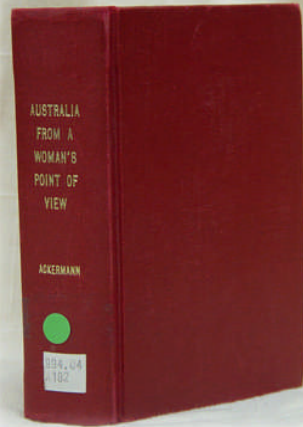


Australia From a Woman's Point of View

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**AUSTRALIA FROM A
WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW**
By **JESSIE ACKERMANN, F.R.S.G.S.**

WITH SIXTY-FOUR PLATES

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. SOME GENERAL REMARKS	1
2. THE NATURAL ASPECT OF THE ISLAND	6
3. A GREAT COUNTRY OF GREAT ENTERPRISE	16
4. THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA	35
5. AMUSEMENTS AND GAMBLING	46
6. LIFE IN THE BACKBLOCKS	59
7. GLIMPSES OF HOME LIFE IN AUSTRALIA	70
8. MEN IN AUSTRALIA AS HUSBANDS AND FATHERS	76
9. MOTHERS, CHILDREN, AND THE BIRTH-RATE	86
10. THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE PEOPLE	101
11. ROMANCES OF CHRISTIAN ENTERPRISES	115
12. CULTS AND " ISMS " ABOUND	124
13. THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY MILES THROUGH THE BACKBLOCKS IN A GOSPEL VAN	135
14. CONSTITUTIONAL SETTING OF POLITICAL OPERA- TIONS	144
15. HOW AUSTRALIA IS RULED	154
16. STRIKES AND THEIR CAUSES	165
17. UNIONISM AS A MONOPOLY	181

CHAPTER	PAGE
18. POLITICIANS	191
19. RIOTS IN PARLIAMENT	201
20. HOW WOMEN GOT THE FRANCHISE	207
21. WOMEN OF AUSTRALIA AS CITIZENS	217
22. SOME LAWS RELATING TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN	226
23. REFORMS WHICH WOMEN CITIZENS COULD ACCOM- PLISH	236
24. WOMEN AND WAGES	249
25. THE GIRLS OF AUSTRALIA	261
26. EDUCATION OF GIRLS	274
27. THE BUSINESS GIRL	281
28. THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIA	292
29. REMINISCENCES OF MY FIRST VISIT TO AUSTRALIA	301

AUSTRALIA

FROM A WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW

CHAPTER I

SOME GENERAL REMARKS

*"Thou hast in thy confines many a haven
Where peace and plenty reign from year to year,
Where lines on fair white brows are never graven
By lonely days and nights of lonely fear.*

*"Where dance and song are never out of fashion,
And life is an eternal, gracious Spring:
Where Honour is a creed and Love a passion,
And every true man is of himself a King."*

KENNETH MACKAY.

AUSTRALIA, to many, is still an undiscovered continent. Formerly the position of the island left it far off the regular highways of commerce. So meagre was the knowledge of its possibilities, so uninviting its apparent prospects, so scanty the openings of a business character, that inducements to visit the country were few indeed, until the discovery of gold brought the famous immigration of early years. This led to a new and enlarged interest in the country, and great was the influx of people, chiefly men, which followed.

When one fully realises the extent of natural resources, the opportunity of creating a distinct

CHAPTER IV

THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA

*“ From gross delights and selfish aims,
From souls that love whate'er is mean,
From every thought that mars or shames,
Keep Thou our waking manhood clean.”*

KENNETH MACKAY.

IN most countries the population is a matter of natural increase. As peoples are a reflection of the locality in which they are born, a race is as much the product of a country as trees are of the soil. Students agree that the geographical position, climate, landscape, and, in fact, the soil itself, because of what it produces, are all woven into the very fabric of peoples, producing that indefinable whole summed up in the word temperament. It therefore holds that, in general make-up, they must be in harmony with other features of nature about them. Types of people are but so many expressions of physical geography.

The Greeks wrought what they did, not because they were Greeks, but because of the particular situation and conditions of Greece. The Spartan women were a phase of development, not because they were born in a country called Sparta, that might have been anywhere, but because Sparta is where it is. The word “call” expresses it better, perhaps, than any other. The “call” of a locality gets

CHAPTER VI

LIFE IN THE BACKBLOCKS

*“ But a people rot in the lap of ease,
And trade, be it all in all,
Breeds the canker-worm of a fell disease—
The germ of a Nation's fall.”*

KENNETH MACKAY.

THE “Never-Never” is the Soul of Australia. This is where failure kills, or success is writ large; where weak women are made strong, and courage finds birth in a single day of struggle; where Hope chases the shadows of Despair that lower and often settle upon the heavy grind of daily toil. So hard is the struggle that only a woman's heart may cry it out. Her soul would shrivel if her faith failed. The blowing sands of the “Never-Never” have made women brave to endure. The sweeping fires which threaten property and life have armed them with almost superhuman strength. The howling winds, which roar about the house, hammering and beating at door and window until no spoken word within can be heard, bring no terror to her heart which is stayed on Him “Who calmed the waves on Galilee.” Soul meets soul in the battle—a battle in which women would go to the wall did not the hand of Nature restore a balance at her very feet in those kindly voices which compel a forgetfulness of woe-swept senses. Morning always comes after a night of storm.

CHAPTER VIII

MEN IN AUSTRALIA AS HUSBANDS AND FATHERS

*"This life is but a chapter in a story,
A minor phase in an omniscient plan,
A fleeting prelude to the changeless glory,
That awaits the coming perfect man."*

KENNETH MACKAY.

MUCH space in these pages is given to the status of women and girls of Australia, because of their classification in political life and the many opportunities and obligations which fall to their lot. The position of men in all countries is practically the same, while that of women changes with the spirit of the times, until it is now taken as the criterion of national progress. It has been said: "A country will never rise above the status of its women."

To state the condition of women in Australia and relate their activities in no way discounts men, or gives the impression that the sterner sex is either the submerged or subdued half. It merely reflects the spirit of a new order of things. Men have always, throughout human history, held a recognised place. It has never been challenged, disputed, or claimed by women. So great an innovation as citizenship for women has in no way readjusted their sphere, nor is such likely to be the case. In relation to matters dealt with in these pages, men have gone the usual way of men the world over. This being so, there is

CHAPTER IX

MOTHERS, CHILDREN, AND THE BIRTH-RATE

*" All things are bright to you, baby mine !
For the world is very fair, and no echo of despair
Comes to fill your heart with care, baby mine.*

*" All lips have smiles for you, baby mine ;
For earth's sadness or its gloom, there is neither place nor room,
When a life has yet to bloom, baby mine."*

KENNETH MACKAY.

WE may sum up the shortcomings of the women of Australia in regard to their citizenship, point out their weaknesses as a whole, run up against their points and angles with evidences of the collision, but it must be said that they are royal mothers. Many of them, as such, reach the ideal standard ; remembering, of course, that there are exceptions to this statement, and very many of them.

It is impossible to " toe these women to the line " with the mothers of other countries, for the reason that the setting here is unique. It has no parallel elsewhere.

Mothers of all classes are overworked. This is one situation which cannot be overcome by the possession of money. It all revolves around the cruel lack of domestic help. The entire supervision of the house, often the housework itself, including the washing, devolves upon the mother. Then there is the care of the children : the making and

CHAPTER X

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE PEOPLE

*“ Grant us, O God, the Right Divine,
That steadfast steers its course by Thee,
So that our lives as lamps may shine,
To guide Australia's destiny.”*

KENNETH MACKAY.

RELIGIOUS alarmists are numerous, and are an unfettered menace to the country. They fairly wallow in lamentation over any sign of unquenched fires or unbounded future woe. The “ eternal punishment ” dogma so fascinates them that to limit future misery would rob them of their chief joy of heaven. They are dying off gradually, although slowly, and for some time will still put forth like a hardy annual which neither cold nor heat blights or kills.

To a normal, sane mind the religious unrest of Australia is the most hopeful sign of progress. With every phase of life bounding onward, it would mean spiritual decay and a victory of the material were the people to sit like so many graven images under the false preaching which, at most, was merely spiritual pap for sucklings when the race was young and wrapped in superstition.

Australia cannot afford to lag behind in this general move toward a knowledge of God. The whole world, both Christian and non-Christian, is in the throes of a great religious unrest. There has been

CHAPTER XX

HOW WOMEN GOT THE FRANCHISE

*“ When shadows gather round our pathway, sweet,
Remember, lest your spirit faint and fail,
How out beyond, where sky and forest meet,
After long quest, you found ‘ The Holy Grail.’ ”*

KENNETH MACKAY.

IN the Conservative countries, which are emerging from the “ old order of things ” into constitutional forms of government, the great question is, “ What shall we do with our women ? ” At other times men were wont to say, “ We will never understand women.” They may not understand them any better to-day, but thinking men know full well that the enlarged influence of women must be reckoned with as a vital factor in all human affairs.

Woman is now a real world-problem because her new position has brought her into close competition with men in every walk of life. The economic value of women to the nation is involved in modern development. How best to utilise this force to the advantage of the home, and for the good of the country, is now the chief concern of thinking men. The situation throughout the world resolves itself into the same question. “ How may we locate women in this oncoming new civilisation without rendering her advancement a loss to home, and a detriment to her sex and the race ? ”

CHAPTER XXII

SOME LAWS RELATING TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN

*" We prate of chivalry. Laud those who live
The pain and care of Motherhood to face,
The while we steadfastly refuse to give
Them equal rights to shape our coming race."*

KENNETH MACKAY.

As in other countries, the women of Australia, generally speaking, are alarmingly ignorant of the laws under which they live. Few, indeed, have the slightest knowledge of even their legal relation to their children; and as for their status, it is as unknown to them as the most remote foreign subject.

Although women have been made equal with men so far as voting is concerned, the most appalling inequality in their legal status obtains in every State of the Commonwealth. This is observed in regard to punishment for given offences, as well as in provisions made by some of the States for the housing of offenders against the law in the case of State wards, and especially in relation to the conduct of women in public places. There are offences for which a policeman puts his hand upon a woman and brings her to account for her deportment before the law; while a man, guilty of similar conduct, merely acts up to the privileges which are granted by men to men.

If a girl with painted face and brazen mien

CHAPTER XXVI

EDUCATION OF GIRLS

*"I would that each of you could understand
How much the future of this unshaped land
Lies in the hollow of your youthful hand."*

KENNETH MACKAY.

It is impossible to make a general statement about the education of girls in Australia. The matter so largely depends on the point of view of parents, especially the father who must pay the bills. Public schools up to a certain standard are free. A silly idea prevails in some quarters that to take advantage of this splendid process of development appears to be accepting charity, and indicates a niggardly spirit in sending children to free schools. It is the supreme duty of the State to prepare children for intelligent citizenship. That these schools should be open and free to all is a matter which does not require discussion. As all property-holders contribute by taxation to the upkeep of the system, there can be no ground upon which to make the charge of trying to "get something for nothing," which is so often heard in regard to well-to-do people whose children are pupils at public schools.

In most of the State schools a girl is required to attend until she is fourteen years of age. Later movements depend wholly on circumstances. If the services of girls are required in the home, or

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BUSINESS GIRL

*“For at last I saw my pathway lay
Where men and women bend beneath life's yoke,
If so be I might help to bear the stroke
That falls upon the backs of such as they—
If so be I might make a heart glad
That now for aught I know is lone and sad.”*

KENNETH MACKAY.

As the population of Australia is composed very largely of well-to-do working people—but workers, nevertheless—it must follow that vast numbers of young women are engaged in business. Most girls positively refuse to take up domestic service as a calling, although it offers more than double the money to be earned in factories. The lack of domestic help is so keenly felt that the arrival of every ship from England is closely watched by hundreds of housewives, in the hope that maids may be obtained from among the immigrants. The number is so small that it has made no appreciable difference in the ceaseless demand. In one office 284 applications were lodged, and thirty-nine positions, were filled.

There is a growing contempt for housework. The reasons for this have been so frequently discussed that it is sufficient merely to state the fact and mention that the chief objections are the length

INDEX

A

- ABORIGINES, Benedictine mission to, 116 *et seq.*; characteristics of, 117-8
Adelaide, strike of cadets at, 170
Anarchists' Association, meeting of, 132-4
"Anti" spirit in politics, 154
Architecture, non-characteristic type of, 293
Art in Australia, lack of, 41; no encouragement for native, 41-3
Australian "type" not yet fixed, 37-8

B

- Backblocks, life in, 59 *et seq.*; lack of nurses in, 61; motherhood in, 63; mission work in, 135 *et seq.*; life in, 138 *et seq.*
Barton, Mr. E., 145
Benedictine Mission, 115
Betting, prevalence of, 49 *et seq.*
Birds, songless, 39
Birth-rate, decline of, 94
"Black Boy" tree, 9
Blue Mountains, 6
Boys, and compulsory military training, 99
Brentano, Prof., 97
Brisbane, strike riots at, Mr. Fisher and, 161; causes of, 175; Government attitude to strikers, 188-9
Bush-fire, description of, 12

C

- Cadets' strike at Adelaide, 170
Canberra, 34 (*see also* Capital City)
Capital and labour, positions of, 166, 184
Capital City, site of, 28; discussion of, 29-30; plans for, 30-1; development of, 31-4
Card-playing, prevalence of, among women, 51
Cattle as a national asset, 18
Children, training of, 87-8; temperament of, 88; education of, 90; work as fruit pickers, 91-2; as rabbit catchers, 93
Child-workers, 91
Christian Science, progress of, 127
Church, the, and politics, 109-111; responsibilities of, 110
Churches, and maternity nurses for the backblocks, 65
Church-going, decrease of, 102
Churchwomen and citizenship, 224
City councils, women and, 247
Clannishness of families, 71
Climate, 9
Collins Street, Melbourne, 293
Commonwealth Constitution and women's franchise, 215
Commonwealth offices in London, 26
Commonwealth Parliament, work of, 145; payment of

members of, 147; democratic composition of, 149

D

Dam in New South Wales, 22
 Deakin, Mr., and Government circular on Unionism, 187
 Dean of Newcastle on gambling, 49
 De Kontski in Australia, 40
 Divorce Laws, inequalities of, 234; women and reform of, 237
 Doctors, women as, 290
 Domestic science, lack of teachers of, 284
 Domestic servants, scarcity of, 87, 268, 281; betterment of, 282
 Domestic service as well-paid employment, 260
 Drought, terrors of, 10
 Dry season, 12
 Dudley, Lady, and nurses for the backblocks, 61

E

Edinburgh, Duke of, visit of, 39
 Education, 90; for girls, conditions of, 274 *et seq.*
 Eight-hour celebration, 163
 Eight-hour movement, triumph of, 182
 Elections for Commonwealth Parliament, unrepresentative results of, 149; status of candidates at, 194
 Employers' Association, action at Brisbane of, 177-8
 Excitement, demand for, 46-7

F

Factory workers, women and

girls as, 243, 282; Commission of Inquiry into conditions of, 283; conditions of life of, 284

Family clannishness, 71
 Family life, 76 *et seq.*
 Federal Constitution, 145
 Federal elections, women voters and, 213, 222
 Federal Government, composition of, 146; cost of, 146-7; and Interstate Labour Conference, 155, 162; and Trade Unionism, 186; unrepresentative position of, 222
 Federal Parliament, scene in, 222
 Federation, legislation under, 145
 Female workers and sick leave, 254-9
 Fisher, Hon. Andrew, and Brisbane Riots, 161; and hours of labour, 163; on labour question, 189; Parliamentary reforms of, 199; and Immigration policy, 296
 Flood, horrors of, 11
 Flora, distinctive character of, 14
 Flower "excursions," 15
 Flowering trees, 9
 Flowers, delight of people in, 15
 Forrest, Sir John, water scheme Bill of, 20; and women's franchise, 211
 Franchise, neglect of the, 149; women and the, 208-10; how given to women in Western Australia, 211
 Froude on Australia, 3
 Fruit-picking, children and, 91

G

- Gambling, prevalence of, 49 *et seq.*
 George Street, Sydney, 293
 Gilbert, Mr. Webb, 43
 Gilruth, Dr., and administration of Northern Territory, 27
 Gippsland, trees of, 8
 Girl, evolution of Australian, 261; education of, 274 *et seq.*
 Girls, lack of legal protection for, 230
 Gold, as a national resource, 18
 "Gold fever," 18, 20
 Goldfields, gambling at, 54
 "Gold-rush," a, 20
 Goldstein, Miss Vida, 240
 Government employees and wages, 249
 Government House, Society and, 267-8
 Guild of Service, 271

H

- Hatters' strike, 168
 High Commissioner, the, 296
 High Court and Labour Conference, 160, 189
 Hobart, Interstate Labour Conference at, 155
 Holder, Sir F., death of, 202
 Home life, 70 *et seq.*
 Horse-racing, betting and, 51-3
 Housework, contempt of girls for, 281
 Husband as head of the house, 77

I

- Iceland, Women's Political League of, 3
 Illegitimacy, laws relating to, 227-9

- Immigration, limitation of, 19
 Immigration policy, Federal Government and, 296
 Imports, 297; value of, 4
 Industrial courts, 166
 Infants, care of, 95
 International Council of Women, 3
 Inter-Colonial Convention of Women at Melbourne, 306; at Sydney, 307
 Interstate Labour Conference, enormous power of, 154 *et seq.*
 Irrigation in Western Australia, 21

J

- Jenolan Caves, 7
 Johnson, the pugilist, reception of, 58

K

- Kalgoorlie, and Transcontinental Railway, 24
 Kangaroo Paw, the, 14

L

- Labour and Capital, position of, 166, 184
 Labour and Unionism, 167
 Labour party and Commonwealth Government, 149; and Western Australian Government, 150; and Interstate Conference, 157-9; defeat in South Australia of, 179; and appointment of judges, 189; methods and men, 192; Parliamentary "reforms" of, 198
 Land, population and, 16
 Launceston, theatre strike at, 172
 Leasehold, question of, in Northern Territory, 28

Legal status of women, 226
 Legislative Councils, membership of, 148
 Liberal Party, lack of method in, 151; methods of, 193
 Lucas, "Father," 307
 Lucas, Miss, 308
 Lucerne, wonderful crops of, 17
 Lyceum Theatre, Sydney, Methodist work in, 122

M

Mace, the, removed from Commonwealth Parliament, 198
 Malthus, "Principles of Population," 97
 Marriage, decrease of, 95
 Marriage question, women and, 237
 Melbourne, Anarchists' Association in, 132-4; Inter-Colonial Conference of Women at, 209; Collins Street, 293; Inter-Colonial Convention of Women at, 306
 Melbourne Cup Day, 52
 Melbourne University, woman doctor of, 290
 Methodist Mission, 122
 Military Defence, Act of Universal Training for, 99
 Mine Employees Association and Tasmanian strike, 168
 Ministry, the, position of, 113
 Mission work in backblocks, 135 *et seq.*
 Mitchell, Nellie (Melba), 40
 "Monday Musicals," 39
 Morals of industrial workers, 287
 Motherhood, in the backblocks, 63; scientific, question of, 97-8
 Mothers, overworking of, 86

"Mothers' schools," 96
 Municipal Councils, women excluded from membership of, 248
 Municipal government, lack of suitable candidates for, 195
 Music, love of, in Australia, 38-40; in the family, 74

N

National Anthem of Australia, 40
 National Defence scheme, 296
 National Women's Temperance Union, 302
 "Never-Never," the, 10; women in, 59
 New Norcia Mission, 116 *et seq.*; girls' college of, 121
 New South Wales and capital city, 29; and State lottery, 57; State Labour Conference of, and industrial matters, 163; scene in Parliament of, 204; women factory workers in, 244; prosperity of manufactures in, 294
 "No Man's Land," 10
 Northern Territory, problem of, 26; development and administration of, 27
 Nurses, lack of, in backblocks, 61

O

O'Connor, Mr. E. J., water-supply scheme of, for mines in Western Australia, 21
 Orchestra strike, 170
 Originality, lack of, in Australia, 2

P

Paddy's Market, Sydney, musical festivals in, 40

Parents and children, 73 ; anomalous laws relative to, 231
 Parliament, " scenes " in, 201 *et seq.*
 Payment of members of Parliament, 147 ; disadvantages of, 196
 Perth, great reservoir near, 21 ; Chamber of Commerce of, and gambling, 56 ; shop-girls' club at, 285 ; early visit to, 304
 Pigeon-flying and betting, 55
 Pioneers, disadvantages of, 19 ; hardships of, 60 ; heroism of women, 60
 Politicians, status of, 191 *et seq.*
 Politics as a trade, 196
 Population, sparseness of, 16 ; in cities, 17 ; no distinct Australian type, 37 ; increase of, 299
 Postal Department of Commonwealth, women workers in, 254-8
 Postal voting, abolition of, 150
 Preachers, inadequate payment of, 245
 Preachers' strike, 169
 Preferential voting, compulsory, in Western Australia, 151
 Presbyterians, and shortage of ministers, 113
 Prison accommodation, disgraceful condition for women of, 234
 Prosperity, and politics, 224 ; evidences of, 293

Q

Queensland, Government works in, 295
 Quick, Sir John, 200

R

Rabbit-catching, children and, 93
 Railways, transcontinental, 23 ; progress of, 22 ; change of gauge and military movement on, 23
 Rainfall, uncertainty of, 10
 Rainy season, recuperative effects of, 13
 Religious life, 101 *et seq.*, 124 *et seq.*
 Revenue figures, 295
 Revival services, popularity of, 124
 Rinking, popularity of, 47
 Rivers, scarcity of, 10

S

Sabbath, as day of pleasure ; 104-6
 Salvado, Father, 116, 118-20
 Sand, plant life in the, 14
 Savings banks, average deposits in, 81
 School age for girls, 282
 Schreiner, Mrs. Olive, 36
 " Self-Realisation," sanctum of, 126
 Shaw, Miss, on Australia, 3
 Sheep as a national asset, 18
 Shop-girls, conditions of life of, 284-7
 Sick-leave of male and female postal workers compared, 254-7 ; in commercial houses, 258-9
 Six-hour labour movement, 162
 Socialist Church, and Sunday school, 127
 Socialistic legislation, 2, 4
 " Society girls," 262
 " Soul of Australia " not yet

- discovered artistically, 41 ; in the backblocks, 59
- South Australia, defeat of Labour Party in, 179 ; and women's franchise, 214 ; results of Labour defeat in, 197
- Spiritualism, progress of, 125
- State Constitutions and Federation, 148
- Stevenson, Rev. P., 123
- Strikes and their causes, 165 *et seq.*
- Summer, aspect of country in, 12
- Sunday school, interest in, 106 ; Socialist, 127
- Sweating, churches and, 245 ; encouragement of foreign, 297-8 ; of women teachers, 251-2
- Sydney, musical festivals in, 40 ; betting in, 51 ; Labour conference at, 157 ; eight-hour celebration at, 162 ; George Street, 293 ; Post Office at, 293 ; Inter-Colonial Convention of Women at, 307 ; harbour, 292 ; town hall, Convention meetings at, 307 ; town hall, Guild of Service exhibition at, 271
- T**
- Tasmania, strike in, 168 ; women workers in, 244
- Taylor, Rev. G. W., 123
- Telephone girls and sick leave, 256-7
- Temperament of people, 46
- Temperance and the Church, 110
- Theatre, sensationalism in the, 48
- "The Commonwealth of Australia," by Bernard R. Wise, 51
- Times, The*, and Australia, 3
- Torres, Bishop, 120, 122
- Totalisator, Commission of Inquiry into working of the, 51, 98 ; women and, 52-3
- Trade Unionism, tyranny of, 167 *et seq.* ; 185
- Trade Unions and Interstate Labour Conference, 155 ; expenditure of, 180 ; membership and benefits of, 181 ; and eight-hour movement, 182 ; Government contracts and, 187-8 ; and foreign sweating, 298
- Trades Hall and unnecessary strikes, 179 ; and mandate to Government, 187
- Tram-workers' strike at Brisbane, 175
- Transcontinental Railway, 23 ; building of, 24 ; methods of work on, 25
- Trees, giant, 8 ; flowering, 9
- Typists, girls as, 290
- U**
- Unemployment, 297
- V**
- Victoria, and school holidays, 91 ; and Interstate Labour Conference, 161 ; and women's franchise, 212 ; and illegitimacy, 228 ; girl breadwinners in, 284 ; women solicitors in, 290
- W**
- Wage Boards, 298
- Wages and women, 249 *et seq.*
- Water question, 10 ; and the mines, 20

- Water supply in Western Australia, 21; in New South Wales, 22
- Watson, the Hon. J. C., 200
- Wedding customs, 263
- Western Australia, gold rush in, 20; water supply scheme in, 21; non-representative Government of, 150; compulsory preferential voting in, 151; slump of Liberalism in, 197; women and elections in, 222-3; and the women's franchise, 211
- Wharfmen's strike, 172
- Wheat, cultivation of, 17
- Whippet racing, 55
- Wise, Bernard R., on betting, 51
- Women, as gamblers, 52; courage of, in backblocks, 61; as mothers, 86; and the franchise, 207 *et seq.*; political position of, 207, 218-21, 240, 242; their legal status, 226; and municipal councils, 247-8
- Women electors, classes of, 218
- Women factory inspectors, need for, 245
- Women teachers, low salaries of, 250
- Women's Christian Temperance Union and the franchise, 208-9
- Women's suffrage, views on, 217
- Wooden "fruits," 10
- Wool, value of exports of, 19
- Working-class, thrift of, 81
- Working men and church-going, 102, 107, 112
- Working women as electors, 221

Y

- Yass-Canberra, 30
- "Yellow Peril," the, 23

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