

# On the Home Rule Bill

If, Mr. Speaker, I intervene in the contest of giants which has been proceeding for so many days in this House in reference to this great question, it is not because I suppose that that intervention is specially suitable to the moment; and I certainly should not, under ordinary circumstances, have felt any self-confidence whatever in following so able and eloquent a member of this House as the right honorable gentleman, the member for the Eastern division of Edinburgh. But ‘Thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel just,’ and even a man so inferior from every point of view to the right honorable gentleman as I am, may hope upon this occasion not to be so much behind him as usual. The right honorable gentleman has sought—I think, very unfairly—to cast a lurid light upon the situation by an allusion to those unhappy outrages which have occurred in Kerry. I join the right honorable gentleman in expressing my contempt for these cowardly and disgraceful practises. I join him in that respect to the fullest extent.

Nor do I say that because for months evictions have been more numerous in Kerry than in all the rest of Munster taken together—neither do I say that that constitutes any excuse for these outrages, altho it may supply us with a reason for them; but when I denounce outrages I denounce them in all parts of Ireland, whether they occur in Ulster or in Kerry. But certainly I do condemn these outrages in Kerry; and the right honorable gentleman says very rightly that they must be put a stop to. Well,

so say we all; but the right honorable gentleman would try to put a stop to them by resorting to the old bad method of coercion, which he and his friends have been using for the last eighty-six years, while we say with the prime minister: ‘Try the effect of self-government,’ and if Kerry men then resort to outrages they will very soon find that the rest of Ireland will put a stop to them. Now, sir, the right honorable member for East Edinburgh spoke about the sovereignty of Parliament. I entirely agree upon this point. We have always known since the introduction of this Bill the difference between a coordinate and a subordinate Parliament, and we have recognized that the Legislature which the prime minister proposes to constitute is a subordinate Parliament—that it is not the same as Grattan’s Parliament, which was coequal with the Imperial Parliament, arising out of the same Constitution given to the Irish people by the Crown, just in the same way, tho not by the same means, as Parliamentary institutions were given to Great Britain by the sovereign. We understand this perfectly well. With reference to the argument that has been used against us, that I am precluded from accepting this solution as a final solution because I have claimed the restitution of Grattan’s Parliament, I would beg to say that I consider there are practical advantages connected with the proposed statutory body, limited and subordinate to this Imperial Parliament as it undoubtedly will be, which will render it much more useful and advantageous to the Irish people than was Grattan’s Parliament, and that the statutory body which the right honorable gentleman proposes to constitute is much more likely to be a final settlement than Grattan’s Parliament.

We feel, therefore, that under this Bill this Imperial Parliament will have the ultimate supremacy and the ultimate sovereignty. I think the most useful part of the Bill is that in which the prime minister throws the responsibility upon the new Legislature of maintaining that order in Ireland without which no state and no society can exist. I understand the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament to be this—that they can interfere in the event of the powers which are conferred by this Bill being abused under certain circumstances. But the Nationalists in accepting this Bill go, as I think, under an honorable understanding not to abuse those powers; and we pledge ourselves in that respect for the Irish people, as far as we can pledge ourselves, not to abuse those powers, and to devote our energies and our influence which we may have with the Irish people to prevent those powers from being abused. But, if those powers should be abused, the Imperial Parliament will have at its command the force which it reserves to itself, and it will be ready to intervene, but only in the case of grave necessity arising.

I believe this is by far the best mode in which we can hope to settle this question. You will have real power of force in your hands, and you ought to have it; and if abuses are committed and injustice be perpetrated you will always be able to use that force to put a stop to them. You will have the power and the supremacy of Parliament untouched and unimpaired, just as tho this Bill had never been brought forward. We fully recognize this to be the effect of the Bill. I now repeat what I have already said on the first reading of the measure that we look upon the provisions of the Bill as a final settlement of this question, and that I believe that

the Irish people have accepted it as such a settlement. We have had this measure accepted in the sense I have indicated by all the leaders of every section of national opinion both in Ireland and outside Ireland. It has been so accepted in the United States of America, and by the Irish population in that country with whose vengeance some honorable members are so fond of threatening us. Not a single dissentient voice has been raised against this Bill by any Irishman—not by any Irishman holding national opinions—and I need scarcely remind the House that there are sections among Irish Nationalists just as much as there are even among the great Conservative party. I say that as far as it is possible for a nation to accept a measure cheerfully, freely, gladly, and without reservation as a final settlement,—I say that the Irish people have shown that they have accepted this measure in that sense.

I will now leave this question of the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, and I will turn to one that was strongly dwelt upon by the right honorable gentleman the member for East Edinburgh. I mean the influence which he fears the Irish priesthood will seek to exercise upon the future education of the Irish people. I may say at once that I am quite sure that the right honorable gentleman's apprehensions upon this subject are genuine, so far as they go, and that at the same time he has no desire to fan the flame of religious discord. On the whole, I think that the right honorable gentleman has spoken very fairly in reference to this part of the question; and I will not say that, perhaps as a Protestant, had I not had, as I have had, abundant experience of Ireland, I might not have been inclined to share his fears myself.

Certainly, I have no such fears, but it is rather remarkable that this question of education is the only matter the right honorable gentleman has any fears about in dealing with the question of Protestant and Catholic in Ireland. I can, however, assure the right honorable gentleman that we Irishmen shall be able to settle this question of Irish education very well among ourselves. There are many Liberal Nationalists in Ireland—I call them Liberal Nationalists, because I take the phrase in reference to this question of education—there are many Liberal Nationalists who do not altogether share the views of the Roman Catholic Church upon the subject of education, and they are anxious that Ulster should remain an integral part of Ireland in order that they may share the responsibility of government and may influence that government by the feelings which they have with regard to this question of education. You may depend upon it that in an Irish Legislature Ulster, with such representatives as she now has in the Imperial Parliament, would be able to successfully resist the realization of any idea which the Roman Catholic hierarchy might entertain with regard to obtaining an undue control of Irish education. But I repeat that we shall be able to settle this question and others very satisfactorily to all the parties concerned among ourselves.

I observe that reticence has been exercised with regard to the financial question, of which such a point was made upon the first reading of the bill. The speech of the right honorable gentleman upon the first reading of the Bill undoubtedly produced a great sensation in the House and in this country. The right honorable gentleman, as I and others, and as I believe the country,

understood him, argued on that occasion that Ulster was wealthier than either of the three other provinces, and that consequently the burden of taxation would chiefly fall upon her, and that without Ulster, therefore, it would be impossible to carry on the government of Ireland. The right honorable gentleman did not press the financial question very far to-day; but it would not be improper, perhaps, if we were to direct a little more of our attention to it. For instance, the great wealth of Ulster has been taken up as the war cry of the Loyal and Patriotic Union. The right honorable gentleman was not very fair in choosing the Income Tax, Schedule D, referring to trade and professions, as his standard and measure of the relative wealth of the four provinces. The fair measure of their relative wealth is their assessment to the Income Tax under all the different schedules, and also the value of the rateable property in Ireland; and these tests show conclusively that, so far from Ulster being the wealthiest of the four provinces—and the right honorable gentleman does not deny it now—Ulster comes third in point of relative wealth per head of the population. She comes after Leinster and Munster, and she is only superior to impoverished Connaught.

I come next to the question of the protection of the minority. I have incidentally dwelt on this point in respect to the matter of education; but I should like, with the permission of the House, to say a few words more about it, because it is one on which great attention has been bestowed. One would think from what we hear that the Protestants of Ireland were going to be handed over to the tender mercies of a set of thugs and bandits. The honorable and gallant member for North Armagh cheers that. I only wish that I

was as safe in the North of Ireland when I go there as the honorable and gallant member would be in the South. What do honorable gentlemen mean by the protection of the loyal minority? In the first place, I ask them what they mean by the loyal minority. The right honorable member for East Edinburgh does not seem to have made up his mind, even at this late stage of the discussion, as to what loyal Ulster he means. When asked the question, he said he meant the same loyal Ulster as was referred to by the prime minister in his speech; but he would not commit himself by telling us what signification he attributed to the prime minister's expression. Well, I have examined the prime minister's reference since then, and I find that he referred to the whole province of Ulster. He did not select a little bit of the province, because the opposition had not discovered this point at that time; and consequently I suppose I may assume that the right honorable member for East Edinburgh also referred to the whole province of Ulster when he asked for special protection for it. He has not, however, told us how he would specially protect it.

You must give up the idea of protecting the Protestants either as a body or as a majority by the establishment of a separate legislature either in Ulster or in any portion of Ulster. No, sir, we can not give up a single Irishman. We want the energy, the patriotism, the talents, and the work of every Irishman to insure that this great experiment shall be a successful one. We want, sir, all creeds and all classes in Ireland. We can not consent to look upon a single Irishman as not belonging to us.

We do not blame the small proportion of the Protestants of Ireland who feel any real fear. I admit, sir, that there is a small proportion of them who do feel this fear. We do not blame them; we have been doing our best to allay that fear, and we shall continue to do so. Theirs is not the shame and disgrace of this fear. That shame and disgrace belong to right honorable gentlemen and noble lords of English political parties who, for selfish interests, have sought to rekindle the embers—the almost expiring embers—of religious bigotry. Ireland has never injured the right honorable gentleman, the member for West Birmingham. I do not know why he should have added the strength of his powerful arm; why he should, like another Brennus—let us hope not with the same result—why he should have thrown his sword into the scale against Ireland. I am not aware that we have either personally or politically attempted to injure the right honorable gentleman, yet he and his kind seek to dash this cup from the lips of the Irish people—the first cup of cold water that has been offered to our nation since the recall of Lord Fitzwilliam.

The question of the retention of the Irish members I shall only touch upon very slightly. I have always desired to keep my mind thoroughly open upon it, and not to make it a vital question. There are difficulties, but they are rather more from the English than the Irish point of view, and I think that when we come to consider that question in Committee that feeling will be a growing one on the part of Liberal members. I admit the existence of a strong sentiment in favor of our retention. I will not say it is a reasonable sentiment, when I consider how many times my colleagues and I have been forcibly ejected from this House, how often the

necessity of suspending, if not entirely abrogating, representation on the part of Ireland has been eagerly canvassed by the London Press as the only necessary solution of it—perhaps I may not, under these circumstances, consider the desire on the part of Liberal members as a very reasonable one. I admit that it is an honest one. All I can say is that when the prime minister has produced his plan, without binding myself beforehand, I shall candidly examine it, with a desire not to see in it an element that will injure the permanency of the settlement.

Now, sir, what does it all come to? It comes to two alternatives when everything has been said and everything has been done. One alternative is the coercion which Lord Salisbury put before the country, and the other is the alternative offered by the prime minister, carrying with it the lasting settlement of a treaty of peace. If you reject this bill, Lord Salisbury was quite in what he said as to coercion. With great respect to the cries of ‘No’ by honorable members above the gangway, I beg to say, you will have to resort to coercion. That is not a threat on my part—I would do much to prevent the necessity for resorting to coercion; but I say it will be inevitable, and the best-intentioned Radical who sits on those benches, and who thinks that he ‘never, never will be a party to coercion,’ will be found very soon walking into the division lobby in favor of the strongest and most drastic coercion bill, or, at the very outside, pitifully abstaining. We have gone through it all before. During the last five years I know, sir, there have been very severe and drastic coercion bills; but it will require an even severer and more drastic measure of coercion

now. You will require all that you have had during the last five years, and more besides.

What, sir, has that coercion been? You have had, sir, during those five years—I do not say this to influence passion or awaken bitter memories—you have had during those five years the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act; you have had a thousand of your Irish fellow subjects held in prison without specific charge, many of them for long periods of time, some of them for twenty months, without trial and without any intention of placing them on trial—I think of all these thousand persons arrested under the Coercion Act of the late Mr. Forster scarcely a dozen were put on their trial; you have had the Arms Acts; you have had the suspension of trial by jury—all during the last five years. You have authorized your police to enter the domicile of a citizen, of your fellow subject in Ireland, at any hour of the day or night, and to search every part of this domicile, even the beds of the women, without warrant. You have fined the innocent for offenses committed by the guilty; you have taken power to expel aliens from this country; you have revived the Curfew Law and the blood-money of your Norman conquerors; you have gagged the Press and seized and suppressed newspapers; you have manufactured new crimes and offenses, and applied fresh penalties unknown to your laws for these crimes and offenses. All this you have done for five years, and all this and much more you will have to do again. The provision in the bill for terminating the representation of Irish members has been very vehemently objected to, and the right honorable gentleman, the member for the Border Burghs, has said that there is no half-way house between separation and the maintenance of law and

order in Ireland by imperial authority. I say, with just as much sincerity of belief, and just as much experience as the right honorable gentleman that, in my judgment, there is no half-way house between the concession of legislative autonomy to Ireland and the disfranchisement of the country and her government as a crown colony. But, sir, I refuse to believe that these evil days must come. I am convinced there are a sufficient number of wise and just members in this House to cause it to disregard appeals made to passion and to pocket, and to choose the better way of the prime minister—the way of founding peace and good will among nations; and when the numbers in the division lobby come to be told, it will also be told, for the admiration of all future generations, that England and her Parliament, in this nineteenth century, was wise enough, brave enough, and generous enough to close the strife of centuries, and to give peace, prosperity, and happiness to suffering Ireland.