

The Platform

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THE PLATFORM
ITS RISE AND PROGRESS



THE PLATFORM



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BY

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IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

London
MACMILLAN AND CO
AND NEW YORK
1892

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P R E F A C E

IN presenting this work to the public, there is but one plea which I would urge in extenuation of some of the comments which may be made on it—namely, that it is the first history of the Platform which has ever been written ; and just as there are special difficulties to be surmounted in constructing a new road in an unexplored country, so there are special difficulties in writing a history of a subject hitherto not treated historically.

In putting forward this plea I do not, however, in any way wish to deprecate criticism or discussion on the conclusions set forth. Rather do I invite them ; for, even limiting the matter to our own country, it is manifestly desirable that the position of so great a political institution as the Platform should be thoroughly discussed and defined.

But the subject has a further interest. "The Platform" is an attempt to graft a system of democratic government on the

ancient constitution of this kingdom—or, in other words, is an attempt at a solution of the great problem of popular government which has in recent times come into such commanding prominence.

As a great experiment in that world-lasting problem, the system which the British people have adopted, and are attempting to work out, must, whether it fails or whether it succeeds, attract the closest and most searching attention of rulers and peoples in other countries, and at later times than ours. It is, therefore, I venture to think, the more essential that the position, and power, and functions of the Platform, as an institution of government in this kingdom, should be clearly and distinctly defined.

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INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to give a completely satisfactory definition of "the Platform." As a comprehensive definition, I should say, that every political speech at a public meeting, excluding those from the Pulpit and those in Courts of Justice, comes within the meaning of "the Platform."

It may be objected that this definition includes speeches made after a public dinner or banquet, but such occasions have been so largely used for great political speeches outside Parliament, that to exclude them from any history of "the Platform" would be to treat this great subject most imperfectly.

It may also be said that this definition includes political lectures—that a Platform speech and a political lecture are two totally different things; but the difference is more one of the manner and circumstances of delivery than of matter; and public discussion usually follows a lecture.

I think, then, that this is, on the whole, a fair and sufficiently distinct definition, as it fills the space between the speeches in Parliament on the one hand, and the written opinions and arguments of the Press on

the other hand, and this is what the Platform practically does.

I must also make an explanation. From the very commencement of this work, I have called "the Platform" by the name we now know it by, though the name only came into use in its present sense long after the thing itself was in existence.

What technically is now called the "platform" was during the last century, and in the early part of this, known by the name of the "Hustings," which word survives in use to the present day. Occasionally it was designated by the terms "scaffold," as at a meeting of the inhabitants of Westminster in 1795, or by the word "stage." Later on, the words "tribune" and "rostrum" and "forum" were sometimes used. In 1820 we find the word "platform" used as describing the place from which the speakers addressed the meeting, and gradually, as we advanced into the present century, the word "platform," by a perfectly simple and natural transition, came into general use and acceptance, not merely in the technical sense, as the place from which the speech was made, but as descriptive of the spoken expression of public opinion outside Parliament.

For the sake of clearness therefore, and so as to present the history of this great institution as a consecutive whole, unbroken by change of designation, I have adhered to the word "Platform" throughout.

One other remark I also wish to make. I have confined this work to the *political* "Platform," for it is in its political aspect that the real power of the Platform lies.