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## FREEDOM IS ELUSIVE

*No Cow, No Common, No Free Bus Rides  
—But Plenty of Bog*

**M**R FRASER has returned to New Zealand but with the added distinction of having had the Freedom of the City of London conferred upon him. When someone asked me what it meant I found I knew very little about it, so I set out with the intention of consulting an authority or two on the subject.

I started with the encyclopædias. They told me that the Honorary Freedom of a City or Borough could be conferred on eminent visitors or persons of distinction. The Freedom implied certain rights and privileges that were nowhere clearly specified.

I determined to try the Library. On the way I met an acquaintance and asked her if she could solve my problem. "Oh," she replied, "doesn't it mean that you can keep a cow on the common?" I couldn't quite see why the Prime Minister should be offered or should accept, the right to graze a cow on an English common. So I went to

the Public Library. Here the staff were most considerate, but after consulting the encyclopædias with no better results than I had achieved elsewhere, examining volumes on constitutional law and history, and wading through chapters on



freemen and guilds, I knew no more than that each borough admitted freemen according to its own peculiar customs and by-laws, and that the rights and privileges generally included the right to vote at Parliamentary elections for the borough, and exemption from tolls and dues. It did appear, however that by an Act in 1835 every person who was a freeman retained the right to a share in the corporate property, commons, and public stock. Here, I thought, was the common, but there was no mention of the cow anywhere.

Another volume told me that the Freedom of a Borough or City could at one time be claimed by birth, servitude (i.e., apprenticeship) to a freeman, purchase, gift, or marriage, but that in 1933 another Act was passed abolishing the gift and purchase provisions, although it was still the practice to confer Honorary Freedom as a mark of distinction upon a person whom the council wished to honour. "But the admission of a person to an honorary freedom does not confer the right of sharing in the benefit of any hereditaments, common lands, or public stock of such borough or its council." That finished the cow finally.

\* \* \*  
[I finished the day too, but next morning I called at a newspaper office with my question. "Well," one of the reporters said, "it means . . . well . . . I don't know—Mac, what does the Freedom of the City mean?" "Mac" thought that it meant you could get drunk, break windows, or do anything that was not felony and get away with it. I didn't trust the twinkle in his eye, but felt on safer ground when he added, "I'll get the girl in the other room to look it up for you." While I waited I broached the subject to another member of the staff. "Yes," he said, "it entitles you to free rides on the trams and buses of the city."

"But you'd need to carry some kind of identification with you," I remarked. "Oh yes. It's a large box . . . so big, with a long scroll in it."

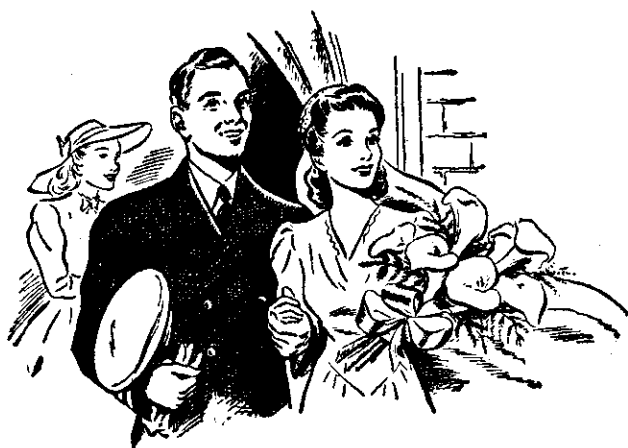
At that point the girl came in and said that she couldn't find anything about it, but why didn't I look it up in an encyclopædia?

By this time I was completely in bondage to freedom. As I passed a shop the manager, whom I knew well, was just going in. "Coming in to see us?" he asked.

"Too busy," I replied. "I'm looking for the freedom of a city!"

"Oh, I read an article about that in an English paper some time ago. It told all about the origin of it and what it means to-day."

(continued on next page)



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