

THE
PEOPLE'S
BOOKS

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

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WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

A SHORT HISTORY OF A
GREAT MOVEMENT.

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It is not to be thought of that the flood
 Of British freedom, which to the open sea
 Of the world's praise, from dark antiquity
 Hath flowed "with pomp of waters unwithstood"—
 Road by which all might come and go that would,
 And bear out freights of worth to foreign lands;
 That this most famous stream in bogs and sands
 Should perish, and to evil and to good
 Be lost for ever. In our halls is hung
 Armoury of the invincible knights of old:
 We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
 That Shakespeare spake—the faith and morals hold
 Which Milton held. In everything we're sprung
 Of earth's first blood, have titles manifold.

—W. WORDSWORTH.



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WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS

WE suffragists have no cause to be ashamed of the founders of our movement—

“In everything we're sprung
Of earth's first blood, have titles manifold.”

Mary Wollstonecraft¹ started the demand of women for political liberty in England, Condorcet in France,² and the heroic group of anti-slavery agitators in the United States. It is true that Horace Walpole called Mary Wollstonecraft “a hyena in petticoats.” But this proves nothing except his profound ignorance of her character and aims. Have we not in our own time heard the ladies who first joined the Primrose League described by an excited politician as “filthy witches”? The epithet of course was as totally removed from any relation to the facts as that which Horace Walpole applied to Mary Wollstonecraft. William Godwin's touching memoir of his wife, Mr. Kegan Paul's *William Godwin: his Friends and Contemporaries*, and Mrs. Pennell's Biography show Mary Wollstonecraft as a woman of exceptionally pure and exalted character.

¹ *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 1792.

² See *Le vote des Femmes*, pp. 16-22, par Ferdinand Buisson, Député de la Seine et Président de la Commission du Suffrage Universelle. Condorcet had a predecessor in Mademoiselle Jars de Gournay, the friend of Montaigne. See Miss E. Sichel's *Michel de Montaigne*, p. 137.

Her sharp wits had been sharpened by every sort of personal misfortune; they enabled her to pierce through all shams and pretences, but they never caused her to lower her high sense of duty; they never embittered her or caused her to waver in her allegiance to the pieties of domestic life. Her husband wrote of her soon after her death, "She was a worshipper of domestic life." If there is anything in appearance, her face in the picture in the National Portrait Gallery speaks for her. Southey wrote of her, that of all the lions of the day whom he had seen "her face was the best, infinitely the best."

The torch which was lighted by Mary Wollstonecraft was never afterwards extinguished; there are glimpses of its light in the poems of her son-in-law Shelley. The frequent references to the principle of equality between men and women in the "Revolt of Islam" will occur to every reader.

In 1810 Sydney Smith, in the *Edinburgh Review*, wrote one of the most brilliant and witty articles which even he ever penned in defence of an extension of the means of a sound education to women.

In 1813 Mrs. Elizabeth Fry began to visit prisoners in Newgate, and shocked those who, citing the parrot cry "woman's place is home," thought a good woman had no duties outside its walls. She had children of her own, but this did not shut her heart to the wretched waifs for whom she founded a school in prison. A little after this England began to be stirred by the agitation which resulted in the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832. It is one of life's little ironies that James Mill, the founder of the Philosophical Radicals, and the father of John Stuart Mill, who laid the foundation of the modern suffrage movement, was among those who, in the early nineteenth century, justified the exclusion of women from all political rights. In an Essay on "Government" published in 1823 as an appendix to the fifth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, he dismissed in a sentence all claim of women to share in the benefits and protection of representative govern-