

**THE IRISH CHURCH: A  
SPEECH DELIVERED IN THE  
HOUSE OF COMMONS ON  
MONDAY, MARCH 1, 1869**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649326624

The Irish Church: A Speech Delivered in the House of Commons on Monday, march 1, 1869 by  
W. E. Gladstone

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**W. E. GLADSTONE**

**THE IRISH CHURCH: A  
SPEECH DELIVERED IN THE  
HOUSE OF COMMONS ON  
MONDAY, MARCH 1, 1869**



# THE IRISH CHURCH.

---

## A SPEECH

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON  
MONDAY, MARCH 1, 1869.

BY THE

RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P.

---

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1869.



DD42  
G45  
H

591496

6

## SPEECH OF MR. GLADSTONE

ON THE

### ESTABLISHED CHURCH (IRELAND).

---

MR. GLADSTONE :

The Motion, Sir, which, in concluding, I shall propose to the Committee is--

"That the Chairman be directed to move the House, that leave be given to bring in a Bill to put an end to the Establishment of the Church in Ireland, and to make provision in respect of the Temporalities thereof, and in respect of the Royal College of Maynooth."

16 March 1870  
I do not know, Sir, whether I should be accurate in describing the subject of this Resolution as the most grave and arduous work of legislation that ever has been laid before the House of Commons; but I am quite sure I should speak the truth if I confined myself to asserting, that there has probably been no occasion when the disproportion was so great between the demands of the subject that is to be brought before you, and the powers of the person whose duty it is to deal with it. I will not, however, waste time in apologies that may be considered futile; and the rather, because I am conscious that the field I have to traverse is a very wide one, and that nothing but the patient favour and kindness of the Committee can enable me in any degree to attain the end I have in view--namely, that of submitting with fulness and with clearness both the principles and the details of a measure which, as far as regards its principles is singularly arduous, and as far as regards its details, must necessarily embrace matter of a character highly complex and diverse.

Now, Sir, I cannot but be aware that, under ordinary circumstances, any one, who undertakes to introduce to the House of Commons a proposal of grave constitutional change, ought

The circumstances of the case a sufficient excuse for not going into the historical and political reasons which justify the measure.

to commence by laying his ground strongly and broadly in historical and political reasons. On this occasion I shall feel myself in the main dispensed from entering upon them. Under ordinary circumstances, in discussing the subject of the Church of Ireland—I mean, had nothing already occurred in this House or elsewhere in relation to it on which I might take my stand—I should endeavour to pass in review the numerous—I might say the numberless, and powerful arguments which, in my opinion, may be adduced to prove that this Establishment cannot continue to exist with advantage to itself or without mischief to the country. I should be prepared to show how many benefices there are in Ireland where, although there is a Church population, it can hardly be said to be more than an official Church population; for the congregations of those benefices are too often restricted to such as we may reasonably suppose to be supplied by the families of the clergyman, the clerk, and the sexton. I should show, Sir, how buttresses have been devised for the maintenance of this extraordinary system, in the shape of those grants from the Consolidated Fund in this country,—on the one hand to the Presbyterians under the form of the *Regium Donum*, and, on the other hand, to the Roman Catholics under the form of the Maynooth Grant,—without which it was felt that the maintenance of such an establishment in Ireland would be intolerable and impossible. I should endeavour to show how Parliament had been so conscious of the difficulties attending the position which it has held, that it has actually been reduced upon more than one occasion to waste away, by positive provisions of legislation, the property of the Church, in order that its magnitude, when compared with the duties to be done, might not too much shock the public mind. I should endeavour to show how, in past times, and through all the evil years of the penal legislation that has affected Ireland, the authorities of this Established Church have unfortunately stood in the foremost rank with respect to the enactment of those laws on which none of us can now look back without shame and sorrow. These chapters of debate, happily, I need not open.

Sir, of the Established Church in Ireland I will only say that, although I believe its spirit to have undergone an



*Dem - clarity & understanding*

immense change since those evil times, yet, unfortunately, it still remains, if not the home and the refuge, yet the token and the symbol of ascendancy; and, so long as that Establishment lives, painful and bitter memories of ascendancy can never be effaced.

But, Sir, instead of lengthened discussion upon this and kindred topics, I hope I shall be sufficiently justified, by a reference to recent and patent occurrences, in passing at once to the measure of the Government. In mere form, without doubt, this motion is the first—the very first—stage of a great political measure, liable and open at every point to controversy; but in substance we cannot dismiss from our view that we are virtually taking up, and are bound to prosecute, the unfinished labours of last year. I refer to those debates, which formed the main, almost the only, subject of party difference in the discussions of this House during the Session of 1868. I refer to the large majority which, in a House of Commons undoubtedly most conservative in its general spirit, affirmed, notwithstanding, the necessity of bringing the system of religious establishment in Ireland to a close. I refer to the autumn, spent in incessant discussions of this subject before every constituency in the country. I refer to the elections, in which the issue so clearly put was not less decisively answered. And lastly, but not least, I refer to that resignation of the late Administration on which I have not to pronounce one word of censure, but about which I am sure I am justified in stating that it was an unusual course. I have neither to pronounce nor to insinuate any blame; but assuredly I am justified in saying that it forms the most emphatic testimony to the character of that judgment, which has already been pronounced by the representatives and by the people of the Three Kingdoms.

Nor shall I dwell in any detail upon the counter-arguments which have been ably, sincerely, and persistently used in defence of the Established Church. If I now refer to them, it is to do little more than to say that we are responsible for this measure, and shall be ready upon every due occasion, with all respect to those who oppose us, to meet those counter-arguments.

It is said, that the measure we are about to introduce will

*a mandate*

And also for not dwelling on the counter-arguments brought forward on the other side.

be adverse to religion. I believe it to be favourable to religion, and to be essential to the maintenance of those principles of right on which every religion must rest. We shall be told, more especially, that it is adverse to the interests of Protestantism; but we shall point to the condition of Ireland, and shall argue from the facts of that condition that the interests of Protestantism have not been promoted, but, on the contrary, have been injured, by our perseverance in a system which reason does not justify. We shall be told, perhaps, that we are invading the rights of property. No possible confidence can be greater than the confidence with which we shall meet that argument. On former occasions, indeed, things have been done by Parliament, under the extreme pressure of the case, which it may be difficult to reconcile with the extreme assertion of the rights of property. There are clauses, and important clauses, of the Church Temporalities Act of 1833, which greatly strain the abstract theory of the rights of property, and which I, for one, am totally unable to reconcile with its general rules. But, so far as I know, there is no imputation that can fairly be made against the measure we propose with respect to the rights of property by any other persons than those who hold what appears to me the untenable—I may even say the extravagant—doctrine, that although Parliament has a perfect right to direct the course of the descent of property in the case of natural descent, of lineage by blood, yet it has no right, when once the artificial existence of what we call a corporation has been created, to control the existence of that corporation, or to extinguish it even under the gravest public exigency. We shall be told also of the Act of Union; and I cannot, nor shall I attempt to dissemble that, on a point which has been described as essential, we propose to alter that Act. The Act of Union has been altered on other occasions, though never for so grave a cause as this; but we shall confidently contend that while we are altering this particular provision of the Act of Union, we are confirming its general purport and substance, and labouring, to the best of our humble ability, to multiply those roots which unfortunately it has never yet adequately struck into the heart and affections of the people. And lastly, Sir, this claim I, for one, confidently,

77  
 1833  
 1834

boldly make on behalf of the measure that we are introducing: I say we are giving effect to the spirit of a former policy. The great Minister, who proposed the Act of Union, neither said nor believed that it would be possible, under a legislative Union, to maintain the system of religious inequality, which he found subsisting in Ireland. On the contrary, he has left upon record his strong conviction that the countenance and support afforded from national sources to the Established Church must be extended to the other religions of the country. I admit that we pursue religious equality by means different from those proposed by Mr. Pitt—[Mr. NEWDEGATE: Hear, hear!] but by means, as I believe, better suited to the purpose we have in view, and certainly more consonant to the spirit, to the opportunities, and I will add to the possibilities, of the times in which we live. Be that, however, as it may, and with all that allowance for difference of means, the end we have in view is the same, and for that end we are entitled to quote the great authority of Mr. Pitt, and the authority of many of those who have followed him in their public career.

Sir, having referred to what I venture to call—although not in any technical or formal sense—the previous stages of this measure, I will briefly remind the Committee of the character of the general declarations by which the late House of Commons was moved to action, and of those pledges—for I do not hesitate to recognise them as such—before the country, which we are now called upon to do our best to redeem. I think, Sir, it was well understood to be the view of those who supported the Resolutions of last year that the system of Church Establishment in Ireland must be brought thoroughly and completely to a close; and that although the word “disendowment” was never embodied in any Resolution of this House, nor, so far as I recollect, was ever accepted without qualification in the speeches of those who most prominently supported the Resolutions in debate, yet, as a general rule, and for every substantial purpose and effect, an end must likewise be put to the system of public endowment for religion in Ireland. While the principles of the measure were laid thus broad and deep, it was likewise professed, and,

The general principles to which the House of Commons committed itself last Session.