

**NOTES ON POLITICS &
HISTORY; A
UNIVERSITY ADDRESS**

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Notes on Politics & History; A University Address by John Morley

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NOTES
ON
POLITICS & HISTORY

A UNIVERSITY ADDRESS

BY
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CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER



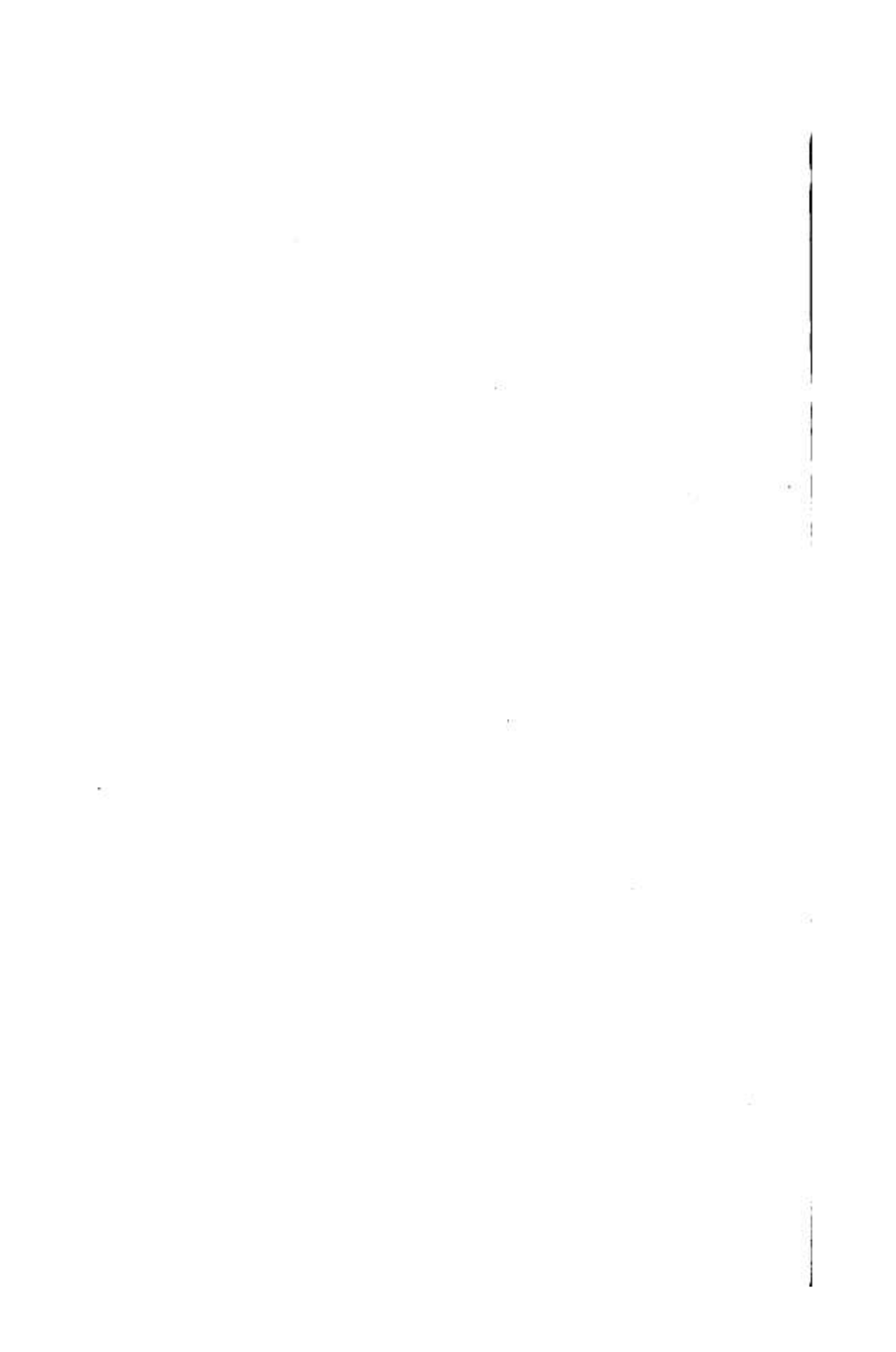
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NOTE

THESE pages are a version, amplified and recast, of an Address delivered by the writer as Chancellor of the University of Manchester, in the summer of 1912. The strict rules that limit the contents of a Bill in parliament by its Title, would be fatal to an academic address like this. I only hope that my Notes are not too dispersive to prevent some points of thought from being of use in the way of suggestion, interrogatory, and perhaps as spur to curiosity.

M.



NOTES ON POLITICS AND HISTORY

I

WHEN I had the pleasure of coming among you a few months ago, I offered some remarks upon the obvious truth that democracy in the discussions of the day means government working directly through public opinion; and upon the equally urgent importance of a body, like this University, making it one part of its office to help in forming those habits of mind and temper upon which, along with knowledge of the right facts, the soundness of opinion depends.

Universities and political habit of mind.

To-night I propose (to harp upon the same string,) and to say something about politics and history. I intend a double subject with a single object. I need your indulgence, for of history I know too little, and of politics some of you may think I know too much, and know it wrong. Pretty manifest roots of mischief easily spoil both contemporary politician and historian; both the minister or the elector of to-day, and the interpreter of days long ago. Looseness of mind is one;

\ narrowness of vision is another. Plenty of infirmities besides are left. You know the worst of them, at least by distant report—indolence, impatience, procrastination, incoherence, pugnacity. I include pugnacity among defects, for it is no vice of intellect if our first attitude towards new opinion is one of readiness and attentive response, rather than instantaneous combat; to give a hearing, before rushing to controversial fire-arms. A receptive mind is after all no hindrance to firm love of truth. On the other hand life is short, and there are limits to patience with quackish fungoids. You have not, I would fain believe, forgotten the spirit of a passage from Spinoza that I quoted here last time: "When I applied my mind to politics, so that I might examine what belongs to politics, with the same precision of mind as we use for mathematics, I have taken my best pains not to laugh at the actions of mankind, not to groan over them, not to be angry with them, but to understand them." By understanding them, he says, he means looking at all the motives of human feeling,—love, hatred, envy, ambition, pity,—not as vices of human nature, but as properties belonging to it, just as heat, cold, storm, thunder belong to air and sky.

Signs of
 the times.

So much to begin with—the mood and temper: then the application and occasion. Any reflective observer, if he likes, can sketch some of the signs of the times in rather formidable outline.