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House of Commons Debates

FOURTH SESSION—SIXTH PARLIAMENT.

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

ON

TORONTO UNIVERSITY, &c.

FRIDAY, 14TH MARCH, 1890.

Mr. BLAKE. I beg to call the attention of hon. gentlemen opposite to a question of public interest, which, it seems to me, ought to be considered by us for a moment at this stage of the Session. I refer to the matter which was brought up in the House yesterday by an hon. member for one of the divisions of Toronto, and which the right hon. the First Minister asked to be allowed to stand. I mean the question as to whether the Government intended to submit to Parliament some proposition with reference to the recent conflagration at the University of Toronto. I have some reason to believe that suggestions have been made from more than one quarter to the Administration on that subject; and, following the course which it has always seemed to me more expedient to pursue, I am anxious to make any suggestions I have to make with reference to a money grant, here openly and under my responsibility as a member of this House. I wish to submit that the circumstances of the case are such as may not unreasonably induce the favorable consideration of those who are responsible for the administration of public affairs, and of the House at large, to some exceptional proceedings on this particular occasion. The institution, whose loss gives rise to my present observations, is one which may not unfairly be described as of a national character. It is one wholly unsectarian, and whose benefits are participated in by all citizens, of whatever creed or origin, of the large Province to which they belong; and in a community like ours, which is, and is long destined, I hope, to be a democratic community, without any enormous accumulation in individual hands of property, composed mainly of men who are dependent for their maintenance upon their own labor and exertions, it is of peculiar importance that institutions of the highest class for learning should not suffer serious impairment, but, on the contrary, should be efficiently promoted. The character of the calamity to which I refer is so exceptional that a remarkably marked and far extended interest and sympathy have already been exhibited. In the neighboring Province, a pro-

position to grant aid, as a mark of sympathy, is now far advanced and will doubtless become effectual, and in the city of London a committee has been formed, comprising the names of very distinguished men, with whom we are familiar as having filled, some of them, the highest station in our country, as the representatives of our Sovereign, and others as former Colonial Secretaries, with the view to signify, in a substantial, tangible manner, that a bond of sympathy exists, even between us and that remote community. I may say that, after a very careful consideration of the situation, which my own relation to the University rendered it my duty to give, I am convinced that the peculiar position is one which entitles us to say that the exigency is great. Contemporaneously with the loss of the library, to which I am about more particularly to refer, has occurred the destruction of the main portion of the fabric; and the restoration of that portion, without any unnecessary expense whatever, in the most economical manner possible, consistent with the efficiency of the institution as it now stands, will involve a very large expenditure for the old and the new necessary buildings, beyond all the public or municipal and all the private assistance which we can now fairly expect. A large public grant has been made, a municipal grant is hoped for, and the liberality of the friends of the institution, including the graduates, has been appealed to, and appealed to so far with gratifying results. But from what I know of the situation, I am convinced that all possible resources which are available will have to be applied in order that the efficiency of the institution in its present condition, and looking to its present needs, may be maintained. I am not at all insensible of the difficulty and the delicacy of the situation in more than one respect. A question may be raised with reference to our interference with educational institutions, a question may be raised also with reference to money grants, which may form an inconvenient precedent; and to these considerations I am myself disposed to attach—although this particular institution is one which