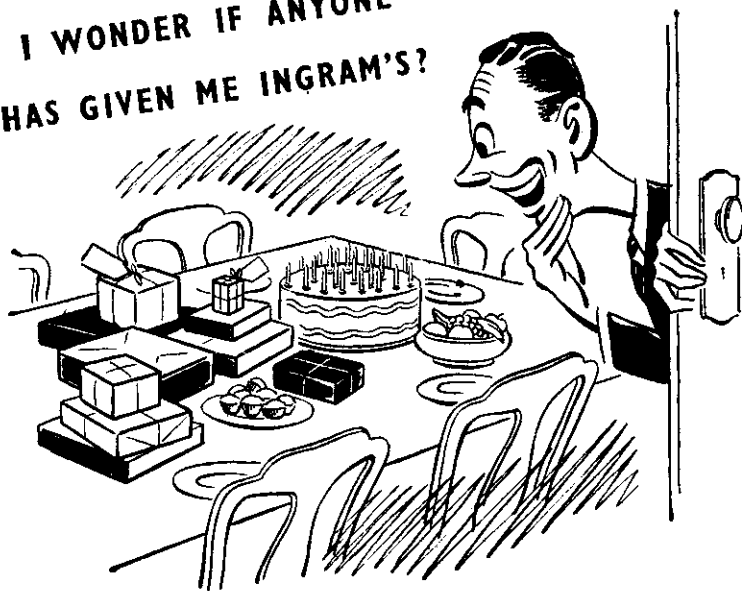


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FREE SPEECH WAS FREER IN DISRAELI'S DAY

FEW of us to-day are in a position to recall what Gladstone said in 1883, but what was said about him was so frequently venomous and vituperative that it has persisted long after the occasions giving rise to it have been forgotten. The passages which we reprint below (from "Invective and Abuse," an anthology. Edited by Hugh Kingsmill. Eyre and Spottiswoode, London), remind us that whatever modern politics may have lost in rhetoric has been balanced by a gain in good manners.



NO one dares to say to-day what Disraeli said about some of his contemporaries. Here are some examples:

Of Palmerston: You owe the Whigs great gratitude, my lord, and therefore, I think, you will betray them.

Your lordship is like a favourite footman on easy terms with his mistress. Your dexterity seems a happy compound of the smartness of an attorney's clerk and the intrigue of a Greek of the lower empire.

Of Lord John Russell: If a traveller were informed that such a man was leader of the House of Commons he might begin to comprehend how the Egyptians worshipped an insect... you are now exhaling upon the constitution of your country all that long-boarded venom and all those distempered humours that have for years accumulated in your petty heart and tainted the current of your mortified life.

Of Joseph Hume: You are a man who, having scraped together a fortune by jobbing in government contracts in a colony, and entering the House of Commons as the Tory representative of a close corporation, became the apostle of economy and unrestricted suffrage; and you close a career, commenced and matured in corruption, by spouting sedition in Middlesex and counselling rebellion in Canada.

Of Gladstone: A sophistical rhetorician, inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity, and gifted with an egotistical imagination that can at all times command an interminable and inconsistent series of arguments to malign an opponent and glorify himself.

O'Connell Turned the Tables

Sometimes, however, Disraeli met his match. When he attacked O'Connell, the Irishman made this reply:

"I must confess there is one of the late attacks on me which excited in my mind a great deal of astonishment. It is this: the attack made at Taunton by Mr. D'Israeli. In the annals of political turpitude there is not anything deserving the appellation of blackguardism to equal that attack on me. What is my acquaintance with this man? Just this: in 1831, or the beginning of 1832 the borough of Wycombe became vacant. He got an introduction to me, and wrote me a letter stating that I was a Radical Reformer, and as he was also a Radical (laughter), and was going to stand upon the Radical

interests for the borough of Wycombe where he said there were many persons of that way of thinking who would be influenced by my opinion, he would feel obliged by receiving a letter from me recommending him as a Radical. His letter to me was so distinctive on the subject that I immediately complied with the request, and composed as good a letter as I could in his behalf. Mr. D'Israeli thought this letter so valuable that he not only took the autograph, but had it printed and placarded. It was, in fact, the ground upon which he canvassed the borough. He was, however, defeated, but that was not my fault. (Laughter). I did not demand gratitude from him, but I think if he had any feeling he would conceive I had done him a civility at least, if not a service, which ought not to be repaid by atrocity of the foulest description. (Cheers).

"The next thing I heard of him was that he had started upon the Radical interest for Marylebone, but was again defeated. Having been twice defeated in the Radical interest, he was just the fellow for the Conservatives (laughter) and accordingly he joined a Conservative club and started for two or three places in the Conservative interest. (Loud laughter).

"Abominable, Foul, Atrocious"

"At Taunton this miscreant had the audacity to call me an incendiary! Why, I was a greater incendiary in 1831 than I am at present—if I ever were one (laughter)—and, if I am, he is doubly so for having employed me (cheers and laughter). Then he calls me traitor. My answer to that is, he is a liar (cheers). He is a liar in action and in words. His life is a living lie. He is a disgrace to his speeches. What state of society must that be that could tolerate such a creature—having the audacity to come forward with one set of principles at one time, and obtain political assistance by reason of those principles, and at another to profess diametrically the reverse? His life, I say again, is a living lie. He is the most degraded of his species and kind; and England is degraded in tolerating or having upon the face of her society a miscreant of his abominable, foul and atrocious nature (cheers).

"If there be harsher terms in the British language I should use them, because it is the harshest of all terms that

(continued on next page)