

SELECTED  
SPEECHES  
*of the R<sup>t</sup> Hon<sup>ble</sup>*  
JOHN BRIGHT<sup>M.P.</sup>  
*on Public Questions*



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## INTRODUCTION

JOHN BRIGHT was born at Rochdale in 1811, and he died there in 1889. He came of an old Quaker family, was educated at Quaker schools, and remained to the end of his days a loyal member of the Society of Friends. His father was a cotton manufacturer, and John Bright was himself trained to business at the mills, in which he was all his life a partner. When he was a Privy Councillor, the older hands, who had known him from a boy, still regarded him as one of themselves. When Bright was a young man the whole country was convulsed by the great Reform agitation, and from that time forward he took a keen interest in public affairs. His earliest speeches were in support of temperance, and he soon won repute in the contest against the local church-rate. It is recorded that in 1840 his eloquence carried an amendment at a public meeting called for the purpose of levying such a rate. About the same time his sympathy was aroused by the sufferings of the masses of his fellow-countrymen from the stagnation of trade and the high price of food, caused by the incidence of Protection. He spent a large part of his time between 1840 and 1846 in agitating, in co-operation with Richard Cobden, for the abolition of the Corn Laws. In 1843 he was elected M.P. for Durham, and in 1847 for Manchester.

He was a convinced individualist in all things, and held throughout his life that it is unwise, and in many cases oppressive, to restrict the working hours of adults by *Act of Parliament*, though he was in favour of the legislative protection of children.

"He was not a philanthropist in the common and rather hackneyed sense of the word. His sympathies

did not run in that channel. He had not much faith in remedies prescribed for the occasion, nor in short-cuts for reforming social evils. On such matters he was a difficult man to move. Hence he was not found hurrying to and fro in quest of every fresh symptom that might be clamorous for a cure. But he had a steadfast faith in the operation of general causes, such as temperance, education, the improvement of the material condition of the people, and the removal of political inequalities. He aimed chiefly at being just and doing justly. He believed in the remedial power of justice, and he loved it with an ardour which set his whole being on fire. But having given the people what they were entitled to, he was not disposed to go further. Anything like petting or coddling seemed to him to be at variance with manliness, and sure to fail of its object. Give them, he would say, equal political rights with the rest of the community, remove every hindrance to their industry, and then, with the aid of the schoolmaster and a cheap press, they may be left to work out their own salvation" (Dunkley).

His strong conviction that the Crimean War was a blunder and a crime brought him into collision with the great body of his fellow-countrymen, and ultimately cost him his seat for Manchester. He was, not long afterwards, elected Member for Birmingham, and continued to represent that constituency to the day of his death. When three-fourths of the Members of the House of Commons were anxious for the break-up of the American Union, in the dispute over the question of slavery, Bright adhered heroically to the cause of the North, appealing, not without success, to the tribunal of working-class opinion on behalf of his faith in freedom.

After the General Election of 1868, he became a member of Mr. Gladstone's Government; he finally left it in 1882 as a protest against the bombardment of Alexandria. It is important to notice, however, that in this case, as in the case of the Crimean War, he based his opposition on the merits of the quarrel, and that he refused to commit himself to any condemnation of all war in the abstract. During his tenure of office the

Bright Land Clauses of the Irish Church Act, which were the basis of all subsequent Irish land legislation, proved his success as a practical legislator. His suggestion of a commercial treaty between England and France, taken up by Chevalier, led to the famous treaty which Cobden carried out between the two countries in 1861, with such beneficent and far-reaching results. With all his sympathy for Ireland, Mr. Bright never accepted the idea of a separate legislature, and Gladstone's Home Rule Bill, therefore, did not obtain his approval. To his infinite regret, he consequently passed his last years in political separation from Mr. Gladstone and from many of his other old friends.

One of Mr. Bright's great sayings was, that "statesmanship consists as much in foreseeing as in doing." His historian, in the "Dictionary of National Biography," thus points out the singular success of his own important forecasts. In his first speech in the House of Commons (August 7, 1843) he remarked that Peel was at issue with his party upon principles. On June 25, 1844, he predicted that Peel would repeal the Corn Laws at the first bad harvest. From the outset of his career he denounced the Irish Church establishment. He foresaw the danger of restriction to one source for the supply of cotton; the probability of a cotton famine ensuing on the break-up of slavery, and the consequent disorganization of the Southern States. He insisted that India should be brought under the authority of the Crown. While Palmerston was asserting the revival of Turkey, Bright as consistently insisted that Turkey was a decaying power. Sir James Graham afterwards made him the admission, "You were entirely right about the Crimean War; we were entirely wrong." He predicted that the successful defence of Turkey would lead to fresh demands on her as soon as Russia had recovered from her exhaustion. He foretold that the cession of Savoy would bring about Italy's independence from French control. He said, as far back as 1878, that an Irish party hostile to the Liberal party in Great Britain involves the perpetual reign of the Tories."

A man who attacked all the cherished idols of the ruling classes, and who characterized the aggressive foreign policy of Palmerston as "a gigantic system of out-door relief for the aristocracy of Great Britain," was not likely to be much loved by the great ones of the earth. And "there was nothing deprecatory about John Bright. He could be quite as insolent in his way as any aristocrat in his. What was really irritating about him was that his disdain was genuine. He did think very little of the Tory party, and he did not care one straw for the opinion of society. He positively would not have cared to have been made a Baronet."

Years have elapsed since these speeches were delivered, but they are not therefore out of date. Of the 1,500 pages that Rogers selected for publication there are very few that do not still afford good reading, and the same applies to many other addresses which might be disinterred from old newspaper files. The great problem of Indian government is always with us. Protection, which its champion, Disraeli, said was "not only dead, but damned," is again trying to rear its head. The military and naval expenditure, which Bright held to be absurd and wasteful, was small compared with that which a Liberal Government now considers necessary. Those causes which, largely through Bright's influence, were carried to a successful issue, and have become part of the national inheritance, depended on the underlying principle of faith in freedom, which is of undying value and importance. His great saying, "Force is no remedy," deserves specially to be revived at a time when its spirit has been eclipsed by clouds of materialism and passion.

As models of the clear and convincing expression of thought, Mr. Bright's speeches will be read and re-read by every student of the English language and by every one who wishes to learn so to express himself as to influence the minds of his fellow-countrymen. It was said that Bright and Gladstone were the only men of their time in the House of Commons whose eloquence actually changed votes. Thorold Rogers remarked how well these speeches fulfil the three demands of Aristotle

that an orator must convince his audience at the outset, first, that he has their interests at heart ; next, that he is competent to interpret them ; and thirdly, that he is free from any taint of self-seeking. It was remarkable to notice how, if the apt word he wanted did not come to John Bright at first, he would keep the mighty audience hanging on his lips for quite a long pause until he had found the very phrase that

“ Helved his thought as slick  
As straight-grained hickory does the hatchet.”

In studying the speeches, it will be noticed how thoroughly Mr. Bright's mind was impregnated by the study of the Bible and of great English classics, especially Milton. The point of almost every address seems to be brought out by a line from the Old Testament, or it may be from Dante, from Homer, or from Lowell.

A generation has grown up which never felt how John Bright not only convinced men's minds, but “ swayed their hearts like barley bending,” and which is not thrilled by the mention of his name. The esteem in which Birmingham held him was well voiced by Dr. R. W. Dale in August, 1882 : “ I venture to say that the affection and veneration which Mr. Bright has inspired are not fully explained either by his eloquence or by the magnificent service which he has rendered to the country. The man is greater than the eloquence. The man is nobler than his service. In circumstances of great peril Mr. Bright has always been loyal to his conscience. Slanders never turned him aside from what he believed to be the path of righteousness, nor mockery, nor insult, nor hatred. He never quailed before the power of the great ; and when, for a time, fidelity to conscience brought upon him storms of unpopularity, and he lost the confidence of the people he loved and served, Mr. Bright remained faithful still. I believe he has elevated the national ideal of political morality.” This passage may help to illustrate the faith and enthusiasm that Bright inspired in great masses of his fellow-countrymen and the influence which he wielded over the minds of his generation—an influ-

ence doubtless based on his own profound faith in righteousness, in the Divine government of the world, and in the duty of every citizen to take his share in carrying that government forward.

The following selections from the speeches will be sufficient to illustrate Mr. Bright's determined opposition to the Crimean War, his passionate protest against the rebellion of the American Slave States, his desire to bring the possession of land within the reach of the people of England and Ireland, and his suggestions for the better government of India. They will serve their purpose if they induce some of their readers to study the volumes from which they are taken, and to consider the problems of the present day in the light of the principles for the furtherance of which John Bright's life was spent.

1907.

The following is a list of Bright's published speeches, letters, etc. :

"Speeches on Questions of Public Policy," edited by Professor J. E. Thorold Rogers, 2 vols., 1868; popular edition, 1 vol., 1878, 1892; "Public Addresses," edited by Professor J. E. Thorold Rogers, 1879; "Public Letters," collected by H. J. Leech, 1885; "Life and Speeches of John Bright," by G. B. Smith, 1881.

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# I

## INDIA—I

(FROM HANSARD)

*House of Commons, June 24, 1858.*

[After the suppression of the Indian mutiny, Lord Palmerston's Government determined to introduce a Bill the object of which was to place the possessions of the East India Company under the direct authority of the Crown. This Bill was introduced by Lord Palmerston on February 12. But the Government fell a few days afterwards, on the Conspiracy Bill, and Lord Palmerston's Bill was withdrawn. On March 26 the new Government introduced their own Bill, which was known as the India Bill No. 2. The chief peculiarity of this Bill was that five members in the proposed council of eighteen should be chosen by the constituencies of the following cities: London, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Belfast. The scheme was unpopular, and Lord Russell proposed that it should be withdrawn, and that resolutions should be passed in a Committee of the whole House, the acceptance of which might prove a guide to the proceedings of the Government. The suggestion was accepted by Mr. Disraeli, and in consequence India Bill No. 3 was brought in, and read a second time on June 24.

The non-recognition, by the East India Company's government of adopted heirs was doubtless, one of the contributory causes of the mutiny of 1857. After peace was restored, the right of adoption was expressly recognized by the Government, and Sanads, or documents guaranteeing this right, were issued by Lord Canning to all the chiefs on March 11, 1862.]

WHAT is it we have to complain of in India? What is it that the people of India, if they spoke by my mouth, have to complain of? They would tell the House that, as a rule, throughout almost all the Presidencies, and throughout those Presidencies most which have been longest under British rule, the cultivators of the soil, the great body of the population of India, are in a condition of great impoverishment, of

great dejection, and of great suffering. I have, on former occasions, quoted to the House the report of a Committee which I obtained ten years ago, upon which sat several members of the Court of Directors; and they all agreed to report as much as I have now stated to the House—the Report being confined chiefly to the Presidencies of Bombay and Madras. If I were now submitting the case of the population of India I would say that the taxes of India are more onerous and oppressive than the taxes of any other country in the world. I think I could demonstrate that proposition to the House. I would show that industry is neglected by the Government to a greater extent probably than is the case in any other country in the world which has been for any length of time under what is termed a civilized and Christian government. I should be able to show from the notes and memoranda of eminent men in India, of the Governor of Bengal, Mr. Halliday, for example, that there is not, and never has been in any country pretending to be civilized, a condition of things to be compared with that which exists under the police administration of the province of Bengal. With regard to the courts of justice I may say the same thing. I could quote passages from books written in favour of the Company with all the bias which the strongest friends of the Company can have, in which the writers declare that, precisely in proportion as English courts of justice have extended, have perjury and all the evils which perjury introduces into the administration of justice prevailed throughout the Presidencies of India. With regard to public works, if I were speaking for the Natives of India, I would state this fact, that in a single English county there are more roads—more travelable roads—than are to be found in the whole of India; and I would say also that the single city of Manchester, in the supply of its inhabitants with the single article of water, has spent a larger sum of money than the East India Company has spent in the fourteen years from 1834 to 1848 in public works of every kind throughout the whole of its vast dominions. I would say that the real activity of the Indian Govern-

ment has been an activity of conquest and annexation—of conquest and annexation which after a time has led to a fearful catastrophe, which has enforced on the House an attention to the question of India, which but for that catastrophe I fear the House would not have given it.

If there were another charge to be made against the past Government of India, it would be with regard to the state of its finances. Where was there a bad Government whose finances were in good order? Where was there a really good Government whose finances were in bad order? Is there a better test in the long run of the condition of a people and the merits of a Government than the state of the finances? And yet not in our own time, but going back through all the pages of Mill, or of any other history of India, we find the normal condition of the finances of India has been that of deficit and bankruptcy. I maintain that if that be so, the Government is a bad Government. It has cost more to govern India than the Government has been able to extract from the population of India. The Government has not been scrupulous as to the amount of taxes or the mode in which they have been levied; but still, to carry on the government of India according to the system which has heretofore prevailed, more has been required than the Government has been able to extract by any system of taxation known to them from the population over which they have ruled. It has cost more than 30,000,000*l.* a year to govern India, and the gross revenue being somewhere about 30,000,000*l.*, and there being a deficit, the deficit has had to be made up by loans. The Government has obtained all they could from the population; it is not enough, and they have had to borrow from the population and from Europeans at a high rate of interest to make up the sum which has been found to be necessary. They have a debt of 60,000,000*l.*, and it is continually increasing; they always have a loan open; and while their debt is increasing their credit has been falling, because they have not treated their creditors very honourably on one or two occasions, and chiefly, of course, on account of the calamities which

have recently happened in India. There is one point with regard to taxation which I wish to explain to the House, and I hope that, in the reforms to which the noble Lord is looking forward, it will not be overlooked. I have said that the gross revenue is 30,000,000*l.* Exclusive of the opium revenue, which is not, strictly speaking, and hardly at all, a tax upon the people, I set down the taxation of the country at something like 25,000,000*l.* Hon. Gentlemen must not compare 25,000,000*l.* of taxation in India with 60,000,000*l.* of taxation in England. They must bear in mind that in India they could have twelve days' labour of a man for the same sum in silver or gold which they have to pay for one day's labour of a man in England; that if, for example, this 25,000,000*l.* were expended in purchasing labour, that sum would purchase twelve times as much in India as in England—that is to say, that the 25,000,000*l.* would purchase as many days' labour in India as 300,000,000*l.* would purchase in England. [An Hon Member: "How much is the labour worth?"] That is precisely what I am coming to. If the labour of a man is only worth 2*d.* a day, they could not expect as much revenue from him as if it were 2*s.* a day. That is just the point to which I wish the hon. Gentleman would turn his attention. We have in England a population which, for the sake of argument, I will call 30,000,000. We have in India a population of 150,000,000. Therefore, the population of India is five times as great as the population of England. We raise in India, reckoning by the value of labour, taxation equivalent to 300,000,000*l.*, which is five times the English revenue. Some one may probably say, therefore, that the taxation in India and in England appears to be about the same, and no great injury is done. But it must be borne in mind that in England we have an incalculable power of steam, of machinery, of modes of transit, roads, canals, railways, and everything which capital and human invention can bring to help the industry of the people; while in India there is nothing of the kind. In India there is scarcely a decent road, the rivers are not bridged,

there are comparatively no steam engines, and none of those aids to industry that meet us at every step in Great Britain and Ireland. Suppose steam engines, machinery, and modes of transit abolished in England, how much revenue would the Chancellor of the Exchequer obtain from the people of England? Instead of 60,000,000*l.* a year, would he get 10,000,000*l.*? I doubt it very much. If the House will follow out the argument, they will come to the conclusion that the taxes of the people of India are oppressive to the last degree, and that the Government which has thus taxed them can be tolerated no longer, and must be put an end to at once and for ever. I wish to say something about the manner in which these great expenses are incurred. The extravagance of the East India Government is notorious to all. I believe there never was any other service under the sun paid at so high a rate as the exclusive Civil Service of the East India Company. Clergymen and missionaries can be got to go out to India for a moderate sum—private soldiers and officers of the army go out for a moderate remuneration—merchants are content to live in the cities of India for a percentage or profit not greatly exceeding the ordinary profits of commerce. But the Civil Service, because it is bound up with those who were raised by it and who dispense the patronage of India, receive a rate of payment which would be incredible if we did not know it to be true, and which, knowing it to be true, we must admit to be monstrous. The East India Government scatters salaries about at Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Agra, Lahore, and half a dozen other cities, which are up to the mark of those of the Prime Minister and Secretaries of State in this country. These salaries are framed upon the theory that India is a mine of inexhaustible wealth, although no one has found it to be so but the members of the Civil Service of the East India Company. The policy of the Government is at the bottom of the constant deficit. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has twice recently declared that expenditure depends upon policy. That is as true in India as in England, and it is the policy that

has been pursued there which renders the revenue liable to this constantly recurring deficit.

I have come to the conclusion, which many hon. Members probably share with me, that the edifice we have reared in India is too vast. There are few men now, and least of all those connected with the East India Company, who, looking back to the policy that has been pursued, will not be willing to admit that it has not been judicious but hazardous—that territories have been annexed that had better have been left independent, and that wars have been undertaken which were as needless as they were altogether unjustifiable. The immense empire that has been conquered is too vast for management, its base is in decay, and during the last twelve months it has appeared to be tottering to its fall. Who or what is the instrument—the Cabinet, the Government, or the person—by whom this evil policy is carried on?

The greatest officer in India is the Governor-General. He is the ruler of about one-fifth—certainly more than one-sixth—of the human race. The Emperors of France and Russia are but the governors of provinces compared with the power, the dignity, and the high estate of the Governor-General of India. Now, over this officer, almost no real control is exercised. If I were to appeal to the two hon. Gentlemen who have frequently addressed the House during these debates (Colonel Sykes and Mr. Willoughby), they would probably admit that the Governor-General of India is an officer of such high position that scarcely any control can be exercised over him either in India or in England. Take the case of the Marquess of Dalhousie for example. I am not about to make an attack upon him, for the occasion is too solemn for personal controversies. But the annexation of Sattara, of the Punjab, of Nagpore, and of Oude occurred under his rule. I will not go into the case of Sattara; but one of its Princes, and one of the most magnanimous Princes that India ever produced, suffered and died most unjustly in exile, either through the mistakes or the crimes of the Government of India. This, how-

ever, was not done under the Government of Lord Dalhousie. As to the annexation of Nagpore, the House has never heard anything about it to this hour. There has been no message from the Crown or statement of the Government relative to that annexation. Hon. Members have indeed heard from India that the dresses and wardrobes of the ladies of its Court have been exposed to sale, like a bankrupt's stock, in the haberdashers' shops of Calcutta—a thing likely to incense and horrify the people of India who witnessed it.

Take, again, the case of the Burmese war. The Governor-General entered into it, and annexed the province of Pegu, and to this day there has been no treaty with the King of Burmah. If that case had been brought before the House, it is impossible that the war with Burmah could have been entered upon. I do not believe that there is one man in England who, knowing the facts, would say that this war was just or necessary in any sense. The Governor-General has an army of 300,000 men under his command; he is a long way from home; he is highly connected with the governing classes at home; there are certain reasons that make war palatable to large classes in India; and he is so powerful that he enters into these great military operations almost uncontrolled by the opinion of the Parliament and people of England. He may commit any amount of blunders or crimes against the moral law, and he will still come home loaded with dignities and in the enjoyment of pensions. Does it not become the power and character of this House to examine narrowly the origin of the misfortunes and disgraces of the grave catastrophe which has just occurred? The place of the Governor-General is too high—his power is too great—and I believe that this particular office and officer are very much responsible—of course, under the Government at home—for the disasters that have taken place.

Only think of a Governor-General of India writing to an Indian Prince, the ruler over many millions of men in the heart of India, "Remember you are but as the dust under my feet." Passages like these are left



out of despatches, when laid on the table of the House of Commons:—it would not do for the Parliament, or the Crown, or the people of England to know that their officer addressed language like this to a Native Prince. The fact is that a Governor-General of India, unless he be such a man as is not found more than once in a century, is very liable to have his head turned, and to form ambitious views, which are mainly to be gratified by successful wars and the annexation of province after province during the period of his rule. The “Services” are always ready to help him in these plans. I am not sure that the President of the Board of Control could not give evidence on this subject, for I have heard something of what happened when the noble Lord was in India. When the Burmese war broke out, the noble Lord could, no doubt, tell the House that, without inquiring into the quarrel or its causes, the press of India, which was devoted to the “Services,” and the “Services” themselves, united in universal approbation of the course taken by the Governor-General. Justice to Pegu and Burmah and the taxes to be raised for the support of the war were forgotten, and nothing but visions of more territory and more patronage floated before the eyes of the official English in India. I contend that the power of the Governor-General is too great and the office too high to be held by the subject of any Power whatsoever, and especially by any subject of the Queen of England.

I should propose, if I were in a position to offer a scheme in the shape of a Bill to the House, as an indispensable preliminary to the wise government of India in future, such as would be creditable to Parliament and advantageous to the people of India, that the office of Governor-General should be abolished. Perhaps some hon. Gentlemen may think this a very unreasonable proposition. Many people thought it unreasonable in 1853, when it was proposed to abolish the East India Company; but now Parliament and the country believe it to be highly reasonable and proper; and I am not sure that I could not bring before the House reasons to convince them that the abolition of