

Hon. Edward Blake on Irish Financial Grievances.

Below will be found a report taken from The Dublin Freeman's Journal of the speech of Hon. Edward Blake in the House of Commons on July 4th on the Irish financial grievance. This address has been praised in the English press as one of the ablest criticisms ever heard in Westminster. The Hon. Edward Blake said the statement just made by the right hon. gentleman (the Chancellor of the Exchequer) was that there was no case for further inquiry, although the right hon. gentleman had given two different and inconsistent reasons for not having such an inquiry. The position taken up by the Government was that further inquiry was essential in order that a just conclusion might be arrived at. There was an admission for the purposes of the debate last session that there was at all events a prima facie case which required further investigation, but not a case such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer now suggested, a case demonstrable on the materials before Parliament to be one that did not need any further inquiry at all. Speaking in the House of Lords last year, three weeks before the debate took place in the House of Commons, Lord Lansdowne, a member of the Government, admitted that "to deny Ireland the position of a separate entity was to fly in the face of facts," a view which indicated opinions quite divergent from those to which the Chancellor of the Exchequer had given expression on the present occasion. The attitude taken by the First Lord of the Treasury during the debate on the Address was that the Royal Commission had been guilty of sins of omission, that they had refused to investigate facts which they should have investigated, and that it was impossible to form a judgment without further investigation. The right hon. gentleman (the Chancellor of the Exchequer) now said they did not proceed with the second Commission, because they thought it well to postpone it till Parliament expressed its opinion on the giving of the agricultural grant to Ireland, and a little later he said they did not proceed with it on account of the refusal of the hon. members of that side of the house to support it. Which was the real reason? Was it both or was it neither? In his opinion the non-appointment of the second Commission was due to neither of the reasons given by the right hon. gentleman; it was because he had decided that the time had arrived when the right hon. gentleman thought he could take his stand on the grounds which they (the Irish members) believed really underlay the terms of reference to that Commission. (Nationalist cheers.) The right hon. gentleman had said that the mover and seconder of that motion differed in some of their opinions on the subject. They were discussing this question not as a party question. He thought perhaps a greater latitude for variation of opinion might be permitted on this great question than seemed to be permitted in political organizations, ordinarily supposed to be bound by a common policy. For gentlemen who remain in solemn ignorance of the attitude of their colleagues and so declare themselves to the House—for a right hon. gentleman who occupies that position with reference to the solidarity of the Administration to complain that there was not entire agreement on this point seemed to him (Mr. Blake) a little far fetched. (Irish cheers.) The right hon. gentleman suggested that the Royal Commission gave no answer on important elements of the investigation; but he himself answered his complaint. The work of the Commission in respect of those matters which deal with the present condition of affairs was none the less valuable because at the time it was necessary to ask it to do something more, a necessity which had disappeared at the time of the publication of the report. It was necessary for the purpose for which that Commission was appointed to enter into an investigation of what the proper contribution of Ireland should be towards the expenditure of the United Kingdom under a Home Rule system, because a Home Rule system was in contemplation, but when the Commission reported a Unionist Government with a majority of 160 was in power, and they reported with reference to a state of things upon which the right hon. gentleman wanted to act now, and which the right hon. gentleman hoped might be perpetual, namely, the continuance of the Union; and the great majority of the Commissioners found that, except for the purposes of a Home Rule system, it was not necessary, not even proper, to enter into these questions of contribution, and for that reason they did not enter into them. The supporters of the motion before the House contended that the right hon. gentleman's contention was an entire distortion of the condition of things contemplated by the Union. It was the avowed policy of the Union that the Union that Ireland should be secure against the possibility of the suggestion that she was to bear taxation at the same

deal with in this Parliament, not upon conjecture, but upon the application of the principles of fairness, equity, justice and common sense. We have got to deal with it upon the assumption which the right hon. gentleman would make that the security which the framers of the Union contemplated was a security for the weaker country against the injustice that might result to her from the application of indiscriminate taxation. The question is to be dealt with, not without reference to the changed circumstances of to-day. The argument that you cannot remedy the existing grievances in the manner contemplated by the Act of Union does not relieve you from the duty of remedying the grievances in some other way. (Irish cheers.) The plea that it is to the convenience of the common system should remain has been taken as a reason for doing nothing at all. I say that view is unworthy of this Parliament and the kingdom. (Irish cheers.) The suggestion that the specific remedy of the Act of Union can no longer be applied should be coupled with the free and frank acknowledgment that some other method of discharging the obligation should be found. (Irish cheers.) The right hon. gentleman has suggested that there is really nothing oppressive. Now, I deny that statement. Considering the poverty of Ireland, where half a million, not in the congested districts, are nearly if not quite in the same distressful circumstances, I say that the taxation imposed is too heavy. (Irish cheers.) Continuing, Mr. Blake said:—It seems to me that the suggestion which I have referred to, made by the right hon. gentleman, is to be discarded. If you cannot give us exemptions and abatements because of your policy, if you interpose a non possumus, then you are bound to propose some other remedy or some other method of dealing with this question. (Hear, hear.) The right hon. gentleman says we are absurd when we ask for common expenditure under the compact of Union. We are not. I hold it is perfectly clear under that Act, under the conditions under which it was originally framed, that first of all there would be proportionate contribution, and, secondly, that there should be no indiscriminate expenditure. (Hear, hear.) No man can deny it is impossible to deny it on the basis of the provisions of the Act of Union, nor is it reasonable. What was going to happen when the fate and fortunes of the smaller and poorer country were to be subjected to the good will, the good faith and the integrity of the larger and richer country? There was no provision for separate accounts in that Act except the separate debit account in the interest of Ireland. It was impossible that that Act could be applied. What is there unjust in that? Who is to decide what the expenditure is to be, this amount of that expenditure, the mode of its application, its objects, where it should be? Well, practically the Saxon (Irish cheers), the Minister of the Saxon Treasury (renewed cheers), and he decides all those matters in this Parliament, there being only a small and insignificant Irish minority. That is his security. It has been said that the arrangement of taxation laid down in the Act of Union was altered by the Formative Act of 1817. That it has not been altered it is true that the principle of separate taxation was eliminated, but it was eliminated not with a view of doing injustice to Ireland. It was eliminated with the intention and the idea of making a substantial contribution to the poorer country proportional to its relative taxable capacity. Honourable gentlemen opposite talk of themselves as Unionists, and yet they propose that the Federal Budget should be set up, that we should enter into an account every year. I say that this system of separate accounts is a direct step towards physical separation (hear, hear). If we are charged as a country first of all with the whole charges put upon us, and having done that, to contribute proportionately to our taxable capacity to Imperial expenditure, then I say that you must allow us to fix the scale of our local rates (hear, hear). It was stated I contended last year that Ireland should not contribute to the army and navy. I made no such statement. On the contrary I said under the Act of Union that Ireland had no security against an enormous and disproportionate expenditure on the army and navy. I said that what ever expenditure this Parliament would fix we were bound to contribute to it by contributing to the bill of the United Kingdom. If you sell that bill beyond our means our hard bargain will make us suffer. It is you that raise the question as to the relative interests of Ireland and Britain in this matter. We cannot raise it. We may protest against enormous expenditure, but whatever is fixed here we are bound to contribute as part of the Imperial expenditure. It has been said, I think, that Ireland is expensive to you, and that we are bound to you, and that we are bound to suggest that if Ireland is expensive to you, you are expensive to Ireland (Irish cheers). If Ireland costs the Imperial Exchequer too much, we may point to the fact in connection with the army and navy that they are altogether different from yours, and our contribution should be, as it would be under other circumstances, very

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