

# MARGARET THATCHER

## “the iron lady”



- Behind her stand 200 years of struggle for liberation waged by English women.
- A self-made woman who was not spoiled by her good looks nor prevented by her marriage and family from reaching the highest political position in England.
- Her triumph represents a highlight in women's march toward equality.

Modern European history mentions the first militant woman who, as early as 1792, published the "Vindication of the Rights of Women" by which she claimed for her sex equal rights with men in education and work. She was an English writer called Mary Wollstonecraft who married the feminist novelist and philosopher William Godwin. Her daughter Mary (born 1797) became the wife of the English poet reofrmer Shelley, and produced a famous modern novel: "Frankenstein".

Mary Wollstonecraft and her daughter were two pioneers in a series of distinguished women writers who shone in 19th century England and included a number of eminent novelists: George Eliot (real name Mary Evans), the three Bronte sisters: Charlotte, Anne, and Emily, Jane Austen, Catherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf.

Besides their contribution to literature, the English women of the 19th century produced militant leaders who worked for women's political rights. In 1897, New Zealand, the foster child of Great Britain, was the first country to grant its women the franchise. Between 1905 and 1920, all the countries in Northern Europe, including England, enfranchised their women.

### Margareth Thatcher

She was the daughter of Alfred Roberts, who owned a grocery in Grantham of Lincolnshire, a market town which produced the philosopher-scientist Newton. Her mother was a seamstress before her marriage and both parents embedded in their children very strongly that "work and cleanliness were next to godliness". There was more than just having to work to live — there was work as a duty. Though a man of limited means, Alfred Roberts was determined that his daughter should go to the university and both were determined that it be Oxford. In elementary school she won a poetry reading prize but in Oxford she majored in chemistry because she knew it would guarantee a job. Her interest in politics was, however, the keener. At the age of 24 she ran for Parliament and failed. After her marriage with Denis Thatcher in 1950 and soon after she had given birth to twins, a boy and a girl, Margaret qualified as a barrister specializing in tax and patent law. In 1959 she succeeded in securing a Tory seat in Finchley, a London suburb, and "her political carrer was launched."

In 1970 she was named by Edward Heath as secretary of State for Education and Science; then she cut

out free milk for elementary school children because she considered it a wasteful expenditure. When, in 1974, leading right wing leaders declined a candidature to the leadership of the Tory party, Margaret stepped in and won in 1975. The victory of the Tories in 1979 made her the first woman prime minister in Great Britain.

### Her Political program

- It may be condensed into the following:
  - Removing restraints in private enterprise.
  - Correcting the most flagrant abuses of organized labor.
  - Curbing public expenditure and cutting the income tax.
  - Improving Britain's nuclear deterrent force.
  - More pro-Arab policy than under Callaghan.
  - Supporting a single foreign and defense policy for the European community.
  - Holding the rush toward the bureaucratic state that controls people.

### Her faith in women

She says that women should be given managerial offices because they have far more experience than men as managers of their homes. According to her, women tend to be far more practical than theoretical. In the past, women in power did very well for Britain, thinking of Elizabeth I and Victoria as examples.

### An iron woman

Her reputation for toughness won her the nickname of "Iron Lady". Yet this tough woman is greatly devoted to her family and greatly concerned about the welfare of the future generation. She believes that the most powerful and dynamic force in society is that people want to do better for their children. Hinting at the Tory wind of change that England has to face, she made to her well-wishers the following conciliatory statement: "I would like to remember the following words of St. Francis of Assisi: "Where there is discord may we bring harmony; where there is doubt, may we bring faith; where there is despair may we bring hope."

### Sources:

Time, May 14, 1979 p. 10

Enc. Britannica: William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft