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SELECT SPEECHES

OF

DANIEL O'CONNELL, Esq., M.P.

THE speech of Mr. O'Connell, with which we commence this volume, was in many respects a remarkable one. In the first place it brings out in a clear light one great and marking feature of his policy, that of steady persistence in the use of the ways and means that the constitution provides for declaring grievances and demanding redress; persistence through every discouragement, and apparently, but only apparently, against hope itself at times.

In the next place it presents a lively picture of the state of things in Europe, at the period of the first Napoleon's first abdication—now not far from forty years ago; the hopes then rationally entertained for human liberty—the opportunities then before kings and princes to give a permanent and enduring basis in the grateful affections of their enfranchised subjects, to thrones and dynasties, yet but tremblingly re-established after the terrible hurricane of war and conquest that had for a while overset them. To us, at present, anxious spectators of the probable beginning of another mighty European controversy in arms; who have had such ample material and time to judge of the faults, the follies, the mistakes, and the crimes that were committed in 1815, and that have borne such fatal fruit since (notably so in that year of terrible distraction and disaster, and of still more terrible omen of future evil, the year 1848), there cannot be anything more interesting than the picture this speech gives of things and expectations at the moment in question, when kings and princes had the destinies of nations, as well as their own in their hands, to model them for good or ill, at their pleasure; and when a little wisdom, a little self-denial, a little generosity, a little faithfulness to the promises by which, in former moments of deadly peril they had won the heart-whole support of their people against the French invader, might have secured the lasting peace and happiness of the world!

In the third place this speech is particularly remarkable for the clear, penetrating, and decisive view that Daniel O'Connell took of the now generally condemned and exploded injustice of the Corn Laws. Far otherwise were those laws at that time than condemned. They were just being re-enacted after an interval of several years; and their re-enactment was, at the time we speak of, hailed by public speakers and writers as a measure of great wisdom. In Ireland, especially, were they held up as eminently calculated to be of benefit, and the assumed organs of public opinion here, and indeed whatever degree of public opinion then was active amongst us, fastened with a loving faith upon the plausibilities of the scheme, and set down as ill-judging, or ill-disposed, any one who attempted to stay the current, and urge a calmer and a larger consideration.

It will be seen how even Mr. O'Connell, himself, popular as he then was, and little capable as he then or at any other time showed himself, of being daunted in any du

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