

## MR. JOHN BARRY, M.P.

Statement to His Constituents at Wexford.

Mr. John Barry rose to deliver his statement, and he was received with loud and prolonged applause. He said—Before proceeding to deal with the special business which brings us here to-day, I would like to say a few words upon the events, or at least upon the great event, of the past session, and after dealing at some length with the course of events during the past session, paying marked compliment to both Mr. Sexton and Mr. Arthur O'Connor, proceeded—Now, gentleman, having said so much upon the great measure of the past session, perhaps you will allow me to contradict some of the statements that appeared in the press immediately after my resignation was announced. It is understood that proceedings at meetings of the party are to be regarded as strictly private and confidential. I did not mention the fact of my resignation to anyone. After leaving the House I went to Manchester that night. You may, therefore, imagine my surprise when taking the newspaper next morning to find a long account of the matter, and the reason given was that I resigned as a protest against granting £8,000 to the evicted tenants out of the Parliamentary Fund. This statement was absolutely false (applause), and was calculated to prejudice me in the eyes of the evicted tenants and of the country. I have a good idea who it was started this calumny. As a matter of fact, I strongly supported the proposal to grant aid to the evicted tenants (applause). I held as a matter of honour and good faith we were pledged to stand by them to the end. It is true I hold a strong opinion on the policy which was pursued in certain parts of the country, notably at New Tipperary, a policy which drained our party resources and left so many people dependent on the country. The unfortunate people were not responsible, they acted with heroism and devotion (applause). I always felt and feel as strongly as ever at this moment that the party and the country are bound to stand by them until a satisfactory settlement is secured (applause). Then, again, it was widely circulated in the press that I resigned because I took a different view from the majority on the question of the Paris Funds. Now, as a matter of fact, there was no discussion on that question until after I had left the room, so my opinion was not expressed one way or the other. In this matter it is true I also hold strong opinions on the policy of secrecy and muddle connected with this unfortunate business, but to say that I resigned my seat in Parliament for that and for that alone is simply untrue (applause). As I will have something to say upon this question later, I will not dwell further upon it now. I have been actively connected with Irish politics for 31 years. During that period the National cause passed through trying and dangerous times. Innumerable personal controversies were fought out. During all that time I started no controversy. I made no personal attack on the platform or in the press (hear, hear). If differences arose with my colleagues I held my peace. I can point with a feeling of pardonable pride to that long record in which I never allowed any personal consideration to embarrass or endanger the National cause (applause). With this record behind me you will readily understand that I did not lightly and without pain take the course which I have taken in resigning my seat. After the bitter experience we had in Ireland of the evils and dangers which flow from placing unlimited authority in the hands of one man we should never allow a similar state of things to arise, and it is because I have witnessed the steady growth of that spirit of what I

will call, for the want of a better word, "Bossism," that I am here to-day to make the strongest protest in my power against it (applause). To make the situation quite clear to you, and to prove to you that I have not acted hastily nor without sufficient reason, it is necessary to recall certain events. You will remember when the Parnell crisis came upon the country in November, 1890, in what a fearful position the National cause was placed. Amongst our other difficulties we were without a paper in Dublin to voice the opinion of the country. The *Freeman* had joined the factionists, and poured forth its stream of deadly venom every day, and *United Ireland* was forcibly seized by Mr. Parnell. Prompt action was necessary, the painful proceedings at Committee Room 15 came to an end on a Saturday night. Mr. Barry proceeded to describe the proceedings connected with the starting of the *National Press* and Mr. O'Brien's unexpected refusal to act on the Board of that paper, or to assist in its foundation, pointing out how likely this refusal seemed at the time to bring about the wrecking of the project. He went on—We intimated the fact of his refusal to the people who had subscribed, and, to their eternal honour, he it said, that only two persons who subscribed to the extent of £500 withdrew their names in consequence of Mr. O'Brien's refusal (cheers). Then followed the absurd Boulogne negotiations which so sorely tried the patience of the country. The party after a long and agonising discussion had deposed Mr. Parnell in the most solemn manner, but that, forsooth, was not enough for Mr. O'Brien. He ignored the decision of the party and must negotiate terms with Mr. Parnell himself. I don't remember exactly the terms which Mr. O'Brien was prepared to accept from Mr. Parnell, but in a letter which appeared on Saturday last from Father Humphreys he states—and I think he is correct—that the first condition was that the Irish Bishops should make an apology to Mr. Parnell for having issued their letter (laughter), and for having dealt so hardly with him. The second proposal was that Mr. Justin McCarthy should be at once put aside and somebody else elected in his place, and the third proposal was that Mr. Gladstone should withdraw his letter in the most unqualified manner. So far as my recollection serves me these were the conditions which Father Humphreys states so positively and so definitely in his letter last Saturday. I want to ask you as reasonable men, what was to be thought of the judgment of the men who would consider for a moment such conditions as these? These negotiations lasted a long time, and the country was left in a very distracted condition. It was thrown back into doubt and confusion. The negotiations failed, as every sensible man knew they would fail, and then Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Dillon went into Galway jail. At that time the party was splendidly united, working together like one man. I challenge anyone to say there was the slightest friction or difference in our ranks. Its unity was maintained in the most perfect manner until Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Dillon came out of jail. Then, I regret to say, in a short time all was changed. They found the National Party strong and united. Carlow and Sligo had endorsed the verdict of Kilkenny—(hear, hear). The *National Press*, conducted with courage and ability, had brought the *Freeman* to its knees (cheers). All danger was passed and the country was saved (cheers). From the first moment these gentlemen came amongst us they looked with ill-concealed displeasure upon all that had been done in their absence. They took up a position of veiled hostility to the *National Press*. They endeavored to shield the

*Freeman* from the just indignation of the people. You remember Mr. Dillon's attempt to carry out that policy at the convention here in Wexford—(A Voice—Quite well)—and you remember how it failed. They threatened to resign their seats if resolutions in favour of the *National Press* were carried at conventions. This and a great deal more of the same kind took place; but for the sake of peace all this was tolerated in silence. The *Freeman*, utterly beaten, utterly smashed and pulverised by the vigorous and well-maintained attacks of the *National Press* and by the steady patriotism of the people, then sued for peace, and the *National Press* could have arranged its own terms with the *Freeman* but for the ill-omened interference of Mr. Dillon. Again, for the sake of peace silence was maintained, and for the sake of unity Mr. Dillon, although he had not a single share in either paper, was invited to join the board. But this did not satisfy Mr. Dillon. He insisted that Mr. O'Brien, who did not own a penny in the papers, should also be a director. At that moment we—that is, the directors of the *National Press*—were engaged in difficult and delicate financial negotiations with the representatives of the Gray family on the *Freeman*. Three others and myself had guaranteed the payment of £26,000 within a certain limited time. It was at that critical hour that Mr. Dillon insisted upon introducing for the first time the question of the *Freeman* directorate into the Parliamentary party. I regarded this as a grievous error of judgment, and protested against it on the ground that it would lead to dissensions. I pointed out that this was a question of business, that this was a question to be settled by the shareholders, and that men who had no financial interest in the concern had nothing to do with it (hear, hear). And apart from that, I argued that it was unwise to get up as a permanent institution in the country a popular organ of opinion, controlled and directed by politicians and members of Parliament (hear, hear). I pointed out that we—the *National Press* directors—that every man of us was willing to retire. I was only too glad, speaking for myself, to retire, and I object now to the presence of politicians upon the board of a great national paper, for this reason, that one side or the other, if there is division in the board, will have the opportunity of preventing the expression of free opinion in its columns, and so freedom of speech in the country is practically throttled while you allow an institution of that kind to remain. My strongest reason above all other reasons for protesting was, that if the question was introduced into our party it would undoubtedly create a line of cleavage and lead possibly to permanent division and dissensions in the party. However, Mr. Dillon insisted, and a meeting of the party was called to consider the question. Unfortunately an accident detained Mr. Dillon in Dublin, and he was unable to be present at the meeting in London. But after a discussion lasting over ten hours it was unanimously agreed by the party that nothing further should be done in the *Freeman* matter until the important financial arrangements then in progress, and which I referred to just now, were successfully carried through. In defiance of this unanimous agreement of the party, Mr. Dillon on the following day rushed a long letter into the *Freeman* throwing the whole subject into the vortex of public discussion. Again, for the sake of peace, we were silent. I am not sure that we were wise in being silent when Mr. Dillon committed the glaring act of undisciplined, of defying the agreement of the party, rushing into the paper, and throwing the whole subject before the country. I will not follow Mr. Dillon in all his deplorable action in the

*Freeman* business, but this I will say, he forced that wretched quarrel to the front in a reckless spirit, and utterly regardless of the consequences to the country, just on the threshold of a general election. You all remember the heartbreaking display at the shareholders' meetings at the Imperial Hotel. All this action was prompted by the spirit of bossism; but once more, for the sake of peace, he was allowed to have his own way. I have said we were a really united and advancing party until these gentlemen appeared on the scene. Allow me to give you some proof of this assertion. They at once commenced a movement to oust Mr. Justin McCarthy from the chair. At the first meeting of the party in 1892 Mr. Sexton nominated Mr. McCarthy. Mr. O'Brien nominated Mr. Dillon in opposition. They were appealed not to press the matter to a division—the danger of starting a line of cleavage in the party was strongly urged—but in vain, they insisted upon going to a division, and Mr. Dillon got only 9 votes, and one of these was recorded by a mistake by a very good friend of ours, who afterwards said he gave his vote in error, so that practically he had only eight votes. With the exception of the Parnell incident in Room 15, this was the first division on a personal issue ever forced on the party. From that time the intrigue has gone on—lobbying, button-holding, private conclaves of all kinds, a kind of secret society within a party all of which I have observed for a long time with feelings of growing disgust. I am firmly convinced that the end and object of all this is to set up a kind of Brummagem "Parnellism," but with twin bosses in stead of one. The proceedings at the recent election in Mayo should have opened the eyes of the country to the dangers of the boss system. In Mr. Parnell's time we had at least to deal with a man of cool judgment, but Messrs. O'Brien and Dillon, although possessing many excellent personal qualities, are, in my opinion, very deficient in judgment and common sense. After the displays they have made, the burdens that some of their unwise acts have placed upon the country—New Tipperary, for instance, cost £70,000—the bumptious Boulogne negotiations, their reckless grasping after power on the *Freeman* and in the party, they would, I firmly believe, in any country but generous Ireland be laughed out of serious and practical politics. I made some reference just now to the question of the Paris Funds. My knowledge on this subject dates very far back. In 1881, when there was apprehension that the National funds might be seized in Ireland or England, Mr. Parnell entrusted to me the forwarding of the first amount—£20,000, I believe it was—to Paris. Again in 1890, immediately after the Parnellite split—in fact, the day after the proceedings in Room 15 terminated, at my urgent appeal to Mr. Arthur O'Connor and Mr. J. F. X. O'Brien were despatched to Paris that day (Sunday) to prevent the withdrawal of all or any portion of the fund by Mr. Parnell. I provided £100 from my own pocket to meet any preliminary expenses. They were at the bank when the doors opened on Monday morning, and were just in time, because a demand had arrived that morning from Mr. Parnell withdrawing a large sum for his campaign. After much careful deliberations and many consultations with eminent French lawyers, proceedings were taken to recover the money, which the bankers declared they could not part with without a legal decision. The French lawyers further advised that a decision in the English courts declaring Mr. Justin McCarthy as the surviving trustee entitled to the money would be invaluable, but a difficulty arose about suing the Paris banker in the English courts. It was at that