

John Bright on a Friends' Funeral

WHILE in the main Bright carefully prepared his orations, he could on occasion deliver an effective extempore speech. He seems to have delivered two such speeches on the Burials Bill—one in 1875, and one in 1880; both produced a profound effect upon the House of Commons. His account of a Friends' burial in the former speech was listened to with deep feeling. He said:

“ I will take the case of my own sect, and try to draw an argument from that. We have no baptism; we do not think it necessary. We have no service—no ordered and stated service—over the dead. We do not think that necessary. But when a funeral occurs in my sect, the body is borne with as much decency and solemnity as in any other sect or in any other case to the graveside. The coffin is laid by the side of the grave. The family and friends and the mourners stand around, and they are given some time—no fixed time; it may be five minutes or ten, or even longer—for that private and solemn meditation to which the grave invites even the most unthinking and the most frivolous. If any one there feels it his duty to offer any word of exhortation, he is at liberty to offer it. If he feels that he can bow the knee and offer a prayer to Heaven, not for the dead, but for those who stand around the grave, for comfort for the widow or for succour and fatherly care for the fatherless children, that prayer is offered. Well, but if this were done in one of your graveyards—if, for example, such a thing were done there, and a member of my sect, or a Baptist, an Independent, or a Wesleyan came to be interred in one of your graveyards, and if some God-fearing and good man there spoke some word of exhortation, or on his knees offered a prayer to God, is there one of you on this side of the House or on that, or one of your clergymen, or any thoughtful and Christian man connected with your Church, who would dare in the sight of Heaven to condemn that, or to interfere with it by force of law? ”

From R. Barry O'Brien's *John Bright*, 1913 ed., pp. 451-453. The speech is referred to but not given in Trevelyan's *Life of John Bright*, p. 413.

Anecdote of Elizabeth Fry

Samuel ———, an Irish Friend, was at an English Friend's house, and was walking in the garden in company with Elizabeth Fry and her husband. Elizabeth Fry had her hand on the arm of her husband, who caressingly stroked it and asked: “ Samuel, did you admire my wife's hand in Ireland? ” The reply was: “ We saw so much to admire that we did not descend to particulars. ”

From THOS. HY. WEBB'S MS. *Collection of Quaker Stories*.