

**BRITISH FREEWOMEN,
THEIR HISTORICAL
PRIVILEGE**

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British freewomen, their historical privilege by Charlotte Carmichael Stopes

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BY

CHARLOTTE CARMICHAEL STOPES

DIPLOMÉE, EDIN. UNIVERSITY

"I do own for myself that Seneca the Declaimer saith, that I take pleasure in going back to studies of antiquity, and in looking behind me to our grand-fires' better times.

As saith another poet :

"Antique, buried in rubbish, old and musty,
Which make one vers in customs old and new,
And of Laws, Gods, and Men giving a view,
Render the careful student skilled and trusty."

Inver Temple Dec. 25, 1610.

John Selden's *Janus Anglorum*, translated by Redman Westcott, alias Littleton.

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1894

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CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
I. ANCIENT HISTORY AND BRITISH WOMEN	1
II. THE MODERN BASES OF PRIVILEGE	15
III. ROYAL WOMEN	27
Queens Consort	27
Queens Regnant	28
Queens Regent	33
IV. NOBLEWOMEN	35
They paid Homage	35
They received Homage	37
They held Courts Baron	37
They held by Military Service	39
They could be Knights	42
They could inherit Public Offices	42
They could be High Sheriff	43
They could be Earl Marshal	43
They could be High Constable, High Steward, High Chamberlain	47
They could be Champion, Governor of Royal Castles	60
They could be appointed to various offices	51
They could act as Femmes Soles when married	54
They had the Care of Churches	55
As Peregesses summoned to Parliament in person or in proxy	53
V. COUNTY WOMEN	59
Could be Freeholders	59
Could act as Femmes Soles when married	61
Could hold by Military Tenure	62
Paid and received Homage	63
Could present to Churches	63
Could hold Motes and attend Motes	64
Could be Suitors at County Courts, Pares, Judges or Jury	64
Could elect Knights of the Shire	67
Could elect Members of Private Boroughs	69

CHAP.		PAGE
VI.	FREEWOMEN	77
	Could be Members of Guilds	79
	Could have Guilds of their own	81
	Were free of the City of London	84
	Were free in other Boroughs	86
	Could be Members of Corporation	90
	Could vote for Members of Parliament	94
VII.	THE LONG ESS	99
	The Errors of Sir Edward Coke	99
	A Believer in Coke's Views	107
	Protesting Women	112
	Anne Clifford	117
	Mary Astell's Protest	124
	Mary Wolstonecroft Godwin	127
	Legal Cases decided in their favour	128
	The Reform Bill of 1832	130
	The Reform Bill of 1867	139
	Chorlton v. Lings	140
VIII.	THE TURN OF THE TIDE	146
	Something has been done	147
	Municipal Franchise—School Boards	148
	Married Women's Property Acts	149
	Lady Sandhurst's Case	150
	What a Woman can do	152
	Women and the Universities	155
IX.	OTHER WOMEN	159
	The Test of Civilization	162
	Labour the basis of Property	165
	The Unrecorded Increment of Women's Labour	166
	The Duality of Humanity	176
	The Woman God's Fellow-worker	178
APPENDIX		
	Eldest Daughters	180
	The Countess Lucy	180
	Women's Service	180
	Women's Guilds	181
	Free Kent	181
	The Learned Selden	181
	Sir Edward Coke	181
	Judge or Jury	182
	Physical Force Argument	182
	Women and the Universities	182

PREFACE

IN the spring of 1885, when planning to attend the British Association meeting in Aberdeen that summer, it struck me that I might prepare a paper on a Woman's Subject, and try to find an opportunity of reading it before the Section of Economics and Statistics there. The paper divided itself into two, which I carefully entitled—I. The History and Statistics of Woman's Privilege; and II. The Economic Effects of the Abstention of Women from Voting.

They were, as might have been expected, both rejected. I was told that, though they formed valuable contributions to Constitutional History, the Committee felt they would certainly lead to political discussion, which must not be risked. At a public meeting in Aberdeen the same week, I gave a resumé of my arguments, and the materials then collected I have frequently used since in Drawing-room Addresses, and in private conversation; in public papers, and in friendly correspondence. So many have been surprised at the facts, and interested in the results, that, at the present crisis, I thought it advisable to spend another six months in careful verification of details, and in grouping apparently disconnected data, so that their full import might be seen at a glance. My first authorities were Sydney Smith's "Enfranchisement of Woman the Law of the Land" (1876), and Mr. Chisholm Anstey's Book and Papers on "The Representation of the People's Acts" (1876).

Thence I went through the materials of Constitutional History, the Statutes, Rolls of Parliament, State Papers, Parliamentary Writs, Journals of the House of Commons, Reports of Cases, Works on Law, History, and Archæology, both printed and manuscript.

Just as my paper was complete enough for the purpose in hand, M. Ostrogorski's book upon "Women's Rights" appeared. But he had considered the question in regard to all women, I, only in regard to British Freewomen. He was the more general, I the more special, and I had noted several points which had escaped him in regard to the prime question of the day.

I consulted Miss Helen Blackburn, Editor of the *English-woman's Review*, and she urged me to bring out what I had prepared. She had always thought the work necessary, had intended to undertake it herself, when she could find leisure, and thought that now was the most fitting time to publish.

She generously placed her notebooks at my disposal, whence I have gleaned many interesting facts in support of my own. Therefore this little book may be taken as her voice as well as mine. The points I specially wish to be considered, are:—

1st, The Ethnological.—The racial characteristics of our ancestors. They revered women.

2nd, The Philological.—All old Statutes are couched in *general* terms. Through a deficiency in the English language, the word "man" is a common term, including woman as well as man, even by Statute.

3rd, The Legal.—The Late Laureate speaks of the liberties of men as widening down from precedent to precedent. We find that the liberties of women have, on the other hand, been narrowed down from precedent to precedent. Sir Edward Coke, the technical cause of this limitation, is only a fellow mortal, liable to error.

4th, The Historical, in which facts speak for themselves.

5th, The Biblical, in which prejudice and mistranslation have confused the ideas of readers on this point. Some may disagree with my conclusions, but I trust they may accept the facts, and do what they can with them.

No one can deny that it is *just* to grant women the Suffrage, no one can deny that it would be *advantageous for them* to receive it. There is no reason that a thing should be because it has been, but when the only objection brought against a thing is, that it has not been, it is time to test if that statement be really true. We have not found the received assertions true in regard to this subject. Hence the publication of this little book.

Thus far I had written as Preface to the little Brochure that I printed for the use of the Women's Suffrage Societies a month ago. But as the whole Thousand was ordered before it came from the printers, it was evident that I ought to publish my work formally, with the many additions I had held back from lack of space, and with the article from the *Athenæum*, No. 3475, which I had been permitted to incorporate. Amongst the Labour-saving appliances of the day, may be classified collections of verified facts. I trust these may reach the hands of those for whom I write, *brave women* and *fair men*.

CHARLOTTE CARMICHAEL STOPES,

31 TORRINGTON SQUARE, W.C.

6th June, 1894.