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MR. CHAMBERLAIN

AND THE

BIRMINGHAM ASSOCIATION

S P E E C H

DELIVERED IN THE

*TOWN HALL, BIRMINGHAM,*

APRIL 21, 1886.

London

THE LIBERAL COMMITTEE FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF THE LEGISLATIVE  
UNION BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND,  
35, SPRING GARDENS, WESTMINSTER, S.W.

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**O'NEILL LIBRARY  
BOSTON COLLEGE**

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THE annual meeting of the Two Thousand of the Birmingham Liberal Association was held in the Birmingham Town Hall April 21st, and derived special interest from the circumstance that an invitation had been given to Mr. Chamberlain to deliver an address upon the proposals of Mr. Gladstone with respect to the future government of Ireland. There was a very full attendance. Among those present were Messrs. G. Dixon, M.P., H. G. Reid, M.P., W. Cook, M.P., W. Kenrick, M.P., Powell Williams, M.P., and Dr. Foster, M.P. Mr. F. Schnadhorst was unanimously elected president and Mr. A. C. Osler, vice-president for the ensuing year. Other appointments were also made, and a resolution was passed thanking Mr. G. Dixon, M.P., for his services to the party in the capacity of president of the Association, and also thanking Alderman R. Chamberlain, M.P., and Alderman Powell Williams, M.P., for their services as vice-president and hon. secretary. Mr. Chamberlain entered with Dr. Dale, at the conclusion of the formal business, and was received with great enthusiasm.

### **THE GRAVITY OF THE QUESTION WE HAVE TO DECIDE.**

Mr. CHAMBERLAIN, who, on rising to speak, was received with prolonged cheers, said: Whatever view this meeting of the representatives of this great constituency may take on the subject which has called us together, I am convinced that upon one point we shall all be agreed, and that no one will underestimate the gravity and the magnitude of the discussion to which we are invited. (Hear, hear.) On the one hand, we have the venerable

and trusted leader of the Liberal party—(loud cheers)—who invites us to consider the scheme which he believes will put an end to that perennial difficulty, the Irish difficulty, which has been the anxiety and almost the despair of politicians for so many years ; and, on the other hand, **we have also to consider that if by any chance he should now be mistaken, if we should be over sanguine, over hasty, in accepting his view, we shall take a step that we cannot retrace—(cheers)—which may be disastrous to the interests of the United Kingdom—**(“ No,” and interruption)—and which may lessen, if it does not destroy, the power and the influence of that mighty Empire which has been built up and left to us as a heritage by our forefathers, and which has done so much to promote the civilisation and the freedom of the world. We have often discussed important questions on this platform. We have discussed the reform of the land laws, the provision for national education ; we have discussed the question of Church establishment and the question of the extension of public liberties, but on all those occasions we have been discussing questions which may fairly be considered as within the limits of the State. (Hear, hear.) Now we are called upon to face a question upon which a **wrong decision may imperil the existence of the State itself.** (Cheers.) I am very glad to have the opportunity which is afforded to me by our brief recess to confer with you, my friends and fellow townsmen—(hear, hear)—whose sympathy and support has been afforded to me on so many occasions, and has given me strength in times of difficulty and anxiety—(A Voice : “ And will again ”)—(cheers)—whose Liberalism no one has ever been bold enough to call in question, and whose judgment I have hitherto always been able cordially to accept. I thought, in the first instance, of appealing to those who are in a special sense my own constituents, my friends in West Birmingham, but it was urged upon me that I had not ceased to be one of the members for Birmingham—(cheers)—and that I might without presumption, and without any slight

to those who have been good enough to return me to Parliament, address myself to you, the representatives of the whole of what was once my constituency. (Cheers.) There is one other observation which I should like to make by way of preface before I come to the main subject of our discussion.

### **THE FUTURE OF THE LIBERAL PARTY AT STAKE.**

I have said that we are discussing a matter which may concern the existence of the State; after that it may seem a small thing to say that **upon our right conduct of this controversy depends the existence of the Liberal party as a great and potent force in the political life of the future.** (Hear, hear.) That is not a small matter to me. Fifteen or sixteen years ago I was drawn into politics by my interest in social questions, and by my desire to promote the welfare of the great majority of the population. At that time I saw the great majority—the masses—of industrious, thrifty, hard-working artisans and labourers condemned by bad laws and by neglect of their rulers to a life of exacting toil without the advantages and liberties which education affords, and borne down by conditions which I thought to be unfair and unjust; and then I looked to the Liberal party as the means for removing and remedying those grievances—as the great instrument of progress and reform—and from that time to this I have done everything that an individual can do. I have made sacrifices of money and time and labour—(hear, hear)—I have made sacrifices of my opinions, to maintain the organisation and to preserve the unity of the Liberal party. (Cheers.) Even now, in this time of discouragement and anxiety, when personal friendships and political ties are breaking down under the strain of the dissensions which have arisen among us, I entreat of you, and **I implore of you, that you will so continue this discussion that when this time of trial is past we may once more unite—(loud cheers)—without embittered memories, without unkind reflections, to**

carry forward the great work upon which hitherto we have been absolutely unanimous. (Cheers.) Surely, it is the very irony of fate that we should be here to-night to discuss a question which, I will venture to say, never entered into our thoughts or anticipations a few months ago, when we were engaged in the General Election. It is not very long ago since I was addressing you in this hall. I was congratulating you upon our success in Birmingham, upon our comparative success throughout the country, and upon the hope which then burned in my breast that shortly we should see some considerable progress made towards the amelioration of the condition of the people; towards the solution of those great social problems which had excited our interest and our sympathy. I do not believe there was a man among us at that time who thought that in a few short weeks all these matters would be relegated to the dim and distant future, that we should be absorbed in this vast problem of reconstituting and remodelling the arrangements between the three kingdoms which constitute the British Empire. (Cheers.)

**THE PRESENT CRISIS BROUGHT ABOUT BY  
MR. GLADSTONE.**

What has produced this great change in the situation? There is nothing new, there is nothing that was unexpected in the condition of Ireland. (Hear, hear.) There has been no popular demand in England or in Scotland. (Hear, hear.) No. Let us recognise the fact; the whole change is due to the force of character, to the determination—aye, I will say to the courage—of one great, illustrious man—(cheers)—and although I regret the object for which these qualities have been displayed, I will say to you that never before has my admiration for them been so sincere and so profound. (Cheers.) But just think what is the nature of the change which has thus been effected. For eighty-six years the question of the repeal of the Union has been a matter of agitation in Ireland. It has



been a fitful agitation—(hear, hear)—sinking or swelling with the changing conditions of Irish politics and of Irish social conditions. But during the whole of that period no English statesman has been found, including even the present Prime Minister—(cheers)—no statesman has been found who has regarded this agitation as otherwise than sentimental; as being, that is to say, the expression of discontent with existing legislation, but not the fixed idea of the people of Ireland. (Hear, hear.) I do not believe that there has been any Radical, any Liberal of note who has hitherto, until very recently indeed, doubted that with the removal of the material grievances of Ireland this desire for separation would cease and die away. (Hear, hear). The situation has changed just at the time when a Parliament has been elected, strengthened by an infusion of influence and support—(hear, hear)—and more ready than any Parliament that has ever existed to do justice to Ireland, to secure equality, to secure absolute equality between the three kingdoms, and to remove every grievance against which a reasonable claim could be set out. (Hear, hear.)

### THE NEW DEPARTURE.

But now we are asked to embark on a new order of ideas; we are asked, once for all, to give up the hope which I confess I have ever cherished, that in the course of time, with fairness and kindness, and, above all, justice—(hear, hear)—a policy of reconciliation, pursued consistently by the Imperial Parliament, might unite Ireland to Great Britain in bonds as firm and as close as those which now unite Scotland to England. (Hear, hear.) All this we have to surrender, and we are asked to seek relief from present difficulties by the surrender of the hope of anything in the nature of closer union, to look for it in a loosening, if not in a severance, of the bonds which have hitherto held the peoples together. (“No, no,” and cheers.) Unless you have changed very much—(“You have.”)—No, I have not changed. (Loud cheers.) What I say now with

pain and grief I have said with your assent and approval ever since I have been in public life; and I say that unless you have changed, this new view of the situation is a hard saying, and almost a humiliation.

### ONLY ONE PERSON.

There is only one person in the three kingdoms who can regard the situation with unmixed satisfaction, only one person who has no past to appeal to which should be inconsistent with his present opinions, and that is the distinguished leader of the Nationalist party in Ireland—(hisses)—the uncrowned king—(laughter)—Mr. Parnell. (Cheers.) You know that I have never, either in public or private, spoken with other than respect of Mr. Parnell. I believe him to be sincere and patriotic. I think, however, he has been mistaken in his course, but at least I give him credit for perfect honesty of purpose, and I recognise in him a man who knows his own mind, who has stated his desires and demands again and again, and who has never withdrawn one jot from the position he has taken up. Well, now, that we are asked to consider the possibility of a final settlement of the Irish question it becomes of more than ordinary importance that we should see what it is that the Irish people, through Mr. Parnell, have asked for. Now, I could take, I believe, haphazard, almost every speech that Mr. Parnell has made during the last five or six years, and I could find repeated again and again, views that he has put forward. I will, however, call your attention to two of those speeches which seem to me to put the position in a nutshell. In the first place here is an extract from a speech which Mr. Parnell delivered at Cincinnati on February 23, 1880.

### MR. PARNELL'S DEMAND FOR SEPARATION.

He was speaking to the Irish-Americans, and he said "**None of us, whether in America or Ireland, or wherever we may be, will be satisfied until we have destroyed the last link which keeps Ireland bound to England.**" (Shame.) **That is a policy which Mr.**

**Parnell has consistently pursued.** My next quotation will show you, also, what are the methods by which he has pursued it. I have said that, as far as I know, he has never varied in the slightest degree in the character or extent of his demands, but I am bound to say he has varied very much in his opinion of certain prominent statesmen. (Laughter.) You will see from the quotation that I am about to give you that he did not always speak of Mr. Gladstone with the respect and admiration which I am glad to think he now sincerely feels for him. (Laughter.) This is from a speech which was delivered at Wexford on October 18, 1881.

#### **MR. PARNELL'S DEFIANCE OF MR. GLADSTONE.**

Mr. Parnell said that he (Mr. Gladstone) "would have you believe that he is not afraid of you because he has disarmed you, because he has attempted to disorganise you, because he knows that the Irish nation is disarmed so far as physical weapons go; but he does not hold this kind of language with the Boers, although he has attempted to regain some of his lost position with the Transvaal by subsequent chicanery and diplomatic negotiations. Yet that sturdy and small people in the distant Transvaal have sent over to William Ewart Gladstone, and have told him again, for the second time, that they will not have their liberties filched from them, and I believe that, as a result, we shall see that William Ewart Gladstone will again yield to the people of the Transvaal, and I trust that, as the result of this great movement, we shall see that just as Mr. Gladstone, by the Act of 1881, has eaten all his old words, has departed from all his formerly-declared principles, now we shall see that these brave words of this English Prime Minister will be scattered as chaff before the united and advancing determination of the Irish people to regain for themselves their lost land and their lost legislative independence." I have said that I could point probably to almost any speech which has been delivered in recent times, up to the very meeting of Parliament, by Mr. Parnell, in confirmation of the views which are expressed in the extracts which I have read to you. I ask you whether

there is any man among you who believes any settlement of the Irish question will be permanent— (“ No ”)—which does not yield to the full demands of Mr. Parnell, which does not enable him to break the last link which holds Ireland to Great Britain,” which does not give him full control of the land of Ireland, and does not make Ireland absolute master of her own legislative independence? (Hear hear.) We have heard in the course of the discussions in the House of Commons the argument used that if we do not concede the wishes of the Irish people as expressed by their representatives in Parliament, we shall have once more an outburst of outrage and violence in Ireland, and that even here in England we shall be subjected to the nefarious proceedings of assassins and of dynamiters. That is a cowardly—(loud cheering, and cries of “ Bravo,” which were twice renewed)—and a mean argument, and it ought not to be addressed to Englishmen by Englishmen. (Cheers, and a voice : “ Who said that ? ”) But I only refer to it in passing in order to point out to you that the argument applies equally to any proposal which does not meet the full demands of Mr. Parnell. It applies to any proposal which does not give to him the absolute legislative independence of his country.

#### **WILL MR. GLADSTONE'S SCHEME SATISFY MR. PARNELL ?**

Let us now consider how far the Bill which is before us for the better Government of Ireland fulfils the conditions which Mr. Parnell has laid down, and, if it fulfils those conditions, whether you or I can hope that it will be a permanent settlement. If it be not a permanent settlement we shall again have the Irish problem upon us in all its complications, and in all its difficulties—aye, into the distant future. **What is the proposal ?**

## MR. GLADSTONE'S PROPOSAL.

The proposal is, that there shall be established in Dublin a Parliament representative of the Irish people. (Cheers and hisses.) At the same time it is proposed that Ireland shall be deprived of all representation in the English Parliament. ("Hear, hear," and "No, no.") I am speaking of the Bill; some gentleman says "No"; if he has read the Bill he will find that I am perfectly accurate. (Cheers and "Hear, hear.") By the Bill it is proposed that all representation of Irishmen in the Imperial Parliament shall cease. Henceforth Ireland is to have no part in the foreign and colonial affairs of this great and mighty Empire, which Irishmen have done so much to build up. (Hear.) It is to have no share in the control of the Army and Navy, to which Ireland has given so many brave and valiant sons. It is to have no part in any matter relating to trade or navigation, and to a number of minor matters which henceforth are to be decided, so far as Ireland is concerned, in the Parliament, which will then indeed be a foreign Parliament, since not a single Irish representative will find a place in it. That is not all. This Imperial Parliament is henceforth to be sole judge and arbiter in the matter of all taxation concerned in excise and customs. ("Hear, hear," and a voice: "So it ought to be.") It is to fix the amount and character of that taxation, it is to deal with three-fourths of the taxation revenue of Ireland, and the Irish people are to have no voice at all. (Shame.) Does my friend in the gallery say that that is as it ought to be? (Cheers.) Does he call himself a Liberal? **Does he pretend to be a Radical when he approves of a system which would tax the Irish people to three-fourths of the whole revenue of the country, and gives them absolutely no representation in the Parliament which levies these imposts?** (Cheers.) **The Bill does more than this—it imposes on the Irish people a Constitution which I venture to say is absolutely odious and hateful to every true**

**Liberal.** (Hear, hear.) It would be repudiated with scorn in this country. (Cheers.) It is contrary to all the practice, to all the principles, of our representative government. There is to be an assembly with two orders; life peers are to be *ex officio* members of the assembly; a third of the body are to be elected with a property qualification, and by electors who are also to have a property qualification—(shame)—and then this privileged minority of one-third of the new assembly is to have an absolute veto for a limited time over all the proceedings of the majority of popularly elected representatives? **It is an extraordinary arrangement to be proposed by a Liberal to a Democratic Parliament.** Why is it so proposed? Because it appears that those safeguards and restrictions are necessary under the scheme of the Bill to give protection to minorities who were not otherwise to be trusted to a popularly elected Parliament in Dublin. **Now, I ask you seriously, as sensible men, Do you believe that an arrangement of that kind is going to be permanent?** (“No.”) Do you believe that that is a final settlement of the question between Ireland and Great Britain? (“No.”) Do you believe that any free people worthy of the name would submit for long to such miserable restrictions upon their liberty and their representative authority? (Cheers.)

#### **A PARALLEL TO MR. GLADSTONE'S PROPOSALS.**

Let me bring it home to you by a domestic illustration. Suppose we were considering in this room to-night the desirability of conceding local government to Birmingham, and suppose that the propositions made to us were that we might have a Town Council to govern our local affairs, provided that, in the first instance, we give up our Parliamentary representation, and that, in the next place, we allow the whole of the borough rate and half of the improvement rate to be settled as to its amount and to be collected by Sir William Harcourt as Chancellor of the Exchequer. (Laughter.) Suppose we were asked to leave the defence of our families and our houses to a police force governed

by Mr. Childers as Home Secretary. (Hear, hear.) Suppose that if any difficulties arose between us and neighbouring local authorities, we were expected to see them decided, without reference to us, by Mr. Stansfeld, as President of the Local Government Board. Suppose, then, that the Town Council was to include among its members magistrates as *ex-officio* life members—(laughter)—suppose that aldermen were elected by £20 householders, and were required to possess a heavy property qualification; and suppose, lastly, that then this privileged minority had a veto given them on every Act and every resolution which might be passed by their popularly elected colleagues. I ask you whether you would not resent such an offer as an insult. (Cheers.) You would not pick it from the gutter. (Cheers.) You would do anything rather than submit to such degradation. (Hear, hear.) But, then, under these circumstances, how is it that there are some people who are sanguine enough to suppose that the Irish nation will accept a precisely similar arrangement as a final settlement of their claims for legislative independence? (Hear, hear.) It is ridiculous. (Cheers.)

#### ONLY AN INSTALMENT.

**If these proposals are accepted at all they are accepted only as an instalment—(hear, hear)—they will be a justification for further demands.** You have not to consider these safeguards and restrictions; you have to consider whether you will accept what will undoubtedly follow when these restrictions and these safeguards are removed, and Ireland becomes an independent and a foreign country and the integrity of the Empire becomes an empty name. (Hear, hear.) I do not know whether you have seen the speech which was delivered last night by Mr. Davitt at a public meeting. I have for Mr. Davitt the greatest respect. I believe him to be a man—a really honest and a sincere patriot—(hear, hear)—who has been led into this agitation by his knowledge of the privations which his poorer countrymen have to endure—(hear, hear)—by his desire to raise them to a higher level. In all that he has

done—not, perhaps, in all his methods, but in all his objects—I have the deepest and the most earnest sympathy. (Hear, hear.)

### **MR. DAVITT'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT BILL WOULD NOT SATISFY IRISH.**

But Mr. Davitt, speaking last night, said that he had been asked whether Irishmen would be satisfied with these arrangements, and whether they would accept them as a permanent settlement of the question. He said that was as unreasonable as to ask him after he had had his breakfast to refrain from demanding his dinner and his supper.\* (Cheers.) Sympathise with Mr. Davitt—(laughter)—but, gentlemen, do not be led astray. (Hear, hear.) It is not the breakfast alone that you will concede. If you accept these proposals you will have very shortly a demand for the dinner and the supper—(hear, hear)—and, believe me, you will not be able to resist it. (Hear, hear.)

### **BILL FROM ENGLISH POINT OF VIEW.**

I have hitherto spoken of this Bill entirely from the point of view of Irish interests; now, look at it for a moment from the point of view of the interests of the United Kingdom. What is going to happen under these brand-new circumstances?

### **OUR POSITION IN CASE OF GREAT WAR.**

Suppose, unfortunately, we got involved in war with a great Continental Power. You may think that that is improbable, but remember it was only a few months ago, under the leadership of the present Prime Minister, who I verily believe is a most ardent lover of peace—(cheers)—more anxious than any Prime Minister that has preceded him to avoid international complications, yet even under his pacific leadership we were on the eve of a great struggle with Russia—(hear, hear)—which might have strained the resources of the Empire to the uttermost. Now, if that happens again, where shall we be? **What will be the position of the various members of the so-called United Kingdom? England may**

\* Mr. Davitt has since written to the papers to say that this illustration did not apply to the present situation, but had reference to the position of Irishmen after the Land Act of 1881.



be struggling for its very existence ; it may be in the throes of death, but Ireland will be unconcerned. ("No" and "Yes.") I am speaking only of the Constitution. (Hear, hear.) Under the new Constitution she will be unaffected ; no call can be made upon her for assistance or for aid. She will have no voice in the policy which has brought us into conflict, she will have no part in it, she will have no share in the pecuniary burdens which it may involve. She is asked to provide fixed contributions—that is, settled upon a peace estimate—to the cost of the Army and the Navy. When that is provided her responsibility will cease ; she will have no further obligation, no further concern. Well, that may be all right ; **those are the new ideas ; but it is inconsistent, in my judgment, with what always has been held by the leader that we have hitherto followed and revered.** (Hear, hear.) In the Manifesto which Mr. Gladstone addressed to the electors of the United Kingdom at the time of the General Election he laid down conditions which, in his judgment, were paramount, and which must be fulfilled before any concession could be made of local government to Ireland. Those conditions were not only that the Union of the three kingdoms and the integrity of the Empire should be preserved—(hear, hear)—but that the supremacy of the Crown and the supremacy of Imperial control should be maintained. (Hear, hear.) Well, I confess I have looked at this matter over and over again, and Heaven knows I have desired, if I possibly could, to find ground of agreement with the leader whom hitherto, at any rate, I have always loyally followed. (Cheers.) I say I cannot admit that those conditions laid down by him are fulfilled by the arrangement by which, in the case of a great war, Ireland, although, perhaps, subject indirectly to the consequences of the struggle, would yet have no part whatever in the contest, no share whatever in the burdens which it might involve. There is one other point which I wish to put before you in reference to the Bill for the better government of Ireland. In the debate on the introduction, my friend, Sir William Harcourt

—(laughter)—in a speech which was very witty, very amusing, and very good-tempered, said, among other things, that he thought he detected an Orange flavour in the arguments which I used. (Laughter.) I do not think—no man knows himself, but I do not think—that I have any sympathy whatever with bigotry—(hear, hear)—whether it is exhibited by the Orangemen of the North or by the Roman Catholics in the South—(hear hear)—but, on the other hand, I cannot blind myself to the facts of the situation.

#### IRELAND INHABITED BY TWO DISTINCT PEOPLE.

**We have been accustomed, perhaps a little too much, to talk of Ireland as if it were one people.** There are two nations in Ireland—(hear, hear)—two communities separated by religion, by race, by politics, by social conditions. There are in Ireland at this moment something like a million and a quarter of Protestants, most of them in the Province of Ulster, a great number in Dublin, and others scattered up and down the country in little groups, everywhere justifying their existence by becoming the centre of honest, praiseworthy industry and enterprise. (Cheers.)

#### IRISH PROTESTANT MINORITY ALWAYS LOYAL TO ENGLAND.

This minority—it is not a small one—(hear, hear)—it is one quarter of the whole population—through good repute and evil repute has been loyal to the British connection—(cheers)—it has been industrious, and it has been prosperous. Now, they are bitterly opposed to this scheme, rightly or wrongly. Under the protection of the British Government they have lived on terms of amity with their Roman Catholic neighbours. They believe that their property, their religion—ay, and their lives—could not safely be trusted to a Nationalist Parliament in Dublin. (Cheers.) **For my part, I hate coercion, and I am not disposed to coerce these men by British soldiers. I am not prepared to disregard altogether**

their wishes and their feelings. (Hear, hear.) I think that they are entitled to some consideration from the British power that they have hitherto uniformly supported.

#### BRITISH LIABILITY FOR £150,000,000.

We are asked now to pledge the credit of the British nation to the extent, as I shall show you directly, of 150 millions—(hear, hear)—for the benefit of the Irish landlords—(“ Oh ” and “ Shame ”)—who, as Mr. Gladstone has shown himself, in the speech which he made in introducing the Land Purchase Bill, have not always had a blameless record in the past. We are told that this enormous liability is a duty laid upon us by the misdeeds of our ancestors, that it is an obligation of honour—(“ Not at all ”); but, then, **is there no obligation of honour to that great Protestant minority of one and a-half million, who, at all events in recent times, have never committed any act of oppression, who have never lent themselves to violence or disorder**—(cheers)—**whose patient industry has contributed more to the prosperity of Ireland than all the agitators that ever lived, and who even now are giving, in the shape of taxation, in the shape of enterprise, in the shape of all that can come from enlightened citizenship, as much as all the rest of the population put together?** (Cheers.)

#### THE LAND PURCHASE BILL.

I pass on to consider briefly the provisions of the Land Purchase Bill, to which I have already had occasion to refer. We are told that this Bill is inseparable from the other, that it is an essential part of the policy of the Government. (Hear, hear.) Why is it inseparable? Because Mr. Gladstone and the Government feel that they cannot in honour leave the interests of a small minority who have become objects of dislike to a consider-

able portion of the population to a popularly elected body. (Hear, hear.) But, if that is so, I confess I do not see why other minorities are not also entitled to protection. (Hear, hear.) There is the Protestant minority, of which I have already spoken; there are the commercial classes, there are the large farmers—any section of the population which for no reason has become an object of envy or dislike ought not to be handed over without security to the control of a triumphant majority, as to which even those who propose to invest them with this almost unlimited power are obliged to confess their apprehensions and their suspicions. But I want to consider this second Bill rather from the point of view of the British taxpayer. (Hear, hear.) I ask you, the representatives of a great industrial community, many of you earning your livelihood by the toil of your own hands, are you willing to pay this vast price for the repeal of the Union? (Loud cries of “No.”)

#### WE MAY WANT MONEY FOR OURSELVES.

**Are you ready, at this time of depression—when, for my part, I can see no rift in the clouds—are you willing to anticipate the resources of the country, which may yet be wanted at no distant date to relieve the misery of a suffering people?** (Hear, hear.) Let us look at two points of the greatest importance—what is the liability in which we are asked to involve ourselves, and what is the security which we are asked to take? What is the liability? I was very glad the other night to hear Mr. Gladstone say that, after considering the objections which I had urged while I was in the Cabinet, he had come to the conclusion that it was desirable to limit the liability, and that he had accordingly reduced the amount of Consols to be issued from 113 millions to 50 millions. I was very glad, I say, to hear that; but I have been thinking it over ever since, and the more I think of it the more I am convinced that the reduction is perfectly illusory. (Hear, hear.) The reduction is not owing to any alteration of the plan of the original Bill to which I

objected ; it is a mere alteration of the paper estimate—(hear, hear)—of the amount which may ultimately be called for. I think I can make that clear to you.

#### AT LEAST 150 MILLIONS.

**Mr. Gladstone** offers by his Bill an option to every landlord in Ireland to sell his land on certain terms. If the landlords accept it, it will not be 50 millions, nor 113 millions ; it will be at least 150 millions. (Hear, hear.) It is quite true that the Bill only proposes a present issue of 50 millions of Consols ; but the liability will remain. (Cheers.) Parliament will be called upon hereafter to do honour to the obligations of the nation, and if more is required more will have to be found. (Hear, hear.) Whether it is £5 that is wanted, or £5,000,000, or £150,000,000, will not depend, if this Bill is passed, upon us, upon Parliament, upon the English and Scotch people—it will depend upon a few hundred landlords in Ireland. If they accept the option we pledge we cannot escape from the obligation. (Hear.) I do not know whether they will accept it or not ; I do not know whether they will think it a sufficiently advantageous offer. I should if I were in their place. (Laughter.) But one thing I am certain of—that if only a part of them take the option we shall have all the worse bargain.

#### ON WHAT SECURITY SHALL WE ADVANCE OUR MONEY ?

Now let us consider what the security is for this operation. The security, in the long run, is the willingness and the ability of the people to pay the rents. Well, the payment of rent in Ireland has lately been rather a spasmodic performance, and really I do not see that it is probable or reasonable to expect that tenants will pay rents estimated at 20 years' purchase at the present rent at a time when their leaders are telling them, and have been telling them for years, that five years or three years' purchase would be

**ample for the value of the land.** (Hear, hear.) I think they are still more unlikely to pay these rents when they remember, or when somebody reminds them hereafter, that they have been fixed by a foreign authority, by the Parliament at Westminster, which at the same time has admitted its incompetence to deal with other Irish affairs. But that is not all. If you like to be hopeful, if you are more sanguine than I am, you may believe that the tenants will be willing to pay these rents, extorted from them by the decision of the Parliament at Westminster and against the opinions of all their trusted leaders. You may believe that; but then comes the question, **Will they be able to pay them?** These rents are fixed upon the principle of the judicial rent. The judicial rent was established before the recent reduction in produce. I am told that the reduction amounts to from 20 to 30 and 40 per cent. I do not believe we have touched bottom; I believe the reduction will go on. If the English farmers were sensible enough to open the ports of the Kingdom to the cattle from the United States, to take them as store cattle, that would at once involve an enormous reduction in the price that is now being paid for Irish cattle, which alone are allowed to be introduced into the Kingdom for that purpose at the present time. If that reduction goes on, if it continues, as I anticipate it will, I believe there are many cases in which it will be impossible for the tenants to pay the existing rents; and then what would happen? Whether it be because they are unwilling, or whether it be that they are unable it is not the landlord who will suffer. He will be spending the income derived from British Consols in London or Paris at his fancy, and according to his will. But **the Irish Parliament, elected by these tenants, existing by their breath, will certainly be called upon, and cannot fail to repudiate the English tribute, and to refuse to pay more than a proportion, at any rate, if it pay anything, of the sum which is required as the interest and sinking fund of the debt that will have been created. And then, what is your remedy?**

**YOU WILL BECOME IRISH LANDLORDS.**

**Working men of England and Scotland, where is your remedy? You will be Irish landlords—**(laughter)—**you will have to evict the tenants, you will have to collect your rents at the point of the bayonet, and I refuse to be a party to such contingencies.** (Loud and continued cheers.) **British credit, built up as it has been by past generations, is a precious reserve to be held for times of need and necessity, and I will not anticipate it for the benefit of Irish landlords.** (Cheers.) **We also have a land question in England; there is a land question in Scotland; there is a land question in Wales; and I am inclined to maintain these resources for cases which I think may be even more urgent and more deserving than those of the Irish landlords.** (Cheers.) **These differences, which I have endeavoured briefly, but I hope clearly, to explain to you, have compelled me to resign the office which I held in the Government.** (A Voice: "It will not be for long.") **If you will believe me, I made a great sacrifice in giving up the opportunity that I thought I held in my hands to carry forward some of the questions in which I have felt deep interest.** (Cheers.) **I might have perhaps had the honour of introducing a Local Government Bill; of doing something to equalise the burdens of local taxation, which I think at the present time press unfairly on some classes of the rate-payers; I might have done something to extend that municipal government in which I have always taken so great a pride and so deep an interest; and, at the same time, I had hoped to provide opportunities for a happier and a better existence for the agricultural labourers, who are at once the most numerous and the most necessitous part of our artisan population.** (Cheers.) **All these things I have surrendered with the deepest pain and regret, but with a sense of overwhelming duty and obligation.** (Cheers.) **Perhaps I may be allowed to add a word or two as to my**

present position. I am afraid that the opposition which I feel to the proposals contained in the Land Purchase Bill cannot be met. I think the Bill is a bad one.

### **THE LAND PURCHASE BILL AND THE HOME RULE BILL LEAD TO SEPARATION.**

I would sooner go out of politics altogether than give my vote to pledge the capital of the country—ay, and the future earnings of every man and woman in the United Kingdom—(hear, hear)—in order to modify the opposition of a small class of Irish proprietors to a scheme which, if it remain in its present form, will, I believe, infallibly lead to the separation of Ireland from England. I object, in this case, to the risk which we are asked to incur; I object also to the object for which we are asked to incur that risk. (Hear, hear.) But as regards the Home Rule Bill—the Bill for the better government of Ireland—my opposition is only conditional. (Cheers.) I regret very much that this great measure, involving so vast a change, such enormous risk, so vitally affecting the life of the Kingdom, should have been brought before Parliament without some consultation with the other leaders of the Liberal party and with the members of the Liberal party generally. I think the Bill would have benefited a good deal by fuller consideration, both in the Cabinet and in the country—(hear, hear)—but, at the same time, I admit that, having been introduced by so eminent a man as the Prime Minister, it cannot be disregarded. The only question is as to the form which the Bill shall assume, and I think I can show you in a few words that if certain alterations were made all the anomalies which I have described to you, most of the objections which I have taken would disappear. If, to begin with, the representation of Ireland at Westminster were maintained on its present footing—(“No,” and cheers)—if Irishmen were allowed to vote and to speak on all questions which would specially refer to them, then they would remain an integral part of this



Imperial realm, they would have their share in its privileges and their responsibility for its burdens. (Cheers.) In that case the Imperial Parliament would be able to maintain its control of Imperial taxation in Ireland, and for all Imperial purposes the Parliament at Westminster would speak for a United Kingdom. (Hear, hear.) **I should like to see the case of Ulster met in some form or another. I should be glad if it were found possible—having regard to the great distinctions which I have pointed out of race, religion, and politics—to concede to Ulster a separate Assembly.** (Cheers.) If those changes were made I think it would be altogether unnecessary to maintain that long list of restrictions and safeguards and minority representation and curious electoral devices which we have long ago repudiated in our own representative system. (Cheers.) I am told by some of the more ardent advocates of the Bill that these are matters for Committee. No, gentlemen, they are matters which clearly affect and would modify the principle of the Bill. I am only a young Parliamentary hand—(laughter)—but I have had experience enough of the House of Commons to know that if we go into Committee without having secured some assurance from the Government that these or similar amendments will be accepted by them we shall be beaten hopelessly in detail on every point by the superior force which the Government will, in that case, be able to bring against us. I hope—**I sincerely hope—that Mr. Gladstone**—(cheers)—**who, I have no doubt, has all these matters fully before him, will see his way to accept these modifications. If he does it is with real gratification and delight that I shall be found once more giving him whatever humble support I can**—(cheers)—but if not, then my duty is clear, and, at all hazards, I will perform it. (Loud cheers.) I am not going to enter any cave; I am not going to join any coalition—(cheers)—of discordant elements and parties; but in the case I have mentioned I shall give an independent, but I hope also a

perfectly frank and loyal, opposition to the **measures** which in my heart and conscience I believe, **in their present form, will be disastrous and dangerous to the best interests of the United Kingdom.** (Cheers.)

Gentlemen, I have completed the statement which I undertook to make to you. I do not<sup>2</sup> know whether you will agree or disagree with the views that I have expressed, but I think that, knowing me as you do, at least I may be sure that you will appreciate the motives which have guided my action. If I have been fortunate enough in the past to win your confidence and support it has been because you have known that I have been faithful and true to the trust which has been confided to me, and you would justly despise and condemn me now, for the sake of private interests or personal ambition, I were to be false to my convictions and to disregard what I believe to be the vital interests of my country. (Loud cheers.)

**There are some people, no doubt, whose convictions and principles sit so lightly upon them that they can swallow them with ease whenever their disappearance becomes convenient.** (Laughter.)

But for my part I prefer to seek example and precedent in the life of the great leader to whom for the first time I am now opposed. In the course of his illustrious career—(cheers)—Mr. Gladstone has on more than one occasion found it necessary to separate himself from a Government whose policy he could not conscientiously approve—(hear, hear)—and I am well assured he would be of all men the last to condemn in others the consistency which, on similar occasions, he has himself so honourably maintained. (Loud cheers.)



