

conclusion forthwith that the question is within the range of practical politics and has got to be dealt with. Now, I say that even if Parliament could now take up what it ought long ago to have taken up, we might hope it would be dealt with, but it also was dealt with so late as to obviate all chance of its settlement being concurrent with a resolution of better feeling between the people of the two countries, and thus it is that I am brought to the conclusion that it is the duty of every man who entertains a strong feeling for the Empire, who entertains a feeling of pride in its glories and of shame in its failures and its faults, to do what he can in his sphere towards pressing forward this Irish question to a solution while there yet be time. Now, so long ago as 1873 the statesman to whom I referred a while ago, Mr. Gladstone, spoke in this manner, prior to the General Election which took place at that time:

"In the matter of Local Government there may be a solution of some national and even Imperial difficulties. If you ask me what I think of Home Rule I must tell you that I will only answer you when you tell me how Home Rule is related to Local Government. I am friendly to Local Government; I am friendly to large local privileges and power, and desire, I may almost say I intensely desire to see Parliament relieved of some portion of its duties. I see the efficiency of Parliament interfered with, not only by obstruction from Irish members, but even more grossly by the enormous weight which is placed upon the time and minds of those whom you have sent to represent you. We have got an over-weighted Parliament, and if Ireland or any other portion of the country is desirous and able to arrange its affairs, that by taking the local part or part of its transactions off the hands of Parliament, it can liberate and strengthen Parliament for Imperial concerns, I say I will not only accord a reluctant assent, but I will give a generous support to any such scheme.

"One limit, gentlemen, one limit only, I know to the extension of colonial Government, it is this, nothing can be done in my opinion by any wise statesman or right-minded Briton to weaken the authority of the Imperial Parliament. Because the Imperial Parliament must be Imperial in the three Kingdoms, nothing that creates a doubt upon that supremacy can be tolerated by any intelligent and patriotic man. But subject to that limitation if we can make arrangements under which Ireland, Scotland, Wales and a portion of England, can deal with questions of local and special interest to themselves more effectually than Parliament now can, that, I say, will be the attainment of a great national good. The Scotch members who always show in Parliament—I must say, speaking of them as an average, and perhaps it is all the more true because the majority of them are Liberal—who always show in the transaction of Scotch business remarkable shrewdness and efficiency, yet all find cause to complain and complain seriously and gravely, that they cannot get the Scotch business properly transacted.

"The Parliament is over-weighted. The Parliament is almost overwhelmed. If we could take off its shoulders that superfluous weight by the constitution of secondary and subordinate authorities, I am not going to be frightened out of a wise measure of this kind by being told that I am descending to the prejudices of the Home Rulers. I will condescend to no such prejudices. I will consent to give to Ireland upon principle nothing that is not upon equal terms offered to Scotland and to the different portions of the United Kingdom. But I say that the man who starts to devise a machinery by which some portion of the excessive

and impossible task, now laid upon the House of Commons, shall be shifted to the more free and therefore more efficient hands of secondary and local authority will confer a blessing upon this country, that will entitle him to be ranked among the prominent benefactors of the land."

I think, Sir, having regard to that speech, I was justified in hailing the accession to power of the Liberal party, as I did in the year 1880, as giving an omen of some measure of redress for Ireland in this particular. But, Sir, another speech was delivered by that same statesman, under the responsibility of office, in the Imperial House of Commons, not very long ago, in which he once again recurred to this subject and said:—

"We attach great value," said Mr. Gladstone, "to the extension, perhaps I should say to the establishment—(hear, hear)—of the principles of Local Government in Ireland. We believe that one of the great evils under which Ireland labours is the want of local administration, and a more central system of authority. We believe that the state of Ireland never can be satisfactory until its people have acquired and learned by practice and practice to exercise those powers of Local Government which were so beneficial in other portions of the Empire. Moreover, we believe that where the Irish people had the opportunity within a limited range of giving proof of their powers and qualities and capabilities for Local Government, as they have done under the Poor Law Acts and through some other channels, they have administered well. Indeed, no one can doubt that, or their perfect capacity for such a duty. But this is speaking on the question of purely local administration. The motion of my honorable friend embraces matters of wider scope. I wish to point out to those honorable gentlemen that neither they nor, so far as I know, Mr. Butt before them, nor so far as I know, Mr. O'Connell before him, ever distinctly explained in an intelligent and practical form the manner in which the real knot of this question was to be untied. The principle on which they profess to proceed is that purely Irish matters are to be dealt with by a purely Irish authority, Imperial matters to be left to the Imperial authority of a Chamber in which Ireland is to be represented. But they have not told us by what authority it is to be determined which matters taken one by one are Irish, and which matters are Imperial. Until they lay before the House a plan in which they go to the very bottom of the question, and give us to understand in what manner that division is to be accomplished, the practical consideration of this subject cannot really be arrived at, and I know not how any effective judgment upon it can be pronounced. I am well convinced that neither this Parliament nor any other House of Commons will at any time assent to any measure by which the one paramount centre of authority necessary for holding together in perfect unanimity and compactness this great Empire can possibly be in the slightest degree impaired. (Ministerial and Opposition cheers.) We are entitled and bound to ask a clear and explicit explanation as to the mode in which the vital matter is to be determined. Who is to say what purposes are Imperial? Who is to determine the circumscription within which the Irish authority is to have a final voice? Quotations have been made in reference to the positions of other countries—for example, Finland in relation to Russia. But this affords no practical illustration of the matter. It would be just as rational for those gentlemen to quote the case of the Channel Islands. With regard to the Isle of Man, we have sometimes interfered in the matter of Customs duties, but not in my recollection have we interfered in the legislation of the Channel Islands. We have left it entirely to their own authority, and we have not felt any inconvenience flow from that arrangement. Thus while some development is given to the principle of Local Government without any practical inconven-