

CHAPTER VTHE MOVEMENT UNDER WAYOVERSEA DEVELOPMENTS

The 1880's marked the first decade of the international organisation of women. It was a movement encouraged by the advances in legislation and the general feeling that improvements though considerable, were not considerable enough. Women at this time were interested primarily in two things: legislation which concerned them personally and legislation which directly or indirectly concerned the wellbeing of their families. They were very little concerned with other social legislation which did not affect them in this way and even when they became active in political and semi-political work thirty years later, their ambitions were mostly confined to the same goals. Very few were personally ambitious and political aspirations by women were absent almost to the point of non-existence. By 1880 or a little after, however, they had begun to believe that only possession of the franchise would affect the stepping-up of those classes of legislation in which they were particularly interested. The franchise became then the key to open all doors.

The degree to which this belief became rooted in a country depended on the extent of the introduction of women's rights in that country and the availability of women to spread this belief. These conditions were accentuated by the fact that faster transportation and speedier communications made the sheer mechanics of organisation easier and more successful.

Alongside the ability to move around more easily was the acceptance of the fact that women might now travel unchaperoned and the fact that modifications in 19th century<sup>1</sup> dress enabled them to move more easily anyway.

Australia learnt most of her lessons in organisation from the United States, though she practised them on a far more limited scale. In 1882 Mrs. Cady Stanton had considered the idea of organising an International Council of Women to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the meeting at Seneca Falls. A year later in England, Miss E. Whittle, M.D., organised a gathering of friends of women's suffrage to meet Mrs. Stanton and Miss Susan Anthony. The meeting resolved that

... recognising that union is strength and that the time has come when women all over the world should unite in the just demand for their political enfranchisement... they should appoint a committee preparatory to forming an International Women's Suffrage Association... 2

The first meeting was held in America the following year with delegates from Europe, Canada and the United States. Australia was not represented, but the meeting was reported in Sydney.

Taking advantage of the fact that this was the first occasion when they had had time or opportunity to talk about themselves in this way to such a large audience, delegates at

1. Rufus H. Darby, Report of the International Council of Women Washington, 1881, p.9. Reference is made to this. There have been studies made also of relationships between social movements and changes in dress.

2. Ibid. p. 280

the Council expatiated at length on the place of women in the world. Nevertheless they kept within the traditional limits of acknowledged fields of interest for women and formulated a theory of international morality which was adopted by women's groups everywhere.

The Council declared that international co-operation between women would, among other things, lead to

... Closer bonds of friendship between women of different nations ... to strengthen the idea of international arbitration in the settlement of all differences that thus the whole military system, now drawing the very lifeblood and wealth of the people in the old world, may be completely outlawed and war, with its crises and miseries, ended forever.

#### DEVELOPMENT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

In New South Wales the 1880's was also a period of steady if not spectacular, extension of earlier legislation. A second amendment of the Married Women's Property Act was introduced in 1886 and moves led by Sir Alfred Stephen for extension of the divorce laws were made between 1886 and 1892. Sir Alfred's earlier bills for a number of reasons were never passed, but in 1893, after Victoria and South Australia had both passed more advanced legislation, a New South Wales Act became law.

3. An extremely popular ideal with women in New South Wales up to and including the First World War period.
4. Connections with the ideals of the League of Nations are obvious. Over the years the principles were formulated much more precisely, and President Wilson's 14 points owed much to them.
5. The law was given Royal Assent on condition that uniform laws be passed by other colonies. The New South Wales Act provided for divorce after three years' desertion, habitual drunkenness, or cruelty, or neglect of domestic duties, or three years' imprisonment or habitual convictions.

It was 1893 before major changes were made in the Married Women's Property Act. The 1879 Act, in spite of its establishment of provision for separate property, had still not declared a married woman's right to be equitable. She had no right to contract in respect of property she did not possess before, and though the law protected her separate property during her husband's lifetime, she could not dispose of it as feme sole at common law.

Alterations to the existing law were made partly on English example. The provisions of the first Imperial Married Women's Property Act had been extended earlier in England and the 1893 legislation in New South Wales was an attempt to rectify the anomalies of the State law as well as some of the still existing English ones. Under this new Act a married woman was declared capable of acquiring, holding and disposing by will or otherwise of any realty or personality which was her separate property in the same manner as if she were a feme sole, without the intervention of a trustee. She could now enter into contracts and give receipts in her own name. In certain circumstances she could be sued.

The bulk of New South Wales women were still unconcerned in 1893 with this legislation, though a growing and highly articulate minority were beginning to comment on it. Interests were in fact, stirring, though the most considerable advancement to women's prestige had come somewhat earlier. This was something they

had not, on the whole, sought and for a number of years they failed adequately to use it.

#### HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

Higher education for women was not a central issue in the Women's Movement in New South Wales or in most countries. On the whole it was of marginal interest only. Its relative unimportance in New South Wales is traceable mainly to the fact that the battle, such as it was, was waged and won very early. The wave of educational reform that brought in universal state-sponsored education in most western countries benefitted both boys and girls, and the principle of universal primary-level education was well-established by 1880. A similar responsibility for secondary school training, however, was not accepted as a matter of course and this meant that post-primary education for some years longer, rested solely in private hands. It was considered basically a luxury, to be sought only if it could be afforded.

Even so, by the mid 19th century and somewhat earlier in America, it was a luxury which was afforded to a great many more girls.

Depending on the school to which they were sent, many received an excellent education in an atmosphere progressively less antagonistic to training girls. This general atmosphere and the fact that there was a considerable number of educated women ready to take their studies further, contributed heavily to the successful campaign to have women admitted to universities.

New South Wales naturally benefitted from the English example. In 1881 the Senate of the University of Sydney, largely on the instigation of Sir William Manning<sup>6</sup>, discussed<sup>7</sup> and agreed to a motion admitting women to the Faculty of Arts. Whatever dissension there was, was confined to the Senate, and its final decision was accepted generally with little controversy and little newspaper or public discussion. If the BULLETIN saw, correctly at the time, that the measure would only work for the benefit of the rich girl, it didn't stir up any particular dissatisfaction by saying so. There was very little demand for University training for girls in New South Wales in 1881; thirty years later it was scarcely more popular.

In 1881, however, the oversea example was important as was the fact that South Australia had already taken action. In addition the important point was not lost that admittance to Arts did not automatically mean that women would want to study for a profession. In fact, women could not be called to the Bar in New South Wales for a number of years to come, and the first women medical students had a similar struggle

6. His daughter was an office bearer in the later Women's Suffrage League.
7. M.V. Hale and A.H. Treweeks, History of the Women's College Within the University of Sydney, Sydney, 1953 contains the facts relating to the admission of women to the University. Sir William Manning had referred to the possibility in a speech three years earlier.

to that of their colleagues overseas to be accepted at lectures and, upon graduating, to receive satisfying appointments. The bulk of the women graduates in New South Wales entered the teaching profession, so that the extension of university training could be fairly seen to be a means to attain higher qualifications for women in a field already traditionally theirs.

Nevertheless, in the 80's there was already a small body of girls in New South Wales qualified for university entrance and, in fact, there had been since the Senior and Junior public examinations had been opened to them in 1871. The extension of the Education Acts of 1866 and 1880 contributed to the favourable educational climate in New South Wales and six years after the first women students were admitted to Arts, the project received the official support of a ladies committee working for a Women's College. The committee enjoyed the patronage of the Governor's wife, Lady Carrington, and included Miss Rose Scott of the Women's Suffrage League, Lady Windeyer whose husband was to become Chancellor of the University, and representatives of the Fairfax family. The SYDNEY MORNING HERALD supported the venture and reported a deluge of favourable letters when its foundation was announced.

8. SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, 14 August, 1889.

The achievement of university entrance was impressive as a milestone, not as a signpost. Women enrolled in handfulls only in the first decade after 1881; in 1895 there were only 86 women graduates and in 1914 some 500 only. Even proportionately they could not show a total like the United States which in 1886 had an estimated enrolment of 35,976 in tertiary institutions. Nor did the majority of these New South Wales graduates make any contribution to the Women's Movement in New South Wales. With the exception of a very small minority which included women such as Dr. Gullett and Dr. Mary Booth, who were members of the National Council of Women, the bulk of women graduates were inclined to keep aloof, divorced from any particular cause. At one stage those who joined the Sydney Women's Club applied for permission to form their own sub-group within the organisation. Even the valuable acquisition by the Women's College of its first principal, Miss Louisa McDonald and her deputy, Miss Dickson, did little to further general interest by women in higher education. Both women were socially in demand and became prominent figures in Sydney public life, but neither became a particularly dedicated exponent

9. This figure is based on graduates listed in the Calendar of the University of Sydney Angus and Robertson Ltd, 1916. Over 400 of the graduates were in the Faculty of Arts, the remainder almost equally divided between Medicine and Science. There was one graduate in Law and one in Engineering. A number had taken out Master's Degrees.
10. Rufus H. Darby. op. cit. p. 53
11. Teachers' Federation Journal, 16 December, 1907. Miss McDonald may have had her reasons. She wrote that she found a flaw in the intelligent girl in Australia. She had "a certain lack of natural initiative, an absence of love of learning for its own sake". This was not surprising; there was little encouragement of it.





MISS LOUISA MACDONALD.

of university training for more than a select band of girls. In fact, they could be more often found speaking in favour of practical training for girls at a much lower level.

The Women's Movement in New South Wales did not, therefore, find its leaders from the university educated. It is impossible to discover where most leaders in fact, were educated, but almost certainly, as their general standard of speaking and writing was exceptionally high and their social standing assured, it is reasonably safe to assume that the majority were educated either in Australia or England, in private girls' schools, or at home, the only two methods available before 1880 and the establishment of the Superior Public Schools and the first Girls' High Schools.

Depending on the standard of these private schools, and the qualifications of the teachers, girls received a reasonable to excellent education in Literature and English. Instruction in these subjects was probably on a par with that in boys' schools; instruction in French and German was probably better. Girls received, however, somewhat inferior knowledge of scientific subjects. Also depending on the extent to which their Principals were influenced by overseas standards of behaviour and their belief that these standards should be reproduced in New South Wales, girls were enjoined to remember their responsibilities as women and the necessity of decorous and ladylike

behaviour at all times. What they were told at school was  
 very much what they later expected of the new woman in public life. 12

Behaviour was undoubtedly of more importance than matricu-  
 lation. 13

Many of the oldest established girls' schools in Sydney did not present their first candidates to the University for a number of years and at others, the proportion sitting was very low. In 1892, only 719 girls sat for both the Senior and Junior public examinations.

At the first girls' high schools, the record was not much better and the conception of such schools was generally not popular. Until the period of educational reform which

12. The curriculum taught and the standard of social behaviour stressed, are discussed by Miss J. Milbin in her thesis, Girls' Secondary Education in New South Wales, 1880-1930 Department of Education, University of Sydney.
13. Prejudices against higher education were deep rooted and often based falsely on what was considered to be a scientific fact. One delegate to the International Congress of Women in the United States in 1888 told of a belief she had frequently encountered among men. "It is a physical fact" they had stated, "that woman's brain is inferior to man's and that the marks of inferiority are natural and potential and easily recognisable in the brain mass itself and that there was a danger to woman herself and to the race and her children, if she be allowed to attempt these things for which the structure of her brain shows her to be incapacitated."

The SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, 2 July, 1869 expressed a similar view by quoting a report in the Quarterly Review which stated that " ... the health of women cannot stand much evening reading. Nature imperative in these matters...the sphere of women is home ". The idea was given less credence in time, but it left in women themselves a niggling uncertainty they found difficult to shake off.

began with Professor Francis Anderson's attack on the New South Wales Educational System in June 1901, the girls' high schools received little parental support and with their fee paying pupils, were looked on, in some cases, as private schools. They did not, therefore, cater for any markedly different class of girl than the existing schools and certainly did not enlarge the educational opportunities of any great number. <sup>14</sup>

The only other educational field that women were beginning to enter in any numbers before 1900 was in the field of technical education. When in 1885 the activities of the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts were taken over, first by a Board of Technical Education and then by the Department of Public Instruction, the number of classes was enlarged and the enrolment of students increased considerably. <sup>15</sup> Sydney Technical College listed <sup>16</sup> 2,364 students in 1885, some of whom may have included women.

14. Report of the Minister of Public Instructions. 1885. p.26  
There were then 251 girls at high schools in New South Wales.
15. Few private schools stressed the need for vocational training. One that did was Mrs. Wolstenholme's "Maybank". This was not altogether surprising as her brother, Norman Selfe, was closely connected with the introduction of vocational classes in mechanical drawing at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts in 1865.
16. Report of the Minister of Public Instruction, 1885, p.61.  
The report lists 327 clerks and 69 miscellaneous students.

In 1888 there were five nurses enrolled and 76 teachers, as well as a number of others studying scientific dress cutting, typewriting and ladies' phonography ( stenography ).

By 1902, 1,153 were taking technical college courses of varying descriptions.

The early women's movement undoubtedly operated without the support of a large literate general following or of members with the lustre of academic achievement. As far as the immediate aim of suffrage was concerned, however, this may have had its advantages. While a higher standard of education may have led to the general active participation of working class women in the movement and may perhaps have broadened the interests of many women's organisations, it may also have made the movement appear more dangerous in the eyes of the more conservative New South Wales politicians. In the same way, any strong organisation whose members included numbers of highly educated women may have given rise to the fear that the movement was comprised of ladies a little too ambitious and well educated. The women's suffrage movement in New South Wales, steered a fortunate, though unplanned middle course, never creating an image of itself as a dangerous social force, or as an organisation of blue stockings. Unfortunately this conservatism affected the movement too deeply and did much to turn it up a blind alley after the suffrage was obtained.

### GENERAL ACTIVITIES

This period was, nevertheless, one of general self-improvement. Women joined the Council of the Arts Society, formed literary groups and joined debating societies. Among these literary groups, the most active was the Women's Literary Society of the early 1890's. Total membership of the society was at least 120, among whom were Mrs. Goodlet, the wife of the editor of the DAILY TELEGRAPH, Mrs. Garran of the Boarding-Out Society who was also wife of one of the editors of the SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, Lady Windeyer, Rose Scott and Dora Montefiore who were to join in the formation of the later Women's Suffrage League; and Lady Jersey, the Governor's wife who became patroness of the Society. This group had the distinction of being the first ladies' society to sit at night in Sydney. <sup>17</sup>

Its discussions covered the works of most literary figures of the preceding century. Carlyle and George Eliot were discussed at length, such questions as "What Teaches us Most, Beauty, Art or Nature?" were argued out, and the view of Mary Wollstonecraft and the effects of socialism were debated.

17. Manuscript, Women's Literary Society, Scott Papers, Uncatalogued MS 38.

As a result, most women in the group amassed a considerable knowledge of literature, proposed welfare schemes and social reform projects. Above all many were given the opportunity to discuss and to argue, to learn the rules of debate, and, in general to develop the articulateness which was the chief characteristic of the leaders of the Women's Movement in New South Wales. Louisa Lawson, for example, became the first woman member of the School of Arts Debating Society in 1893 and in the same year, another member, Mrs. Hastie, was elected a delegate to the Union of all debating societies.

Women first toyed with the idea of a club in the 1880's, though men could not see such an institution as much more than a permanent sewing bee. The SYDNEY MORNING HERALD was frankly enthusiastic about the idea.

From her friends there, it wrote, she could obtain hints on domestic economy and the management of children, also in the treatment of husbands by women older and more experienced than herself. She will hear new recipes in cooking, of the newest novels, of treasures of servants and other subjects too numerous to mention...

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This was almost certainly not what the club-minded woman had in mind and formed only an incidental part of the official aims of the first large Sydney Club for women.

18. SYDNEY MORNING HERALD 4 May, 1889

### THE WOMEN'S CLUB.

By 1900 the active life of the women belonging to Sydney's various movements was responsible for the planning by a fairly representative middle class group of the Sydney Women's Club.<sup>19</sup> The oldest and the largest still operating in New South Wales, the Women's Club was a deliberate attempt<sup>20</sup> to provide a feminine form of club life, along the same lines, and bound by the same type of rule as a man's club. The women were consciously imitative and their determination to stick to rules is as evident here as in all other organisations where they suspected they were being watched for slips. The club remained primarily a meeting place for women and, though its activities were primarily social, it constantly denied that this was the reason for its existence.

The Club stressed the interchange of ideas, but it also continually denied itself any official sympathies and, in fact, at a time when suffrage was such a prominent issue and so much legislation affecting women was under discussion, its detachment as a body was remarkable. It was a deliberate choice, however.

19. It was conceived on a larger scale than the proposed Proprietary Club sponsored by Lady Darley in 1896 which with its side entrance for staff, was to operate as a labour bureau for domestic servants and as a residential hotel for members. For a short time The Victoria Club and Salon organised by Miss May Manning in 1896 also operated.
20. It also included popular entertainment and the usual selection of lectures and social evenings. Information about the Club's activities has been gained from the Club's Minute Books which are in the possession of the Women's Club, Elizabeth Street, Sydney.



In 1906 it would not support Rose Scott's motion that the Inebriates Act, which was supported by the National Council of Women be put into effect, and in 1910 it would not support a petition to raise the Age of Consent, preferring to express  
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its sympathy through the National Council of Women.

In a period of favourable social legislation the Club did fulfill a valuable function. It allowed women yet another place to meet, talk and practise debate, and its members, either on their own account, or through their relatives, moved in the most prominent social and political circles of the day. The first President, Lady Beaumont, was the wife of the Admiral of the British Fleet in Sydney, Mrs. John See and Lady Lyne, both wives of Premiers of the State were members, and Rose Scott of  
22  
the Women's Suffrage League, was one of its strongest supporters. In addition the Club probably brought together the largest gathering  
23  
of professional women in New South Wales at the time.

21. In 1895 the letter sent to the first committee members foresaw "more intimate knowledge of one another's work in philanthropy education, literature and social reform... larger mutual sympathy and greater unity of thought and therefore a more effective action in all questions relating to the welfare of women in general."
22. Rose Scott usually had her way in most organisations to which she belonged and it was usually more forceful than anyone else's. Her Presidential Address in 1907 was the outspoken rallying cry of a worker for women's rights calling for more support
23. One of the Club's first Vice-Presidents was Dr. Mary Booth, a practising doctor. Women university graduates joined the Club in greater numbers than they did any other organisation.

Nevertheless, its influence was felt mainly through the individual activities of its members. It never became politically active or officially sympathetic to any cause. It had few ambitions and survived better than most post-suffrage organisations because it was hampered by few impractical ideals.

#### VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN

The 80's were also an era in which women talked in public and were talked at. They made their debut with traditional topics; Mrs. Fawcett's "Storey's" "How to Make, Buy and Mend Clothes"; Mrs. Costello's "Home Nursing"; Mrs. Hastie's "Employment". Within a few years the woman lecturer was a commonplace, either working for a particular movement or explaining her own theories on various subjects, both in Sydney and in the country. It is doubtful if the record up to 1914 has been matched since. In addition women received advice from those who recognised that their horizons were broadening, but who still wished to stress the value of old traditions. Typical of such talks were those of the indefatigable Dr. Jefferis, husband of Mrs. Jefferis of the Boarding-Out Society. He was a supporter of the franchise and higher education for women, but his views on enfranchised women were merely his extension of the current ideal of noble womanhood, an extremely popular one among men.

24. At a time of concern over the falling birthrate, the Club was attacked by a writer to the SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, 24 January, 1906, who claimed women's clubs were a form of race suicide. United States statistics, he stated, proved only one woman in 10 became a mother after joining one.

This is, in fact, an important point, because of the assertion that women for a period before, and for a long time after the granting of the suffrage emphasised their moral superiority and based it on a fanatical belief in sexual superiority. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that many did indeed believe in some form of superiority, but it is a view that should be qualified.

The majority of leaders of the women's movement in New South Wales were not fanatics of any description. Rose Scott writes in her private papers of her affection for men in general and in 1894 Lady Windeyer expressing an unusual support for lady Members of Parliament, stated that women would not gain support " by bitter sarcastic talk about men who are in reality, the true friends of women".

More forthright was Vida Goldstein of Victoria, but all her actions and views became more extreme the longer the franchise was withheld in that state. On the whole, most views expressed fell into two categories, the first of mere exasperation, represented best by the cry of Louisa Lawson, who wrote in "Dawn"

... women are what men make them. Why a woman can't bear a child without it being received into the hands of a male doctor. It is baptised by a fat old male parson; a girl goes through life obeying laws made by men; and if she breaks them, a male magistrate sends her to goal where a male warder handles her and looks in her cell at night to see she's all right. If she gets so far as to be hanged, a male hangman puts a noose around her neck; and she is buried by a male gravedigger; she goes to a Heaven ruled over by a male God, or a hell managed by a male devil. 26

25. Australian Christian World, 9 November, 1894

26. Louisa Lawson Newspaper Clippings. 24 October, 1896.p.22  
Mitchell Library. Sydney.

At the other extreme women's views represented an attack on society and were motivated by a distaste for the long accepted double standard and the system of organised vice under which women felt they, or some of their unfortunate, if unknown sisters, were being both victimised and exploited. Both conviction and convention contributed to their belief in their higher moral standards but they never claimed intellectual or physical superiority.

The references women made to their superiority were in part their natural reaction as they became increasingly aware of, and impatient with, their civil disabilities. But far more basically they were an expression of a desire to prove what both men and women had been brought up to believe was a natural truth: the fact that woman-- or rather the idealised woman-- was in some way finer and better than men.

Women did not originate their views. They were, in fact the victims of male publicity; the constantly reiterated flattery which reached its peak in the franchise campaigns, which insisted that women were nobler, purer and infinitely more sensitive than men. Because of their superiority, it was stated with a deft turn of argument, women should not meddle in politics or defile their images by exhibiting too much self-confidence. Instead they should devote themselves to their true duty: the ennobling of their own and their family's lives. It was a heady notion and had served adequately for a number of years as a substitute for civil rights. It also proved to be

a notion useful for reversing an argument and as such it did not mean that women had suddenly developed a radically new conception of themselves. Rather it now seemed to them a good reason why they should enter public life to better project this 'truth' and to apply their influence where they believed it was most needed.

Both men and women found themselves therefore genuinely committed to this view and both would have been loth to shatter the illusion.<sup>27</sup> Women had the harder task in view of their new ambition and in fact, if they were not to alienate the sympathy of men, could not afford to tamper with the illusion too drastically. When agitation for suffrage began in earnest, they were faced with the superhuman task of preserving this image, in which they believed, of living up to the ideal of ladylike behaviour, and of entering a man's world in a guise which as nearly as possible, men could recognise.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF WOMEN'S LITERATURE.

Women's literature of the period tended to enforce the traditional view of the role of women. What women chiefly still wanted to read about was their importance as homemakers. The most serious articles by or about women appeared in general magazines or in the columns of the newspapers, but there was no

27. Though in fact, it was qualified again and again. Noble womanhood was originally the preserve of the middle or higher classes, but was also represented by the picture of the idealised working class mother as well. At the other end of the scale was the prostitute. The era was concerned to prevent her operation by law, or to save her through institutions. In any case she was to be salvaged for, and incorporated into, the idea.

proliferation of biased feminist literature for women in New South Wales and only one or two special magazines designed for their more serious interests. The two most important of these were Mrs. Lawson's *DAWN* and Mrs. Wolstenholme's *WOMEN'S VOICE*, *DAWN* was the more actively feminist of the two; *WOMEN'S VOICE* published a more mixed selection of local social news and information about available positions. Both included articles on suffrage, reviews of literary works, and featured short stories. *WOMEN'S VOICE* was somewhat more inclined to print recipes and theatrical news.

Most Sydney papers from time to time published a special woman's page or a woman's column. By 1914 these were scarcely any different in flavour from those appearing twenty years earlier. Women apparently still asked for, and mainly received, stories of a strong moral flavour in which their special womanly qualities invariably shone, news of social events and cooking and sewing hints. Even Mary Gilmore's long running column in *THE WORKER* which was largely literary or philosophical in tone, had to yield and supply fashion and cookery paragraphs as well.

Perhaps the only paper in Australia which succeeded for any length of time in trying to change women's interests altogether was Vida Goldstein's *THE WOMAN VOTER*. She resolutely refused to make it anything but a newspaper and the majority of its article about women presented women as active feminists.

It probably provided a fuller coverage of the suffrage campaigns in Australia and overseas than any other Australian newspaper, and until its demise at the end of the First World War, remained the most beligerantly feminist publication issued in the Commonwealth.

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### CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the extent of their participation in public life in New South Wales, women's image of the nature of their true functions very effectively put limits on their ambitions. In 1901 Lady Beaumont, President of the Women's Club and wife of Admiral Beaumont of the British Naval Squadron, stated:

... it was most important that at this period of the country's history that its women should stand clearly for the highest standards in everything. The responsibility of keeping up such standards lies always very largely with the women of any land.. woe the land whose women are less high minded than the men...

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28. Its views were not typical of Australian women as a whole Norman McKenzie in WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA refers to the paper when he talks of the claim of sexual superiority by Australian women. But Victoria produced a somewhat different suffrage campaign and Vida Goldstein was unusual. She was not generally liked by New South Wales women leaders who found no inspiration, as she did, in the English suffrage movement. Her paper also acquired a Pankhurst of its own, Sylvia, who on visiting Australia, attached herself to Vida Goldstein. At this point some battle for control of editorial outlook is discernible in the paper and Vida Goldstein herself seems to have been uncertain whether to become more extreme or less. In the end she underwent a complete reversion of ideas, returning from the 1919 Peace Conference of Women in Europe with a deep interest in pacifism and religion. The paper ceased publication shortly afterwards.

- 29 Manuscript Minutes of the Women's Club. These Minute Books are in possession of the Club, Elizabeth Street, Sydney.

Three years later in October, 1904 women's true sphere of influence was again defined by Lady Rawson, President of the National Council of Women, who reminded members that:

... they should never forget that women's first duties were her home duties. Her chief sphere of action was there and her first care should be to secure the well-being of her husband and children, her servants and those over whom she had influence. 30

New South Wales men could agree wholeheartedly with these prominent ladies, and with such utterances issuing from two of the strongholds of feminine influence in the state, it is not surprising that neither seems to have been looked on as the breeding ground of feminine ambition. And the women constantly proved themselves conservative. 31 In November, 1891, Mrs. Julian Ashton, a journalist, read a paper at the Women's Christian Temperance Union, recommending the overhaul of the marriage laws and the loosening of the bonds of marriage itself. Her suggestions were radical, but not only was she attacked by all sections of the press, but by a great number of women's organisations and individual women, who hastened to get into print to prove that her views in no way reflected the general beliefs of the majority of women in the state.

30. Manuscript Minutes of the National Council of Women.  
The Minute Books of the National Council of Women are in possession of the Council, Philip Street, Sydney.

31. SYDNEY MORNING HERALD. 12 and 14 November, 1891.



Mrs. Ashton was felt to have transgressed badly and in the words of Lady Jersey, the wife of the Governor -

her sentiments [could not] be characterised as  
otherwise than atrocious. 32

Conservative views were shared by the majority, if not all New South Wales women, but the most militant often found themselves playing a difficult multiple role, keeping to the rules, yet deliberately attempting to prove, within a limited range, their abilities and their femininity at the same time. In the long run, some women were inclined to harp hysterically on women's superiority, but no contemporary disagreed basically with their statements. The most lasting effect of such sentiments was to contribute to the inhibition of a freer working partnership between men and women, to keep women out of effective politics and restrict their working ambitions.

32. Lady Jersey to Lady Windesyer. 17 November, 1891.  
Windesyer Papers, Uncatalogued MS DL59, Item 7.