INTRODUCTION.

The first years of the 19th century mark the turning point in the legal fortunes of women. For the first time a body of influential male opinion expressed a new and honest interest in women's position and a belief that the doctrines of equality and liberty did not apply to men alone. They were strengthened in these views by women themselves, writing and speaking, as the century progressed, from nearly every viewpoint from the conservative and moderate to the violently revolutionary.

The 19th century produced in all parts of the western world some able and remarkable women, in nearly every case from the only class at this time in which they could develop. As writers, poets and unrecognised business women they produced remarkable work, often of genius, and if their legal rights were limited, their prestige, their courage and their achievements were often considerable. Not all of these women were workers for feminist causes, though they enhanced them, and from the same general social background which produced most of them, the working feminists also sprang.

The women's movement of the 19th century was on the whole, a middle class movement, its members from highly respectable and comparatively wealthy families. Though other spokesmen can be

1. Among others may be included Mary Ann Evans, the Bronte sisters, Jane Austen and Isabella Beaton.
found in both the working classes and the aristocracy, aspiring feminists from both these classes tended to suffer from disadvantages. The most dedicated feminists in any country worked to rigidly defined, though unwritten, rules and personally filled certain almost essential qualifications. Briefly these consisted of the ability to make demands without appearing to demand something completely fanciful, which called for an assured social background and acknowledged respectability; an ability to argue logically and convincingly in support of these demands, which called for a superior education; and above all, for the security of a position in a society which they could enter easily and which was at least willing to listen to them. Lastly they required time and an adequate income.

The working class woman was debarred on almost all these counts, whilst the higher the woman's social position, the more she was hampered by too valuable a social standing. In the early stages too, the upper class woman had less sense of the injustice of the laws affecting her. Her wealth protected her against some of the provisions of the laws of marriage and property, and her sense of social injustice was not so highly developed. There were certain exceptions, but on the whole, the woman's movement in England, Australia and the United States was a middle class one, strongly liberal in outlook, if not completely egalitarian, and highly idealistic in its motives. Its leaders were women who found
a life of leisure particularly irksome, and who had the time, the education and more important, the means to indulge in activities which many members of the population considered wholly unwomanly.

The work of some of these women and the different causes they followed must be alluded to in some detail as it was essential background to the activities of the women in New South Wales. In particular, the activities of the women in England and the United States must be described as these were the two source countries of the Australian movement, the countries from which Australian women gained many of their ideas and methods, and from which their most important organisations were copied.

EARLY FEMINIST WRITERS.

By almost common consent today the pioneer feminist is taken to be the English Mary Wollstonecraft. Her theories had their antecedents in those of Mary Astell, who a century earlier had pleaded for better educational opportunities for women, and in the pronouncements of the Abbé Siegès and Condorcet of France who had both written on the same subject. Mary Wollstonecraft, however, was the product of an age of pronounced liberal and revolutionary ideals, and a woman of unusual determination.

2. The introduction of commercial contraceptives had by the latter half of the 19th century also allowed more women more time because of the limitation of families.
Born in 1759, her early life was an unhappy one and she had, by working as a governess, become the sole supporter of a shiftless father and a number of brothers and sisters. She became a professional writer, married Charles Godwin and became the mother of Mary Shelley. In 1792 she published a book of forceful views and marked character which she called _A Vindication of the Rights of Women_.

The book has never been greatly admired for its style or its reasoning and even her apologists give her little credit for philosophical content. Its prevailing spirit is one of indignation and her minor likes and dislikes are often given disproportionate importance. Nevertheless, it clearly sets out a number of ideas, which may not have been original but were certainly unusual at the time. Amongst these are some now considered recent concepts, particularly the idea that differences of abilities between the sexes are the result of cultural and social conventions and that these play a considerable part in producing what are considered to be innate male-female personality traits. Primarily, however, the book is an intense plea for the understanding and improvement of woman’s lot. A century before Ibsen Mary Wollstonecraft described life in a doll’s house, with all its limitations, and did it so thoroughly, that Walpole was moved to call her a "hyena in petticoats".

Her extreme but not incorrect presentation of what was expected of women, Mary Wollstonecraft expressed in these words:

[Woman] was created to be the toy of man, his rattle, and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused ...

Her main target, however, was Rousseau, and particularly his EMILIUS. Whatever Rousseau may have felt about liberty in general he gave little evidence that he wished to see it extended wholeheartedly to women, and his ideas on their education were reactionary.

... all the ideas of women, he wrote, which have not the immediate tendency to points of duty, should be directed to the study of men and to the attainment of those agreeable accomplishments which have taste for their object, for as to works of genius, they are beyond their capacity. Neither have they sufficient precision or power of attraction to succeed in sciences which require accuracy ....

Mary Wollstonecraft on the other hand envisaged the education of women for the professions.

Make them free she wrote and they will quickly become wise and virtuous.

4. Ibid. p. 68

5. In another context Rousseau's writings on education had a sounder effect. His beliefs considerably influenced later educationalists such as Pestalozzi and Froebel who, when their own educational systems became better known, enjoyed the active support of women in every country where they were introduced.

6. Mary Wollstonecraft, op.cit. p.75.

Mary Wollstonecraft, though she became widely known, had no immediate influence on the movement for women's rights; if indeed in 1792 such a movement could be said to exist. She only achieved the status of a prophetess some fifty years later and for many years the mention of her name was sufficient excuse almost everywhere in the English speaking world for attacking what were considered all the more ridiculous pretensions of women. "Crackbrained" the SYDNEY MORNING HERALD called her in 1847 in the course of an admonitory article on the Governor's choice of women house guests.

Mary Wollstonecraft's most immediate follower, though he did not argue from quite the same viewpoint, was William Thompson an early exponent of scientific socialism. Thompson's attention had been drawn to an article by James Mill, father of John Stuart Mill, in the 1823 edition of the Encyclopaedia, in which Mill had written:

... all those individuals whose interests are indisputably included in those of other individuals may be struck off from political rights without inconvenience... in this light... women may be regarded, as the interests of almost all of whom are involved in that of their fathers or that of their husbands ..... 9

8. SYDNEY MORNING HERALD. 24 May, 1847. In 1904 the New South Wales Royal Commission on the Birthrate also saw a sinister link between the publication of her book and that of the Rev. Malthus, Principles of Population .

9. A position opponents of suffrage were still defending in the Legislative Assembly in New South Wales in 1902.
Thompson and his associate, Mrs. Wheeler, attacked this view in a book whose title summed up their subject, *An Appeal by One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain their Political and Thence Civil and Domestic Slavery*.

This book pleaded for complete political equality, but it was not widely read. In 1832 the Reform Bill gave the vote to "male persons" thereby specifically for the first time excluding women. Their position in this respect was worse than before.

Nevertheless in the same decade the first real stirrings of women's rights movements in England and America began to be discernible. In particular, the influence of women through organisations not designed for this purpose, but allowing them the opportunity of expressing opinions with which an influential sector of the community heartily agreed, contributed immeasurably to their standing and their self-confidence. Some of these organisations had a wider application than the small local charities which had always been considered a respectable and worthy outlet for women's energies, and which on a smaller scale, provided a training ground for them. But the number of topics in which women were taking an interest was increasing. The lead however, came from the United States, and the cause; slavery.

10. With whom he formed a liaison and whose views on the rights of women influenced him considerably.
The English abolitionist movement had been a man's movement, but in America, from the time slavery began to reveal itself as a dangerous national problem, women took an active part in the campaign against it. In 1832 a Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society came into existence. At its first convention there were 81 delegates from twelve states. Many of its members were Quakers, who already accepted the principle of equality of the sexes.

Women stepped a little less easily into public life in England. Although they campaigned for the Anti-Corn Law League in 1836, and many had been active Chartists, they had gained little experience. When the World's Anti-Slavery Convention was held in London, they were barred and the American delegates were not received. They were however, allowed to sit behind a curtain.

Suppose now, said Mrs. Stanton to Mrs. Lucretia Mott, one of her fellow delegates, the spirit should move you to speak, what could Joseph Sturge do, as a Quaker in the Chair?

II.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, replied Mrs. Mott, there is liberty. There is no danger of the Spirit moving me to speak here.

II. Rufus H. Darby, Report of the International Council of Women, Washington, 1888, p.322. Quakers had never insisted on the secondary role of women. In 1776 on the motion of a Quaker Minister, New Jersey changed its colonial charter to give women with a $40 property qualification the right to vote. In 1800 three women voters helped to give the State's electoral vote to J.Q. Adams over Thomas Jefferson. They lost this voting right in 1807.
Almost certainly the existence of a substantial body of women who had met less traditional antagonism to their participation in public life through their interest in this and other good causes, and who had conducted an early campaign for higher education for women, put American women into an early lead in the women's rights movement. Very early too, they received the support of a wide range of such magazines as Godey's Lady's Book, Amelia Bloom's Lily and Margaret Fuller's Women in 19th Century, all of which brought general public feeling and influential intellectual sympathy onto their side. Similar publications made a later appearance in England.

In 1848 Mrs. Stanton and Mrs. Mott fulfilled their long cherished plan to hold a Women's Rights Convention by calling one in the Wesley Chapel in Seneca Falls. Delegates came from 50 miles around to hear a Declaration of Principles based on the Declaration of Independence. The women attracted a great deal of attention and undoubtedly drew some support for their claims for property rights for which the organisers of the convention, and their main supporters, had been actively pressing.

12. Troy College had been founded in 1821 and Oberlin in 1833, though at this stage, both had the status of seminaries.
The first Married Women's Property Acts were passed in United States State Legislatures in the early 1850s, more than twenty years before similar legislation was passed in England and Australia. The work done in America, in fact outstripped that done anywhere else at this time. Stepping into the spotlight was Susan Anthony, the first to organise petitions on a grand scale, thereby exerting a later influence on women's groups in both England and Australia. She was also the first woman to travel extensively for her cause, an example followed later elsewhere, notably in Australia. In 1855 Susan Anthony made an epic and difficult tour of New York State to raise both funds and general interest.

Women's Rights Conventions were held regularly from 1850 in America and in 1853 the first Temperance Convention was also organised. This was a venture by women in a field in which they had long been interested in many countries and their first important solo effort in one they were to dominate in the second part of the century.

Nevertheless in spite or because of the American lead, there had been some progress in England. In 1845 Mrs. Henry Read had published A Plea for Women and followed it with a number of suffrage pamphlets. In 1848 Joseph Hume and Richard Cobden had moved a resolution in favour of women's votes in the House of Commons. Disraeli spoke in support and Charles

Kingsley and Frederick Denison took up the cause. In 1855 the first regular Committee for Women's Rights was formed by Barbara Leigh Smith and two years later it launched the *Englishwoman's Journal*.

In 1857 at its third attempt, the first English Matrimonial Causes Act was passed. Its introduction owed much to liberal divorce laws adopted in Prussia and France and to the writings of Bentham, particularly about freedom of contract, but very little to agitation by women. In a time of women's absolute dependence on men for support, this is not entirely surprising. Not admitted generally was the desire of men themselves to obtain a cheaper and more satisfactory form of divorce. Women, in fact, had considerably more difficulty than men in obtaining a divorce under the new Act. Men needed only to prove adultery; a woman had to prove adultery plus misconduct of a grave nature. In England and later in New South Wales the arguments were the same. A man's adultery could be forgiven; a woman's might result in the introduction of a child into a family circle for whom the husband should not be responsible. Constantly reiterated was the sentiment that a woman's sin was different in kind from a man's, her moral lapse far greater and far more shattering to society.

This continual exposition of a double standard, freely admitted, explains in part the moral stand taken by many women who later became identified with women's movements.

In England women could be said to have entered politics in 1865, when a committee of ladies helped J.S. Mill to Parliament. From this date a number of small committees of women pledged to support suffrage or to debate political questions was formed. They raised local interest only, however, and had little success. Mill, whose attitude to women was very greatly influenced by his admiration for his wife, introduced a suffrage bill in Parliament in 1867 to enfranchise unmarried women householders. It was defeated and an active campaign by over 5,000 Manchester women the following year to have their names placed on the voting registers also failed.

All these intermittent campaigns were played out in England and the United States against a general increase in publicity for women's rights. Two wars had advanced their position immeasurably. The first, the Crimean, gave the world Florence Nightingale and a more efficient nursing system, and the second, the American Civil War, an opportunity for women to prove similar organisational ability was not confined to one country. The American women also had the opportunity to prove singular business acumen as well.
The Crimean War, whilst it did not cast women in a new role, did transform their old ones. The American Civil War went a step further by drawing women into the special organisations for the upkeep of the new sanitary commissions. The fact that America, unlike England, was internally torn by war at this time, with greater loss of male life, partly explains why women took up professional training in great numbers after the war finished and why there was also a marked increase in the numbers teaching or employed in Government offices. Nevertheless, in spite of Susan Anthony's renewed campaign for suffrage, there was mixed support only for this. Kansas put the question to a referendum in 1867 and lost, but the territorial Council of Wyoming passed it in 1870, largely because of the persuasion of a Mrs. Esther Morris. Wyoming was, from this time, the lode star of suffragettes everywhere.

Higher Education in England and America

The plea for facilities for higher education from women in Europe and America was an integral part of the Women's Movement, though not one of its central facets. The principle of equal educational opportunity was usually fought for by groups of women who, though upholding the necessity of equal status in the political and legal fields as well, nevertheless

15. The Lady with the Lamp was the 19th century equivalent of a successful public relations image. It presented Florence Nightingale in a traditional domestic role which was more important than where she was performing it.
put their main energies into this particular cause. The most vocal fought for university education and achieved success at a time when the principle of universal education was being generally adopted in most western countries. Though these groups themselves did not represent a general demand in the 60's and 70's, improved educational opportunities continually proved the strength of their efforts from this time on.

General thinking about education had been undergoing a change in Europe for almost a century before 1870. Broadly the new feeling sparked off by reformers such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel and a host of lesser known followers, held that education should not only be extended to more people, but widened in its scope. A score or more educational bodies on both sides of the Atlantic worked to this end in the first part of 19th century, but though few of these schemes aimed specifically at the improvement of education of women, in the general awakening of interest in education their position was also considered. In 1868 the Royal Commission on Education in England found female education badly conducted, though it made few suggestions for improvement. It did pave the way for the Education Act of 1870 which made education compulsory for 16. Although there were a number of better class schools for girls in England and the United States, these were private ones. The important Girls' Public Day Schools Company of England was founded in the early 1870's.
for boys and girls and also enabled women to sit on School
Boards. The 1880 Education Act in New South Wales was
itself a manifestation of a world-wide trend, and advanced
the aims of the 1866 Act.

Though the women of England and America were interested
in the workings of their various Education Acts and stood
immediately for Board selection, they made their most public
appeal for educational rights on the question of University
training. Here they had actively to seek the support of male
sympathisers and definitely to take the initiative. They
were almost immediately successful. The battle for University
education for women was joined in the United States and Europe
in the 1860's and was all but over within 20 years.

In some cities, Paris and Zurich, for example, women were
studying at University before 1865, but the main breakthrough
came in the 70's.

17. This privilege was extended to many women in America at
much the same time.

18. Except for the granting of degrees by Oxford and Cambridge.
Oxford agreed in 1920; Cambridge in 1948.

19. The back of the opposition had been broken a little earlier
in the United States. Troy College had been founded in 1821
and Oberlin in 1833. Vassar was founded as a full college
in 1865, Michigan in 1870, Smith and Wellesley in 1875,
Harvard Annex in 1879 and Bryn Mawr in 1885. Women could
study medicine in the 1850's in the United States and the
first English woman doctor, Elizabeth Blackwell, obtained
her degree at Geneva College in 1859. Elizabeth Barrett
gained admission in England to medical school through a
legal loophole, afterwards closed, and graduated in 1865.
In England it was precipitated by London University's refusal in 1862 to allow Emily Davies to enrol and her subsequent campaign to have the Local Oxford and Cambridge exams opened to women. Both universities had agreed to this by 1870, largely because of the wide sympathy the majority of the staff had with her cause. In 1869 she founded a women's college at Hitchin and later moved it to Girton at Cambridge. At much the same time the interests of women were further forwarded by the sponsoring of a series of lectures by the North of England Council for Higher Education for Women. Newnham College was founded as a result of efforts to provide better accommodation for girls attending these lectures. The opening of this college was followed in a short period by the attachment of women's colleges to other British Universities.

**CONCLUSION**

Although they could claim only relatively minor successes, the women of England and America by 1880 were demonstrating a fairly uniform advance in the direction of political and social equality. More important, on both sides of the Atlantic they had drawn considerable attention to their position and won an awareness of themselves, and for themselves, that had been missing before. They had also made a few excursions along the paths they were to follow later; those of political action and militant demonstration. 20

20. Eleanor Flexnor, *op. cit.*, p.167. From 1868 onwards there were organised demonstrations in the United States, followed by some court actions. One judgement in the 1870's issued as a result of a legal challenge stated that suffrage was not co-extensive with citizenship.
The New South Wales Women's Movement was virtually the product of this overseas movement and, when it emerged in the 70's and 80's, it did so against a background of overseas successes and a sudden appreciation of the importance of achieving something similar in New South Wales.