

that much can be explained which has been somewhat mysterious up to the present. Presumably the allotropic nitrogen is formed like ozone by the passage of an electric spark through the parent gas. The strange contraction observed when nitrogen is treated in this way would thus be explicable. Moreover, the substance thus formed by electricity would probably be subject to a sudden change into a mixture of ordinary inert and nascent nitrogen, similar to that observable in ozone. Now the assimilation of free nitrogen from the air by various plants was long doubted, partly owing to the known disinclination of the gas to enter into combination. The presence of nascent nitrogen might explain this unusual behaviour, and the character of the ordinary atoms completely cleared from all suspicion of unbecoming forwardness. Further particulars of the remarkable discovery will be eagerly looked for.

### A Book of the Week.

"BRITISH FREEWOMEN."\*

MISS STOPES has traced the history of British women from the earliest records down to the present time. She reminds us how Boadicea, having succeeded in uniting some of the neighbouring tribes, drove Catus over the sea, had subdued Petilius Cerialus, destroyed Colonia, sacked Verulam, and marched on London, building an entrenched camp near what is now called Islington; but Boadicea was defeated by the Romans. Miss Stopes says:—

"There is no picture more touching in the history of our country! The forces of oppression and lust, the spirit of Nero himself, then Emperor, were ranged against this woman. With superhuman energy, as patriot, as mother, and as *individual*, she struggled against these in defence of country, home, and honour. And *she failed!* Had circumstances been but slightly altered, had the brave Caractacus been but able to hold out a little longer, and take shelter with her, instead of trusting the rival Queen Carismandua, how differently might our British history have read to-day!"

Miss Stopes does not write with enthusiasm about the Empress Helena (the mother of Constantine, the Christian convert, the finder of the true cross, who was held up to most of us in our youth, *ad nauseum*, as a true example of womanly virtue and piety). She thinks "that good, refined and cultured as she was, she was merely a Romanised Briton . . . and the Roman law was a meaner foster-mother for feminine virtues than the free old British law."

Among the Anglo-Saxons, women seem to have held property in their own right. The Queen Consorts had their separate household and attendants, and acted in all respects as *femmes soles* in tenure management, and also in alienation of real property. Ladies of birth and quality sat in the Saxon Witenagemote, and queens seemed in those days to have signed charters as well as kings. Women landowners sat in the shire gemote; women burgesses were present at folk motes; and, in fact, much industrious research

among archives and ancient histories has led Miss Stopes to the conclusion that in the Saxon times the privileges of women were nearly equal to those held by them in later times; and, as we have seen, greater in questions of voting, and sitting in the general and local Parliaments of the time.

But the Roman invasion changed all this, and the subsequent limitations of the privileges of women seem to have been greater than those of the men. The second chapter of this interesting history deals with the feudal system, and it is full of most instructive facts that are evidently the result of much painstaking compilation from ancient sources. Then follows a chapter on royal women, which sets forth the good deeds of queens consort and queens regnant. The fourth chapter contains the history of noblewomen, and is full of most curious information as to the woman who paid and received homage, inherited and held titles and properties, etc., etc.

The following chapter tells us of the doings and the rights of "County Women," who inherited freeholds under the same conditions as noblewomen.

"Certain Boroughs, formerly held by military tenure, seemed to have been included in those permitted to return burgesses to Parliament, though belonging to one owner. When women inherited the property and held the Borough, they returned their one or two members, as the custom might be, in their own name."

Dame Dorothy Packington returned Thomas Lichfield and John Burdes, Esquires, to be her burgesses for the town of Aylesbury. In the following century, after the Restoration, Miss Stopes tells a most humorous story of a lady who, when urged by the Secretary of State to return a *persona grata* in her name to Parliament, replied:—

"I have been neglected by a court, I have been bullied by a usurper, but I will not be dictated to by a subject. *Your man shan't stand.*"

ANNIE, DORSET PEMBROKE AND MONTGOMERY."

Chapter VI. traces the "History of Freewomen." Among many other interesting and suggestive pieces of information, Miss Stopes tells us that the Trades' Guilds admitted women as sisters. Women could also have guilds of their own, and they might be free of the City of London, and they could also be free in other boroughs.

Miss Stopes, during her personal researches among the records of Stratford-upon-Avon, discovered that then, in 1573, women could be burgesses; and that in York, women who were free of the city, on marrying a man who was not free, forfeited their freedom. Chapter VII. is entitled, "The Long Ebb," and is headed by the line, "Ye have made the law of none effect by your tradition," and herein the authoress brings a vigorous indictment against the errors of Sir Edward Coke, who first pronounced an opinion on the disability of women. Miss Stopes thinks that "Male credulity, in regard to Coke, has been the cause of much direct and indirect suffering to women; that it is not surprising that they now attempt to get behind 'the oracle,' and question the spirit itself of the English Constitution." So Miss Stopes, as the advocate of the rights of her sex, takes up the cudgels against "Sir Edward Coke," and leaves no stone unturned, no authority unconsulted, to prove her charges against that legal autocrat of the Seventeenth Century. She blames him for want of care and want

\* "British Freewomen. Their Historical Privilege." By Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, 1/. Swan, Sonnenschein & Co. 1894.

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