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MATRONS WITH A MISSION:

WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS IN NEW ZEALAND

1893 - 1915

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts in History at Massey University.

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April, 1976.

For the cause that lacks assistance
For the wrong that needs resistance,
For the future in the distance
And the good that we can do.

- Motto of the Gisborne Women's Political
Association.

PREFACE

There have consistently been two aspects to the development of a generalised feminist consciousness. One has involved the personal drive toward autonomy and self determination - the expression of which resulted mainly in individual onslaughts on male-oriented systems of education and employment - the other, the combination of forces for the attainment of a more comprehensive system of social, economic and legal rights. However they went about it, feminists always sought to have women determine for themselves their own sphere in life, and to have them develop their talents and faculties to the fullest without the restraints of sexually-circumscribed notions of what was permissible or proper.

In this country the organised aspect of feminist effort was manifest in the campaign for women's suffrage, which finally resulted in New Zealand becoming the first national state to enfranchise its women on the same terms as its men. The franchise campaign has received thorough coverage in Patricia Grimshaw's book Women's Suffrage in New Zealand, which argues for the independent role played by the Women's Christian Temperance Union in the agitation, and for the genuine feminist motivation behind the Union's activities. Following the acquisition of the vote, several commentators in overseas journals remarked on the proliferation of women's societies in New Zealand that were devoted to political organisation and social reform, and in 1896 the National Council of Women came into being to co-ordinate the activities of these bodies. And yet, in 1910 Mrs Kate Sheppard, the leader of the franchise movement wrote that women's societies in New Zealand were few and, where they did exist, worked largely in isolation. Something had obviously happened to undermine the sense of purpose and enthusiasm which had inspired so many women in the previous decade.

The aim of this thesis is to examine four of the larger women's organisations in existence during the years after 1893, to examine the principles for which they were working and the social

framework which influenced the course of their development. The years 1893 to 1915 are particularly focussed upon, since the earlier period has been covered by Grimshaw, and the events of the war years form a topic in their own right. Clearly, my choice of organisations was influenced in part by the completeness or availability of extant records, but the Women's Christian Temperance Union, as the major women's organisation of the late 1880's and the instigator of the women's suffrage agitation, was an obvious subject for this study. Since by no means all women formed into association from a personal sense of sexual oppression, but rather to help from a "privileged" position less fortunate members of their own sex, the Society for the Protection of Women and Children, first formed in Auckland in 1893, is also dealt with as an example of the "social service" type of organisation to which women have always been attached. The National Council of Women to which were affiliated many of the smaller women's political associations of the 1890's also required examination since its history tells us much about the difficulties experienced by the politically motivated women, and also indicates the inconsistencies arising from their remarkably extensive range of interests. The Plunket Society forms a final focus of this study to illustrate the narrower domestic orientation which for some women took the place of the Councillors' more catholic social concern.

Obviously the study of women's organisations has its limitations as a reflection of the general condition of women at any one time. Those who were attracted to such organisations, particularly to organisations of a political or reformist nature, were those sufficiently motivated by their vision of an improved society to do so; usually they were the more articulate of their sex; certainly they were as a group out of the ordinary. It must be recognised at the same time that their ideas were more likely to reflect the ideal than the currently attainable, and they were not above overstating their case or overestimating the extent of their support.

In pursuing the historical roots of the present day women's movement there is also a danger of attributing to the early feminists

motives which they themselves might have disowned. This is particularly the case in New Zealand where the comparative ease with which women were enfranchised appears to have undermined radical feeling. By 1894 New Zealand women were past the stage of heroics - they sought consolidation and adopted "evolution not revolution" as their unofficial catchcry. It is not therefore our task to draw our predecessors larger than they actually were, nor to reproach them for their timidity. To do either is as much a distortion of history as their virtual exclusion from historical commentaries until recent times.

During my research for this thesis I attempted wherever possible to examine the records of the respective societies, but since I did not intend the thesis as a detailed history of any one of these bodies, and since I was restricted by the demands of time, there may have been sources of information which I overlooked. The Auckland Branch of the Society for the Protection of Home and Family had detailed records of its foundation period which proved invaluable, and although I would have liked to study similar material relating to the Wellington Branch, which was controlled by a committee of women alone, I was unable to verify the existence of such records. Other important primary sources included the Sheppard Papers in Christchurch, the Lady Anna Stout Collection, the Women's Christian Temperance Collection, and correspondence from the National Council of Women (Auckland Branch) Collection.

Finally, I would like to record my sincere thanks to a number of people who have helped me during my preparation of this thesis, especially Mrs B. Holt, to Mrs C. Polglase and Mrs Toomer of the WCTU, to Mrs C. de Vries and the Committee of the Auckland Branch of the Society for the Protection of Home and Family, to Miss Jane Tucker of National Archives, to the staff of the Alexander Turnbull Library, to the Plunket Society, to my supervisor Professor W.H. Oliver and to Mrs Steffert for typing this thesis.

CONTENTS

	Page
Preface	iii
Illustrations	vi
Tables	vii
Abbreviations	viii
1. A Beginning or an End?	1
2. Eminently in the Sphere of Woman's Duty: The Society for the Protection of Women and Children.	17
3. For God and Home and Humanity: The Women's Christian Temperance Union.	38
4. The Political Woman: The National Council of Women.	54
5. Woman's True Profession: Plunket and the Competent Household Executive.	85
6. Feminism in Retreat.	118
Appendix	134
Bibliography.	136

ILLUSTRATIONS

Between pages

1. The Political Woman. New Zealand Graphic,
2 July 1898. 13-14
2. The National Council of Women, Christchurch,
1896. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
Standing, from left: Mrs A. Ansell, Mrs Henry Smith,
Miss A.E. Hookham, Mrs G.Ross, Miss Jessie Mackay,
Mrs Isherwood, Mrs Black, Mrs Widdowson, Mrs F.Garstin,
Mrs Wallis, Mrs Darling, Mrs J.M.Williamson, Mrs Wilson,
Seated, from left: Mrs G.T. Smith, Mrs A. Daldy, Mrs
A.J.Schnackenberg, Mrs Sievwright, Mrs A.M.Tasker, Mrs
D. Izett.
Seated on floor: Mrs C.M.Alley, Mrs A. Wells, Miss
Sheriff Bain. 58-59
3. Snapshots at the Hen Convention. Spectator, 30 April
1898. (Political Cartoons, Seddon Papers, National
Archives). 62-63
4. Ministerial Mamas. New Zealand Graphic, 11 June 1904. 87-88

TABLES

	Page
I. Proportions of Sexes in Boroughs and Counties 1878-1906.	3
II. Infant Mortality Rates (Europeans). Quinquennial Averages 1872-1941.	113

ABBREVIATIONS

AJHR	Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives
JHR	Journals to the House of Representatives
JLC	Journals and Appendices to the Journals of Legislative Council
LT	Lyttelton Times
NCW	National Council of Women of New Zealand
NZH	New Zealand Herald
NZPD	New Zealand Parliamentary Debates
ODT	Otago Daily Times
SPWC	Society for the Protection of Women and Children
WCTU	Women's Christian Temperance Union
WR	White Ribbon

A BEGINNING OR AN END?

Yea, tyrants all, on land or sea, the tribes and nations
through,
Shall tremble when they see the deeds New Zealand's
women do.¹

On 19 September 1893, Vice-Regal assent was given to an electoral bill which enfranchised New Zealand's women on the same terms as her men and which, depending on whether one had supported the measure or not, opened the way either to a social and political millenium or to sexual strife and national degeneration. The Christchurch Press lamented that "we have now got the female franchise as surely as we had the measles", and thought it "quite impossible that women of all classes may vote for a member of Parliament once in three years without losing their female characteristics or utterly neglecting their home duties".² The suffragists, on the other hand, were jubilant, and in their enthusiasm spoke of a new epoch when men and women (in the words of one poem, whose sole merit lay in its enthusiasm)

Hand in hand [would] work together,
Planting truth, uprooting wrong,
Sharing calm and stormy weather,
Making life one long glad song.³

If one were to plot on a graph the intensity of feminist feeling in New Zealand the years 1893 and early 1894 would surely show as a high point when all enthusiasts thought feminine influence had at last come into its own. Yet, although the franchise issue captured the attention of contemporary commentators in New Zealand and overseas, it was but the sequel to a more generalised feminism which had been evolving in New Zealand for more than three decades, and which cannot be overlooked in any account of the women's movement in New Zealand.

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1. LT, 13 Sept. 1893, "A Tale of '93".
 2. Press, 11 Sept. 1893, Press Cutting, Mark Cohen, "Women's Suffrage Scrapbook, Dunedin, 1892-1912", Turnbull Library.
 3. W. Sidney Smith, "A Song of New Zealand", Press Cutting, NCW Collection, Turnbull Library.

In the first place this involved women's entrance into new spheres of employment and education, and in the second, their formation of separate women's associations. A few of these organisations had from their inception a perceptibly feminist outlook wherein women were viewed as a distinctly oppressed social group; others did not, Others still were formed to help socially underprivileged groups and almost by accident found that women predominated among those seeking their assistance. In this way they sometimes developed such a feminist orientation over time and as they slowly became aware of their own impotence were led to agitate for the extension of women's economic and political rights. Then, in 1893 the women of New Zealand were enfranchised. This event encouraged the formation of new women's societies, all enthusiastic, all well-intentioned, and all anxious to see women assume the new responsibilities for which the educational advances and changing concepts of a woman's place had prepared them. It is necessary therefore, to look both before and immediately beyond the franchise campaign to gain an understanding of the forces which were to influence women's organisations over the next two decades.

The New Zealand society of the 1850's was distinctly masculine, the imbalance of the sexes being reflected in what one sociologist describes as "a community of male-centred interests which precluded the easy acceptance of women and things feminine".⁴ Despite the improved status which might be supposed to result from her scarcity in a frontier-type situation and her obvious fortitude in face of considerable hardship, the New Zealand woman was still bound by a legal status and traditional conception of woman's role inherited from the mother country, and was disadvantaged by the proliferation of male-oriented institutional forms. Family concerns and the demands of daily life in primitive and often isolated conditions effectively negated any attempts at association or the sustained assertion of feminine solidarity.

4. J. Stewart Houston, "The New Zealand Family: Its Antecedents and Origins", in J. Stewart Houston (ed.), Marriage and the Family in New Zealand, 1970, p.32.

It was in the developing towns that these hardships were first mitigated by the advantages of membership in a larger community. In the towns also were first manifest the demographic characteristics of a maturing society - most notably the higher average age of men and women and the equalisation of the sexes, even to the extent where, in many towns, women were the more numerous (see Table I). These developments were significant, for although marriage and family life were the anticipated goals of most young women, a large proportion of the surplus females in urban areas found no alternative to paid employment, and the usual sequence of school, work (or home-life for the better-off) and marriage was broken. Many women thus became breadwinners in a society geared to the concept of female dependency upon the male wage-earner.⁵ And, with an aging population, it was so often the older woman who had both the time and financial resources for involvement in community affairs.

Table I Proportions of the Sexes in Boroughs and Counties,
1878-1906.

Females per 100 males.

	1878	1881	1886	1891	1896	1901	1906
New Zealand	79.40	81.72	85.28	88.26	89.37	90.33	88.65
Boroughs	94.31	95.75	99.75	104.33	105.66	105.46	101.25
Counties	72.16	74.62	77.38	78.45	79.38	80.44	79.56

Source: Census of New Zealand,
1878-1906.

5. The White Ribbon noted in 1896 that Christchurch had a surplus of 2000 women and girls and asked, "Will those who contend that a woman's sphere is the home undertake to provide homes for these 2000 women?" WR, May 1896, p.10.

It was against this background that occurred what Edith Grossman termed "the first wave of advance" of feminism in New Zealand - an advance that involved in the first instance the development of women's talents and faculties.⁶ At a time when the lot of most women was still to "rock the cradle and bake and brew" more and more girls were availing themselves of advances in the education system. New Zealand had by the 1890's a better and more widespread system of primary education than England, and under the terms of the 1877 Education Act, this was free and compulsory for girls as well as boys between the ages of seven and thirteen.⁷ That the education of girls to even this level was not considered essential by some parents was illustrated by the tendency of girls to start school later and leave earlier than the boys and as late as 1909 the Department of Education was moved to comment upon the "number of parents who think that it is sufficient for a girl to have little more than half the amount of schooling that a boy receives".⁸

It was, however, at the secondary level that the education of girls had its greatest need, for here there was a prejudice against free education which tended to restrict education to those thought worth the cost - and this, to many, precluded girls. Rhoda Barr in her autobiography records the unfavourable reaction of her peers to her enrolment at Waitaki Girls' High: "Few girls went on to the high school in 1892, and the reaction of my primary school classmates to my doing so caused me considerable discomfort. They thought it a very snobbish and unnecessary step to take, and even hinted that the money

6. Edith Searle Grossman, "The Woman Movement in New Zealand", Westminster Review, July 1908, p.45.

7. W.B. Sutch, Women With a Cause, 1973, p.75.

8. Annual Report, Department of Education, AJHR, 1909 (S.2), E.1, pp.5-6. The leaving age was 13, or when standard four was reached, and it was noted that girls tended to advance through the standards more quickly than the boys, which also altered their average leaving age. AJHR, 1912, E.1, p.8.

to be paid in fees might be spent more profitably".⁹ Fortunately there were from an early date enlightened women who sought for their daughters educational opportunities equal to those of their sons, and Jane Maria Atkinson who strongly supported the establishment of a girls' secondary school in Nelson wrote,

I want my girls to have a boy's education because it is a better education than what is called a girl's, since it better exercises the faculties God has given girls as well as boys My experience in the Colony shows me that the most solidly educated women are the most useful in every department of life, and that so-called "feminine refinement" is fatal to feminine usefulness.¹⁰

It was largely through the efforts of Miss Learmonth Dalrymple and a committee of Otago women that the Otago Girls' Seminary was opened in a wing of the boys' school (but "distinctly separate from it").¹¹ A connection with existing boys' schools was a feature of some of these early girls' secondary schools and although male headmasters tended, like Tibbs of Auckland Grammar, to "look on the teaching of girls as a sort of light relief to the more serious task of educating boys", girls soon showed that they could compete academically with their brothers - 10 of 25 Junior Scholarships being won by girls at Auckland Grammar between 1893 and 1900.¹² It is interesting in view of the later movement toward differentiation in the education of the sexes to note that an 1879 Royal Commission saw "no reason why the curriculum of a girls' school should differ materially from that of a boys' school, except that in the former it would be unadvisable to introduce the study of Greek".¹³

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9. J. Rhoda Barr, Within Sound of the Bell, 1953, p.7.
 10. Jane Maria Atkinson to Margaret Taylor, 23 March 1870. Guy Scholefield (ed.), The Richmond-Atkinson Papers, Vol.II, 1960, p.30.
 11. A. Cumming, "The Status of Women and its Educational Implications", Ph.D.Thesis, 1970, p.120.
 12. *ibid.*, pp.180,182.
 13. *ibid.*, p.136.

It was, in the main, the entrance of women into the New Zealand University Colleges which gave the greatest boost to girls' secondary schools by providing women graduates who enthusiastically set about raising the academic standards of these institutions to rival the boys' schools. Kate Edger, the first woman graduate became the headmistress of Nelson College for Girls, for example, and Helen Cannon, the first woman masterate graduate, head of Christchurch Girls'. The entrance of women into the Universities was accomplished with little fuss, only minor objections arising from those who protested at the lateness of lectures as being inimical to female morality, and when the Canterbury College Professional Board took exception to the inclusion of "unsuitable" plays by Terence in the Latin syllabus.¹⁴ These first students, in the words of Edith Grossman,

felt that they were studying with a larger object than the culture of their own minds; their success had a significance that was not merely personal; they were like the ancient athletes who won victory more for their city than themselves. When their own course was finished they turned with equal or even greater enthusiasm to the training of other girls.¹⁵

It was not with such exalted motives that the less academic women participated in a parallel extension of women's employment opportunities, although many appreciated the relative independence signified by their own wage packet. Domestic service, the customary opening for unmarried women seeking employment in New Zealand was by the 1880's threatened by the growth of factories and the entrance into them of cheap female labour under the impetus of depression conditions. Between 1881 and 1886 the ratio of female to male workers in secondary industry rose from one woman to every seventeen men, to one for every five (not taking into account those working in their own homes).¹⁶

14. J.C. Beaglehole, The University of New Zealand, 1937, pp.130,160.

15. Grossman, p.46.

16. W.B. Sutch, The Quest for Security in New Zealand, 1966, p.66.

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The increase in the number of women seeking employment resulted in an overabundance of labour which depressed wages in some industries to near starvation level.

Disclosures by the Reverend Rutherford Waddell, the Otago Daily Times and the 1890 Sweating Commission showed the urgent need to improve the lot of the female worker, not least of all because of the lack of cohesion among women workers themselves. By 1890 only the Tailoresses had formed a union of female workers, the effectiveness of which was frequently attested by Labour Department officials in the following years.¹⁷ The problem with protective legislation was, however, that it tended to apply to women and young persons only, and thus worked against their interests in times of economic betterment. Edward Tregear in 1899 pointed out that the restriction of working hours in particular gave men an unfair advantage in competition, and to be fully effective, needed to apply to both sexes.¹⁸ Whatever the problems of female workers - and these ranged from a thoughtless lack of sanitary conveniences to deliberate exploitation in the matter of wages - there was an increasing diversion of female labour from domestic service to this and other spheres, most notably banks and offices. In 1893 it was remarked that

Domestic service attracts few, and it is difficult to keep good female servants, as they marry as soon as their worth becomes known. In towns the tendency of the young women is to obtain work either in shops or factories and they prefer the slightly higher wages and regular hours of commerce and manufacture to the obligations of domestic service the semi-independence, shorter hours and better pay explain its attractiveness for the young. 19

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17. Mrs Grace Neill, New Zealand's first woman factory inspector commented upon the exceptionally healthy appearance of the Dunedin tailoresses and noted that employers as well as workers were benefitting from the union, since it offered protection against undercutting in trade competition. Annual Report, Department of Labour, AJHR, 1895, H.6. p.10.
18. Annual Report, Department of Labour, AJHR, 1899, H.11. p.ii.
19. Official Year Book, 1893, p.224.

Prominent men and women would for many years yet bemoan the declining number of girls who pursued the noble calling of the domestic servant, young men would darkly warn of their growing insecurity and consequent inability to marry if girls continued to be appointed to clerical positions at a lower rate of pay than themselves, articles would be written expounding the incompatibility of "Banking and the Feminine Mind",²⁰ but girls valued their new-found independence and while avoiding the drudgery of domestic service strove to ascend the newly emergent scale of factory worker, to shop-girl, to office girl or "typiste". Employers might occasionally deplore the erratic spelling and lack of punctuality of their female employees, might describe them as "subversive of proper discipline" or "unable to respect the solemnity of modern financial practice",²¹ but once the trend toward women's employment in business and commerce had begun in the late 1880's they found that they could not afford to disregard altogether this source of cheap and willing labour.

Considerable encroachments were therefore made upon the established conceptions of women's role in the later nineteenth century, education and their entrance into wider fields of paid employment being two vital features of the assault. These changes in themselves created anomalies which, coupled with longstanding disabilities, increasingly pressed for resolution. Depression heightened social distress to which women and children were particularly vulnerable, the deserted wife becoming a major burden on the colony's charitable aid system.²²

20. e.g. Auckland Weekly News, 6 July, 1916, p.15.

21. *ibid.* The entrance of women into offices must be kept in perspective. Even in the war years when they replaced men who had been conscripted only 3.05% of the female population were employed in the commercial sector (as compared with 2.68% in 1911, and .98% in 1891).

22. Report on Hospitals and Charitable Institutions of the Colony, AJHR, 1888, H.9, p.4.

As communications improved and population concentrated in urban areas, these problems became both more acute in an actual sense, and more visible. But at the same time as the legal disabilities and practical needs of New Zealand's women became apparent, there emerged articulate, concerned women with the leisure and comparative affluence to answer the need - and it was in fact in response to localised distress that the first known associations of New Zealand women had been formed.

The Onehunga Ladies' Benevolent Society, founded in 1869 to assist refugees from the Maori Wars was followed by other predominantly church and service oriented groups operating mainly on a local basis - the Methodist Ladies' Guild, the Girls' Friendly Society (a Church of England Group formed in 1883), the New Zealand Mothers' Union (1879), the Young Women's Christian Association (founded first in Dunedin in 1878 but not organised on a national basis until 1907).²³

By the late 1880's some organisations, those of men as well as women, were questioning the efficacy of essentially stop-gap philanthropy and aimed instead at grappling with the roots of social distress as they saw them. It was when such organisations as the WCTU (formed in 1885) sought to promote wider social reform by influencing legislative activity that a conscious social feminism found expression. This, New Zealand's first truly national association of women, already regarding itself as the "spearhead of women's contemporary interests" found itself blocked from achieving reform through political action by women's disenfranchisement.²⁴ Hence, early in its existence it commenced organised agitation for the suffrage.

23. Helen Simpson, The Women of New Zealand, 1962, p.168; A.M. Burgin, "Women in Public Life and Politics in New Zealand", M.A.Thesis, 1967, p.139.

24. Patricia Grimshaw, Women's Suffrage in New Zealand, 1971, p.35.

Kate Sheppard, Franchise Superintendent of the WCTU from 1887 later described how the unequal treatment of men and women in a number of laws made a profound impression on her. When petitions which she organised against the sale of intoxicants to children and the employment of barmaids were tossed aside without comment by the petitions committee, she resolved to secure for women the power to repeal bad laws and make good ones.²⁵

This assumption that women would as a matter of course have an uplifting effect on the political affairs was one continually reiterated by the suffragists in the ensuing debate. Basing their arguments on the "new woman" as they saw her - educated, efficient, independent, but retaining those special womanly qualities of moral goodness and love - the suffragists demanded the franchise for women on the dual grounds of expediency ("the votes of women would add weight and power to the more settled and responsible communities") and natural right ("it is the foundation of all liberty that those who obey the law should have a voice in choosing those who make the law").²⁶

The anti-suffragists, on the other hand, regarded the ideal woman's function as solely domestic, suiting her to "soothe the brow of the breadwinner, to restore the jaded faculties of the man of genius, and above all, to liven the family circle with the enduring smile of cheerfulness".²⁷ The enfranchisement of women, they feared, would lead to the unsexing of both women and men, to the decline of home life and the deterioration of the political condition of the colony. Vast armies of coarse, advanced "he-women" would be elected

25. Prohibitionist, 7 Oct. 1893, p.4.

26. "Sixteen Reasons for Supporting Women's Suffrage", Prohibitionist, 7 Nov. 1891, p.3. It was sometimes argued that the female franchise would add to the voting power of the responsible family man as opposed to his shiftless unmarried counterpart, since the former could influence his female relatives to vote along the same lines as himself.

27. ODT, 15 Oct. 1888.

to Parliament, disrupting its business and passing frivolous, faddish legislation.²⁸

With the passing of the 1893 Electoral Act the anti-suffragists were placed in a somewhat embarrassing position as in their concern to prevent the "shrieking sisterhood" from dominating the polls they urged the "womenly women" to make use of that from which they had formerly tried to protect them. The Christchurch Press extolled every man to see that his womenkind were put on the roll, feeling sure that if he was "an honest, decent, manly man who treats his mother or wife or sisters as manly man should treat the women of his circle, ... they will follow his lead and vote as he does".²⁹ Mrs Sheppard commented with deserved satisfaction on "the mirth-provoking wriggles" of several candidates, noting that men and women who "denounced the idea of women voting as degrading, unsexing and unwomanly, now displayed an amazing alacrity in enrolling women, and seemed utterly regardless of the feminine delicacy which they had said would be marred if women went to the poll".³⁰

The Franchise Department of the WCTU was itself anxious for women of all classes to enroll, but in the long run hoped as an effect of the franchise that inequality in all the laws affecting men and women would be removed. To the suffragist leaders the vote was but a means to an end, and Mrs Sheppard pointed out to her followers that

Constant work will be necessary to induce women to avail themselves of their new privileges. Laws need altering for the protection of our sex and those dear to us. On women devolves the special duty of seeing that our legislators are men who honour purity and probity more than party, men to whose names to the title of "Honourable" is a fitting prefix and not a biting sarcasm. 31

28. See Grimshaw, pp. 74-85 for a summary of the debate on women's suffrage.

29. Press, 11 Sept. 1893. Mark Cohen, "Women's Suffrage Scrapbook ..."

30. WCTU of New Zealand, Franchise Report for 1893, 1893.

31. *ibid.*

The success of the franchise campaign had so bolstered the women's faith in the political medium of reform that the years immediately after saw a proliferation of women's political associations. At the inauguration of one such body Mrs Margaret Home Sievwright, suffragist leader in Gisborne stated

the great woman movement at the close of this wonderful 19th century is, in a word, the revolt of womanhood against a despotism, often apparently unconscious, which authorizes and perpetuates this enforced condition of childhood.

The Legislature of New Zealand has enfranchised woman. This has accentuated N.Z. womanhood, and was the first necessary step towards her complete emancipation. Till, however, she is able to work out her own independence, and to place herself side by side with man, his comrade and his peer, there can be no talk of emancipation.³²

Mrs Sievwright, by now an experienced political campaigner, was intensely aware of the New Zealand women's movement as part of a wider international tide of feminism, and felt that much more could still be done to improve women's status. In the following years she was to be a dominant figure among those who struggled for this end.

Although the word "political" was prominent in the titles of many associations formed in the 1890's - including Mrs Sievwright's group in Gisborne - most members would have protested that their interests were by no means purely political, and would have heartily agreed with Mrs Sheppard that "in a democratic country it is difficult to draw the line between the social and the political".³³ Some societies involved themselves with welfare work as well as political agitation, while others were responsible for the foundation of other, more socially oriented offspring. The WCTU continued to work among prisoners and seamen and in several areas conducted night classes in cookery and dressmaking; the Dunedin Women's Franchise League, despite its narrow title, opened a soup kitchen in 1895 and within three months

32. Gisborne Women's Political Association, President's Address, September 19th, 1894, 1894, p.1.

33. WR, June 1896, p.4.

had fed 3,500 persons.³⁴ The Canterbury Women's Institute, after publishing its manifesto on neglected children, provided the impetus behind the formation of the Canterbury Children's Aid Society. The emergence of such associations as the Canterbury Children's Aid Society and the Society for the Protection of Women and Children showed that despite political enfranchisement the practical sufferings of many women and their dependents had by no means abated and it was in these societies also that many of the much ridiculed "political women" were active.

There was a considerable amount of interaction between many associations, especially after the foundation of the White Ribbon in 1895 under Mrs Sheppard's editorship. The Ribbon was entirely edited and managed by women and although the mouthpiece of the WCTU, was also intended as a medium for the discussion of social, religious, moral and political questions of interest to women, as well as for the reports of various women's groups.³⁵ There was also much interaction of personnel and time and time again the same names crop up in connection with different groups, not always at different times. Mrs Sheppard was active in both the WCTU and the Canterbury Women's Institute, and was later president of the NCW; Lady Stout, also a WCTU member, was co-founder of the Southern Cross Society and the NCW, was a vice-president of the Wellington SPWC and later, was active in the Plunket Society. Mrs Sievwright, founder of the Gisborne Women's Political Association, was a member of the WCTU and at the time of her death was president of the NCW; Christina Henderson, a graduate of Canterbury University College and a WCTU member was prominent in the Women Teachers Association (founded 1901), as well as being secretary of the NCW; Amey Daldy, WCTU franchise leader in Auckland, was also active in the NCW, as well as being a committee member of the Auckland SPWC - and so the list goes on. Friendships formed during the suffrage campaign continued after the vote was won and, strengthened by the leading feminists' conviction that women should combine to become a

34. Prohibitionist, 30 Nov. 1895, p.3.

35. WR, July 1895, p.1.

THE POLITICAL WOMAN.



1

*I'm a maiden with a mission; I'm a woman with a will;
I'm a female of the type that's known as 'new';
I've a tongue of brassy sweetness that is very seldom still.
And I love to talk of subjects slightly 'blue'.
Ah! Too true,
I've a leaning towards those subjects which are blue.*



2

*I've a self-inflicted mission to regenerate mankind,
And to elevate the sex I represent;
And I'm going to make things lively for I've quite made up my mind
That they'll let me have a seat in parliament.
Yes! I'm bent
On lifting up my voice in parliament.*



3

*I've a cure for every evil; I've a ban for every sin;
Of philanthropy I am the fountain-head;
As a socialistic angel, I serenely amble in
Where even fools may hesitate to tread.
I've no dread,
Of rushing in where others fear to tread.*



4

*Though my logic may be faulty and my eloquence too gush
Yet the object of my chatter's pretty plain.
I intend to go on shrieking till an overwhelming rush
Of suffering men shall 'put me down' again.
Oh! What pain,
When they put me in my proper place again*

Finny Hunter

political and social force, led to the advocacy of a federation of women's societies, - an objective which was achieved with the foundation of the NCW in 1896.

When in 1895 the Secretary for Labour wrote with reference to New Zealand's first government labour bureau for women: "It was thought neither wise nor just that the necessities of one half of our population should be neglected, or that the woman-citizens of our colony should not be provided with equal means of escaping destitution as their male relatives",³⁶ he was expressing a fundamental development in the condition of New Zealand women. Women had now emerged as a distinct group in their own right: in the eyes of the government who were now willing to appoint officials such as Grace Neill to deal with essentially female concerns; in the eyes of the legislators who had spent many agonised (and frivolous) hours debating such questions as married women's property, the equality of divorce, and the female franchise; and in the eyes of women themselves, few of whom were totally unaffected by the agitation for the suffrage, and many of whom were now in their own associations. A number of outstanding women had gained experience in organisation and agitation and by their determination had contributed to a considerable political victory.

There were still many areas to which women could direct their reforming impulses and a variety of associations through which they could do this. Where an association did not exist, there were certain to be women with the confidence and experience to rectify the matter. Socially-oriented organisations such as the SPWC offered an outlet for women concerned about economically disadvantaged or ill-treated members of their own sex, while those to whom alcohol appeared as the primary source of social disharmony were welcomed in the WCTU which by this time had branches throughout New Zealand.

36. Annual Report, Department of Labour, AJHR, 1895, H.6, p.2.

The formation of the NCW offered a unified voice for those to whom the women's cause was a more important priority, and still later the promotion of motherhood and responsible child-care would provide yet another mission for the number of women who supported the Plunket Society. It remained to be seen if women would maintain their allegiance to a variety of public causes, as exemplified in these four organisations, or whether the conception of woman's duty held by one such body would assert itself to the detriment of another; whether the long-established attachment of women to benevolent causes would be promoted at the expense of the women's rights movement. Could the sense of solidarity engendered by the franchise campaign be sustained now that those who had seen the vote as an end in itself had dropped by the way?

In 1893 Mrs Sheppard wrote,

For the first time in the history of the English people have the Mothers joined hands with the Fathers in governing their land.

We believe that peace and blessing will flow from such a union, and that the year 1893 is the beginning of a new and happy era.³⁷

She, like most of her fellow suffragists saw 1893 as marking not the end of a well-fought campaign, but the commencement of new and concentrated efforts for the attainment of true equality and the fuller contribution of women to social betterment. She recognised, however, that only through organised effort, rather than the individual drive for success, could women come closest to realising her hopes. The next twenty years would demonstrate the effectiveness or otherwise of women's groups as instruments of social reform, and would test the optimism expressed in Jessie Mackay's "Battle March":

37. WCTU of New Zealand, Franchise Report for 1893, 1893.

... red in the East is the dawn the demons have dreaded
 fore-knowing,
 The visible day of Messiah, whose light is their last
 overthrowing,
 When jewel of womanhood glitters, the age-long assailing
 ended;
 When to be born but a woman is heritage noble and splendid,
 When mothers are sworn unto peace, and the children hate
 naught that is human;
 When Pole to the Pole shall be knitted by the love of the
 woman for woman.³⁸

38. "The Woman's Battle March", read before the first NCW meeting, 1896. Mrs B. Holt, "A History of the National Council of Women of New Zealand", (typescript). I am indebted to Mrs Holt for providing me with a copy of this history, and also with material from the NCW (Auckland Branch) Collection.

EMINENTLY IN THE SPHERE OF WOMAN'S DUTY:
the Society for the Protection of Women and Children.

Unlike the many social and political associations of women working for the advancement of their sex, the Society for the Protection of Women and Children did not directly owe its foundation to the mood of purpose and optimism generated by the franchise issue. Nor could it strictly be termed a "women's organisation" for the first branch was established in April 1893 by an Auckland man, Henry Wilding, and men and women at all times worked together within the Society. Rather, the Society was characteristic of a number of bodies, not necessarily activated by any conscious feminist concern, which were working directly on behalf of disadvantaged women and children in New Zealand. The assistance given by the SPWC was, however, regulated in such a manner and directed toward such varied groups as to make it unique among the practical humanitarian agencies of the period.

The heightened awareness of women in New Zealand society in the later nineteenth century was not simply reflected in their assumption of new roles. Under the influence of social darwinism it paradoxically involved a renewed emphasis, particularly from the 1890's on the function of women as mothers, as bearers of the race. This emphasis was reiterated not only by traditionalists, but by feminists themselves who, like Mrs Sheppard used it as a justification for raising the dignity and status of women:

We are the mothers. Through us in our bondage,
 Through us, with a brand in the face,
 Be we fettered with gold or with iron,
 Through us comes the race!

We were ignorant long, and our children
 Were besotted and brutish, and blind;
 King-driven, priest-ridden! - Who were they?
 Our children? - Mankind.

We were kept for our beauty, our softness,
 Our sex; What reward do ye find?
 We transmit, must transmit, being mothers,
 What we are to mankind! 1

At this time when many women's organisations, medical men, and even politicians were beginning to speak of society's dependence upon the physical and moral condition of its women, it became apparent

1. NCW, Fourth Session, Auckland 1899, p.38.

that the circumstances of numerous women were far from ideal. Wife desertion, always a feature of the New Zealand social pattern, was exacerbated in depression by the need for men to travel in search of work. Supporters of the 1884 Married Women's Property Act were unfavourably impressed by the "unusual prevalence" of wife desertion in New Zealand, and more particularly by the example of errant husbands who returned to confiscate their wife's independent earnings before departing once more.² Duncan Macgregor, Inspector of Hospitals and Charitable Institutions, noted with disapproval that an "enormous proportion" of those receiving outdoor relief were deserted wives with families, and blamed the frequency of desertion both on the ill-assorted unions struck up between shipmates, and the reasonable assurance with which both wives and husbands found they could depend upon their families being supported by public charities.³

Sympathy for deserted families was tempered, however, by the not infrequent occurrence of collusion between husband and wife, by the tendency of "forward" women to exploit the charitable aid system, and by the feeling that many women were themselves to blame. Helen Stavely, officer in charge of the government labour bureau for women expressed this feeling when she wrote of deserted wives:

I fear they themselves are often to blame for such a state of things by their want of knowledge in making a comfortable home The husbands get into the habit of looking for comfort outside their own homes and eventually drift away, no one knows where. Then these poor wives and mothers have to apply for benevolent aid for themselves and their children, and I find it hard to induce employers to engage these women to do daily work ... as they are obliged to take one or more of the children (who are too young to be left alone) with them during the time they are at work.⁴

2. NZPD, 48, pp. 490-491, (23 Sept. 1884, Mr Waterhouse).

3. Annual Report on Hospitals and Charitable Institutions of the Colony, AJHR, 1888, H.9, p.6.

4. Annual Report, Department of Labour, AJHR, 1899, H.11, p.ix. /

The death or illness of the breadwinner, although less publicised because there was no deliberate evasion of responsibility, also left families in severely straitened circumstances and featured in government reports along with old age as the major causes of poverty.

The depression also pressed severely upon those wives of working men who were forced into "sweated" employment in competition with their sons and daughters. Factory work in particular was supposed to endanger not only the physical health of the women involved, as submissions to the 1890 Sweating Commission showed, but to expose them to severe moral contamination.⁵ Free from "the wholesome restraint of domestic service" factory girls often spent their days in close proximity to male employees and exhibited, according to Mrs Neill, "a certain coarseness and rough behaviour" as the result.⁶ Worse still, their nights were spent on the streets, many believed, adding "ruined life to ruined life".⁷

Juvenile depravity generally was evidenced by the numbers of young people congregating on the streets in idleness, and by that scourge of the later nineteenth century thoroughfare, the larrikin. The problem was considered sufficiently serious in 1891 for meetings of Justices of the Peace to pass resolutions on the best means of dealing with juvenile offenders. While many of the proposed remedies were intended to weigh heavily upon the young offender himself and to bring about his reformation through exposure to hard work, others, including fines and disenfranchisement, were directed towards parents whose neglect and irresponsibility were considered a primary cause of juvenile delinquency.⁸

By 1896 the Police Commissioner was reporting that "the larrikin nuisance" could not be effectively put down until power was given to arrest, and not merely to summon "lads and boys who loiter about the street corners and make themselves objectionable to the

5. Report of Sweating Commission, AJHR, 1890, H.5, pp.34-35.

6. Annual Report, Department of Labour, AJHR, 1895, H.6, p.10

7. Australian and New Zealand Family Friend, 10 Aug. 1889, p.2.

8. Resolutions Passed at Meetings of Justices of the Peace on Juvenile Offenders, AJHR, 1894, (S.2), H.4, pp.1-4.

annoyance of passers, more especially to unprotected females",⁹ and by 1896 some politicians, including Seddon, were considering a virtual curfew on young people in the streets.

While girls were less likely to be assigned to the "larrikin" category, they too posed a problem for those concerned about the moral fibre of the rising generation. Between 1886 and 1896 illegitimate births rose from 3.12% of all live births to 4.48% and although the proportion of spinsters in the child-bearing ages also increased in the same period, the rise in illegitimate births was frequently taken as evidence of moral laxity.¹⁰ Juvenile prostitution and venereal disease were also thought to be on the increase and for over twenty years prompted the stalwarts of the Legislative Council to resist the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act.

The problem was compounded by the fact that the corrupted girlhood of the colony were so often those who, it seemed, were least likely to produce children of sound colonial stock. Macgregor pointed to the case of the "defective" half-imbecile girl who already had five illegitimate children by different fathers, all of whom were supported by charitable aid, and sighed "Truly, it is a far cry to Utopia".¹¹ Here also the males of New Zealand were seen to be evading their responsibility and many women's organisations, resentful of the double standard, recommended legislative means of dealing with the problem. The Christchurch WCTU, for example, urged an Act which would make compulsory the establishment of the paternity of illegitimate children,¹² and Mrs Sheppard six years later thought it monstrous that "a child who has no voice in the matter of its birth should be burdened with a Legal Brand of illegitimacy, while its father skulks and avoids the obloquy of his wrong-doing".¹³

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9. Annual Report on Police Force of the Colony, AJHR, 1896, H.16, p.2.
 10. Official Yearbook, 1900, p.118.
 11. Annual Report on Hospitals and Charitable Institutions of the Colony, AJHR, 1893 (S.2), H.22, p.1.
 12. Prohibitionist, 26 May, 1894, p.3.
 13. NCW, Fifth Session, Dunedin 1900, p.13.

Although it was disputed whether the young people of New Zealand were more lawless than their counterparts "at home", there occurred in New Zealand, as in England, a hardening of attitudes towards juvenile offenders, a hardening which involved a new willingness to resort to prosecution and formal avenues of punishment, and which was part of what one writer terms "the institutionalization of adolescence".¹⁴ This restrictive attitude was directed not only toward the hardened transgressor, however. It also aimed at prevention, and special concern was felt for the need to protect children of young age groups and to counteract the effects of bad birth. It was thus with some justification that a member of the National Council of Women spoke of the child as "the great discovery of the nineteenth century."¹⁵ Women's organisations in particular emphasised the receptivity of the young mind, the need to protect it from corruption, and the role played by women in its proper socialisation. Stressing that the "production of noble men and women depends upon the physical, mental, moral and spiritual training of children", the Canterbury Women's Institute pointed out that many became criminals at an early age while others who escaped the taint were unable to become useful members of society if left in their present surroundings. The Institute therefore recommended that separate state homes be provided where criminal or neglected children should

be nurtured, protected, trained and educated for life's work by women of great culture and refinement

In order that the children should come under the influence of the Home before they are irretrievably corrupted by their surroundings it seems advisable that they should enter the Home before the age of seven. A creche could be part of the Home where the children could be cared for until the age of four.¹⁶

In this the women were partly supported by Dr Macgregor who continually recommended that all neglected children should be made wards of state and placed under the supervision of the Education Department.¹⁷

14. John R. Gillis, "The Evolution of Juvenile Delinquency in England", Past and Present, May 1975, p.97.

15. (Miss Henderson) NCW, Sixth Session, Wanganui 1901, p.18.

16. WR, March 1897, p.8.

17. e.g. Annual Report on Hospitals and Charitable Institutions of the Colony, AJHR, 1896, H.22, p.2.

The reluctance of successive governments to institute such a comprehensive state guardianship reflected the fear that state interference in this, as in other matters affecting the welfare of women and children, would only discourage responsibility and initiative. The role of the state in the distribution of charitable aid was considered unsatisfactory especially by the Department itself. On the issue of outdoor relief Macgregor was adamant that the existing state subsidy must be avoided at all costs, eloquently stating that "All over New Zealand the State subsidy for outdoor relief is the most effective scheme that could be devised for the systematic cultivation of social parasites. We carefully hatch them out, and lay them down in the alimentary tracts of society, and we call the insane proceeding philanthropy".¹⁸ Despite the desperate situation of so many women left alone to rear children, it was ironically the successful manipulation of the charitable aid system by less scrupulous women which probably led to the use of female inspectors such as Mrs Grace Neill. Women, it seems, were not only more likely to elicit the confidences of the needy, but retiring members of their sex, but were considered more adept at ferreting out cases of brazen exploitation.

The growing disfavour with which indiscriminate charity was viewed and the unresolved question of state responsibility left a vacuum for new responses to the genuine hardships experienced by the most vulnerable members of society. By the 1890's the Salvation Army was firmly established among agencies offering aid to the outcast and needy. In addition to its prison gate missions and night shelters for inebriates, it ran rescue homes in the four main centres and sought to cut off prostitution at its source by helping girls in straitened circumstances. Where the need arose it took in orphans and girls from broken homes.¹⁹ Other churches ran similar institutions, some (maternity homes) restricted to girls giving birth to their first child, others (rescue homes) seeking to reform confirmed prostitutes. Among the latter were the Mount Magdala Magdalen Asylum and St Mary's in Christchurch and the Parnell Home in Auckland run by

18. Annual Report, Hospitals and Charitable Institutions of the Colony, AJHR, 1897 (S.2), H.22, p.1.

19. John C. Waite, Dear Mr Booth, 1964, pp.62-67.

Mrs Bishop Cowie. The Costley Home in Auckland, the Salvation Army Pauline Home in Wellington and the Linwood Home in Christchurch provided maternity facilities for girls "on the downward path but not yet fallen".

Although the SPWC worked in collaboration with other voluntary organisations and with "homes" of the type mentioned, it did not seek to duplicate the services they offered. Avoiding for the most part the establishment of costly institutions or the distribution of goods and money, the Society involved itself with the deserted wife, the prostitute, the unmarried mother, the "uncontrolled" youngster and the neglected or ill-treated child, but reached as well individuals who had largely been ignored or beyond the reach of other philanthropic bodies. The Society's concern, as its stated aims showed, was not only with the immoral woman, or wayward adolescent, but with women whose distress stemmed from the marriage situation itself. The aims of the Society were fourfold - to prosecute in cases of cruelty, seduction, outrage or excessive violence to women and children, to give advice and aid to women who had been cruelly treated, to make provision for children when it was found the parents or guardians were unfit persons to have charge of them and to agitate for the improvement of statute laws with a view to the more effective protection of women and children.²⁰ The different branches later added to these aims and these additions, like the Wellington branch's objective of organising girl's clubs for social intercourse and mutual improvement, stressed the preventative nature of the Society's activities. The Society sought then, as now, to treat the causes of social distress, or to deal with them before they resulted in the breakdown of the family unit.

20. Annual Report, Auckland Branch SPWC, 1895, frontispiece.

The establishment of the first branch of the SPWC in Auckland was followed by Wellington in 1897, by Dunedin in 1899, and by Christchurch in 1908, though similar work in the latter centre was undertaken until this time by the Children's Aid Society. The four branches were independent of each other and although they exchanged ideas, mainly on legislative matters, they exhibited some differences in organisation and interests. The Auckland Branch, for example, combined with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and from 1898 to 1927 operated separate branches for women and children and for animals.²¹ The first conference of the branches was not held until 1929.

Membership of the Auckland branch on its establishment in 1895 comprised ordinary members who contributed annually the sum of five shillings or more, life members who contributed five pounds or more and honorary members who, by their practical sympathy with the objects of the Society, might be elected as such by the executive.²² The influence of the Society was not through the numerical strength of its membership however, but through the prestige and support of certain of its members, often committee members. In Auckland representatives of local churches were prominent, including clerics of the Roman Catholic, Jewish, Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist faiths. The Society also benefitted from the presidency of the Governor General, Lord Glasgow, and from having legislative councillors W. Jennings and W.J. McCullough among its vice-presidents. Later, the active influence of F.E. Baume and G.M. Fowlds, both vice-presidents of the Society and members of the House of Representatives proved invaluable, while from 1900 the inclusion of Mrs Amey Daldy, prominent in the NCW, provided a link with feminist organisations. Wilding, the chairman, was careful in his correspondence with cabinet ministers such as Reeves to include reports and lists of the officers of the Society in order to convince them of the integrity of the Society.²³

21. This was not done, however, without lengthy consideration of the implications of combining the two titles, NZH, 28 Jan. 1898. The fact remained, however, that women, children, and animals were regarded as the common victims of cruelty and required the intervention of a humane society.

22. Auckland Branch SPWC, Minute Book, 1893, p.2.

23. e.g. Auckland Branch SPWC, Letter Book No.1, p.133.

The Dunedin branch of the Society was for many years presided over by the Rev. (later Archdeacon) Curzon-Siggers supported by an executive which included such noteworthy local figures as Mrs W.H. Reynolds, a founder of the Free Kindergarten movement and widow of the legislative councillor, her daughter, Mrs Denniston, the wife of a prominent Dunedin businessman and mayor of Dunedin, Dr Emily Siedeberg, the Rev. W.A. Sinclair, president of the Dunedin Council of Churches and prominent temperance worker, Ethel Benjamin, first woman lawyer in New Zealand, and Edith Statham, secretary of the WCTU.

In Wellington the wives of prominent men were active in the Society, as well as women who were public figures in their own right. Mrs W.A. Evans (formerly Miss Kate Edger) was the first president and her husband a trustee. Members of early executives included Lady Stout, Miss L.M. Kirk, prominent in the WCTU and later wife of A.R. Atkinson, Captain Waldie of the Salvation Army, Mrs Wallis, wife of the Bishop of Wellington, Mrs J.G. Findlay, whose husband was later Minister of Justice, Mrs Kirkaldie and Mrs Gresley Lukin, wife of the Evening Post's editor. Edward Tregear was for many years a trustee and Stella Henderson, one of the first women law graduates and sister of Christina and Elizabeth Henderson (the latter the first woman member of Parliament), was an honorary solicitor.

The SPWC thus attracted socially concerned, and often socially prominent, men and women, as well as women of an openly feminist persuasion such as Mrs Daldy and Lady Stout. The involvement of women varied between branches, however. Men predominated on the council and committee of the Auckland branch during its early years and although a ladies' committee was formed in 1899 under the leadership of Lady Ranfurly, this was for the purpose of raising finances - in the best bazaar stall tradition.²⁴ By 1900 a greater number of women were on the executive of the Auckland SPWC however, one of the reasons perhaps being, as was revealed by the chairman

24. Annual Report, Auckland Branch SPWC, 1899-1900, p.7.

at the 1899 general meeting, that there had been too many men on the committee who had been too busy to give sufficient time to the special work of the Society.²⁵

In Wellington, as Mrs Evans explained to the 1899 Select Committee on the Young Persons Protection Bill, the executive itself was confined to ladies.²⁶ This may have reflected the origins of the Wellington Branch in the agitation of the WCTU at revelations made in the Magistrate's Court concerning juvenile immorality.²⁷ In keeping with the female composition of its executive, the Wellington Society maintained contact with other women's organisations and in 1912, for example, submitted resolutions for the better protection of women and children to other women's societies throughout New Zealand.²⁸ In the same year it joined the Overseas Suffrage Union and in 1914 urged equal pay for women teachers.²⁹ In 1917 a public meeting was held under the auspices of the Wellington SPWC to protest against proposals by the Council of Education as to the segregation of sexes in schools and the greater differentiation of education.³⁰ The concerns of the Wellington Society thus followed more closely the concerns of women's societies generally in that they were interested in the wider aspects of women's status.

Whatever the composition of their respective executives, each branch of the SPWC had a woman visitor, believing like many of the Charitable Aid Boards that women were more likely to confide in their own sex. When the branches became firmly established the women visitors worked on a full-time salaried basis, assisted where necessary by members of the executive or the Society's trustees or solicitors. Of all the voluntary societies in New Zealand at the time, the SPWC perhaps best illustrates in its women visitors the

25. Auckland Branch SPWC, Press Cuttings Book No. 1, (no reference).

26. Report of the Select Committee on the Young Persons Protection Bill, JLC, 1899, p.21.

27. Annual Report, Wellington Branch SPWC, 1898, p.3.

28. Annual Report, Wellington Branch SPWC, 1912-1913, p.6.

29. Annual Report, Wellington Branch SPWC, 1913-1914, p.6.

30. Press cutting, 1917 (no reference), Letters, Notes and Papers Regarding the Teaching of Domestic Science in Schools, Lady Anna Stout Collection.

development of the role of professional social worker as a viable occupational option for woman. Professional women were also to be found as honorary solicitors or doctors to the Society, Dr Elizabeth Platts-Mills being associated with the Wellington branch for many years, and Dr Emily Siedeberg with the Dunedin branch.

The first concern of each branch on its establishment was the immediate cases of need confronting them. There was a growing feeling that the evils of the Old Country were being reproduced in New Zealand, and Bishop Neligan, speaking to the thirteenth annual meeting of the Auckland branch, lamented that even the beautiful surroundings of New Zealand did not eliminate cruelty to children.³¹ In a similar vein a religious monthly rejoiced that the Society was rapidly becoming a terror to that "vast army of drunken and heartless husbands" who in New Zealand as in the Old Country "cruelly trample upon and illtreat those whom they promised to love, honour and cherish".³²

Although changes in the classification of cases unfortunately prevent detailed comparison over the years, the consistently largest group of cases cited in the Auckland Society's records, as the above comment suggests, related to "troubles between husband and wife" - often involving cruelty. The difficulties faced by the Society in such domestic situations were considerable since it had to consider not only the truth of the complainant's charge, but the degree of provocation involved, and having secured lawyers often found the injured party reluctant to take action against her spouse. One such case, where the veracity of the complaint was in no doubt whatever involved a 90 year old man ("a heavy drinker and eccentric") who regularly threw knives and pieces of wood at his elderly wife and 40 year old daughter, saying that if his wife could not work, she ought to die and make way for a better woman! Since this geriatric tyrant also kept a loaded gun at the ready the report on the case said, quite understandably, that "Mrs and Miss P. are afraid of their lives". Despite the Society's intervention - the daughter was persuaded "with

31. Annual Report, Auckland Branch SPWC, 1906-1907, p.8.

32. Joyful News, March 1897, Auckland Branch SPWC, Press Cuttings Book No. 1.

some difficulty" to lay information against her father in the magistrate's court - the case had a tragic ending. Court proceedings were adjourned to give the defendant a chance to behave himself, and within a month the wife was dead, "he having injured her chest". An enquiry a month later showed that the unmarried daughter was still living with her father, but the Society was unable to ascertain her welfare.³³

The second largest group of cases were those described in early reports as "cases of seduction", and later given as affiliation cases. These were followed, and from the 1900's exceeded by cases of cruelty towards children. Since the Society shared in the current philosophy that children and society were best served by their transfer from an unsatisfactory environment, cases of "young persons removed from dangerous surroundings" figured separately up to the 1900's and later were probably cited under the more general heading "concerning children and young girls". Despite the Old Age Pension cases of "parents against children for support" were sufficiently important by the 1900's to be listed separately, and the incorrigible nature of many of the cases investigated necessitated a further category of "old cases redealt with". Only a minority of cases, it appears, were finally solved with complete satisfaction to all. Fallen women fell once more, drunken husbands returned to plague their wives, deserting husbands defaulted on maintenance and illegitimate babies died with tragic frequency.

The varied nature of the cases considered by the Society is illustrated by the Auckland branch's record book and by comments in annual reports.³⁴ Drink figured prominently in marital disputes and sometimes led the Society's visitor to conclude that one of the partners was as much to blame as the other. The Society was also alarmed at the frequency of wife desertion, and came down heavily against absconding husbands who, in neglecting their familial duties, they considered were threatening the very roots of society.

33. Auckland Branch SPWC, Record Book No. 1, Case 30.

34. See Appendix.

In its 1901 report the Society pointed out the problems involved in inducing the absconders to return. It cost, they noted, a deposit of £24 to bring back one man under police escort. If a woman was destitute, she was not able to provide this amount; if she was able to afford it, she was reluctant to bring her husband back as a criminal. Charitable Aid Boards rarely took any action because a man was likely to be sent to gaol if they acted, would not be able to support his wife in any case, and might not be able to secure work on his release from prison.³⁵

The SPWC itself used legal action only as a very last resort. The usual process in cases of cruelty, for example, was for a complaint to be made to the Society by the wife or a friend. The Society was anxious to avoid a reputation for unnecessary interference and as a rule did not send out its visitor until the wife herself had come to the office and sought help. Exceptions were made where the wife was ill or where complaints were made on behalf of a minor.³⁶ An approach was usually made by the visitor to the husband and if necessary the chairman interviewed the man. If he proved intractable and the original complaint were justified the Society's solicitors were consulted. At this point disputes were often able to be resolved informally, the threat of legal action causing one or both parties to reconsider their stand. Close contact was kept with the police, Inspector Hickson of the Auckland Police being on the Society's committee. Mrs Evans of the Wellington branch, which operated on similar lines to its Auckland counterpart, reported that the Society was sometimes successful in approaching the employers of erring husbands and having them spoken to by their superiors.³⁷ All cases were dealt with confidentially, names being known only to the committee, and the Society stressed its role in reconciling many couples.

35. Annual Report, Auckland Branch SPWC, 1900-1901, p.11.

36. Wilding to 1899 Annual Meeting. Auckland Branch SPWC, Press Cuttings Book No. 1, (no reference).

37. Report of Select Committee on Young Persons Protection Bill, JLC, 1899, p.20.

Even maintenance cases were frequently arranged privately through the Society's solicitors, and such were the amounts being handled and distributed in this way that it was decided in 1899 to have the Auckland Society incorporated.³⁸ It was a matter of pride to the Society's members that their actions were saving the rate-payers a considerable financial burden. Tables were given in each annual report headed "value to the State" which showed the amount awarded in maintenance by magistrates' orders (usually the larger amount) and by private arrangement. But despite the Society's success in lifting at least part of the burden of financial support from ratepayers to those who were considered responsible, and despite the demonstrably economical basis on which it operated, it laid itself open to criticism in departing from the customary "almsgiving" response to social problems. As late as 1927 the Society's chairman had to defend the Auckland branch from anonymous criticism by a subscriber that practically all its income went on salaries. Pointing out that its staff were at any rate underpaid, the chairman reiterated that the Society did not undertake to distribute charitable aid. Its object, he stated, was the protection of women and children, and with this end in view it endeavoured to give expert advice through its secretary, woman visitor, and solicitors. Without salaries there could be no staff; without staff, no expert aid and advice.³⁹ The idea that a social worker should work for nothing out of a sense of social duty or Christian zeal died hard, it is clear.

The fact that an organisation such as the SPWC was needed at all was naturally a matter of regret to its members. Year after year the Society's reports stressed that only a revival of British home life could successfully combat the evils it grappled with. In 1910 Wilding told the annual meeting of the Auckland branch that "the real work of protecting women and children belonged to the family, and one could not help noticing and deploring in these young countries the decay of filial piety". The most serious blot on modern civilisation, he claimed, was the decline in discipline and

38. NZH, 10 Oct. 1899, Auckland Branch SPWC, Press Cuttings Book No.1

39. Auckland Star, 28 July, 1927, Auckland Branch SPWC, Press Cuttings Book 1926-1931.

the weakening of family ties.⁴⁰ Urgent action was needed, in the words of one report, "ere we sink to the low moral level of but too many states placed under the same climatic influences as ourselves".⁴¹ Many of the individual cases coming to the Society's attention must indeed have suggested that the ideal of family life was threatened and that for many of its clients the family situation itself was a source of conflict and distress.

It was at this point that the fourth, and some thought, the most important of the Society's aims sought alternative, legislative solutions to the problems of protecting women and children. With the growth of cities and the greater complexity of society, informal means of sanctioning violations of the social code were proving increasingly inadequate, and as the Society's comments showed, the family was thought to be falling down in the task of disciplining and restraining its members. The SPWC, like many similar associations, thus turned to more formal avenues of social control to supplement its routine activities.

By continually writing to government ministers, providing Members of Parliament with evidence of discrepancies in the law and with copies of their annual reports, by holding public meetings and publicising matters in newspapers, and by supporting Members of Parliament, often Society subscribers, who supported the Society's aims, the SPWC brought pressure to bear for legislative change and sought to educate public opinion as to the frequency and severity of offences against the person, even within the family. It was concerned not only with the matter of punishment, but with the prevention of such offences. In 1895, for example, the Auckland Society wrote to Seddon seeking his assistance in altering the Criminal Code Act in three ways. First, it requested that the time in which action might

40. Annual Report, Auckland Branch SPWC, 1909-1910, p.6.

41. Annual Report, Auckland Branch SPWC, 1895, p.9.

be taken in cases of seduction of under-age girls should be raised from one to three months from the offence; second, that a penalty be added for the punishment of incest; and third, that provision be made for the more drastic punishment of the hordes of larrikins who infested the Auckland streets "to the danger and discomfort of women and children". In the same letter it was urged that the care of all neglected children be made directly chargeable to the State since local bodies preferred to leave children in unsuitable surroundings rather than incur the expense of their committal.⁴²

In succeeding years the Auckland branch also urged the establishment of children's courts, the raising of the age of consent, the better classification of inmates of lunatic asylums, and that the State bring back defaulting husbands from Australia at the public expense.

While most of the branches were agreed on the above points, each branch had particular reforms which seemed more important than others and which they brought to Parliamentarians' attention. The Wellington Society, for example, recommended the appointment of women doctors and women official visitors to prisons, and protested at the unfair treatment of women teachers. From Dunedin in the late 1900's came resolutions to government recommending that part of the wages of drunken husbands be attached to their wives, that institutions be provided for feeble-minded girls, and that industrial colonies be established where lazy or deserting husbands could be compelled to work for their family's support.⁴³ The branches of the SPWC were not, of course, alone in their advocacy of many such measures. Societies such as the WCTU and NCW were equally diligent in sponsoring resolutions regarding the age of consent, the greater use of women officials, and the need for the state to take responsibility for neglected, criminal and orphaned children.

42. Auckland Branch SPWC, Letter Book No. 1, p.134.

43. Emily H. Siedeberg-McKinnon, Fifty Years of Active Work in the Interests of Women and Children, 1949, pp.10-11.

The question of juvenile depravity was strongly debated within the SPWC, as indeed by all similar organisations. Separate meetings of ladies and gentlemen of the Auckland Branch in 1900 failed to reach agreement on the extent, cause and remedy for juvenile immorality in the colony. The general feeling was, however, that the assembly of young people in the streets at night was at best undesirable and unproductive, and at worst the prelude to a life of misery and disgrace.⁴⁴ The Society thus gave its unqualified support to curb the freedom (or license), of young people and to institute more formal means of control. Unlike some groups, however, it did not see the imposition of a virtual curfew on young people as the ultimate solution to juvenile immorality. Thus, when the ladies of the Wellington branch gave evidence through their president to the Select Committee on the 1899 Young Persons' Protection Bill, and in their annual report of that year expressed sympathy for the measure, they added that "the evil arises largely from the laxity of parental control, and all remedial measures should aim at increasing the sense of responsibility in parents, alike by the infliction of substantial penalties in cases of neglect and through the growth of a healthy public opinion in the direction of providing better accommodation for the people".⁴⁵ Some Society members, including W.J. Jennings, the Auckland Legislative Councillor, were against compulsion and felt that the SPWC, the Salvation Army, and kindred bodies could do better work on an informal basis.⁴⁶

By no means all the legislation supported by the SPWC passed into law during our period; some, like the Young Persons Protection Bills, because it was thought to be too restrictive; others, such as the measures advocated in response to desertion, because they needed the impetus of further depression to enlarge the problem. Nevertheless the Society did have some notable successes, two acts in particular owing their implementation to the Society's pressure. The first was

44. Minutes of Special Meeting of Gentlemen, 3 July 1900; Minutes of Special Meeting of Ladies, 13 July 1900, Auckland Branch SPWC, Minute Book, 1900.

45. Annual Report, Wellington Branch SPWC, 1899, p.7.

46. NZPD, 110, p.169 (3 Oct.1899).

the Criminal Code Act Amendment of 1900 which provided for the punishment of incest, and the second, the 1906 Juvenile Offenders Act which led to the establishment of separate courts for juvenile offenders.

The latter bill owed its success largely to the efforts of F.E. Baume, member for Auckland East and Vice-President of the Auckland SPWC. In 1904 the Wellington Branch advocated that children's courts be established along the lines of those in South Australia and also urged that all cases involving divorce or offences against children should be heard in camera.⁴⁷ The following year the Auckland branch passed resolutions along similar lines and heard an address from Baume on the "promiscuous congregation of children with criminals of all classes" which went on in the Auckland Police Courts.⁴⁸ When in 1906 the Juvenile Offenders Bill was near its final reading, the Minister of Justice admitted that it was largely the result of requests by the SPWC.⁴⁹

The need for the Criminal Code Act to be amended to allow for the punishment of incest was established by the continual recommendations of the SPWC and in particular, by evidence circulated by the Wellington branch to Members of Parliament in 1900. This evidence contradicted the assertion of a few Members and Councillors that such an "abominable practice" did not exist in New Zealand and that legislation to deal with it was "a libel on the people of New Zealand". One Legislative Councillor even insisted that there was "no need whatsoever" for legislation of that type and put the prevalence of "sex bills" down to the "hysterical women, some so-called purity society, or to a general softening of the brain".⁵⁰

47. Annual Report, Wellington Branch SPWC, 1904, p.10.

48. Annual Report, Auckland Branch SPWC, 1904-1905, p.11.

49. NZPD, 136, p.286 (30 Aug. 1906, Mr McGowan).

50. NZPD, 113, p.476 (5 Sept. 1900, Mr T.Kelly).

The gentlemen members of the SPWC must have resented the association with organisations of "hysterical women" which resulted from their advocacy of similar causes. Better informed sources tended to make a distinction, however, and to be effusive in their praise of the Society when comparing it with its feminist counterparts. The Auckland Star compared the NCW unfavourably with the SPWC, stating that

While the Councillors, like the Laird of Cockpen, are taken up with affairs of the State, discussing first principles and passing general resolutions of an all-embracing character, the Society may be permitted to modestly occupy itself with some of the more particular evils and injustices which daily present themselves in a concrete form.

Though we may yield to no one in our respect for great principles, we must confess that the enunciation of these with never so much warmth and eloquence, wins our admiration much less than evidences of their practical application. For that reason we gladly turn from the National Council of Women to the Society for the Protection of Women and Children. The latter has apparently done something other than talk.⁵¹

The New Zealand Herald echoed this sentiment, pointing out that

Women nowadays are sometimes blamed for their pertinacity in having wrongs made right before they are perpetrated, but the class of women, and of unhappy little children who are the proteges of this merciful Society, have generally drained the bitterness of life to the dregs; and, for their sufferings, appeal to every true man and woman, with a spark of manliness or of womanhood in their breasts.

Not least in the Society's favour, according to the Herald was that it was probably "the least expensive and certainly the least extravagant of all the beneficent institutions of the city".⁵²

51. Auckland Star, April, 1896, Auckland Branch SPWC, Press Cuttings Book No. 1.

52. NZH, 24 April 1897, Auckland Branch SPWC, Press Cuttings Book No.1.

It was, however, an editorial in the same paper during the following year which put its finger on the Society's success and the favourable publicity it received from all acquainted with its operation. In supporting the SPWC on a national basis, the Herald stated, women's associations might prove the sincerity of their advocacy of the cause of the wronged and weak:

... if, amid their dissertations on economic independence and divided skirts and kindred subjects, they took up the financial as well as the moral support of the crusade against cruelty, whether it be to women and children or to the dumb creation, they would have not only a subject worthy of their noblest impulses, but one that all would recognise as eminently in the sphere of woman's duty.⁵³

Thus, by gaining the support of prominent men and women, and through its association with the long-established concept of "saving" women and children the SPWC acquired a respectability which eluded the more specifically feminist organisations, even though many of the measures they advocated were in fact similar. There was broad public support in New Zealand, as elsewhere, for the idea that it was a woman's business to be involved in regulating the welfare of children, and by association, of less fortunate members of their own sex. Women were seen (and saw themselves) as "social servants" and because of this assumption fitted readily into the emerging role of professional social worker. Women, by virtue of their sex were not only considered closer to the problems which presented themselves to such a society, but because they were regarded as more moral, more sympathetic and more altruistic than men had a distinctive claim to give their opinion on welfare matters. That they were able to do so under the auspices of such a worthy organisation which numbered among its members men of indisputable respectability was an added advantage. Membership of the SPWC did not involve any denial of the antifeminist view that a woman's place was in the home, partly because a primary concern of the Society was the elevation of family life and the investigation of those personal and social pressures which were combining to undermine it.)

53. NZH, 28 Jan. 1898, Auckland Branch SPWC, Press Cuttings Book No. 1.

Although in its early years the SPWC placed an undeniable emphasis on women and children as victims, principally of "cruel, drink-maddened, selfish men",⁵⁴ it was moving towards a more balanced conception of family problems, as evidenced by its change of name in the 1950's to the "Society for the Protection of Home and Family". The question of poverty which has always played a lesser role in the Society's deliberations than in those of earlier "charitable" bodies would become even less relevant as an increasing number of clients, both men and women, came from higher income brackets.⁵⁵ While those organisations which had relied on the feminist impulse of the 1890's for their vitality dissolved or went into decline, the SPWC continued in existence, for it was clear to the Society that those problems which had prompted its founding - child neglect, juvenile immorality, marriage dissolution and wife abuse - remained to threaten the effectiveness of the family as a social unit.

54. Annual Report, Auckland Branch SPWC, 1921-1922, p.6.

55. Annual Report, Auckland Branch Society for the Protection of Home and Family, 1974-1975, p.5.

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY:

The Women's Christian Temperance Union.

While few would have criticised the activities of the SPWC, especially where they were directed towards women and children who were the victims of cruelty and neglect, the temperance cause roused greater controversy. Extremists who saw in this one reform the answer to all social problems laid the majority of temperance workers open to the accusation of being faddists and intolerant cranks. And yet the distress caused by the misuse of alcohol was no doubt considerable in a society where "the crudest drunkenness, a sight not very common today, was almost a part of everyday life".¹ As already noted, the records and reports of the SPWC contain numerous cases of wives and children assaulted and intimidated by drunken husbands or parents, and Dr Emily Siedeberg confirmed that the "demon drink" greatly increased the work of the Dunedin branch and hampered its operations.² The misery caused to families by the loss of wages in the public house prompted the Dunedin and Wellington branches of the Society to repeatedly urge that at least part of a drunkard's earnings be paid directly to his wife.³ The motivations of those temperance workers who saw women and children in the role of helpless victims were not, therefore, so different to those of the SPWC, and individual members sometimes divided their energies between both causes.

Since women were, on the whole, less attracted to alcohol, and since they were so often the victims of its misuse, it was natural that they were attracted towards temperance, first participating in predominantly male groups such as the Rechabites and Good Templars,

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1. Paul McKimney, "The Temperance Movement in New Zealand 1835-1894", M.A. thesis 1968, p.11.
 2. Siedeberg McKinnon, p.8.
 3. *ibid.*, p.11.

and later forming their own society, the Women's Christian Temperance Union.⁴

While Dr R.H. Bakewell's view that the female prohibitionists were almost entirely women who had suffered as a consequence of drunken relatives no doubt reflects his customary antifeminist prejudice, it suggests that women were indeed aware of the suffering caused to their sex through the excessive consumption of alcohol.⁵ It is at this point that the link between temperance and feminism becomes apparent, for as Brian Harrison has noted with reference to the British situation, "The very act of joining a teetotal society involved a modest form of feminism: the belief that resources should be diverted from purely male pleasures to expenditure which could benefit the whole family".⁶

Once actively committed to temperance, women were likely to be impelled even further in the direction of feminism by their experiences in the movement. At a time when such public activity was well outside the norm for their sex, women acted as canvassers for petitions, chaired meetings and spoke on public platforms and, in response to criticism from outside the temperance movement, were

4. In 1874 there were 493 female convictions for drunkenness to 3682 male convictions, in 1884, 867 female convictions to 5774 male convictions, and in 1894, 593 female convictions to 3900 male convictions. McKimney notes that, even allowing for the larger male population, these figures suggest that women in the later nineteenth century did not drink as heavily or as often as men. McKimney, p.136. These figures do not of course allow for the fact that women were more likely to drink in private and thus avoid conviction for drunkenness, but on the other hand, Burt's study of drunkenness in Wanganui shows that the same women appeared repeatedly for the offence - in 1901 75.8% of women convicted of drunkenness in Wanganui had been convicted before, compared with 40.4% of males. This suggests that the list of total convictions considerably inflates the number of individuals involved. Andrew Burt, "Aspects of Drunkenness and Prohibition in Wanganui, 1880 to 1920" M.A. Thesis, 1973.

5. R.H. Bakewell, "New Zealand Under Female Franchise", Nineteenth Century, Feb. 1894, p.27.

6. Brian Harrison, Drink and the Victorians, 1971, p.175.

sometimes forced to a more overtly feminist stance to justify their behaviour. Patricia Grimshaw, in Women's Suffrage in New Zealand has also shown how in the temperance societies women learned the arts of organisation, administration and leadership which were later used in the feminist cause, and how they illustrated by their activity and commitment the truth of new notions of women's capabilities.⁷

The WCTU, founded in 1885 as the result of a visit by Mrs Mary Leavitt of the American WCTU, was the first national association of women in New Zealand. Ten branches of the Union were formed in the first year of its existence, and by early 1886 its membership numbered some 600 women.⁸ Like its counterparts in other countries the New Zealand WCTU attracted women from diverse backgrounds but was especially remarkable for the number of women whose names were well known in their local communities and whose families had long been connected with public causes and humanitarian interests. The names of women who figure in different chapters of this thesis in connection with other organisations and feminist activity generally are frequently to be found associated with the WCTU - among them Margaret Home Sievwright, Amey Daldy, Lady Stout, Kate Evans, Harriet Morrison, Christina, Stella and Elizabeth Henderson, Learmonth Dalrymple, Rachel Reynolds and Lavinia Kelsey (both prominent in the Free Kindergarten movement), Lily Atkinson, Jessie Mackay and Kate Sheppard.⁹

Other common characteristics of leading WCTU members, Grimshaw notes, were their mainly non-conformist backgrounds, and the fact that many had only limited family commitments, having married late in life or not at all.¹⁰

7. Grimshaw, pp.23-25.

8. *ibid.*, p.28.

9. *ibid.*, pp.29-30.

10. *ibid.*, pp.30-31.

Most had, therefore, both the time and the money to become involved in WCTU activities - a feature, it may be noted, of most women actively involved in social and political causes.

The involvement of such women was natural enough in view of the exceedingly wide interests of the WCTU. Although its temperance programme was paramount, the stated aims of the Union included the promotion of social reform and Christian work generally.¹¹ It thus attracted women such as Stella Henderson who recognised that not only did liquor lead to degradation and crime, but also that social conditions might themselves promote intemperance.¹²

Having found that women's political disabilities reduced its effectiveness on both temperance and social issues the Union began agitating at an early stage of its existence for the extension of the franchise to women. Here also the temperance-feminism link was strongly in evidence. Far from being the passive instrument of the male temperance party, the WCTU took the initiative in a struggle which lasted for some seven years, attracting during this time the support of many who were indifferent to the temperance question itself, and developing close links with overseas feminists.¹³ When in September 1893 the right of New Zealand women to vote on the same terms as men was finally conceded, letters of congratulation poured in to Mrs Sheppard, the franchise superintendent, from suffragists in New Zealand and over the world, the latter including Francis Willard, the founder of the WCTU, Catherine Wallace of the Australian WCTU, the American feminist Susan B. Anthony and members of the London-based National Society for Woman Suffrage.¹⁴ These links were maintained in later years and

11. Women's Christian Temperance Union of New Zealand, Constitution, [1913?]

12. WR, June 1898, p.2.

13. Patricia Grimshaw has refuted the view, first elaborated by W.P. Reeves, that women gained the vote without struggle and almost against their will.

14. Letters to Mrs Sheppard, 1893, Sheppard Papers.

were consolidated by the visits of Mrs Sheppard to Britain and America in 1894 and 1908.¹⁵

Thus, in the years preceding 1893 the WCTU established itself as the leading association of New Zealand women with an interest in all aspects of "the woman question". These interests were continued after 1893 when the elation brought about by the electoral victory had subsided into an earnest intention for women to show they were worthy of the responsibility conferred on them. At both national and local levels the Union directed its activities not only toward temperance, but also to a broad range of women's disabilities.

The extremely efficient organisation of the WCTU was based upon "departments", each of which was under the supervision of a local superintendent. Not all of these departments were operated by each local union, their existence and effectiveness depending upon the enthusiasm of a competent local leader. In 1896, for example, the WCTU ran some 22 departments, including those for legal and parliamentary work (under the direction of Mrs Sheppard), juvenile and kindergarten work, missionary work, prison work, peace and arbitration, scientific temperance, sabbath observance and Sunday trading, Maori work, press work, hygiene and food reform, Bible in schools, literature, social purity, and a flower mission.¹⁶

Reports read at the national conference of 1895 give some idea of the work undertaken by important departments. Over the previous year Evangelistic departments in local unions had distributed literature and conducted Bible-reading sessions for young women and social teas for seamen and non church-goers. The department concerned with Maori work had written to Maori women and distributed Bibles, hymn books and pledges in Maori, while the harmful effects of heavy clothing and corsets, and the need for government-appointed meat inspectors had been well publicised by the hygiene department. Attempts had been made

15. Grimshaw, p.112.

16. Minutes of Annual Convention of WCTU, 1896.

mainly in Christchurch and Auckland to have scientific temperance made a compulsory pass subject in schools. Some Unions had also conducted "mothers' cottage and drawing room" meetings in an attempt to reach women outside the Union, and had provided toys and play-things to occupy children brought to the meetings.¹⁷

At a time when in many towns hotels were the only place where meals might be bought, the WCTU sought to provide a practical alternative by operating tea and luncheon rooms. At Agricultural and Pastoral shows the WCTU provided rest and refreshment rooms to counteract the attractions of the public bar, the Christchurch Union sometimes serving meals to over 7000 people in the course of one show. Much of the work of the WCTU was directed not only toward publicising more wholesome lifestyles, but to teaching skills which might stand young persons in good stead in later years. In Dunedin, for example, the Union conducted at Leavitt House classes in dressmaking, cookery, carpentry and tailoring until technical classes became more readily available.¹⁸ Seamen's rests were run by the Union at Dunedin, Greymouth, Lyttelton, Timaru and New Plymouth, and much work was done through the Prison Gate Missions to visit and aid released prisoners.¹⁹

As well as maintaining its numerous practical humanitarian activities, the Union continued to act as a national pressure group, realising that the struggle for reform had only begun. On welcoming Mrs Sheppard home from Britain in 1896 a group of Union members expressed the hope that "with renewed vigour" she would be equal to leading them on to fresh victories

for in gaining the franchise we see that we have gained no end, but only a weapon with which we may win the reforms we require We hope that you will be able to organise our forces so that we can convince the gentlemen of the House that the women of the Colony are in earnest in demanding social reform.²⁰

17. WR, May 1895, pp.3-7.

18. C. Henderson, The WCTU in Action, a Long View, 1945, p.3.

19. The Women's Christian Temperance Union, 1885-1960, 1960, p.9.

20. Learmonth Dalrymple to Mrs Sheppard, 13 January 1896, Sheppard Papers.

By passing well-publicised resolutions, sending letters to members of Parliament, arranging deputations to wait upon government members and organising petitions, the WCTU pressed upon government and public opinion its views on temperance and on matters directly and indirectly affecting women and children.

From 1895, however, the Union had in the publication of its own magazine, the White Ribbon, an additional weapon in the co-ordination of feminist agitation. The magazine was edited by Mrs Kate Sheppard who wrote in one of the first issues:

When all the disabilities under which women labour are removed, then, and not until then, shall we be a free country in the fullest sense of the word; and we intend that our paper shall do its part in helping to cultivate a more healthy and just public opinion in this direction.²¹

The White Ribbon thus included reports from various women's societies, including branches of the Union itself, articles on a wide range of subjects, among them prison reform, women's disabilities, facts and figures about women, noteworthy women throughout the world, domestic science, enlightened parenthood, interviews with prominent New Zealand feminists, transcripts of papers read at WCTU and NCW conventions, as well as temperance stories and letters from temperance workers throughout the world. An important feature of the White Ribbon, especially under Mrs Sheppard's editorship, was the inclusion of reports and comments upon parliamentary business, particularly on legislation relating to women and to the temperance question, and information on the lobbying activities of other women's organisations.

The use of petitions was a form of political lobbying in which the WCTU itself was well-versed, and the spate of petitions from women and women's groups to both Houses in 1894 and 1895 included a number from representatives of the WCTU. In 1894, for example, Annie Schnackenberg, the WCTU president, presented three petitions on its

21. WR, July 1895, p.1.

behalf requesting the raising of the age of consent to eighteen years. The following year the Canterbury Union petitioned on a more general basis for a revision of the laws of the colony so far as they affected women, while the Napier branch presented two petitions, one for the admission of women to Parliament, and the other requesting equality for men and women in marriage and divorce laws, and the raising of the age of consent.²² In later years petitions presented to both Houses on behalf of the WCTU or local branches, with the exception of three for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act (presented to the Legislative Council in 1901 by the Kaiapoi, Auckland and Naseby Unions²³), placed greater emphasis on temperance issues. In 1904, for example, petitions from the Auckland WCTU to the House of Representatives requested that no licensed bars be operated by the State, that an enquiry be held into the care taken by returning officers in local option polls, and a further enquiry be held into deaths declared to be the direct result of drink.²⁴ The WCTU was also closely involved with the male temperance societies in canvassing for more drastic temperance reform, and played a particularly important role in the 1917 petition for six o'clock closing.

The vast range of resolutions passed by the WCTU at local and national level perhaps gives a better idea of the social concerns of the Union and, although not formally considered by parliamentary bodies, certainly did not go unnoticed by the legislators. The first group of resolutions passed by the Union's annual conventions were those obviously concerned with the temperance-christianity aspects of its work - those which urged the abolition of barmaids, the suppression of gambling, the stricter enforcement of Sabbath observance, the teaching of scientific temperance in schools, and the application of the initiative and referendum to questions of social importance (especially the liquor question).²⁵ Others were more directly related to the protection or improvement of the status of women and followed closely the platforms of the various women's political associations -

22. JHR, 1894, p.xxxiv; 1895, p.xix, p.xxxviii.

23. JLC, 1901, p.xiv, p.xv.

24. JHR, 1904, p.xvi.

25. Minutes of Annual Conventions of WCTU, 1895-1913.

the removal of the Contagious Diseases Act was repeatedly called for, as was the raising of the age of consent (at first to eighteen, later to 21), the admittance of women to parliament, the granting to women of equal guardianship rights over their children, and (probably under the influence of Mrs Sievwright and the NCW), the economic equality of husband and wife. From the late 1900's and in the war years especially, the better protection of women and girls, the appointment of women police officers and increased penalties for assaults on females were requested, as well as the censorship of the cinema, the training of school-girls in domestic science and, last but not least, the provision of separate toilets on long distance trains. The Union also maintained a firm stand against the compulsory military training of young boys and the persecution of conscientious objectors. These resolutions were reinforced by letters to Members of Parliament and by the occasional deputation to Government in collaboration with other groups.

The efforts of the WCTU and allied organisations did not pass without remark from Members of Parliament, although the effect of all this activity was sometimes other than that intended. It must frequently have seemed to the politically-minded women that their efforts were damned whatever action they took, for Members tended to use an absence of resolutions or petitions from women as evidence of a lack of support on measures pertaining to their sex, and yet to dismiss them when they did appear as the activity of a few agitators, the "masculine females", unrepresentative of "the better class of womanhood". "The better class of womanhood", needless to say, were distinguished by their devotion to domestic duties and by their aloofness from active politics.²⁶

This view was clearly demonstrated in debates upon a series of bills introduced between 1894 and 1900 aimed at allowing women to contest parliamentary seats. In 1894 it was contended in opposition to the measure that women themselves were silent, and therefore indifferent to the measure. "We have received no petitions", Massey

26. NZPD, 87, 635 (17 July, 1895, Mr Maslin).

pointed out, "and except for a few agitators, we have heard of no resolutions on the subject".²⁷ On the other hand, one speaker made much of a resolution passed by the Dunedin branch of the WCTU ("no doubt, a well-organised society") against the proposal under consideration. "If that was the opinion of the women", Mr A.W. Hogg declared, "he did not think they desired to have this uncalled-for honour thrust upon them".²⁸

When in the following year the same measure was reintroduced, petitions signed by over 300 women were produced in its support and reference was made to the fact that nearly all the women's political leagues in the country had passed resolutions in its favour.²⁹ These communications were, however, speedily dismissed as the handiwork of a dozen or so women who did not at all represent their sex on the matter. The bill's sponsor, Dr Newman, was accused of currying favour with the women's societies around Wellington, and in the derisive tone which was so often a feature of debates on women's issues, one member elaborated upon the debt of gratitude owed to the Honourable Member for Wellington Suburbs for introducing such a bill, "if only to put the House in a good humoured and jocular mood before serious business began".³⁰

27. NZPD, 83, 410 (11 July 1894).

28. NZPD, 83, 568 (18 July 1894). The Dunedin Union was castigated for this in the WCTU column of the Prohibitionist which concluded, "Our Dunedin friends must surely be still under the influence of the reaction which follows any great exertion. Their vigorous efforts have, apparently, exhausted them, and dulled their senses for the time". Prohibitionist, July 1894, p.3.

29. NZPD, 87, 631 (17 July 1895, Dr Newman). Such petitions suffered however, in comparison with the franchise petition of 1893 which was signed by over 30,000 women.

30. NZPD, 87, 657 (17 July 1895, Mr Graham).

Members were occasionally less good-humoured in their attitude towards the "political women" and cast doubts not only upon the extent to which they represented the majority of their sex, (for which there was some justification), but on their integrity. Pressure by the WCTU for the prohibition of barmaids on the dual grounds that the girls were used by "the Trade" to entice men away from family life, and were themselves corrupted by such employment drew an especially strong response from defenders of "the nymphs of the corkscrew". The ladies of the WCTU, one Member suggested, would do better to attend to their own homes than to meddle in matters which did not concern them. He had no doubt that these ladies had plain daughters and were jealous of the barmaids, adding, for good measure, that they would not in their own homes be found too tidy, either.³¹ It is interesting as an indication of the advance of the temperance cause and the gradual acceptance of measures advocated by the WCTU, that this measure, so greatly ridiculed in 1904, was incorporated in the 1910 Licensing Act.

Disparaging comments and unfair criticism of their domestic capabilities had long been the lot of New Zealand feminists and, although resented, did not deter the WCTU from continued interest in political matters. Nevertheless, some doubt as to the effectiveness of their methods was evident by the late 1900's and the Union's Annual Convention of 1913 felt it necessary, "in view of the very little recognition given to resolutions forwarded" to appoint suitable ladies resident in Wellington to bring such resolutions more prominently to the Government's attention.³² But although it was becoming increasingly clear that the genteel passing of resolutions and the preparation of petitions were ineffectual as long as women were divorced from actual political power and without consistent champions in government

31. NZPD, 124, 244 (2 Sept. 1904, Mr Rutherford).

32. Minutes of Annual Convention of WCTU, 1913.

the pattern had been laid whereby these processes, however feeble, were the primary weapons used by women's societies.

Disregard and ridicule from outside the Union were not the only trials it experienced. Practical difficulties such as those imposed on any national association by distance and communications hindered the Union in its activities and later proved an even more decisive handicap for the NCW. In 1893, for example, Ruth Atkinson wrote from Nelson to Mrs Sheppard explaining her absence from the forthcoming WCTU convention:

It would have been a great pleasure meeting so many workers from all parts of the Colony, but, unfortunately, the fact of its being held in Invercargill, makes it quite out of the question on account of the great distance. Won't that practically cut out all from the North Island?³³

In an association which embraced such a variety of women, there was occasionally need also to remind members of the catholicity of the Union. Referring to attempts to create new tests of membership of the WCTU, the White Ribbon warned that

Intensity of purpose seems to have had an almost fatal propensity for allying itself with narrowness of thought. While we welcome and admire zeal we must strenuously resist narrowness, lest we lapse into bigotry and create greater evils than those we are banded together to overcome.³⁴

It is likely that even as early as 1896 there were differences between those WCTU members to whom temperance was of overriding importance and those like Mrs Sheppard, the Ribbon's editor, who placed it in perspective among other desired reforms.

The crippling effects of lethargy were even more threatening to the Union, especially as the novelty of a new and active

33. Ruth Atkinson to Mrs Sheppard, 1 Sept. 1893, Sheppard Papers.

34. WR, March 1896, p.1.

organisation became less and the excitement of the franchise campaign subsided. By 1897 the White Ribbon was complaining of the malaise affecting the larger unions and of the tendency for business to continue in a routine way, without interest or inspiration.³⁵ The need to widen the Union's basis of support and to reach young women, particularly those in shops and factories, had been recognised for some time, and had been only partly met from the ranks of the Union's youth branches. It was necessary, Mrs Sheppard maintained, to make these younger women aware of their voting power, to make them value more highly the privilege they possessed and to realise their responsibility in the matter.³⁶

By the late 1890's it was apparent that many of the women of the colony did not in fact view their electoral responsibilities in the same light as the WCTU. In a paper read to the Wellington Union in 1898, Mrs W.H. Judkins elaborated upon the failure of women to cast out the liquor traffic as they had been expected to do in the years before 1893. It was futile, she pointed out, to expect women to vote against the "drink curse" simply because they were women and were affected by it:

The big fact before us is that women sadly need educating, just as sadly as do the man. Where we have looked to the tender solicitude of wives and mothers to dictate opposition to what more than anything else causes the ruin of husbands and sons, we have been astonished to find callousness and indifference.³⁷

This realisation that women would not be driven by some innate female instinct to vote for no-license, and needed persuading and educating in the follies of alcohol resulted in the Union's temperance aims becoming more pronounced from the late 1890's. Although the Union continued to show an interest in all aspects of women's affairs, other societies had emerged which took over some of the earlier aspects of its work - the SPWC and the NCW each in its

35. WR, June 1897, p.7.

36. Prohibitionist, May 1896, p.3.

37. WR, Nov. 1898, p.9.

own way looked to the well-being of New Zealand women, the technical schools relieved the Union of many of its educational functions, and the numerous, though frequently short-lived political associations which sprang up from the franchise departments provided an outlet for women whose political or feminist leanings were stronger than their support for temperance. Since most of the latter associations had disintegrated by the mid-1900's in a general subsidence of feminist enthusiasm, it was not surprising that the WCTU itself lost some of its earlier force as the champion of women's rights, and turned with greater determination towards temperance activities.³⁸ Most of the old suffragist leaders maintained their broad interest in women's rights, however, and it may well be their zeal which was reflected in the Union's motions at a national level.

If feminism and women's rights were languishing by the early 1900's, this was certainly not true of the temperance crusade. Triennial local option polls instituted by the Alcoholic Liquors Sale Control Act of 1893 had resulted by 1900 in one district, Clutha, being won over to no-license. This limited success and the rise in the absolute percentage of votes for no-license over the country (from 37.82% of all votes cast in 1896 to 42.23% in 1899) gave considerable encouragement to the temperance party which pursued its activities with increased vigour and attracted new members.³⁹ These gains, which were consolidated in the polls of 1905 and 1908, gave heart to the WCTU as much as any of the temperance bodies and prompted them to divert more and more of their energies into a crusade which seemed destined for success. In the great campaign of 1911, for example, in which national prohibition became an option for the first time, the WCTU conducted a women's crusade which included a series of children's demonstrations.⁴⁰

38. The decline in feminist activity is examined in more detail below, Chapter 4.

39. J. Cocker and J. Malton Murray, Temperance and Prohibition in New Zealand, 1930, p.78. K. Malthus, "The Liquor Problem in New Zealand", M.A. thesis, 1948, pp.48-51.

40. *ibid.*, pp.108-109.

Although the swell of support for temperance was checked by the onset of war and the disorganisation in 1914 of prohibitionist forces, the WCTU continued in its crusade against the liquor traffic and played a major part in securing signatures for petitions supporting six o'clock closing, and the banishment of alcoholic liquor from Bellamy's during the war.⁴¹ Suggestions from the liquor interests that a "truce" be called during the war elicited an indignant refusal from the Union which maintained that it was just as patriotic to fight the liquor trade as to fight the enemy. Pointing out that if the work was dropped even for a short time it would be much harder to take it up again, the White Ribbon added, "This war is not going to leave the world where it found it, and in the future, when nations shall be cast into the crucible and a new order evolved, our women want to be alert and ready to lead in the path of progress and reform".⁴²

The WCTU was not, however, to be the only organisation which sought progress and reform in the post-war years. Whereas in the 1880's and early 1890's it had been the only major association of New Zealand women, it had now to compete with a range of women's organisations - the reconstituted NCW, the Country Women's Institutes, the Federation of University Women, the Women's Division of the Farmers' Union, and the League of Mothers all had their foundation in the years 1917 to 1927. Although it would never regain the position of ascendancy in women's causes which had characterised its early years, the WCTU continued after the war to take an interest in social and moral reform and the status of women, maintained a close connection with the NCW and was active in promoting New Zealand's connection with the Pan-Pacific and South East Asian Women's Association.⁴³

41. *ibid.*, p.183.

42. WR, Nov.1915, pp.1-2.

43. The Women's Christian Temperance Union, 1885-1960, 1960, p.9.

The persistence of the WCTU was, a New Plymouth newspaper stated in 1911, one of its most worthy characteristics:

In the advocacy of reform the Union do [sic] not necessarily achieve all their objects, but by persistence and influence both in private and public, they ultimately accomplish many of the objects for which they aim. In social reform the WCTU probably represents the feelings of ninety-nine per cent of the women of New Zealand.... In relation to one phase of their work - antagonism to alcohol - it must be universally recognised that their fight is for their sons and daughters, for the safety and comfort of themselves, and the ultimate health and prosperity of the nation.⁴⁴

This was fair assessment of the WCTU which in 1909, with a membership of 1855 was still the largest national association of women in New Zealand.⁴⁵ Though some of its demands, particularly those relating to the removal of women's disabilities would certainly not have gained the support of "ninety-nine percent of the women of New Zealand", these were receiving less emphasis by the time of the newspaper's comment, having lost ground to other demands which most women would either have supported or have found relatively inoffensive - better supervision of the degenerate and feeble minded, improved training in domestic science, and the harsher punishment of assaults on women and children.

Those who were fond of depicting WCTU members as sour, frustrated fanatics undoubtedly did the majority a disservice. More often were they sensible, enlightened women who took their social duties seriously, and reacted in a responsible manner to a genuine social evil. While interested in a vast range of social reforms, many of them stemming from the subjection of women, the WCTU was first and

44. Quoted in WR, June 1911, p.11, no reference given.

45. WR, April 1909, p.9.

foremost a temperance society, however, and it was this concern which enabled it to escape the malaise affecting so many women's associations at the beginning of the twentieth century - though probably at the final expense of its identity as the leader of women's causes in New Zealand.

THE POLITICAL WOMAN: The National Council of Women.

Woman - sedulously trained to consider the home as her proper sphere - is evolving, through her leading minds, a passion to domesticate the whole dear homeland, be it of birth or adoption, and is spreading her influence beyond the mere walls of the family nest, to bring the woman spirit and home influence into the affairs as well of the state as of the parish.¹

Mrs Margaret Home Sievwright

Throughout the period of the franchise campaign leading suffragists such as Mrs Sheppard had stressed that the vote was but a means to an end, an instrument by which women might make known their views on a wide range of social concerns, but most particularly on matters affecting women and children. Many of the WCTU franchise leagues therefore continued in existence beyond 1893, some with a change of name, some with a decline of membership as the less zealous fell by the way.

While the Wanganui Franchise League promptly changed its title to the Wanganui Women's Political League, the Dunedin Franchise League retained its existing title and adopted a comprehensive political programme, much to the distress of those who considered women too politically naive as yet to formulate a political creed. The Dunedin women sought, among other measures, the general improvement of women's social conditions, the more equitable adjustment of their wages and of laws affecting marriage and divorce, compulsory arbitration, the appointment of women to hospital and charitable aid boards, the abolition of the totalisator, and the right of a majority of electors who recorded their vote to control or abolish the sale of alcohol.²

1. NCW, Sixth Session, Wanganui 1901, p.28.

2. Daybreak, 2 March 1895, p.2.

More cautious was the Southern Cross Society formed in Wellington in 1895 by Lady Stout "for the purpose of organising women from all classes and shades of opinion to take a wide view of the questions of the day and to do all in their power to promote reforms that would benefit women, promote their independence and equality, and make life and the conditions of living easier and better for those women who have to depend upon their own exertions for their livelihood". Stressing the Society's educative role, Lady Stout referred at the inaugural meeting to the need for a firm grasp of the elements of political economy before women ventured to criticise any Government policy or took up any line of action or particular views.³

Although few associations shared Lady Stout's reservations, at least where applied to their own competence to formulate political programmes, they also viewed their educative functions as paramount. Lectures and discussions on a vast range of subjects formed the staple of their regular and public meetings as the societies sought to enable women to make an informed decision on matters of public concern. In 1894, for example, the Wanganui Women's Political League held debates and discussions on the education system, the constitution of parliament and modes of procedure, the status of women amongst the most civilised of ancient nations, the proper objects of women's associations, colonial larrikinism, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the employment of women.⁴

One of the most vigorous, and certainly one of the most enduring of the numerous political associations was the Canterbury Women's Institute. Formed, like many of its counterparts, during the franchise campaign it was not however a branch of the WCTU Franchise League. Christchurch alone of the major cities had no such branch,

3. Lady Anna Stout, The Southern Cross Society, Its Objects, 1895, p.1.

4. Mark Cohen, "Scrapbook on Women's Suffrage" (source not given).

a circumstance which Grimshaw attributes to the exceptionally large number of non-temperance feminists there. The Canterbury Women's Institute therefore attracted not only WCTU feminists such as Mrs Sheppard, but other outstanding Christchurch citizens who found the drink question of less compelling urgency - among them Edith Searle Grossman, the author, Professor Bickerton, Mrs Eveline Cunnington and Mrs W.P.Reeves.⁵ Organised like the WCTU into "departments", the Institute collaborated closely with the WCTU and joined with the latter in organising deputations and public meetings. Its members recognised, as was stated at an inaugural meeting, that reform would not come from the presence among them of a few highly cultivated women, but from the cultivation of knowledge and refinement among the mass of their sisters.⁶

Most associations, the Canterbury Women's Institute included, stressed their aloofness from party politics, preferring to support men not according to party affiliation, but according to their integrity of character - with the proviso that such favoured candidates must also support their respective political programmes. Such impartiality was difficult to maintain, however, once the unity imposed by the franchise issue had faded. From the very proliferation of women's societies in the major cities after 1893 it is possible that women of like political persuasion and social status were organising in smaller, more tightly knit groups, not to promote a general issue of concern to most women, but a number of reforms, the importance of which would be determined by their existing social and political convictions.

As early as 1895 it was reported that a resolution had been passed by the Wellington Women's Social and Political League to the effect that any of their members joining the Southern Cross Society would be "excommunicated" - Lady Stout, it will be remembered, was prominent in the latter association, while the wife and daughters of

5. Grimshaw, p.51.

6. Prohibitionist, 3 Dec. 1892, p.3.

Sir Robert Stout's political rival Seddon, belonged to the Social and Political League.⁷ The League was rebuffed in its turn, however, by the Canterbury Women's Institute which in 1896 gave its non-party stance as the reason why it could not join in sending a congratulatory address to the Premier.⁸

Despite these early indications of friction, it is clear that in the 1890's at least, all the associations were working for the same general ends and in many cases agreed on particulars. Close similarities in their programmes reflect the considerable amount of interaction between them and the avenues of communication that were utilised. Both the WCTU column in the Prohibitionist and the White Ribbon received, published, and commented upon reports from sister associations. In the 1890's reports were received on a reasonably regular basis from the Canterbury Women's Institute, the Southern Cross Society, the Auckland Women's Democratic Union, the Auckland Women's Political League, the Gisborne Women's Political League, the Canterbury Children's Aid Society, the Wanganui Political League and the Dunedin Women's Political League, and, somewhat less regularly, from the Malvern Women's Institute, the Christchurch Women's Political Association and the Christchurch Tailoresses' and Pressers' Union. These reports further suggest that much correspondence passed between the different associations and that a certain amount of uniformity in the measures advocated was the likely result.

In view of the existing, albeit informal interaction between these societies, the common ends for which most worked, and the experience of united action for a political end which the franchise campaign had engendered, it was natural enough that they should soon feel the need for a closer and more regular association with one another.

7. Daybreak, 5 Oct. 1895, p.1.

8. WR, June 1896, p.3.

The initiative for such a move came from Mrs Sheppard, who in 1894 visited England and made contact with Mrs Eva McLaren, corresponding secretary of the International Council of Women. Mrs McLaren suggested that a branch of the International Council be formed in New Zealand with Lady Stout and Mrs Sheppard at its head. During Mrs Sheppard's absence the Dunedin Women's Franchise League also called for the federation of women's societies to co-ordinate their activities and make more effective their representations on matters of common concern, and Lady Stout was advised to contact its president, Mrs Hatton, to further the matter. By the time Mrs Sheppard returned to New Zealand arrangements were under way and in early 1896 the executive of the Canterbury Women's Institute invited representatives of women's societies to a convention to be held in Christchurch.⁹

On April 13, 1896, the Convention gathered in the Christchurch Provincial Chambers. Eleven women's organisations were represented - the Canterbury Women's Institute by Miss Sheriff-Bain and Mrs Sheppard, the Malvern Women's Institute by Mrs Alley and Mrs Isherwood, the Wellington Women's Institute by Mrs Fleming, the Southern Cross Society by Lady Stout, the WCTU by Mrs Schnackenberg and Mrs Widdowson, the Auckland Women's Political League by Mrs Daldy, the Gisborne Women's Political League by Mrs Sievwright, the Dunedin Women's Franchise League by Mrs Hatton, the Wellington Women's Social and Political League by Mrs Tasker, and the Christchurch Women's Political League by Mesdames Izett and Cooper. Many of these women had been leaders of earlier franchise leagues, were actively involved in community affairs, and undoubtedly represented the best of New Zealand feminism. Members of the public and invited guests also attended the convention and joined in discussion, some of the guests presenting papers of interest to the gathering.¹⁰

9. Mrs McLaren to Mrs Sheppard, 20 August and 31 December 1894, Sheppard Papers; Daybreak, 11 May 1895, p.11.

10. NCW, First Session, Christchurch 1896, p.4.



The National Council of Women, Christchurch 1896. Alexander Turnbull Library,
Wellington.

Following one such paper presented by Edward Tregear and advocating the greater involvement of women in unions, Lady Stout read a paper on the aims, ideals and organisation of the International Council of Women. The advantage of a National Council in Lady Stout's view, was that

women of all classes, and of all shades of opinion on religious, social and political questions, would meet others who were equally enthusiastic in the cause of industrial independence, and who believed that their remedy was the only one that could accomplish the advancement of women, and the abolition of misery and degradation. Those too who held to "prohibition" as the cure for every evil, would meet women who blamed our unsectarian education for all the sin and crime that surrounds us. They might be much surprised when they found there were some women who blamed the apathy of the ministers of religion for much of the immorality and vice that we deplore.
[Lady Stout herself was an atheist.]

Pointing out that "a house divided against itself cannot stand", Lady Stout concluded: "We New Zealand women have now political power; but we must bestir ourselves, and show that we are governed by high aims and unselfish motives, and that we can lay aside all petty disagreements and work together for the sake of justice, home and humanity".¹¹

As expected, the convention resolved after Lady Stout's speech to form itself as a branch of the International Council of Women, its objects being to unite all women's organisations for mutual counsel and co-operation, and to encourage the formation of societies of women where no organised union then existed, especially in the trades and professions.¹² Mrs Sheppard was elected the first president, Lady Stout, Mrs Schnackenberg, Mrs Sievwright and Mrs Hatton vice-presidents, Mrs Ada Wells the Council's secretary, and Miss Sheriff-Bain its treasurer. The National Council of Women of New Zealand was

11. Lady Anna Stout, The National Council of Women of New Zealand, [1896?] , p.4, p.6.

12. NCW, First Session, Christchurch 1896, p.1.

thus formally constituted, though some observers questioned its right to style itself a "national" body, and yet others seriously doubted whether a gathering of females assembled for such dubious purposes could justly be termed "women".

After this, the main purpose of the convention, was decided, the ladies and their guests settled down to an intense round of lectures, discussions and resolutions. Papers on a vast range of subjects were contributed by delegates and invited guests - Mrs Williamson spoke on "Women in the Service of the State", Miss A.E. Hookham on "Constructive Socialism" and Mrs Tasker on "The Undesirable Immigrants Bill". At this first meeting of the Council however, the majority of the papers read - and in the opinion of the Christchurch Press, the most ridiculous presented - were written by men. Professor Bickerton, for example, contributed two papers, one on "Unitary Homes", and the other on "The Problem of Purity". Mr Bryen O'Hoare contributed two also, on "Land Nationalisation" and the "Treatment of Criminals", Mr Sievwright on "State Banks", and Mr G.W. Russell M.H.R., the originator of several bills on the subject, spoke on "The Political Disabilities of Women".¹³ This preponderance of male speakers was not repeated at later Council meetings, more probably because the women had plenty of able speakers among their own body than because of the inevitable jeers about the "political roosters who were allowed to crow at the hen convention".¹⁴

Despite the number of male speakers, the women were by no means passive listeners, being sufficiently vocal to assure hostile commentators that they more than enough follies of their own. A large number of resolutions were put forward, some arising from the papers presented, others reflecting the interests of the individual societies

13. *ibid.*, pp.5-11.

14. Press, 21 April 1896.

represented. Many pointed the way to the deliberations of later Councils - resolutions were passed supporting the economic independence of married women (proposed at this very first meeting by Mrs Margaret Sievwright), the equal rights of women to the guardianship of their own children, equality in the divorce laws, the right of a majority of voters to determine every political question which went before the polls, reform of the existing system of party government, the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act, the raising of the age of consent to 21 years, the institution of a system of old age pensions, and the admittance of women to jury service. By the time the convention ended on April 18, it had established a platform around which later Councils would evolve, had formulated a constitution, and had received an unprecedented amount of publicity - amounting, some thought, to notoriety.

From this first meeting of the Council there emerged a smaller group of women whose names consistently appeared as members of the executive and who were to provide the Council with its essential character. Most were, as was pointed out in their defence, the very women who in their different towns were known for their good works and acts of mercy, and their dedication to the feminist cause reached back to the franchise campaign. These women might justly be regarded as the cream of New Zealand feminism. Most were leaders of the franchise agitation and having given so much to the cause were appreciative of the responsibility conferred upon them. Their names appear in connection with numerous causes and when in the 1900's the women's movement faltered, it was their voices which were heard to the last or which were stilled only by age or ill-health. Their interests were manifold and although, as Edith Grossman noted, they were not as a group drawn from the ranks of graduates and scholars,¹⁵ they were not afraid to apply their minds to such a wide variety of social issues.

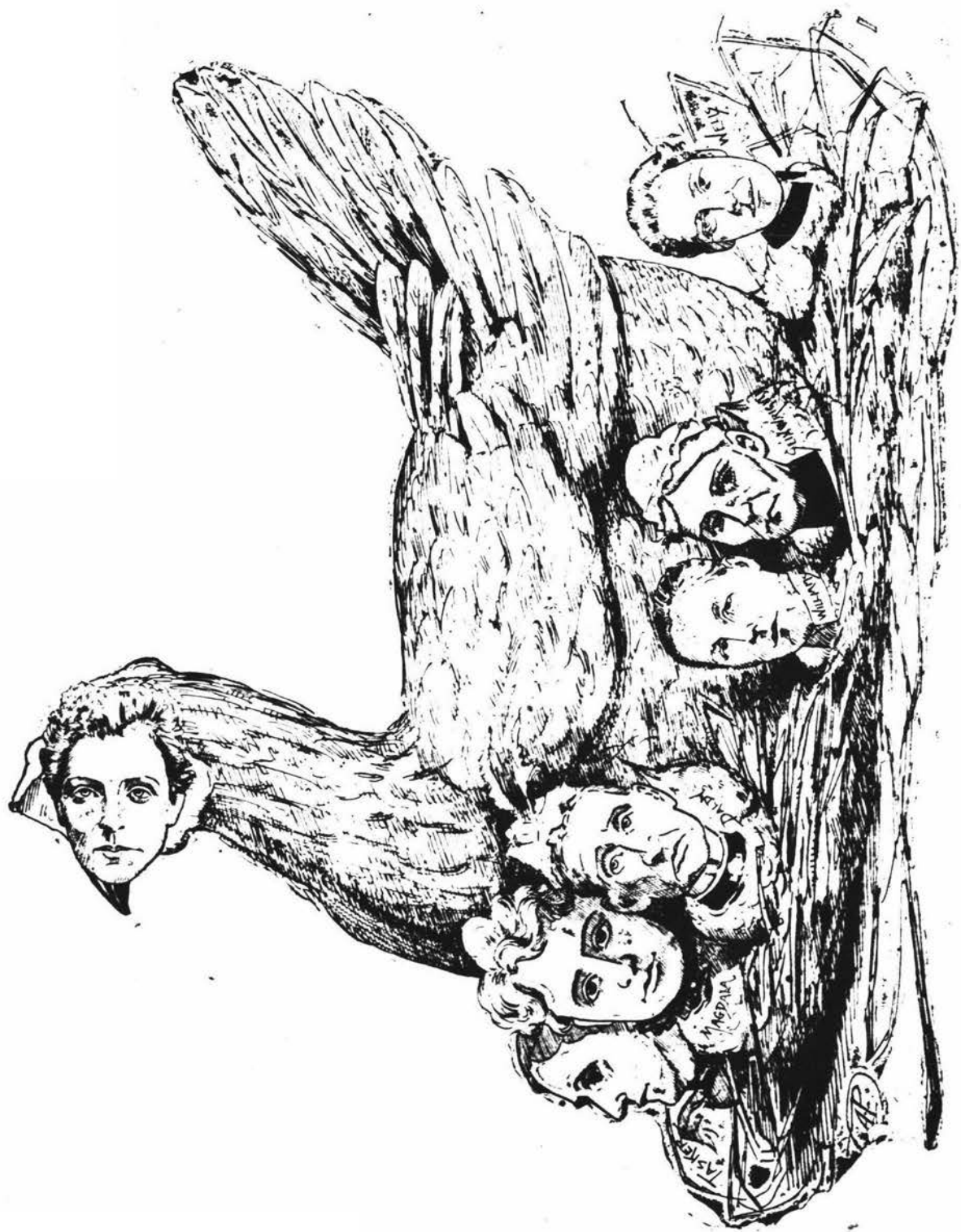
15. Grossman, p.48.

Kate Sheppard, the Council's first president was described during the franchise campaign by one reassured reported as "a womanly woman, with not an atom of the women's rights style about her".¹⁶ She continued to disarm critics with her tact, intelligence and competent knowledge of all aspects of "the woman question", and while providing a valuable and personal bond with feminists in other countries was able, as editor of the White Ribbon, to link the New Zealand societies. Amey Daldy, president of the Council when it met in Auckland in 1899, and a vice-president in other years maintained an active interest in the welfare of children and was a frequent contributor to the Council's meetings of papers on such topics as marriage and divorce, constitutional reform and women's disabilities. Miss Christina Henderson, secretary of the Council from 1901 until 1904, was one of the few executive members who also worked for her living, and in addition was kept busy with her duties in the temperance movement and the Women Teachers' Association. She was also a capable speaker, her main interests being the care of neglected children and the role of women as wage earners. Ada Wells was another trained teacher, was secretary of the Council from 1896 until 1900, and was later vice-president. As president of the Canterbury Women's Institute for many years she assisted in the formation of the Children's Aid Society, was at one time a member of the North Canterbury Charitable Aid Board, was associated during World War I with the Peace Council in resisting the conscription of young boys for military service, and in 1917 became the first woman member of the Christchurch City Council.¹⁷ Mrs J. Williamson, for many years the Council's treasurer repeated this tradition of public service, being an active member of the Wanganui Hospital Board.

But perhaps one of the most remarkable of this group was Mrs Margaret Sievwright, a former trained nurse, leader of the Gisborne WCTU, president of the Gisborne Women's Political League, for many years a vice-president of the NCW and from 1901 its president. The

16. New Zealand Graphic, 28 Oct. 1893.

17. G.E. Scholefield (ed.), A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Vol. II, pp. 333-334.



Snapshots at the Hen Convention.--Lady-President Sheppard and her Chickens.

Snapshots at the Hen Convention. Spectator, 30 April 1898.

personality of Mrs Sievwright, like that of Mrs Sheppard, was stamped upon many of the resolutions passed each year by the Council. Mrs Sievwright, repeatedly described by those who met her as "gentle-voiced and quiet mannered", "a white-haired lady of superior education and scholarly attainment",¹⁸ was yet so aroused by the prospect of a girl promising life-long obedience in marriage to any man that she herself "several times successfully interposed at the eleventh hour to ward off the catastrophe".¹⁹

The death of Mrs Sievwright, whose energy and enthusiasm did much to sustain the NCW in its last years, undoubtedly hastened its demise and gave the executive occasion to place on record their appreciation of her "noble character and far-reaching imperishable work". Mrs Sievwright's "refined and gentle, yet strenuous nature, her love of truth and fidelity to principle, her courage and catholicity of sympathy as well as her highly cultured intellect combined to make her a rare and beautiful example of true womanhood", the tribute read.²⁰

It was Mrs Sievwright who provided the stimulus behind a policy which, in the words of Mrs Wells, brought a "hornet's nest" about the Council's ears from one end of the country to another. Of all the Council's demands the "economic independence of married women" aroused the greatest reaction from those men who (rightly) interpreted it as an open assault on traditional assumptions of male privilege. Mrs Sievwright's speech on the subject in 1897, a male correspondent to the Lyttelton Times indignantly contended, "fairly bristled" with hostility to men.²¹

18. Press Cuttings, Vol.I, (source not identified), Lady Anna Stout Collection.

19. NCW, Third Session, Wellington 1898, p.17.

20. Miriam Macgregor, Petticoat Pioneers, 1973, p.178.

21. LT, 2 April 1897.

The essence of the Council's claim was that "in all cases where a woman elects to superintend her own household and to be the mother of children, there shall be a law attaching certain just share of her husband's earnings for her separate use, payable if she so desire it, into her separate account".²² The justification behind it was that women who consented to become wives and mothers gave up their opportunity of earning money for their present need and future wants. It was therefore only just, and indeed necessary for her own protection in the event of family disaster, Kate Sheppard argued, that a woman should have equal voice in the disposal of the family income. Economic independence would raise women from their degrading position of dependence to a situation of dignity and freedom while helping men to act justly: "To sue for [sic] as a favour for what belongs to one as a right is to create a subject on the one hand and a tyrant on the other. The subject condition is a degrading one, and must tend to enfeeble our women and retard their highest development".²³

In 1900 Mrs Sievwright carried the argument even further, maintaining that every girl should be brought up to be economically independent, and that the facilities of technical and continuation schools should be made available to this end. There was no reason, Mrs Sievwright declared, why marriage should put an end to any professional woman's career, nor to that of any other woman. If women would thus maintain their economic independence they would avoid "the hideous marriage of convenience" by which woman transferred her slave nature to her children.²⁴ This was particularly strong language at a time when a husband was held to be the sole family provider; when many, perhaps most wives had no knowledge of the family income and business affairs, and when a husband could will his property away from his family if he so desired it, no matter what their contribution

22. NCW, First Session, Christchurch 1896, p.6.

23. NCW, Fourth Session, Auckland 1899, pp.32-38.

24. WR, May 1900, p.7.

to its value in practical terms. In the rhetoric they used to discuss economic independence and in their tenuous relating of sexual subordination to the question of property relations, Mrs Sheppard and Mrs Sievwright appear almost to have been influenced by the socialist economic analysis of women's oppression.²⁵ Unlike the socialists, however, they came down heavily in favour of the existing nuclear family structure and their solution to women's economic disabilities was typically couched in terms of legal and constitutional reform.

Although to many women the stirring language of the councillors would doubtless have been alien, it is just as certain that the fact of economic independence did indeed represent a very real source of discontent and distress for many women. One wife writing to the Press under the pseudonym "Behind the Scenes" described how

A good wife works her best, strains every effort for her home, husband and children. Her work is a work of love; nevertheless the duties are arduous and may, nay must tire the human frame, though taking nothing from her affection. But there the strain should cease - must it continue with asking for every penny for necessities, not luxuries for the body? Must every separate garment be prayed for?

I say, Mr Editor, then is the time that the seed of discontent is sown, well-watered and brought to maturity.²⁶

Most commentators were less in sympathy with the Council's proposals however. The irate gentleman who accused Mrs Sievwright of sexual hostility saw economic independence as an effort to enable women to live without men and to renounce marriage, an effort based on the premise that all men were brutes and all women angels. "If we

25. Engel's work on The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State was published in 1884 and argued that the development in the means of production outside the home gave men the economic power to subject women and the home sphere. Although they were probably more influenced by their own practical observations in this matter, it is possible that New Zealand feminists had read this or similar works. Andre Siegfried noted the frequent reference in NCW proceedings to learned and philosophical works - "a surfeit of documentation, often superficial and ill-digested", is his comment. Andre Siegfried, Democracy in New Zealand, 1914, p.290.

26. Press, 18 April 1896.

look", he warned, "we will find that this feeling comes about not so much by the desire of women to introduce another disturbing factor into sexual relations, but by the budding political females' egotism, who are searching around for fresh avenues of competing for pay and power".²⁷

Others were milder in their criticism, seeing in the proposal not malice and self-interest, but an over-enthusiastic committal to utopian principles on a matter which could not be successfully dealt with by legislation. When the matter was first proposed, the Press observed, "We should be sorry to see what should be a matter of mutual affection and respect, made the subject of lawyers' wrangles and appeals to the courts".²⁸ In reply the feminists claimed that there would be little recourse to law and that the measure as proposed in a draft bill approved by the Council placed greater responsibility on the women themselves, as in the settlement of debts.

The question of financial recognition of the services of the home-maker was thus very topical even in the 1890's, although the arguments of feminists such as Mrs Sievwright and Mrs Sheppard were more fundamental to the marriage relationship than present day proposals for a State allowance for dependent-minders. What was sought was not so much an earned income for a legitimate work role, but the equal participation of husband and wife in family resources and responsibilities; in particular, a more clearly defined economic partnership in marriage which would raise the status of the female partner in the eyes both of her spouse and of society.

Another subject as dear to the hearts of the NCW as it was anathema to anti-feminists, was that of "women's disabilities" - usually enumerated as the inability of women to become justices of the peace, to sit on juries, to enter parliament, to enter into partner-

27. LT, 2 April 1897.

28. Press, 6 May 1896.

ship without their husbands' consent, to earn an equal wage to men for equal work, or to share in the legal guardianship of their own children - were unsuccessfully attacked in Parliament by private bills of 1895, 1896, 1897, 1898, 1899 and 1900. Although in supporting the introduction of a bill to remove their disabilities the women were once more showing their faith in the legal avenue of reform, the more perceptive of them saw that such a weapon could only be effective if taken up willingly by women themselves. The passing of any one bill could not at once remove all sexual inequalities, Mrs Sheppard pointed out, but the passing of a bill which contained "a pronouncement in general terms of the right of women to civil and political freedom" would place in the hands of women a power to help themselves and would be a great advance towards a truer civilisation.²⁹

In claiming these rights the NCW stressed that women were not seeking to extend their privileges but to augment their responsibilities, and that the country as a whole could only benefit from the involvement of women in public affairs. An introduction to the fourth session of the NCW indicated the contradictions and frustrations faced by women who sought such involvement, and the desperate need for the application of the womanly temperament and skills to national policy:

In moving towards her social, economic, civil and political freedom, woman's object is by no means a self-centred one. The cruel competitive commercial system that universally obtains has forced her to take her share in the councils and governments of the world, or universal ruin with ensue. She sees that in the struggle for existence the weakest by the tens of thousands are trampled down; the fight for food has become so terrible that her children, body and soul, are sacrificed; that parenthood is in danger of reverting below the standard of the brute beasts.

29. K.W. Sheppard, Women's Disabilities, 1903.

This rude awakening of woman to her responsibilities has made her conscious of her own bondage. In New Zealand ... a woman may take a lively interest in all that concerns the treatment of the criminal, but she may not be appointed to any position of direct control. All that she can do must be done by indirect and circuitous methods. Again, she may specially concern herself with the legislation of her country, but she is excluded from taking part in the deliberations of Parliament. Here again she has to content herself with suggestions³⁰

Women would not be hardened and masculinised by their involvement in public affairs, it was emphasised - rather, in Mrs Sievwright's words, the masculine element was already too much in evidence. Instead, women sought to "increase the truly feminine" in all walks of life. The family was likened to an embryo state and the characteristics of a good home - cleanliness, comfort, order, economy, health, justice and goodwill - were seen as the same qualities needed in the efficient management of the state. Women were thus especially well fitted to comment on such matters as public education, food inspection, hospital management, water supply and public sanitation.³¹

In reply to the old criticism that many aspects of public life were too sordid for women's presence, it was argued that these supposed pits of iniquity should be purified and brought up to the standard that women expected of them. Women should not have to descend to the depths to which men, from their protestations, apparently had. The White Ribbon rather caustically commented on the subject of women's disabilities that "We frankly admit that we are old-fashioned enough to think that there are some things that men do which we should like women to be saved from. As we step gingerly along the pavement to avoid the frequent marks of expectoration we feel glad that most women draw the line somewhere". If it was good enough for women to work as cleaners and empty the ash-trays and spittoons of Bellamy's, the Ribbon added, it would surely not injure the dignity of womanhood if they sat in one of the cushioned seats and spoke as to the wants and wishes of the people.³²

30. NCW, Fourth Session, Auckland 1899, pp.3-4.

31. WR, April 1899, pp.8-9.

32. WR, Aug. 1898, p.6.

The right of women to sit in Parliament was one disability continually stressed by the NCW and its affiliates, for it was hoped that when women were at last elected this reform would lead to the enactment of other legislation sought by the feminists. Although during the franchise campaign many women's groups had insisted that women had no desire to enter Parliament, others, like Mrs Sheppard, saw this right as following naturally from the right to vote. This feeling was intensified by the apparent failure of the legislators to listen to the requests of women and the "fitful, grudging and partial" way in which had been conceded those improvements which were made. All of this proved, Mrs Sheppard stated, the manifest inability of one class to legislate for another, and the need for women to represent as well as to be represented. "By barring women from Parliament in defiance of their natural rights as electors", she added, "our legislators are either most fantastically chivalrous, or most barbarically tyrannous. In either case they are out of tune with the spirit of civilisation and of humanity".³³

The question of women's admittance to either house of the legislature usually in fact provoked anti-feminists there to an excess of hilarity as much as chivalry - "a burlesque that was on a par with a third-class nigger-minstrel entertainment",³⁴ was one newspaper's opinion of the 1894 debate on the subject. Members were urged to imagine "a beautiful blonde sitting next to the member for Wellington Suburbs" (an unlikely event since, on the other hand, it was claimed that only the unattractive "he-women" would seek election),³⁵ or to imagine "one or two ladies inviting one or two gentlemen to a little caucus at a certain place of an evening".³⁶

33. K.W. Sheppard, Women's Disabilities, 1903.

34. Mark Cohen, Scrapbook p.162. (Source not given).

35. NZPD, 83, 568 (18 July 1894, Mr Hogg).

36. NZPD, 93, 59 (8 July 1896, Major Harris).

And the inevitable excuse was offered that it was unfair to impose this unsought-after burden upon the weaker sex.³⁷

Deputations to Government on this and related disabilities faced somewhat less puerile but equally obstructive arguments. A petition organised in 1902 by the NCW urging the removal of women's disabilities was reinforced in mid-1903 by a deputation to Seddon himself, consisting of Mrs Sheppard, Mrs Sievwright, Mrs Williamson, Mrs Allan (formerly Stella Henderson), and Mrs Atkinson, the WCTU president. The deputation was introduced by Mr T.E. Taylor and each woman spoke in turn. Mrs Sheppard elaborated upon woman's anomalous position in being represented in Parliament while she herself could not represent, and pointed out that any naturalised Chinese or negro was entitled to a privilege which was denied the most cultured woman (possibly a shrewd appeal to Seddon's low opinion of non-white races, but more likely reflecting the feminists' own inability to escape the display of non-sexual forms of prejudice). The White Ribbon recorded that in reply to this claim "Mr Seddon could only bring forth the lame old phrase that the women had not asked for it". He was, however, prepared to give women visitors to gaols official standing, but asserted that the law would not permit their appointment as justices of the peace - a woman on the bench would, he maintained, be more severe upon her own sex than a man!³⁸

A further request of the deputation, that of equal pay for female teachers, could not in Seddon's view be considered unless the salaries of male teachers were reduced to compensate - a move no doubt out of the question. Although the position of women in the workforce tended in the Council's deliberations to focus upon the woman teacher, interest was also taken in the factory worker and the Dunedin and Christchurch Tailoresses' Unions were intermittently represented at

37. e.g. NZPD, 83, 410 (18 July 1894, Mr Massey).

38. WR, Aug. 1903, pp.6-9.

the Council's annual meetings. The deputation therefore included among its requests the suggestion that any limitation upon the hours of women workers be abolished, since this unfairly limited women's freedom of choice and handicapped them in competition for employment and a fair wage. On this point the deputation left similarly dissatisfied since the premier felt the women should rather have asked for a reduction in men's hours of work.³⁹

It was to be many years before most of these disabilities were lifted from women - in 1919 women became eligible to stand for Parliament, in 1926 they were given equal rights to the guardianship of their own children, under the impetus of war they were appointed to the Legislative Council in 1941 and in 1941 and 1942 were appointed as justices of the peace and were permitted to enrol for jury service. Not until 1972 was the Equal Pay Act passed, and some formal restrictions still remain which prevent women from doing certain types of work or reduce their ability to earn the same rates as men doing similar work. More significantly, many of the attitudes which resisted the easing of these disabilities in the 1890's still remain, not least of all among women themselves.

Less censured was the Council's attention to such "womanly" subjects as domestic service, parenthood and child care. The shortage of domestic servants, always a headache for the New Zealand housewife, had reached such proportions by the 1890's as to amount to a national crisis. To the "domestic servant problem" was attributed the decline in the birth rate, the prevalence of marital discord and indeed, the phenomenon of "the new woman" herself. "Britannicus", a New Zealand Herald columnist, maintained only half facetiously, that "When a woman turns platform agitator, and is found everlastingly holding forth at mothers' meetings, and national conventions on the eternal

39. *ibid.*

principles of justice for the two sexes and the urgent necessity for women rising in revolt against the magnitude of the masculine evil, I am always tempted to account for her eccentricity by the hypothesis that she has been a victim to servant girlism"⁴⁰

The question was viewed in an equally serious light by the NCW, most of whom would doubtless have been "mistresses" themselves. Unlike the general round of opinion on the question which made much of the benefits of domestic service to the girls concerned - a moral lifestyle (since the servant was left with so little unsupervised time in which to transgress), healthy physical exercise, and a training in those useful feminine skills much valued by the honest working man in search of a wife - the women of the National Council showed greater understanding of the reservations of the girls themselves. Mrs F.E. Cotton, speaking to the Council meeting of 1900, compared the lot of the domestic with the factory or shop girl who lived and worked with her equals, had regular hours of work after which she was free, and the example of a forewoman of her own class who was "not so far above her but that she may hope some day to step into her shoes": "The girl is too much alone and not enough alone. Too much alone, especially where only one is kept, occupying a solitary inferior position, looked down upon with gentle contempt by her superiors, and frequently spoken of as 'the slavey' and 'our Biddy' ". Too often, Mrs Cotton added, the girl had no room of her own and was never absolutely free for more than one half-hour, day or night.⁴¹

The solutions proposed by the NCW frequently followed those advocated by more overtly self-interested groups - mistresses should treat their servants with greater consideration and respect, more leisure should be allowed to the girls, and the status of domestic service should be raised by instituting a system of training,

40. NZH, 22 April 1899, Supplement.

41. NCW, Fifth Session, Dunedin 1900, p.63.

as was being done for nurses. If the basic drudgery of the job could not be eliminated the servants were at least to be encouraged to feel important while they did it. Several NCW delegates went further however, in advocating reorganisation of the entire system. Unions for domestic servants, day employment only, and a system of communal laundries and kitchens, or visiting cooks were among the suggestions made. The time was also anticipated when necessity would lead to labour saving methods and machinery would replace the notoriously unreliable "slavey".

Some of the Council's sympathisers found it regrettable that the Council did not confine itself to topics on which women might be expected to have special knowledge or a separate interest. With this view Mrs Sheppard had no sympathy whatever, feeling that "humanity was greater than sex".⁴² Bearing this justification in mind, the Council repeatedly passed resolutions advocating a wide range of reforms, including a universal old age pension, electoral and constitutional reform, the restructuring of the charitable aid system, prison reform, and the abandonment of militarism.

On some of these subjects the Council's interest involved more than a general humanitarian concern. Just as some women had turned toward the franchise when existing avenues of reform proved inadequate, so now did the leading women's organisations seek not only the right of women to sit in Parliament, but the abolition of party government, the restructuring of the Upper House and an elective executive which would be individually responsible to the House of Representatives. In 1899 Mrs Wells pointed out that although New Zealand women boasted of their representative power they were very far from possessing real representation. Men were elected to oppose

42. LT, 25 March 1897, p.4.

or support one man and there was no such thing as a vote according to conscience or the wishes of constituents. The consequence was that social legislation of burning interest to all was brought about only at the point of a bayonet.⁴³

The Legislative Council, in which had foundered so many reforms, was a special target for the women's displeasure and its abolition or the inclusion of women among its members was continually advocated. The White Ribbon, angered by the Legislative Council's refusal to repeal the Contagious Diseases Act or to raise the age of consent agreed that in view of the Upper House's recent record the opponents of the "Woman's Age" might well be correct in claiming that the halls of legislation were unfit places for the feet of women to tread, for

Who among us would even care to sit in the presence of men who openly avow their belief that prostitution should be licensed by the State; that any girl over fifteen is fair play for the grey-haired villain; that opportunities for men and women to debase themselves below the beasts of the field should not be curtailed? And, horror of horrors, they have the power to put their beliefs into practice. And we pay them for so doing!⁴⁴

Such language, which was echoed in the discussions of the NCW did nothing to endear the "political woman" to these supposedly debased and incompetent legislators, and some of the Council's most extravagant demands may have entrenched their opponents in opposition to more temperate requests. The demand of the NCW and some of its affiliates that the age of consent be raised to 21, for example, did

43. NCW, Fourth Session, Auckland 1899, p.30.

44. WR, Oct. 1895, p.2.

little to further attempts to have it raised first to 16, and later to 18, a typical response being that of one Member who felt they should raise it to 40 and be done with it!⁴⁵

Whatever its occasional excesses, the NCW came in for much criticism that was unjustified and uninformed. Anti-feminists were vociferous in their denunciation of the Council, composed, one religious publication claimed, of women clamorous for "a dislike to motherhood, a lax marriage, an easy divorce, a love of money to spend, and a desire for power and a love of publicity".⁴⁶ A similarly religiously-inclined correspondent to the New Zealand Herald expressed his shock at the failure of the Council to begin its deliberations with a prayer, and concluded sadly that if Miss Willard was looking down from heaven, "she and the angels would weep at the degeneracy to which her high ideal of women had sunk".⁴⁷

In a less serious tone, the New Zealand Graphic besought such "new women-wolves in lambs clothing" to warn prospective suitors of their feminist predilections least some young man innocently take a serpent to his heart. "Never since the day the Lemnian matrons took it into their hearts to slaughter their husbands has the gentle feminine mind conceived a harsher treatment for the males than is embodied in the resolutions passed in Christchurch", the Graphic intoned, consoling its readers however, that the women "whose fiery eloquence and revolutionary statements were concentrated in those awful pronouncements" did not by any means represent the women of New Zealand. There were still numerous girls "who would merrily laugh to scorn the unnatural, and therefore unfeminine, shrieking of their so-called 'stronger sisters' ".⁴⁸ Others thought the Council should restrict its deliberations to matters on which women were authorities -

45. Quoted in press cutting (source not given), Mark Cohen, "Scrapbook on Women's Suffrage ..."

46. The Methodist newspaper the Advocate, quoted in WR, May 1897, p.7.

47. NZH, 15 April 1899.

48. New Zealand Graphic, 25 April 1896, p.466.

such as the best make of flannel for petticoats, how to cook a potato, or make a porridge, suggested one reactionary to the Press.⁴⁹

Nor was the NCW exempt from criticism of a more personal nature. A Herald columnist, apparently of the Councillors' own sex, felt that the main impression left by the Council was one of bad grooming. A composite picture of the NCW suggested to her "a plea for frills and frizzes and chiffons; for those dear delightful touches of toilette that surround a truly feminine woman with her most subtle and compelling charm". The Councillors were urged therefore, if they must be agitators, iconoclasts and reformers to "do it prettily" in fitting frocks and "loves of bonnets". One would also wish, the article continued, that the faces of the delegates had not shown quite so hard a line - "these tense, purposeful mouths quite seemed to have lost their upward curve, their softness, and pretty tremulousness ...". "Moderna" finished with the almost inevitable "hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" argument, adding that "the true woman does not feel her economic disabilities, but realises that material conditions are finally and happily outweighed a hundred-fold by her sovereign possession of sex privileges".⁵⁰

Such disparaging comments did not pass unnoticed by the "advanced women" themselves and conscious efforts were made to counteract these impressions of their personal qualities by having the annual meetings held in different centres, by encouraging the public to meet delegates in person, and by public refutation of damaging and unfair criticism. Mr W.A. Sheppard, husband of Kate Sheppard, defended Council delegates from the allegation that they had hastily and without due consideration committed themselves to far-reaching principles, pointing out that most questions had been fully discussed by the affiliated societies and that delegates had prior instruction on how to vote.⁵¹ It is evident that the Council delegates of 1896 were also

49. Press, 18 April 1896.

50. NZH, 22 April 1899, Supplement.

51. Press, 25 April 1896.

criticised for leaving their families and household chores to attend the Convention of 1896, since yet another correspondent to the Press censured those men "who would like to set the bloodhounds on a woman's track who dared to go away from her household duties for, say, a fortnight".⁵²

The White Ribbon insisted that all of the women at the annual gatherings were "thoughtful, grey-haired mothers of families, who have been brought face to face with problems of evil for which they seek a remedy. However accustomed they may be to the rebuffs and abuse which have been the lot of women-workers from Mary Wollstonecraft downward, yet flippant criticism and untruthful statements can wound".⁵³ The Ribbon's assessment of the delegates was confirmed by at least one press account which described them as being pleasant, well cared-for matrons: "This is no hysterical sisterhood, to be treated with contempt, no conclave of crabby old maids" but "a band of women fairly representing the educated middle-class, who have manifestly thought out Socialistic problems and are prepared to speak the truth concerning them without allowing considerations of political bias to have any weight".⁵⁴ The delegates to the 1896 convention were also congratulated by the Press on their earnestness and their competence in the conduct of public meeting and debate,⁵⁵ while the Otago Daily Times, always favourable to the Council, expressed its admiration for the practical ability and savoir faire so freely displayed.⁵⁶

By the time the NCW had its fifth and sixth meetings such favourable comments were more prevalent. As the novelty faded of a group of women daring to meet together to discuss questions of wide social and political import, the Council was even congratulated on having abandoned its former chimerical ideals and settled down to a

52. Press, 21 April 1896.

53. WR, May 1897, p.7.

54. Press Cuttings Vol.1, Lady Stout Collection (source not given).

55. Press, 16 April 1896.

56. ODT, 21 April 1896.

practical programme. As the White Ribbon somewhat ironically pointed out, the Council's policy was unchanged; the change had rather been in other people's attitudes towards it. This was nevertheless, taken as a valuable testimony to the educative work of the Council.⁵⁷

Notoriety had had its advantages however, and growing public acceptance may rather have indicated a decline in public interest towards the Council's deliberations. In 1900 the Ribbon noted that while newspaper comment was generous, the attendance of the public was smaller than at previous sessions.⁵⁸ Only two years later the Council held what was to be its last annual convention at Napier, and by 1905 the remaining vestiges of activity at executive level were faltering. This, New Zealand's first attempt to organise a National Council of Women fell victim to advancing prosperity and satisfaction with New Zealand's social progress from the late 1890's.

The decline of the NCW well illustrates the problems besetting feminism at the time and the essential hollowness of the franchise victory. The NCW was never representative of the women of New Zealand and indeed it never seriously made this claim. The members did however regard themselves as representative of the "active thinkers and workers of New Zealand women", and felt that whatever their influence they at least aroused other women to thought and discussion. The 1899 report commented, "that the more conservative feel that to counteract the influence of the advanced woman-guard they at any rate must interest themselves in politics and exert themselves to return men of whom they approve is a proof that an awakening of thought has taken place, and this is a distinct advance. Any

57. WR, June 1901, p.6.

58. WR, May 1900, p.6.

effort is better than stagnation".⁵⁹ The unrepresentative nature of the NCW was both its greatest strength and greatest weakness. It could not claim to speak for the women of New Zealand; it could not hope to organise women into a unified voting force, but it maintained, in its leading members at least, a vigorous interest in "the woman question" and in social reform generally, and this at a time when the reaction of all too many women was one of indifference and an ever more intense preoccupation with domestic concerns.

The task of the Council's leaders had always been complicated by the inevitable differences arising in an alliance of such varied organisations. By 1897 there were already reports of breaches in the Council, the disagreements being attributed to political differences. In that year it was reported that the Southern Cross Society and Christchurch National Association had refused to send delegates to the annual meeting and there was initially some doubt over whether Dunedin, and the Auckland Women's Liberal League would be represented.⁶⁰ Lady Stout made public protest over the decision of the executive to transfer the annual convention from Wellington to Christchurch (apparently because of a lack of financial support from the Wellington societies), and also accused the Council of promoting its political ends above all others, with the result that the Council was viewed as a purely political body for the promotion of wild, anarchistic ideas.⁶¹

After it had assembled, the Council affirmed its confidence in the executive's decision, and when it met in Wellington in the following year the Southern Cross Society was once more represented (although in 1899 its withdrawal and subsequent dissolution were recorded). In later years the Council was further weakened by the

59. NCW, Fourth Session, Auckland 1899, p.4.

60. LT, 25 March 1897.

61. Press Cuttings Vol.1, Lady Anna Stout Collection, (source not given).

withdrawal and sometimes the disbandment of other affiliates, though more often, sometimes through deliberate intent, sometimes through lack of finance or through the more crippling lack of sufficiently motivated members, delegates were simply not sent to annual conventions and their participation was no longer recorded.

This dwindling involvement was a feature of the women's movement throughout New Zealand. Improved social and economic conditions and the enactment of certain measures of social legislation combined to reduce the enthusiastic sense of commitment which had motivated many women. In 1904 Mrs Daldy reported that the women's cause was dead in Auckland despite the efforts of Mrs Sievwright to keep it alive and the following year she mourned, "I have heard nothing of our women's movement for such a long time that I am wondering if the past was all a dream and nothing more Why, oh why do the women not rouse themselves from their love of ease and do something for the betterment of the race?"⁶²

Factors other than the love of ease combined to thwart the feminist impulse. Practical difficulties such as the lack of finance and leisure and the difficulties and uncertainties of travel also contributed to the Council's decline. Grimshaw notes that the women of the WCTU soon found that however affluent they appeared, their husbands held the purse-strings and were not overly generous in contributing to their wives' causes.⁶³ We must assume that this difficulty was experienced by other women's groups also, and this may partly explain the intensity with which the economic independence of married women was pressed as a primary condition to emancipation.

Correspondence between leading members of the NCW after 1900 reveals an uncertainty over arrangements and venues for meetings, unexpected delays in receiving replies to earlier letters and impediments, often of a domestic nature, which prevented the remaining stalwarts from

62. Mrs Daldy to Mrs Sheppard, 4 Feb. 1904 and 14 April 1905, Sheppard Collection.

63. Grimshaw, p. 34.

attending executive meetings. Christina Henderson, writing to Mrs Daldy in May 1903, explained that a planned executive meeting could not be held because nearly all the members were unable to leave their homes - Mrs Sheppard was about to leave for England, Mrs Wells had only recently returned from Germany, Mrs Williamson was preparing her husband for a trip to England, Mrs Atkinson could not leave home until the settlement of a libel case on which her husband was engaged, and the unfortunate Mrs Sievwright was "having trouble with her teeth" and could not speak.⁶⁴

In addition to these difficulties, there was sufficient discouragement for many women in the prejudice and ridicule still encountered. Even Mrs Daldy, a long-time worker in the cause, described in 1904 how much she had relied on the support of her recently-deceased husband, "for I acknowledge I did sometimes shrink from the odium of publicity over our unpopular movement. What I can do without him I do not know".⁶⁵

In an attempt to gain at least some measure of practical reform the Council's executive was forced to modify its aims and for legislative purposes to promote a few specific measures instead of the broad platform which had featured in its annual meetings. Mr McNab, one of the few Members of Parliament whom the executive considered influential and sympathetic enough to be entrusted with its bills, refused to take up the question of "women's disabilities" in a general form and instead urged the Council to select the most pressing disabilities for his consideration. "He insists", Miss Henderson wrote to Mrs Daldy, "that only one disability can be removed at a time - the members cannot, apparently, take in more than the very simplest ideas." The executive reluctantly agreed to his condition and were promised two bills, one admitting women to Parliament, and the other making them

64. Miss Henderson to Mrs Daldy, 14 May 1903, NCW, Auckland Branch Collection.

65. Mrs Daldy to Mrs Sheppard, 4 Feb. 1904, Sheppard Collection.

eligible for jury service. Miss Henderson consoled Mrs Daldy with the thought that if even one of the desired reforms was conceded the Council could feel that it had done something to justify its existence, for while she personally thought the Council had done "splendid work" she knew that they were constantly asked for tangible proof of it.⁶⁶

The burden of work for the movement gradually fell on a steadily narrowing group, most of whom were no longer young, and some of whom, Mrs Sheppard included, were not in the best of health. From Gisborne Mrs Sievwright desperately sought to promote visits by overseas speakers and to organise local councils and reading circles, since activities on a national basis were proving so difficult to sustain. But even in her own district she found that apathy limited the number she could attract to her reading circles. "Strictly entre nous", she confided to Mrs Daldy, "I am ashamed of my own sex! When I think of the ignorance that prevails on this side of political righteousness in general, I feel inclined to shake the dust of 'Society' from my feet and leave it to its fate!"⁶⁷

Mrs Sievwright's active brain continued to advocate schemes for attracting "plucky young recruits", but such recruits were not forthcoming, and even the numbers of the old guard were diminishing. Many who might have swelled the ranks of feminism were attracted to temperance work and Mrs Sievwright sought without success to take advantage of their allegiance: "Temperance - even prohibition is fashionable now. Could we not persuade the Alliance to affiliate and send us two or three of their best speakers?" In a later communication she added that Miss Hughes, who was winning Mount Eden to prohibition "could do much for us as she goes along".⁶⁸

66. Miss Henderson to Mrs Daldy, 14 April 1903, and 14 May 1903, NCW, Auckland Branch Collection.

67. Mrs Sievwright to Mrs Daldy, 7 Oct. 1904, NCW, Auckland Branch Collection.

68. Mrs Sievwright to Mrs Sheppard, 11 Jan. 1905 and 18 Jan. 1905, Sheppard Collection.

The link between temperance and active feminism had indeed weakened. Invitations to affiliate were also sent to "Mr Hornibrook's Physical Culture Club", "The Ideal Club", the Christchurch Tailoresses' Union and the Peace Association, but from some of these Mrs Sievwright did not even receive the courtesy of a reply.⁶⁹

By April 1904 it was evident that even Miss Henderson was, in Mrs Sievwright's view, losing heart, and at an executive meeting in June she resigned, unable to undertake Council work in addition to her duties as acting secretary of the Alliance. Although she maintained her connections with the Council, her resignation was compounded by the deaths of several of the old suffragist leaders - in 1903 Mrs Margaret Bullock, an ex-vice president of the Council and former journalist had died in Wanganui, and in 1905 the deaths of Mrs Schnackenberg, Mrs Hatton and Mrs Sievwright herself were all recorded. And, as if to confirm the demise of the NCW, Mrs Daldy suffered a stroke in late 1905 which ended her years of active participation in women's causes.

The last record of the NCW meeting was in 1906 and in that year also the new secretary Mrs Page wrote to Ward on behalf of the Council expressing disappointment at the government's failure to rectify any of women's disabilities. But for all practical purposes the NCW as it had been conceived and had functioned in its earlier years was dead. Not until 1909 however did Miss Henderson write to the International Council giving the reason for New Zealand's withdrawal. Mrs Sheppard was appointed an honorary vice-president of the International Council and it is an indication of the distance New Zealand women had moved from their earlier ideals that she could report in 1911: "I do not see any chance at present of forming a

69. *ibid.*

National Council here. Our women's societies are few. They are separated by distances which take considerable time to bridge, and with one or two exceptions, even societies having the same name and object work in isolation".⁷⁰

Although the NCW was revived in 1917 largely due to the efforts of Mrs Sheppard, Miss Henderson and Miss Jessie Mackay, the reconstituted body never equalled its predecessor's remarkably catholic intensity of purpose. Nevertheless, advanced though their ideas appear and far-reaching though the implications of these ideas may have been, the early NCW feminists were careful to refute charges of radicalism and revolutionary intent. If their arguments sometimes lacked consistency, their faith in the legal avenue of reform did not, and "Evolution not Revolution" were words frequently used by them (even forming the motto of one affiliated society).⁷¹ It is still true that the members of the NCW stood out among their contemporaries in their claim to speak as citizens and human beings on a wide range of social concerns. Admittedly, they stressed women's unique qualities which, if socially mobilised would make for a better world, but did not like many women's groups before and since confine themselves to a consideration of the needs of women and children. And yet, despite their enthusiasm and eagerness to accept responsibility they failed to promote any substantial spread of their influence among their less enthusiastic sisters. The contrast between the ideals of this diminishing group of women and the apathy of the majority became even more acute. The wider vision which had sustained the women's movement during the suffrage campaign and immediately after, and which had anticipated the accelerated participation of women at all levels of society, had been diverted into a new concern - the campaign for responsible, educated motherhood.

70. Mrs Sheppard to Dr P.A. Saloman, Corresponding Secretary of International Council of Women, 9 March 1911, Sheppard Collection.

71. i.e. The Wellington Women's Democratic Union. Daybreak, 18 May 1895, p.3.

WOMAN'S TRUE PROFESSION: Plunket and the Competent Household Executive.

We hear much nowadays about national defence but we must not put our whole trust in the 'reeking tube and iron shard'! The safety of nations is not a question of the gun alone, but also of the man behind the gun, and he is largely the result of the grit and self-sacrifice of his mother. If we lack noble mothers we lack the first element of racial success and national greatness.

THE DESTINY OF THE RACE IS IN
THE HANDS OF ITS MOTHERS! 1

Frederick Truby King.

As the activity of the NCW receded and its narrowing basis of support became more apparent, interest was already being generated in a movement of a very different kind. This movement would place the mental horizons of women firmly in the home, just as the NCW and its affiliates had attempted in the previous decade to involve them in wider social activity. In practical terms the work of this, the Royal New Zealand Society for the Health of Women and Children,² was to be of immense benefit to the groups which it sought to reach, and yet it is significant that it was founded by a man who, despite his very real concern to "help the mothers and save the babies" must be recognised through his personal views as the archetype of much that the early feminists had been fighting against.

It was not that Frederick Truby King had an inordinately low opinion of women or of their intelligence; he like most anti-feminists would have protested the very high esteem in which he held the sex. But he held strongly to the view that the natural aptitudes of women lay in a certain very definite direction, and that any woman who diverged from the pattern of devoted wifedom and motherhood was laying in store for herself a life of discontent, ill-health, and possible mental collapse. To him it was thus imperative that girls

1. F. Truby King, Feeding and Care of Baby, 1913, p.153.

2. The Society soon came to be known as the Plunket Society in recognition of the support of Lady Victoria Plunket, the Governor's wife.

be prepared at an early age for their future domestic and maternal role, and that an appreciation of the immense value of home-life to a nation's progress and prosperity be inoculated as a matter of course.

King did not conceive his ideas in isolation, and the success of the Plunket Society, as his mothercraft organisation came to be known, must first be viewed in relation to certain interrelated ideas then in vogue. Foremost among these was a concern for racial fitness and purity, and an exaggerated fear that the Anglo-Saxon race, formerly so influential and vigorous, was in a state of mental and physical deterioration. The consequences of racial decline were held to be particularly tragic in the case of New Zealand, a young country bountifully endowed by nature with an invigorating climate so favourable to the production of a healthy and vigorous race; a country untrammelled by the traditions and conventions of the Old World, and where even the workers lived under conditions conducive to health and happiness. These fears were reinforced by a decline in the rate of natural population increase which was possibly triggered by the economic depression of the late 1880's and early 1890's.³ Whatever its long-term cause, the decline was attributed by pessimistic eugenicists to the deliberate and unreasonable limitation of births by those classes best fitted to produce children of requisite racial standard - to a practice, wrote one of Seddon's correspondents, "dishonouring to God, degrading to man and woman, and one of the most unpatriotic acts that a man can be guilty of".⁴

Seddon himself was sufficiently disturbed by the number of "wilfully sterile" marriages to introduce into Parliament a "Sale of Preventatives Prohibition Bill"⁵ in 1901, but possibly realising the

3. Vosburgh, Miriam Gilson, "Some Social and Demographic Influences on the New Zealand Family Structure from 1886", Ph.D.Thesis, 1971, p.132.

4. [?] Ronaldson to Richard Seddon, 21 June 1904, Seddon Papers 2/34.

5. JHR, 1901, p.xlvii.

difficulties of imposing such a measure, withdrew the bill and later turned to another, more humane solution to the problem posed by the declining natural increase - to the preservation of the child life which was in fact born into the colony. In May 1904 Seddon issued his Memorandum on Child Life Preservation which was circulated to all interested bodies and received wide publicity in the press.

In the Memorandum Seddon stated his conviction that the findings of the New South Wales Royal Commission on the declining birth rate applied also to New Zealand, and noted that a law against the indiscriminate sale of preventatives was recommended in its report. Commonsense dictated an alternative approach however, and Seddon pointed out that over the previous ten years 20,000 children between the ages of one and five had died. In his view many of these could have been saved, and to this end he advocated the registration of midwives, the establishment of state maternity hospitals, day homes for infants in cases where mothers were forced to work, stricter controls over the maintenance of illegitimate children, whose life expectancy was known to be less than their respectably-born counterparts', and state-subsidised nurses and midwives for the poor. To bewail the want of a proper natural increase, Seddon concluded, was sheer hypocrisy unless something was done in the way of saving infant life.⁶

The immediate result of Seddon's statement was the enactment in 1904 of a measure to register midwives, and the establishment from 1905 of the St Helens Maternity Hospitals. The alacrity with which these measures were put into effect was largely due to the efforts of Mrs Grace Neill, then Assistant-Inspector of Hospitals. Although Mrs Neill was later to describe as one of her greatest achievements her role in lessening for thousands of women the pains and risks of child-bearing,⁷ the impression remains that for many others the comfort of mothers was a lesser factor in these advances than was the health of the child and the resultant increment to the nation's numbers.

6. "Memorandum on Child Life Preservation", Seddon Papers, 2/34.

7. Quoted in Cecil and Celia Manson, Doctor Agnes Bennett, 1960, p.61.



Ministerial Mamas, New Zealand Graphic, 11 June 1904.

Government measures alone could not deal with a problem of this magnitude however, unless buttressed by a more generalised public concern. An intense interest in popularised genetics was shared by many sections of the population and was reflected at one extreme in the fear of a vast Asian influx and the consequent mixture of bloods; at the other in the emphasis on responsible parenthood and the need to avoid the reproduction of the degenerate and feeble-minded. Mrs Margaret Sievwright, speaking to the third session of the NCW, urged each woman to "guard the sacred portals of maternity with watchful care and jealous determination" since to become "the parent of an organism, badly born and badly bred, always placed under unwholesome conditions and slowly saturated with disease" was a crime against God and man. A woman was guilty of a very serious crime, she added, who became with child during any part of her life without having first insured to that child the right to a wholesome birth and childhood.⁸

While Mrs Sievwright used these views to argue for a greater sexual knowledge among women and the deliberate spacing of births to avoid strain upon the mother, others went further and stressed the duty of women to keep themselves and their children in the best possible condition in preparation for maternity. Parenthood was increasingly promoted as a vocation of national import, and women viewed as race-producers and race-developers, not only by concerned members of the medical profession, but by representatives of their own sex: "We have only to stand in any busy street to see how far the race has fallen below the image and likeness of God", Mrs Nellie Bendeley told the 1912 Convention of the WCTU. "What this world has seen this world should see again, and it is for women, the mothers of the race to hold the ideal of that standard steadily before the race as a thing attainable".⁹ As Professor John Macmillan Brown had written in the Lyttelton

8. NCW, Third Session, Wellington 1898, p.10.

9. WR, May 1912, p.11.

Times during 1908, the essential need of the race was for "cultivated, elevated responsible womanhood, and enlightened, dutiful self-sacrificing motherhood".¹⁰

The prevalence of such views and a renewed emphasis among women themselves on their unique feminine qualities accelerated the movement towards differentiation in the education of the sexes. As education was extended to girls as well as boys the syllabus used in the education of boys was adopted for their sisters - with the exclusion where necessary of material unsuited to the girls' more delicate sensibilities and the addition in many cases of such accomplishments as music and needlework. By the 1890's anxiety was expressed that girls were not benefitting from such a system, and that they might even be suffering irreparable damage from the strain imposed at a critical time in their development. There was undoubtedly something in these fears of pressure since, as the principal of the Otago Girls' High School pointed out in 1886, many girls were obliged to share in the cares and responsibilities of the household in addition to their studies. A further factor likely to weigh heavily upon girls in the later school years was the still limited range of professions available to them. Whereas a boy of only average ability could choose a profession which did not require high educational attainment, almost the only professional occupation open to girls in 1886 was teaching, with its numerous grades and competitive advancement examinations.¹¹

Throughout the 1890's and 1900's therefore, the "relevance" of the syllabus in primary and secondary schools came under close scrutiny. Studies were made of technical education overseas, including the teaching of domestic subjects, and subsidies offered under the Manual and Technical Institution Act of 1900 encouraged the establishment of dressmaking and cookery classes in girls' schools.¹² At the

10. Quoted in WR, Feb.1908,p.17.

11. Annual Report on Secondary Schools of the Colony, AJHR, 1886,E.9,p.41.

12. Cumming, p.150.

secondary level the need for restructuring was felt to be particularly urgent since most pupils spent so little time there in which to benefit from the options available. The hope was expressed that if domestic instruction were offered to girls at both primary and secondary levels, parents would be less disposed to withdraw their daughters from school at an earlier age than their sons.¹³

The major justification for the education of girls in domestic matters was, however, in the words of Mr G. George, director of the Auckland Technical School, that since "the natural function of every girl was to become a wife and a mother", the schools should do everything possible to educate the girl "along the lines she ought naturally to go".¹⁴ And, as successive Labour and Educational Department reports did not neglect to mention, the training of girls in domestic science might do much to rectify the current dearth of domestic servants.¹⁵

These were views with which Truby King, then superintendent of the Seacliffe Mental Asylum, was very much in accord. King regarded the education of boys and girls along the same lines as "one of the most preposterous farces ever perpetuated". The teaching to girls of mathematics, algebra and other subjects which had no utility in everyday life he considered a serious waste of time - time which "might be better employed in learning those things and understanding those principles which underlie the making of happy homes".¹⁶ The stress placed upon girls by the educational system interfered with their development and their fitness for maternity, producing "neurasthenic" females who were unable or unwilling to suckle their young, unable to

13. e.g. Annual Report, Department of Education, AJHR, 1912 (S.2), E.1, p.8.

14. Proceedings of the General Education Conference, AJHR, 1910, E.10, p.12.

15. e.g. Annual Report, Department of Labour, AJHR, 1909, H.11, p.lxix.

16. Society for the Promotion of the Health of Women and Children, Addresses Delivered by Doctors F.C.Batchelor and Truby King, 1909, p.11.

bear the pains of labour as well as their mothers had, and suffered in addition from eye failure, headaches, menstrual disturbances and constipation! King was supported in his offensive against the education system by Dr F.C. Batchelor of the Otago Medical School (who in the course of one such onslaught raised the ire of lady medicals such as Agnes Bennett and Emily Siedeberg when he rashly asserted that the majority of women medical students "broke down" during their course of study. He then compounded his error by maintaining that whereas the average and sometimes the poor male student usually turned out a useful and successful practitioner, even the brilliant female student at best attained only mediocrity).¹⁷

Impressed by the need to raise the status and prestige of domestic work, the two doctors gave their enthusiastic support to John Studholme's proposals to endow a chair in domestic science at Otago University. With the help of a citizens' committee which included King, Batchelor, W. Downie Stewart and G.R. Ritchie, the new faculty commenced its first session in 1911 with two degree students, three diploma students and 21 casual students. By raising domestic science to degree status it was hoped that the teaching of the subject in schools would be made more efficient and that girls would be encouraged to enter domestic service in greater numbers.¹⁸

In their most sanguine pronouncements the advocates of domestic training anticipated not only the regeneration of the race, but comprehensive and unqualified domestic happiness - the appeasement of the national temper through the provision of nutritious, well-cooked meals and comfortable, attractive homes. Edward Tregear, the retiring Secretary of Labour would have been particularly relieved

17. *ibid.*, p.6.

18. A.G. Strong, History of the Development of University Education in Home Science in New Zealand 1911-1936, 1937, pp.7-10.

at the establishment of the new chair, having predicted some future time when "a dyspeptic and sour-minded race might turn and rend to pieces the national education system" unless greater status was given to domestic work. If only the highest degrees for women were reserved for those who studied physiology, domestic hygiene, and practical chemistry, the results for the better would be almost incalculable, he had written.¹⁹

Many of King's views on the errors of educational pressure, especially where inflicted upon the vulnerable minds and bodies of young girls, arose from observations made while he was superintendent of Seacliffe. King came to the conclusion that the mental state of his patients was largely due to physical causes, especially from faulty rearing and lack of nourishment during early childhood. If mothers would only follow the simple laws of nature in the feeding and rearing of their children, and would avoid the follies imposed by an ignorant civilisation, the appalling death rate among children under five might be avoided.

Following from experiments he had conducted on the raising of plants and livestock, King drew parallels between the rearing of young animals and human infants, and the fundamental laws of reproduction, nutrition and growth common to both.²⁰ He was confirmed in his views on the benefits of breastfeeding by a visit to Japan in 1904, where he discovered that it was not uncommon for babies to be breastfed for up to eighteen months. The fitness and physique of the Japanese Army and the vigour of the Japanese peasantry attested to the benefits of breastfeeding on a generalised scale, and while King did not expect his countrywomen to nurse their infants for eighteen months, he thought they might be more confident about allowing nature her own way for nine. On his return to New Zealand King therefore

19. Annual Report, Department of Labour, AJHR, 1897 (S.2), H.11, p.ix.

20. R.M. Burdon, New Zealand Noteables, Series Two, 1945, p.19.

commenced a campaign to promote the breastfeeding of infants, training one of the Seacliffe nurses, Miss McKinnon, in his theories of nutrition and child welfare. The general opinion among the medical profession at this time was unfavourable to King's ideas however, and this discouraged the wider diffusion of his work for a further two years.²¹

Although King was initially regarded as a crank and his ideas disregarded by most of the medical profession, the related questions of infant welfare and infant mortality were receiving wide consideration in New Zealand and other Western nations. Particular attention was being paid in New Zealand and elsewhere to the improvement of the milk supply and to general municipal sanitation in an attempt to reduce the incidence of those dietetic and diarrhoeal diseases associated with most infantile deaths. Dr. Valintine, the assistant health officer noted that pollution of the milk supply occurred at almost every stage of its preparation - in the milking shed, in storage, in transit to the town, in its collection and distribution by the middle man, and in the household itself where milk was usually collected from the dusty street in open containers and stored too long. In this way "an ideal food for children" was transformed into "a veritable agent for ill-health and death".²² Until adequate regulations and means of inspection could be enforced, breastfeeding could indeed mean the difference between life and death for even the most sturdy infant.

In some parts of Britain and France, where fear of depopulation also encouraged an interest in infant welfare, milk depots were established which provided sterilised and modified milk and sometimes a service of baby-weighing and supervision. Pierre Budin, Professor

21. Mary King, Truby King, The Man, 1948, pp.148-149.

22. Annual Report, Department of Health, AJHR, 1906 (S.2), pp.30-33.

in Clinical Obstetrics at the Paris University had established as early as 1892 the "Consultation des Nourissons" with the central idea that for two years after its birth the baby should be under systematic supervision and the mother guided in the steps necessary to preserve her own and the child's health. An Infant Welfare conference held in Paris in 1905 and the 1906 Infantile Mortality Conference held in London encouraged the dissemination of such practices and led, for example, to the establishment of Schools for Mothers, some of which received a direct government grant in recognition of their work.²³

King's efforts must therefore be viewed in relation to developments which were taking place in other parts of the world. Where the New Zealand movement differed, however, was in that it involved an organisation of women themselves. Women here took the initiative in disseminating knowledge about maternity and mothercraft to others of their sex.

Initially the formation of such a movement was very much due to the forceful personality and skilfull propaganda of Truby King and, on the negative side to the failure of the medical profession to interest themselves in his ideas. After two years of systematic educational activity in Dunedin, including newspaper articles, lectures and the personal visitation of homes by Nurse McKinnon and the sisters of the various churches, King had still not got any substantial support from his fellow medical men. He therefore decided to appeal to those most directly concerned in the matter, the women themselves, and in May 1907 called a public meeting which led to the establishment of a "League for Promoting the Health of Women and Children".²⁴ Four months later a branch of the new society was formed in Christchurch and in October a public meeting in Wellington decided that the SPWC

23. G.F. McCleary, The Maternal and Child Welfare Movememnt, 1935, pp.7-12.

24. ODT, 15 May 1907.

should undertake such work in Wellington. In March 1908 the work of the SPWC and the Plunket Society was separated and in the same year a branch of Plunket was established in Auckland. By 1912 the work of the Society had proven so beneficial that King was temporarily released from his other duties to undertake an extensive lecturing tour. This led to the formation of over 60 new committees, making 70 branches of the Society in all.²⁵

The aims of the Plunket Society as laid down from the very first were fourfold. The first and possibly the most important aim sought to "uphold the Sacredness of the Body and the Duty of Health" and to "inculcate a lofty view of the responsibilities of maternity and the duty of every mother to fit herself for the perfect fulfillment of the natural calls of motherhood".²⁶ An especial objective here was to promote breastfeeding of infants, and to undermine the popular view that women were unable through the conditions of modern life to nurture their infants. Although the Society reported considerable success in this respect, it soon found a deterrent in the way of many mothers who wished to nurse their babies, especially in country districts. As early as 1910 the Wellington Branch called on the government to provide domestic help for women with young families, remarking that many mothers found housework and the care of four or five young children more than they could manage, and frequently gave this as the reason for not nursing their babies.²⁷

The second aim of Plunket stressed its educative function: to acquire knowledge on matters affecting the health of women and children, and to disseminate such knowledge. Both members and nurses

25. The Plunket Magazine, Jan. 1915, pp.15-17; Mary King, p.205.

26. The Plunket Magazine, Jan.1915, frontispiece.

27. Wellington Branch Plunket Society, Annual Report 1909-1910, p.4.

were to be involved in this aspect, and the informal passing on of information was stressed as much as the use of lectures, demonstrations and pamphlets. An important contribution to the Society's educative work was a weekly newspaper column written by Mrs Truby King under the pseudonym "Hygeia". Initially published by the Otago Witness in 1907, the column entitled "Our Babies" appeared in some 50 newspapers by 1915. The column dealt with matters of general interest and since "Hygeia" also answered letters, she proved a blessing to mothers living in outblock areas where no skilled assistance was available.²⁸

The effectiveness of such an approach was attested by the Dunedin Branch report for 1916 which reported that "the Society is always coming across cases where a community has been gradually brought up to take a keen and intelligent interest in motherhood and the proper rearing of children by one woman". Such a woman had usually been deeply impressed by what she had learned from a Plunket nurse, from a Society member, or from reading one of the Society's publications.²⁹ Plunket thus regarded its efforts in teaching practical domestic hygiene and mothercraft to an adult as of far greater importance than its success in tiding an individual baby over an attack of illness.

A third aspect of the Society's work was the training and employment of specially qualified nurses whose services were given to the community free of charge. The Plunket nurses were state-registered nurses who had undergone a period of training at the Society's Karitane-Harris Hospital in Dunedin, while Karitane nurses were women without previous nursing qualifications who underwent a longer course in baby care and nursing at the Hospital. Hester Maclean, Grace Neill's successor as Assistant Inspector of Hospitals notes that the Dunedin Trained Nurses Association intervened when the Plunket Society was

28. The Plunket Magazine, Jan. 1915, pp.5-6.

29. Dunedin Branch Plunket Society Annual Report, 1916, p.23.

first formed to ensure that only registered nurses or midwives would be eligible to train as Plunket nurses (presumably being alarmed by the fact that Miss McKinnon, the first Plunket nurse was not registered).³⁰ The Society's fourth aim, to cooperate with other organisations working toward similar ends, is self-explanatory, and at this time worked particularly with reference to the SPWC.

Although Plunket stressed the importance of breastfeeding and in King's opinion instances where the mother was genuinely unable to breastfeed were so exceedingly rare and striking as to prove that breastfeeding could be universal, much was in fact done to ensure that bottle-fed babies and weaned babies received the best possible substitute. Even before the establishment of the Plunket Society King had done considerable investigation into the matter and a milk dispensary was established in Dunedin for the preparation of "humanised" milk. As the Society grew it was found more expedient to teach mothers the principles of "home-modification" and to directly involve them in this aspect of the baby's care also.³¹

The "True Plunket Baby" was, however, the breastfed child, and indignant reference was made to those mothers who called their children "Plunket Babies" because they had been fed on humanised milk, but were otherwise unsuitably cared for.³² At the Society's Karitane Hospitals (the first of which was established in Dunedin in 1907), feeding problems among babies were studied and, if necessary, mothers were admitted along with their infants to be instructed in their care and feeding and to facilitate the establishment of breastfeeding.

30. Hester Maclean, Nursing in New Zealand, 1932, p.93.

31. Mary King, p.211.

32. e.g. Dunedin Branch Plunket Society, Annual Report 1916, p.17.

Under the heading of "A High Ideal of Motherhood" the Dunedin Branch report for 1916 described the gratifying example of a mother of triplets whose milk supply was doubled after one month at the Hospital, to the extent where she was nearly completely feeding all three babies. On her return to the farm where she lived this inordinately devoted mother continued to feed the three babies herself, as well as caring for a family totalling six children - the eldest of whom was only four years old.³³

Early in its history and under King's influence the Plunket Society laid down certain basic principles which, although later criticised, were always adhered to. The voluntary nature of the Society was considered fundamental and although it received a government grant, the greater part of its funds always came from voluntary contributions and from funds raised by the women themselves through jumble sales, garden parties, balls and displays. King was adamant that Plunket's role was a "mutual, educative health mission" which could not be imposed by compulsion or by directives from some impersonal government department.³⁴ It would have been all too easy for Plunket to become a merely charitable body dispensing aid to the poorest classes - instead it sought to reach and involve all sections of the community since, as King did not tire of pointing out, the wealthy and cultured classes were as misled on the subject of infant care as the poor.

Although pressure was exerted, sometimes from the branches themselves for a fixed fee to be paid for the services of the Plunket nurses, this was firmly resisted.³⁵

33. *ibid.*, p.20.

34. Fourth General Conference of the Royal N.Z. Society for the Health of Women and Children, 1914, p.11.

35. e.g. Third General Conference, 1913, p.2. The Christchurch delegates in this year unsuccessfully attempted to have a fixed fee established.

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It was feared that if a fee became compulsory the independent poor might then be reluctant to seek help. If on the other hand the Society became associated with the idea of charitable aid the "self-reliant" and receptive classes then seeking the help of the Plunket nurse might be estranged. For this reason the Society also resisted successive governments' attempts to have the Plunket nurse combine the duties of a district nurse, especially in country areas. District nursing was then associated with charitable aid, and it was felt, moreover, that under such a system the Plunket nurses would be unable to maintain their regular round of visits, and their preventative health mission would degenerate into the tending of sick people.³⁶

While much of Plunket's educative work was conducted at the local level and by the numerous branch committees, it also exerted pressure in various directions as a national body. From the very beginning concern was felt for infants in state licensed homes where, despite the provisions of the Infant Life Protection Act, conditions were very often inadequate and the death-rate was still substantial. King had his week-end cottage licensed for boarding unwanted infants and through proper feeding and regular care disproved the inspecting authority's contention that such babies were by nature unable to thrive³⁷ (partly because, it was stated, their mothers had taken drugs and used other means to be rid of their offspring).³⁸

One of the first efforts of the Plunket Society was to publicise the conditions members had observed in licensed infant homes, and largely as a result of a Plunket deputation to the Government in 1908 the inspection of these homes was transferred from the Police Department to the Education Department, the period allowed for the notification of births was reduced from two months to three days, and the duty was removed from sugar of milk, an important constituent in

36. Fourth General Conference 1914, pp.12-13. Hester Maclean in Nursing in New Zealand, p.50, expresses the government view that as the Plunket nurses were already trained nurses or midwives their work might have been greatly extended, especially in country districts. She also thought it wrong that the nurses' services were given free to those well able to pay.

37. Mary King, p.159.

38. Press Cutting, 24 May 1907 (source not given), Seddon Papers, 3/60.

artificial feeding formulas.³⁹ As in later years the condition of babies admitted to the Karitane Hospitals indicated that many keepers of licensed homes still had little knowledge of the first principles of the care and feeding of infants, the Plunket Society offered a thorough training course in baby care to government inspectors, and recommended a more equitable remuneration for licensed home keepers.⁴⁰ Neither measure was immediately acted upon by the Government however. Plunket also continually advocated that midwives have a more adequate training in infant care and sought assurances from the Government and local bodies for an improved milk supply, stressing the more rigorous inspection of dairies, and in later years, the testing of cows for tuberculosis.⁴¹

In view of the emphasis Plunket placed upon motherhood, and in view of King's exceedingly definite opinions on the state of the education system, it was natural enough that one of its preoccupations as an organised body was to agitate for the training of girls in child care and domestic matters. As it became apparent that the teaching of domestic science in schools might be tending too far toward detail and theory, and in concentrating upon dressmaking and cookery was neglecting to provide instruction in the most fundamental role of a girl's future existence - motherhood - Plunket intensified its efforts to rectify the omission.

By 1917 every girl presenting herself for matriculation had to present a certificate showing she had studied domestic science. Plunket sought to have the feeding and care of babies included on the syllabus for the certificate with Dr Truby King's book on the subject as text. King himself would have liked to see every girl spending some time in an institution devoted to the care of babies and young children

39. Society for the Promotion of the Health of Women and Children, First Annual Report 1908, p.4.

40. Central Council, Annual Report 1919, p.8.

41. Central Council, Annual Report 1918, p.8.

before she went out into the world, and thought it a matter for extreme regret that present teaching focussed on physiology and the structure and functions of the body - knowledge of which was quite unnecessary and, he thought, harmful.⁴² Unfortunately for the Society both the primary and secondary school syllabuses were already overcrowded and even the offer of a Plunket nurse to instruct in "Home and Hygiene" had to be turned down when it was offered to an otherwise sympathetic Otago Education Board. There was simply nothing that could be added to an already full programme, the Board told a Plunket deputation, which expressed its regret that society allowed itself to remain fettered to an educational system founded, as Herbert Spencer had said many years before, with a view only to celibacy.⁴³

With the declaration of war in 1914, the need to augment the birth-rate became even more imperative, and a correspondingly greater stress was laid upon the education of girls in "womanly qualities". Although Plunket was forced to curtail most expansion because of the shortage of nurses, it received a boost from the revitalised interest in child-care and physical efficiency, and the level of voluntary contributions remained remarkably high.

The report of the Dunedin branch for 1918 commented with satisfaction on a wider recognition by the authorities and general public of "the truly patriotic nature of the Society's mission", and considered that people had become far more interested in all pertaining to the rearing of a healthy and efficient race.⁴⁴ The fact that

42. Fifth General Conference, 1917, p.32.

43. Dunedin Branch, Annual Report 1916, p.5.

44. Dunedin Branch, Annual Report 1918, p.20.

some 40% of men offering themselves for active service were rejected as unfit was continually projected as a lamentable state of affairs which need never had arisen had there been some 30 years previously a knowledge of Plunket principles and teaching facilities "with a view to potential motherhood". Now that the requisite information was readily available, the Dunedin branch anticipated that "if the need should arise again ... for men to go forth and fight for hearth and home, New Zealand could rely on practically all her sons coming up to the required standard".⁴⁵

In the upsurge of patriotism that engulfed New Zealand the baby was seen as a bulwark against invasion by an enemy whose greatest strength was in its population increase. "Tohunga", a particularly rabid columnist with the Auckland Weekly News even maintained that the true patriot and hero was the man who would build a home and breed sons and grandsons to fight for the State:

a man's first duty is to make a Home and a woman's first duty is to be a Wife and Mother. If war can teach us by our need for men that only in its homes is a nation truly great and only in its children is it really rich, then will our loss be turned to gain, and from the very grave shall we win a lasting victory.⁴⁶

The words "Home" and "Mother" let it be noted, invariably elicited capitals in such writings.

In this climate of intense patriotism the education of girls in the duties of the home and their responsibilities as mothers became an attractive proposition, not least of all to those in positions of authority. At one extreme it was even argued that as military training

45. Dunedin Branch, Annual Report 1916, p.4.

46. Auckland Weekly News, 18 Feb.1915, p.14.

was compulsory for boys, domestic instruction should be equally obligatory for their sisters - if boys were to be trained to fight for their homes, should not the girls make the country's homes worth fighting for? asked Mrs A.R. Atkinson, now involved in the Plunket Society as well as the WCTU.⁴⁷

When therefore, in June 1917 the Department's General Council of Education presented its report on differentiation in the education of girls, its recommendations almost inevitably tended in the direction of greater differentiation. It was suggested that wherever possible girls and boys should be taught separately in secondary schools, that girls be taught for the most part by women teachers, that the secondary course for girls should in all cases include vocational training bearing on home life, that the programme of work for women students in teachers' training colleges should provide for substantial training in Home Science, and that there be more women on all bodies dealing with education. The reasons given for greater differentiation included such unsubstantiated statements as "their work in life is different, and the knowledge and training that each will require in preparation for that work will therefore be different", "their mental capacity and physical strength are unlike; the boy is more original, the girl more imitative; and there is more danger of the girls suffering from hard work" and "the quality of adaptiveness is far more necessary in the girl than in the boy. The latter may be trained from the beginning with some definite end in view; but a girl never knows what life may have in store for her".⁴⁸ The

47. Press Cutting, 1917, (source not given), Letters, Notes and Papers Regarding the Teaching of Domestic Science in Schools, Lady Anna Stout Collection.

48. *ibid.*, (source not given).

following month, and as if to give official blessing to the Council's proposals, amendments in the free-place regulations made Home Science a compulsory subject for girls in all secondary and district high schools.⁴⁹

These and earlier developments did not pass unchallenged, especially by professional women who resented the disparagement implied to their own achievements, and saw the dangers involved in further limitation of the opportunities acquired over the previous thirty years. Both Dr Emily Siedeberg and Dr Agnes Bennett took particular exception to remarks on the education of women made at the 1909 meeting of the Plunket Society by Doctors Batchelor and Truby King. Dr Siedeberg challenged Dr Batchelor to point to one case of a women medical student who had "broken down" in the course of her study, and questioned whether the majority of women who were unfitted for domestic work could, as he maintained, blame this on higher education.

Rather, she continued, it was the woman whose brain had been disciplined and trained to think for herself who made the most capable housekeeper and whose experience of the world and conversational powers made her more acceptable as a companion than "the quiet house-drudge". As a doctor practising almost exclusively among women, she found that it was the girls who were kept at home with no outside interest who developed neurasthenia in the most marked degree.⁵⁰

49. New Zealand Gazette, 17 July 1917.

50. ODT, 22 May 1909.

Dr Siedeberg's remarks were supported by other women who considered it the duty of every man to ensure that his daughter was trained for an occupation in life and thus rendered independent of marriage. "Dorothea" wrote in the columns of the Otago Daily Times,

No one disputes the nobility and beauty of worthy motherhood and wifehood - not least of all a woman whose mind has been trained to think a little - but perhaps some day men will realise that women have a right to expect that they shall prepare for a marriage with a higher aim than the making of a comfortable home for themselves. An intelligent, independent woman doing congenial work - perhaps nursing the sick, or, as a 'scholarship girl with a D certificate', trying to lead little children to catch a glimpse of the knowledge and wisdom of the world - may sacrifice more than any man can realise when she gives herself till death.⁵¹

And one feels some sympathy with the woman who rather scathingly commented of Doctors Batchelor and King,

This year pigs, next year fowls, the third year after, babies. They talk about women as if they were some kind of chattels to be moved around and treated in exactly the same way as cranks treat chickens. They love to hear themselves talk.⁵²

Meanwhile, in Wellington Agnes Bennett expressed her disquiet at the "antiquated ideas" put forward by her two colleagues. Even more distressing was the approval with which such ideas were received by an audience including leaders of church and state - an indication, she noted, of the many battles still to be fought for the rights of women.⁵³

Five years later at the 1914 session of the Australasian Medical Congress, Dr Bennett was once more compelled to speak out

51. ODT, 3 June 1909.

52. Quoted in Strong, p.7.

53. Quoted in Cecil and Celia Manson, p.65.

against the tendency to attribute a host of social ills to inadequacies in the education of girls. At the Eugenics section of the Congress King caused to be passed a motion deprecating the excessive straining after accomplishments involved in the education of girls. The motion, which also provided for a deputation of doctors to wait upon the Minister of Education ended by stating:

This Congress is satisfied that, broadly speaking, even where marriage does not take place, the education which gives the girl the best all round equipment in body, mind, morals and inclination for home life and potential motherhood also gives her the soundest and surest foundations for future health and happiness, and for a sustained power of earning an independent living, if such should prove her lot [a reference, most likely, to domestic service] .54

At the Eugenics section itself an Australian doctor, Mary de Garis had pointed out that even now it was men who were deciding on the education of women. (Somewhat missing her point, King agreed as a concession to have Dr Elizabeth Platts-Mills, a member of the Wellington branch of Plunket, included in the proposed deputation). No man was trained for his trade, Dr de Garis pointed out, until he had received his general education. Why, then, should a girl's education be directed solely towards her trade?⁵⁵

When the time came for the entire Congress to endorse King's motion, Agnes Bennett raised a point of order, suggesting that as lay people had voted on the resolution, it could not be taken as the opinion of the Congress. The resolution was exceedingly wordy, moreover, and it would be unworthy of a scientific body to take as proven the statement that the modern education of woman unfitted her for maternity. As it was nearing the end of the Congress, Dr Bennett succeeded in having the motion deferred.⁵⁶ Her actions were supported by "Imogen"

54. Transactions of the Tenth Session of the Australasian Medical Congress 1914, 1916, p.42.

55. *ibid*, p.93.

56. *ibid*, p.53.

writing in the Dominion. While appreciating the magnificent work done by King in reducing infant mortality, "Imogen" nevertheless felt that

To a woman ... it appears there is a somewhat unfair tendency to throw everything, every responsibility upon the shoulders of the mother. She may, and usually does, play her part nobly in the care of her children, but she is not the only one responsible for their well-being, for the physical and mental equipment with which they face the world. And that, apparently, has not yet been fully emphasized.⁵⁷

Further opposition from professional women was aroused by the developments in 1917 and particularly by the recommendations of the Council of Education. In Wellington a meeting was held under the auspices of the SPWC to discuss the Council's proposals. Lady Stout (somewhat inconsistently in view of her earlier arguments in favour of cooking lessons at the Dunedin Girls' High School)⁵⁸ maintained that a man required a companion in marriage and did not want to eat all the time he was home. The keynote of a democratic country, Lady Stout stressed, was differentiation according to ability, not sex. Other speakers, including Professor Hunter, Miss McLean, secretary of non-departmental schools, and Miss N.E. Coad, one of the more vocal members of the Women Teachers' Association, supported Lady Stout, and a Mr W.H. Foster moved a motion against any alteration in the education system which would place disabilities on women and deprive them of educational rights equal to men. In support of the motion, which was later carried with a large majority, it was pointed out that if changes were instituted, girls would get neither a good general education, since other subjects would have to be dropped in order to make room for Home Science, nor a thorough training in Home Science, since there was an inadequate supply of teachers and facilities.⁵⁹

57. Dominion, 14 Feb. 1914. Letters ... regarding the Teaching of Domestic Science, Lady Anna Stout Collection.

58. Lady Stout wrote to the Board of Governors of the School, "That ignorance of the principles of Cookery and consequent inability to provide digestible and properly cooked meals for a household is the cause of much misery, waste and ill-temper is a well known fact." Letters ... regarding the Teaching of Domestic Science, Lady Anna Stout Collection.

59. Press cutting 1917, (source not given), Letters ... re the Teaching of Domestic Science, Lady Anna Stout Collection.

Many of the predictions made at this meeting were realised when in later years it became clear that the domestic science course was both too technical and abstract for use in the home, and too unsystematic to be a science. University professors agreed that girls were handicapped in their preparations for university work, since they had insufficient grounding in pure science as a basis for university science and medicine.⁶⁰

Although the infant welfare movement and its implications for the field of education were so enthusiastically taken up by certain influential men and by heads of government departments, it must not be supposed that most women accepted unwillingly this emphasis on their domestic role, nor that it was especially imposed on them. It was the WCTU itself which recommended to the 1912 Education Commission that a reduction in the time spent by girls in studying mathematics might lead to an increase in the time allowed for domestic instruction (and incidentally to the eventual solution of the "domestic help difficulty").⁶¹ Many women teachers also saw distinct advantages in the teaching of domestic science to girls at higher levels in the schools - it would help their claim to those higher responsibilities which in co-educational schools especially were monopolised by men. By promoting the distinct needs of girls within the education system they would at least not have to fear encroachment by men in their distinct sphere: who better than women could impart an education in "womanly qualities"?⁶²

60. J.H. Murdock, The High Schools of New Zealand, 1943, p.130.

61. Report and Proceedings of Commission of Education, AJHR, 1912, E.12, p.739.

62. See *ibid.* for submissions of women teachers to 1912 Education Commission, e.g. Mrs V.M. Grieg, p.726.

Even many of those speaking out against the compulsory teaching of domestic science supported some form of domestic training, and accepted that the primary role of women (or of those women whose intelligence did not equal their own) was to be a wife and mother - Agnes Bennett, for example professed herself anxious to see Home Science and the proper care of children taught in schools.⁶³ The objection was not so much to an "education in womanly qualities" as to the all-embracing imposition of such subjects as cookery and dress-making on girls whose talents might lie in other directions, and the assumption that the higher education of women was harmful and, except where it involved domestic concerns, might be discouraged.

While the success of the Plunket Society was, it is true, due very much to the personality of Truby King himself, its expansion was also fostered by the numerous committees of women throughout New Zealand. Although at one level the Society consisted of salaried officers, of whom the nurses made up the greater number, there were by 1918 some four to five hundred women who made up the committees of various working branches. These women were regarded by King himself as the backbone of the Plunket scheme, and although the involvement of women from all social backgrounds was claimed by Plunket, it is likely that at this level of participation the more leisured middle-class women once again dominated. This impression is reinforced by the frequent references at Plunket conferences to Plunket's appeal to the "most self-reliant, most intelligent, most receptive" members of the community.⁶⁴ Particular reference was made at the 1922 General Conference to the Committees' failure to appreciate the deplorable situations - involving drunkenness, disease, and bad housing - under which some mothers struggled, and the futility of such mothers carrying out Plunket instructions under such terrible conditions unless sex

63. Transactions ... of the Australasian Medical Congress 1914, p.43.

64. e.g. Fourth General Conference 1914, p.11, p.12.

hygiene and the spacing of births were also taught.⁶⁵ The question of contraception was, however, one which Plunket quite understandably avoided, and King himself strongly deplored the "small family tendency".⁶⁶

Despite the fact that Plunket's Central Council guided and controlled the Society's general activities each local branch was allowed a considerable amount of autonomy and initiative, and the development of Plunket was undoubtedly strengthened by this distribution of responsibility. The Plunket Society's mission was, its secretary informed the Minister of Health in 1918, "essentially a woman's mission - a woman's society, appealing to women." Where men had helped, she added, it had been in the capacity of advisors and friendly helpers to whom they could turn when in doubt, "never as dictators of the policy and methods we were to pursue". Any attempt to introduce bureaucratic formalism into the Plunket structure (as it was feared the Minister intended) would thwart the progress of the cause, based as it was on groups of women voluntarily banded together to do what they could for home life. King himself agreed that Plunket's mission was "essentially women's work" and always stressed that it was his appeal to the women of the country which underlay Plunket's success.⁶⁷

In England, where concern over infant mortality was scarcely less intense, the infant welfare movement never gained the same national impetus which, under the auspices of the Plunket Society, it acquired in New Zealand. It may well be that in the Mother Country the forces of conservatism were stronger and more deeply resistant to change, while

65. Eighth General Conference 1922, p.21.

66. e.g. Fifth General Conference 1917, p.32.

67. Mary King, p.210; Fifth General Conference 1917, p.8. Fifth General Conference 1917, p.22. The secretary's statement may have underestimated the considerable influence King appears still to have had on Plunket policies.

the energies of the women themselves were still committed to the franchise struggle and to the wider campaign for women's rights. In New Zealand the franchise had been gained, significant social reforms had been achieved under the Liberal administration, and Plunket provided an alternative outlet for women's organising impulses. Plunket had a distinct advantage over earlier women's associations, moreover, in that its end - the saving of child-life - was inherently respectable and indisputably worthy. Even those who initially based their reservations on the premise that Plunket was "saving" children who because of their debased parentage and unworthy physical inheritance might be better dead, were soon disproven by the example of "better-dead" babies restored to thriving good health under Plunket care. Plunket's success could not be denied, and in the process of its acceptance, in the face of the results it achieved, subsidiary ideas - such as those on the education of girls and the duty of women to devote themselves to home and family - may have been accepted with rather less question than would otherwise have been the case.

The devotion of women at last to domestic concerns was undoubtedly viewed with relief by those who had formerly been perturbed by their persistent questioning of the status quo. James Allen, then Minister of Finance, referred with obvious satisfaction to the influence which the work of Plunket had had not only among the mothers and children, but upon ladies who were involved in the work. One thing, he stated, he had realised in the last half dozen years, and that was the enormous change that was coming over some of the women in this country because of the interest they took in this work. In that way he considered it one of the most valuable assets this country had.⁶⁸ Women, it must have seemed, had at last realised their

68. Fourth General Conference 1914, p.32.

true vocation and were directing their reforming zeal in an appropriate direction!

It was not only the committee ladies who were influenced by Plunket's teachings however. In the year 1918-1919, for example, 15,951 individual babies came under Plunket care, and these numbers increased considerably in the following year when the restraints imposed by war had been lifted. Although Plunket services were provided free, mothers benefitting from them were encouraged to become members of the Society and to pay a small subscription. It is understandable that in its immediate work of saving child-life Plunket struck a chord among the women of New Zealand, and not only among those who were socially aware or oriented towards organisational activity. Where formerly a woman might have accepted as a matter of course the death of one or more of her babies she was now encouraged to be the intelligent, "competent executive in her own household"⁶⁹ whose knowledge and care would be rewarded by the health of her children. Where before she received little advice from doctors on her baby's nurture and care, and might have watched helplessly as for seemingly no reason it "failed to thrive" she now found there was an agency which was willing, and indeed anxious to provide her with this knowledge. Whether or not one agrees with Truby King's views on education and home life, whether or not his particular views on child care are now fashionable, one must not underestimate the significance of such knowledge and its availability for mothers throughout the country.

Plunket rightly claimed that it had been instrumental in promoting the importance of the early years of life to mental and physical development. In 1900 the major causes of infantile deaths were diarrhoeal diseases, prematurity and respiratory diseases, in that order. By 1925 the importance of respiratory and, even more

69. F. Truby King, quoted in Rita F. Snowdon (ed.) From the Pen of F. Truby King [no date] , p.66.

significantly, of diarrhoeal diseases had been greatly reduced and prematurity, closely connected with the matter of maternal health, had succeeded as the major killer.⁷⁰ While the comparatively rapid fall in deaths from diarrhoeal and respiratory diseases must be linked in part to improvements in housing and public sanitation and to more efficient dairy inspection, much of the credit must go to the Plunket Society in teaching methods of infant nurture and feeding. The precepts taught by Plunket were neither complicated nor new, but were, the Society claimed, based on sound common sense and were easily communicated to those mothers willing to learn.

Table II. Infant Mortality Rates (Europeans).

Deaths of Infants under One Year per 1000 Live Births.

Quinquennial Averages 1872-1941

Quinquennia	Death rate	Quinquennia	Death rate
1872-76	109.28	1907-11	68.46
1877-81	93.47	1912-16	52.50
1882-86	91.80	1917-21	48.04
1887-91	82.65	1922-26	41.17
1892-96	84.81	1927-31	35.13
1897-01	78.87	1932-36	31.63
1902-06	72.90	1937-41	31.58

Source: F.S.Maclean, Challenge for Health, 1964, p.176.

70. F.S.Maclean, Challenge for Health, 1964, p.178. See Table II. The reduction was mainly due to deaths occurring after the first month. The neonatal death rate was virtually unchanged, linked as it was to the question of maternal health and mortality. An effective attack on the latter was not begun until the mid-1920's when the Health Department began a campaign to standardise obstetrical techniques, improve midwifery and maternity training, and raise the standard of maternity hospitals.

The Plunket Society is also of interest because of its association with contemporary perspectives on women and their role in New Zealand society. Just as the leaders of the NCW and indeed of the early WCTU, based though it was on a firm foundation of God, Home and Humanity, sought to widen women's horizons and to place their special talents at the service of society, Plunket through its emphasis on the domestic and maternal role helped to limit women's horizons to the home and domestic sphere. King was always a firm advocate of discipline, be it of mother or child. "Unselfishness and altruism are not the outcome of habitual self-indulgence", he wrote, "... failure through lack of control ... underlies all weakness of character, vice and criminality".⁷¹ Feeding, preferably breastfeeding, at regular intervals, the encouragement of regular habits, the conscientious preparation of wholesome foods and the shunning of patent baby foods were all part of the early Plunket regimen as expounded in King's books and articles, and when added to the routine demands of the servantless home certainly demanded selfless dedication on the part of the mother, whose conscience could no longer be clear if she shirked or delegated her maternal duty.

This is not to say that Plunket initiated the narrowing process - its own development must be viewed in relation to existing ideas and to an earlier decline in the feminist impulse of the 1890's - nor that the NCW and its affiliates rejected the domestic and familial conception of women. There is in fact in many of the speeches of NCW feminists a hearty endorsement of woman's role as mother and house-keeper - but a stress that woman could, and indeed, had a duty to combine this role with involvement in public affairs. They recognised that domesticity might not be the forte of every girl and sometimes insisted that every woman had a right to wants and ambitions of her own.

71. F. Truby King, Feeding and Care ... , p.149.

Stella Henderson, for example, thought that the great mistake of the past had been in supposing that "each and every girl should devote the whole of her life to domestic economy, and treating her with contumely if she dared to take up other branches in addition".⁷²

Plunket however placed its influence firmly behind the domestic role of women, seeking to "promote home-life by simplification". In doing so it endorsed a wider ethos whereby the very stability of the State was viewed as dependent upon the conformity of women to their "natural role". This ethos, which was clearly elaborated in the statements of Truby King, was taken up in a more general way by the Plunket Society, was seized upon by Government ministers and enforced by the State's agencies, especially education, and finally was largely accepted by women themselves.

In 1897 the Secretary of Labour, Edward Tregear, had emphasised that the entry of women into the work force must be regarded as a necessary evil, potentially fatal however to the nation's domestic comfort:

Great as is the admiration due to the independent-minded and often unselfish women and girls who have ventured out into the fierce current of competition and struggle in the working world, we must remember that the 'higher education' of some women and the business skill and mechanical capabilities of others should not be allowed to overshadow the fact that the woman who is house-wife and house-mother occupies, or ought to occupy the position of honour in the heart of the nation.

72. WR, June 1898, p.2.

If boys and girls (with the exception of those of "marked genius") were respectively instructed in farming, carpentry and boat-building, and cooking, scrubbing, the laying of tables and sewing, innumerable social ills would be eliminated. The "male larrikins and corrupted girl-children" of the colony were, in Tregear's view, the products less of poverty than of ill-kept and miserable homes characterised by mismanagement and waste.⁷³

Nearly twenty years later, with these opinions reinforced by the exigencies of war, the Minister of Education expressed almost exactly the same sentiment. By this time, however, the institutionalising of this outlook in the country's education system was a much more immediate prospect:

However much we may recognise the need for training girls to fill such positions as that of teacher, clerk, assistant or factory girl, we know that in the great majority of cases such occupations are merely temporary, and that nearly all of the girls become wives and mothers. This must be so if our nation is to stand in its present high position, which is due in the greatest measure to the influence of devoted mothers in our British homes

To this end we must see that every girl, both in her secondary and her primary education, shall have such training in domestic affairs as will render her great future work a source of interest and pleasure, and will enable her to meet its demands with the confidence and success that a good training can give.

The need of the State to secure the health and physical efficiency of our girls was never greater, more imperative, or more urgent than now. The vital worth of child-life to the well-being of the State is being revealed in no uncertain manner by present circumstances. To save child-life is an axiom of State preservation; to remedy the defect is an axiom of State economy.⁷⁴

73. Annual Report, Department of Labour, AJHR, 1897 (S.2), H.6, p.ix.

74. Annual Report, Department of Education, AJHR, 1916, E1A, p.8.

At a time when, as one woman teacher pointed out, the education of boys was inclining towards the encouragement of individual aptitudes,⁷⁵ it was assumed that the education of girls must be directed towards the eventual fulfillment of their "natural role". The conformity of women to this role was viewed as a panacea for a multitude of societal ills - a simple and above all economical solution to existing problems. The interests of the individual girl were to be subjugated to the ideal of State preservation, and any resistance eliminated by a stiff dose of domestic science in her formative years.

The Plunket Society was in part the organisational expression of existing concerns in society. Although its conception was due very much to the persistence and enthusiasm of Truby King, its expansion and acceptance by the women of New Zealand nevertheless showed that it met a definite need. The acquisition of the vote and various other rights in the nineteenth century had not been accompanied by significant changes in social attitudes, and their benefits seemed ever more illusory. Women, encouraged by the State and its agencies, now consciously sought fulfillment in home-life and devoted, satisfied maternity.

75. WR, July 1918, p.7, (N.E. Coad).

FEMINISM IN RETREAT.

The failures of reforms are rather apparent than real. The tragic sense comes from over-estimating the effects of each separate measure. We imagine we see the whole social system regenerated, and find that we have only cured one disease, or perhaps only temporarily improved the general health, while the whole body still remains imperfect. And yet it is a good thing and a great thing to have cured even the one disease.

Edith Searle Grossman.¹

The emergence of women as a distinct interest group in New Zealand society was attended by the formation on both local and national levels of separate women's organisations. The appearance of these societies was encouraged by the increasingly visible dislocations caused to the social fabric by the forces of urbanisation, industrialisation and economic depression in the later nineteenth century; for women in New Zealand, as elsewhere, felt more justified in combining in groups to promote reform than for social intercourse with members of their own sex and the examination of matters of common feminine interest and complaint. In thus aligning themselves with social reform movements women were able to avoid the censure still falling upon those of their sex who involved themselves in extra-domestic activities. Their involvement in reform work was seen to be an extension of their traditional caring role and a viable deployment of their "natural" feminine sympathies.

The greater amount of leisure available to many women (especially in towns where developing municipal services assumed some of the routine tasks which had fallen to the early settler's wife, and where domestic servants were more readily available) prompted the more energetic among them to seek outlets for those talents and ambitions which home-life could no longer satisfy. As communications improved,

1. Grossman, p.48.

as essentially local or provincial concerns were replaced by national perspectives, the organisation of women's societies on a national basis was attempted - though not without difficulty, as the history of the the first NCW was to show. Once this had happened the potential impact of women's organisations on decision making at government level was greatly increased and politicians, though they might sometimes scorn the women's submissions, could no longer ignore their views altogether.

From an awareness of social problems generally, it was but a small step to an appreciation of the inequities experienced by women as a specific group, and to a desire to help redress the grievances of their sex. Observant women soon noted that it was women and their dependent children upon whom economic deprivation pressed most heavily, and who were further deterred by legal restraints and social conventions from playing a more positive role in the determination of their own condition. Even more crucial to the developing feminist consciousness of the socially-motivated woman was the realisation that however highly regarded she might be in theory, her opinions were frequently dismissed out of hand since her real weapons were few.

As the first national association of women in New Zealand and the initiator of organised suffrage agitation the WCTU provided an important link between social reform and women's rights. Although women were encouraged to participate in the activities of the male temperance societies, it is likely that some of them found insufficient scope for their talents and leadership qualities in the male groups. Thus, when a representative of the American WCTU paid a visit to New Zealand in 1885 she was greeted with enthusiasm, and with considerable alacrity branches of the Union were established throughout New Zealand. The WCTU undoubtedly benefitted from its initially dominant position and attracted women of varied social and political persuasions. Its main concern - the liquor question - was one likely to be shared

to some degree by most "respectable" women, and the Union was, moreover, involved in a wide variety of welfare activities not directly related to temperance.

Later, as the temperance question gained in urgency, the outlook of the Union narrowed somewhat and, since new organisations had been formed which took over aspects of the Union's work, active membership appears to have been confined to those who placed temperance highest upon their list of reform priorities. Through certain of its members - Mrs Schnackenberg, her successor as president Mrs Atkinson, and most notably Miss Christina Henderson - the WCTU maintained close links with the NCW which endorsed most of its temperance aims. Union delegates to the Council did not always dominate the Council's discussions on temperance however. When, for example, a Union resolution that scientific temperance be made a compulsory pass subject in schools was amended to read that the subject be merely taught in schools, Mrs Williamson contended that prohibition would lead to other evils, adding that she believed in temperance in all things - including language.²

The SPWC, although less exclusively a "women's" organisation than the WCTU, shared its interest in improving the legal and social position of women and their dependents, and was popularly regarded as a women's organisation of the most commendable type. Its very title denotes a recognition of the special vulnerability of women and children, who needed safeguards beyond those provided by conventional legal and administrative procedures. Although an indisputably worthy organisation, ostensibly following in the best traditions of benevolent social service, it nevertheless represented a radical departure from earlier voluntary efforts wherein men and women had gained public approbation and personal satisfaction from "doing good" and distributing relief to society's indigents. Immediate contact between the Society and the recipient of its services, for example, was normally restricted to its paid secretary-visitor, reinforced where necessary by a male member of the Society.

2. NCW, Fifth Session, Dunedin 1900, p.48.

The SPWC was thus an organisation comprising women and working on a practical day to day basis for their welfare. A pioneer of the more professional approach to social welfare, it was nevertheless sufficiently close to women's traditional caring role to attract women who might have shied away from involvement in more overtly feminist associations. It attempted to influence legislative changes in areas where its practical experience had shown that existing laws were inadequate or outdated and in doing so, it generally gained a respectful hearing, especially from the press which regarded it as the best type of women's organisation and one which gave a knowledgeable opinion on matters of women's and children's welfare.

Such was not the case for the NCW which steadfastly maintained its right not only to consider issues related to the condition of women, but to give the women's viewpoint on each every matter which came to its attention (and which was thereby censured even by its sympathisers). Its aim was not merely isolated measures of reform, as one feels was so often the case with women's organisations in the 1930's and 1940's, but the integration of the woman's viewpoint into all aspects of life, not merely the familial and social, but into existing male-directed spheres of influence.

As committed to the popular conception of women's comforting ministrations in home and society as the most conservative ladies' charity, the NCW sought to extend women's social duty into government and administration, and to have them involved in decision-making at the highest levels. The enthusiastic and long-standing commitment of individual Council members to numerous public causes went unacknowledged in criticisms of their endless chatter and discussion, and members were continually forced to justify their involvement in Council activities, and to insist that they were not bad mothers or neglectful housekeepers. In this way the Councillors maintained an allegiance to traditional values even while approving such controversial issues as cooperative settlements, land nationalisation and reform of the police.

The correctness, decorum and even occasionally the lack of animation with which the Council discussed radical issues and advocated all-embracing reform, particularly struck the French observer Andre Siegfried, and points to one of the essential contradictions of New Zealand feminism in the 1890's.³

The NCW was a federation of other associations and depended for its vitality on its affiliates' continued existence and loyalty. As individuals found their allegiance to an affiliate organisation of more pressing concern than Council business, and as many of the smaller women's societies formed in the 1890's were dissolved, the Council's own viability was affected. After 1900 the difference between the committed feminists and the larger group to whom general social reform was a higher priority became more apparent. In the letters of Mrs Sievwright, herself a supporter of temperance and a WCTU member, there is a tone almost of alienation from her colleagues in the temperance cause, and certainly a note of frustration at their failure to advance the women's cause in their other endeavours. Mrs Sievwright still sought, when the wider aim of a women's federation was fading, to organise local Councils and to form reading circles to disseminate information on the women's movement.

Whereas the "advanced women" of the 1870's and 1880's, the pioneers in women's education and wider employment had stressed the similarities between men and women, and the equal facility with which they could apply their minds to a task, could acquire the same training, and compete efficiently with men in careers and professions, the trend of the 1900's was toward the reassertion of sexual differences and, associated with this, a revitalised emphasis on the maternal role. This factor was present to some extent even in the rhetoric of the suffrage debate. A potent argument for extending the vote to women was that women might thereby be better equipped to protect their families.

3. Siegfried, pp. 289-295.

They would be better mothers since they would be able to instruct their children in their responsibilities as citizens - public spirited mothers, one article pointed out, would make public spirited sons.⁴

This reasoning was continued in the deliberations of the NCW where the concept of government as "enlarged housekeeping" was continually promoted as a justification for women's involvement in it. Such arguments constituted good tactics whereby antifeminists were met on their own ground and the assertion that a woman's place was in the home was turned against them. But in agreeing that woman's primary place was in the home, and in stressing women's special skills and feminine uniqueness, these early feminists exalted motherhood at the expense of the independent woman and unwittingly worked against the wider conception of women's role; certainly against any real alternative to the existing family pattern. The women's movement at all times had its contradictions and herein lay a major inconsistency.

From a stress on women's sexual uniqueness as a justification for their sharing in public decisions and responsibilities, it was but a short step to a re-emphasis of the maternal role - to the consideration that women could, after all, wield power through their children. When prominent personalities began to speak of women's responsibility in determining the quality not only of individual children's lives, but in the attainment of "racial success and national greatness", women were ready to answer the call. The attractions of homelife were understandable, especially when compared with the trials of a public life.

Plunket, with its stress on the duties of motherhood and its regimen for the production of healthy, attractive children, offered a powerful inducement for women to realise their true vocation under the

4. Prohibitionist, Nov. 1891, p.3. "Sixteen Reasons for Supporting Women Suffrage".

guidance of an officially approved association of women dedicated to the reinforcement of the maternal ideal. As a national organisation Plunket undoubtedly reached a greater proportion of the female population than any of its forerunners. It provided the opportunity not only for social intercourse and public action, but provided a service for those to whom active commitment was impossible.

Despite its unquestioned humanitarian role and the practical help and advice which proved so valuable to innumerable mothers, Plunket was part of a movement which involved the narrowing of women's opportunities. The old conflict between home and work or public involvement remained, now weighted by the demands of "scientific motherhood" and the decrease in domestic servants. The desperation of those women who cabled incoming ships in an attempt to engage servants⁵ and who held public meetings to discuss the severity of the shortage,⁶ becomes more intelligible when placed against Plunket reports of mothers unable to give sufficient attention to their children or to keep "in form" (as one report put it) for pregnancy while coping with the duties of the home.⁷ Although Plunket was at this time more concerned with the physical well-being of the child, its appearance anticipated a period when the maternal role and child care would increasingly engage the attention of "experts", and when the mother-child relationship would gain an emotional intensity possibly unparalleled in history.⁸

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5. In August 1907 the 30 emigrating domestics on board the "Turakina" were engaged by wireless while still at sea. ODT, 27 Aug. 1912.
 6. A conference of Dunedin ladies in 1912 recommended the establishment of training hostels for domestic service and compulsory continuation classes in domestic science for girls in offices and factories. ODT, 30 Aug. 1912.
 7. Central Council, Annual Report 1920, p.3.
 8. Some recent historical studies, such as Philippe Aries' Centuries of Childhood (1962) have argued that the family as we know it is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Aries suggests that the medieval household was a large, loosely-knit entity in which the productive relationship was more important than the personal or emotional. Not until the eighteenth century did the family concept begin to spread to all classes and private parent-child relationships become important. Other writers have surmised that the completion of this process in the nineteenth century involved a narrowing of women's opportunities and resulted in the feminist movement. See William O'Neill, The Woman Movement, 1969, pp.7-8.

A common feature of the four organisations on which this thesis has focussed was their attempts to promote legislative reforms or to influence governmental decisions. Although Plunket's efforts in this respect were the most narrow some of the specific reforms sought by the other three bodies were almost identical - this is not surprising of course in view of the overlap of membership already noted. Requests for the raising of the age of consent, State responsibility for neglected and criminal children, and the appointment of women officials to government departments and State institutions figured prominently among the resolutions of the WCTU, the SPWC and the NCW, and would doubtless have gained the approval of many individual members of Plunket. For the WCTU and NCW, as indeed for many unaligned citizens, the repeal of the discriminatory C.D. Act was an urgent priority, while measures to augment the economic security of women and children figured prominently among their demands. A striking characteristic of many of the measures supported by women's organisations was their acceptance of State interference and the frequency with which they advocated greater State responsibility. This was especially true of more radical bodies such as the NCW, but even the SPWC which prided itself on its voluntary basis and spoke out against State-originated benevolence recognised the need for some State interference. This was probably because of the absence in a relatively new society such as New Zealand of wide extremes of wealth or of privately based reserves of charitable funds.

It is another question how much of the social legislation of the 1890's and 1900's owed its appearance to the organised voice of New Zealand's women, especially when this voice had been given force by the concession of 1893. Despite the disappointment of some at women's failure to introduce prohibition, many important enactments certainly corresponded with the women's vision of social justice, and in the 1900's the earlier suffragist leaders were fond of compiling lists of the advances made. The 1894 Legitimation Act which legitimised

those children whose parents married after their birth, the 1895 Adoption of Children Act which prevented adoption without the consent of a magistrate, the 1896 Criminal Code Amendment Act which raised the age of consent to sixteen, the Female Law Practitioners Act of the same year which enabled women to practise at the bar, the 1898 Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act which provided for more equitable grounds of divorce, the 1900 Testator's Family Maintenance Act, the Juvenile Smoking Suppression Act of 1903, the Midwives Act of 1904, the Offensive Publications Act of 1905 and the Juvenile Offenders Act of 1906 - these were but some of the measures which women congratulated themselves on having advanced.⁹ Even Seddon (who could afford to be generous to his countrywomen since they had consistently helped return him to power) asserted that "In the legislation of which we boast, in the great social advancement we have made, more particularly in that great beneficent Legislation, the Old Age Pensions Act, I may say that women are behind it all".¹⁰

It is fruitless to speculate whether this legislation would have been enacted had not women acquired the vote or whether, as Lady Stout maintained, politicians were sufficiently fearful of the female voters' censure to concede to their wishes. When after a while it became obvious that women would not vote as a consciously organised body, it is quite likely that their organisations carried less weight with politicians than previously. What is certain however, and many contemporary observers were agreed on this point, is that a proportion of New Zealand women were awakened to a sense of their social and political responsibilities. Through their concern and their enthusiasm

9. e.g. Lady Anna Stout, "What the Franchise has done for the Women and Children of New Zealand", Englishwoman, May 1910, pp.3-6.

10. Quoted in D.M. Carter "An Estimate of the Political Development of New Zealand Women", M.A. Thesis, 1947, p.66.

through their public and private agitation they promoted interest in and accelerated the trends towards reform in such areas as child welfare, maternal care and the legal equality of the sexes. This was certainly the opinion of Mrs Sheppard who, when questioned in 1914 on the effect of the franchise, stated that "the enfranchisement of women was in itself an expression of the growing sense of justice and humanitarianism in New Zealand. That sense, once aroused could not stop short at one legislative act, but found further expression, and the women's vote gave it an added force". Most of the more important enactments, she added, were initiated and agitated for by New Zealand's women. Others were proposed by legislators and "received such hearty support from the women voters as hastened their passage through Parliament".¹¹

The very proliferation of social legislation in the years following the franchise was, however, fatal to the women's cause, leading as it did to a feeling of satisfaction and even complacency. Around 1908 Mrs Sheppard herself questioned whether separate women's organisations still had a role to play:

Today, many of the reforms we were ridiculed for urging are now on our Statute Books, and others are considered to be fair questions of practical politics. Some of us are beginning to wonder whether there will be a need for Societies composed entirely of women much longer and if the humanitarian view of politics will not soon have permeated the community sufficiently to be undertaken by Societies of both sexes.¹²

11. Evening Star, 19 Sept. 1914, Press Cutting, NCW Collection, Turnbull Library.

12. K.W. Sheppard, Woman Suffrage in New Zealand, [1908?] p.9.

For some women the franchise had been an end in itself, and for them the need to further extend themselves had ended in 1893. The suffrage campaign had in fact imposed a somewhat specious unity which dissolved under the pressures of party affiliation, divergent reform priorities and self-interest, while the comparative ease with which the vote was acquired may have worked against sustained radical feeling. Mrs Sheppard further maintained that the absence of any one town in New Zealand with a sufficiently large population to focus the country's intellectual resources also handicapped the women's movement.¹³ Resources and talents were widely scattered and the movement probably suffered through lack of stimulation from wider intellectual currents.

Although aware of the need to widen their basis of support the women's organisations retained an undeniably middle-class and indeed, a somewhat middle-aged aspect, since it was only women with the leisure and financial resources to participate in their activities who did so. A working woman could not attend the meetings of an association which met in the day time and (as present day trade unions have found, even with a shorter working day) she was frequently too tired or bound by family commitments to attend evening meetings.

Nor did the more zealous NCW feminists such as Mrs Sheppard consider that the professional or business woman was doing her bit for the women's cause, or for social reform generally. The White Ribbon several times denounced the "callous, selfish indifference of those who, profiting by the advantages so dearly won by the pioneers in professional and business life, make no attempt to right other wrongs or to lift the burden from those still oppressed".¹⁴ It was sad enough to

13. Mrs Sheppard to Dr P.A. Saloman, Corresponding Secretary of International Council of Women, 9 March 1911, Sheppard Collection.

14. WR, May 1906, p.7.

see the apathy and obstruction of women who had no special opportunities to widen their outlook, the Ribbon again commented, but more pitiable still was the self-interest of those "who had reaped what came in their way of others' sowing".¹⁵ As women's entrance into certain spheres became less disputed, as higher education became readily available to those who sought it, those who entered these spheres apparently felt less responsibility towards others of their sex, and saw their attainments more in the light of a personal accomplishment than a triumph for womankind. Their commitment was to the immediate task in hand and in view of the demands made of them in the most readily accessible profession - teaching - it is likely that they too found their energies drained by the daily routine.

The fact was that to numerous women the disadvantages of a public life, whether in male dominated areas of employment or in the role of public agitator, were becoming all too clear. The ridicule and, even worse, the apathy experienced in the latter capacity were keenly felt by even the most stalwart members of the old suffragist guard, while the exceptional woman who succeeded in the business and professional world found demands made of her which would not be made of a man on a similar pay scale, or even in the same position. Submissions made by women teachers to the 1912 Education Commission, for example, indicated that many dissatisfied women were leaving the service to take less responsible jobs at only slightly lower rates of pay. Able and experienced women, it was maintained, experienced the humiliation of seeing young and comparatively inexperienced men promoted above them, and when they retired it was on a pension far below that of men who had done the same work in their teaching career. "The finest girls of today", Miss Euphemia Simpson contended, "are not going to enter a profession where, no matter how talented they may be, they see nothing ahead but a blind alley as far as promotion is concerned".¹⁶

15. WR, May 1901, pp.6-7.

16. Report and Proceedings of Commission on Education, AJHR, 1912, E. 12, p.82.

Apart from the unfairly weighted struggle to succeed in her chosen occupation, the business or professional woman also found that celibacy was considered her inevitable lot, since the social supports which might have enabled women to combine motherhood with employment were almost non-existent.¹⁷ As Dr Montague Lomax-Smith had told Christchurch women in a series of addresses during 1895, those who chose the path of study and achievement must recognise that they could not be the mothers of future Bacons and write philosophy as well - to gain one they must lose the other.¹⁸ Given the alternatives it was understandable that most women chose the security of wedlock and maternity to remaining unmarried and pursuing an extra-domestic calling - to joining the "immense army of unwilling celibates" who in Lomax-Smith's estimation made up "one of the saddest sights in the world".¹⁹

Absorption in affairs of the home had considerable attractions nonetheless, especially when bolstered by the approbation of community leaders. In particular, stress was laid upon the great power women wielded through their regnancy of the home. Through their manipulation of their husbands and (presumably their male) offspring, they were assured, they ruled the world.

17. This was not strictly true of the poorer class of working women, whose employment was seen as preferable to their dependence on charitable aid. For them there were isolated examples of creches or child-minding centres established to keep their children off the streets and under a good moral influence. The very first kindergartens had such a charitable, rather than an educational function.

18. Montague Lomax-Smith, Woman in Relation to Physiology, Sex, Emotion and Intellect, [1895], p.12.

19. *ibid.*

The notion that women must live through and for others underlay much of the thinking of the antifeminists and, albeit more unconsciously, of their feminist counterparts. Men might live for themselves, might develop their individual talents and realise their personal ambitions, but despite the outward advances made by women in the later nineteenth century little change was made to the self-sacrifice expected of them - whether in the home or in the context of public service. "Girls, who will soon be mothers" were urged in one magazine to develop their home influence and make the home inviting for their fathers and brothers:

To do this you must not consider yourselves, your own rights, pleasures and amusement, but, putting these on one side, think first of others. Of course it is not pleasant to put down the book in which you are interested in order to fetch your father's slippers or set his tea; to turn from your own studies in order to help Willie with his ... but it is by a thousand daily recurring acts of this kind that homes are rendered happy and attractive.²⁰

Even in their organisations women tended to stress this ideal of service. Where societies did not have an overtly philanthropic purpose they were given to intensive consideration of the public weal and a stress on women's duty to consider the welfare of others. Many of the demands made by the NCW for advances in women's position stressed not only their natural right to certain privileges, but wherever possible emphasised the benefits such advances would have for the entire social structure, for children and for men also. The economic independence of married women would provide for the greater protection of children,²¹ while enabling men to avoid the moral corruption falling to a tyrant; equal pay would remove the danger of

20. Zealandia, Vol.1, No.3, p.135.

21. e.g. Mrs Sheppard to NCW, Fourth Session, Auckland 1899, p.37.

cheap female labour with its attendant threat to the man's sufficient wage.²² And yet it was only in the Council that the open claim was made for "women's right to have wants, and as many and varied as possible, and the right to satisfy these wants".²³

In view of these entrenched attitudes it is not surprising that even many of the NCW members appear almost defensive about their activities outside the home and felt the need to assert their own adequacy as wives and mothers. To women less confident of their public duty the possible censure involved amounted almost to a denial of their basic femininity. The inevitable accusations of selfishness were likely to be even more daunting. When, on the other hand the very security of the State was promoted as dependent upon women's conformity to their "natural" role, their acceptance of this womanly ideal was very nearly complete.

Unfortunately the "professionalisation" of the domestic role which their mentors had anticipated did not occur. Domestic science in the schools and in the university never disassociated itself from the stigma which had attached to domestic service (as evidenced perhaps by the need to make domestic instruction compulsory). It failed to endow household labour with a dignity and status equal to the outside work of men, more especially since such labour was losing the economic functions associated with it in the early colonial period.

22. WR, June 1904, pp.6-7.

23. Miss Christina Henderson, quoted in WR, May 1900, p.9.

The greater involvement of women in economic, political and administrative processes which had been anticipated by the suffragists did not happen, nor were they truly accepted as men's equals. Women as much as ever were divorced from those functions on which society bases it's actual criteria of achievement and worth.

APPENDIX.

CASES TAKEN FROM THE FIRST RECORD BOOK OF THE AUCKLAND BRANCH
OF THE THE SPWC, MAY 1894 - APRIL 1896.

Case 13:

Dr King brought before the Society the case of a "notoriously bad prostitute" about to be discharged from the Costley Home with her baby which she refused to feed properly. King feared for the child's life and considered it should be removed from the mother. The child was put out to board by the mother and in just over a month was reported dead from natural causes.

Case 15:

A wife complained to Dr King of her husband's cruelty and that he "communicated disease". When the chairman wrote asking her to call, the husband opened the letter and turned her out of the house. The husband's solicitor then charged her with drunken habits. The case was resolved by separation, in which the wife came off rather worse than the husband: she was to be paid 7/6 per week, "he to keep the child, and she to remain chaste".

Case 21:

A mother reported that her 19 year old daughter had been seduced by a 26 year old widower. A baby boy was born at the Costley Home and after considerable negotiation maintenance of 4/- per week was arranged by the Society, the father to pay an extra £1, "when he could". Four months later the child died from diarrhoea, and six months later the girl's mother reported that her daughter was "once more in the family way" to the same man.

Case 34:

The Society's visitor and a friend investigated an advertisement for hydropathic treatment - "Ladies' Ailments a Specialty" and with the Chairman concluded that the advertiser had only a superficial knowledge of massage and was "a man once known in Auckland for his evil ways". It was resolved to watch the matter.

Case 35:

It was reported that two women had lost their lives through the carelessness of a Doctor G. who had gone from a post-mortem to a confinement. Though two patients afterwards died from blood-poisoning, perhaps more germane to the complaint was the fact that Doctor G. was living with another man's wife. The Chairman discussed the complaint with Inspector Hickson who promised to look into the matter.

Case 39:

A woman known to be a prostitute was reported to send her daughter out in the streets at night "dressed up like a doll to entice men". The Society asked for a police investigation which concluded that there was insufficient evidence to pursue the complaint. Five months later the child was said to have been severely thrashed by a man living with the mother, but no marks were found on her. The mother was then charged with keeping a brothel, but the case was later dismissed.

Case 46:

A 17 year old girl admitted to several people that her own father was the father of her child. The Society's Chairman was obliged to inform the complainant that there was no law in New Zealand to punish incest.

Case 64:

Neighbours reported to the Society that a small child was looked after by a woman who treated her cruelly and "gave her stuff to make her sleep". When the Society made enquiries the woman claimed to have only her own child living with her. This was later disproved and as the woman's house was unlicensed for child care she was charged with evasion of the Infant Life Protection Act.

Case 72:

A girl was given "strong poisons" by a male friend to cause an abortion. The Society questioned the girl and informed the police, but in the ensuing court case the man was acquitted.

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