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978-0-521-43611-3 - Woman Suffrage in Australia: A Gift or a Struggle?

Audrey Oldfield

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WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN AUSTRALIA

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*For Katherine, Elizabeth, Joel, Mitchell and Amy.
A generation which will learn that their mothers, as well
as their fathers, made Australian history.*

'Power is the ballot, the symbol of freedom and equality, without which no citizen is sure of keeping even that which he hath, much less of getting that which he hath not.'

SUSAN B. ANTHONY, 1871

'What is a vote? It is a certain factor in the system of our government. Does Miss Badham suppose that we are merely fighting for this piece of machinery, which may be here today and gone tomorrow? No, we are battling for the liberty, the freedom of women.'

ROSE SCOTT, 1896

'The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting than the story of that emancipation itself.'

VIRGINIA WOOLF, 1929

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Dr William Maloney
Lilian Locke
Sir Thomas Bent
A Victorian voter's right
Alice Henry and Miles Franklin
Margaret Fisher, Emily McGowan and
Vida Goldstein

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Abbreviations

Libraries

BL:WA	Battye Library, Western Australia.
JOL:Q	John Oxley Library, Queensland.
LTL:V	La Trobe Library, Victoria.
ML:NSW	Mitchell Library, New South Wales.
ML:SA	Mortlock Library, South Australia.
SL:NSW	State Library, New South Wales.
SL:Q	State Library, Queensland.
SL:SA	State Library, South Australia.
SL:T	State Library, Tasmania.
SL:V	State Library, Victoria.
SL:WA	State Library, Western Australia.

Parliamentary Debates

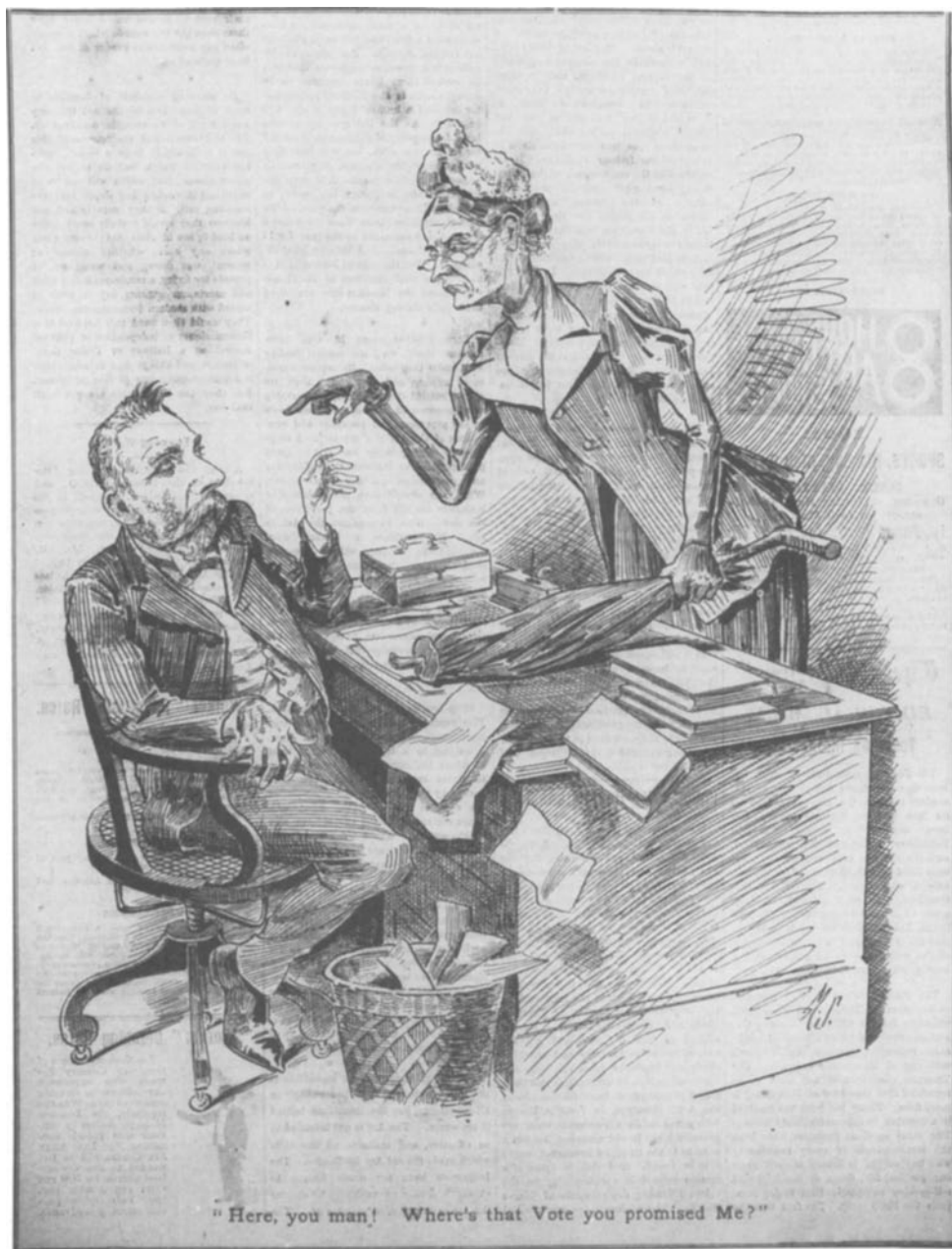
CAPD	<i>Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Debates.</i>
NSWPD	<i>New South Wales, Parliamentary Debates.</i>
QPD	<i>Queensland, Parliamentary Debates.</i>
SAPD	<i>South Australia, Parliamentary Debates.</i>
VPD	<i>Victoria, Parliamentary Debates.</i>
WAPD	<i>Western Australia, Parliamentary Debates.</i>

Organisations

WCTU	Woman's Christian Temperance Union.
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In mid-1900 the Queensland Premier, Robert Philp, promised a delegation of the three suffrage groups that he would introduce a woman suffrage bill, but did not fulfil his promise.
Worker (Brisbane), 17 November 1900. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

Preface

In the early 1980s, during an election campaign which generated much discussion as to whether women's issues might determine the outcome, I went to the New South Wales State Library to research an article on the granting of the vote to Australian women. I found only a few pieces in academic magazines, but they said little about the women themselves. Driven to contemporary newspapers and to the Mitchell Library's stock of documents, I soon realised that this could be no article. The stories of the campaigns have had to be pieced together like a giant jigsaw, using parliamentary debates, press reports, surviving records of societies, Louisa Lawson's *Dawn*, Vida Goldstein's *Woman's Sphere*, and the records of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Rose Scott's meticulous preservation of letters gave me references to what was happening at the time in other states, and when I visited their Australiana collections I sometimes augmented my knowledge of the New South Wales movement. I am left with some sadness at the end of my years of research, however; there are some gaps in the jigsaw because so many quite prominent women did not think their experiences important enough to commit to paper, and much of what the others left has been destroyed.

The New South Wales suffragists held what they termed a 'joy meeting' in late 1902 to celebrate the granting of the Commonwealth and New South Wales votes. The platform of the Sydney School of Arts was crowded with politicians, all of whom were eager to accept the credit, and in the process woo the new electorate. Rose Scott told the men that their names would live 'not only in the history of Australia, but in that of the world', while the names of the women would be forgotten. Her words have been true for the best part of a century. I hope that this book will reverse the situation.

Being so heavily dependent on original sources, I have relied very much on the aid of librarians. I cannot speak too highly of the help given to me in the Mitchell Library,

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but I must also thank those in the Tasmanian Archives, the La Trobe Library in Victoria, the Mortlock in South Australia, the John Oxley in Brisbane, and the Batty in Perth. In all capital cities I was received warmly and courteously at the offices of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and was given access to their material. They have my thanks. I also express my appreciation to those of the above institutions which gave me permission to publish material from their collections.

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Audrey Oldfield

Women's suffrage in Australia was one of the earliest objectives of the movement for gender equality in Australia. It began to be socially and politically accepted and legislated during the late 19th century, beginning with South Australia in 1894 and Western Australia in 1899. In 1902, the newly established Australian Parliament passed the Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902, which set a uniform law enabling women (except those who were "aboriginal natives" of Australia, Africa, Asia and the Pacific