

GLADSTONE WILLIAM EWART,
O'BRIEN WILLIAM

**THE SPEECHES (IN
FULL) OF THE RT. HON.
W. E. GLADSTONE, M.
P., AND WILLIAM
O'BRIEN, M.P., ON
HOME RULE,
DELIVERED IN
PARLIAMENT, FEB. 16
AND 17, 1888.**

William Gladstone

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Rt. Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P.,
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MR. GLADSTONE'S SPEECH

Mr. Gladstone. In following the right honorable gentleman, I shall only touch those portions of his speech which go to the heart of the question. In my opinion, they constituted a very small part of his address (*cheers*), the rest being criminatory and incriminatory matter, which, however amusing to a portion of the House, really assists us very little in getting at the root of the great question before us. I do this particularly because there is a great difficulty, owing to the enormous range of the question, in confining the debate within the narrow limits to which we all desire to confine it. My honorable and learned friend, the member for Inverness (Mr. Finlay), last night, when no member of the Government seemed in a condition to follow the speech of the honorable member for Northeast Cork (Mr. W. O'Brien), (*Opposition cheers*), gallantly stepped into the breach, and performed that office on behalf of ministers, which has so often been performed by those who are sometimes termed "Dissenting Liberals"; namely, that of finding expedients of defence for the Government which they and their adherents behind them have been unable to discover. (*Opposition cheers.*) My honorable and learned friend said he thought it high time that the debate should draw to a close. I can perfectly understand reasons why he should desire that there might be no debate at all on this subject (*laughter and cheers*), but when he says that the discussion has extended to unreasonable length, I point to the speech of the Attorney-General last night, of the length of which I am far from complaining, but which was evidently in sharp contradiction with the view of my honorable and learned friend.

Why, sir, it has not been possible to include in this debate a number of questions which deserve, and may yet have to receive detailed criticism. For example, the law of public meetings has hardly been touched, and yet it is gravely involved in the proceedings of the recess. ("*Hear, hear.*") The relations between landlord and tenant have hardly been touched, and to that notwithstanding a similar observation will apply. ("*Hear, hear.*") The treatment given to prisoners of a particular class has not been the subject of discussion, and I will make none of these three matters subject of discussion; but at the same time no one can doubt that all of them, and many more besides, are fit for the attention of the House. ("*Hear, hear.*") I must proceed by the method of selection, and I am bound to say that so far as I am personally concerned, if it had not been for the pointed references to me, and the perfectly fair and just challenges delivered against certain portions of my speeches in the recess, I should gladly have remained out of sight. I am of opinion that such speeches as have been made by the honorable member for the city of Cork in moving his amendment, and by the honorable member for East Cork on the memorable occasion of the opening of last night's debate (*Home Rule cheers*), go more to the heart of the matter, and more to the mind of the country, than anything that can be said or urged by those who, whatever else may be said of them, cannot deny that they stand in the position of leaders of a party, and are liable to the imputation of party interests. On the other hand, these gentlemen are in a position to say that they have shown us independence of party. They have dealt a death blow to Liberal administrations, and the members of those Liberal administrations never have complained, and would not have been justified in complaining. They are the advocates and the organs of a nation.

(*Opposition cheers.*) They are in a condition to speak with an effect to which they cannot make any just pretension when they address themselves to the heart and to the understanding of another nation on whose judgment they are content to rely. ("*No,*" *from the Ministerial benches, and counter cheers.*)

But, sir, there was a part of the speech of the right honorable gentlemen which he introduced with an apology, and which I think it right briefly to follow. He referred to the communication between Lord Carnarvon and the member for Cork, and I cannot question for a moment the denials he has made. But what were those denials? I attended as well as I could to his statement, and his denials were three. In the first place, he denied that any engagement or agreement had been made. Sir, I am not aware of its having been asserted. He denied, secondly, that it ever had been stated to be the intention of a Conservative Government to grant a measure of Home Rule. I am not aware, sir, that that has ever been stated. Thirdly, he denied on the part of Lord Carnarvon, and I accept the denial with all my heart, that Lord Carnarvon had ever used any words inconsistent with the maintenance of the Union. (*Ministerial cheers.*) But these three denials leave entirely untouched the material parts of the case. What are these material parts? If the right honorable gentleman wishes to dispose of them, I can only say that they are not disposed of by what he has said to-night, and he must set about with a new set of statements and denials in order to get rid of them. (*Opposition cheers.*) It was stated by the honorable member for the city of Cork, that he found himself in substantial – I might say, in entire agreement with Lord Carnarvon on the question of Home Rule. That has not been denied. (*Home Rule cheers.*) It has been stated that Lord Carnarvon spoke for himself, and that I do not question, in so far as a Lord Lieutenant can speak for himself. (*Opposition cheers.*) The right honorable gentleman, the Chief Secretary, did not deny in the speech he has just made, and certainly there was space in that speech for such denial, that Lord Carnarvon and the honorable member for Cork were in substantial agreement on the policy of Home Rule.

Mr. Balfour. I may say that, from the abstract I read, Lord Carnarvon clearly, in my idea, did not express his opinion about the Home Rule policy.

Mr. Gladstone. The honorable member for Cork declared that he had an interview with Lord Carnarvon, and that he found himself in agreement with Lord Carnarvon on the subject. The right honorable gentleman has not denied that. (*Home Rule cheers.*)

Mr. Balfour. I interpreted Lord Carnarvon's statement as distinctly denying that.

Mr. Gladstone. I ask for the words of Lord Carnarvon's statement which contains that denial. (*Cheers.*)

Mr. Balfour. I will obtain them as quickly as I can, but it would take me out of the House to do so now. (*An honorable member: "Send for them."*)

Mr. Gladstone. It is a very dangerous practice to make statements of that kind and importance without the material on which they are founded. (*Ministerial cries of "Oh."*) I affirm that I am in the recollection of the House that whatever inference or interpretation the right honorable gentleman made upon the declarations of Lord Carnarvon, there was not a word in the passage he read which contained, or which approached to containing, a denial of the statement of the honorable member for Cork, that he and Lord Carnarvon were in substantial agreement on the policy of Home Rule.

Now I ask the right honorable gentleman what he thinks of another statement made by Lord Carnarvon in the House of Lords, and within the memory of all of us, in which, speaking of the measure of extended government that ought to be granted to Ireland, he said that they ought to meet all the just demands of that country for local self-government, and likewise ought to be directed in some degree towards giving reasonable satisfaction to national aspirations? Does the right honorable gentleman say that he is in favor of giving reasonable satisfaction to national aspirations? On the contrary, it is the very phrase and the very idea which, on no consideration, will he recognize, and it is the phrase and the idea which form the basis of the views of Lord Carnarvon, and here the right honorable gentleman cannot contradict me. Well, I think, having got so far, I may go farther. Lord Carnarvon, being Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and being a member of the Cabinet, or whether he was

a member of the Cabinet or not, was absolutely bound to make known his views to Lord Salisbury, if not to the Cabinet at large. He did make known his views to Lord Salisbury in the fulfilment of a primary duty. Lord Salisbury continued to repose his confidence in Lord Carnarvon. For months afterwards Lord Carnarvon continued to be Lord Lieutenant. When he retired he did so professedly on account of his health and amid the expressed regrets of his colleagues. Now, sir, we are called separatists. (*Ministerial cheers.*) We are denounced as such. (*Renewed Ministerial cheers.*) I am glad to have any of my assertions supported by honorable gentlemen opposite, whose approval is conveyed in that semi-articulate manner which they find so congenial. (*Opposition cheers and laughter.*) But we are called separatists, and because we wish to give effect to the national aspirations of Ireland within the limits of the Constitution and with supreme regard to the unity of the Empire. (*Ministerial cries of "Oh," and Opposition cheers.*) Lord Salisbury, as the head of a Conservative Government, was content to stand before the country, having in Ireland a Lord Lieutenant who was prepared to give satisfaction, reasonable satisfaction, as we are, to national aspirations, and at the same time to give Ireland everything in the way of local self-government that ought to be conceded consistently with the unity of the Empire. (*Opposition cheers.*)

Now, it appears then that a Tory Lord Lieutenant may dally as he pleases with the sirens of Home Rule. It appears that when a general election is pending, the Prime Minister may regard the entertainment of a Home Rule policy as no object whatever to placing unbounded confidence in a Tory Lord Lieutenant. But when the election is over (*Home Rule cheers*), when the Lord Lieutenant is gone, and when Liberals declare that they desire to meet the national aspirations of Ireland with a reasonable and safe satisfaction, then, forsooth, they are to be denounced as separatists. (*Opposition cheers.*) I must say a word upon the entertaining speech of the honorable and gallant member for North Armagh. I was struck, I confess, when, after all his assaults upon us, the honorable gentleman gravely concluded with an argument in favor of law and order, but with an insinuation that his countrymen would not be very much disposed to adopt that doctrine. Well, I don't agree with him about his countrymen, but if we were engaged in an endeavor to show that Irishmen were not sufficiently good to recognize the principles of law and order, undoubtedly the instance to which I should refer would be the honorable gentleman himself. The honorable and gallant gentleman is here, forsooth, to instruct and to educate us on the subject of law and order, while he reserves to himself the right of declaring, and more than once declaring, in this House, as far as I remember – (*Col. Saunderson: "Yes."*) So much the better. All right. (*Laughter and cheers.*) He declared that "if Parliament passed an act for granting to Ireland a carefully guarded portion of the independence she once possessed, he will be the man to resist and to recommend resistance." (*Opposition cheers.*) He is dealing with gentlemen below the gangway, and he has the consummate art and the consummate courage to advertise himself as the apostle of law and order. (*Cheers.*) Then the honorable member referred to a speech of mine in which I referred to the lamentable murder of Constable Whelehan in the county of Clare. The Chief Secretary was not ashamed in this House, where he could not be answered, to say that I had made adverse comments on the conduct of Whelehan, a man who had lost his life in the service of his country.

Mr. Balfour. I said it in this House on Friday last, and I say it again. (*Ministerial cheers.*)

Mr. Gladstone. I have no intention of charging the right honorable gentleman with anything which is not true in fact. I am glad he has contradicted me. I did not recollect, for I did not hear it. But it was totally and absolutely untrue. (*Opposition cheers.*) Either he had not read what I said, or if he has read it, and the same applies to the honorable and gallant member for North Armagh, they have absolutely misrepresented the purport of the speech they professed to quote. I never named Whelehan except to deplore his death, and to express the hope that his murderers would be punished. In my reference to that speech, there is not a word to show that Whelehan was the man who was the unhappy organ of the police in ministering pecuniary payment to the infamous informer, nor is there one word in all that reference of blame to her Majesty's Government. On the contrary, there is an

express declaration that I laid no blame upon her Majesty's Government with reference to the case of Whelehan. Why, then, did I refer to it? On this account: The honorable and gallant gentleman, in the careless way in which he refers to these things, said I must be cognizant of the fact that prices were paid for obtaining information I said at Nottingham; I made no reference at all to the rather difficult question of payment of prices for obtaining information: but what I referred to was the payment of prices, not for obtaining information, but for concocting and concerting crimes. (*Cheers.*) After the gradual revelations that were made to us of the mode in which Ireland is administered, according to the traditions of that country, it is perfectly possible that such things may have been done, though I have never heard of them. But when I did learn in that particular instance of that foul and loathsome practice of paying money for such a purpose to a man, as far as we are yet informed, who was to attend a meeting of the criminals for the purpose of putting a hand to the arrangement and the execution of it (*loud cheers*), then I did think it was time to protest in the name of the Liberal party, if not of the whole country, against the practice which, in my opinion, is in itself odious to the last degree, which would not be for a moment tolerated in England, and in reference to which I thought it wise and right to point out that it was dangerous as well as odious, that when in a similar case the population of England had become cognizant of similar practices, they themselves had resorted to the commission of crime for the purpose of marking the detestation with which they regarded it. ("*Hear, hear.*")

I pass on to the remarks of the right honorable gentleman the Chief Secretary for Ireland, and I feel bound to refer to the observation he made during the general debate on the address last week, to what he called the practice of members on this side of the House of making statements outside this House which they would not repeat within it, and especially to his adverse and rather angry comments on the pacific tone of the speech which I had just delivered. The right honorable gentleman overflows with pugnacious matter. He is young and inexperienced in debate, and bold and able as I confess him to be, I think that when he has been fifty-six years in the service of his country, it is possible that his stock of contentious eagerness may be a little abated. (*Laughter and cheers.*) I have many reasons, but if I must give a reason why I was particularly anxious to avoid the needless introduction of contentious or polemical or accusatory matter in speaking on the opening debate on the address. I felt that an Irish debate was pending; and in the second place, the great object I had in view was to assist and to promote the purpose of the Government, – to promote, I will also say, the honor, dignity, and efficiency of this House, by giving what I may call in homely language a good start to the business of the session, by detaching it from everything like controversy. But if the right honorable gentleman laments the uncombative character of that discussion, I think he will derive probably ample satisfaction in the future. There is no fear, I believe, that Irish debate will be wanting in animation, possibly in animosity, so long as the right honorable gentleman continues to be Chief Secretary. (*Opposition cheers and laughter.*) The right honorable gentleman even on that occasion found in my pacific speech matter deserving of indignant rebuke. I repeat my lamentations that some of the most difficult and the nicest parts of the law are removed by the operation of the Coercion Act of last year from judges and juries to men whom I termed of an inferior stamp. That was the observation I ventured to make, and the right honorable gentleman was rather wrathful over it. I fully admit that he is a perfect master of *tu quoque*. He said, "Whoever they are, they are the men whom Lord Spencer appointed." In the first place, that is quite inaccurate; and in the second place, if inaccurate, it was totally irrelevant. It is perfectly inaccurate.

Mr. Balfour. I said that sixty out of seventy-three were appointed mostly by Lord Spencer, or else were the appointments of previous Governments revived by him.

Mr. Gladstone. And so the right honorable gentleman thinks that what he calls reviving – that is to say not dismissing – is the same thing as appointing. ("*Hear, hear,*" and *laughter.*)

The gentlemen of whose conduct as resident magistrates I especially complained, were Mr. Eldon, Captain Seagrave, Mr. Cecil Roche, Mr. Meldon, and Mr. Carew. These five, and undoubtedly these are the gentlemen I had specially in view when I spoke of men of an inferior stamp, not one of

these was appointed by Lord Spencer. (*Cheers.*) But supposing they were, the statement of the right honorable gentleman was absolutely and ludicrously irrelevant. What I was speaking of was not the discharge by the resident magistrates of their ordinary and traditionary duties, but the extraordinary duties which the right honorable gentleman and the Government have insisted in putting upon them. The right honorable gentleman was especially indignant with me, because at a given date in the recess, or before the termination of the session, I telegraphed to some correspondent the words, "Remember Mitchelstown," and that in a speech at Nottingham I had developed my meaning of that phrase with all the force I could. The right honorable gentleman thought fit to point at me the reproach that I was not disposed to maintain here what I have said elsewhere.

Now I have referred to my own statement at Nottingham about Mitchelstown, and I can only say I not only adhere to it, but I strengthen it. I never in my life uttered words, or sent words by letter or telegram, which I more rejoice to have used, and am better content to have used, than the words, "Remember Mitchelstown." (*Loud Opposition cheers.*) It was not done inconsiderately. It was done considerately, for the sake of Ireland and the country, and for the sake of preventing the enormous mischiefs, probable sufferings, probable bloodshed, and the consequent resistance to the law that might arise in Ireland in consequence of what had occurred at Mitchelstown, and of its adoption and appropriation by the right honorable gentleman. (*Cheers.*) What was it? It was this: A legal meeting ("*Hear, hear*") of 4,000 men assembled; the police, under the plea of the common practice of having an official reporter at the meeting, instead of prior communication with those who held it, instead of going to the platform at a point where it was open and accessible, formed a wedge of twenty men, and endeavored by force to drive that wedge into the middle of the crowd. I am here to say that a public meeting is an orderly assembly; that to observe order in a public meeting is part of the law of the land ("*Hear, hear*"); that the driving a wedge into the meeting was an illegality on the part of the police; and that the police who drove it into the crowd were themselves guilty of illegality, and ought to have been given into custody. (*Cheers.*)

On this deplorable occasion the agents of the law were the breakers of the law, and those breakers of the law, acting in the first instance under subordinate authority, were adopted and sanctioned by the right honorable gentleman, with the full authority of the Government. (*Cheers.*) What was the second act of the police? Their wedge was not strong enough; they were pressed back out of the crowd, and it seems to me with perfect propriety and legality, whereupon they brought a large force of police and charged the crowd, because the crowd had not concurred and co-operated in the former illegality. That was a fresh illegality committed by the police. Then violence began; then began the use of batons; then began the use of sticks and cudgels; then began the sufferings of the men in the crowd, and of individual members of the police, on which the right honorable gentleman is eloquent, and which I regret as much as he does. But the police in these two illegalities of attacking and batoning the crowd were defeated. The crowd did not pursue them. (*Cheers.*) According to all the information before us, the crowd were recalled, and again took their places in the square. A mere scattering and sprinkling of most probably boys, we know not how and to what extent, were in the street where the police barracks are to be found; and among them, those boys or others, succeeded in breaking three windows of the police barracks. (*Laughter.*) Those three windows were exalted and uplifted by the right honorable gentleman into a general attack on the barracks, compelling the police, in self-defence, to fire on the people. In one sense I must say the police did not fire on the people, for no mass of people was there to fire on. I said at Nottingham, and it is the result of all the inquiry I have made, that there was not more than twenty people in the street opposite the barracks, and under these circumstances the police actually fired into the windows of the opposite house, where there were peaceful people, women, and children; and they fired deliberately at individuals, two old men and one boy, whom they destroyed. That I do not hesitate here to denounce – I think I did not use the words at Nottingham – as cruel, wanton, and disgraceful bloodshed (*Loud cheers.*) It recalls the period of Lord Sidmouth, and was bloodshed which, so far as I know, has had no example in

its wantonness and causelessness since the memorable occasion in Manchester, which is popularly known as the Massacre of Peterloo. (*Cheers.*)

Now, I have given the right honorable gentlemen my views about Mitchelstown. (*Opposition cheers and derisive Ministerial cheers.*) It was time that I should say, "Remember Mitchelstown." Mitchelstown might have become what in one particular class of language is termed a "prerogative instance." The Mitchelstown police, commended by the right honorable gentleman, were held up to the police in Ireland as the pattern which they were to follow. (*Cheers.*) They were told they had acted only in self-defence, and the measure and meaning of self-defence, as exhibited at Mitchelstown, I feared, and it was reasonable to fear, would be the meaning and the measure of self-defence on every other occasion, when, by legality or illegality, the police found an opportunity of coming into collision with the people. (*Cheers.*) I tell the right honorable gentleman frankly that, in my opinion, he had become, by clear implication, a breaker of the law. (*Cheers.*) He had given to the breaking of the law authoritative countenance and approval, and not only so, but he had done it under circumstances where that authoritative approval, conveyed to the mind of the police, would naturally, justly, and excusably, almost necessarily, have pointed out to them that that was to be the model and rule of their conduct in every example of the kind. (*Cheers.*) Sir, it was in the interests of law and order that I denounced the conduct of the police. (*Opposition cheers and derisive Ministerial cheers, in which Mr. Balfour joined.*) It will be a long time, I think, before he can discover an instance, either on this bench or among any of those who are our friends, in which the law and order of the country, and the security and the lives of the people, had been treated with such recklessness as they then were by the right honorable gentleman and his colleagues. (*Cheers.*) I have done my best to inform myself, and in conformity with, I believe, uncontradicted and consentient statements, I contend that the inferences I have drawn from these facts are just inferences, and that it was not only natural but necessary to adopt precautions on the part, I will say, of England, against the fatal imitations which Mitchelstown might have produced, and to take securities for law and order in Ireland, first of all, as I pointed out to the people of England, that these things ought to be watched; and secondly, by making known to the Government, and to their agents and their organs beyond the the Channel, that if such occurrences did happen, they would not pass uncensured. (*Cheers.*)

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