

# HON. EDWARD BLAKE

An interesting sketch of the distinguished Irish Canadian.

(By William Ellison, in the Catholic Union and Times.)

In this present sketch the mind of the biographer has not to strain itself in making choice of a subject among distinguished men of Irish blood and lineage in Canada, for the name and fame of Hon. Edward Blake entitle him to a front place among the many worthy sons of Ireland who justly rank on the roll of honor.

At a time when Hon. Mr. Blake has won fresh distinction, as an orator and patriot, by his great speech in the Imperial Parliament, on behalf of Ireland, it may be considered a fitting occasion to give the readers of the Union and Times some definite particulars of the life and career of the man, although in the wider and public aspect of the case the character of Hon. Edward Blake is known all over this continent and in every part of the world wherever Irishmen have found a home.

IN CANADA, FOR A GENERATION AT LEAST, the name of Mr. Blake has been as a household word among the people, and with whatever project, public or private, he has associated himself he has ever been the eloquent and fearless advocate of parity, honor and honesty. At the bar he distinguished himself at an early stage of his professional career as a lawyer of keen perceptive faculties, great mental grasp of points in dispute and clear and logical argument on the legal issues involved in any case he handled. With such marked forensic ability combined with unflinching honesty of purpose, 'tis no wonder Mr. Blake quickly reached a high place at the Ontario bar, nor that in later years he has been recognized as the first among the leading lawyers of the Dominion. But his great gifts as an orator gained wider scope when he entered the Provincial Legislature, in which he became Premier of Ontario, and wider still when he entered the Federal House at Ottawa as member for West Durham in the year 1867.

During his long years of faithful service there many were the hot and furious debates he engaged in, and while a pronounced Liberal in politics his acute sense of justice and clear vision led him to appreciate whatever was good in both parties. But men or measures that were faulty could not have his sanction, nor could laws that he believed were not framed in the interest of the people, no matter from what source they proceeded.

### HIS GREAT POWER IN DEBATE

was duly acknowledged in the Commons; and on the retirement of the late Hon. Alexander MacKenzie—a former Dominion Premier—he was selected as leader of the great Liberal party. This position he resigned some time before he was called to the English House of Commons as member for South Longford, and as Mr. Blake was preceded in the leadership by an ex-Premier, he has had for successor the Hon. Wilfrid Laurier, the present distinguished Prime Minister of Canada.

During the long years that Hon. Mr. Blake gave his strong mind and clear intellect to the consideration of politics and statecraft he left the impress of his far-seeing views upon every measure and policy he advocated, and although bitterly opposed by his opponents at the time, no public man has been more thoroughly vindicated, as the wisdom of his views upon public questions has been unfolding itself in later years.

But admirable as has been his Canadian record of services to his country, the patriotic side of his personality was raised to a higher plane when he consented, at the call of Ireland, to leave his home in Toronto and his large legal connections in Canada, to cross the Atlantic in order to give his commanding talent and devotion to the suffering land of his fathers.

### THE CALL TO IRELAND

are perhaps unequalled in the history of a public man, and reflect double distinction in the honor implied. A case can scarcely be recalled in which a statesman of one country was called by another nation to serve in the parliament of a third. This unique honor has been conferred upon the Hon. Edward Blake, and right well has he merited and deserved the high distinction. In such a noble procedure the high motive that prompted the action merits the gratitude of the people directly interested, and the admiration of all fair-minded men who desire that even-handed justice between nations as well as between individuals should be the rule of conduct. But let us get down to actual results and see what Mr. Blake has done to help forward the cause of Home Rule for Ireland, for that was the prime object of the Irish Nationalists in seeking the powerful assistance of the great Canadian orator and statesman.

He scarcely had left the steamer at Moville before he had to utter his warmest thanks to enthusiastic crowds, both lay and clerical, who gave him cordial welcome to Ireland; and hardly a day had elapsed when he was called upon to address overflowing meetings in Derry, Belfast and other political centres, prior

### HIS VISIT TO SOUTH LONGFORD,

where he was afterwards elected and for which constituency he still sits in the British Commons. Then in rapid succession, in nearly every city in Ireland, England and Scotland he spoke to immense audiences in powerful advocacy of the cause of Home Rule. Nor did he deal in empty theories, because in every sentence he uttered he had before his mind the practical working of the Home Rule in Canada, and no more convincing arguments in favor of that system of government ever fell upon the ears of eager listeners. And shortly after his arrival in London he made an address before the Eighty Club, which was pronounced a master-piece of eloquence and statesmanlike views.

It was, however, when Hon. Mr. Blake entered upon his duties in Parliament that his eminent abilities as an orator and debater showed to the best advantage. His maiden effort in the Imperial House was in the shape of a reply to a

speech made by the Rt. Hon. Joseph Chamberlain; of course a great deal was expected from a man of the high reputation of the Irish-Canadian, nor did he disappoint his friends, for the well-reasoned and powerful rejoinder placed him at once in the very front rank of the great speakers in that famous assembly. Not long after that he again raised himself high in the estimation of great parliamentaries by a reply he made to Mr. T. W. Russell, who rather sought to distort the real situation in Ireland, and to misrepresent the valuable results of Home Rule in Canada. But

### THE GREATEST EFFORT OF HON. MR. BLAKE'S

life was made a few days ago in introducing the question of the financial relations between Great Britain and Ireland. He was specially selected for the unfolding of the great problem, and it required a statesman of the first order and a speaker of pre-eminent ability to do full justice to such a theme. Mr. Blake consumed two hours and more in the presentation of his weighty subject, and yet he held the closest attention of the House to the end, and as the last words of his masterful speech closed, congratulations were showered upon him and the feeling was universal that the eloquent Irish-Canadian had added fresh laurels to his already wide fame.

The subject of this all-too-brief sketch, Hon. Edward Blake, Q. C., LL.D., M. P., etc., was born in the province of Ontario in 1833, son of the late Hon. William Hume Blake, a distinguished jurist of Upper Canada, for a time Attorney General and subsequently chancellor of the province, by Catharine Hume, grand daughter of William Hume of Hume-wood, England, M. P. for Wicklow in the British House of Commons. Descended from such noble Irish stock as the Blakes of Galway and the Humes of Wicklow, Hon. Edward Blake has come by his nobility of character by inherent right, and it is easy to conceive that under the supervision of such exemplary parents young Master Blake's budding faculties got the tender nursing and bent which left a beneficent impress upon his boyhood's life and materially aided in shaping the grand characteristics which have since distinguished him in all his moral and official life. He received his education

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, where he took first class honors in classics and proved himself an apt student of rare mental gifts and perseverance. In 1858 he received the degree of M. A., was called to the bar in 1856, and created a Queen's Counsel in 1864. From that time onward his forensic triumphs were rapid and enduring and such as placed him in possession of the highest professional practice. His eminence in the courts of law brought him government offers of the very highest judicial rank, but he declined the chancellorship of Ontario, and at a later period the chief justiceship of the Supreme Court of the Dominion.

As would be naturally expected, a man of Mr. Blake's intellectual capacity tends strongly in the direction of higher learning for the rising generations in Canada; and as chancellor of the Toronto University he gives both moral and material encouragement to induce to the higher branches of studies. It is not unusual for him to donate as much as \$10,000 at a time to that great seat of education, and the same liberality of soul marks his generous contributions to the Home Rule fund in Dublin. So absorbing is the splendid career of the honored gentleman that one loves to dwell upon it almost to the exclusion of his private and domestic life; let it suffice to say that Hon. Mr. Blake married Margaret, daughter of the late Rt. Rev. Dr. Cronyn, Lord Bishop of Huron, and that his private life has been as blissful as his public life has been distinguished.

### CONTINUED FROM FIRST PAGE.

## ISAAC BUTT.

shrank from the very name of Nationalist as they would now from the name of Anarchist. An occasional funeral procession, if it is not paradoxical to say so, was the one symptom of life in the country—that and the interruption or total suppression by the popular voice of any attempt at constitutional agitation. I remember as if it were yesterday the suppression of the tenant right meeting proposed to be held by Sir John Gray and the late Dean O'Brien, of Newcastle West, in the Limerick Cornmarket. It was carried out with superb audacity by Mr. John Daly. He and his men took charge of each speaker as he arrived at one gate of the Cornmarket, marched him through a double line of young men to the opposite gate, and conveyed him courteously but firmly outside. One of Butt's

### MOST FORMIDABLE DIFFICULTIES

was to get even a hearing for his agitation from young men, deeply depressed, no doubt, by the horrors and failures of the Fenian cycle, but firmly determined to allow no revival of the parliamentary agitation of the old kind which smelled to heaven. One of his appeals for a trial remains very distinctly in my memory. A banquet was being given to the first batch of amnestied Fenians in Hood's Hotel in Great Brunswick street, Dublin. I, a shy and inexperienced boy, completely overawed by the immensity of Dublin, was sent up by the Cork Herald to report it. It turned out that it had been resolved to be wiser, in those dangerous times, to have no newspaper report of the speeches, but as a friend intimately known to the famous John Nolan and to Mr. P. F. Johnson, of Kanturk, who were the organizers of the banquet, I was made personally welcome at the board. Butt had been engaged at the Four Courts during the day in the trial of a man named Barrett for firing at a Galway landlord, and the jury were sitting late to finish the case. It was not until the dinner was over and the speechmaking begun that the great counsel arrived with the news that

### HE HAD BEEN VICTORIOUS AND THE PRISONER ACQUITTED.

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speech from the dock in Cork, when he had the very Judge in a flood of tears, and the other Mr. Gladstone's lion-like, flowing-tide speech the night the home rule bill of 1886 was beaten. Butt's speech was almost wholly a plea to the released Fenian leaders to give him a chance for seeking Irish freedom by conciliatory means. He was argumentative, pathetic, passionate, by turns; but the passage that will always live in my memory was that in which in language actually blazing with the divine fire of eloquence he declared that if the methods he pleaded for failed, he would not only give way to those who would lead where all the nations of the free had gone before them, but that, old as he was, his arm and his life would be at their service in the venture.

At John Nolan's suggestion I had taken a note of the speech, and when the banquet was over I went up to Mr. Butt to beg his permission to publish a speech with which the blood of everybody present was still tingling. He was dismayed at the request. He said he had been told there were to be no reporters present, and that the publication of the speech would ruin all hope for his contemplated movement. I told him that of course his wishes would be respected; but he continued to show so intense an anxiety on the subject that, in order to completely reassure him, I threw my notebook into the fire, where it peacefully burned away. I thought then, as I have often thought since, that there perished in the ashes not only an interesting piece of history, but one of the most

MEMORABLE OUTBURSTS OF GOLDEN ELOQUENCE

that ever left human lips. Some rumors crept into the English papers that Mr. Butt had made an extraordinary speech

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at the banquet, and the Chief Secretary was asked on the subject, a few nights afterwards in the House of Commons, whether Mr. Butt, as Queen's counsel, would not be brought to account for it. But of course, there was no record of the speech, and the matter went no further, and the fact gave me some comfort for returning to Cork empty handed after destroying a notebook which would now be worth its weight in gold.

Mr. O'Brien vividly describes the last time he saw Mr. Butt. It was, he says, the final tussel in the Home Rule League in the Molesworth Hall in Dublin, in which Butt was for the last time beaten by a narrow majority by Messrs. Parnell, Biggar and Dillon. Who that has heard him can ever forget the bowed and broken old man's heart-breaking appeal to give him back the days when he had a united country behind him? IRELAND IS WORFELY RICH IN SUCH TRAGEDIES.

The days in which Mr. Parnell in his last tragic struggles went through a similar ordeal in his turn were not more pitiful. Those who deposed Mr. Butt were inevitably and absolutely in the right; but the pity of it—the drooped shoulders, the genial old face, the vast arched forehead, with the rings of silver hair tossing about it, the voice you heard the last rattle of dying genius! There was this difference between the scene in Molesworth Hall and the scene in committee room No. 15—that the people's parting with their leader was effected without the slightest trace of the hideous personalities that will make the later scene eternally disgraceful in Irish recollection. The thing had to be done; but it was done so rowlfully and cleanly by a surgeon, and not by a butcher. I saw Butt carry on a general chat with John Dillon just after he had spoken the last word against his leadership, and, if my memory does not deceive me, I think it was the arm of his victorious successor, Mr. Parnell, the great old fellow took in leaving the hall, with the glorious courage of the days of chivalry.

I never saw Butt again. Many months afterward I was returning from Egypt, having just escaped from the grave by one of life's curious chances; and at Naples, where the boat of the Messageries Maritimes called, I paid 6 pence for a copy of the "Daily News," which a Neapolitan news vendor came on board to sell. The first paragraph of its news announced that Mr. Butt was dead, and before I reached Ireland he was already sleeping in his quiet Donegal churchyard, not very much remembered, perhaps, amidst the fever in which the Irish town meeting was already throwing the country. The Irish heart, however, is a merciful and loving heart, whatever passing gusts of passion may blow over it; and as time goes on I have no doubt Irishmen will more and more fondly treasure the memory of a man who failed in life by the very exuberance of his Irish qualities of geniality, recklessness and softness, but who has left undying evidence of his genius and patriotism in the foundation of the movement which others, in more fortunate times, built up to such a wondrous height and in which another evil turn of fate has in these later years wrought such woeful havoc.

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