

Mr. John Redmond's Speech

The Government of Ireland Indicted—The Denial of Education

London, Feb. 4.—In the House of Commons to-night Mr. John Redmond, on rising to resume the adjourned debate on the address, was received with loud Irish cheering. He said—I make no apology, Mr. Speaker, for intervening at the earliest possible moment in this session to call the attention of Parliament to

THE IRISH QUESTION.

and to the well-known universal demand of the Irish people for a radical change in the system of government under which their country has been pauperized and depopulated in the past. I know that there are a great many people in this country of all parties who quite naturally are anxious, if they could, to get rid of the Irish question, even for a day, and I noticed with interest that in all the speeches made on the address to the Throne yesterday not one solitary reference was made by any speaker to Ireland. That may be a perfectly natural feeling, but what really does surprise me is that there seems to be serious statements on both sides of the House who appear to think it is possible to get rid of the Irish Question. A greater delusion than that was never entertained (Irish cheers).

YOU CANNOT GET RID OF THE IRISHMAN.

(renewed Irish cheers). Nothing that you can do, either by way of force on the one side, or of concession on the other, can relieve you of the necessary consequences of maintaining in Ireland a system of government opposed to the will of the governed (Irish cheers). These consequences are chronic unrest and discontent in Ireland, chronic disturbance in the Imperial Parliament. This problem is too vast, too far reaching, and too urgent for it to be possible to cease, even for a few short months, to trouble the public mind in England, to intrude itself into the consideration of great English questions, and to haunt and disturb the serenity of the Imperial Parliament (cheers). At the present moment all England is stirred by the Fiscal Question, and the British people are appealed to with passionate earnestness to save the Empire by conciliating the Colonies. But every honest man must know that the conciliation of the Colonies fades into insignificance compared with

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONCILIATION OF IRELAND.

(Irish and some Opposition cheers). We are told that there is no concession too great to be made for the purpose of buying the continued friendship of Canada and Australia. For that purpose you were asked actually to uproot these great principles of fiscal policy which for fifty years you have all regarded as the very foundation of your greatness and prosperity (Opposition cheers). You are told at the same time and from the same quarter to disregard the hostility of Ireland, and to make no real sacrifice to win her friendship, though every man knows that as long as your talk about a united Empire is mere clap-trap, and that an Ireland contented, peaceful, and friendly would be more valuable to the empire than the possession of all your Colonies put together (Irish cheers). This question of discontent and of disloyalty to the Empire in Ireland is one which you cannot get rid of for a single day. I noticed with great interest that quite recently the Duke of Devonshire solemnly declared there was no room for two great questions like the Fiscal Question and the Irish Question at the same time, and yet, within one week of that declaration,

THE GATESHEAD ELECTION

took place (Irish and Opposition cheers), where, in spite of the efforts of both parties, the issue, in the end, turned, not on Protection or Free Trade, but on Home Rule for Ireland (Irish cheers), and was decided by the votes of the Irish Home Rulers in the constituency (renewed Irish cheers). Some men seem to think that because last year we obtained a valuable Act of Parliament, remedying some of the evils of your past misgovernment, that, therefore, no Irish question would be heard of no more, and that it was shelved. Such an idea argues an absolute ignorance of the very essence of this Irish question (Irish cheers). No conciliation can weaken the force of our demand for self-government. On the contrary, every concession strengthens that demand and strengthens our arms, and every concession we have obtained and every concession we may obtain will be used by us for the furtherance of the remainder of our contest for self-government (Irish cheers). I read the other day a letter written by the right hon. gentleman

THE MEMBER FOR LEEDS (MR. H. GLADSTONE).

one of the chief whips of the Liberal party, to his constituents, in which he said: "So far as I am concerned, I am a Home Ruler; but I have frequently said to my constituents that the Nationalist Party have accepted, at any rate for the present, the alternative policy of the Conservative party." I read that statement with amazement. It disclosed to me a strange and utterly unaccountable inability to understand the real meaning of this Irish question. It was, as a matter of fact, an unfair misrepresentation of our attitude.

WE HAVE ACCEPTED NO ALTERNATIVE POLICY FOR HOME RULE.

We accepted the Land Act of last year just as we accepted the local government act of 1898, and just as we accepted every act which removed or would be removed by Irish grievances, and we would be fools did we not do so (Irish cheers), but to say that we accepted any or all of those things as an alternative to Home Rule is absurd and untrue (Irish cheers). Such a statement coming from the right hon. gentleman the member for Leeds makes it necessary, in my opinion, for us to define our position once more, if not for the benefit of those who are the Government to-day, for the benefit of those who hope to be the Government to-mor-

row (laughter and cheers), and who, for all I know, may be hugging the comfortable delusion at this moment that they can obtain Irish support on any alternative policy to Home Rule. If your government in Ireland were as good as it is universally and admittedly being, we would still be Home Rulers (loud Irish cheers). Our position is that we hold

WE HAVE A RIGHT TO RULE OURSELVES.

We have certainly the capacity, knowledge, and intimate sympathy which you have not, but, above all that, we say we have the right, and that right we shall never surrender (Irish cheers). We say without the slightest hesitation that Ireland would prefer to be governed even badly by her own Parliament than well by the Parliament of any other nation in the world (Irish cheers). But we are not governed well. Your government in Ireland not only springs from usurpation and wrong, but violence and corruption, as if admitted to-day by your greatest writers and historians, but it is a government which depends every year of its existence on a small minority in Ireland, which is in direct opposition to the will of the majority of the governed; but your government on its merits is

BAD GOVERNMENT—A WASTEFUL, EXTRAVAGANT, AND INEFFICIENT GOVERNMENT.

(Irish cheers). We have heard a great deal in recent years from some distinguished quarters about efficiency. The English government in Ireland is the most inefficient government in the whole world to-day (Irish cheers). It is wasteful in every department; it is corrupt in every department (Irish cheers, and Ministerial cries of oh, oh). Perhaps I ought to explain what I mean by "corrupt." I don't mean corrupt to do disgraceful things, though in Ireland these disgraceful things have happened. What I mean is that the only class that supports the Government is the class of placemen (hear, hear). For every happy child who is born a member of the loyal minority there is a place provided. I myself am a member of the Irish Bar, and it is not likely that I will make any unworthy accusations against it. But I venture to assert that there is not a member of the Irish Bar who is a supporter of the English Government and an opponent of Ireland who is not accommodated with a place if he has any brains at all. Now, I say that is corruption. It is true to say to-day as Lecky said, that the whole unbridled intellect of Ireland is arrayed against the Government (Irish cheers). In addition to being corrupt the government of Ireland is also inefficient. Let me give an illustration. To-day admittedly Ireland lags behind every nation in Western Europe in trade, commerce, agriculture, technical skill, science, and arts. Why? Is it because the Irish race are less talented than the people of other races? No one who knows anything of the history of the world, and of the British Empire especially, will make any such assertion. No, Ireland lags behind in the race of nations because there is no nation in the world in which education has been so denied, so neglected, and so starved (Irish cheers). For my part, I know no better test of a Government than

THE QUESTION OF EDUCATION.

and I may say that the system of government which for a century has denied, neglected, and starved education in Ireland is one which cannot justify its existence before the public opinion of the world (hear, hear). That is what you have done in Ireland. First, you forbade education altogether, and made it a penal offence. Then you established a system of education grossly and ludicrously absurd, and which to-day has no parallel in the whole history of the world (Irish and Opposition cheers). This system you have maintained down to the present moment. Let me first take

THE CASE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION.

The present system came into existence in 1831. Lord Stanley, who was then Chief Secretary of the Lord Lieutenant, formed a Board of unpaid gentlemen, whom he called a National Education Board. The whole primary education of the country was put into the hands of that Board. It is a Board absolutely unrepresentative and irresponsible (Irish cheers). From an educational point of view, it is admittedly incompetent, and through its whole history it has been anti-National in its feelings and tendencies (hear, hear). There is no educational qualification for membership of this Board. It is made up of estimable country gentlemen, some of them landlords, and it includes five judges whose presence on it I cannot understand. I won't weary the House by reading the names. There are sixteen members unpaid and one paid Resident Commissioner. No one can controvert my assertion that

THERE IS NO QUALIFICATION REQUIRED.

and no one represents the Board in the House or has authority to speak for it. No one has authority over the Board in Ireland. Neither the Chief Secretary nor any department in Dublin Castle has any authority over the Board. We have frequently heard the Chief Secretary complain of the fact in answering questions about primary education in Ireland that, though he was the channel for conveying information to the House, he had no authority over the Board, that it held its meetings in secret, and that when he applied for information the Board could deny it if it chose. Let me ask

WAS SUCH AN ABSURD SYSTEM EVER HEARD OF?

This Board, in addition to being unrepresentative and irresponsible, is

anti-National, and has been so through all its history. There is not a single man amongst the Commissioners who is in sympathy with the wishes and aspirations and National feelings of the Irish people. It is a Board of this kind, calling itself a National Board and charged with the duty of educating the children of the Irish race, should not have even one solitary representative of the National feeling of the country? The natural tendency of the Board has been to denationalize the children of the Irish race. The history, poetry, and language of Ireland, have been banished from the schools under this Board. It was only the other day, after a bitter and vehement contest, that we were able to force this Board to allow the little children in these schools to be taught through the medium of the Irish language in the Irish speaking districts. I will quote a few words on this point

FROM THE REPORT OF MR. STARKIE,

the Resident Commissioner and paid servant of the Board:

"I fancy few practical educationalists will deny that the National Board were guilty of a disastrous blunder in thrusting upon a Gaelic speaking race a system of education produced after a foreign model and utterly alien to their sympathies and antecedents. Such an attempt was unsound, both philosophically and practically. Neglecting the principle of continuity which pervades all human things, it disregarded the human training and associations of the children, and thus rending in twain the national consciousness, rendered all development impossible. True education is a refining and developmental of the whole intellectual life and character; and I think there can be little doubt that the Board were guilty of narrow pedantry in neglecting as worthless the whole previous life of the pupil, and the multitude of associations, imaginations, and sentiments that formed the contents of his consciousness. To this unhappy blunder may be attributed the want of initiative and independence and distaste of knowledge which so hampers the industrial development of Ireland qualities so alien to the quick sympathies and alert intelligence which are the most salient characteristic of our race."

Thus the administration of this Board, as viewed from the Irish point of view—narrowed even on the authority of their own Resident Commissioner, and from the Irish point of view has been grossly anti-National. I do not care to go into religious questions in connection with this question, further than to point out that whatever may be the course to-day, when this Board is established, it is run from the religious point of view, on its boasted and most dishonest lines (Irish cheers). That can be proved by referring to the declaration made by Archbishop Whately when he was probably the most prominent and powerful member of the Board, and when he declared in so many words that

THE OBJECT OF THE BOARD WAS TO PROSELYTISE THE CATHOLIC CHILDREN

of Ireland. He said: "The education supplied by the National Board is gradually undermining the vast fabric of the Irish Roman Catholic Church (laughter). I believe, as I said the other day, that if we give up the mixed education, as carried out on the system of the National Education Board, we give up the only hope of weaning the Irish from the abuses of Popery. But I cannot venture openly to express this opinion."

That quotation is taken from the diary of the Archbishop, which, of course, did not see the light for many a long year after his death. Thus you have under the blessings of English rule in Ireland—yours have primary education in the hands of a Board established in 1831, a Board entirely unrepresentative, absolutely irresponsible, anti-Catholic in its conception, and down to this moment anti-National in its feelings—a Board so incompetent that it is denounced and condemned out of the mouth of its Resident Commissioner, and so incapable of reform that a couple of years ago

ARCHBISHOP WALSH RESIGNED HIS POSITION

upon the Board in absolute despair. No wonder that this system of education is to-day unanimously denounced by the people of Ireland, where only a few years ago the children attend schools at all, and when, as I am told, only less than 30 per cent of them go through more than the three first forms in the school. No wonder that Ireland lags behind the nations of the world in all the essentials of prosperity and advancement (cheers). And now, sir, what is the remedy? I say

THE ONLY POSSIBLE REMEDY IS HOME RULE

(loud cheers). This is an old, antiquated, irresponsible, and unrepresentative Board. It is a narrow-minded, bigoted, incompetent Board, which must be swept away into the dust-bin (cheers). It would not be tolerated in England for twenty-four hours. What we want is a Department of Education responsible to the public opinion of Ireland, and that is the only possible remedy; but that remedy is not possible so long as Ireland is deprived of the right of self-government. To abolish the Board, as I have heard some people suggest, and to put their absolute power in the hands of a new ring of irresponsible officials in Dublin Castle, would be to alienate still more the confidence of the Irish people. What we want is a Department of education responsible to the public opinion of Ireland, just as the Department of Education here in England is amenable to the public opinion of England. This we cannot have until we have self-government (cheers). And so the disgraceful tragedy goes on.

BUT WHAT ABOUT INTERMEDIATE EDUCATION?

The very same story is told there again. You have the same story of unrepresentative and irresponsible gentlemen, some of whom are eminent men, but none of whom can be picked out as educational authorities qualified for the work upon which they are engaged. Just let me give you one example. Twenty years ago this Board had full control of Intermediate Education, and they carried out a system of payment by results to such an extent that the

result was failure, and at last they appointed a Commission to inquire into the defects of their own work (laughter). Now, since then I admit there has been some improvement, but how bad the state of Intermediate Education in Ireland is at this moment may be gathered from these words of the Chief Secretary. On the 1st of April last year he said: "Money has been lavished"—"I must not be taken as saying that, if we had a proper system under an authority responsible to the people that even larger sums could not be well spent"—"on Intermediate Education, but how can such expenditure be turned to good account when Elementary Education is not levelled up to the necessary standard and when only 55 per cent of the children attend school at all, and when continuation schools no not exist? Money devoted to Intermediate Education in such circumstances is truly thrown away." Now, if that be the state of inefficiency of the government of Ireland in this matter, its dishonest evasion of an admitted duty, its unwillingness, or incapacity, or both, to remove an admitted grievance which poisons the whole life of Ireland, and which condemns Ireland to hopelessly failure in the struggle with the nations of the world for existence—I say the treatment of this question by the Government, taken alone, is sufficient to utterly and completely damn and condemn the whole system of the government of the country (cheers). For fifty years this grievance has been omitted, and every attempt made to deal with it has failed, for the same reason that has destroyed every effort of this House to deal with Irish grievances—namely, because it was an effort made by men who did not understand the requirements of Ireland and who would not listen to the advice of the Irish people (hear, hear). First of all you abolished the Queen's University and the Queen's College in Ireland. They were denounced by O'Connell in the name of the Catholic laity and by the Irish Bishops on behalf of the clergy. Their failure is admitted, and they are dead and gone. Then, in disregard of Irish advice, you establish an examining body, which you dignify by the name of a Royal University. After twenty years your Royal Commission has declared that this Royal University also is a failure and must go. You of the Conservative Party, representing a Conservative Government, pledged yourselves publicly and privately to deal with this question year after year, and session after session, until your pledges on the subject have become a by-word in Ireland (cheers). In 1885 the late Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was then Leader of the House, explicitly and solemnly pledged the Government that if they were in office next session they would introduce a practical measure to remedy this grievance. They were in office "next session," and, with the exception of three years, they have been in office ever since, and that pledge has never been redeemed. In 1889, in answer to Mr. Parnell in this House, the present Prime Minister, who was then Leader of the House, pledged himself, on behalf of the Government, to produce a Bill dealing with this question next session.

MR. WYNDHAM—In 1889?

MR. REDMOND—In August, 1889, Mr. Parnell questioned Mr. Balfour on this subject. He said: "We should be glad to know also whether any immediate steps are contemplated in that direction"—there had been a vague promise of legislation, but Mr. Parnell was not likely to be put off with vague promises—"and whether the Government proposed to make this important subject one of the earliest of what arrangements are in preparation?" What was the reply? Mr. Balfour said: "With regard to the question put to me by the right hon. member for Cork, I have to say that there is no possibility of dealing with this question of University Education except under a Bill. . . of course, cannot give a pledge at this moment as to the exact order in which the various questions will be dealt with by the Government next session." The right hon. gentleman then, speaking on behalf of the Government as Leader of this House

AN HON. MEMBER—"As Chief Secretary?"

MR. REDMOND—Well, that gives more point to what I was going to say. He spoke then as Chief Secretary, and it might be said that he spoke for himself and not in the name of the Government; that really he was outstepping the limits of his authority, and that he had no right to make such a declaration; but the right hon. gentleman is now Prime Minister, and I want to know by what rule of morality he can now refuse to be held responsible for what he is leader of the House and Prime Minister of this country, how he can justify the refusal to carry out those pledges which he gave? From 1895 to this moment those pledges have remained unfulfilled. The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY ARE PLAYING WITH THE QUESTION

and fooling with it, and they have found it, I am afraid, somewhat useful to them in dealing with Irish Parties (hear, hear). Lord Dunraven the other day published a letter in the Irish newspapers in which he formulated a scheme for the settlement of this question. Now, that scheme was represented to us in Ireland as the Government's scheme. We were told in addition that that scheme would receive the support of the Ulster Presbyterians, because they are very closely interested in this matter. Part of the scheme was to make Queen's College, Belfast, one of the competent colleges of the University of Dublin, and, of course, to give large endowments to Queen's College, Belfast, so that to bring it into a proper position to meet the needs of that great city. We were told that the Ulster Presbyterians were told in addition that that what about the Catholics? I took it upon myself to speak to my constituents a few weeks ago, to say that in my judgment that scheme would have been accepted by both the Hierarchy and the laity of the Catholic Church any time for the last twenty years. Not one Bishop, priest, or layman has contradicted the state-

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ence (cheers). After all, education, vital as it is, is only one department or element in the National life of our country. In every other department the inefficiency is the same—the same ignorance, the same failure. Take for example the case of

THE FINANCIAL RELATIONS

between the two countries. You are niggardly to education, and you are prodigal of taxation. Ireland some years ago accused Great Britain of robbing her of several millions a year, and the accusations were so incessant that you were forced to investigate it, and a tribunal was appointed for the purpose. Now, let the House mark Great Britain appointed the tribunal herself; Great Britain packed the tribunal herself with all her own greatest financial authorities; yet that tribunal, so appointed and constituted, brought in a verdict in favor of Ireland—(Irish cheers)—a verdict which for a whole century has been overtaxed to the extent of three millions a year, and that that had gone on for half a century. That was in

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