

John Bright.

12. 4. 1841

**Bright, John** (*b.* 1811, *d.* 1889), orator and statesman: He was born near Rochdale of a Quaker family, his father being engaged in the cotton-spinning trade. When sixteen years old John Bright entered his father's business, and began to take an interest in public affairs. He first met and became associated with Cobden in connection with the national education question, after returning from a visit to Eastern Europe; and in 1839 his name was prominent among the committee of the National Anti-Corn Law League, which sprang up at that time, and his devotion to the cause was intensified by the grief occasioned by the death of his

wife in 1841, after a married life of only two years. In 1843 he was returned by Durham to Parliament, and was indefatigable in his efforts for the repeal of the corn laws. The movement set on foot by Lord Shaftesbury for the limitation of factory labour to ten hours a day was strongly opposed by Bright, who thereby incurred much unpopularity. His eloquence was next turned to Irish and Indian questions; and in regard to Ireland he advocated reform of the land laws and disestablishment of the Irish Church. In 1849 he married a second time. The parliamentary session of 1855 was rendered memorable as the occasion of some of Bright's finest orations, delivered in denunciation of the Crimean war. Illness compelled him to go abroad in 1857, when Palmerston was defeated on the Chinese question. In the general election which followed Bright was defeated at Manchester, for which constituency he had sat since 1847. In 1857 he was elected for Birmingham, and remained that borough's member till his death. After helping to defeat Lord Palmerston in 1858, he supported strongly Lord Derby's measure for the abolition of the East India Company; and on the outbreak of the American Civil war he again excited great unpopularity by his uncompromising advocacy of the cause of the North. After Mr. Gladstone's defeat in 1865 on the Reform Bill, Bright conducted a campaign in favour of reform, and obtained from Mr. Disraeli's government a measure embodying many of his principles. Again he turned to the questions of Irish disestablishment and land reform, and was president of the Board of Trade in Mr. Gladstone's government which passed the 1870 Land Act and the Irish Church Disestablishment Act. For two years he retired from public life, but joined Mr. Gladstone's Ministry in 1873, and from then until his return to office with the Liberals in 1880 took a prominent part in the agitation for the disestablishment of the English Church. In 1886 he opposed Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule policy, and became the great strength of the Unionist party, his influence going a very long way towards winning the general election of 1886.