

## HON. EDWARD BLAKE.

## His First Speech in the Imperial Parliament.

## A Brilliant and Effective Effort.

The following report of Mr. Blake's speech is taken from The Times: Mr. Blake, referring to the speech made in this debate by the leader of the opposition, said that the right hon. gentleman argued that there was a good case against the policy of home rule because Ireland had for some time been tranquil and untroubled. But what was the true reason of Ireland's comparative tranquillity? It was the prospect held out to her people that there would soon be an end of the system of government under which they had groaned for many years. (Cheers.) A happy consummation, thanks to the unabated zeal and unflinching fervor of the right hon. gentleman at the head of the government, in the Irish cause, was now, he believed, in sight. If, however, the expectations of the Irish people should be balked; if all the difficulties which the present measure was intended to solve were to remain unsolved, then he did not say it as a threat—hope, turned to despair, might produce results absolutely fearful to contemplate. (Cheers.) It was a singular thing that whatever scheme of home rule might be proposed it always turned out to be impracticable in the view of the right hon. gentleman, the member for West Birmingham. Yet the right hon. gentleman was he believed, one of the oldest home rulers in Great Britain. (Laughter and "Hear, hear.") As long ago as 1874 the right hon. gentleman announced that he approved of the home rule movement, and that he was of opinion that the Irish had a right to govern themselves and manage their own affairs. (Ministerial cheers.) The right hon. gentleman added that to concede home rule would be an advantage to both countries, for the Irish would be satisfied, and the legislature here would move at an accelerated pace without the Irish members. At present, the right hon. gentleman said, the legislature only travelled by parliamentary train, and that was not quick enough for him. (Hear, hear.) At what a snail's pace did the right hon. gentleman's present train travel? Then, in 1881 the right hon. gentleman pointed out that the Irish question was no new problem—that every generation in turn for 400 years had had to deal with it, that each generation had bequeathed it unsettled to its successor, and that the removal of the English garrison at any time would have been the signal for an uprising of the people. The problem to which the right hon. gentleman referred in 1881 was less grave now in consequence of the arrangements made by the Liberal party in 1886, but it would certainly recur in an intensified form if those arrangements should fall of execution. (Hear, hear.) The right hon. gentleman's great objection to the proposal made in 1886 was the non-inclusion of the Irish members, and he had pointed out how much their retention meant, and also consequences, politically of the utmost gravity, as flowing from that state of things. He agreed with the right hon. gentleman: his belief had always been that the

## RETENTION OF THE IRISH MEMBERS

was a most proper element in the adjustment of the question. He regretted that the right hon. gentleman now found that retention so difficult as to be impossible. (Cheers.) Before the Liberal-Unionist party had assumed its present attitude of impotence in this matter—(cheers)—and while yet the right hon. gentleman felt, with some remainder of the traditions of Liberalism (hear, hear)—that the Irish question did not require constructive legislation for its solution, he had put out a profuse programme, which contained many of the most important elements of the present measure. It provided that the Irish members should be retained for Imperial purposes in the Imperial parliament. (Loud cheers.) It also provided for the minority, so far as religion and education were concerned, those guarantees which the bill of 1886 contained; and it declared that, not merely upon reason and theory, but also from practical experience in the working of the constitutions of other countries, those guarantees had been found ample and adequate for the purpose. (Hear, hear.) But now the right hon. gentleman, finding that many of his suggestions had been adopted in the bill, declared that they were absolutely useless and impracticable. (Hear, hear.) The right hon. gentleman had asked whether the bill preserved the Imperial unity, and whether the central authority would have full control of the forces for offence or defence. His answer was "Yes"; for the present measure was designed to prevent the recurrence or continuance of those very feelings to which the right hon. gentleman had alluded when he stated that the result of the solemn compact and treaty of perpetual peace between Great Britain and Ireland would produce the feeling that England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity. But the right hon. gentleman forgot that his own statement was that that had been the feeling of Ireland for the last 400 years. (Cheers.) The bill offered a prospect, and even a certainty, of putting an end to that state of feeling. (Hear, hear.) There was force in the contention of the right hon. gentleman that the geographical situation of Ireland was a bar to separation, and that that barrier would prejudice the interests of Ireland. He thanked God, however, that it was possible to reconcile the interests of Ireland, as they had now been learned by the great masses of her people, with the

## CONTINUITY OF THE UNION.

for all purposes of offence and defence, of managing our colonies and dependencies, of trade and trade policy and relations. With regard to the trade between the two countries, he believed that, serious as would be the loss to England, the loss to Ireland would be infinitely greater. The difficulties which William Pitt at the time of the debate on the union had pointed out as difficulties to be guarded against by means of the union were the very ones which were involved in the series of subjects reserved to the Imperial parliament. (Cheers.) If the plan of local administration of local affairs combined with a central organization for common and Imperial purposes had been widely known at that time, and if it had not been discredited by the circumstances under which it had been adopted by the United States, that solution would have been adequate to accomplish every purpose for which William Pitt suggested the necessity. (Hear, hear.) The union in its incorporate form had been tried and had lamentably failed. (Hear, hear.) It was necessary that the Irish should have a domestic legislature, and it was not proposed that the act of union should be repealed, for it would continue in full force for all proper and legitimate purposes by the free consent of the Irish people. (Hear, hear.) There was one portion of the speech of the right hon. gentleman which had sounded to him more like the speech of a Fenian head centre, and that was when the right hon. gentleman pointed out that the present measure would not satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the Irish people. He said that the Irish parliament would have no control over foreign policy, no power to send ambassadors; that they were restrained from setting up an established religion and from interfering with education, customs and trade. The Irish members accepted the provisions which were borrowed from the constitution of the United States to safeguard these rights, not because they thought those rights would be violated, for he believed that the Irish majority would never as the minority had done, in the dead and evil times, use their rights to do wrong, but as practical men they accepted them without any feeling of degradation or humiliation, as recognizing what they considered the immutable principles of civil and religious freedom. (Cheers.) It was important from two aspects—it would soothe the apprehensions of those who were really nervous as to the new constitution, and it would have practical application to attempts to transgress either the letter or the spirit of the provisions. Such attempts would furnish a plain excuse for the intervention of the Imperial power. The right hon. gentleman suggested that the measure would be sowing the seed of future demands. What had been the position of this bill for many years? What had been the constant effort in Ireland? The house was actually asked to believe that an arrangement agreed to by the Irish people as satisfactory, and removing the great cause of complaint which had existed up to the present time, was only sowing the seed of future demands! (Cheers.) The right hon. gentleman asked what guarantee there was that the bill would be

## ACCEPTED AS A SETTLEMENT.

It was true that a phrase might be culled from the utterances of a distinguished man now departed to the effect that the bill of 1886 was only acceptable pro tanto; but the record of that man's action and speech, as the unquestionable and unchallenged representative of the Irish race in Ireland and beyond the seas, was the record to which attention should be paid—(cheers)—and that was a record of absolute, unhesitating and unequivocal acceptance of the bill of 1886 as a final settlement. (Hear, hear.) The difficulties and delay which had arisen had furnished absolutely satisfactory tests and confirmation of this view. The question had been before the Irish people for seven years, and there had been an unhappy difficulty in Ireland eminently calculated to produce dissatisfaction, if it could be evoked, with the moderation of the Irish demands. He would point to the general acceptance by the Irish all over the world of the present bill as the best and most satisfactory proof of the finality of that acceptance, on the hypothesis that the statements of the prime minister were effectually embodied in the bill. (Cheers.) The right hon. gentleman urged that in the case of a struggle with America or France, Ireland would be on the side of America or France. But more so or less than now? (Loud cheers.) It was impossible to get absolute securities in respect of the future of countries; but as far as reason could give a ground for security there was the absolute assurance that the constitution of things as it was before 1886 was infinitely less advantageous to this country in the emergency suggested than it would be after the present bill had passed. (Cheers.) Then the right hon. gentleman suggested financial difficulties, and put the case of the Irish parliament refusing the collection of taxes. The Irish revenue was mainly to consist of excise, and the not too liberal provisions of the prime minister would

have to be strenuously exercised to get any revenue at all. But the raising of Imperial revenue for Imperial purposes was a different thing. Whatever was essential for the exercise of the taxing power of the common parliament in which Irishmen were properly represented, ought to be given, and no doubt would be given, in the bill. (Hear, hear.) The right hon. gentleman further suggested that volunteers and armed forces might be raised in Ireland. The whole of the suggestions were most baseless and fantastic. (Cheers.) They meant that concord, contentment and peace between the two countries were to produce a last state of affairs worse than that which the very reverse of those conditions had produced. (Cheers.) During all this time the power to place troops in Ireland and to blockade her ports remained. The only thing that was changed was that the bare idea of the necessity for such action vanished for ever. (Cheers.) On the subject of the supremacy of the Imperial parliament, the house had the right hon. gentleman's own record. The right hon. gentleman had repeatedly declared that the continued representation of the Irish people in the Imperial parliament did effectively produce that supremacy which he now questioned. That was the right hon. gentleman's ground for voting against the bill of 1886, and now, when Irish representation was conceded, the supremacy withered to nothing before the right hon. gentleman's eyes. (Hear, hear.) Did the right hon. gentleman wish to keep up Dublin castle and the bureaucratic control of Ireland, which no man had more effectively denounced than he? (Cheers.) The right hon. gentleman suggested the case of the Irish parliament initiating

## LAND LEGISLATION

of which the British parliament did not approve, and urged that there would be no power to check such legislation. Apart from the land, Ireland was in crime abnormally low among the countries of the world. The main lines for the solution of the land problem had now been laid down, and the machinery was ready to hand. It was a gigantic business of detail only now. When the Irish legislature obtained control of the land with securities—for he was no separatist and no confiscator, and would take no one's property without just compensation—the Irish legislature would find no occasion for a plan of campaign, and, if such a movement were started, the legislature, being responsible for peace, order and good government, would know how to deal with it. (Hear, hear.) The right hon. gentleman suggested that large salaries might be paid to ecclesiastics for services not rendered, so as to constitute a practical ecclesiastical endowment. He should regard any such plan as an unworthy artifice to evade the spirit of the law, deserving of the contempt of every honest man, and meriting the stern and speedy intervention of Imperial authority. Under the existing conditions provision was made, without remonstrance from any party, by which those most competent to deal with certain hospitals were appointed to the posts. Was that an iniquitous endowment of religion? (Cheers.) The right hon. gentleman remarked that the supremacy of parliament was "reverently noticed in the preamble." It was not necessary to notice it anywhere. It was unquestioned, and it had been admitted by the right hon. gentleman himself that by the retention of the Irish members that supremacy was an indisputable fact. (Cheers.) He did not object to the repetition of indisputable facts in an act of parliament; he did not object to truisms in an act of parliament—because he wished they were always contained in an act of parliament. There was not a man in that house but believed and knew that this act of parliament would leave the supremacy of the Imperial parliament intact in all its parts. (Hear, hear.) But the supremacy of the Imperial parliament would be used only under conditions in which the obvious intent of the act meant that it should be used. If the right hon. gentleman suggested that the supremacy of the Imperial parliament was to be used in the way of constant, continuous operative review and reconsideration of Irish legislation and administration, the last state of Ireland would be worse than the first. (Cheers and counter-cheers.) It would be better in that case that Irishmen should not be called upon to carry out a sham system of self-government, free from the responsibility which attached to and could not be divested from substantial power. Nor did the right hon. gentleman himself in days gone by think otherwise, because he had said that the practical control of the Irish people over Irish affairs was an aspiration which he assented to as a reasonable end to be attained. (Hear, hear.) Then as to the veto of the crown, the normal action as to the bills presented to the Irish parliament for their assent would be the same as in the Imperial parliament. The viceroy, as representing the Queen, would act upon the advice of the cabinet. The viceroy would occupy a dual position. He would act ordinarily upon the advice of the cabinet, but he was also an Imperial officer, and express power was in fact reserved to him to give instructions with regard to any particular bill, and in case of those instructions being received he would act ministerially on behalf of the Imperial parliament. The right hon. gentleman said that that would involve the resignation of the Irish ministers. He thought not; he thought that it would plant them more firmly in their offices of the power was wisely used. (Hear, hear.) They would not be called upon to resign for an

act for which they were not responsible. The policy of both Imperial ministers and of the Imperial parliament ought to be one of non-interference, save in cases where the spirit and letter of the act under which the Irish legislature was created was violated. (Hear, hear.) With regard to the protection of minorities, he could say that the rights of the minorities were as dear to Irishmen as they were to Englishmen. (Hear, hear, and cries of "Oh.") The right hon. gentleman had made some suggestions with regard to

## CONCURRENT LEGISLATION.

Of course, the Imperial parliament, having power to carry out concurrent legislation, would have the power to give effect to that legislation, although it was obvious that any step of that kind would be a serious one. The right hon. gentleman offered no guarantee to the hon. member for Waterford that the powers for the protection of the Irish minorities would be used. But Irishmen did not ask for guarantees. They depended upon their own honor and good faith, and upon their determination to carry out the conditions of this compact on their part. He believed that the letter and the spirit of this act of parliament would be observed by the Irish parliament, and all that Irishmen asked was that, whilst they observed that letter and spirit, the Imperial parliament would observe them also. (Hear, hear.) If the Irish legislature violated that letter and that spirit, the Imperial parliament would have the moral right and actual power to interfere and to redress. The right hon. gentleman suggested that the interference of 10 Irish members would make things difficult in the Imperial parliament if that power was put into action. But what would 103 Irish representatives in that Imperial parliament do? (Hear, hear.) To hear the right hon. gentleman speak it would be supposed that there was no Irish question in existence—that there was no Irish representatives to interfere with the Newcastle programme or with proposals for the settlement of the Irish land question. Let hon. members look at the situation—look at what they had suffered during the last few years. How many ministries had been made and unmade by the Irish members against the will of the other divisions of the United Kingdom? (Cheers and counter-cheers.) Let them ask themselves, what was the position to-day? What made this ministry? What could unmake it? (Cheers and counter-cheers.) But hon. members talked as if all this did not exist. (Hear, hear.) The Irish members, voting on Imperial, on English, on Scotch and on Irish questions, had forced upon successive ministries the conviction that they must consider what was the best policy they could adopt for Ireland. The result of the action of the Irish representatives had made the position of the Imperial ministries intolerable; they had found their path obstructed, and had found no peace nor ease. (Hear, hear.) This bill put forward a plan for reducing the numbers of the Irish members, and for

## REDUCING THEIR POWER FOR MISCHIEF.

for abstracting from them the power to interfere with all local legislation for England, Scotland and Wales, and, more than all, for removing the cause for members dealing with those questions otherwise than upon their merits. (Hear, hear.) Difficulties there possibly might be in the way of attaining this end in view, and no doubt the proposals of the bill might involve logical inconsistencies, but the English people had never yet been intimidated by logical inconsistencies from adopting great and beneficial changes in their constitution when they had in view the redressing of evils or the conferring of benefits upon the community. (Hear, hear.) He believed that under the new plan the dual parliament would have the same opportunities of discharging its Imperial duties that it now had. It was true that the Irish members would be subject to some inconvenience in having to come here to take their part in the work of the Imperial parliament. It was an inconvenience to them, but not to hon. gentlemen opposite, whom he would ask to allow them to bear that inconvenience. (Laughter and cheers.) The right hon. gentleman the member for West Birmingham had pointed out that there would be no relief under the proposed bill, but he had now indicated that there would, on the contrary, be every relief. If they would not take home rule in form, they would hereafter have to take it in substance, for, ultimately, English legislation would come to be specially dealt with by Englishmen, Scotch legislation by Scotchmen and Welsh legislation by Welshmen. It would be found in practice that certain other adjustments would furnish good practical solutions of the enormous mass of theoretical objections put forward by the opponents of the home rule scheme. It was urged that the parliamentary system under the new plan was so work only by corruption, but had the right hon. gentleman and his friends never before heard of Irish grants? (Cheers.) Why, what had been the course adopted by this country towards Ireland for years past? They had been trying to placate her with sopas. With regard to the protection of minorities, he rejoiced to know that there was in the minds of the Liberal party a trust which was well founded in the honesty and good faith and equity of the great majority of the Irish people. He rejoiced to think that the restrictions were not proposed in a form and with allusions which would make them degrading to, and would render them difficult of acceptance by, the Irish people. The Liberal party said that they reposed confidence in Irishmen; that confidence