

Hon. Edward Blake, M.P.

He Will Stick to Longford and Give All His Energies to Ireland

His Love for the Cause makes Parliamentary Work a Cheerful Sacrifice

At a great national demonstration in Longford on May 30th the member for the division, Hon. Edward Blake, made the following address, being received with vociferous cheering upon rising to address the people: I was excited to address the people of Longford at length I have been able to come amongst you once again (cries of 'welcome'), and the only regret that I have in my long connection with the County Longford is that circumstances have been too strong for me and that these occasions of meeting with my constituents have been so much rarer than I would have wished. It had been my full intention to have asked the opportunity of meeting you last year, but I was stricken down by an illness which incapacitated me for work and necessitated my absence for a long time, and it is with some difficulty that I am able to be here to-day. The fact of the matter is that besides that acute illness which besets me, there is an illness which is getting worse day by day, the incurable illness of old age, and I have been convinced at last that

I CAN NO LONGER DO ALL THE WORK

that I used to be able to do, and that I have got to give up some part of my work, and the choice was before me, therefore, whether I would give up the professional work with which I have been connected for nearly 50 years or the representation of this constituency.

A Voice—Represent the county while you are alive (cheers).

Mr. Blake—I have decided to give up the one and to stick to the other so long as you want me to stick to you (loud cheers); and, therefore, although with lessened energies, yet with a more concentrated use of those energies for the Irish cause, I hope, as soon as arrangements can be made and in the course of next year

TO GIVE MY SINGLE ATTENTION

to those concerns which you entrust me to represent (applause). I am influenced in the decision, which is a grave one for me, not merely—although I own to you mainly—by my love for the cause with which I am associated, but also by the warm recollection of the cordial and unflinching kindness, consideration, and goodwill which have been shown to me by the electors of this division (hear, hear). It could not have been exceeded. You have made my political life as happy in that regard as the life of any man could possibly be. You have dealt indulgently with my defenses, you have warmly seconded my efforts, you have shown belief in what, I think, you may believe in—my earnest, honest, good wishes and devotion for your cause (applause); and as far as you could have made that work of an Irish politician, never a very light or cheerful work, you have made it light and easy for me (applause), and

THE ONLY THING I ASK YOU

is what you gave me long ago, that you will not grudge me, owing to the few years in which I can hope to remain connected with the cause of the division, those yearly visits to my home, which is 4,000 miles away, where my children and grand children, which I have paid whenever I could before (hear, hear). I am happy not merely in my division, but I am happy with my colleagues (applause). There is much that I could say of my friend and your fellow-townsmen and my constituent, as well as my colleague, Mr. Farrell, which I cannot say in as high terms as I would use if he were not beside me on the platform; but I must say this of him, that he is a man valued in the Councils of the Irish Party and in the House of Commons, that he is entrusted with the discharge of important duties in that regard, and that he performs these well (applause), and that, to the great advantage of this division as well as the North Division, with the intimate personal acquaintance and the profound local knowledge he has of its affairs, he has taken to your great benefit, full charge of all those varied local concerns which belong to the County Longford, and he has discharged them as I am sure my friend and colleague, Mr. Hayden, will say to you, with marked ability and great advantage and success in that questioning operation which goes on in the House of Commons sometimes (applause). Now, I want to say one word as to

THE QUESTION OF ATTENDANCE

My home is, as I have said, 4,000 miles away. I live during the session in London, because my duty as your representative obliges me to be there. I am there, that is my temporary home, and of course there as for me no excuse and I plead no excuse whatever for absence at any time from the House of Commons, except the sad excuse of illness, which sometimes occurs to every man. Others are differently circumstanced. No man can feel more truly than I do the advantage, wherever possible, of constant and vigilant attendance, but this is a matter which in each case, whether the difficulty is occasioned by illness or whether it is occasioned by business, must rest with the constituency. I think the constituency has the full right to say to its representative—"We want a man who will attend every day in the House of Commons, and if he is not sick that he will go there, or if he stays away, let him stay away from the Commons altogether." It is for you to determine. I am quite sure my friend Mr. Farrell and myself, each of us, stand on the same ground that we recognize the full right of the constituency to be a judge of the advantage of the continuance of the relations between the member and the constituency (applause); and if the business affairs of a man oblige him to be away sometimes, the constituency is the judge, and neither of us would wish to say a word against that decision. But I do say this that Mr. Farrell will live amongst you, you know when he is here and when he is there—Mr. Farrell attends always when he can,

is always reluctant to be absent, returns on every emergency, and when he is in Parliament is active, earnest and diligent in the discharge of his business, and when he comes home he learns your wants, and is actively working for you in his business in the dissemination of National news (applause). I express my own opinion. I don't know whether those views are grateful to Mr. Farrell or not, but I express my own opinion because I think it due to you and due to him and due to myself when I do say that

THE VALUE OF MR. FARRELL'S ATTENDANCE

In Parliament is very great, and nobody should suggest that this country should part from him because of what you know are the absolute necessities of the case—having him amongst yourselves when he learns your wants and comes back to represent them, that should form no difficulty or weakening of his position in the constituency.

A Voice—Longford does not say what Jasper says (laughter and applause).

Mr. Blake—I intended when this meeting was first arranged to have talked to you upon the subject which will only form a very small part of this speech after all. I intended to have tried to give you some exposition of some things connected with that which, after all, is the main and all-embracing question of

HOME RULE;

but since that time two circumstances have occurred. First of all, I was called upon at the late National Convention to endorse or expound its principles only in a ten-minute speech; but still I said as much as I could in ten minutes to endeavor to expound our general principles on the subject of Home Rule and my views as to its future. I have no doubt you all have read and all remember it, and I am not going to repeat it. The next thing is that there are some things I wanted to talk about on that subject of great importance, but the time for which I think, on consideration, is not ripe, and the last is this, that I have felt that coming amongst you after a considerable interval, when there were new situations created since I last addressed you upon various of those matters, which would all be included in Home Rule, if only we had Home Rule, but which, while we have not Home Rule, we are obliged to fight and struggle for in the British House of Commons. It was, perhaps, better that I should do what I, as a speaker, at any rate don't much like to do, go very shortly over a great number of those topics that deal exclusively with one great topic of all, and so I am going to turn to the various matters which we are fighting for, and have been fighting for in the British House of Commons. Many of them have been alluded to. The first of all these questions, of course, in Ireland is

THE LAND QUESTION

in all its varied aspects. My friend Mr. Farrell has spoken to you on some details of the question. The speaker who moved the resolution and seconded it spoke also on certain other details. I have no doubt whatever that my valued friend and colleague, Mr. Hayden, than whom no one in broad Ireland is more competent to deal with this question, will also speak of many of these details with which naturally I, not having the good fortune to live upon the soil, am less familiar than they. I want, therefore, to speak to you in general terms, and state a few comprehensive observations. I owe to you, first, as my constituents, some reference to my own action on the recent development of the Land Question. You will understand that this does not involve any discussion of one matter most painful to all of us. If such discussion were necessary or would be useful I would not shrink, but as things are I gladly abstain. It will only be needful to recall well-known and essential facts on which we have now to act. Let me say, then, that

I WAS ASKED BY THE U.L.L. OF AMERICA

to attend the last Convention at Boston and the meetings at New York, Philadelphia, Washington, and elsewhere. Before my return here the Land Conference and subsequent events had occurred which profoundly modified the situation. I then decided, while expressing my individual views to the Chairman of the Party for confidential use, to act upon the policy which I stated to him, namely, that recognizing events and avoiding all discussion of accomplished facts, I would endeavor to secure all gains and to minimize all risks involved in the new situation (applause), and this, gentlemen, is the policy I have undeviatingly pursued in my relations to the question.

AFTER THE LAND BILL WAS INTRODUCED A CONVENTION WAS HELD

at which the National policy as to that Bill was laid down. As you remember, I had a humble share in shaping first and later in laboring for the success of the policy; but you know that our efforts met with but partial success. We were unable to obtain some important demands of the Convention, and the Act retained clauses we thought dangerous, and omitted provisions we thought essential. Accordingly it passed on the sole responsibility of the Government, our Chairman disclaiming all National responsibility for these errors. Then followed sad experiences of its practical working, largely due to

THE EXORBITANT DEMANDS OF THE LANDLORDS,

which its provisions furthered, taking note of which the Directory of the League about the new year formulated its views and advice as to the working of the Act. Next came the present session, when the Irish Party submitted an amendment to the Address calling for some essential changes, all of which had indeed been demanded during the passage of the Bill under the aegis of the Convention. At the Convention itself held both this demand of the Parliamentary Party and the view and advice of the Directory as to the working of the Act were unanimously sanctioned (hear, hear). (No one can suggest that these were new matters sprung upon the Convention. They had been before the country for a long, long time, and had been the subject of universal discussion, and the cordial adoption by the Convention

showed that they but re-echoed the settled opinions of the people. Now, THE OFFICE WHICH A NATIONAL CONVENTION CAN PERFORM with the greatest efficiency, and which affords the best guarantee for the validity of its conclusions, is that of formulating the final decisions of the nation which have been fully before the people, which have been thrashed out in all the various forms of public discussion, and on which each delegate has had the advantage of learning his constituents' minds while making up his own, and this was the office of the last convention in this regard. My present duty, and I submit the duty of every one of us, is to labor to the utmost for the furtherance of its resolves. Now, there are

MANY PHASES OF THE LAND QUESTION.

You have got the general question of the agricultural tenanted lands; you have got in that connection the question of prices and of values; you have got the landlord's demands and the tenant's rights, and the bonus which is a free gift to the British Treasury; Ireland pays for it; the landlord gets it. He has got other advantages. The tenant buys because the British Government lends him the money—not a free gift like the bonus. Interest has got to be paid for every shilling that is borrowed until the last shilling is paid, and the longer the line of the instalments the greater, of course, naturally and properly and fairly, the payment of interest.

WHAT THE LANDLORD HAS BEEN ATTEMPTING TO DO

is to obtain all the advantage gained by the use of British credit—this money being lent at a moderate rate of interest—as well as all the advantage of the bonus, and to suggest to you to take upon yourselves for the whole of your own lives, and for the lives of the children who live after you, certain fixed burdens as to which you will have an inexorable creditor, the Government of the country, whom you will have to pay to the day, and as to which the credit of all your local funds is charged for the default of anyone amongst you, so that the country, the locality, and your neighbors go bail for the defaulters. They want to get all the benefit of that as well. You have, therefore, a long day to look forward to, and you have to make your bargain a fair and liberal bargain, but a bargain made with due regard to the inexorable nature of it by which the present law, the circumstances of agriculture, and future, and to the consideration of whether it affords you a reasonable chance of seeing in your own day, if you are very young, or seeing, at any rate, daylight for those who come after you (applause). Now, that is a question which is to be disposed of by yourselves, and there is nobody better able when the position is set before them to judge of it than the farmers of Ireland; but you must never forget that

YOU HAVE ALWAYS AT YOUR BACK THE OLD SAFEGUARD,

unsatisfactory as it is, of the judicial rent. You are not shut up to buy on any terms the landlord's demands, and to hold your hand may often be the best way and to demand a second term rent may very often be the best way of making a tolerable bargain (applause). So much with regard to the case of the ordinary tenant farmers. Now, the question of the congested regions to which I do not limit myself to the regions which the present law makes congested, technically, but those regions where more is required to be done in order that a decent livelihood may be made by the man on the soil than the simple getting possession of the soil on which he lives.

WHERE RE-DISTRIBUTION HAS TO TAKE PLACE

as well as purchase, the problem is, of course, a more complicated, as well as an even more urgent, one. It is more complicated because it involves the question of the acquiring other lands and afterwards of putting them up and distributing them along with or in substitution for the lands on which the unfortunate men cannot live a decent life at all, even if you give them their rent free in many cases (hear, hear). It involves those questions which are complicated. They are also most urgent, because I am sure that you as Irishmen will feel that the cause of those of your fellow-countrymen who are living in the lowest scale of life in this country, I believe in the lowest scale of life in civilized Europe, I am not sure if they are not in the lowest scale of life in any country that can boast of calling itself civilized—the case of those of your fellow-countrymen is the most urgent of all. I don't mean to say that your regeneration is to be delayed for theirs; but I do mean to say that the two works can proceed side by side, and I am sure of the earnest and heartfelt sympathy of those who are not so badly off as those who are in the west towards those to whom my heart has gone out ever since I learned the way they live (applause), and that you would be ready to agree we should agitate and demonstrate that what may be necessary, even if it is more than necessary to settle the Irish Land question generally, shall be done in order to settle this which affects a million or more of your own people (applause). In that we want, and we want it in a more large and liberal spirit elsewhere, we want the recognition of the principle that

THE GRASS LANDS WERE NOT MADE BY GOD TO BE WASTE SOLITUDES.

peopled only by bullocks, but that they were meant for the happy homes of men (applause); and there is no sanctity in the ownership of property which shall make it the instrument of continuing a state of degradation and burning in the hearts of the people who live upon the land on which that property is (applause). We hear talk—and I am not sneering at other organizations—of the improvement of agriculture to obtain increasing returns from your farms. I have no doubt whatever that agriculture may be improved in Ireland greatly. It is now acknowledged that the system which has been forced upon you and kept upon you by an ignorant and prejudiced Parliament for the Irish garrison is a system which does not conduce to

the good farming of the country at large (hear, hear). Why? Because there is no stimulus so great towards diligent work, towards running a risk towards determining to improve, as to know that you are laboring for that which is your own (applause), and that every turn of the plough, every stroke of the spade, every work at the hedge, or stone, or ditch, is a work which is making a little better part which is to be the property of yourself and your children (cheers). That is the stimulus. That is what will appeal to every man once he gets into the position. That is the reason

I WANT TO SEE IRISHMEN THE OWNERS OF THEIR OWN SOIL,

because I know that no society for the organization of agriculture will ever do as much as that; but it may do much. Only I distrust a little those who press upon us, or did press upon us a little while ago, this organization as tending to so great an improvement and to so great an addition to the profits of agriculture that really it made rent a matter of no consequence. Gentlemen, the improvement of your property, of the property on which you live, will be good for you; while somebody else continues the owner the next settlement of the judicial rent will determine who profits by the improvements (hear, hear). You know the extent to which the owner has profited by the improvements in the past and though I would be the last man to use what I believe would be a cowardly argument and to suggest that houndry and illness and so forth, I scout altogether the suggestion that you can by your own exertions with comfort or safety relax your efforts to become the owners of the property and be indifferent as to the rent because some great improvements which these gentlemen tell you they can make in agriculture will enable you to pay higher rents, but make them with the assurance that they belong to yourself. So, with reference to

THE CHEAPENING OF TRANSPORT

it is in the nature of things that the cheapening of transport will, to a considerable extent—I daresay only partly; you will not get all the benefit—but to a considerable extent it will increase the profits of agriculture. At present the charges which are made for the transport of agricultural produce in some instances which I have seen in this country, are monstrous, but any improvement of that nature in the value of farms in the nature of things belongs to the owner in the long run; therefore become the owners (applause). I turn next to another phase of this question,

THE QUESTION OF THE LABORERS.

A Voice—"The best of all." Mr. Blake—Well, he is as good as another anyway (cheers). I am not going to consider the question which are the best. I don't think either of us are judges. I have no doubt the laborers would say the tenant-farmers were the best and the farmers would say the laborers are the best—that is the generosity of the Irish nature (laughter); but I do say that tenant-farmers and laborers will agree that the lot of the laborers in some respects ought to be made better than it is, and the absence of improvement has tended to produce that condition which has been alluded to in terms which could not be heard without pain by any lover of the country, by one of your speakers, the condition as to the emigration and the general state of the country in that regard (hear, hear). Now what we want is a provision for giving the laborer some hold upon the country, some habitable and some title of ground, that the procedure should not be made with such numerous stages. I saw it reckoned lately that there are

NINETEEN DIFFERENT STAGES OF LAW PROCESSES TO GET A LABORER'S COTTAGE AUTHORIZED.

and there was a return the other day which showed that there were 476,000 spent in buying sites for the houses and plots, and 473,000 spent in law costs to enable them to buy the houses and plots; so you might have had twice as many houses built if you had only got rid of the lawyer—here I am (laughter), and I am not blaming the lawyers; it is the fault of the law which makes this complicated, expensive process necessary, instead of the simple, reasonable process by which the result shall be avoided of making the law costs equal the cost of the land which is being bought (hear, hear). I am very anxious about one thing. In many cases where plots have been acquired there is an agitation for an increase. The Irish Party has undertaken to see how that subject can be dealt with, but I am considering those who have plots as well as those who are to get plots, and there is an obvious difficulty in the case of those who have plots, if there was to be any increase, in suggesting the acquisition of more land adjoining the holding; but both with them and as to the others I am extremely anxious to have considered by the country, and, if thought practicable, adopted what seems to me a very reasonable improvement, and that is that we should, as far as possible, provide for

THE ACQUISITION OF A PIECE OF COMMON GRASS

in which a cow's grass, or even in some cases a goat's grass might be got for the laborer (hear, hear). This becomes more and more necessary for the laborer and his family as time goes on. Your present system of making butter, the improved factory system, is, of course, diminishing the supply of fresh milk and the general conditions are such that that best food for children certainly, and good food for all of us, containing all the natural elements for health and strength and nutrition, should be made more plentiful in the houses of the poor. I see no reason at all why within a reasonable distance of a group of laborers' cottages a small plot should not be provided where the laborer should have his cow's grass which would make his home more like home (hear, hear). Now I turn to another phase of the land question,

THE QUESTION OF THE TOWN TENANTS.

Here we are in a town—I am glad to say for an Irish town, prosperous, and a town that has the reputation of being one of the most prosperous towns in Ireland. That question is a very difficult and complicated question. There are numerous points to which I am not about to allude. What I am about to allude to is this—that I am glad to be able to tell you that there are signs of progress and development in the formation of public opinion in the adjoining island which governs us on this question, not with reference to themselves, and that is a much more hopeful prospect, for as soon as they decide that they have got to do something with reference to the condition of town tenants in England, depend upon it we will get it in Ireland too, upon it we are joining hands with them to forward that view (hear, hear). Something used to be said about the sanctity of land and property; but I always believed, and now believe, though I am an individualist in this sense, that there is nothing so good as that a man should own the soil on which he lives as his own, free from all other men's control. But there is no such sanctity in property as entitles a man, to the detriment of the other citizens of the community, to insist on having more than he can use. Property in that respect and in the large sense is a monopoly. The island is here. What did God plant it here for? For those who were to live on it (applause). No man would deny you a right to some spot in the island in which your bones should be laid after your life had ended; but it is still more important that you should not be denied the right to some spot on the island in which you could live and flourish, to rear your families (applause), and therefore, I say that the old doctrine which made a sort of idolatry of that property right—it believed that a man could not be disturbed—has long ago given way in the case of railways; but my goodness, is it not infinitely more important that men should live healthy and comfortable than that they should be able to move comfortably through the country at 40 miles an hour. In the case of town tenants some arrangement whereby a tenant can be converted on fair and reasonable terms into a fee is a reasonable aspiration, though one full of difficulty; and the first thing to encounter in order to reach that aspiration is to encounter those prejudices I have referred to and make up one's mind that

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"We will turn out the Government unless the demand of Ireland is complied with." I don't think united Ireland is really united Ireland in this case (hear, hear), and the short of it was this, that when the Government determined to give you that great boon of local government they accompanied it with this condition that half the landlord's rates should be paid out of the Agricultural Aid Grant. That is what that wing of united Ireland voted for and got, and ever since that day I have seen very little interest taken in the Financial Relations question by that wing of united Ireland (hear, hear). I am not disposed to go into any more UNITED IRELAND COMBINATIONS WHICH ARE NOT GENUINE.

I am very much disposed to go in for any that are genuine and earnest. Since that time what was bad then has grown much worse. Since then the whole people of Great Britain—not the ruling people, but those who are ruling the people of Great Britain—have become apparently absolutely reckless on the subject of expenditure and taxation. The army and the navy, which cost a little over 30 millions a few years ago, cost over 60 millions a year now. Meanwhile we, who were found by the evidence and Report of the Financial Relations Commissioners to be paying beyond our strength some time ago, are paying between two and three millions a year more than we were then. THE GREAT PRINCIPLE OF FAIR TAXATION is the equality of sacrifice; but of what we earn an allowance must be made us enough to support us and (Continued on page 6.)