⁷ This theory of women's special, moral power and responsibility, while raising women's domestic and spiritual status, and widening their sphere of action to include philanthropy, nevertheless was used to ensure their inferior economic, legal and political status to men. Insofar as she subscribed to these beliefs, therefore, Fanny Colenso unconsciously supported the popular Victorian ideals that ensured feminine inferiority.

Fanny can moreover be seen to have been susceptible to contemporary ideologies which supported the stereotype. The Victorian attitude to sex for instance (briefly described in the first chapter), was acutely sensitive, and this emerged in a comment Fanny made to Sophie Colenso on the subject of the correcting of proofs for the bishop's Zulu dictionary. The work was not always pleasant, she wrote, since the dictionary included 'many words & expressions in it which a civilised nation do not use ... (I don't mean necessarily bad words, you know, but – well! unclothed ones, expressing unclothed ideas).' Consequently, she concluded, she did not like her men friends to know that she was doing that work as 'they might not understand that none of the unpleasant words stay in my mind.'⁸

In her efforts to exonerate Durnford, Fanny can be seen to have experienced the weight of Victorian disapproval of extramarital relations and divorce. These were severely condemned, and even friendship between the sexes, particularly if one or both were married, was viewed with constraint if not suspicion. Thus it was that the relationships between Fanny and Durnford was kept a closely guarded secret, except among Fanny's closest friends, and Fanny supported this cover up. But the blatant injustice she felt had been done to Durnford's reputation was a grievance she would not ignore, despite the consequences, and these were such that she found herself in an awkward and frustrating position. She observed once that it was an impossible situation to be in, and when the possibility of a public trial concerning the Durnford case arose, she wrote to Sophie:

If the trial takes place in England I shall have little or nothing to suffer thro' being a principal witness, except the natural feminine disinclination to any sort of public actions, for between Edward [Durnford] & Col. Luard I sh[oul]d be well shielded. If it takes place out here, Col. L[uard] will come between me & all avoidable annoyance, but you, no doubt, will understand how willing I am to meet such, & that (even) I sh[oul]d not be quite content, or feel that I have done my work, if I could entirely escape all disagreeables in the matter. Of course it w[oul]d be easier if I were a man.⁹

There is no hint in her writings that the fact of her sex had been a hindrance in her fight for the Zulu. This may have been due to the fact that Fanny was never perceived as a major threat to local and imperial policy. After the bishop's death in 1883 it was Harriette who gradually emerged as the principal Colenso critic. Fanny's defence of the Zulu and of Cetshwayo, moreover, was part

of a wider Colenso defence, whereas Harriette became Dinuzulu's personal champion. But in her fight for Durnford, Fanny's sex proved a problem. When referring to her role in the Durnford case, Fanny acknowledged her 'woman's weakness' and realised that being 'merely' a woman, her opinions would not likely be listened to.¹⁰ In 1884 she decided to try to republish *My Chief and I*, under her own name, so as to achieve maximum publicity for the Durnford trial which she thought would be held the next year. She believed that the sex of the author would create a 'slight sensation'. She also felt that the publishers would need some encouragement to induce them to publish the book under a woman's name.¹¹

There is another sphere in which Fanny experienced one aspect of the conventional Victorian family relationship. When she went to England in 1886, to help Sir George Cox with the bishop's biography and to pursue the Durnford case, she met her one-time admirer, Louis Knollys, after a break of fifteen years. Frank apparently wrote to Fanny complaining that he and Sophie were being neglected for Knollys, and implying that Fanny had been guilty of an impropriety in her relationship with him. Fanny was deeply pained and she chided her younger brother for forgetting that she was 'no longer a girl' and for bringing a serious accusation against 'a woman of my age and position by her brother.'¹² In Frank's attitude there is a suggestion of the traditional masculine authority fostered by contemporary conventions relating to the family, and which underlay Victorian attitudes to women.

The fact that Fanny disputed Frank's implicit claim to authority over her morals and actions, however, implies a certain independence in her attitude. She herself, in 1881, claimed that she was growing more independent, and in 1886 she was even prepared to disregard parental authority on the issue of the Durnford case.¹³ There are a number of other indications that Fanny was not an embodiment of all the elements of the popular stereotype. She was far from the image of the poorly educated, empty-headed creature. The fact that she had no hesitation in venturing into the 'masculine' realm of political debate implies that she did not subscribe to ideas of female intellectual weakness and that she did not believe that woman's legitimate sphere of activity should be confined to the home with interests limited to domesticity. Her ambition to study art and to become a professional artist indicates that she believed that women possessed creative talent and could aspire to professional status.¹⁴

Furthermore, she had a high regard for at least one woman's practical and administrative talents – Harriette's. Her sister's management of the mission station after the bishop's death, so Fanny wrote to Frank, showed presence of

mind, energy and wide experience, far more so than would have been evident in any Natal man. Harriette, moreover, was 'wiser & more capable than most men', and was able to guide and manage the churchmen and lawyers in Natal without them being aware of it.¹⁵

Fanny was obviously restive under certain Victorian conventions. She disagreed, for instance, with the constraints put upon friendship between the sexes. She felt that Ruskin's concept of women's pure and moral influence within the home was meant to be extended beyond marriage and into friendship between any man and woman.¹⁶ Finally, what she called the 'mere' convention which required women to be accompanied when travelling Fanny was also prepared to flout when it suited her, although on most of her journeys she was accompanied.¹⁷

There were, therefore, a number of paradoxes in Fanny's attitude to womanhood. Her obvious belief in women's intellectual, artistic, administrative and political abilities contrasted with the Ruskian concept of women's 'different' but 'special' aptitudes. Not only were those special aptitudes ones that best fitted women for domestic duties and organisation, but the assigning of different qualities to women has been shown to have denigrated women's status. Fanny was in fact a product of the conflicting attitudes and beliefs of Victorian England, a conflict which has recently been shown to have existed in the beliefs of that recognised champion of sex equality in the last century – John Stuart Mill.¹⁸

In this respect Fanny was typical of the other writers discussed in this thesis, who, despite displaying certain characteristics that did not conform to the stereotype, were nevertheless products of the social ideologies that had engendered the ideal of Victorian womanhood. Lady Barker, for instance, also believed in the civilising or moral influence of women in society.¹⁹ Furthermore, in her non-political daily activities, Fanny's lifestyle was not too dissimilar to that of women such as Mrs Robertson, Mrs Feilden and Lady Barker, all of whom led home-orientated lives.

The great difference between Fanny and most of the other women writers associated with Natal was that she wrote because she was deeply committed to a political cause. Most of the other women writers wrote merely to entertain and inform readers of colonial life and travel. The fact that they wrote and published was in itself a challenge to the extreme form of the stereotype. What they showed in their books – that Victorian women could cope physically and psychologically with the hazards and hardships of colonial life, and that they could derive satisfaction from this – was strong proof that for this group of

women at least, the popular stereotype was highly unrealistic. But this evidence was implicit, and it was not likely to arouse male hostility for none of these women made even moderate claims to educational, economic or legal equality.

Fanny on the other hand wrote because she was passionately committed to a political cause. Her interest in politics was not, as we have seen, based on radical feminism. There was in fact little explicit discussion on the nature and role of women in her writings. This was probably due to a number of factors. First, she was not by nature a rebel against her social environment. Second, she spent most of her life in Natal where the 'women's movement' had little impact. Third, she was too deeply involved in the Zulu and Durnford causes, and her health was too precarious, to have left her time and energy to devote to other causes. Nevertheless, by venturing into the 'masculine' realm of political debate in the 1880s, she was making implicit claims to political equality at a time when the demand for political influence for women through the vote was viewed as the most radical aspect of the so-called feminist movement. Only a minority in Britain were claiming political equality at this period, and it was not until the next decade that the political emancipation movement became 'thoroughly' radicalised.²⁰

In the climate of opinion in the nineteenth century, for women to make even moderate claims to educational, legal and economic equality required great courage and determination 'to brave male hostility and prejudice and defy social convention'.²¹ This was even more so for women who claimed political equality. Fanny's writings were therefore a display of intellectual and political courage. In this respect, Fanny would seem to have been closest to her sister Harriette and Lady Florence Dixie among the Natal women writers. Her comparison with Lady Florence cannot be taken too far, however, for as has been indicated, Lady Florence was a married aristocrat and therefore less susceptible to middle-class values. It is against her sister Harriette that Fanny should be most closely compared, and one is led to the conclusion that they were unique personalities in Natal history.

Harriette naturally emerges as the greater figure. As we have seen in the previous chapter, she became a force to be reckoned with in Zulu and native affairs, as her contemporaries acknowledged through their behaviour towards her. She had an astute grasp of political and legal complexities, and was unusually well informed on native custom. She not only ventured into political debate through the power of the pen, but also involved herself actively in the hurly-burly of politics to the extent of speaking in public and participating in political trials. Her involvement in politics was therefore bold, active and

of long duration, and far more effective than either that of Fanny or Lady Florence Dixie.

Fanny lacked the objectivity and breadth of intellect of Harriette. Her participation in political issues was confined to writing. Moreover, her personal involvement was considerably diluted because of her equally, if not more, passionate commitment to Durnford's defence, and because of a debilitating disease. On the other hand, when one considers what Fanny accomplished despite these handicaps, her career becomes heroic. Harriette was never troubled by ill health, and her active career spanned many decades. Fanny's active career lasted barely eight years. Furthermore, Fanny's first publication appeared eight years before Harriette's and it is the significance of this first publication that made Fanny a notable personality in the history of women in Natal.

By launching into the 'masculine' realm of political issues, well ahead of any other woman writer associated with Natal, she must rank as one of the first women in the Colony to break away publicly from the restrictions imposed by Victorian ideals of womanhood. She could well therefore be considered an early forerunner of a more explicit emancipation movement in South Africa.

NOTES

- 1 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 17–18, 45–47, 54–55, 145.
- 2 See, for instance, KCAL, Colenso Papers, Ms. Col. 9.04, KCM 1946, Fanny Colenso to C. Bunyon, 10 March 1881; RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 1 March 1887; NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Mrs Lyell, 15 July [1881].
- 3 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, ? October [1884], 7 April 1886.
- 4 See, for example, *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 24 February [1885].
- 5 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 14 October 1885.
- 6 When Fanny's resolution in this matter began to waver, she fortified her determination to proceed with the case against Offy by reminding herself of the justice of rehabilitating the 'cruelly wronged' Durnford; see NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Colonel Walker, 24 November 1885.
- 7 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 2 June [1880].
- 8 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 28 April 1884.
- 9 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 24 February [1885]; and see also Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 3 November 1884.
- 10 NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso to Colonel Walker, 24 November 1885.
- 11 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 23 November 1884. This second edition was never published. A manuscript copy may be found in NA, Col Col, box 9.
- 12 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 9 August [1886].
- 13 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 11 November 1881; Fanny Colenso to Frank and Sophie Colenso, 2 March 1886.

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- 14 NA, Col Col, box 6, H.S. Taylor to Fanny Colenso, 26 December 1884.
- 15 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 9 July 1883.
- 16 *ibid.*, Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 14 October 1885. See also NA, Col Col, box 8, Fanny Colenso fragments (miscellaneous subjects), 'Friendship'.
- 17 RHL, Colenso Papers, Mss. Afr. s.1288, Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 7 April 1886. For occasions when she had companionship see, for instance *ibid.*, general letter from Fanny Colenso, 26 November 1881; Fanny Colenso to Frank Colenso, 11 November 1881; and Fanny Colenso to Sophie Colenso, 9 July 1883.
- 18 Annas, 'Mill and the subjection of women'.
- 19 Dalziel, 'The colonial helpmeet': 119.
- 20 Evans, *The Feminists*: 63–69.
- 21 *ibid.*: 34.

NOTES ON SOURCES

The fire at the Colensos' home at Bishopstowe in 1884 destroyed most of Fanny's correspondence and private papers. What remains covers the last nine years of her life, 1879–1887, with the period 1885–1887 most thoroughly documented. The material relating to the 'Durnford case' also survived. The bulk of these letters and papers (many of them copies of letters) are to be found in the Natal Archives Depot, Pietermaritzburg and in Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

The reconstruction of Fanny's life and literary career was compiled entirely from her letters and from a selection of other Colenso correspondence, most notably that of her mother Sarah Frances. The latter correspondence was obtained largely from the Natal Archives, and from Wyn Rees's edited version (1958) of the Killie Campbell Africana Library collection of Mrs Colenso's papers. Further information was culled from Sarah Frances and Frank Colenso's letters in Rhodes House Library. The time available for research in Great Britain was unfortunately too limited for these sources to be exploited in detail. Microfilm copies of the correspondence between Fanny and Frederick Chesson of the Aborigines Protection Society between 1879 and 1887 were also consulted. These form part of the Anti-Slavery Society Papers in Rhodes House Library.

It is regretted that a thorough reading of all the Colenso family correspondence in the Natal Archives and the Killie Campbell Africana Library was not possible. The writer left Natal during the course of preparing this thesis and it was not feasible to return for this purpose. A more rounded interpretation of Fanny's character and life could probably be gained from wider reading of her family's letters. The only secondary source offering details of Fanny's life and career is an unpublished paper by Brenda Nicholls, which was presented at the Anglo-Zulu War 1879 Conference held in Durban in February 1979. It is a useful survey and brief analysis of her major literary achievements, unmarred by any but a couple of minor factual errors.¹

Anthony Durnford's private papers were burnt by the military authorities after his death. There are no letters between him and Fanny in the latter's correspondence, and enquiries made to the Royal Engineer Corps Library at Chatham in 1977 elicited the information that there were no A.W. Durnford papers there. Secondary accounts of Durnford's life do not throw much light on his romance with Fanny. The major biographical account, the memoir

published by his brother in 1882 under the title *A Soldier's Life and Work in South Africa*, is based on his letters to his family; but this work does not mention Durnford's special relationship with the bishop's daughter. Other more recent sources, such as J. Man's honours research essay entitled 'Colonel Anthony William Durnford in the history of Natal and Zululand, 1873–1879' and D. Morris's military history, *The Washing of the Spears* (1966), add nothing about Durnford's private life that cannot be gained from the memoir or from references to Durnford in the Colenso correspondence. The latter references are extremely discreet, and it is largely from Fanny's own letters, her actions and her anonymous semi-fictional account of Durnford's early experiences in Natal, *My Chief and I* (1880), that one gains evidence of their relationship.

There is only one secondary account of the events leading up to the military court of inquiry into the 'Durnford case', held in Pietermaritzburg in 1886. This appears as Appendix A to R.W.F. Droogleever's MA thesis, 'The role of Offy Shepstone in Swaziland, 1886–1895' (1976). The original material upon which this summary is based is to be found in Fanny's correspondence in the Natal Archives, in box 8 of the Colenso Collection. A more thorough reading of this turgid material, plus access to the proceedings of the case, might make it possible to assess the validity of Fanny's accusations against Offy Shepstone. The development of Fanny's defence of Durnford's actions at Isandhlwana may also be traced from her correspondence, and from Edward Durnford's three publications: the memoir cited above, and his pamphlets entitled 'Isandhlwana, 22nd January 1879: a narrative compiled from official and reliable sources' (1879) and 'Isandhlwana: Lord Chelmsford's statements compared with evidence' (1880).

The following works were consulted as general background to Natal in the 1870s and 1880s: E. Brookes and C. Webb, *A History of Natal* (1965), W. Rees, *Colenso Letters from Natal* (1958) and W.A. Thompson's PhD thesis 'Wolseley and South Africa: a study of Sir Garnet Wolseley's role in South African affairs, 1875–1877' (1973). Two published works on Bishop Colenso, namely P. Hinchliff's *John William Colenso, Bishop of Natal* (1964) and Sir G. Cox's *The Life of J.W. Colenso* (1888), provided further information on specific issues relating to the bishop, but Simon Barber's MA thesis was particularly useful – 'The development of J.W. Colenso as a missionary bishop, 1854–1879' (1975). Social background to Natal was also culled from A. Hattersley, *Portrait of a Colony* (1940) and Sir J. Robinson, *Life at Natal a Hundred Years Ago* (1972). S. Vietzen's *A History of Education for European Girls in Natal* (1973) provided valuable information on attitudes to female

education in colonial Natal. Further evidence on this aspect was also gained from the leaders and correspondence columns of the *Natal Witness* and *Times of Natal* for the 1880s.

For details regarding the Langalibalele affair, the following sources were the most useful: W. Guest, *Langalibalele: The Crisis in Natal, 1873–1875* (1976), Edward Durnford's memoir of his brother, British Parliamentary Papers C-1025 and C-1342-1, Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal* and Barber's thesis, cited above.

The Anglo-Zulu War has, in recent years, generated many military histories, some of which are popular accounts and none of which have superseded Donald Morris's *The Washing of the Spears* (1966). R. Coupland's *Zulu Battle Piece: Isandhlwana* (1948) and F.W.D. Jackson's article 'Isandhlwana, 1879: the sources re-examined' (*Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 43(173, 175 and 176) 1965) were also found to be reliable analytical and factual accounts. Fanny Colenso's *History of the Zulu War* (1880) provided useful details on military issues.

The centenary of the Anglo-Zulu War greatly stimulated research into its origins, a topic which had previously been neglected. Earlier accounts, including Fanny's history, (1880), C.W. de Kiewiet's *The Imperial Factor in South Africa* (1965), Brookes and Webb's *History of Natal* (1965) and Morris's military history (1966), offer the standard interpretation of the roles and ambitions of Sir Bartle Frere and Shepstone relative to the war. Three recent studies have emphasised Frere's responsibility for the war: C. de B. Webb, 'Lines of power: the high commissioner, the telegraph and the war of 1879' (*Natalia* 8, 1978); P. Colenbrander, 'An imperial high commissioner and the making of a war' (*Reality* 11(1) January 1979); and P. Maylam, 'The official mind and the war: the view from the Colonial Office' (unpublished paper presented at the Anglo-Zulu War 1879 Conference held at Natal University, Durban in February 1979). A stronger emphasis on the role of Shepstone appears in the following: N. Etherington, 'The meaning of Shepstone's coronation of Cetshwayo' (1979); P. Kennedy, 'The fatal diplomacy: Sir Theophilus Shepstone and the Zulu kings, 1839–1879' (PhD thesis, 1976); and J. Guy, 'The British invasion of Zululand: some thoughts for the centenary year' (*Reality* 11(1) 1979).

Secondary material on the post-1879 history of Zululand is scarce. The few recent accounts that do exist have been invaluable for an assessment of Fanny Colenso's substantial *The Ruin of Zululand* (1884–1885). These include the following: C. de B. Webb, 'Great Britain and the Zulu people, 1879–87' in *African Societies in Southern Africa* edited by L.M. Thompson (1969); J. Guy,

The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: The Civil War in Zululand, 1879–1884 (1979); and three papers presented at the Anglo-Zulu War 1879 Conference – J. Guy, ‘The destruction of Zulu independence: the part played by the Natal officials’; P. Colenbrander, ‘The Zulu political economy on the eve of the war: some observations’; and C.C. Ballard, ‘Sir Garnet Wolseley and John Dunn: the architects of the Ulundi settlement, 1879–1883’.

For the comparative section in Chapter 5 on the other women writers associated with Natal, published works were the main sources. The one major exception was Harriette Colenso, who is better documented than Fanny. Yet even Harriette has not received the attention her remarkable career deserves. The only published source is an article by Shula Marks, which appears in the *Journal of History* (4(3), 1963) – ‘Harriette Colenso and the Zulus, 1874–1913’ – and outlines her political and ecclesiastical activities and achievements. There are two theses that offer a more detailed analysis of her political career: L. Swart, ‘The work of Harriette Emily Colenso in relation to Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo’ (MA, 1967); and R.D. Edgecombe, ‘The influence of the Aborigines Protection Society on British policy towards black African and Cape Coloured affairs in South Africa, 1886–1910’ (PhD, 1976). Chapter 4 of the latter work includes a valuable analysis of Harriette’s long-term influence on Zulu affairs. These three sources do not, however, discuss topics such as the woman question. Evidence for Harriette’s attitude towards women was obtained from a search through the index to her letters in the Natal Archives; and in person from Ruth Edgecombe.

Brian Roberts’ *Ladies in the Veld* (1965) provided biographical information on Lady Florence Dixie and E.R. Pitman’s *Lady Missionaries in Foreign Lands* (1889), though based largely on Mrs Wilkinson’s book, nevertheless included minor points of detail not found in the original. Shelagh Spencer generously provided further biographical details on Catherine Barter from her ‘Register of Natal settlers’, which is to be published by the University of Natal Press. For the other women discussed in Chapter 5 deductions were based solely on their published works.

Since the question of the role and status of the English middle-class woman in the nineteenth century has only recently come under serious academic research, the subject is in a state of flux and earlier assumptions are being rapidly adjusted. A reading of the two collections edited by Martha Vicinus, *Suffer and be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (1972) and *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (1977), indicates the advances made in the intervening five years, as does the title of each volume. The now

respectable academic study of women in history is producing a rich crop of socio-economic, as well as political and literary, studies of women.

For the purpose of this thesis, the following works were particularly significant: P. Branca, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian home* (1975), which offers an especially interesting image of the middle-class woman, based on the material conditions of the 'average' woman, and A.J. Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830–1914* (1979), which is concerned with a minority group rather than the 'typical' woman. Both these writers have interesting defences for their different approaches, but both are concerned with correcting the image of the popular female stereotype. This stereotype is nevertheless still a subject of serious debate, as is clear from M.J. Peterson's article, 'The Victorian governess: status incongruence in family and society' in *Suffer and be Still* and from L. Davidoff et al., 'Landscape with figures: home and community in English society' in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* edited by L. Mitchell and A. Oakley (1976).

The study of the stereotype as it appears in literature has been a popular approach for the study of women in the last century, as for instance in Francoise Basch, *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel, 1837–67* (1974, a translation from the French) and J. Killham, *Tennyson and 'The Princess': Reflections of an Age* (1958).

To gain a deeper appreciation of Victorian attitudes to women, nineteenth-century novels and poems are fruitful sources, but they should be read with the caution advocated by Branca and Hammerton.² The works of John Ruskin, specifically 'Of queens' gardens' and 'The crown of wild olive', which are to be found in his collected works volume 18 (1905), as well as John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869), were particularly relevant to this thesis.

Research into the role, status and behaviour of colonial women in Australia and New Zealand has proved extremely valuable for comparative purposes. Hammerton's book on impoverished female emigrants has been cited above, but two other articles which were equally significant were: P. Grimshaw, 'Women and the family in Australian history: a reply to 'The real Mathilda' (*Historical Studies* 18(72) 1979); and R. Dalziel, 'The colonial helpmeet: women's role and the vote in nineteenth-century New Zealand' (*New Zealand Journal of History* 11, 1977).

NOTES ON SOURCES

NOTES

- 1 See for instance, page 15 of Nicholls' article where the date for the purpose of burying some of the bodies on the battlefield at Isandhlwana is given as 19 May instead of 21 May; and page 25 where it is stated that Fanny received visits from the Bunyons, Frank Colenso and Mrs Lees while staying in lodgings in Ventnor, when in fact none of these people managed to visit her there in the last few weeks of her life.
- 2 Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*: 11; Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*: 20.

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The sources are set out as follows

- I Bibliographies and indexes
- II Primary sources
 - Private manuscript sources
 - Official publications
 - Newspapers
 - Contemporary published works, letters, etc.
- III Secondary sources
 - Monographs
 - Journal articles and chapters in books
 - Unpublished papers and theses
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Rhodes House Library (RHL), Oxford

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About the author



Hemel Hempstead, 1974

Patricia Lynne (Pat) Merrett (née Russell) was born in Pietermaritzburg in January 1946 and died there of cancer at the age of 50 in January 1997.

Her father, Walter, had served in the South African army up North and would later work for the Natal Provincial Administration's Roads Department. Her mother, Joy(ce), worked for Harper's the Church Street men's outfitters. Pat had two sisters, one four years older than her and the other eight years younger.

The family lived in Guttridge Street. There was an interlude in Dundee and then they moved back to Pietermaritzburg, living in Longmarket Street. Pat was at Longmarket Street Girls School from 1951 to 1958 and in 1959 moved on to Girls High School where she wrote matric in 1963. In her first year at high school, Eve Grundy wrote of her as a 'girl of high intelligence and thoroughly dependable, extremely conscientious'. She was about to turn fourteen. Her matric year class teacher was the historian Sylvia Vietzen,

who wrote of Pat that she was a ‘conscientious polite pupil with exceptional maturity and good sense’ and a promising academic future. The family home had meanwhile moved to Prince Alfred Street and then finally to New England Road in Scottsville.

She had a very conventional white South African conservative upbringing. Her main out-of-school teenage interest was horses and she rode them at a farm just outside Pietermaritzburg that belonged to the family of her friend Cynthia Ashton (later Guest). At home there was a maid who cooked and Pat grew up speaking a modicum of domestic Zulu.

There was no tradition in Pat’s family of university education, nor money for it. So, in 1964, she registered with UNISA and worked for a year at the Agriculture Faculty of the University of Natal (UN) as a technician. From 1965 to 1968 she studied for a BA degree, majoring in History and Theology, and in 1967 and 1968 worked as an assistant in the University Library on the issue desk. In 1969 she studied for her library diploma at University of Cape Town and in 1971 for her Honours degree in History at UN, which was awarded first class. In the meantime, she was working for Natal Provincial Library Services as a cataloguer and assistant librarian becoming acting librarian for the Midlands region not long before leaving for overseas in August 1972 with her friend and colleague Yvonne Baker.

In Britain she found a job at the South African embassy in Trafalgar Square as a clerical officer in the Information Department where she worked for John Porter who was involved in the right-wing propaganda magazine *To the Point*. (This is something she later redacted from her CV.) But she searched hard for a post in a British library, had several interviews and eventually landed a job at the School of Oriental and African Studies near, appropriately enough, Russell Square. Her employment in the library was motivated to the immigration authorities on the grounds of a knowledge of Zulu. She started at SOAS in April 1973 and left to come home to South Africa in September 1974 having been acting head of the Africa section in the absence of Malcolm McKee. Back home she had a cataloguing job in the library of the Killie Campbell Africana collection, but when I was appointed to a post at Natal Society Library, she managed to get a transfer to Pietermaritzburg where she became one of the first subject librarians.

After the award of her masters degree in 1980, Pat never again had a long-term permanent job. She worked as a tutor in the Department of History at UNP and as a lecturer in the part-time BA programme. In the 1980s she worked briefly for the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness, was

chair for one year of the Natal Midlands region of the Black Sash, and for most of the decade convenor of its advice office. After a short-lived episode as a reporter on the *Natal Witness* she worked as a researcher and writer for the Association for Rural Advancement, but after her health took a major turn for the worse in 1990, she resigned to work from home as a freelance editor. At the time of her death, she was planning to start a PhD on the history of land issues in the Msinga area and had consulted Creina Alcock of Mdukatshani about this.

Pat edited two titles in the Killie Campbell Africana Library publication series: *The Hunting Journal of Robert Briggs Struthers, 1852–56 in the Zulu Kingdom and the Tsonga Regions* (with Roland Butcher, 1991) and *Alone among the Zulus* by Catherine Barter (1995, previously discussed in her thesis). Her other significant writing was: ‘Mrs E.E. Russell and the role of women in the city’s public life’ in *Pietermaritzburg, 1838–1988: A New Portrait of an African City* edited by John Laband and Rob Haswell (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Shuter & Shooter, 1988): 213–216; ‘Underdevelopment and removals: an historical survey of Cornfields, 1912–July 1990’ in *From Removals to Development: Cornfields – Profile and History of a Rural Community* (Pietermaritzburg: Association for Rural Advancement, 1991; AFRA special report; 7): 50–95; and with Elizabeth van Heyningen “‘The healing touch’: the Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa 1900–1912’ *South African Historical Journal* 47 (2002): 24–50. She was also a participant in the Durban Women’s Bibliography Group that published *South African Women: A Select Bibliography* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs, 1996).

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Pietermaritzburg, January 2025