

HOME RULE DEBATE.

AN INTERESTING AND ABLE ADDRESS

The Contending Parties Were W. A. Weir, R. C. L., and Col. O'Brien, M. P.—Mr. Weir Fires Some Hot Shots into the Unionists Ranks.

Victoria Hall, Lachine, was crowded to its utmost capacity last Friday evening, on the occasion of a debate on Home Rule between Mr. W. A. Weir, of this city, and Col. O'Brien, M. P. The debate was held under the auspices of the Young People's Society of the Baptist Church. J. A. Wilson, of Montreal, presided and announced that no vote would be taken on the subject. He then introduced Mr. Weir, whose popularity was evidenced by the hearty applause that greeted him. Mr. Weir spoke as follows:—

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: I count myself happy to-night in being afforded the privilege of addressing again the free citizens of Lachine and the men and women of the noble old county of Argenteuil, and I heartily thank the committee at whose invitation I am here. It is my boast that in all my public utterances I have endeavored to be on the side of freedom and liberty. I am for freedom in commerce; freedom of exchange; a freedom of voting unchained in any way; a free constitution untrammelled by the arbitrary action of any functionary, no matter how exalted his place may be.

Such being my platform you will not be surprised to-night to find me advocating legislative freedom for Ireland.

I have been warned that my mission was a fruitless one, that there were so many Orangemen in Lachine and Argenteuil, that Protestant prejudice here was so firmly rooted, that it would be a forlorn task to advocate before them the claims of a people, the majority of whom belong to a different faith. This, gentlemen, did not daunt me in the least.

I know, however, that an attempt will be made to-night to appeal to Protestant pride and arouse your Protestant prejudices. All the misery in Ireland will be ascribed to the fact that her people are Roman Catholic. If there is a Protestant here so ignorant and bigoted as to believe this, I shall be glad to have him vote against me, but I shall blush to own him as a co-religionist. You will find as dense misery in Protestant London and Glasgow, in the Protestant rural districts of Scotland and England, as you will find in Ireland. If it is more general in Ireland than in great Britain, it is due to another reason entirely, which I will point out ere I have finished.

It will be told you that Protestants will be oppressed, but section 4 of Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule bill provides all the required guarantees if any such are needed, which I do not believe. One fact I want to emphasize here. Nothing in their history shows that the Irish are intolerant in religious matters.

THEY HAVE SUFFERED

too much from religious bigotry to be bigoted themselves. Take even in these last days; all their parliamentary leaders have been Protestants—Isaac Butt, William Shaw and Charles Stewart Parnell. When James II. landed in Ireland, backed by an army of the most Catholic Prince of Europe, what was the first act passed by the Irish Parliament in the face of the bigotry of their new leader—it was an act proclaiming the utmost freedom of all religions. The struggle at the Boyne, at Derry and at Limerick, although the combatants differed in religion, were not battles for faith, but the contest of two races bitterly hostile to one another. The primary issue to be decided in this discussion is, in brief, Has English rule in Ireland justified its acts? and Has the Act of Union of 1800, of Ireland to England, proved itself a wise solution of the difficulty between the two nations? Now, in speaking of England and of English rule, I want it distinctly understood that I am proud of the grand old Mother land. I honor and respect her as the grandest nation the sun ever shone upon, the chosen home of freedom. I am an Anglo-Saxon, and particularly proud that my ancestors were born on the north side of the Solway Firth, in dear old Scotland. But no matter what our particular origin, I am

sure we are all proud of the history and progress of our race. But that does not mean that we deprive ourselves of the right critically to examine the history of our country; it does not mean that we must say that England was always right and her opponents always wrong. On the contrary, I think that we, situated here in our own broad share of the Empire, distant from the scene of action of the events we are to discuss, have the right as well as the duty to deliberate impartially upon the conduct of the Mother land in matters which seriously affect the happiness and prosperity of certain of our fellow subjects, and which in the eyes of the civilized world may reflect upon the honor of our Empire.

After referring to Home Rule measures in our Canadian Parliament, Mr. Weir continued:—

It has been a slow task to convince England of her wrong in her dealings with Ireland. In the days gone by, the more the world called upon her to right the wrongs she had committed in Ireland, the more dogged did she become in her error, the more did she hug her darling sin to her bosom. We cannot altogether denounce this persistency and pig-headed determination of the British character. It is the same characteristic that

IN THE FIELD OF BATTLE

makes the sons of England fight desperately on even when, as Napoleon once said of them, they should know they were beaten; it is the same resoluteness that made the immortal light brigade struggle through tiers of Russian cannon to achieve an impossible purpose and that finally floated the grand old Union Jack on the heights of Sebastopol, after innumerable repulses. It is the same stout persistency that has made our Queen Empress of the 300,000,000 of Hindostan, that has made the sails of British ships whiten every sea, that has redeemed from wilderness whole zones of fertile lands, now peopled by her hardy sons and winsome daughters. But in her stubbornness England has often been wrong. She was wrong when she attempted to force episcopalianism upon Scotland, and dragged on the covenanters for their conscientious refusal. She was wrong when she took away from the Highland Clans their patrimony in the native soil and vested the ownership in the hands of the chieftains only. She was wrong to seek to impose taxation without representation upon the descendants of those sturdy puritans whom her own folly drove to seek liberty under the free skies of America. She was wrong in making the dissenters of England pay tithes to the established Church of England, as she was wrong in making the Roman Catholics of Ireland to support the English Church there. She is wrong to-day in making the Welsh dissenters pay tithes for the support of Episcopalianism in Wales, and she is wrong now in not righting promptly the great evils she has wrought in Ireland. Every reader knows that the world of thought acknowledges that Ireland has

GREAT HISTORIC WRONGS

that demand redressing. Can you believe that Gladstone, Morley, Harcourt, Earl Spencer and Lord Aberdeen, advocate Home Rule from any unworthy motives? Earl Spencer went to Ireland as Lord Lieutenant and a strong anti-

Home Ruler. He left it convinced that Home Rule was a necessity. The illustrious Charles James Fox, the most brilliant statesman England ever produced, said, in the debate for the abolition of the Irish Parliament, in 1800:—"The whole House goes upon the false and abominable presumption that we could legislate better for the Irish than they could do for themselves—a principle founded upon the most arrogant despotism and tyranny. There is not a more clear axiom in the science of politics than that man is his own natural governor, and that he ought to legislate for himself. We ought not to presume to legislate for a nation in whose feelings and affections, wants and interests, opinions and prejudices, we have no sympathy." It may be laid down as a fundamental historic axiom that one nation cannot rule another successfully. In biblical times the Jews could not be governed by their powerful conquerors. The countries conquered by the great Roman Empire finally burst their bonds and started on independent careers. The only instances of successful union are on the federative principle. For a hundred years Austria tried to keep Hungary under her yoke and only effected peace by giving Hungary a Home Rule Parliament. There are a dozen Home Rule parliaments in the different States of the German Empire; five in Switzerland, under which Germans, Italians and native Swiss live in harmony. The British parliament itself has given Home Rule to its different colonies. Upper and Lower Canada united were at daggers drawn in 1865. Home Rule for each of the provinces has allayed all dissatisfaction. The 40 American States with vast diversified interests are kept in harmony by the Home Rule principle. Then why not try the principle in Ireland. The British Parliament is blocked with work. It has sat almost every day for the last year and yet cannot accomplish a tithe of the work before it. It has not time to pass the private legislation needed by London city alone, apart from the rest of England, of Scotland, of Ireland, of Wales, and of India. It is losing the respect of the people owing to this very state of congestion. Every little Irish Gas Co. bill, amended charter bill, drainage bill, and so forth, has to wait weeks and months for the leisure of unsympathetic legislators. Again I say, why not let Ireland attend to such matters herself, and Scotland and Wales, too, for themselves, if they wish it?

THE LAST HOME RULE PARLIAMENT

sat in Ireland in the year 1800. Prior to 1772, it was a parliament in name only. It was filled with paid officials of the English Crown. In 1772 it achieved certain legislative independence, thanks to the renowned oratory of Grattan and Henry Flood, both Irish Protestants. Catholics were soon after permitted to vote for members of this parliament, although they were not allowed to sit within its walls. This parliament was snuffed out by William Pitt, through the lavish use of gold, and promises of place and office and by grants of titles in the peerage. What has been the result? For scarcely a year since then has Ireland been governed by the common law. Coercion act after Coercion act has been promulgated. Three or four rebellions have been put down. Two or three famines have decimated the people. Hundreds of evictions have occurred each year, but land the people must have, and so the others take the vacant places. The people have produced great parliamentary leaders like O'Connell and Parnell. From time to time earnest philanthropic Englishmen have expressed their cause and struggled to secure remedies. Canada has given one of her brightest sons and greatest orators in the person of the Hon. Edward Blake to help on the great cause. The greatest Englishman of the century, the Right Hon. Wm. Ewart Gladstone, the grand old man, has devoted the last years of his life to removing the great stain from the name of England. The majority of the British House of Commons to-day is in favor of Home Rule. The whole civilized world is waiting for the accomplishment of this grand act of reparation. Is all this for the sake of an ephemeral dream, for a matter under which there lies no vital principle? Must we say that in this struggle of centuries the Irish were always wrong and still are so? Must we believe that no great underlying and fundamental principle of our common humanity inspired them in their cease-

less struggles? Has it been for error only that these poor peasantry time and again, armed only with scythes and rude blades, faced the artillery and the keen bayonets of the trained English battalions, and allowed themselves to be slaughtered in thousands? Was it for naught that thousands of poor Irish exiles fled from

THEIR LOVED EMERALD ISLE,

and wasted their valor and their lives in the armies of almost every nation in Europe? Was it for mere chimeras that millions more cut the ties that bound them to their mother land and crossed the wild ocean in every direction in search of the peace and happiness denied them in Ireland? Did these men of culture for naught abandon lives of ease and prosperity and struggle ceaselessly and agitate untiringly in press and forum until the quick death of the scaffold or the slower death of the convict's doom under the hot sun of the West Indies, or under the hopeless skies of Botany Bay, culled their usefulness? Has might always been right and have the weak always been wrong? These are some of the questions the answers to which I confidently await from the hearts of an audience of Canadian freemen to-night. To their eternal honor be it, Irish Protestants who had learnt to know, to love, and to sympathise with their Catholic fellow-countrymen led the loudest protests against England's treatment of Ireland. Lord Charlemont, Charles Lucas, Henry Flood and Henry Grattan, all Protestants, formed the patriot party in the Irish Parliament from 1760 to 1800. The United Irishmen, who raised a futile rebellion in 1798, were officered by Protestants. Hamilton Rowan was president and James Napper Tandy, a Protestant Dublin trader, was secretary. The other leaders were Wolfe Tone, an eloquent barrister, the chivalrous Lord Edward Fitzgerald and Arthur O'Connor were all Protestants, and all, save the last, died for their attempt. Another rising was planned by Robert Emmet, a too enthusiastic Irish patriot. He also was a Protestant and died on the scaffold. John Mitchell, who headed the rebellion of 1848, was also a Protestant, and received sentence of death, which was afterwards commuted to transportation for life. The great change that marks civilized thought on this question of Home Rule is notably marked in our meeting to-night to discuss Irish questions under the auspices of a Protestant church. Not many years ago to favor Home Rule would have marked a man as a traitor to his religion. He would have been despised and treated scornfully, but to-night a Protestant church invites us cordially to discuss this question on its merits, and I have no doubt that this audience, Protestant by a large majority, will decide

IN FAVOR OF HOME RULE.

The story of Ireland's wrongs and of the tears and sufferings of Ireland's sons and daughters would take many hours to relate. Let me, however, state a few of the general features. The story, in brief, is one of the deprivation of patriotic islanders of their land, i. e. of their means of subsistence. Henry II., one of the Norman Kings of England, was the first great invader. He partially conquered the Island and granted the land in great sections to feudal barons, who built castles and held regal sway. (Concluded on page 7.)

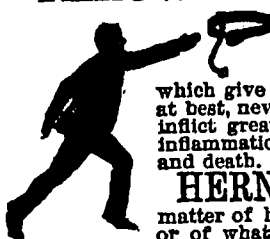
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