

HON. EDWARD BLAKE'S SPEECH —ON— THE IRISH QUESTION.

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

THURSDAY, 20th April, 1882.

MR. BLAKE.—If no other hon. member proposes to address the House on the subject, I do not, for my part, feel disposed to give a silent vote upon it. It is now two years ago since, in the course of a very important discussion here, I ventured to suggest in my place in Parliament that the accession to power which had then recently taken place of the Liberal Administration in England, would lead very shortly to the concession of some measure of Home Rule to the Irish people. I believed, as I said, that such a solution as could be obtained of the land question, such a solution as had been from time to time reached of other questions, would, after all, not settle the Irish question, and that unless the dictates of prudence and of justice alike were observed and fulfilled by the granting of some measure of control over their local affairs, we would see that which had been the disgrace and the humiliation of the British Empire for many years still continued. I also observed, as the hon. gentleman in his speech and in his motion has observed, that we had one amongst many material interests here, in Canada, in the solution of that question, in the change which might be expected from it, in the attitude of the great bulk of the Irish people towards the Empire, that we had a material—although I regard that as a much lesser interest than the interest which has been mainly discussed—we had a material interest of a serious character with reference to the chances and the opportunity of immigration to our soil so long as the present state of feeling continued. Now, I propose to justify the attitude which I took upon that occasion and which did not then meet with any very animated response in the House or in the country; I propose to justify it by a reference to some obvious historical facts which, it appears to me, can lead to only one inevitable conclusion. In order that we may understand the grounds upon which, as I conceive, some action in this direction is demonstrably necessary, it is by no means needful to go further back than to the time of the Union.

IRISH GRIEVANCES.

It is not needful here to recur in detail to the more ancient events in connexion with

Irish history, to the history of 'the conquest, to the history of the confiscations, to the history of the proscriptions, to the history of the penal laws, directed at one time against Protestants, and at another time against Catholics, to the history of these penal laws of the most serious and terrible description, laws and events to which I have briefly alluded, but which ought to make us all, when we recur to them, blush with shame, and which have left the marks of human error and of human crime almost indelible, enhancing, there can be no doubt, even to-day, the difficulties of the situation—I say it is needless for the purposes of this discussion that we should revert to those in detail, for I am willing that this question should be tried not upon the history of previous years, but upon the history of the government of Ireland under the present constitution of the United Kingdom. That history begins with the Union Act—an Act secured, as you all know, by means of the basest corruption. However beneficial the public men who carried that measure may have believed it to be, I do not suppose it will be urged to-day that the end justified the means, and I have myself a strong belief that the nefarious means by which that measure was carried, operated very largely to increase the difficulties of its working and produced a state of feeling which gave it a poor chance of proving satisfactory to the people of the country which was by such means brought into more intimate connexion with the Empire. But, Sir, since that period, for a little more than 30 years, has Ireland been managed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom, and I do not hesitate to say that the result of that management has been a

DREADFUL FAILURE.

There has been time enough to try the question out. Eighty years in the history of a country, and such eighty years as Ireland has experienced, is surely time enough to try the question out. Now, let us apply some obvious, plain and palpable tests as to whether there has been a good and successful administration of Irish affairs under the existing system. The population of Ireland in 1726 was 2,300,000; in 1805 it was 5,400,000, and that increase, more than doubling, occurred