

**SIR EDWARD CLARKE (HER
MAJESTY'S SOLICITOR
GENERAL), PUBLIC
SPEECHES 1880-1890**

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Sir Edward Clarke (Her Majesty's solicitor general), public speeches 1880-1890 by Edward Clarke

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(HER MAJESTY'S SOLICITOR GENERAL)

PUBLIC SPEECHES

1880—1890



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TO
THE ELECTORS OF THE BOROUGH
OF PLYMOUTH,

Who have shown a great and sustained confidence in my capacity for public service, by four times returning me to Parliament as their Representative, I dedicate this selection from the Speeches made by me during the last ten years, trusting that it will serve as an expression of gratitude for their favour, and of my hope that for many years to come I may be allowed to represent them in the House of Commons.

EDWARD CLARKE.

37 Russell Square,
Feb. 4, 1890.



PREFACE.

Address to the Electors of the Borough of Southwark,

FEBRUARY 4, 1880.

GENTLEMEN,—The death of the senior member for your Borough, my old friend Mr. John Locke, who had for many years been held in deserved esteem by all classes among his constituents, affords you an opportunity of expressing your opinion upon the conduct of public affairs.

The questions before you for consideration are of national importance; and the judgment which shall be expressed by the great constituency of Southwark will materially influence the opinion and the action of the country at large.

During the last six years a Conservative Government has directed the policy, and conducted the administration, of Great Britain, under the accumulated difficulties of foreign war, depressed commerce, failing harvests, and the most malicious and unscrupulous Opposition which the history of this country records. As a Conservative, I ask you fairly to consider the title which that Government has established to your confidence and support.

In Eastern Europe the policy of Her Majesty's Government has received the justification of complete success. The Berlin Treaty has not only for the past eighteen months secured the peace of Europe, but has dissolved the formidable triple alliance, which hindered the progress of Constitutional freedom, and menaced the independence of the smaller States. At the great council which gathered at Berlin, the representatives of Great Britain spoke in the name of a people who were anxious for honourable peace, but had shown themselves ready to bear the burdens and anxieties of war. The firm and resolute will of Lord Beaconsfield was shared and sustained by the great majority of his countrymen, and the jealousies and ambitions which had threatened Europe with the horrors of wide-spreading war disappeared before the peaceful and unselfish but unwavering policy of the people of Great Britain.

In Afghanistan the Liberal Government of 1868-74 had succeeded in disturbing and alienating the Amoer, and in providing for Russia an opportunity for unofficial war against this country, of which, in the crisis of the European difficulties, she gladly availed herself. To have remained quiescent would have been to expose our Indian Empire to the danger of an invasion, of whose time and place we should have had no warning, of whose strength we could make no estimate, and whose retreat we could not follow. The emergency was firmly met, the passes of the North-Western frontier are now in our hands; and the chief danger which threatened the safety of our empire in India is finally dispelled.

In South Africa a war, for which the Home Government was in no way responsible, has ended in the destruction of a barbaric military organization which disturbed the peace and hindered the progress of our colonies.

The Government has been called upon to provide for large and exceptional expenditure, while the depression of commerce, and the failure of recent harvests have checked, for a time, the natural tendency of the revenue to increase. Yet they have neither imposed heavier burdens on the people, nor increased the national debt. The Liberal Government of 1868-74 had five complete years of office; of the Conservative administration only five years have yet been completed. It is fair to compare these terms. In the five years of Conservative rule the amount paid in taxation was less per head than it was in the five years of Mr. Gladstone; the Income Tax, which in the same period amounted under Mr. Gladstone to 1s. 10d. in the £, in the five years of the Conservatives was only 1s. 3d.; and, at the end of the five years, the Conservative Government had effected a real reduction in the debt of the country of no less than seventeen millions and a half.

It has been the fashion of late for Radical speakers to declare that domestic legislation has been neglected. The accusation comes from those who, by abetting a system of mere obstruction, have done their best to bring Parliamentary Government to inefficiency and disrepute. And the accusation is not true. During the last six sessions between twenty and thirty Acts have been passed into law by the exertions of the Ministry, which have directly and substantially contributed to the health, education, and social welfare of the people.

The administration of the law has been rendered more simple and more speedy; the prosecution of criminals has been assumed as the duty of the State instead of being left to the revenge of the victim of the crime; the right to a trial by jury has been widely extended: the unnecessary and costly imprisonment for small offences has been greatly lessened; the treatment of criminals undergoing imprisonment has been rendered uniform.

The laws relating to Public Health have been consolidated and improved; municipalities have received powers to remove unhealthy dwellings. Rivers have been protected from pollution, and Commons from enclosure; and the Factories Act of 1871, and the Factories and Workshops Act of 1878, completed a series of Acts which have given comfort to the homes of working men, and saved their children from the evils of premature toil.

The relations between employers and employed have been improved by the Acts of 1875, and the real grievance which working men suffered under the law of conspiracy, as then expounded, was removed in that year; in the same session the statute was passed under which Friendly Societies have been enabled to re-organize themselves on a safer basis than before; and the Agricultural Holdings Act secured to every tenant, who had no written contract with his landlord, compensation for what he had put upon the farm, and an ample term of notice before he could be made to quit possession.

I have not attempted to summarize the whole of the legislation of these years, but the measures I have named do, in themselves, constitute a body of social reform of which the Ministry may be proud.

Of a ministry which has thus worthily upheld the influences of Great Britain, wisely administered the national resources, and diligently applied itself to useful legislation, I avow myself a firm and earnest supporter, and I appeal to all among you who value our good name abroad and good government at home to give me your votes in this contest.

The condition of Ireland has again become a question of serious difficulty. Bad harvests have checked the steady advance in material prosperity which she has now enjoyed for many years, and to add to her misfortune an agitation has been raging among her people which must inevitably tend to drive away the capital which she so sorely needs. The first duty of the

nation is clear ; to relieve by voluntary subscription, or, if needful, by the application of public funds, the real want which is undoubtedly felt in certain parts of Ireland. The second duty is equally clear ; to uphold the authority of the law and to protect with impartial firmness, order, property, and freedom. I hope that any inequalities before the law which may exist may speedily be redressed ; that municipal institutions in Ireland may be extended ; that the measures recently passed to aid the intermediate and higher education of Irishmen may receive full development ; and that the purely administrative business of the country may be carried out by local inquiries and provisional orders, instead of the costly and tedious process of committees and bills in the Imperial Parliament. But I distrust the legislation of panic or of passion, and the statesmanship which allows a political murder or a street outrage to prompt the overthrow of a church, and the confiscation of its property ; or which offers to the starving peasants of Connaught the barren gift of a scheme by which the Imperial Government may become an improvident money-lender, to enable thriving tenants to purchase the fee-simple of the lands they farm. And I would defend the integrity of the Empire as resolutely against a domestic faction as against a foreign foe.

In the field of practical legislation there is plenty of work for Parliament to do. The codification of the Criminal Law ; the establishment of a reasonable and uniform system of valuation for rating purposes ; the amendment of the law of Bankruptcy ; the simplification of the title to land ; the removal of the rule which prevents a person charged with crime from giving evidence on his own behalf, and will not permit his wife to be called as a witness ; the abolition of the rule by which the eldest son in the case of an intestacy takes the whole of the landed property ; these are among the matters upon which I hope I might usefully assist in the work of legislation.

I am by education and by conviction a Churchman, and I believe that the maintenance of the Church of England, and her continued devotion to the work of religious education, are the surest guarantees of the happiness and true prosperity of the country. The schemes of the Liberation Society, now for party purposes discreetly suppressed, to be again brought forward if the confederacy of 1868 is again found possible, will find in me a resolute opponent.

I have never been able to persuade myself that voluntary abstinence from any luxury entitles me to prohibit other people from enjoying it, and I oppose the Permissive Bill agitation in all its forms.

I have lived many years in the South of London, and am thoroughly acquainted with the local interests of Southwark ; and during the last eighteen months I have taken every opportunity of making myself known among you. In so large a borough a personal canvass is, of course, impossible, but I ask you to read my speeches, to come, if you can, to hear me, and then to judge if I am fit to be your member. I have no ambition which is in conflict with your interests ; and if you honour me with the proud position of your representative in Parliament I will strive with all my powers to prove myself worthy of your trust.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your most obedient Servant,

EDWARD CLARKE,

HUNTINGDON LODGE, PECKHAM,

February 4, 1880.