

DEDICATION.



TO

THE RIGHT HON. JOHN BRIGHT, M.P.,

WHO FOR MANY YEARS

HAS

FAITHFULLY REPRESENTED THE BOROUGH IN PARLIAMENT,

THIS

HISTORY OF MODERN BIRMINGHAM

IS INSCRIBED,

WITH THE DEEPEST RESPECT,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

P R E F A C E.

THE publication of this work terminates the labour of many years, in chronicling the public events of my native town. The "Century of Birmingham Life" and "Modern Birmingham," together, record the History of the "Hardware Village," for one hundred and thirty years. As I have before said, the book is "simply what it professes to be, a compilation." I have endeavoured to discharge the duty of a chronicler honestly and impartially—faithfully to tell the "Story of our lives from year to year." It is for the reader to say how far I have been successful.

My thanks are especially due to the Proprietors of the Birmingham Newspapers for the free use of their respective files; to the Secretaries of the various Institutions and Societies of the town, for their readiness in affording me the fullest information; and to many friends for useful hints and valuable suggestions.

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MODERN BIRMINGHAM.

CHAPTER I.—1841-1851.

§ 1. APPEARANCE OF THE TOWN.

FEW towns have undergone a more rapid change in appearance than Birmingham. During the last thirty years its aspect has almost entirely altered. Its fields, gardens, crofts, and orchards have rapidly disappeared; crowded courts and long rows of houses cover the ground which they formerly occupied. It can no longer be called the "town of gardens," and few working men now possess what was almost considered a necessity by the mechanics of old,—a garden. The enormous increase in the population since 1841 has raised the value of land to such an extent, that reserving space either for health or ornament was deemed out of the question. In that year the number of inhabitants was 182,922; in thirty years it had increased to double that number, and according to the Census of 1871 the population of the Borough was 350,000 persons. The mere mention of these figures are sufficient to explain the causes of the change in the appearance of the town.

In 1840, the Government Inspector of Prisons visited Birmingham, and thus reported on an institution which no longer exists:

BIRMINGHAM DEBTORS' GAOL.—There is only one yard for the use of the poor debtors, and of the female debtors. The poor debtors usually take exercise once a week in the yard, on account of its being occupied at other times by the insolvent debtors. The poor debtors only walk there however for an hour or so at other times, if they make application.