ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND

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by

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ABSTRACT

Detecting the source of the origin of the idea of the subjection of women in England was one of the major questions to be answered in this study. A further purpose of the study was to trace the development of the women's rights movement from its origin to the stage when the movement became a recognizable social phenomenon.

Representative samples of the opinions, ideologies, and literature related to woman's historical and legal position were collected. Using many fragmentary accounts of woman's position in society helped build up a mosaic of pieces that gave a broad outline of the birth and growth of women's rights.

The quest for the origin led to the eighteenth century and William Blackstone. Revolutionary forces surfaced during the latter part of the century, and with these forces began the evolution of a women's rights movement which demanded change. Subjection rooted in the customs, mores, and common law was doomed.

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To Monroe

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

For the social historian there is available an abundance of material on the morals, manner, social diversions, fashions, intellectual pursuits, and laws of eighteenth-century England. Voluminous descriptions of the life of those of high and low estate abound.

However, woman's place with respect to her rights in society clearly dominated by men is demonstrated by only fragmentary accounts, and even these are frequently written not by women but by men.

The purpose of this study was to find, if possible, the source of the idea in eighteenth-century England that women were subject to political and social domination by the male segment of the Ehglish population.

A further purpose of this study was to trace the awakening among the women of this period to a consciousness of their subjection to men and to a realization that amelioration or correction of this social condition would depend chiefly upon what women, individually or collectively, would do about it through their own actions.

If should not be necessary to say that this awakening among the women of England eventually resulted in a strong women's rights movement that in the twentieth century brought about political and educational parity with men in both

England and America. This parity, though to this day limited by subtle, if not legal discrimination as between the comparative wages and economic opportunities afforded to women as compared to men, still is one of the great sociological achievements of the twentieth century in England, America, and Europe generally.

It has proved to be impossible in this brief study to survey all the pertinent literature of the subject which includes the work of poets and novelists as well as those who wrote from either the historical point of view or as sheer propagandists.

The powerful forces that created an environment for the social movement of women's rights were important; however, new economic forces produced by advanced technology will only be mentioned as part of historical fabric. Threads to be followed in this paper are those concerning the social aspects of the women's rights movement.

What follows, then, will be a gathering of representative samples of opinion, ideas, aims, and goals from a vast feminist literature devoted to the achievements of the women's rights movement in England during the eighteenth cnetury and the early years of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER I

WOMEN AS THE SUBJECTS OF MEN

The women's rights movement began as an agitation to shake the minds of men. It was based on the preconceived idea that one-half of humanity, the female half, had been deprived of its rights of citizenship. As one searches England's past for the embryonic traces of the idea of the historic subjection of women, one becomes aware of the power of custom and tradition. Mankind generally seems to have taken the subjection of women as part of the natural order of the universe. To question this concept seemed to be a defiance of all the laws of God and man. Meanwhile, the extraordinary idea of women's rights seemed to be awaiting change of a revolutionary nature which to most Englishmen would be unthinkable.

The state of the law, as it affected women, in eighteenth century England is pertinent to our study at this point. The law actually consisted of two things: (1) the law itself, representing an accumulation of legal decisions over the centuries;[1] and (2) what people in eighteenth cen-

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[1] The English common law dates from the work of Henry II's circuit jurists of the twelfth century; to this, of course, statute law had been added from time to time. But in relations so intimate as marriage the common law had for long been supreme.

tury England believed the law to be.

The second aspect of the law is of major importance here. Ironically, it was in the same year that the American colonies of England declared their independence that a great luminary in English law appeared on the English scene, Sir William Blackstone. His Commentaries on the Laws of England, published in that year, fell on receptive ears. The Whig Revolution of 1688-89 was less than a century in the past. Clearly revealed was the fact that the English monarch was subject to the law. Rule by law had become by Blackstone's time a shibboleth of English patriotism. Not even the determined George III would dare to abolish the Parliament which he sought so desperately to manage. Thus, Blackstone's Commentaries fitted in with an earlier glorification of law which suited the temper of most Englishmen.[2]

Blackstone's codification of the common law as it had developed from medieval days revealed a system of subjection. Because of the treatment of women in these earlier laws, the common law becomes important in relation to the question involving women's rights. According to his passages dealing with husband and wife, he interpreted the common law as follows:

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[2] In the United States of the nineteenth century every respectable country lawyer must have the Commentaries on his library shelves or run the risk that his clients might regard him as a shyster.

> By marriage the husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover she performs everything.[3]

Marriage was considered a civil contract,[4] a fact which would also affect the female. In law she had become a feme covert[5] and her legal condition during marriage was called coverture. Under the principle of coverture we have seen that the union of husband and wife depended on all legal rights, duties, and disabilities both acquired by marriage.

Blackstone continued by elaborating on the rights the united couple had in personal relations. In transactions between husband and wife the husband was not allowed to grant his wife anything because such a grant presupposed her separate existence. In making a covenant with her, he would for all intents and purposes be making one with himself. Generally, any agreement between husband and wife prior to their marriage was voided at the time of the marriage.[6]

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[3] Sir William Blackstone, Commentaries on the Laws of England (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, MDCCLXVI), p. 442.

[4] J. W. Ehrlich, Ehrlich's Blackstone (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959), p. 83.

[5] Feme covert is a term used in law meaning a married woman.

[6] Blackstone, Commentaries, p. 443.

A married woman could serve as attorney for her husband, said Blackstone, for she would be representing her lord and not actually be considered separate. A husband could make a will to his wife, but such a document was not effective until coverture was determined by his death. The husband was bound to provide his wife with necessaries by law, as much as himself, and if she contracted debts for necessities he was obliged to pay for them. Beyond her essential needs he was not liable for charges if she should incur additional debts. In the event that a wife left her husband to live with another man, her husband was not responsible even for essential expenses, especially if her lover had means of support. If a woman became indebted before marriage the man whom she married must pay the debts since he had adopted her circumstances and her person.[7]

When a wife was injured in person or property she could not bring any action for recovery without her husband's concurrence. She could neither sue nor be sued unless her husband was defendant. Moreover, a wife was considered responsible for her actions if they were criminal acts, particularly crimes of murder or treason.[8]

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[7] Blackstone, Commentaries, p. 444.

[8] Ibid., p. 445.

Under the old law, Blackstone noted that a husband had a right of correction. Since the husband was responsible for his wife's misbehavior (other than crimes mentioned in the preceding paragraph) the law was considered reasonable. He was to chastise her with the same moderation that men were allowed in correcting their apprentices or children. The famous lawyer pointed out the fact that power of correction was beginning to be doubted by the reign of Charles II. He then made the following suggestion:

> Yet the lower rank of people who were always fond of the old common law, still claim and exert their ancient privilege: and the courts of law will still permit a husband to restrain a wife of her liberty, in case of any gross misbehavior.[9]

These were the legal effects of marriage during coverture, and for the most part Blackstone felt the law protected and benefited the wife.[10] To this writer it seemed that the laws of England's society tended to subvert rather than benefit when the woman had to place her legal existence into the hands of another. She was forced to rely upon her spouse as her representative; therefore, she must depend upon his generous nature and sense of justice. What if a woman were to marry

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[9]Blackstone, Commentaries, p. 445.

[10]Ibid.

a man devoid of these? Her only recourse would be laws of equity which were separate from the general law or common law we have been discussing.

Commentaries gained general applause; Englands's law had been placed into intelligible order, a feat never before executed. Sir William's work greatly influenced his eighteenth century contemporaries. "This legal classic," wrote one bright young man, "is the poetry of law, just as Pope is logic in poetry."[11] Reviews were laudatory in many quarters and unfavorably critical in others. Blackstone's classic placed woman's legal position in the light of the common law which had been streamlined into a rigid form. As a general rule, the common law in relation to married women showed that she had no separate property or personal existence apart from her spouse. The male dominated her under the guise of protection; only single women were recognized as having some rights as an individual.[12]

Admittedly, Blackstone's account of the law accurately captured the law of his day with the exception of a few flaws in his analysis of the earlier periods of the history of English law and his misconception of the laws of equity. His

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[11]Asa Briggs, The Age of Improvement (New York: David Mckay Company, Inc., 1959), p. 90.

[12]James Clancy, An Essay on the Equitable Rights of Women (Dublin: C. Hunter, 1819), p. 1.

summary of main principles had historical importance in our story of feminine rights. We are able to visualize woman's true position in the eye of the law at this time; moreover, his detailed construction of the law which had continuously and logically been developed by the legal profession with little interference on the part of the legislature, came at the time when the women's rights movement was beginning.[13]

Political economists by the latter part of the eighteenth century were approaching society's problems in different ways from those of the major eighteenth century lawyers. From 1780 to 1820 a transformation was taking place. Laws that had evolved and that had grown up from medieval times now became unsuited to the habits of eighteenth and nineteenth century society. Disturbing influences, emanating from gradual industrialization, began to affect England's intellectuals and their written and verbal debates of the merits of the British Constitution. Veneration of the law remained almost universal during the 1800's, but some advanced thinkers no longer felt it was the preserver of political and civil liberty. Blackstone's summation of the principles of the law assisted later reformers in remodeling those principles for they then had an overall view of what

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[13]Sir William Holdsworth, A History of English Law (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1938), XII, p. 703.

laws actually existed.[14]

Common law literature was far more bulky than the literature of equity; however, at this point an explanation of equity and its relation to the common law and woman's position is important. Women were not completely helpless legally. A court of equity could interfere to prevent mischief which maxims of the common law produced. Equity was a court to which a woman could turn when there was no existing law to help her. Here, husband and wife were treated as distinct persons, notwithstanding their unity at law. It is interesting to note that Blackstone briefly mentioned equity in his work on law, but did not elaborate on the subject. He did not seem to be familiar with the subject nor did he like equity. One explanation might be that his love of the precision and certainty of common law doctrines contrasted with the more flexible and uncertain practices that equity allowed and enforced.

Sir William Holdsworth, historian of English law, placed little confidence in Blackstone's treatment of equity. Holdsworth maintained that Blackstone "when dealing with the equity administered by the Court of Chancery...presents a picture of equity and its relation to the law which was

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[14] Holdsworth, English Law, pp. 727-733.

was highly speculative when he wrote it."[15]

Practically speaking, women still legally wielded little power because the procedure through which the principles and rules of equity were executed showed signs of technicality, delay, and expense which by the late eighteenth century became a serious defect in its purpose of helping to alleviate evils of the common law.[16]

Feminine subjection was evident in the letter of the law illustrated in our review of Blackstone's Commentaries. He set the stage at a time when a few men and women would begin to recognize this fact and point to it. Eighteenth-century intellectual and material foundations were being undermined in England and Europe. New ideas as to reform needed in law, religion, politics, and the economy were appearing and England felt their impact. Woman would slowly reap the benefits of philosophies and movements created during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but without these movements the atmosphere would not be created for woman's rise to a more equitable positon.

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[15]Holdsworth, English Law, p. 591.

[16]Ibid., p. 178.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN AS SOCIAL BEINGS

For the most part the legal impotence of women meant that virtually no political or economic power was available to her independent of the male. Yet it is to be remembered that, besides the formal restrictions of society, people are also governed by private practices and agreements. Both men and women are governed in their actions through vast numbers of personal agreements, actions, and standards of conduct which are part of the social sphere and family complex.[1] Since the purpose of this quest is to discover whether women were restricted in ordinary daily living to a narrow sphere, much like her Blackstonian legal image, women will now be observed in their non-legalistic garb—their social attire.

In order to gain a perspective on women in society, one must note powerful forces that gripped and shaped eighteenth and nineteenth century England. It will be a convergence of these forces that will eventually influence her status.

English society in the early eighteenth century was one in which a harmonious social order consisted of the interplay of activity between the country and town. Throughout the century, landed interest would dominate politics through the

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[1] Mary R. Beard, Woman as a Force in History (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), p. 83.

town, country, industry, agriculture, and commerce united to form a single economic system. By the middle of the nineteenth century the destiny of the nation had been transferred from the landed aristocracy's control into the hands of a fast growing urban middle class electorate, a result of an industrial revolution with a more scientific outlook. Land, due to the Enclosure Movement and the agricultural revolution of the eighteenth century, was not utilized to better advantage, but many cottagers and rural poor were displaced. Factory systems were forming within towns. Subsequently, the displaced laborers on the land flowed into ever-growing population centers, and in this way the industrial revolution bore both good fruit and misery.[2]

Economic changes were also made on a world-wide basis. Overseas expansion in the eighteenth century proved to be a broadening influence which touched England's insular community. A successful struggle for world empire became a force that overpowered tradition or local interest in reshaping the character of the individual and the social structure of the period. The influx of fresh ideas, new products, and new opportunities transformed the Englishman's way of life and thought. A world empire's by-products supplied a new environment mixed

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[2]E. W. Bovill, English Country Life, 1780-1830 (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 1.

with a past heritage to form a new self-made man freed from class conventions. New ideas, fashions, and commodities tended to smooth out some social wrinkles and refine society. New rights and opportunities promoted a blend of extravagance and moderation, selfishness and philanthropy: a new state was born, the harbinger of our own chaotic modern century.[3]

Spilling over into the nineteenth century the new freedom and industrial revolution would continue to transform the political, social, and economic life of the people.

Individual character and the structure of the nation as a whole was affected. Business flourished and expanded, but the industrialized nation gleaned lessons as well as profit. Problems accompanied England's transition from a rural to an urban community. Remedies were developed in the form of "metropolitan standards of civic and national consciousness, and of a new morality in political life."[4] Eventually a better standard of living was made available to the nation as a whole and a class caste system was altered to a more fluid state.[5] Moreover, awakened to the religious and moral needs of the empire she governed, England focused her growing philanthropic

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[3]Jay Barrett Botsford, English Society in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), p. vi.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

spirit homeward. Responsibility for basic humanitarian needs for her own society flourished in various reform movements. At this point the public conscience openly recognized woman's role in society.

> There is no class of persons whose condition has been more improved within my recollection than that of unmarried women. Formerly there seemed nothing useful in which they could be naturally busy, but now they may always find an object in attending the poor.[6]

Were women in eighteenth century England enslaved or free?

Having set the historical table with the main utensils, one can now look at a portion of the whole—the floral centerpiece of the story. There are various ways in which one can investigate individual parts of the arrangement and each flower's relation to her setting. In order to recreate an authentic eighteenth century social scene, several methods will be used in an eclectic manner. Women will be reflected through general observations of the social historians, through memoirs, through letters, song, and descriptive poetry. Eighteenth century writers were known as accurate observers who produced distinctive, detailed studies of contemporary life. The novel, which women helped develop, was itself an illustra-

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[6] R. J. Mitchell and M. D. R. Leys, A History of the English People (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950), p. 502.

tion of the manners of that colorful society.

Amusements, love, and courtship, home life, morals and educational standards, etiquette, and ladies' fashions—all tended to show the degree of privileges, freedom, and status allocated to women as compared with men.[7]

Social life in the country was parochial. Small farmers and their families worked hard; therefore, women of this class would be more engrossed in work around their small homes. Leisure time would be almost non-existent and most of a woman's time would probably be spent in weaving, or, more frequently, processing threads for the domestic system which was part of the rural scene during the first half of the century. Thomas Hardy's novels depicted scenes of some women working in the fields, harvesting crops, and of others who were dairy maids.

Lives filled with farm labor, children, and the work of the domestic system left no time or need for education, writing, or music. Descriptions of many of the cottages did reveal a love of flowers, and it does seem that women were interested in decorating with the beauties of nature. Amusement was rare; however, meeting friends at the parish church on Sunday or gathering at a marriage ceremony or christening

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[7] Esme Wingfield-Stratford, The Victorian Aftermath (New York: William Morrow and Co., MCMXXIV), p. 314.

celebration provided some social intercourse. In some parts of England games dating back to the medieval period were still played on holidays such as Christmas and May Day, and women could enjoy the spectacle. A squire's hall or a village green might be used on such an occasion.

Wealthy landlords gave entertainment that included small farmers and their wives. William Beckford did this on his coming of age. He invited three-hundred personal guests to Fonthill; moreover, one day was set aside to supply the farmers with dancing, beef, and ale.[8]

In short, women under these circumstances would live a simple existence rarely interrupted by anything but child bearing and church or holiday-related festivities.

Girls might leave the farming areas during the century to seek a new way of life in the growing towns. Some worked as servant girls. Richardson, the novelist, remembered servant girls of his childhood and their infatuations. He said that he had learned ways of the feminine heart "by acting as an assistant composer to lovesick servant girls"[9] who could not write. By the end of the century a maidservant was often capable of reading novels and writing her own letters. Her diction was not perfect, but a leveling influence in class

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[8]Robert J. Allen, Life in Eighteenth Century England (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1941), p. 18.

[9]Ibid., p. 31.

and progress itself revealed a slow transition toward a more equitable society.[10]

Aristocrats of the countryside, peers and often the landed gentry, resided in large homes. The squire was usually satisfied with his days filled with hunting, political duties, and carousing. Wives and daughters found they were not included in these interesting activities and were left to their own devices. Winter was the most horrible time. Men could travel by horseback; but ladies, who used carriages, remained at home.

Isolated in an environment in which all the work was done by an army of servants, the women of the upper classes were left idle. No shops, opera houses, or neighbors were nearby to provide a respite from boredom. Walking through the surrounding area was the only activity a lady usually had besides needlework.

A young girl of seventeen who was placed in such a situation described her reaction. She was desperate and would have gone to any length to surmount any obstacle placed in the way of a possible social gathering. In a letter written in June, 1737, Elizabeth Robinson later the famous "Blue Stocking" Mrs. Montagu wrote:

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[10]Allen, Eighteenth Century England, p. 31.

> Yesterday I was overturned coming from a neighbor's. We got no hurt at all, but were forced to borrow a coach to bring us the rest of the way, our own being quite disabled by the fall...I always think one visits, in the country, at the hazard of one's bones, but fear is never so powerful with me, as to make me stay at home, and the next thing to being retired is to be morose; contemplation is not made for a woman on the right side of thirty... I have in winter gone eight miles to dance to the music of a blind fiddler, and returned at two in the morning, mightly pleased that I had been so well entertained.[11]

Dr. Johnson in his Rambler described exiles in the countryside that had been imposed upon wives. It seems that a husband would punish his wife for having committed extravagances in town by making her spend the winter in the country in isolation.[12]

Country life in the summer was livelier. Furthermore, all the fashionable people deserted town life to make their exodus to large country estates. For the ladies of fine homes, summer was a time to entertain with small evening parties. It was a period of welcome relief from the strenuous social season of London. Distinguished guests were invited to the homes of these fine ladies enabling some women of the upper class to mingle with and make contact with people who stimulated them in an enlightened manner.

The possibility exists that these new friends would

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[11]Allen, Eighteenth Century England, p. 19.

[12]Samuel Johnson, "The Lady's Misery in a Summer Retirement," The Rambler, III, No. 124 (May, 1751), 75.

be a strong influence on a bright young lady of the day.[13]

Also dotting the countryside were spas. One of the most distinguished features of the eighteenth century was the social life of the upper and middle classes who gathered at the fashionable watering places. In the beginning the aristocracy were solely the frequenters of the baths, ballrooms, concert halls, and theaters located at the various resorts. But the powerful attraction of the spas began to draw the more rustic middle class. To the social historian, this is of genuine importance because the aristocracy at first held this middle class in contempt. At the most famous and popular spa of the day a young man named Beau Nash was undisputably lord of etiquette and conduct. Like masters of ceremonies at similar resorts, he made all conform to the same rules of conduct.

With the advent of these vacation spots moderation of aristocratic haughtiness and moderation of their coarser social inferiors resulted in altered class barriers. Any step toward equalization of class differences could be considered a step nearer equal recognition for women.[14] Essentially, the immediate result on women was to make

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[13]Allen, Eighteenth Century England, p. 19.

[14]Botsford, English Society, p. 278.

them more sophisticated socially in the gaity of the spas.[15] In a mid-eighteenth century play a description pertaining to the value and character of "Islington Spa" was expressed.

> The spa tends to grow as genteel as Tunbridge, Brighthelmstone, Southhampton or Margate. Live in the most sociable way on earth. All the company acquainted with each other. Walks, balls, raffles, and subscriptions. Mrs. Jenkins of the Three Blue Balls, Mrs. Rummer and family from the King's Arms, and several other people of condition to be there this season. And then Eliza's wedding, you know, was owing to the spa. "Oh, the watering places are the only places to get young women lovers and husbands."[16]

Husband hunting was a pastime indulged at these resorts as the excerpt from the comedy clearly states; in short, it was everywhere a girl's most absorbing goal. Young girls took much time in becoming fashionably dressed, in order to capture a man of means. In fact, most of an upper class girl's or ladies' time was spent in the making of her toilette. A fashionable lady of eighteenth century England is a perfect example of a woman entrapped by society's view of the position of a lady. Her drifting idle days she filled with trivia which musthave wasted many a potentially talented person. Her lack of exercise and type of clothing probably added to her lackadaisical

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[15] William C. Sydney, England and the English in the Eighteenth Century (second edition; Edinburgh: John Grant, 1891), II, 47.

[16] Ibid.

attitude. Restricted freedom of a woman's body, entailed a lack of freedom in most other areas of her life, a fact that is more striking when compared to the male who was allowed to exercise physically, where he wished.[17]

A leaf from the beau monde of a fine lady best depicts her situation. One finds that she awoke at noon, immediately summoning a servant to bring to her bedside two or three cups of chocolate and cream. While consuming her wholesome first meal of the day, she began to entertain both male and female visitors. After executing these arduous tasks she arose to begin her rites of the powder-puff. Often assisted by her maid, she would finish her complicated task around three in the afternoon. Meanwhile, she had her precious creatures to fondle. Perhaps a lapdog, parrot, monkey, and squirrel sat nearby chattering and romping.[18]

Alexander Pope's, "The Rape of the Lock", aptly described such a situation in a humorous, accurate manner. Belinda, heroine of this epic poem, after being awakened by her lapdog's tongue, rises and seats herself before her

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[17]Esme Wingfield-Stratford, The Victorian Cycle (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1935), pp. 82-88, 314-316.

[18]William C. Sydney, England and the English in the Eighteenth Century (second edition; Edinburgh: John Grant, 1891), I, 50.

"altar" to begin her work with the help of her maid.

> The inferior priestess, at her altar's side,
> Trembling begins the sacred rites of Pride.
> Unnumbered treasures ope at once, and here
> The various offerings of the world appear;
> From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
> And decks the goddess with the glittering spoil.
> This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,
> And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
> Now awful Beauty puts on all its arms;
> The fair each moment rises in her charms,
> Repairs her smiles, awakens every grace
> And calls forth all the wonders of her face.[19]

Pray what did the finished product look like when ready to be witnessed? Joseph Addison through his written account in The Spectator described what one might encounter in hair styles of the period:

> There is not so variable a thing in nature as a lady's headress. Within my own memory I have known it to rise and fall within thirty degrees. About ten years ago it shot up to a very great height, insomuch that the female part of our species were much taller than the men. The women were of such enormous stature that we appeared as grasshoppers before them. At present the whole sex is in a manner dwarfed and shrunk into a race of beauties that seem almost another species. I remember several ladies who were once very near seven feet high, that at present want some inches of five. How they come to be thus curtailed I cannot learn. Whether the whole sex be at present under any penance which we know nothing of, or whether they have cast their head-dresses in order to surprise us with something of that kind which shall be entirely new, or whether some of the tallest of the sex, being too cunning for the rest, have contrived

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[19]Alexander Pope, The Rape of the Lock, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1940), pp. 155-157.

> this method to make themselves appear sizeable, is still a secret, though I find most are of opinion they are at present like trees new topped and pruned, that will certainly sprout up and flourish with greater heads than before.[20]

Such an elaborate coiffure would probably have taken a long time to dress!

When the hairdos fell from their heights, skirts of dresses blossomed outward in yards. This time the editor of the Tatler, Richard Steele, ridiculed the feminine gender. In a "humble petition of William Jingle coachmaker and chairmaker of the city of Westminster," he suggested the following solution to the transportation problem:

> Upon the late invention of Mrs. Catherine Crossditch, mantua-maker, the petticoats of ladies were too wide for entering into any coach or chair which was in use before the said invention. That for the service of the said ladies, your petitioner has built a round chair in the form of a lantern, six yards and a half in circumference, with a stool in the centre of it, the said vehicle being so contrived as to receive the passenger by opening in two, in the middle, and closing mathematically when she is seated. That your petitioner has also invented a coach for the reception of one lady only, who is to let in at the top. The said coach has been tried by a lady's woman in one of these full petticoats, who was let down from a balcony, and drawn up again by pulleys, to the great satisfaction of her lady and all who beheld her.[21]

Next came a fashion not as cumbersome but probably

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[20]Joseph Addison, The Spectator, I, No. 98 (June, 1711), 64.

[21]Richard Steele, The Tatler, II, No. 113 (December, 1709), 64.

quite unhealthy and surely another monstrous, impractical liability, the train. Oliver Goldsmith pounced upon this extravaganza in his "Citizen of the World."

> What chiefly distinguishes the sex at present is the train. As a lady's quality or fashion was once determined here by the circumference of her hoop, both are now measured by the length of her tail. Women of moderate fortunes are contented with tails moderately long, but ladies of true taste and distinction set no bounds to their ambition in this particular. I am told the lady mayoress on days of ceremony carries one longer than a bellwether of Bantam, whose tail, you know, is trudled along in a wheelbarrow.[22]

A summary of the 1776 view of how grotesque feminine attire had become, was musically summed up in song:

> Give Chloe a bushel of horse-hair and wool,
> Of paste and pomatum and pound,
> Ten yards of gay ribbon to deck her Sweet skull,
> And gauze to encompass it round.
>
> Of all the gay colours the rainbow displays,
> Be those ribbons which hang on her head;
> Be her flowers adapted to make the folks gaze,
> And about the whole work be they spread.
>
> Let her flaps fly behind for a yard at the least,
> Let her curls meet just under her chin;
> Let these curls be supported to keep up the jest,
> With an hundred instead of one pin.
>
> Let her gown be tucked up to the hip on each side,
> Shoes too high for to walk or to jump.
> And to deck the sweet creature complete for a bride,
> Let the cork-cutter make her a rump.

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[22]Oliver Goldsmith, "The Citizen of the World," in The Works of Oliver Goldsmith, I (1900), 129.

Thus finished in taste while on Chloe you gaze
You may take the dear charmer for life;
But never undress her—for, out of her stays,
You'll find you have lost half your wife![23]

Girls who had time to awaken at noon, dress by three, call upon friends in the late afternoon, dine about eight in the evening, then play cards or attend an evening party of some type, had few other diversions except tedious needlework or letter writing. Both she and the middle class girls whose families were comfortably well-to-do might not have much trouble entering the marriage market. Matches had been arranged for years on a business-like basis although love was beginning to be prized by a few in the eighteenth century.

Nevertheless, girls were often prized for fortune first and charms second. At this time fortune-hunting seemed to have achieved the status of an art. A pamphlet published in 1742 was cynically entitled A Master-key to the rich Ladies' Treasury: or the Widowers' and Bachelors' directory containing an exact Alphabetical List of the Duchess, Marchioness, Countess, Viscountess, and Baroness Dowagers; Ladies by Curtesie, Daughters of Peers, Baronets' Widows and Spinsters in Great Britain, with an Account of

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[23]Sydney, England, I, 99.

their Places of Abode, reputed Fortunes, and Fortunes they possess in the Stocks, by a Younger Brother.[24] Indeed, from the diary of a minister, Reverend William Cole, one finds the description of a country gentleman engaged to a "young Lady of £50,000, aged about 17 and plain and ill tempered."[25]

Other writer's reflected the view that marriage was a state not entered into by many except as a good settlement. Provisions for marriage were made between relatives who negotiated the engagement. Defoe said, "one in ten prudent matches" were successful; furthermore, he thought words in the marriage ceremony should have been changed from "I take thee to be my wedded wife...to I choose thee..."[26]

A woman's charms were described by others besides Reverend Cole as in a "figurative" nature: four thousand charms meant four thousand pounds. Marriage announcements in magazines read as follows: "Mr. Baskett to Miss Pell, with five thousand pounds."—Sir George C— to widow Jones, with ten thousand pounds a year besides ready money."[27]

In giving a father's advice to his eighteenth century

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[24]Mitchell, History of the English People, p. 497.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Nina Epton, Love and the English (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1960), p. 240.

[27]Ibid.

daughters on the subject of matrimony, Dr. Gregory felt a love match was highly improbable. Writing in 1774 in his Father's Legacy to his Daughters, he advised them to feel lucky "if they received an offer from a man of good sense, morals, temper, and fortune."[28]

Mary Wollstonecraft alluded to what she considered debauchery of the times when she wrote: "Alas, husbands, as well as their helpmates, are only often overgrown children; nay, thanks to early debauchery, scarcely men in their outward form."[29]

Another female writer, Mrs. Capone, felt mercenary marriages were "a destestable prostitution" and wrote advice to her young readers in Letters for the Improvement of the Mind. However, her admonition went unheeded; a review of actual practices of that time in Pembroke Papers revealed the continued march to the marriage market in London. Emphasis was still on fortunes of girls and men and those qualities that made a good marriage were brushed aside.[30]

One man's point of view reflected the less than

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[28]Epton, Love and the English, p. 240.

[29]G. E. G. Catlen, The Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft and The Subjection of Women by John Stuart Mill, ed. Ernest Rhys (E. P. Dutton and Co, Inc., 1929), p. 26.

[30]Epton, Love and the English, p. 241.

perfect system of choice of marriage partners. "It is right," argued Lord Chesterfield, "that marriage pay for past pleasures for it procures hardly any in the future. Feminine merit without money would not suffice, and money without merit would be a turbulent mixture."[31]

Dr. Johnson, the man whom the eighteenth century knighted as its reflection personified, keenly observed all facets of society. He wondered why young girls married because "they have so much more freedom and so much more attention paid to them while unmarried."[32]

Of course Dr. Johnson, like many others, saw flaws in the society of his day. Keen observers of man and his institutions could see defects in society's surface; nevertheless, society itself takes much longer to notice deep-rooted problems. It was true that single women had the same property rights as men, rights married women would forfeit; however, most women wished to marry because being single was a disadvantage. A married woman enjoyed the status of reigning over a household, while the single aunt or cousin was looked upon with derision. Old maids were considered non-entities who were to be available to care for the children or become a governess. They had no

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[31]Epton, Love and the English, p. 240.

[32]Ibid., p. 241.

other outlet, for society forbade a lady to do any other type of work, except for teaching. Both single and married women occupied unenviable positions.

Encompassed in their mounds of clothing topped by elaborate coiffures, and laced tightly in their stays, women were satirized and somewhat restricted by fashion as has been illustrated. They were also considered by English society as unenlightened and frivolous.

Lady Whortley Montagu lamented the feminine state of affairs in one of many letters: "To say the truth, there is no part of the world where our sex is treated with so much contempt as in England. We are educated in the grossest ignorance."[33] Richardson had his character Pamela exclaim: "I would only beg of those who are so free in their contempts of us that they would for their own sakes... rather try to improve than depreciate us; we should make better daughters, better wives, better mothers, and better mistresses...."[34]

An addition to his statement could have been better spellers; that is, if Barbara Stanhope's letter was an example. In 1726 she wrote to her lawyer husband the following note:

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[33] Epton, Love and the English, p. 193.

[34] Ibid.

> Ded you but knowe how uneasy I have bene sence you left me, I am sure you wood petey me: my hart is so full I cannot right half I wood for shedeng tears. Dear Jacke, thy Duteyfull Wife and yours to command tell Death.[35]

During the 1880's with a few exceptions the sexes tended to segregate. Two astute observers of England's social scene were a Frenchman, the Abbe Blanc, and an Irishman, Jonathan Swift. Lack of integration of the sexes led to coarser actions on the part of men. Mr. Blanc, having intimately known salons in Paris observed that

> ...the English lose a great deal in conversing so little with the sex whom nature has endowed with all the graces and whose company has constant charms and a certain sweetness not to be found in that of men. The conversation of women polishes and softens behavior; by the habit we acquire of endeavouring to please them, we contract a tone of voice equally agreeable to both sexes. The custom of living with what is most valuable in both sexes makes the pleasure and happiness of life; and 'tis by too much neglecting this custom that the English have a certain disagreeable bluntness in their character. Men toast women's health in taverns, but rarely chat with them in a circle. They look in them as good for nothing but to dissipate their vapours or ease the fatigue of business.[36]

The equally observant Swift noted in his Essay on Conversation the deplorable, degenerate state of

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[35] Epton, Love and the English, p. 193.

[36] Jay Barrett Botsford, English Society in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1965), p. 204, citing Le Blanc, Letters on the English and French Nations (London, 1747).

conversation which

> ...with the pernicious consequences thereof upon our humours and dispositions, hath been owing, among other causes, to the custom arisen, for some past, of excluding women from any share in our society further than in parties, at play, or dancing, or in the pursuit of an amour...[37]

Fanny Burney, a rare, knowledgeable woman in the segregated society of her day, flung back a comment of a gentleman in her group. He had been lamenting the lack of agreeable women in England. She retorted with the following illustration: "And if agreeable women are rare, much more so, I think, are agreeable men. At least, among my acquaintances, there are very few indeed that are highly agreeable."[38]

"Yes, and when they are so," he replied, "it is difficult for you to have their society with any intimacy or comfort. There are always so many reasons why you cannot know them."[39]

Another comment revealing the stature of women was made by Richard Steele. He thought the gallant gentlemen of the day entertained a lady in such an absurd manner as to smother her with attention and constant assurance of his

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[37]Jonathan Swift, Polite Conversation, etc., ed. Herbert Davis and Lois Landa (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), p. 94.

[38]Epton; Love and the English, p. 204.

[39]Ibid.

affection because of a woman's "want of wit and invention."[40]

These charming pictures of the fair sex may be further embellished by Lord Chesterfield's stabbing remarks:

> A man of sense only trifles with them, plays with them, humours them and flatters them as he does with a sprightly forward child, but he neither consults them about, nor trusts them with serious matters, though he often makes them believe he does both... No flattery is either too high or too low for them.[41]

Alexander Pope in Epistle II wrote:

> Most women have no characters at all.
> Matter too soft a lasting mark to bear,
> And best distinguished by black, brown or fair.[42]

Not even heroines between the pages of books were considered learned. Being part of an era of sensibility, the female in fiction was charming and vivacious one minute, tearful and fainting the next, and natural prey of the male sex. Her most serious thoughts would dwell on matrimony or amusement. Inevitably, upon maturity she became a fine wife and good mother, quite content to be in her small world. Oliver Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield chose a wife "for such qualities as would wear well. She could read any English book

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[40]Richard Steele, The Spectator, IV, No. 504 (October, 1712), 111.

[41]Lord Chesterfield, Letters, Sentences and Maxims (A. L. Burt Company), p. 163.

[42]Alexander Pope, Epistles to Several Persons, ed. F. W. Bateson (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1951), p. 46.

without much spelling but for pickling, preserving, and cookery, none could excel her.[43]

Lord Lyttelton reflected his view in the following verse:

> Make not too dangerous wit a vain pretence,
> But wisely rest content with modest sense;
> For wit like wine intoxicates the brain,
> Too strong for feeble women to sustain.[44]

The fact remained that many upper class women and nouveaux riche existed in an artificial social realm. "How can she get Wisdom who abhorreth books who glorieth in dissipation, who driveth about to Silk and China Shops; who is in Routs, and whose talk is of dress and masquerades?" wrote another one who was skeptical of womanly values.[45]

Recognizing women's deficiency in society, some writers displayed a more hopeful, progressive view. Addison, who began to write periodical essays in his Spectator, felt it would be most useful to women.

> I have often thought there has not been sufficient pains taken in finding out proper employments and diversions for the fair ones. Their amusements seemed contrived for them, rather as they are women, than

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[43]Oliver Goldsmith, The Vicar of Wakefield (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1900), p. 1.

[44]A. S. Turberville, English Men and Manners in the Eighteenth Century (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 190.

[45]Botsford, English Society, p. 276.

> as they are reasonable creatures; and more adapted to the sex than to the species. The toilet is their great scene of business....Their more serious occupations are sewing and embroidery, and their greatest drudgery the preparation of jellies and sweetmeats. This, I say, is the state of ordinary women; though I know there are multitudes of those of a more elevated life and conversation, that move in an exalted sphere of knowledge and virtue, that join all the beauties of the mind to the ornaments of dress, and inspire a kind of awe and respect, as well as love, into their male beholder. I hope to increase the number of thies by publishing this daily paper, if not improving entertainment, and by that means at least divert the minds of my female readers from greater trifles.[46]

Addison was being both captious and serious. He was serious, in that he would like to have multitudes of women to respect and was giving them a strong hint. Dr. Johnson seemed to convey more than a strong hint in the same direction. He chose a radical approach which in his day would be considered preposterous. He wanted to educate women in a formal way on the highest level. In his History of Rasselas he drew a conclusion about his princess of history. He proposed that what she wanted out of life was to learn all she could concerning all sciences; then, establish a college for women. She would live ther, conversing with the aged and instructing the young. In this way she could learn from

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[46]Joseph Addison, The Spectator, I, No. 10 (March, 1711), 40.

one and communicate her knowledge to the other.[47]

Johnson's advice and Addison's whimsical essay may not have had a direct influence in furthering women's education or interests; yet, some women toward the end of the century did begin to achieve a certain reputation in several fields. Women made a contribution to stage acting equally as creative as men, and literature bore talented feminine works. Sarah Fielding, Catherine Macoulay, Mrs. Barbauld, Hannah More, Mary Montagu, Mary Wollstonecraft, and others contributed literary pieces. Dr. Johnson probably personally influenced some of these writers through his encouragement and suggestions. One finds that women who had talented, interested fathers or brillant men to assist them were the ones who did produce something of note. Caution should be advised to anyone who believed these accomplished ladies were the rule, for they were notably rare exceptions.

Generally, women toward the end of the century were not academically inclined; still, their educational level was improving.[48]

Upper class women, as has been mentioned, were educated at home. Often their governesses were inefficient;

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[47] Samuel Johnson, Rasselas Prince of Abissina (New York: Pafraets Book Company, 1903), p. 156.

[48] Sir Walter Besant, London in the Eighteenth Century (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1903), p. 278.

consequently, a girl who achieved an education approaching the quality of a man's was usually taught by an interested father or friend. Generally, the lives of grand ladies were uneventful existences. Everything had been provided for them, maids to dress them, nurses for their children, servants for their houses, and a carriage with footmen. A woman's husband would have his own friends and an outside interest to occupy his hours. Indeed, societies such as coffee-houses were restricted solely to male members and were often gathering places where men could converse and learn.[49] This left their ladies to their own resources. Aristocratic women gathered in small groups to play cards, a pastime that became expensive for some, since bets were made. Indebted wives pawned jewels when their husbands would not supply them with money.[50] A break in the barrier of contempt came about among this class in the latter eighteenth century when a group of women began to gather and converse instead of playing cards. They became known as the "Blue Stockings." Lady Mary Whortley Montagu was one of these women. Her keen, witty letters showed she was a skilled writer and her interest in smallpox inoculation revealed an understanding above the level of

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[49] Besant, London, p. 280.

[50] Ibid., p. 455.

most women.[51]

Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu and several other women gained reputations as conversationalists. They imitated the French salons and invited the elite in the world of art, politics, writing, and academic spheres to their gatherings. Women like Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft stood for principles that were far-reaching. The liberal education of women and entry into the intellectual world of men were among their demands. They were tired of being accepted as ornaments who chit-chatted at tea tables.[52]

Once the upper-class women had led the way by example, other pioneers would begin to follow, making more demands in their drive for equal opportunities. These wealthier women had the time to indulge in thoughts of equality, influence, and insight--thoughts that their middle-class and lower-class counterparts would not have.

Women of the middle class would be more numerous though not as forceful, since they had less leisure time. Although not rich, many would be in a comfortable position. Very few of these women read anything beyond details of housework, genealogies of the country, and knowledge of what the coat-of-arms were in terms of scientific heraldry. Even

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[51] Turberville, Men Manners, p. 112.

[52] Ibid., p. 11.

if a woman went this far, she felt her duty as a woman was to fulfill jobs within her marriage which was the goal of almost every girl. If she were left single, she was regarded as imperfect; and if forced to pursue a livelihood, she would be disgraced.[53]

Subsequertly, the single woman directly felt a lack of opportunity and her inferior status. If the married woman ever felt a twinge of discomfort, it was probably economically oriented. Wives could not earn money as their husbands did. Thus, the woman may have disliked having sums allotted to her or the knowledge that her property was not hers to control. If her marital situation became unbearable she would have found the course of divorce was not in her favor. Only the wealthy found the process practical and even then it seems that the House of Lords tended to favor the man.[54]

Ranks of working women did form a much larger group at the end of the century. They were affiliated with

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[53] Besant, London, p. 278.

[54] Mitchell, History of the English People, p. 529. Divorce could be obtained at this time only upon grounds of adultery and through an act of Parliament in each individual suit for divorce. Even then no grounds existed until the plaintiff won a civil suit for damages against the guilty party, which, if successful would then become the legal basis for the suit for divorce.

fashion and clothes. Many were dressmakers or milliners; some worked in shops where scarves and gloves were sold; others served as cashiers at the popular coffee-houses; still others made products of fashion such as fans, stays, or artificial flowers. Job opportunities were beginning to expand to a limited degree. Incoming capital in newly-blossoming industries would begin to have an effect on society as a whole, including women.

Little direct information is available concerning the lower class of women; evidently there was not much curiosity about them. It is known that they carried on market gardening around the city of London. They tilled and cultivated soil outside the city, then carried their harvest to the city market. Others sold oranges at theaters or goods in the streets.

Existing reports of conditions of prisons revealed women who were described as the dregs of society. Filthy, vermin-infested, and ragged, the women lived in a horrible environment and were themselves coarse beyond repair. They were on the same basis as men in prison; both were subjected to the inhuman injustice of society's laws.

Girls who came from small farms to large towns eventually fell into a lower-class position if they could not find employment as a washerwoman or servant. Lack of

available opportunities in education and lack of jobs probably drove such young girls into the ranks of prostitution, an establishment that would grow larger and more degenerate in the next century.[55]

Charity schools were established in this period for the poor; however, the principle of subordination was quite strong as to the education of the lower class. These students were severely disciplined in order to get them accustomed to staying in a subservient position. In this way, it was believed, they would not trouble society later in life. Reading and writing was considered sufficient for girls; however, boys were tutored in arithmetic because jobs were available for them as accountants.[56]

Social subjection was prevalent for the poor as well as for women. Rights for men will already be actively sought at the end of the century.[57] Women would have to wait until much later. Yet, the seeds were there among a few men and women; it is their thoughts and actions that will be observed next in the budding of a development of the women's rights movement.

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[55]Besant, London, pp. 281-284.

[56]Mitchell, History of the English People, p. 529.

[57]Charles James Fox and Major Cartwright about 1780 worked out a program of parliamentary reform and extension of the suffrage to the lower classes, part of which was enacted in the First Reform Bill of 1832.

CHAPTER III

PIONEERS OF THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

> The idea of the equality of the sexes is truly ridiculous. Man is natural protector of woman; and the shade of subordination is so delicate as to be almost imperceptible. Let the fair sex enjoy their privileges, and leave imperial man in possession of his prerogatives. They may believe a friend who begs leave to assure them that Venus appears more amiable encircled with her cestus,[1] than Minerva armed with her helm and shield.[2]

Standing on the threshold of the nineteenth century and looking forward to the visible development of women's rights as an organic whole; then looking backward into the eighteenth century from which one has emerged, one meets the above attitude, vividly portrayed in Sir Walter Besant's work on the eighteenth century. Invisible to the naked eye, but visible under microscopic research, one finds faint stirrings of feminine rights expressed in works of a few who might be considered fortune tellers. Some men and women were beginning to visualize the steps which would bring to women their individual rights.

Eighteenth century England had illustrated the fact that highly literate observers of that society supported

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[1]Cestus a girdle worn by Venus that gave her the power of exciting love.

[2]Sir Walter Besant, London in the Eighteenth Century (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1903), p. 278.

the view that women were trapped by law, mores, and self-images. All three are formidable barriers. They were barriers which would take superhuman efforts to crack and tear down. Somehow, mankind manages to produce superhumans from time to time and these are the people now to be discussed.

Ideas and their meaning are important in this setting. One must have a dream before the dream can materialize. Eighteenth century England abounded with ideas, especially those dealing with individual liberty and human rights. France in 1789 was reverberating in a most alarming manner with cries of "liberty, equality, and fraternity." Catchy in wording, the libertine motto was also contagious and Englishmen of radical leanings were afflicted with the malady. However, before an investigation is made of Englishmen whose thoughts burned with the fever of liberalism, one intellectual, a French giant, must be considered.

Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, the Marquis de Condorcet was the only philosopher who advocated the rights of women. In a modern sense he was probably one of the most outstanding pioneers in the movement for women's emancipation. France and England had been exchanging commodities, styles and ideas for a long time; consequently, Condorcet's ideas had an effect on the minds of receptive thinkers of England, as did Rousseau's and Locke's. One might place

Condorcet as a forerunner of the famous English pioneers Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, and to a lesser degree, William Thompson.[3]

Condorcet's attitude toward women undoubtedly was influenced by his marriage to a brilliant woman, Sophie de Grouchy. Through her intellectual stimulation, he could view a woman's potential. He became a staunch supporter of votes for women, at a time when opposition to voting rights for the masses of men prevailed.

Condorcet expressed his ideas in Letters of a Citizen of New Haven and On Admission of Women to the Suffrage. These two pamphlets pleaded for complete political and legal equality for men and women.

The views he expressed were so progressive and inclusive, that they seemed to foretell ideas later expressed in John Stuart Mill's famous feminist work, The Subjection of Women.[4] In an age that considered women sentimental and inept in comparison to men, Condorcet's ideas were daring and quite unconventional.

His plea for women's suffrage was based on the abstract ideals of natural rights. Rights which he thought

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[3]J. Salwyn Schapiro, Condorcet and the Rise of Liberalism (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1963), p. 189.

[4]Ibid., p. 206.

were based on the fact that

> ...men are impressionable beings, susceptible to moral ideas and of reasoning from these ideas. As women have the same qualities as men, they of necessity have the same rights. Either no one truly has any rights or all have the same ones. And he who is against the rights of another because of religion, color, or sex abjures his own rights.[5]

Condorcet countered objections that were based on woman's physically inferior status. A widespread resistance to the idea that women should enjoy equal rights was the view that she was physically disabled and inferior as a result of menstruation and pregnancy. Condorcet said women were no more incapacitated by these bodily processes than were men who had the gout every winter or who easily caught cold.

Another well-worn objection to woman and her rights in the eighteenth century was that her thoughts were not governed by reason but by sentiment. Condorcet rebutted such reasoning by maintaining that this characteristic was a result of woman's inferior social status and lack of proper education. He asserted that women were rational creatures but in a different way from men since women's occupations and interests differed. To him, women were relegated to their eighteenth-century status by "oppressive laws, enacted

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[5]Schapiro, Condorcet, p. 190.

by men, which established great inequalities between the sexes."[6]

Laws, he declared, born from force and continued by sophistry, formed an environment for women, which differed from that of men. Naturally a woman's sense of justice and fairness varied from man's, due to her different status under the law and her different education.[7]

He felt as Mary Wollstonecraft did, that women would make better wives and mothers if they were enfranchised. They would be part of a larger world which would enable them to be more experienced and knowledgeable on a broader basis.

In short, women would not neglect their homes and families if allowed to vote anymore than a man would neglect his business. In fact, enfranchisement would enable women to use their influence publicly, not secretly. He felt the latter was to be feared far more than the former.

Condorcet declared that woman's mental capacity was the same as man's when one was comparing the masses. When comparing men and women on a higher level of intelligence, men surpassed women in genius in science and philosophy. Women, he delegated to a lower brain power capacity in these

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[6]Schapiro, Condorcet, p. 190.

[7]Ibid., p. 191

areas, advocating for women secondary scientific work.[8]

He blamed the deficiencies in women on their bad education. It was for this reason that he encouraged equal opportunities for women with men on all levels of formal educational instruction. Moreover, he realized that women had been held back by the pressures forced upon them by men through the conventions of society. "The kind of constraint imposed on women by traditional views regarding manners and morals," Condorcet said, "has influenced their mind and soul almost from infancy; and when talent begins to develop this constraint has the effect of destroying it."[9]

Condorcet was not a brilliant writer, but due to the nature of his thoughts he was considered powerful. They influenced men such as James Mill and his son John Stuart Mill; consequently, he would have an impact on later reformers. As a spectator of confinement of the mind and body of eighteenth century women, he realized the consequences, but there was one who better understood its causes.[10]

Mary Wollstonecraft, another product of the eighteenth century, was a native of England. Her advocacy of women's rights was forged from her own unhappy experiences

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[8]Schapiro, Condorcet, p. 191.

[9]Ibid., p. 192.

[10]H. N. Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin and their Circle (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1913), p. 199.

as an independent woman trying to support herself and her brothers and sisters. Vindication of the Rights of Women related the impressions of one who had been directly affected as a woman in a restricted society. Although it was one of the most original literary works produced at that time, Mary herself was unique. She was the first woman to attempt her own probe into the problems of humanity and the morals of society, not ignoring the part that involved sex.[11] In thinking out her position as a woman in her society she exposed mental powers of the highest order.[12] As a literary work her famous Vindication had serious defects. Replete with logical arguments, there was, nevertheless, a looseness in the arrangement of the material. If she had toned down some of the harshness with which she expressed her opinions, much criticism and resistance to her views might have been prevented. Moreover, her same goals of pointing to women's education, marriage reform, political rights, job opportunities, and enlightened motherhood could have been achieved. Aside from its digressions, the merits of the book seem to override its flaws. Only philosophers from Condorcet to Mill saw with such clear perception that women's future welfare depended on

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[11]Brailsford, Shelley, p. 200.

[12]Emma Rauschenbusch Clough, Study of Mary Wollstonecraft and the Rights of Women, (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1891), p. 24.

a revised attitude "of man toward women and of woman toward herself."[13]

Mary Wollstonecraft through her own experience arrived at a similar destination without wearing the robes of philosophy. Her famous work on the rights of women reflected her practical and theoretical powers in which the educator was merged with reformer. "It is in reality an elaborate treatise on female education."[14]

Actually, her book was not quite so narrowly confined. Courage of strength and conviction are embedded within its pages. Great love for humanity furthered her insight into the causes that lay at the root of social evils. She was stimulated to push back the camouflage that concealed wrongs that the world of Europe, for the most part, had overlooked.[15]

To Mary Wollstonecraft, women seemed to not be participating to the fullest extent in the true progress of civilization, thereby forfeiting their own best interest; and this simultaneously, endangered advancement of the entire society. Her initial attack was on the social structure. Etiquette of the eighteenth century society

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[13]Brailsford, Shelley, p. 206.

[14]Clough, Study of Wollstonecraft, p. 24.

[15]Ibid., p. 25.

continued to lay bare woman's position.

> Confined in cages like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch. It is true they are provided with food and raiment, for which they neither toil nor spin; but health, liberty, and virtue are given in exchange.[18]

Mary claimed that the social structure had reached its present state of imperfection after having been wrought, molded, and firmed by the evolution of centuries of custom and practices of the Church and State. Through her illustrations she was showing symptoms of woman's problems, not speaking lightly of women for derision's sake. Her purpose was to prove women were subjected, then show them the way out of enslavement.

What sparked her formulation of such advance views on women? Her own experiences have already been mentioned as her guide to problems encountered by a single woman. Add to this the revolutionary age in which she lived and one can say that she was a product of revolutionary-enlightenment. She stood in the center of new revolutionary currents of thought that made her times remarkable. Her views were broadened, encouraged, and guided under the benevolent hand of Dr.

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[18] Ibid., p. 62.

Johnson.[19]

As a literary giant and well-known publisher of liberal works, Dr. Johnson acquired a reputation as a radical. His residence became a meeting place for the English school of reformers. Representatives such as Thomas Paine, William Godwin, and Joseph Priestly, an extremely-liberal group, formed the intellectual circle of which Mary became a part.[20]

Frequently discussed were learned opinions of the day. Among the most influential were ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke. Both made their mark on Mary Wollstonecraft. Master moralist and author of Emile, Rousseau influenced England, mainly by provoking an emotional reaction that started Mary on the road to the Vindication. She agreed with his view that liberty was man's inalienable possession, but she adamantly opposed his philosophy in regard to the nature and position of women in society.[21]

John Locke and his Essay Concerning Human Understanding had been carefully studied by Mary. She quoted him in her historical sketch in the Vindication of the growth of desire among men for their right.

Mary also agreed with Locke's justification of revolution

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[19]Clough, Study of Wollstonecraft, p. 71.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Catlin, Rights of Woman, p. xx.

as expressed in his Treatise on Civil Government. He felt that man should revolt if he is miserable under his form of government and exposed to abuse of arbitrary power. Mary accepted this view, then took it a step further. She felt liberation from tyranny was justified because the laws and customs which serve society's needs in one period of its development would in the succeeding period be insufficient. having lived a century later, Mary was able to take that step.[22] Her book was widely discussed and many editions and [illegible] translations were made.

Reaction against excesses of the French Revolution and a desire of the growing middle class for soothing traditional views resulted in a capitalistic new age, soon dubbed the Age of Victoria. Consequently, Mary's work had little impact. It was the influences that created her and the ideas that impressed her and motivated her to expound a particular doctrine that made her a key character in the origin of the movement for women's rights. Her ideas would be read decades later by numerous women who had become mentally enfranchised. These were the Victorian reformers, educators, and propagandists for political rights who rediscovered a latnet doctrine in her work and put it into practice.

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[22] Clough, Study of Wollstonecraft, p. 84.

Mary Wollstonecraft seemed to be mainly concerned with women's equality as a means of producing better mothers. Thirty years later, William Thompson made an appeal which placed more emphasis on the political rights of women. His Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men,[23] strongly advocated female suffrage, a view that he felt complemented arguments for human rights.[24]

Thompson's contribution to the doctrine of women's rights was considered quite advanced for his day. He had proclaimed that civil and domestic rights of women could not by fully realized until they had been given complete legal and political rights with men.[25]

He continued to insist that the present system under which both male and female labored even prevented the man from giving equal happiness to his wife with the material possessions which he enjoyed, or had the power of enjoying. Legally disfranchised and socially restricted, the woman had no way out. He wrote that "by superstitution and public opinion all her

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[23] Janet Dunbar, The Early Victorian Woman (London: George G. Harrap and Co., Ltd., 1953), p. 130.

[24] J. A. and Olive Banks, Feminism and Family Planning (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964), p. 17.

[25] Ibid., p. 18.

actions and enjoyments are a thousand-fold more restrained than man's."[26]

Thompson summed up what he considered her suppression at the hands of social, political, and legal factors in society. His conclusion was that women, as a result of these obstacles, became mentally enslaved or "confined like other domestic animals, to the house and its little details....The dull routine of domestic incidents if the world to them."[27] Thompson felt women had to accept circumstances involved in a marriage contract, since they were deprived of property rights, public positions, and knowledge.

He deviated from Mary Wollstonecraft's emphasis on the domestic virtues. That married women were able to care competently for children and a family was not disputed by Thompson; however, he did not think this should be the focal point of emancipation. In fact, he encouraged women to take their place freely beside men in political activities. Moreover, he insisted that birth control should be practiced by the wife if she wished to remain unhampered in her activites.[28]

Thompson, like his predecessors, did not have immediate impact on society, and his work was not even read as widely

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[26] Banks, Feminism.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., p. 19.

as Mary Wollstonecraft's.[29] His influence on later writers was his legacy to the movement. He influenced Mrs. Hugo Reid who subsequently published a book in 1843. Her book, A Plea for Women, did have an impact and was widely read and discussed.[30]

The last champion of women's rights to be discussed is John Stuart Mill. He differed from Condorcet, Mary Wollstonecraft, and William Thompson, in that he contributed to the doctrine of women's rights as well as to the women's rights movement itself.

His famous essay, The Subjection of Women, contributed to the doctrine of women's rights; his speeches in Parliament championing suffrage for women contributed to the active movement.

John Stuart Mill was the son of the famed English philosopher James Mill. It was John Stuart's contact with his father and the father's unorthodox education of the boy that helped initially form his thoughts. Then, from 1830 on John Stuart's thoughts on life and women was completed. In that year he met Harriet Taylor, a young married woman who later became his wife. A warm mutual admiration blossomed and Harriet's influence and own problems changed Mill's life and some of his ideas.[31]

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[29]Dunbar, Early Victorian Woman, p. 169.

[30]Ibid., p. 134.

[31]"John Stuart Mill," Dictionary of National Biography, XIII, 390.

Mill made his first move for women in the direction of women's suffrage. In May of 1867, during a debate on the Reform Bill, he moved that the word "man" be deleted from the bill's wording and that "person" be inserted in its place. He then proceeded to defend his parliamentary suggestion through a prudent discourse worded in such a way as to logically counter any arguments. After a tally of the votes for his proposal was made he was pleasantly surprised at the "unexpected support he did gain."[32]

As a result of Mill's bold stand for women's suffrage, a group of supporters began to gather around him. He encouraged his daughter and other followers to publish articles and form committees. Through his efforts and stimulation, a political drive for women's rights was given the energy to propel its way to victory in the twentieth century. Many of the names to become famous in the various branches of the movement for female equality were associated with him- Mr. Fawcett, Mrs. Pankhurst, Kate Amberley, and others.

Mill's written contribution, The Subjection of Women was discreet in its proposals. He was anxious to advertise in a way that made the supposedly preposterous idea of votes for

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[32]Michael St. John Packe, The Life of John Stuart Mill (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954), p. 492.

women a commonplace maneuver.[33]

A neat summarization of the key points in Mill's essay was reflected in a letter written by Kate Amberley to a friend. Mill seemed to blame men for woman's subjection. He felt that England had reached the point when force no longer was dominate. Since women had the same intellectual powers that men, he advocated abolition of laws and customs that held women in their inferior positions. Women were to be allowed a wider sphere of activity. Occupations were to be opened to them on the basis of pay. With freedom to support themselves they could become more self-sufficient. The result might be an elevation of women to a higher level of personal enjoyment.[34]

Although he did not ignore issues dealing with problems such as women's property, education, employment, or prostitution, Mill felt their lack of voting power was the main barrier. He persistently assaulted the parliamentary ramparts in his pursuit of victory. He came close to his goal, though never quite succeeding in his efforts.[35]

The example Mill set, and the fact that for the first time in the legislature of a modern civilization a mortal had stood and demanded voting privileges for women, anticipated a great

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[33]Packe, John Stuart Mill, p. 498.

[34]Catlin, Rights of Woman, pp. 282-316.

[35]Ibid.,p. 500.

step forward in the birth and growth of the Suffragette Movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[36]

[36]Packe, John Stuart Mill, p. 492.

CHAPTER IV

PROGRESS AND REVERSES

Feminism was more than essays, books, and Parliamentary speeches. Organizations were another important part of the drive to balance the rights of women with rights of men. Although a few efforts to organize reform of certain aspects of women's position in society came before the middle of the nineteenth century, isolated, intermittent attempts by individuals began to materialize into an organized movement only about 1850.[1]

At first women as a body would not rush out to take up the banner of freedom. Women who enjoyed idle leisure were apathetic toward the women's rights movement, since many of them did not understand what was happening. Indeed, a lot of the non-supporters were among the most adamant opponents of the movement. Clinging to the customs that bound them, they would denounce their more enlightened, bold, and courageous sisters as eccentric or immoral.

Conservative traditions which became crystallized into customs were slow to change. Ruled by the long established mores of society as to their roles in the community, a large

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[1] Olive and J. A. Banks, Feminism and Family Planning (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964), p. 27.

majority of women resisted deviation from the status quo. Writers such as Sarah Stickney Ellis exemplified the views of average women. Mrs. Ellis' bokks were probably typical illustrations of the prevailing philosophy of the main body of women who refused to become identified with the movement.

In her book, The Wives of England, Mrs. Ellis wrote:

> It is here, the privilege of a married woman to be able to show, by the most delicate attentions, how much she feels her husband's superiority to herself, not by mere personal services officiously rendered, as if for the purpose of display, but by a respectful deference to his opinion, a willingly imposed silence when he speaks, and, if he be an enlightened man, by a judicious turn sometimes given to the conversation, so that his information and intelligence may be drawn forth for the benefit of others.[2]

Nevertheless, such women as Caroline Norton, who had been personally affected by the law, or public-minded women like Miss Beale and Emily Davies, chose to ignore propriety and strike out on their own.

Beautiful Caroline Norton was married and had three children before she started her legal crusade. She had been considered lucky to marry George Norton because she had little money and he was considered very eligible. Marital problems began to make the marriage unbearable for the lovely, talented Caroline. Finally she left her weak, selfish husband;

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[2]Mrs. Ellis, The Wives of England, their Relative Duties; Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations (London: J. H. G. Langley, 1843), pp. 95-96.

unfortunately, George Norton had automatic custody of their children. His petty behavior became worse, and he would not even let her see their children.

Caroline had had an established reputation as a writer before her marriage.[3] She took up her pen again in a forceful manner. Her aim was to attack the common law that had been popularized by Blackstone. Caroline proceeded to gather evidence concerning cases worse than her own and published the facts in her pamphlet The Natural Claim of a Mother to the Custody of her Child as Affected by the Common Law Right of the Father (1837). She continued her fight which ultimately ended in the passage of the Infant Custody Bill in 1839. The Bill stated that women who had not been convicted of adultery could keep their children under seven and might have access to their children at specified times.[4]

With that victory behind her, Caroline later worked for a divorce bill. For years only the very wealthy could afford to obtain a divorce. Since 1697 aristocrats had been able to successfully petition the House of Lords for a private act. Even if the divorce was granted the applicant

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[3]Janet Dunbar, The Early Victorian Woman (London: George G. Harrap and Co., Ltd., 1953), p. 173.

[4]Josephine Kamm, Rapiers and Battleaxes (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1966), p. 26.

would have to have a special provision included in the decree if the applicant wished to remarry.

Caroline's efforts met with success. In 1857 a Matrimonial Causes Act passed its second reading in Parliament. Another bill was introduced independent of the Marriage Act, the Married Women's Property Bill. The latter failed; the former was made law. The Matrimonial Causes Act did not cover all of women's disabilities at law because it had been designed specifically for divorced women. The Bill's main contribution was its extension of the civil system of divorce to the rest of England.[5]

Grounds for divorce for women were still not the same as the grounds provided for men. Men could sue for divorce simply on grounds of adultery; women had to prove adultery, rape, sodomy, bestiality, incest, or aggravated desertion before they could receive a divorce decree.[6]

Men were still favored by the laws; but a first step at least had been taken. Other acts would follow and steps would be taken to allow married women property rights. Further amelioration of the legal position of women continued on into the twentieth century.

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[5] O. R. McGregor, Divorce in England (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1957), p. 18.

[6] Ibid.

Professions were one area of the new frontiers that women were now exploring. Elizabeth Blackwell was the first successful trailblazer to crack the prejudice of men in the medical profession. Elizabeth was born in England but spent her early years in America. While living there, she noticed the increasingly wider demands for the education of women. When a friend of hers became sick, Elizabeth was touched and decided to become a doctor.[7]

The young girl began to apply to many of the large colleges in the United States. Institution after institution refused to accept her; but at last she was admitted to Geneva College in New York. She was accepted without reservations by the faculty and student body. Geneva wrote her a letter explaining their reason for admitting her. The College felt that it was in keeping with principles of a republican government to open their doors to all on the basis of equality.[8]

In 1849 Elizabeth received her degree and Punch, an English periodical, applauded by writing the following:

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[7]Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, Pioneer Work for Women (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1914), p. 9.

[8]Ibid., p. 53.

Young ladies all of every clime,
Especially of Britain
Who wholly occupy your time
In novels or in knitting,
Whose highest skill is but to play,
Sing, dance, or French to clack well,
Reflect on the example, pray,
Of excellent Miss Blackwell![9]

Elizabeth left the United States for further study in France and England. She was accepted in England at Saint Bartholomew's Hospital where she worked with famous physicians of the day. Unable to meet her expenses, she sailed for the United States where she practiced medicine for over a decade. Even in the "land of liberty" Elizabeth found opposition among the populace and in the medical profession. Elizabeth's description of her first consultation humorously supported this view. She had diagnosed the case herself but desired another professional opinion. The doctor called for consultation exclaimed how unusual the particular case was. He vowed that he had never had such an experience. To her amazement, Elizabeth found the good doctor not speaking of the patient but of herself.[10]

After her long practice in America, Elizabeth again returned to England where she began lecturing. As a result

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[9]Nellie A. Franz, English Women Enter the Professions (Cincinnati: Privately Printed for the Author, 1965), p. 99.

[10]Blackwell, Pioneer Women, pp. 157-158.

of her first speech in 1869, a committee was formed by some interested young women. Their aim was to work for medicine as a profession for women in England.[11]

. Not only had Elizabeth unlocked the door to the medical profession, she had become the first woman to have her name placed on the British Medical Register.

Elizabeth Garrett would be the first to decide to open the unlocked door in England. She had attended one of Elizabeth Blackwell's lectures. Soon some of her intellectual acquaintances persuaded her to attempt to gain acceptance at one of England's medical schools. Miss Garrett's applications to all the noted universities were rejected. Finally, she decided to gain admission to medical classes registered as a nursing student. When final examinations were given, she scored the highest grade.[12]

Protests were made by the male students in an effort to bar Elizabeth from further studies. Through legal advice, she found that anyone who had passed examinations had to receive a license to practice medicine. Consequently, the London Society of Apothecaries gave her a license. Success was still an illusion, however, because the Society soon passed

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[11]Blackwell, Pioneer Women, p. 177.

[12]Franz, Professions, p. 103.

a regulation that only graduates of a medical school could practice medicine.

Elizabeth Garrett turned to France and there obtained a medical degree from the University of Paris in 1870. On her return to England she was accepted as a physcian. Her marriage to G. S. Anderson did not terminate her career. She remained the lone female figure in the profession for many years. Respected as a doctor, she was an outstanding success, an example for other women to emulate.[13]

Sophia Jex-Blake was another young individualist who joined in the medical crusade. Her purpose was to open the doors of the English universities to women medical students. She was accepted at the University of Edinburgh; however, a stipulation was made. The University would accept Sophia conditionally if she were joined by some other women. For one woman to attend a class taught by one professor was an immodest act and considered highly improper.[14]

Sophia advertised in the newspapers for some female recruits. Four girls entered the University with her in the beginning term of 1869. Because of the unprecedented situation, the Chancellor passed special regulations. It was

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[13]Franz, Professions, p. 104.

[14]Margaret Todd, The Life of Sophia Jex-Blake (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1918), p. 250.

resolved that women were to be accepted for study, but separate classes were to be conducted for women only. In addition, women attending classes were expected to meet the same standards as the male students.[15]

Of the five women, one qualified for a scholarship awarded at the end of the first year. Students with the four highest averages were recipients of the Hope Scholarship. Mary Pechey ranked third but was denied the scholarship because of sex. Her rejection soon precipitated a war which split faculty members and students.

Jex-Blake wrote about the incidents that followed. Crowds of students kept them from entering their classroom buildings at the same time shouting vile obscenities.[16]

All of these incidents and more were to follow before medical schools would generally accept women. It was a challenge to other girls besides the Garrett's and Jex-Blake's. However, these young women had traversed paths never before used. Their efforts in the profession of medicine would help contribute to the opening of other fields to women.

Another important area in the education of women needed amendment. For years teaching had been an approved

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[15]Sophia Jex-Blake, Medical Women (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, 1886), pp. 77-78.

[16]Ibid., pp. 92-93.

occupation for women. Still, standards were so low for the training of governesses and boarding or day school teachers that women transferred their own poor backgrounds to their charges. Essentially, there was no professional competence. Instead, ignorance was widespread among female teachers.

A description of the talents of an average teacher showed that she could not pronounce difficult words when reading aloud to her classes. Her artistic talents were sadly limited; and her spelling ability was non-existent.[17]

Vestiges of the old eighteenth century educational standards would slowly be erased throughout the nineteenth century. Evidence of change began in a few girls schools in that walking "crocodile" style was now changed to more vigorous exercises. Interest in public affairs began to produce a benevolent spirit in many women. The philanthropic urge pushed them into a world outside the home. Moreover, economics served as a force in the demand for better educated women. Many women had to support themselves, while others, freed by economic plenty, became interested in expanding their knowledge.

A Society for the Employment of Women was formed in 1859. Women who helped form the group had once been supporters

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[17]Mrs. Gaskell, Cranford (Watford: The Greycaine Book Manufacturing Company, Limited, 1853), pp. 258-260.

of the Married Women's Property Bill. After the Marriage and Divorce Bill of 1857 was passed in place of their Bill, some of the members turned to the problem of the employment of women.[18]

The women began advertising in their magazine, The Englishwoman's Journal, for women who were interested in subscribing to an employment register. They were amazed at the large number of responses. An Employment Society was formed as a result of the needs of middle class women.[19] Similar groups were formed to aid artisans' daughters. Poor women had no need for employment since many were already working under deplorable conditions. Their needs were different.

Reform in education began around 1847. The Governesses' Benevolent Institution under the guidance of F. D. Maurice initiated a move toward setting up standards for governesses. This led to the establishment of a school to train competent instructors. Actually, the school became a secondary school for potential teachers as well as a place to enlighten middle class girls.[20]

Dr. Fredrick D. Maurice, Professor of Divinity at King's

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[18]Banks, Feminism, p. 52.

[19]Ibid., p. 32.

[20]R. G. Gryllis, Queen's College, 1848-1948 (London: Routledge, 1948), pp. 1-4.

College, London proved to be an important asset to the institution. He encouraged other members of King's College who were interested in the project to become faculty members. They formed a Committee of Education and volunteered to instruct without fee.

Stimulated by Maurice's movement toward secondary education, a young lady named Amelia Murray decided to found a college near the girl's school. Since she was Maid of Honour to Queen Victoria she gained the Queen's support and finances. She gathered talented, intelligent people to form the faculty and administration. The college was opened in 1848, christened with an inaugural speech made by Dr. Maurice. Maurice took part in the planning of the college curriculum.[21]

His theories of education for women were advanced and the courses established were theology, English literature, music, ancient and modern languages, natural philosophy, mathematics, dancing, and fine arts. As a result of outstanding instruction, solid material, and excellent standards, the Queen's College, as the institution was called, produced some outstanding women educators.[22]

Frances Mary Buss and Dorothea Beale were two of Queen's graduates who helped to extend the superior education of women

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[21]Dunbar, Early Victorian Woman, p. 140.

[22]Ibid., p. 141.

so recently established by their college.

Miss Buss was the daughter of a talented painter-etcher. She entered Queen's the first year of its establishment. Evidently she was an intelligent young lady because she learned quickly. After graduation, Frances founded her own school, North London Collegiate School for Ladies. Her task of raising middle class standards for middle class girls was not an easy achievement; but she continued to strive to educate women, emphasizing merit instead of social rank.[23]

Dorothea Beale was a contemporary who also pioneered an educational institution. She had been educated in France and returned to England when the revolutionary storm of 1848 began to brew. She attended Queen's College the same year Miss Buss attended, 1848. Later, Dorothea taught in various schools but found her educational niche as an administrator. Her appointment as Principal of the Ladies College in Cheltenham was the career she loved. There she applied her talent and knowledge in her efforts to upgrade the institution. The College had been poorly managed; therefore, her efforts to reshape the school won her a reputation as an advanced educator.[24]

The first part of the nineteenth century produced other young women who would nurture the development of advanced

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[23]Franz, Professions, p. 33.

[24]Ibid., p. 35.

education for women. Emily Davies was such a young lady. She successfully established a college near Cambridge University, managing to glean a faculty from the University to instruct the eager pupils.[25]

Her dream was to become part of the great University. The institution, named Girton College, grew as a result of her efforts. Eventually it would become a part of Cambridge in the twentieth century.[26]

Much was to be done. However, concerted efforts on the part of these young pioneers would combine to form forces to help in the eradication of the subjection of women. Social and economic movements were the first to gain the most support; but, as time passed, a drive for the right to vote held the spotlight.

Dame Millicent Fawcett was the leader of the first group formed for women's political rights. Their organization, the Constitutionalists, patiently and persistently worked for almost half a century. Their efforts were not bearing any political fruit; consequently, some of their members left to form the violent militant group, the Women's

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[25]Barbara Stephens. Emily Davies and Girton College (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1927), p. 232.

[26]Ibid.

Social and Political Union.[27]

Enfranchisement would eventually come after World War I. Women who lived in the latter part of the nineteenth and those of the twentieth century, owe a debt to the pioneers. The seedlings planted by the pioneers of the women's rights movement in the eighteenth century assured the educational and political triumphs of women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It should also be said that the pioneers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had to endure more than apathy and honest opposition. Queen's College and the North London Collegiate School for Ladies were the butt of jeers hurled by the more uncouth men of the day. This was well illustrated in a jingle of the time:

> Miss Buss and Miss Beale,
> Cupid's darts do not feel.
> They are different from us,
> Miss Beale and Miss Buss.

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[27]David Mitchell, The Fighting Pankhursts (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 30.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

During the eighteenth century there were isolated individuals who began to advocate the rights of women as being desirable. English society had for years accepted women as the "weaker sex" whose lowly position was accepted as a matter of course.

Legally, women were non-entities for the most part. English women had lost their legal identification as a result of the laws of primogeniture. Another factor that might have been influential here was the fact that her duties were of a domestic nature. Her husband also had responsibilities to the family unit. His role as protector and provider led him into a broader, outer world. Naturally, he would begin to govern and accumulate certain powers in a civilization such as England's; powers that women would not be able to possess. Moreover, women were probably too busy to notice or care what was happening.

As the general laws of England developed, they were recorded but not in a coherent, organic manner. Consequently, no one had a complete view of how men and women stood in relation to the law. Sir William Blackstone would be the person to combine all legal sources on the general body of law and give to England a complete record of the existing

common law.

Blackstone was important in the birth and growth of the movement toward women's rights in that he proved to be a guide to the idea of subjection. Without the view that women were restricted, there would have been no need for women to free themselves from non-existent subjection.

Legal subjection, in all probability, reflected the informal sections of society's organization. Laws are usually supported by a society in which legal maxims have evolved from customs and mores.

A look at women as social beings during the period of codification seemed to substantiate the view that they were subjected in every way. They were not given the same opportunities as men in either their education or their rights as citizens. Participation beyond the home or frivolous social circles was not condoned by their anticipated role as women.

The movement for women's rights was also a part of greater forces. These influential forces began to build up when economic, scientific, and technological concepts and realities combined to form an industrial revolution. Political, social, and intellectual factors were influenced by the economic changes. In response to these forces, the more static eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century society began to change and women were caught in the transition.

During the period of revolutionary changes, eighteenth and nineteenth century England produced advanced thinkers who could see women's status was at a low ebb. They began to write, eventually stimulating the thoughts of others who would in turn actively strive to alter the inequitable position of women.

Generally, one can conclude that it was chiefly the efforts of women, not men, who initiated the women's rights movement and carried it toward successful attainment of its goals. Women of the twentieth century owe much to these early pioneers. The question that remains is whether the majority of women today recognize their acquired position and potential powers that others struggled for years to gain.

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