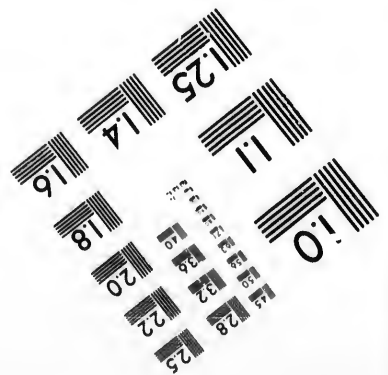
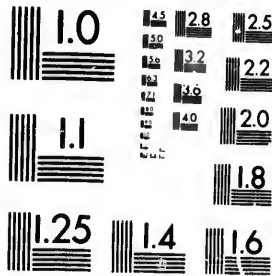


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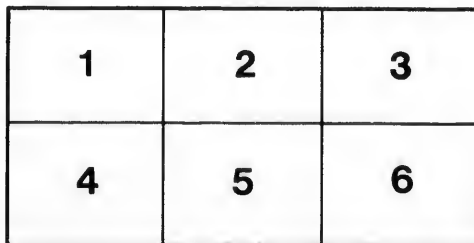
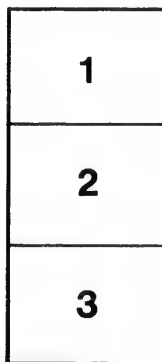
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House of Commons Debates

FOURTH SESSION, FIFTH PARLIAMENT.--49 VIC.

SPEECH OF HON. E. BLAKE, M.P.,

ON

HOME RULE FOR IRELAND.

OTTAWA, MAY 4TH, 1886.

Mr. BLAKE. I rise for a moment to intercept that question, in order to bring before the House another, in which the last House showed a deep concern—I mean the Irish question. In 1880, I spoke my views upon this subject, and expressed my belief and hope that we should at no distant day see a measure of Home Rule granted to Ireland. In the year 1882, the question was moved on the other side of this House. At that time we, on this side, heartily co-operated in order to give the greatest possible weight to the proposed action. Then I spoke at length my opinions upon the whole question, which saves me from the necessity of trespassing now upon the time of this House, and since that time, to the best of my humble power, here and elsewhere, I have aided in the advancement of that cause. Since then a new Canadian House of Commons has been elected, which House has not yet spoken upon the question. Since then great events have transpired in the United Kingdom itself. The people, both of Ireland and Great Britain, have received for the first time a very full measure of representation in Parliament. The Irish people, under that measure of representation, have, by an enormous, an overwhelming majority, pronounced in favor of Home Rule, and the great statesman who leads Her Majesty's Government has recognised the vital necessity of grappling at once with the question; and Her Majesty's Government have, as I ventured to suggest on a former occasion, seen the propriety of themselves formulating a plan for the settlement of that question. Now, Sir, a controversy has arisen on some of the more important details of that measure. I do not, myself, admire all those details. For example, admitting the great difficulties, I should yet prefer, to the present plan for the exclusion of Ireland from the management of Imperial affairs in which she is interested, the continued representation for those Imperial purposes in an Imperial Parliament—I should prefer the plan, notwithstanding its great difficulty, of her retaining that share of control. But it needs not to discuss this or any other matters of detail, because it has been expressly and authoritatively stated that none of these points are considered in any way vital to the question which is now before England and before the world. The vital principle now at stake is that of self-government for Ireland in local affairs. This was stated by Mr. Gladstone in his reply to the criticisms on the first reading of the Bill, and he has further and authoritatively declared it by his recent manifesto, which was transmitted to us only yesterday. In that manifesto, he thus speaks:

"As for the means we take the establishment in Dublin of a legislative body, empowered to make laws for Irish, as contra-distinguished from Imperial, affairs. It is with this that we are now busied, and not with details and particulars; their time will come."

He adds:

"We are not debating the amount of Irish contributions to the Empire, or the composition of the legislative body, or the maintenance of representative connection with Westminster. On these questions and many more we may and we may not be at odds, but what we are at this moment debating is the large and far larger question which includes, and I think absorbs, them all—the question whether you will or will not have regard to the prayer of Ireland for the management by herself of affairs specifically and exclusively her own. This and no other is the matter which the House of Commons has at once to decide. If on this matter it speaks with a clear and intelligible voice, I feel the strongest assurance that the others, difficult as some of them are, will, nevertheless, with the aid of full discussion and with the aid of a wise and conciliatory spirit, be found capable of a rational and tolerable settlement."

Now, Sir, that Bill to which this manifesto refers, stands for a second reading in a few days, and then that vital question is to be decided. A great excitement has arisen; the Empire has been aroused, not merely the Kingdom, but the Empire. The emotion has passed beyond the seas; it has passed beyond the Empire; the English-speaking people outside the bounds of the Empire have been aroused, nay more, the free nations all over the world have been moved. Every eye is at this moment bent on Westminster, and every ear is strained to catch the echoes when they come of the great debate, and to learn the issue of the mighty struggle from beyond. Under these circumstances, marks of sympathy and of admiration have been cabled to the First Minister, and he has responded to them in such a sort as proves conclusively that he regards them, as they must be, helpful to him in the enormous task he has undertaken. We know as well as if we had received it already, what the tone of the reply will be to any such communication as we have on a former occasion addressed, or as other large bodies have addressed, upon this subject. The circumstances are, of course, changed; they are changed since the day we addressed Her Majesty; they are changed as to the position of the question; but they are changed in this particular also, to which I call your special attention. At that time we assumed—and I suppose we are not now prepared to resile; I am not, at any rate, prepared to resile from the assumption of our right respectfully to approach the Throne with a view to tender our humble advice and hopes upon a subject of such vital importance to the whole Empire, and to Canada as a part of the Empire. But, Sir, at this time, not merely in other particulars are the circum-

stances changed, but they are changed in this: That whereas when we were asked to accede to the view that we should assume the responsibility of respectfully tendering that advice and opinion to Her Majesty's Government, that Government had not acted; now we can say that Her Majesty's Government, whether upon that advice or not, have acted in accordance with the spirit of that advice, and that we are no longer called upon by any sense of duty, and it is unnecessary that we should tender them any advice; what we are called upon now to do, under the present circumstance, is to assist them, so far as we can, by giving them our moral support in furtherance of the views which they have expressed, and in the adoption of the principle of the scheme now before Parliament. The answers which have been given to the communications which have been received show their helpfulness. To the Speaker of the Quebec Assembly, in response to their resolution, Mr. Gladstone writes:

"I am deeply grateful at the resolution adopted by your honorable body. It is my belief that the people of England, who have partial responsibility for the old misdeeds of the British Government, and the people of Ireland who have really none, will concur in the wise and liberal view entertained by the Quebec Assembly."

To the Mayor of Boston, in answer to the resolution of the city, he cabled:

"I feel that American opinion, allied as it is with a regard and affection for the Old Country, affords Her Majesty's Government a powerful moral support."

Then, shall we be slack to-day? Shall we be silent now who spoke before? I say, no. We are bound to speak and to speak now. Else it will be said of us: "You spoke ere the question was ripe, when your words embarrassed; now that it is near, even at the doors, you withhold your help." Else it will be inferred that we have changed our minds, and that no longer does the House of Commons approve of local self-government for Ireland. Our silence to-day will be as positively hurtful as our speech to-day would be helpful. It was but yesterday that we were, in effect, appealed to. Listen to the words of Mr. Gladstone's manifesto. He appeals, indeed, directly, in the words which I am about to read, to the masses of the population of Great Britain; and this is what he says:

"Watching from day to day the movement of the currents of opinion during the present conflict, more and more I find it vital to observe the point at which the dividing lines are drawn on the side adverse to the Government. They are found, as I sorrowfully admit, in profuse abundance, in station, title, wealth, social influence and the professions, and the large majority of them in the world, spirit and power of class. These are the main body of the opposing host. Nor is this all. As knights of old had squires, so in the great army of class each enrolled soldier has a roll of dependents. The adverse host, then, consists of class and dependents of class; but this formidable army is the bulk of its constituents, part of the same, though now enriched at our cost, with a valuable contingent of recruits that has fought in every Government the greatest political battles of the last sixty years, and has been defeated. We have a great aim. For us now it is to restore your parliamentary efficiency, by dividing and by removing obstacles to its work, to treat the Irish question with due regard to its specialities, but with the same thoroughness of method by which we have solved colonial problems, that fifty years back were hardly, if at all, less formidable. To give heed to the voice of the people speaking in tones of moderation, by the mouth of the vast majority of those whom we ourselves have made its constitutional representatives, and thus to strengthen and consolidate the Empire on the basis of mutual benefit and hearty loyalty."

I ask whether we, too, though that appeal is not a direct appeal to us, we too, a democratic people, kinsmen of those he addresses, of that very mass of the population to which Mr. Gladstone speaks, shall not echo and further his appeal. He describes in the same manifesto the response from the world. Thus he speaks:

"Never have I known an occasion when a parliamentary event so rang through the world as the introduction of this Bill, under the auspices of the British Government. From public meetings and from the highest authorities in the Colonies, from capitals such as Washington, Cincinnati, Boston, Quebec, and from the remotest districts lying beyond the reach of all ordinary political excitement, I receive the conclusive assurance that kindred people regard it with warm and fraternal sympathy. Our present effort is to settle, on an adequate scale, and once for all, the long-veiled and troubled relations between England and Ireland, which exhibit to us the one and only conspicuous failure of the political genius of our race, to confront and master a difficulty, and to obtain in a reasonable degree the main ends of civilised life."

I ask, under those circumstances, and when the highest testimony is given to those resolutions from various quarters, and their utility, shall Canada, who was earliest in the field, be dumb to-day? Shall her voice, so loud before, be silent now? Shall we not listen to that mute appeal and cause our names to be enrolled amongst those who constitute the forces of the great public opinion throughout the world, giving an added impulse to the progress of this great measure? I dare not be silent longer. I do not bring this as a party question. I have waited till the last moment, hoping that some one on the other side of the House would move. That hope I have been obliged to abandon. I see that the Minister of Inland Revenue has declined to move, and has cabled for himself and for the Irish representatives in Parliament the assurance of his and their adhesion to the address of 1882. I do not undervalue his assurance. But it is not the assurance required. What is required is the assurance, not of one, but of all classes; not of a section, but of the people; not of a Minister of the Crown, but of the Commons of Canada; not of the Irish Catholic members, but of the French and English, Scotch, Irish and German, of all creeds and of all nationalities. To substitute the hon. gentleman's assurance for our voice would be to acknowledge that we do not choose now to speak in the sense in which we spoke then, and in which he declares his own readiness to speak again. I therefore speak, but not as a Reformer, or as a party leader; I speak as a Canadian and citizen of the Empire to brother Canadians and fellow-citizens of the Empire. This is not a Protestant or a Catholic question; they are enemies of their country who would make it so. It should not be, in Canada at all events, a Conservative or a Reform measure. I regard those as the enemies of their country who would try to make it so. I hope that we may, by our own action this day, show ourselves united in the redress of wrongs and in the advancement of the cause of liberty. For my part I should feel myself nothing less than a coward and a criminal should we, without any effort of mine, stand passive to-day and fail to lend our help at this critical moment to the cause of freedom and local self-government for the Irish people. I, therefore, move to leave out all the words after "that" and insert the following:—

An humble address be presented to Her Majesty to respectfully assure Her Majesty that the interest and concern felt by the Commons of Canada, and the people whom they represent, in the condition of Ireland, and their desire that some means may be found of meeting the expressed wishes of so many of Her Majesty's Irish subjects for the grant to Ireland of a measure of local self-government still continue as warm and earnest as in the year 1882, when they were humbly signified to Her Majesty by an address to the terms to which this House affirms its abiding adhesion.

Humbly to inform Her Majesty that this House hail with joy the submission by Her Majesty's Government to the Parliament of the United Kingdom of a measure recognising the principle of local self-government for Ireland."

And humbly to express to Her Majesty the earnest hope of this House that the principle of the said measure may be affirmed, and that it may form the basis for such a settlement of this great question as shall conduce to the peace, happiness and prosperity of the Empire.



