

## MR. BLAKE'S SPEECH.

The following report of Mr. Blake's speech at the banquet given in his honor is taken from the *Freeman's Journal*:

Mr. Blake, M.P., on rising to respond to the toast of his health was received with loud cheers. He said—Mr. Chairman and dear friends, the difficulty under which I felt I would labour in performing the duty which now devolves upon me has, I confess, been intensified by the extraordinary kindness and warmth of language which you, sir, have used, and the affectionate response which has been made to the toast which you tendered to the assembly. It is true I came amongst you not a long time ago, as you, sir, have observed, as a stranger; but it is equally true that it was not many days after I met those with whom I am now gathered together before I had ceased to be a stranger (cheers). I felt that I was amongst friends and comrades and brothers (cheers). To every one of those who are absent, as well as those who are present, I owe the heartiest and most unflinching thanks for their courtesy, kindness, and consideration (cheers); and it was not only that you were kind to me, but you extended to me in a marked, and to me most unexpected manner, a degree of confidence to which I certainly had no claim when at a very early day you did me the honor of choosing me as a member of your committee (hear, hear). I feel that that was a very high honour, and that the position which you imposed upon me was one of very special responsibility so far as I was concerned, because I was under the disqualification of not having that local knowledge and that intimate acquaintance from personal observation and residence with the details of information as to the country which are, I may say, almost essential to the proper conduct of a large part of the business. But as to the general features of Irish history, as to the character of her Majesty's Government, as to the principles upon which it was based, as to the grounds for which we should contend, as to the degree to which we might yield without difficulty, as to the point at which we must resist, it seems to me, after full discussion with my confidential colleagues, that there was between us

## HARDLY A SHADOW OF DIFFERENCE.

(Hear, hear.) It has been a great satisfaction to know that during the long and anxious period of private deliberations and negotiations and public discussions, we have been able, upon the whole, to maintain a wonderful unanimity of view as to what the merits of the Home Rule measure were, and what was the course that should be pursued with regard to it. Nothing has attracted my attention with greater admiration than the degree of, I might almost say, political instinct, which, according to my judgment, has been shown not only by those in command, but also by those who placed them in command of the situation. We have had occasion to take decisions at a moment's notice, and under difficult circumstances, and I think upon a calm review of the whole situation we may congratulate ourselves upon the general result (cheers). As you have said, Mr. Chairman, we are in an historic period. For long years to come, for generations to come, I fancy the events which in one sense are to terminate, which are at any rate to reach a marked and important stage on Friday night, will be looked back upon, and I believe that the verdict of those who shall succeed us in the political arena, and who shall live under that Constitution which we hope ourselves to live to see established at no distant date

(hear, hear), will be that knowledge and statesmanship were with those who adopted the policy of hope and union rather than with those who adopted the policy of distrust and despair (loud cheers). Sir, in most human transactions, in most great political transactions, thank God, it is the spirit in which they are conducted and the feelings that animate the hearts as well as the heads of the men who are concerned in them that are the important matters, and who could have seen the spirit which animates the leading men of those who are bringing forward this measure, who could hear the words which were uttered even to-day (loud cheers), who could have witnessed that which some people call humiliating, but which I call the highest degree of exaltation, the Prime Minister of a great and proud country like this declaring in the face of the assembled representatives of that country that the country for which we speak, and in whose interest we are contending, had suffered great and grievous wrongs which had inflicted a deep and not yet washed out stain on the career of his country, without feeling that he who is occupying the closing months of his life in

## WIPING OUT THAT STAIN

and is restoring to us the blessing of Constitutional rights was animated by a spirit which should make almost any gift from his hands precious, and which would lead us to sustain and support him in the difficult task which he is undertaking to the utmost of our strength? (Cheers.) The circumstances which have occurred since that speech have induced me to depart somewhat from the line I had intended to take, and to say to you a few plain words with regard to the bill. I think the occasion demands that there should be upon our part no unhesitating declaration of what our sentiments are at any rate (hear, hear). I divide it into two great divisions, both of which are important but of which one is far more important than the other. I take it first of all as a great political charter of freedom (hear, hear), and as a great political charter of freedom I say that in all its main essential details—scarred it may be and blemished by some minor defects—but in all its main essential details it is such as we can accept for ourselves and recommend to our constituents as giving to the Irish people in their local affairs a large, wide and generous measure of self-government (cheers). Its fundamental principle is, and we are asked to accept that principle—and as honest men we are bound to say whether we accept it or not—

## ITS FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE

is to consecrate between the two islands a union for purposes really common and coincidental with that consecration for a common and rational purpose, to erect in Ireland itself an efficient instrument for self-government by the Irish people in respect to their own affairs. Now, I say it achieves both these objects. It is not, indeed, irrevocable in form, for our Constitution does not admit of a charter irrevocable in form. None of the great Constitutions of the colonies is in form irrevocable; but it is irrevocable in spirit so long as its obligations and agreements are in good faith observed. It has its limitations and it has resolutions. These limitations are not as was proposed in 1846, in which common and Imperial matters in respect to which the Irish people were concerned were reserved by the bill to a large extent to the Parliament in which the Irish people were not to be represented. These limitations of common matters, subject to a rational union, in respect to which Ireland is to have her just part and share, are objected to very strongly. I do not object to the great bulk of these restrictions, and never have. Why? Because, when you are writing out a constitution, I maintain it is no harm

at all, but rather a good to declare what are fundamental principles of

## CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

as understood at this day (hear, hear). It has been said that these restrictions will some day be swept away, because it will come to be understood that they are not required in that sense. I believe they never have been required (hear, hear). They would be perhaps a very inadequate security if they were essentially required, but it does not matter to us whether they exist or do not exist so long as they are recognized by us as fundamentally just (hear, hear), and, therefore, since they concern only the liberty of conscience, the liberty of education, security for the just rights of property, I do not see how our self-respect is in the slightest degree impaired by agreeing that they shall be inscribed on our Constitution. When they were inscribed on constitutions of great and important countries, when they came to frame written constitutions the temporary provisions are also objected to. Well, if they were infinitely more objectionable than they are, I say no reasonable politician who looked at the history of the Irish struggle for self-government could for a moment hesitate to accept anything of a really temporary character, provided that the fundamental condition of a satisfactory settlement were contained in the same charter (hear, hear). To suppose that we should strenuously object or even churlishly accept this bill, because for three years in one matter and six years in another there is only a partial devolution of the rights which we are then absolutely to acquire, would be to ignore the plainest

## DOCTRINES OF COMMON SENSE

and reason. I go further, for it is well to be frank, and I say these restrictions, many and most of them in the conditions of Ireland, in the circumstances of Ireland, in the difficulties which attend the government of that country in view of the unhappy division between the majority and the minority which has been created and accentuated of late days, have elements of compensation. And I am not at all certain that they may not conduce very greatly to the advantage and the smooth working of the government of that country during the intervening period (hear, hear). The other element of the great contract is the element of finance, a most important element. All of us who have looked into the subject, and who have heard the eloquent and masterly exposition of it by Mr. Sexton (cheers), must have felt and must entertain opinions which differ very much from the opinions, honestly I have no doubt, entertained by those who propose that scheme. But Mr. Sexton's most valuable suggestion, that in consequence of their differences of opinion, in consequence of the mass of subjects requiring investigation, in order to arrive at the just conclusion, the first adjustment should be a short one, and be for a short period, during which inquiries should be made which should give the ground and foundation for

## A PERMANENT SETTLEMENT

on a just basis. That has been adopted (hear, hear). I do not think myself that the present arrangements made for the intervening period are really such as we might have expected. I think there are particulars in which we are treated, not certainly generously, not certainly even justly (hear, hear). But, once again, I don't regret that even if Ireland was to be scalped for these years, even if her purse was to be poor for these years, if we are to obtain a great political charter of freedom, and if we are to have the right to a full examination of the financial relations and taxable capacity of the two countries, and have a right to a permanent adjustment at the end of the six years, based upon justice,

which is all Ireland asks or wants—I say that, upon financial grounds, we ought not certainly to reject, nor even to grudgingly accept the provisions (hear, hear). Now, there are two senses in which people talk of finality. There is one sense in which it is

## ABOUND TO TALK OF FINALITY,

and it is still more absurd to talk of it in political affairs. There is another sense in which you may fairly talk of finality. As far as this bill is concerned, I don't believe that it is a perfect bill any more than any other human work. Possibly there are points in which, working it as it ought to be worked, with an earnest desire on the part of both the great contracting parties to make the best of it, it will be found, after the interval, that some changes in detail may be required, because working it in that sense, and making the best of it, if we find that there are details in which it requires amendment, consistently with these fundamental principles which are settled by it, the common consent of both parties, after practical experience, will be had without any party conflict, without any acerbity, difficulty, or repetition, even on a small scale, of the debates we have been enjoying up to a recent period. In that sense the bill is not final. In the large sense as the end of the old quarrel between Ireland and Britain, as the recognition of the fundamental principles upon which the line of union can be accomplished by the free consent of the people of both these islands, as the recognition of the principle upon which Ireland is to govern herself in local affairs, I say, in these respects, humanly speaking, we may and we ought to regard this as possessing the elements of

## SUBSTANTIAL FINALITY

(cheers). The main lines and the basis of the whole adjustment are here. They are written, and they are written irrevocably, so soon as the people have pronounced finally upon them; and their comparative small details, although some of them may be important, sink into insignificance behind that principle, the successful assertion of which we can only accept. The people of Great Britain agree to it. I think everyone here does see that we can only expect them to agree to it if they see we agree to it, and agree that there is a settlement of the old dispute (cheers). Now, I have been always strongly in favour of the representation of Ireland in the Imperial Parliament for Imperial purposes. I do not think there can be any final settlement without it, but as to the right of Ireland to have members in that Parliament for the purposes of purely British legislation, I do not believe we have that right and we have not claimed it (hear, hear). We did make a claim, for which I think there was great justice, namely, that until the period of the consummation of the settlement, during the intervening period, there ought to be no reduction of the representation (hear, hear). But that is, in my conception, a minor point, because I am a believer in this, that the spirit which leads the British people to consent to this measure is a spirit which

## ENSURES TO YOU JUSTICE

in all the details of the matter (cheers). Therefore I do not believe that the question of members was so essential as that we should wreck the bill upon it (hear, hear). We have to sustain the view which our friends in Britain put forward as the best and simplest for accomplishing the reform. We have done it in that way, and we did not insist on your being at any future time retained in Parliament for purely British questions, and just so soon as the British people say, "We don't want you on this question," we shall be prepared to make our bow (cheers). My own belief is that in this, as in other things, the measure is but a step in the path of progress towards a fundamental settlement of the relations