

# Introduction

## A Mad, Wicked Folly?

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At various moments during her long rule, Queen Victoria (r. 1837–1901) made clear that she was no fan of women’s rights. In a letter written in 1852 to her Uncle Leopold, King of the Belgians, the queen – then in the throes of motherhood – observed that her husband Albert “grows daily fonder and fonder of politics and business, and is wonderfully fit for both – showing such perspicuity and such courage – and I grow daily to dislike them both more and more. We women are not made for governing; and, if we are good women, we must dislike these masculine occupations!”<sup>1</sup> In 1870, faced with the prospect of a women’s franchise bill passing in Parliament, the now-widowed queen engaged in a lengthy correspondence with Prime Minister William Gladstone, in which she registered her “strongest aversion for the *socalled* & *most erroneou*s ‘Rights of Woman.’” The “movement of the present day to place women in the same position as to professions – as *men*,” she explained, was “mad & utterly demoralizing,” and “[t]he Queen feels so strongly upon this dangerous & unchristian & unnatural *cry* & movement of ‘woman’s rights’ . . . that she is most anxious that Mr. Gladstone & others shld take some steps to check this alarming danger & to make whatever use they can of her name . . . Let woman be what God intended; a helpmate for a man – but with totally different duties & vocations.”<sup>2</sup> Later that same year, the queen condemned women’s rights even more vociferously in her exchanges with the author Theodore Martin, whom she had commissioned to write the official biography of Prince Albert. “The Queen,” she fumed, “is most anxious to enlist some one who can speak & write etc. checking this mad, wicked folly of ‘Woman’s rights,’ with all the attendant horrors, on which her poor feeble sex seems bent, viz. In forgetting

<sup>1</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold, King of the Belgians, February 3, 1852, in Theodore Martin, *The Life of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort*, volume 2 (New York: D. Appleton, 1877 [1876]), p. 352.

<sup>2</sup> See, respectively, Queen Victoria to Mr. Gladstone, Osborne, February 10, 1870, and Queen Victoria to Mr. Gladstone, Osborne, May 6, 1870, cited in Philip Guedalla, *The Queen and Mr. Gladstone*, volume 1 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933), p. 221 and pp. 227–228. Emphasis Victoria’s.

every sense of womanly feeling & propriety . . . It is a subject which makes the Queen so furious that she can't contain herself. God created man & woman different – & let each remain in their own position.”<sup>3</sup>

Bracing words indeed, yet considered in isolation they actually tell us very little about how Queen Victoria figured in nineteenth-century conversations about women's rights in Britain. Victoria's opinions about female emancipation, after all, were initially registered in private, not public. While her opposition to women's rights would have been well known to her correspondents and a small circle of friends and associates, it was not conveyed to a broader public until decades later. The queen's letter of 1852 to her Uncle Leopold, for example, only came to public attention in 1876, when it was included in Theodore Martin's *The Life of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort*. It would then be reprinted again in the second volume of Arthur Christopher Benson and Lord Esher's *The Letters of Queen Victoria 1837–1861*, published in 1907. Similarly, Victoria's now famous and far more damning exchange with Martin in 1870, with its indictment of the “mad, wicked folly of ‘Woman's rights,’” entered the public record in 1902, following the queen's death, when the influential editor Sidney Lee included her letter in a footnote of his *Queen Victoria*, based on an obituary of the sovereign that he had written for the *Dictionary of National Biography* the previous year. Lee had received a copy of Martin's intimate *Queen Victoria as I Knew Her*, printed “for private circulation” in 1902 and published in 1908, which included Martin's correspondence with the queen on female suffrage.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps most striking, Victoria's comments to William Gladstone on the vote from 1870 were only made public in 1933, when the barrister and historian Philip Guedalla published his *The Queen and Mr. Gladstone*; this was over sixty years after the conversation between the sovereign and her prime minister had taken place.

For most of the nineteenth century, then, Britons would have been largely unaware of the queen's personal views on women's rights, and only in the early twentieth century would they have encountered her direct opposition to female suffrage. This is an important point, because it requires us to rethink many long- and widely held assumptions about

<sup>3</sup> Queen Victoria to Mr. Theodore Martin, May 29, 1870, RA VIC/MAIN/Y/168/29. This letter was subsequently published (in slightly revised form) in Theodore Martin, *Queen Victoria as I Knew Her* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1908), pp. 69–70. Nor were these Victoria's only hostile outbursts. In 1872, she complained to her eldest daughter Vicky about “those fast, wild young women who are really unsexed.” See Queen Victoria to Vicky, February 24, 1872, in Roger Fulford, ed., *Darling Child: Private Correspondence of Queen Victoria and the Crown Princess of Prussia* (London: Evans, 1976), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> See Sidney Lee, *Queen Victoria* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1902), p. 555.

the queen's limited value to the nineteenth-century women's movement. To date, only a few scholars have cottoned on to the gap between the private exchange and public circulation of Victoria's scathing letters.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the correspondence tends to dominate most discussions of the queen vis-à-vis what her nineteenth-century subjects dubbed the "Woman Question." This does not mean that Victoria has been written entirely out of the story of British women's emancipation. Several historians and literary critics have suggested that the queen carried a certain subversive potential, simply by dint of being a female monarch, which no degree of disavowal on her part could ever entirely resolve.<sup>6</sup> She was, writes Julia Baird, the "unwitting, prickly muse" of the early women's movement.<sup>7</sup> To this end, some have even noted that Victoria – despite her personal pronouncements – was "successfully appropriated" in the mid-nineteenth-century campaigns for female employment, and that she was invoked in the "call for the admission of women to the political system," where she "gave a steady, rarely articulated impetus to the suffragette campaign," although none have yet elaborated on these claims.<sup>8</sup> Still

<sup>5</sup> See, for examples of those who have recognized this gap, Martin Pugh, *The March of the Women: A Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women's Suffrage, 1866–1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 43; Julia M. Walker, *The Elizabethan Icon: 1603–2003* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), p. 153; Walter L. Arnstein, *Queen Victoria* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), p. 203; and Clarissa Campbell Orr, "The Feminization of the Monarchy 1780–1910: Royal Masculinity and Female Empowerment," in *The Monarchy and the British Nation, 1780 to the Present*, ed. Andrzej Olechnowicz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 76–107 at p. 101. Yet, even these scholars do not flesh out the particulars of Victoria's letters' ways into the world, nor do they consider how the letters were received once they entered wider circulation.

<sup>6</sup> For this perspective, see Elizabeth K. Helsinger, Robin Lauterbach Sheets and William Veeder, "Queen Victoria and 'The Shadow Side,'" In *The Woman Question: Defining Voices, 1837–1883*, volume 1 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983), pp. 63–77 at p. 70; Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800–1914* (New York: Routledge, 1996), esp. chapter 3, "The Queen the Beauty, and the Woman Writer"; Gail Turley Houston, *Royalties: The Queen and Victorian Writers* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), esp. chapter 1, "In the Reign of Queen Dick: Legal Fictions and the Constitution of Female Sovereignty," pp. 11–50 at pp. 15–17; Margaret Homans, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837–1876* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), esp. on "The Problem of a Female Monarchy"; Arnstein, *Queen Victoria*, pp. 202–204; Melanie Renee Ulrich, "Victoria's Feminist Legacy: How Nineteenth-Century Women Imagined the Queen," PhD thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 2005; and Julia Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography of the Woman Who Ruled an Empire* (New York: Random House, 2016), esp. p. 403.

<sup>7</sup> See Julia Baird's refreshing recent reassessment of the queen, *Victoria the Queen*, p. 403.

<sup>8</sup> For the passages cited, see Clare Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790–1865* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 130; Dorothy Thompson, *Queen Victoria: The Woman, the Monarchy, and the People* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), p. 100; and Baird, *Victoria the Queen*, p. 490. For others who have acknowledged –

others have ventured that Victoria helped to further women's agendas in different ways, through her literary and philanthropic activity, for example, or through her personal choices, including her controversial decision to use chloroform during the birth of her son Leopold in 1853.<sup>9</sup> Rights, we must remember, were not the only path to women's liberation.

Overall, however, assessments of the queen's impact on the nineteenth-century women's movement have been rather less charitable. Guided by Victoria's own caustic remarks, most scholars posit Victoria as a marginal figure in, if not an active foil to, the struggle for women's equality, especially in the political arena – and treat her monarchy on the whole as one that did far more to preserve than to undermine traditional gender roles. Consider Roger Fulford's classic *Votes for Women: The Story of a Struggle*, which foregrounds this antipathetic dynamic by making "This Mad, Wicked Folly of Women's Rights" the title of one of its chapters. Similar views appear again and again in more recent literature. For Dorothy Thompson, most feminists found "little help in the image of the female monarch," as Victoria "made known her hostility to woman's entry into the major professions, including medicine, and successfully concealed the extent of her own concern with the day-to-day politics of the country, allowing an image to be presented which was almost entirely domestic." Audrey Kelly, meanwhile, describes Victoria as lacking "any sympathy with 'this mad, wicked folly of women's rights with all its attendant horrors' as she wrote in a letter to Sir Theodore Martin." And

although not elaborated on – this tendency to invoke the queen in a suffrage context, see esp. Houston, *Royalties*, pp. 35–36; Homans, *Royal Representations*, p. xxv; Helen Rappaport, *Queen Victoria: A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), p. 426; Sandra Holton, *Suffrage Days: Stories from the Women's Suffrage Movement* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Constance Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866–1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967); Richard Williams, *The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1997), p. 145; David Rubinstein, *A Different World for Women: The Life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), esp. pp. 78 and 132; Arnstein, *Queen Victoria*, p. 203; Brian Howard Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 82; Ulrich, "Victoria's Feminist Legacy"; and Pugh, *The March of the Women*, esp. pp. 42–43.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of Victoria's contributions to "womanist" (as opposed to "feminist") developments, see esp. Orr, "The Feminization of the Monarchy 1780–1910" pp. 76–107; and Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 91. On the implications of Victoria's decision to use chloroform, see Judith Schneid Lewis, *In the Family Way: Childbearing in the British Aristocracy, 1760–1860* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986), esp. p. 83; and Susan Kingsley Kent, *Queen Victoria: Gender and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). As Kent notes, p. 54, "Overnight the strictures against the use of chloroform fell away: The queen's imprimatur on the practice made it possible for generations of subsequent women to ask for the anesthetic without being made to feel they were sinful or monstrous for using it."

for Christine Bolt, “the edge” that “Queen Victoria gave British feminists was a limited one,” given the queen’s “reliance on male political advisers” and the fact that “she was known to regard the women’s rights agitation as a ‘mad, wicked folly.’” A. N. Wilson perhaps captures this view most succinctly in his recent biography of Victoria: “Queen Victoria deplored feminism.”<sup>10</sup> Little wonder that Victoria has remained peripheral to the study of the nineteenth-century women’s movement, and the women’s movement peripheral to the study of the female sovereign.

Once we begin to treat Victoria’s inflammatory comments as private musings rather than public pronouncements, however, our aperture widens considerably. Revisiting the nineteenth-century women’s movement with an open mind – and careful and creative combing of the Royal Archives, National Archives at Kew, Girton College Archive at Cambridge, and The Women’s Library at the London School of Economics (LSE), among other collections and digital databases – we find that the queen in fact played a significant and surprisingly sustained role in the Victorian feminist imagination. This is not to suggest that Victoria the person offered much concrete encouragement on such matters. While the queen may not have openly declared her opposition to the campaign for women’s rights, she never presented herself as a supporter either. Victoria *was* committed to a relatively restrictive domestic ideology – even if she did privately support the passage of the Infant Custody Bill in 1839, and twice described the marriage game for women as a dangerous “lottery” in her intimate exchanges with her eldest daughter Vicky.<sup>11</sup> To this end, the queen made sure

<sup>10</sup> See, respectively, Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women: The Story of a Struggle* (London: White Lion Publishers Limited, 1957), p. 73; Thompson, *Queen Victoria*, pp. 141–142; Audrey Kelly, *Lydia Becker and The Cause* (Lancaster: Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancashire, 1992), p. 1 (Kelly goes on to refer, p. 18, to Victoria’s “known antipathy to women’s rights”); Christine Bolt, “The Ideas of British Suffragism,” in *Votes for Women*, eds. Sandra Holton and June Purvis (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 34–56 at p. 34; and A. N. Wilson, *Queen Victoria* (New York: Penguin, 2014), p. 334. For similar assessments of Victoria’s negligible to negative impact on women’s rights campaigning, see also, among many others, Charles Beem, *The Lioness Roared: The Problems of Female Rule in English History* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), p. 173; Kent, *Queen Victoria*, p. 64; Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), p. 403; Kaevan Gazdar, *Feminism’s Founding Fathers: The Men Who Fought for Women’s Rights* (Winchester: Zero, 2016), esp. the prologue; Simon Schama, “Victoria and Her Sisters,” History of Britain television series, BBC production (2002); and Amanda Vickery, “Suffragettes Forever!,” BBC production (2015).

<sup>11</sup> Victoria described marriage as a “lottery” on two occasions, both in correspondence with her eldest daughter Vicky shortly after her daughter’s marriage to Frederick, heir to the Prussian throne. See Queen Victoria to Princess Frederick William, May 3, 1858: “I think people really marry far too much; it is such a lottery after all, and for a poor woman a very doubtful happiness.” And Queen Victoria to Princess Frederick William, May 16, 1860: “All marriage is such a lottery – the happiness is always an exchange – thought it

throughout her long rule to keep a careful distance from any activities that might be construed as too overtly pushing the gender envelope. As the suffragist and foreign political correspondent Emily Crawford put it in 1903, reflecting on Victoria's life, "[S]he rather stood aloof from the women's movement than opposed it."<sup>12</sup> But this perceived "aloofness" did not stop women's rights activists from appropriating her image, and doing whatever they could to leverage the fact that a woman was head of the British state. This was especially true during the first four decades of Victoria's rule, when the meanings of modern constitutional monarchy were still very much being negotiated. We must remember that Victoria came to the throne just five years after the passage of the Reform Act of 1832, the success of which had hinged on the willingness of her uncle, King William IV, to intercede in parliamentary affairs.<sup>13</sup>

In this context, understandably, the crown could exert an irresistible feminist pull – even for those who might not necessarily describe themselves as royalists. After all, was it not extremely paradoxical that a woman was permitted to rule while her female subjects, up until the last third of the nineteenth century at least, were denied most of the formal rights and privileges accorded to men?<sup>14</sup> "Every wife except a queen regnant," Linda Colley reminds us, "was under the legal authority of her husband, and so was her movable property" – this until the passage of the Married Women's Property acts in 1870 and 1882.<sup>15</sup> On the political front, the disjuncture was even more striking. Even at the close of Victoria's rule, in 1901, British

may be a very happy one – still the poor woman is bodily and morally the husband's slave. That always sticks in my throat." For copies of these letters, see Christopher Hibbert, ed., *Queen Victoria in Her Letters and Journals* (London: John Murray, 1984), pp. 104–105.

<sup>12</sup> See Emily Crawford, *Victoria, Queen and Ruler* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1903), p. 372.

<sup>13</sup> On this point, see esp. Antonia Fraser, *Perilous Question: Reform or Revolution? Britain on the Brink, 1832* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013). In *The British Monarchy and the French Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 27, Marilyn Morris similarly demonstrates that long after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, "England still had a strong monarch; the significant change came in the rules of the game ... The limitations on the power of the Crown remained vague in theory and had to be worked out in practice."

<sup>14</sup> Formal exclusion from many rights and privileges does not mean that women were unable to exercise informal power – especially for women from aristocratic and elite backgrounds. On women's engagement in public and political pursuits before their attainment of social and political rights, see esp. Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, eds. *Women in British Politics, 1760–1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Amanda Vickery, ed. *Women, Privilege, and Power: British Politics 1750 to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); K. D. Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); and Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c. 1754–1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 238. Baird, *Victoria the Queen*, p. 397, offers a similar

women still lacked the parliamentary franchise, a right that men had secured through the successive Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884, but that women would only be granted in 1918, with the passage of the Representation of the People Act (and, even then, the law only applied to women over the age of thirty who met certain property requirements). As one “Penelope” would recall, writing just a week before Victoria’s death in 1901, “[W]hen Queen Victoria ascended the throne, the incongruity was at its height, of a reigning female sovereign, with women shut out from the right of having a voice on any single subject affecting the race.”<sup>16</sup>

Pioneering women’s rights campaigners recognized this paradox, seized on it, and tried to exploit it. To demonstrate their deference to the queen, to celebrate (and sometimes even inflate) Victoria’s political prerogatives, to call attention to the national tradition of including women in the royal line of succession (unlike the practice in France and the German lands, where the Salic law precluded women from inheriting the throne) – all of these became prominent features of early women’s rights campaigning, especially in regard to the question of the female franchise. For reasons primarily practical and opportunistic, activists considered the fact of the “presence of a woman in the highest office of state” a highly compelling argument for securing women’s political equality, at least for a time.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Victoria’s frequent appearances in Chartist and Dissenting tracts, in parliamentary petitions and debates, in Langham Place periodicals, and in the statements and speeches issued by members of the numerous women’s suffrage societies organized in the post-1867 period. “[C]onsidering that the First Personage in the realm is a Queen, and that no sane mind in the three kingdoms would willingly exchange her for any of her male predecessors in the House of Brunswick,” declared the classicist and radical evangelical Francis W. Newman, in a lecture delivered before the Clifton and Bristol Society for Women’s Suffrage in 1869, “I should not find anything paradoxical or rash in wishing that the law would let the two sexes, like other things, find their own level, instead of elevating one sex over the other.”<sup>18</sup>

Elucidating this strategy is an interesting and important exercise on its own. It shows us that several generations of women’s rights activists

assessment: the Queen was “a model of female authority in a culture preoccupied with female domesticity.”

<sup>16</sup> See Penelope, “Our Ladies Letter,” *Derby Daily Telegraph*, January 14, 1901, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> See Dorothy Thompson, “Review of Remaking Queen Victoria,” *Victorian Studies* 42, no. 1 (October 1, 1998), pp. 137–140 at p. 138.

<sup>18</sup> See Francis W. Newman, *A Lecture on Women’s Suffrage* (London: London Society for Women’s Suffrage, 1869), p. 3.

identified Victoria as a key ally, and that her rule provided them with crucial ammunition – and, at times, useful cover for their proceedings. To this end, documenting activists' expansive engagement with the queen is one of the central aims of *The Right to Rule and the Rights of Women*, the first book to reconstruct and offer a sustained analysis of Victorian women's rights campaigners' intense, even if increasingly strained, appropriations of their sovereign. But the exercise becomes only more meaningful when we take into account the effects that their strategy produced. For activists' enthusiastic invocations of the queen did not go unnoticed by their opponents. Many conservative-minded moralists, journalists, politicians, and pundits saw this tactic as a real threat – an “argument of a very popular character,” in the words of the anti-suffragist MP Henry James – and one that actively needed to be countered.<sup>19</sup>

Beginning in the 1830s, and only accelerating from the 1860s, a range of traditionalists (at least on questions of sex and gender) strove to undermine this strategy by stressing the female monarch's long dependence on her male advisors, by drawing attention to her particularly circumscribed role within a modern constitutional framework, and by emphasizing her status as an ornamental figurehead rather than a political agent. If the queen modeled anything, they insisted – albeit incorrectly – it was a woman's deference to the men around her, men with the expertise and energy required to run the state. Consider the words of the anti-suffragist journalist and historian Goldwin Smith in a piece on “Female Suffrage” published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1874. Victoria, in Smith's opinion, didn't “rule” at all. This was a “constitutional queen whose excellence consists in never doing any act of government except under the guidance of her Ministers.”<sup>20</sup> Even as Victoria's own staid views on women and politics began to circulate publicly, from 1876, traditionalists continued to push the notion of the queen as a passive figure, a cipher, and a vehicle for male interests.

This book, then, is about Victorian women's rights campaigners' savvy and sometimes stubborn efforts to appropriate their sovereign. But it is also about how these appropriations prompted a dramatic cultural and political backlash, a backlash, moreover, of lasting consequence. For, in insisting on Victoria's very limited political role, on her deference to others, and on her largely symbolic value, anti-suffragists and their associates served as unwitting architects of modern British constitutional monarchy. They were not the only architects, of course, nor were they always

<sup>19</sup> See *The Times*, March 8, 1879, p. 9, col. d.

<sup>20</sup> See Goldwin Smith, “Female Suffrage,” *Macmillan's Magazine*, 30, May–October 1874, pp. 130–150 at p. 148.



motivated solely by misogyny – Victoria’s youth was also initially a grave concern, as was the recognition that theirs was a democratizing polity. Nevertheless, in attempting to wall the queen off from suffragists and their sympathizers, they provided some of the most distilled, uncompromising, and impassioned statements regarding the monarch’s removal from the realm of politics.

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I have structured *The Right to Rule and the Rights of Women* to highlight these entanglements by drawing attention to the intricate and often overlooked connections between the histories of women, the monarchy, and the state (particularly the ideologies underpinning modern constitutionalism) during the nineteenth century. In five chapters that move roughly forward in time, I not only chronicle women’s rights activists’ extensive leveraging of Victoria, but also show how their opponents responded to this strategy, and the broader cultural and political significance of these exchanges. In tracing these Victorian conversations, my emphasis is decidedly on rhetorical analysis. Pamphlets, essays, parliamentary speeches, letters, petitions, flyers, newspaper columns, and journal articles – these are my key sources. And I focus on teasing out the ways in which arguments about queenship were developed, delivered, and rejected by actors working toward different goals for women in different contexts. For the purposes of clarity, moreover, I have assigned these actors labels that at times belie some of the complexity of their thinking on the Woman Question. To write of women’s rights activists and their opponents – or of progressives and traditionalists, egalitarians and anti-egalitarians, suffragists and anti-suffragists, and especially feminists and anti-feminists – is necessarily to introduce a degree of binary thinking that does not always accord with my subjects’ sometimes slippery and evolving notions of what constituted a woman’s proper place in Victorian culture.<sup>21</sup> As much as possible, I have tried in specific cases to signal the particularities of my subjects’ positions. Do bear in mind, though, that I adopt such terms primarily as heuristics.

The nineteenth century is at the heart of this study, but it would be impossible to understand the developments traced here without placing them in conversation with earlier periods. Chapter 1, “The Radicalism of Female Rule in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” therefore surveys the long eighteenth century to show that many Britons were already beginning to

<sup>21</sup> On this point, see esp. Lucy Delap, “‘The Woman Question’ and the Origins of Feminism,” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, eds. Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 319–348, and esp. pp. 337–338.

equate female sovereignty with robust interpretations of liberty and equality, well before Queen Victoria's accession in 1837. One can, of course, find traces of these egalitarian impulses in Tudor England, where some saw queens Mary I and Elizabeth I – England's first female sovereigns – as harbingers of a new social and sexual order. There was good reason why the Protestant theologian John Knox feared the “monstrous regiment of women” in 1558.<sup>22</sup> Yet, it was the Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689 that ultimately enabled radical readings of queenship to flourish. By doing away with “divine right” monarchy, the revolution made it difficult to conceive of female rule as primarily God's will.<sup>23</sup> Going forward, women's inclusion in the royal line of succession would have to be seen largely as a cultural preference, something actively chosen by the British people rather than assigned to them.

Several eighteenth-century radicals identified an opening for reform here, and began to explore its potential. In their hands, the absence of the Salic law in Britain became evidence of a broader British commitment to fairness, individual rights, and even sexual equality.<sup>24</sup> Only nascent during Queen Mary II's rule (1689–1694), this discourse gained traction as the century progressed, fueled especially by the American and French revolutions. “The want of this right [women's right to vote],” declared the Norwich-based political activist Richard Dinmore in 1793, “is peculiarly absurd in this kingdom, where a woman may reign, though not vote for a Member of Parliament.”<sup>25</sup> Royal developments would soon lend urgency to these arguments. The year 1796 saw the birth of Princess Charlotte, the only child of George, Prince of Wales (the future George IV) and his soon-to-be-estranged wife Caroline of Brunswick, and the

<sup>22</sup> See John Knox, “The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women,” in *The Works of John Knox*, volume 4, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1855 [1558]), pp. 363–422 at pp. 373–374. For an extended discussion of sixteenth-century feminism and female sovereignty, see esp. Sarah G. Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> On this important shift, see Cynthia Herrup, “The King's Two Genders,” *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 3 (2006), pp. 493–510.

<sup>24</sup> On the peculiar history of the Salic law as it pertained to the prohibition of women from the royal succession, especially within a French context, see Sarah Hanley's probing scholarship, particularly *Les droits des femmes et la loi salique* (Paris: Indigo and Cite-Femmes, 1994); “Identity Politics and Rulership in France: Female Political Place and the Fraudulent Salic Law in Christine de Pisan and Jean de Montreuil,” in *Changing Identities in Early Modern France*, ed. Michael Wolfe (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 78–94; and “The Salic Law,” in *Political and Historical Encyclopedia of Women*, ed. Christine Fauré (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 2–17.

<sup>25</sup> See Richard Dinmore, *A Brief Account of the Moral and Political Acts of the Kings and Queens of England, from William the Conqueror to the Revolution of the Year 1688* (London: H. D. Symonds, 1793), pp. 178–179.

first female heir presumptive since Queen Anne. Charlotte died tragically following childbirth in 1817, but just two years later, Princess Victoria (christened Alexandrina Victoria), would be born to the Duke of Kent and his wife Victoria. Although initially fifth in line to the throne, the princess would slowly move up the line of succession – so that, by the late 1820s and early 1830s, some women’s rights enthusiasts were already heralding the day when she would assume power, ushering in what they envisioned as a more liberal and inclusive era in British politics.<sup>26</sup> It made no sense, wrote the Unitarian minister and social activist William Johnson Fox in a widely cited piece titled “A Political and Social Anomaly,” published in the *Monthly Repository* in 1832, to “vest” one woman with the “entire power of the State” while the rest of her sex possessed not even “its meanest fraction.”<sup>27</sup>

During the years leading up to Victoria’s accession, then, radicals were already experimenting with linking the “right to rule” and the “rights of women.” What is more, they were already coming to see Victoria specifically as a harbinger of female emancipation. Given the preexistence of these ideas and associations, it should not surprise us that such tendencies became only more pronounced once the youthful Victoria assumed the throne, following the sudden death of her uncle, King William IV, in June 1837. Chapter 2, “‘An Argument of a Very Popular Character’: Queen Victoria in the Early Women’s Movement, c. 1832–1876,” maps the ascendancy of this strategy in the early–mid-nineteenth century, as an organized women’s movement began to coalesce. Beginning in 1837 and continuing through the early 1870s, and in some cases even well beyond, a range of women’s rights activists featured Victoria in their pamphlets, letters, speeches, and treatises, where – alongside other arguments – they made sure to draw attention to the “paradox” of the queen’s rule.

<sup>26</sup> Egalitarian-minded thinkers, moreover, did not reserve their arguments only for female heirs presumptive. Queen Caroline, Princess Charlotte’s mother, was also a subject of great interest and at no point more so than during her famous trial in 1820 when George IV tried to divorce his estranged wife. On the feminist dimensions of the Queen Caroline controversy, see esp. Anna Clark, “Queen Caroline and the Sexual Politics of Popular Culture in London, 1820,” *Representations* no. 31 (Summer 1990), pp. 47–68 at pp. 62–63; Thomas W. Laqueur, “The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics As Art in the Reign of George IV,” *The Journal of Modern History* 54, no. 3 (September 1982), pp. 417–466, and esp. p. 462; the introduction to Clarissa Campbell Orr, ed., *Queenship in Britain 1660–1837: Royal Patronage, Court Culture and Dynastic Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 1–52 and esp. p. 41; and Mary Spongberg, *Women Writers and the Nation’s Past 1790–1860: Empathetic Histories* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), esp. chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>27</sup> See William Johnson Fox, “A Political and Social Anomaly,” *Monthly Repository* 6, September 1832, pp. 637–642 at p. 638.

To this end, early women's rights campaigners seem to have been interested less in Victoria as a person, although some were certainly captivated by the sovereign, and more in the powers associated with her high office. It mattered little to activists that the queen experienced a few missteps early in her rule (the Bedchamber Crisis, the Lady Flora Hastings affair), that she offered scant encouragement for most of their endeavors, or that, from 1840, following her marriage to her cousin Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, she seemed to be increasingly, although by no means exclusively, consumed by the demands of wifedom and motherhood.<sup>28</sup> What activists dwelled upon instead was the fact that Victoria remained head of state and Supreme Governor of the Church of England, and, crucially, that she possessed the royal prerogative. Her position, regardless of what she did with it, offered a compelling model of female political authority. This, for example, was the logic of a London-based group of female Chartists, who insisted in 1839 that since "it is a female that assumes to rule this nation" that they too must demand "our right, as free women (or women determined to be free) to rule ourselves." It was the logic, too, of the aristocratic law reformer Caroline Norton, who tried to secure divorce legislation during the 1850s in part by registering her disgust with the "grotesque anomaly which ordains that married women shall be 'non-existent' in a country governed by a female Sovereign." As it was of the pioneering suffragist and Langham Place reformer Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, who singled out the now-widowed queen – Albert had died in 1861, possibly from typhoid fever – as one of two reasons why women deserved the vote in her landmark petition to Parliament in 1866.<sup>29</sup> (Bodichon's other argument turned on women's ability to hold property.) This chapter brings together these and many other voices. In the process, it shows just how popular this strategy was in the emergent women's movement, and the degree to which it persisted through Victoria's late adolescence, marriage, motherhood, and early widowhood.

<sup>28</sup> Victoria's absorption in domestic affairs during the 1840s and 1850s was in part driven by necessity; between 1840 and 1857 the queen gave birth to nine children. To some extent too, though, her identification with traditionally "feminine" activity may have been strategic. As Margaret Homans, Julia Baird, and Susan Kingsley Kent, among many others, have suggested, Victoria's projections of "powerlessness" may have made her rule more palatable to her public. See esp. Margaret Homans, "The Powers of Powerlessness: The Courtships of Elizabeth Barrett and Queen Victoria," in *Feminist Measures*, eds. Lynn Keller and Christanne Miller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 237–259.

<sup>29</sup> See respectively the *Northern Star*, May 11, 1839, p. 2; Caroline Norton, *A Letter to the Queen on Lord Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1855), p. 4; and "Elective Franchise – For Extension to All Householders without Distinction of Sex," petition 8501, submitted June 7, 1866, in *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions. Session 1866* (House of Commons: John Gough Nichols and Robert Cradock Nichols, 1866), p. 697.

For women's rights activists, invoking Victoria was heady business. It enabled them to align themselves with custom and tradition rather than with change or abstract reason, an appealing strategy for those engaged in the treacherous business of dismantling patriarchy. But for those who objected to the premises of their campaigning – including many politicians, court insiders, conduct book writers, journalists, essayists, historians, and moralists – such rhetoric could be profoundly disconcerting and demanded responses. The next two chapters of this book thus turn away from the women's movement and look instead at some of the reactions that their tactics elicited. Chapter 3, "Rethinking the 'Right to Rule' in Victorian Britain," charts social conservatives' efforts, beginning in the 1830s, to provide new historical and philosophical foundations for female sovereignty, ones in keeping with rather than at odds with a patriarchal state. They did this, I demonstrate, by rewriting the histories of past English queens (especially Elizabeth I) in ways that underscored the masculine ingenuity and energy at the heart of female sovereigns' administrations. They also did this by valorizing Victorian statesmen, particularly Prince Albert, who was understood to be doing the queen's work on her behalf – a role that Albert readily accepted and promoted. Finally, they did this by stressing the decorative, moral, and fundamentally apolitical role of the female sovereign within the modern British nation-state.

Consider, for instance, the remarks made by one journalist writing for *The Spectator* in 1856. He defended female sovereignty on the grounds that women were better suited than men to occupy the throne because they possessed a "simpler and more instinctive mind" and were thus more willing to perform the routine tasks asked of them. He also noted that the queen regnant exercised over "the men that serve her a species of influence which lends an air of chivalry to their zeal, and calls forth a greater power in the administration of the state."<sup>30</sup> This was not an isolated outburst, but part of a larger historical pattern. Victoria, or so many pundits repeatedly asserted, was defined by her "negative" political capabilities. She "reigned" rather than "ruled." She was a "mere figurehead." Or, in the words of the economist and political analyst Walter Bagehot, who drew on the language of separate spheres to construct his famed argument about the English constitution during the late 1860s, the monarch represented the "dignified" rather than "efficient" part of government.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See "The Salic Law in France," *The Spectator*, October 20, 1855, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> See Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, ed. Paul Smith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001 [1867]), p. 5. When Bagehot wrote these words, they were certainly more prescriptive than descriptive. Now, however, his interpretation has acquired the status of conventional wisdom. For more on Bagehot's use of separate

Such attempts to minimize the queen's powers, of course, were not always explicitly or exclusively concerned with undermining women's rights campaigning. Efforts to curb the monarch's rights extended back to the late seventeenth century, and the passage of the Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867, which dramatically expanded the male electorate, required a further shift in power away from the Crown and Lords and toward the Commons. What is more, some of this new rhetoric stemmed less from fears about the challenge that Victoria posed to patriarchy than from fears about her abnegation of political responsibility. This was especially true during the 1830s, when – in the words of the diarist Charles Greville – Victoria's "extreme youth and inexperience . . . naturally excited intense curiosity," and again, during the 1860s, when Victoria's retreat from public view during her intense period of mourning following Albert's death made some political theorists eager to find ways of justifying an absent monarch.<sup>32</sup> Even so, the cumulative effect of these proposals was to produce new understandings of queenship, ones in which the female sovereign no longer possessed rights and privileges that distinguished her significantly from other women. Instead, the queen now seemed to comply with and even uphold a binary sexual and social system.

These masculinist (if not downright misogynistic) interpretations of female sovereignty posed a challenge to those women's rights activists promoting Victoria's prerogatives and privileges. Yet, what made it absolutely necessary for suffragists and others to grapple with these interpretations – and, in the process, helped to extend these interpretations' reach – was the fact that many opponents of women's rights explicitly and frequently yoked them to anti-egalitarian platforms and initiatives. Chapter 4, "The Anti-Suffragists' Queen," traces how critics of women's rights, and especially of women's political rights, used arguments about the limited and dependent role of the female sovereign to minimize the queen's feminist potential, and to erode faith in the larger aims of the women's movement more generally. To some extent, this strategy was already on display during the first three decades of Victoria's rule. A number of early Victorian conduct book writers and essayists, for example, dwelled upon the queen's deference to men and "feminine" virtues as a means of encouraging women to concentrate primarily on the "formation of their domestic habits" and eschew more radical social and political agendas.<sup>33</sup> But it was from the 1860s, as the women's

spheres ideology, see William M. Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism: The Transformation of the British Monarchy, 1861–1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> For Charles Greville's comments, see his *The Great World: Portraits and Scenes from Greville's Memoirs, 1814–1860*, ed. Louis Kronenberger (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), p. 113.

<sup>33</sup> See Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (New York: D. Appleton, 1839), p. 51. There is a significant secondary literature on Victoria's relationship to the development of "separate spheres" ideology, particularly in

movement developed a more sophisticated institutional apparatus and honed its core arguments – and as the state took its own “leap in the dark” toward universal manhood suffrage – that critics of women’s rights seized with increasing relish on these new interpretations of sovereignty.

For anti-suffragists in particular, the notion of the female sovereign as a figurehead proved a remarkable gift, enabling them to formulate clever rejoinders to those demanding the female vote. Indeed, one can almost sense the relief that Henry James, the anti-suffragist lawyer and Liberal MP for Taunton, experienced when he realized that female sovereignty did not necessarily have to be equated with female political authority, or even with female competence, as women’s rights proponents had long suggested. Speaking in the House of Commons in the early 1870s, James noted that he finally had an answer to the question “which seemed at first sight to many to be unanswerable,” that is, the question of how “inasmuch as the sovereign of this country was now a woman, and Her Gracious Majesty’s reign was justly admitted to be one of the happiest on record, it was illogical to suppose that a woman was unfit to possess the franchise in a kingdom where a woman had proved herself to be so fit to rule.” Yet, as James went on to explain to his audience, the queen was actually in “possession of negative political qualities,” and “had been fully prepared for her high office by wise statesmen.”<sup>34</sup> James was by no means alone in seeing this as a winning strategy. In fact, even after the public disclosure in 1876 of Victoria’s own feelings about women’s ill-suitability for “governing,” anti-suffragists continued to push the notion that the queen was fundamentally a political nonentity. While they were encouraged by what seemed to be Victoria’s tacit endorsement of their cause, it was the idea that the queen was “practically in tutelage” that dominated efforts to combat the suffragist argument through the last quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup>

the first three decades of her rule. See Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody’s Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), esp. chapter 3, pp. 62–79; Homans, *Royal Representations*, esp. part one; Houston, *Royalties*, esp. the introduction; and Alison Booth, “Illustrious Company: Victoria among Other Women in Anglo-American Role Model Anthologies,” in *Remaking Queen Victoria*, Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 59–78. As Booth notes, p. 65, “Queenliness” became synonymous in some quarters with “judicious discipline and domestic virtue.” What this literature to some extent overlooks, however, is the degree to which this was a reactionary discourse – a response, that is, to alternative and far more radical readings of Victoria’s position.

<sup>34</sup> See Henry James’s speech in the House of Commons, May 1871, as reported in *The Times*, May 4, 1871, p. 7, col. a.

<sup>35</sup> See MP Charles Newdegate’s speech in the House of Commons, March 1879, as reported in *The Times*, March 8, 1879, p. 8, col. f.

Suffragists, in turn, were furious, and rightly so. How dare their strategy be hijacked, and on such tenuous grounds? Surveying the queen's accomplishments from the vantage point of the 1870s and 1880s, activists such as Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Florence Fenwick Miller, Helen Blackburn, and Caroline Ashurst Biggs could plainly see that Victoria was not merely the figurehead that so many politicians, constitutional theorists, pundits, and especially anti-suffragists purported her to be. Throughout her rule, although particularly in the years following Prince Albert's death, in 1861, the queen had prided herself on exercising her political rights, even if such interventions often took place behind closed doors or were partially shielded from public view.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, suffragists took aim at those "political misogynists" who "maintain that all the credit usually given to female Sovereigns belong to their male advisers."<sup>37</sup> Yet, in their quest to challenge those anti-suffragists and others who insisted that the queen was a "puppet," they faced a fresh dilemma: how to promote the rights of the sovereign in an increasingly democratic political culture? One of the central objectives of the women's movement, after all, was to make the House of Commons more representative, a process that would necessarily divert further power from the Crown and Lords. Chapter 5, "No More Fitting Commemoration?: Reclaiming Victoria for the Women's Movement during the Golden and Diamond Jubilees," explores this conundrum, following women's rights activists as they tried to wrest the queen from their opponents – yet without jeopardizing their nation's still fragile experimentations with democracy.

Balancing these competing priorities proved no easy task. From the mid 1870s, campaigners struggled to keep Victoria relevant to their causes. Where once they had celebrated the queen's "highest political rights," they now wavered, qualified, and obfuscated – this despite their anguish with anti-suffragists' tactics. Even so, as I demonstrate in this chapter, activists did not entirely cede the queen to their opponents. The British monarchy, with its (relatively) egalitarian succession policy and tradition of female leadership, remained far too rich a seam to go unmined. And at no point were these riches more clearly on display

<sup>36</sup> Particularly notable were the queen's efforts to hasten Britain into war with Russia in 1877, during the Russo-Turkish conflict. "The government," Victoria chastised Disraeli, "will be fearfully blamed and the Queen so humiliated that she thinks she would abdicate at once. Be bold!" See Queen Victoria to Benjamin Disraeli, June 27, 1877, in William Flavelle Monypenny and George Earle Buckle, eds., *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, volume 6 (New York: Macmillan, 1920), p. 148. Scholars are just beginning to appreciate the full extent of Victoria's often muscular interventions. See, for some recent reevaluations, Arnstein, *Queen Victoria*; Baird, *Victoria the Queen*; and Kent, *Queen Victoria*.

<sup>37</sup> See *Daily News*, May 24, 1882, p. 5.



than during the Golden and Diamond jubilees of 1887 and 1897, celebrating Victoria's fiftieth and sixtieth years on the throne. On both occasions, women's rights proponents tried to reclaim Victoria for their movement by featuring the queen in their jubilee flyers, calendars, biographies, pamphlets, and fundraising. As the tireless campaigner Millicent Garrett Fawcett observed in her biography of the queen, published in expanded form to coincide with the Diamond Jubilee, the monarchy had "repeatedly" given "an able woman" the "chance . . . to prove that in statesmanship, courage, sense of responsibility and devotion to duty, she is capable of ruling in such a way as to strengthen her empire and throne by earning the devoted affection of all classes of her subjects."<sup>38</sup>

Departing from their earlier appropriations of the queen, however, and making a clear concession to their critics, women's rights proponents at both jubilees tended to portray Victoria as a less overtly political figure. Instead of dwelling on the queen's rights and prerogatives, for instance, they now played up Victoria's personal qualities – her ability to combine public and private duties, her sound character and sense of modesty, and her skill in raising her (notably independent-minded) daughters. To the extent, moreover, that they cited the queen's authority as head of state, they often situated that authority within an imperial framework, as the passage from Fawcett just cited indicates, a move that enabled them to harness the late-nineteenth-century enthusiasm for empire while deflecting attention away from the queen's involvement in national affairs. These gestures were not just reflections of the shifting priorities and propensities of the women's movement (which placed increasing emphasis on women's distinct "feminine" contributions to nation and empire). They were also attempts to disarm their opponents, by insisting that Victoria remained a change agent even in a democratizing climate.

Activists' clever tactics during the jubilees may have captured headlines, but they did not ultimately change policies. Suffragists were not much closer to achieving the vote in 1897 than they had been in 1867 – even if a women's suffrage bill did pass a second reading in the House of Commons for the very first time that year. What is more, Victoria herself had as of yet given no clear indication that she approved of suffragists' vision, a potentially problematic dynamic given activists' now highly personal and intimate appropriations of their sovereign. To the end, the queen would remain sphinx-like in regards to the Woman Question.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> See Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *Life of her Majesty Queen Victoria* (London: W. H. Allen, 1897 [1895]), p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> As I will explain in greater detail in the chapters that follow, Victoria remained inscrutable throughout her life when it came to the Woman Question. It is true that her opposition to

These realities made turn-of-the-century activists reluctant to continue pressing Victoria in their pamphlets and speeches. This ambivalence was clearly on display at the queen's death, in late January 1901. In their obituaries and eulogies, women's rights activists veered more toward polite than enthusiastic accounts of Victoria's life and its meanings for their causes, although the republican *Reynolds's Newspaper* did go so far as to concede that the queen had "taught us the power we are willfully allowing to go to waste in the womanhood of the nation."<sup>40</sup>

The decisive blow, however, came in 1902, when the queen's own harsh words about the "mad, wicked folly of 'Woman's rights'" posthumously entered the public record, thanks to the efforts of Sir Theodore Martin (himself a noted anti-suffragist). As I indicate in my Conclusion, "Queen Victoria versus the Suffragettes: The Politics of Queenship in Edwardian Britain," it was in this fraught context that feminists' engagement with the queen largely collapsed – and, by extension, that the alternative perspectives on Victoria and her monarchy offered by critics of the women's movement reached their ascendance. Faced with Victoria's bracing words, suffragists and suffragettes alike mostly came to see Victoria as a liability, and all but excised her from their increasingly combative campaigning. Gone was Victoria as symbol of women's possibilities and potentials. Instead, when activists referred to the queen, they tended to describe her as a repressed and misinformed other against whom "modern" women needed to define themselves. This rejection, moreover, silenced most scrutiny or defense of the political rights that Victoria had actually possessed and exercised.

Suffragists and suffragettes' general abandonment of the queen thus opened the door to their opponents, who were able almost single-handedly to shape Victoria's legacy vis-à-vis the Woman Question during the Edwardian period. It was a project that anti-suffragists and their allies clearly relished. Bolstered by the queen's explicit support of their causes, prominent anti-suffragists such as Alfred Maconachie, Lady Dorothy Nevill, Mary Maxse, and Lewis Harcourt promoted a version of their

certain forms of female advancement began to be known – albeit through proxies – from the 1870s. In 1870, for instance, the Scottish physician Sir Robert Christison maintained that the queen had communicated to him her opposition to the training of female doctors. And, in 1876, as already discussed, Theodore Martin published Victoria's comments about women's ill-suitability for "governing." But Victoria had also become a patron to the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women (SPEW) in 1859, and openly supported the establishment of the women-run Victoria Press in 1860 and the women-run Cama Hospital in Bombay in 1883. In 1886, moreover, she attended the opening of Holloway College, Egham, a progressive women's college. These endorsements, too, received ample publicity.

<sup>40</sup> See W. M. T., "La Reine Bourgeoise," *Reynolds's Newspaper*, January 27, 1901, p. 1.

former sovereign not just personally sympathetic to the anti-suffrage movement, but also embodying those beliefs in her own rule – a rule routinely characterized, in keeping with their Victorian predecessors' assessments, as deferential, self-effacing, and, above all, feminine. In the words of Maconachie, a Scotsman active in the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, women “have reigned rather than ruled, and have done it with men at their elbows to keep them right all the time.”<sup>41</sup>

As we know, these kinds of arguments did not ultimately give anti-suffragists the edge in debates about women's enfranchisement. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 pushed women by necessity into new positions, and their displays of resilience and patriotism under duress helped to cement parliamentary support for the passage of the Representation of the People Act in 1918, which gave the vote to women over the age of thirty who met the property qualification. No words from the grave, not even those of a popular sovereign, could override the seismic changes brought on by global conflict. But if anti-suffragists and their allies were on the losing side of history when it came to aspects of the Woman Question, they nevertheless played a decisive role in shaping popular understandings of Victoria's inimical relationship to the women's movement – understandings that persist to this day. Perhaps even more importantly, they helped to shape the belief that Victoria's style of governance, and that of constitutional monarchy more generally, were profoundly apolitical.

This Edwardian coda could not have been further from what eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women's rights enthusiasts had imagined, or intended, by their invocations of the female sovereign. Nevertheless, it marks the strange and surprising culmination of long-standing debates about the “right to rule” and the “rights of women.” These debates, although largely obscure to us now, absolutely animated Victorian culture and politics. It is to these debates, then, that we turn in the following pages.

<sup>41</sup> See “Mr. Maconachie Welcomes an Honest Controversialist,” *Eastbourne Gazette*, October 19, 1910, in Bodleian Library, National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage Collection, aleph system number 014162115.