

# House of Commons Debates

FOURTH SESSION, FIFTH PARLIAMENT.—49 VIC.

SPEECH OF HON. E. BLAKE, M.P.,

ON

## HOME RULE FOR IRELAND.

OTTAWA, MAY 4TH, 1886.

Mr. BLAKE. I rise for a moment to intercept that question, in order to bring before the House another, in which the last House showed a deep concern—I mean the Irish question. In 1880, I spoke my views upon this subject, and expressed my belief and hope that we should at no distant day see a measure of Home Rule granted to Ireland. In the year 1882, the question was moved on the other side of this House. At that time we, on this side, heartily co-operated in order to give the greatest possible weight to the proposed action. Then I spoke at length my opinions upon the whole question, which saves me from the necessity of trespassing now upon the time of this House, and since that time, to the best of my humble power, here and elsewhere, I have aided in the advancement of that cause. Since then a new Canadian House of Commons has been elected, which House has not yet spoken upon the question. Since then great events have transpired in the United Kingdom itself. The people, both of Ireland and Great Britain, have received for the first time a very full measure of representation in Parliament. The Irish people, under that measure of representation, have, by an enormous, an overwhelming majority, pronounced in favor of Home Rule, and the great statesman who leads Her Majesty's Government has recognised the vital necessity of grappling at once with the question; and Her Majesty's Government have, as I ventured to suggest on a former occasion, seen the propriety of themselves formulating a plan for the settlement of that question. Now, Sir, a controversy has arisen on some of the more important details of that measure. I do not, myself, admire all those details. For example, admitting the great difficulties, I should yet prefer, to the present plan for the exclusion of Ireland from the management of Imperial affairs in which she is interested, the continued representation for those Imperial purposes in an Imperial Parliament—I should prefer the plan, notwithstanding its great difficulty, of her retaining that share of control. But it needs not to discuss this or any other matters of detail, because it has been expressly and authoritatively stated that none of these points are considered in any way vital to the question which is now before England and before the world. The vital principle now at stake is that of self-government for Ireland in local affairs. This was stated by Mr. Gladstone in his reply to the criticisms on the first reading of the Bill, and he has further and authoritatively declared it by his recent manifesto, which was transmitted to us only yesterday. In that manifesto, he thus speaks:

"As for the means we take the establishment in Dublin of a legislative body, empowered to make laws for Irish, as contra-distinguished from Imperial, affairs. It is with this that we are now busied, and not with details and particulars; their time will come."

He adds:

"We are not debating the amount of Irish contributions to the Empire, or the composition of the legislative body, or the maintenance of representative connection with Westminster. On these questions and many more we may and we may not be at odds, but what we are at this moment debating is the large and far larger question which includes, and I think absorbs, them all—the question whether you will or will not have regard to the prayer of Ireland for the management by herself of affairs specifically and exclusively her own. This and no other is the matter which the House of Commons has at once to decide. If on this matter it speaks with a clear and intelligible voice, I feel the strongest assurance that the others, difficult as some of them are, will, nevertheless, with the aid of full discussion and with the aid of a wise and conciliatory spirit, be found capable of a rational and tolerable settlement."

Now, Sir, that Bill to which this manifesto refers, stands for a second reading in a few days, and then that vital question is to be decided. A great excitement has arisen; the Empire has been aroused, not merely the Kingdom, but the Empire. The emotion has passed beyond the seas; it has passed beyond the Empire; the English-speaking people outside the bounds of the Empire have been aroused, nay more, the free nations all over the world have been moved. Every eye is at this moment bent on Westminster, and every ear is strained to catch the echoes when they come of the great debate, and to learn the issue of the mighty struggle from beyond. Under these circumstances, marks of sympathy and of admiration have been cabled to the First Minister, and he has responded to them in such a sort as proves conclusively that he regards them, as they must be, helpful to him in the enormous task he has undertaken. We know as well as if we had received it already, what the tone of the reply will be to any such communication as we have on a former occasion addressed, or as other large bodies have addressed, upon this subject. The circumstances are, of course, changed; they are changed since the day we addressed Her Majesty; they are changed as to the position of the question; but they are changed in this particular also, to which I call your special attention. At that time we assumed—and I suppose we are not now prepared to resile; I am not, at any rate, prepared to resile from the assumption of our right respectfully to approach the Throne with a view to tender our humble advice and hopes upon a subject of such vital importance to the whole Empire, and to Canada as a part of the Empire. But, Sir, at this time, not merely in other particulars are the circum-