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## The Duthies of Otago

by C. M. DUTHIE

About twenty years ago a very little boy stood gazing up at a picture and pleading "Don't do it lady, Don't do it. Don't pull the dark down". He was Alexander John Duthie, and he was addressing his great-greatgrandmother Jane.

It is a striking photograph, delicately tinted, on porcelain, and more true, I should imagine, than the large portrait in oils that hangs in our Otago Early Settlers' Museum. The oil portrait shows a young woman, and is handsome enough in its way, but the photo has caught so much of the character of an older face that the effect is arresting. It must be, when even a tiny child saw its strength and invested his ancestress with authority to bring the night. In fact, she did the opposite. She began the day for six generations of Duthies in New Zealand. But Alex was too young to see that there was more to Jane's likeness than sheer strength and courage. There is wisdom, an uncompromising integrity, kindness, a combination of serenity and vitality, and just a twinkle of humour. Here, one would say, is a person who could "see life steadily and see it whole".

Not that I knew Jane Duthie. She was born 155 years ago, in 1815, the year of Waterloo, in Moneymore, Northern Ireland. Her father, John Martin, was well-to-do, owning two farms. He married twice. The first family were Robert, Jane and Rebecca, and their mother was Jane Shields. While the children were still very young, their mother died, and two years later John Martin married Sarah Espie by whom he had seven more surviving children. Somewhere in one or other of the families were three little girls, all named Anne, who died in infancy.

When Jane was twenty-three her father died "of a fever" and a week later his wife followed. The family escaped the infection, and two years later, on the advice of Jane's step-uncle, Dr. Espie, they sold up everything and set sail for the colonies.

That was in 1840, on the ship *Lady Nugent* Robert now a widower, came too, bringing his children, and Rebecca came also, with her husband.

Jane, with two maids to help her, undertook the care of all seven young brothers and sisters. The eldest, Edward, was 19, but James was only a toddler. He had been ailing ever since his mother's death. Perhaps Jane had hoped that the sea voyage would help him, but he grew worse. The ship's doctor was usually drunk and incapable, and the health of all on board was in a bad way. Little James died, and one of the two maids died also.

The family had intended settling in Hobart, but when the relative who was to meet them reeled on board wanting to borrow money, Jane made up her mind that Tasmania was no place for the family and kept them on board.

On they came to New Zealand, and landed at Wellington on March 17th, 1841. It had been a hard voyage. Two of the party had died. So had nineteen other passengers, water had been in terribly short supply, and the crew had made trouble until several landed up in Hobart gaol. Altogether, the sight of land was so welcome that the young Martins, who had been used to fine china at home, brought up their tin mugs and plates and tossed them into Wellington Harbour, just to celebrate. They regretted their exuberance later when they came ashore and found how scarce and expensive all such items were.

Chroniclers gave Jane's disapproval of her relative as the only reason for not stopping at Hobart. They do not mention young Alexander Duthie, who was apparently on the same ship. Had he anything to do with the change of plan? No doubt Jane would still have come on to New Zealand, but did the young man from Aberdeen make the prospect more inviting? At any rate, on December 19th, 1842, Alexander Duthie and Jane Martin were married by

Mr. McFarlane, the first Presbyterian minister in New Zealand. In Wellington the twins were born—and died. Then Sarah was born.

In 1846, Chas. H. Kettle was appointed to survey the Otago block and Alex Duthie become his chain-man. So it was that the family moved South, part of "the lone grey company before the pioneers". Several others of the Martin family went with them, but John remained in the North; Martinborough is named after him.

In the Hocken Library, among the early manuscripts, are two lists or agreements, of the payment and provisions that Kettle's men were to receive. All the items of food are listed, and then the names of the men, followed by their signatures. Some of the men signed, but some just made their mark, a cross.

On the first day's list Alexander Duthie's name has a cross opposite it, but on the list drawn up on the next day, there is his signature, firmly and boldly written. What happened? Was he illiterate on the first day and able to write a good hand on the second? Probably he was busy or absent the first time, and someone else, with or without his permission, made his mark for him, almost a kind of forgery. Anyway, on the second day there was no mistake. Alexander Duthie signed his name, and there it has remained for a hundred and thirty-four years.

So the Duthies stayed while Dunedin was surveyed. Jane was again pregnant and they planned to go to Wellington for the confinement, in a ship that was about to set sail. Mrs. Kettle, however, was in delicate health, and her husband persuaded Jane to remain with his wife and await a specially chartered ship.

They never did sail. The vessel on which they had intended to go foundered, and all on board were drowned. Probably Edward was born before the chartered ship arrived. Anyway they remained in Dunedin.

Among the names on the monument in the old cemetery in Arthur St. is that of Alexander Duthie. There is no age; nothing but the name. Who was this Alexander ?

In 1852 the family moved to the Tokomairiro Plain, where a year later. John Alexander was born, the first white baby in the district. Chroniclers do not mention Alex, but the Visitation Book of the Rev. Dr. T. Burns seems to answer the mystery. The entries run :

Sept. 19, 1848—Alex Duthie not (i.e., not a communicant) from Kirrie- muir, Forfarshire. Jane Martin, Bapt. from near Belfast, his wife, Sarah 3, Edward 10 mos. unbapt., 2 ch. Edward and Thomas M. Martin, her brothers both Bapt.

Dec. 12, 1849—Stafford St., Princes St., Barracks Walker St. Alex Duthie not. Jane Martin not. Sarah 4, Edward 2 ch. Margt Martin not, Edward Martin not.

Dec. 30, 1850—Stafford St.

Alex Duthie not, Jane Martin not, Sarah 5, Edward 3, Alex 1 3 ch. Edward Martin not, Ann Reid com h.w.

Feb., 1853—Tokomairiro.

Ed. Martin com. Ann Reid com h.w. Cath 2, Sarah Espy inft. 2 ch. Alex Duthie not, Jane Martin not h.w. Sarah 7, Ed 5, Alex 2, 3 ch.

Little Alex must have been two years younger than Edward. He went South with the family, but must have been buried in Dunedin, presumably in 1853. This would tie in with an old family story of Alex and Jane bringing a sick child to Dunedin to a doctor. One gets the impression that the journey was made on foot. Was the Taieri in flood? If this was the story, then it seems that the little one did not survive the journey, and that the next child, born a few months later, was given his name, with John added.

Ever since then the name has been carried on, reversed in each generation. John Alexander grew up to become mayor of Milton. His son, Alexander John whose first wife, by coincidence, was named Janet Martin, repeated the pattern of pioneering on the Wanganui River. His son was John Alexander, medical practitioner, and his son is Alexander John.

It seems odd that Dr. Burns says Alex was aged 1 in 1850, and 2 in 1853, but we can only assume that the good doctor made a slip. The fact that Jane and her husband were not communicant members does not suggest any lack of devotion. It was not uncommon for Presbyterians at that time to have a peculiar reluctance to become communicants on the grounds that they were unworthy. The fact that the first sacrament was given to disciples who were distinctly unworthy, and was meant for ordinary folk does not seem to have registered.

Alex named their home Janefield, and they set about farming and bringing up their family. They were still young. And then Alex died. According to family tradition, his last words were "Jane, educate the boys",

There was by now a primary school in the district but no post-primary education to be had closer than Nelson. So Jane sent the boys all the way to Nelson College, and later, on the day it opened, to Otago Boys' High School. With two farms to manage it must have been a temptation to keep the boys to help at home, but Alex had said, "Jane, educate the boys", and so Jane did. It was as simple as that, whatever the cost.

So much for the Jane Duthie of history, the young woman of the oil portrait. There are others far more fitted than I am to carry on her story. I only know the photo at the top of my stairs, some traits that I imagine I can see inherited by her descendants, and the little reminiscences I heard of her from her grandson, my father-in-law.

His own home was only half a mile from Jane's, but as a child he was never troubled by his asthma when staying with her. He remembered a house run with regularity and efficiency.... serenity might be the best word. Jane never raised her voice, never punished, but her quiet authority was such that no one ever, dreamed of disobedience.

But the twinkle was there all the same. When the little boy would clamour to know what she had brought from town, she would reply "A bonnie new nothing to stick on your nose".

She must have been a keen gardener, for some of her plants have been spread far and 'wide. It was from a North Island garden that I was given a green ixia from her stock. Her favourite hymn was the Old 100th. Her grandson in his last illness, often spoke of it, and at his funeral the people sang it—a whole church full of people, and they sang it not as a lament, but full-throated and triumphant.

"Oh enter then His gates with praise,  
Approach with joy His courts unto...."

I never knew Jane, only the legacy she left of hospitality and kindness, courage and an integrity of fearsome intensity. It is easy to idealise a memory, and no doubt Jane must have had faults, but I doubt if sentimentality would have beers one of them. She would probably regard my tribute tolerantly as "a bonnie new nothing to stick on your nose."

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