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House of Commons Debates

FOURTH SESSION—SIXTH PARLIAMENT.

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

ON

THE MEMBER FOR LINCOLN.

MONDAY, 17TH MARCH, 1890.

Mr. BLAKE. With much that the hon. President of the Council has said, I quite agree. I agree with him as to the spirit in which this House should approach the consideration of this question. I agree with him that least of all questions which can be brought before this House, ought this one to assume in any sense a party complexion. I suppose all must have been struck by the observation made by the hon. member for Lincoln, when he gave his explanation at the opening of this debate, that expression of regret which, he said, he entertained at his unfortunate position, in that after having made his speech he was to leave the House and was disabled from participating in the debate which would follow. If that debate were to take the tone which the hon. member for Lincoln obviously conceived, if it were to proceed on the lines he obviously indicated, the regret of the hon. gentleman would have been justified, and the rule to which he gave deference by his retirement would have been proved to be an unreasonable rule. But, Sir, the regret was unfounded and the rule is an entirely reasonable rule; because that vacant chair speaks more strongly than the most eloquent language we could hear in favor of the member who is absent from it. It speaks in solemn tones, and appeals to us in terms more forcible than any tongue could use as to the line which we should take, the tone we should adopt, the spirit which should animate us in disposing of this case. Why is that chair vacant? It is vacant because our colleague is, according to the principles of reason, disabled and disqualified from being the judge in his own cause. But, then, it is a cause in which we are his judges; and it is, therefore, in a judicial capacity, strictly in a judicial capacity, that we have to deal with the matter, thus I agree wholly with the observations of the hon. the President of the Council, and also in the phrase dropped by the Minister of Justice at an earlier stage of the debate, that we are acting here as judges of the cause. Sir, under these circumstances we have no warrant, whatever may be the latitude, the regrettable latitude, which we permit to ourselves under other circumstances,

when we are present face to face and are able, if attacked, to reply to the attack—we have no warrant here and now, to mingle invective with reason, to heighten the complexion of the transaction by any rhetorical devices, to blink the facts, to take any other course than, in a spirit of candor, fair play and impartiality, to endeavor to ascertain the right and the truth. I agree with the observation of the hon. the President of the Council that the honor of the whole House is concerned in the matter. It is concerned in all such matters. The honor of the House is in a sense in the hands of every member of the House. No course of conduct discreditable in the general sense of the community can be pursued by any single member without, to some extent, at all events, lowering the character of the assembly of which he forms a part, and in this view it is our common interest, as members of Parliament, that the transaction, whatever it may be, should not be depicted darker than its true color, and that every reasonable protection should be accorded to the man who is accused. On the other hand, Sir, it is even more clearly the duty of the House to watch jealously that honor of which it is the guardian, and to take care that it does not become, by any unworthy connivance in a discreditable transaction, an accomplice after the fact, and so degrade itself to some extent to the level of those who may be concerned in such transactions. The situation is, under these circumstances, painful. I agree with the hon. gentleman in the view that it ought not to be made in any sense a party question for those reasons which I have given, and for other reasons too; for reasons which, taking a somewhat lower ground, are particularly applicable to those who may happen for the time to be on the side of the minority, because if there be any section of the House that has a deeper interest than another in the observance of these principles, it is those who happen to be in the minority. Their only chance for the affirmation of charges justly made against a member of the majority, consists in the observance of the principle of justice. Their only chance for the avoidance of a condemnation of a charge unjustly made against