

MR. BLAKE'S SPEECH.

Powerful Denunciation of the Gerrymandering.

Mr. Blake took the floor at 4.30, and commented on the fact that the reading of this Bill had been moved without any remarks and without any indication of the course pursued. He proposed to change the election law by placing the nomination of returning officers within the entire control of the Government, instead of requiring the selection of men who from their position might be supposed to act in a judicial manner. He pointed out the fact that the language of the preamble of the Bill did not justify the sweeping changes made, and then proceeded to indicate how the increased representation necessary might have been given. Additional members might have been to the counties of Essex, Kent, Lambton, Bruce and Simcoe, and a member given to the county of Huron. This would have given six seats without the expense of the county at large. Such an operation as that, or anything like it, would demand but a single change in the map of Ontario, and require no such cutting and carving up as was proposed in this Bill. The bases which the hon. gentleman (Sir John) laid for these widespread changes were too narrow altogether, and it was apparent that the political map of Ontario had been altered in such a manner as would be most beneficial to the Government. The principle which was now proposed to apply to Ontario had never been applied before, except in a limited degree, and in 1872 the leader of the Government had intimated, and it had been re-echoed on that side of the House, that the experiment would not be repeated. Proper time should have been given for the consideration of an important measure of this kind, more especially as the Government itself was directly affected by it, in consequence of the bearing it would have upon the approaching election. The Government was judge as well as party, and this of all measures was one which should have been brought down early in the session. Another reason for full consideration was that this measure proposed a different set of jurors to be selected by the Government and had laid upon the people a packed jury. Mr. Rymer, who was the author of the Bill, made a long speech of his fist and looked laughing across. Mr. Blake continuing, condemned the manner in which the Bill had been prepared, and in scathing language ridiculed the changes made even after the introduction of the Bill to bolster up the Tory members of Parliament. Messrs. Rykert and Hession challenged Mr. Blake to meet them in their constituencies, a challenge which met with the reply that they were brave men to have their constituencies fixed to suit themselves. The Bill was not a Government Bill for the redistribution of Ontario, but was framed for low party ends, and aims to use the majority party purposes. It was a and commentary on the boasts of the last four years. This Bill showed that the Ministerialists did not feel confident and were seeking by legislation to make up for the loss indicated by the misdeeds of the last four years. A similar attempt had been made in 1872, but it had not succeeded any more than this would succeed. He was convinced that the people of Ontario would resent, as they did on the well-known previous occasion, an abuse of high trust. The hon. gentleman would find that though he might transfer men's bodies, he could not transfer their minds, and that though he might transfer voters, in many cases he would transfer their votes against himself. He again quoted the remarks made by Sir John in 1872, relative to the desirability of maintaining county boundaries, and said the right hon. gentleman declared he still held these views, but justified his present action on the ground that Mr. Mowat had not followed these principles. The excuse would be absurd if true; but the argument was founded on an utter and entire misunderstanding of Mr. Mowat's Bill, which had recognized throughout the principle of municipal county representation. Mr. Blake afterwards took up the plea of equalizing population, and showed that while some constituencies had 12,000 or 13,000 of a population, others had upwards of 25,000, and this sometimes in adjoining counties; in other cases the population of the very smallest constituencies, such as Monck, Haldimand and North Leeds has been reduced. He went over in detail many of the changes to show how it was proposed to "hive" the Grits, and strengthen adjoining constituencies held by Tories, giving the political effect of each change. As instance after instance of the iniquity of the Bill was brought out the speaker was loudly cheered by his political friends, while his opponents with the exception of an odd interruption from Mr. Plumb, maintained a melancholy silence. The shameless gerrymandering in Bruce was particularly condemned, and it was pointed out that only Sir John's pretended principle of equalizing the population was shamelessly violated in the arrangement of the North and West Ridings, but in the latter constituency, by drawing from North and South Bruce and North Huron, a Riding which, on the basis of the election of 1878, would give a Reform majority of about 1,000. In twenty-five cases were municipalities carried from one county into another, and forty-one out of fifty changes had been made in Western Ontario, where it was expected the battle would be principally fought. In ten constituencies where the Reformers had been "hived" the majorities would be as follows:—On the basis of the election of 1878—North Brant, 723; South Oxford, 688; East Simcoe, 658; South Middlesex, 581; West Bruce, 986; Centre Huron, 446; West Elgin, 463; Halton, 290; a total in these ten constituencies of 6,453, or a surplus of 3,000 votes as compared with an equal number of constituencies in which the Tories had been kept together. The object of this legislation

was to make a Tory minority in the country—a Tory majority in the House. Honest men could not afford to vote for a measure dishonest and fraudulent. The Government dare not attempt the same thing with the members from those Provinces to deal with Ontario as they would wish to be treated themselves. But all this was not enough, and the Government had taken care that they should have the power of appointing their men as returning officers, and to do their "dirty work." He drew a vivid picture of the recent Tory dinner, and of the handwriting which ought to have been on the wall letting the Premier know that the constituencies which had returned his supporters in 1878 would not return them again. The leader of the Government had determined on appointing creatures of his own as returning officers, so that they could accomplish what his legislation had failed to do. He closed by moving an amendment. Mr. Blake resumed his seat at 10.30, having spoken four hours. He was attentively listened to throughout and frequently greeted with loud applause.

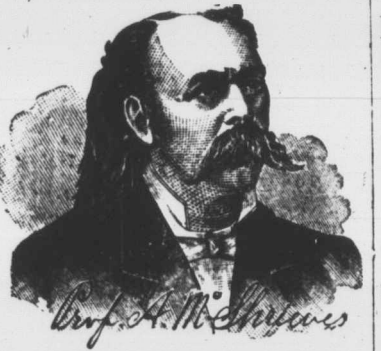
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