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S P E E C H E S

ON THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS OF THE LAST TWENTY YEARS

BY

THE RT. HON. JOHN BRIGHT M.P.

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE

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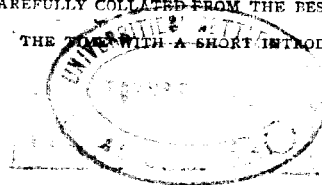
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THE TEXT CAREFULLY COLLATED FROM THE BEST REPORTS TAKEN AT

THE TIME WITH A SHORT INTRODUCTION



LONDON

JOHN CAMDEN HOTTEN, PICCADILLY.

1869

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INTRODUCTION.

BY THE EDITOR.

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THERE are some of the best and most characteristic speeches of John Bright, selected with a view to present to the reader's mind, in something like chronological sequence, the course he has advocated on all the leading questions of the last twenty years. Particular prominence has, of course, been given to the great measures proposed by Mr. Bright for the pacification of Ireland, and which the Ministry he has joined are about to bring before Parliament. The other principal subjects are the Crimean War, India, the United States, Canada, and Parliamentary Reform, on all which fruitful topics Mr. Bright has propounded opinions that once made him the most unpopular man in the country, but are now (with one exception, perhaps,) ratified by the general feeling of the whole nation.

The times are changed, and we are changed with them; but in Mr. Bright there has been no change. The one greatly consistent politician of the age, while others have changed their colours as often and as easily as the chameleon, or, like the vane, have veered about with every wind of doctrine, or, worse still, have sacrificed principle and reputation to the sordid impulses of self-interest, Mr. Bright has sat in the

House of Commons for five-and-twenty years, as a private and independent Member, waiting till the better day should come. He has consistently advocated the same doctrines during his whole political career; that is, for more than a quarter of a century. He has borne the burden and heat of the day; has acted as the pioneer of progress through shouts and screams of obloquy, abuse, and misrepresentation; and now at last, the clouds of ignorance and error being scattered away, his fair fame shines out in the clear noonday. Honour and emolument have come to him at the end unsought, as they do to all who have courage to wait and win.*

* The *Newcastle Chronicle*, referring to Mr. Bright's reception by the Queen on the occasion of his acceptance of office, says: "We understand, on Mr. Gladstone mentioning to her Majesty that he intended, with her permission, to offer a seat in the Cabinet to the hon. member for Birmingham, the Queen was pleased to say it would afford her the greatest satisfaction if Mr. Bright should consent to serve the Crown—that she had read his speeches with great pleasure, and that she was under the greatest obligations to him for the many kind words he had spoken of her, especially for a speech he made about two years ago in a great meeting in St. James's Hall. When Mr. Bright went to Windsor to take the oaths of office Her Majesty showed her delicate consideration for the great commoner in a very marked way. She sent Mr. Helps, the Clerk to the Privy Council, to assure Mr. Bright, if it was more agreeable to his feelings to omit the ceremony of kneeling or kissing hands, he was quite at liberty to do so. Mr. Bright availed himself of this considerate permission, and was very kindly and cordially received by Her Majesty, who took occasion in the most marked manner to express her gratification at meeting him. It was afterwards intimated to Mr. Bright that her Royal Highness the Princess Royal of Prussia had expressed a desire that Mr. Bright should be presented to her. This was done, and the Princess heartily assured Mr. Bright that she greatly desired to be acquainted with him—that she herself and all the members of the Royal family were greatly indebted to him for the way in which he had spoken of their mother. She herself, she said, had read all his speeches, and she was very pleased to see him. Mr. Bright replied in very graceful terms, and said if her Royal Highness would permit him he would tell her what the late Mr. Buchanan, the American Minister, when last in London, said of her to him—that wherever her Royal Highness went she shed sun-

If foresigh', then, be an evidence (and there could hardly be better evidence) of the faculty of statesmanship, Mr. Bright is likely to prove himself fully equal to the exigencies of his new position, and to be as successful in building up, as he has been in pulling down. There is a time to sow, and a time to reap; and the tangled forest of ancient prejudice being now cleared, and a free pathway made through it, we must begin to utilise the trees we have felled, and make them into habitable houses, not leave them as unsightly wrecks to cumber the way.

"Let Freedom's oak for ever thrive
With riper growth from day to day;
That man's the best Conservative,
Who lops the moulder'd branch away."

But it is our business here, more especially, to consider Mr. Bright in his character as a public speaker. The two first essentials of a great orator—humour and pathos—he will be found pre-eminently to possess. A writer in the last number of the *Edinburgh Review** says that

"His speeches are possessed of the deepest interest for all who have watched the course of politics for the last twenty years, as well as for all who can appreciate manly thought couched in pure and often noble language. In their substance they are a manifesto of the Manchester school, embodied in the words of the greatest orator that school has produced. The 'unadorned eloquence' of Mr. Cobden, though more ingenious and persuasive, cannot be compared with the ornate and studied oratory of Mr. Bright. With the restraint necessarily imposed on us in speaking of a living statesman, we shall consider the merits of these speeches both as oratorical compositions and as political treatises.

shine over all her path.' Mr. Bright was very much struck with the graceful, animated manners and genial greeting he had the honour to receive from her Royal Highness."

* January, 1869, pp. 272, 273.