

Sketches in the House (1893) eBook

Sketches in the House (1893)

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Page 1

CHAPTER I.

Opening of A historic Session.

[Sidenote: Memories.]

There is always something that depresses, as well as something that exhilarates, in the first day of a Session of Parliament. In the months which have elapsed, there have been plenty of events to emphasize the mutability and the everlasting tragedy of human life. Some men have died; figures that seemed almost the immortal portion of the life of Parliament have disappeared into night, and their place knows them no more; others have met the fate, more sinister and melancholy, of changing a life of dignity and honour for one of ignominy and shame.

[Sidenote: The irony of the seats.]

But no such thought disturbed the cheerful souls of some of the Irish Members; in the worst of times there is something exuberant in the Celt that rises superior to circumstance. This was to be an Irish Session; and the great fight of Ireland's future government was to be fought—perhaps finally. But there was another circumstance which distinguished this Session from its predecessors. The question of seats is always a burning one in the House of Commons. In an assembly in which there is only sitting accommodation for two out of every three members, there are bound to be some awkward questions when feeling runs high and debates are interesting. But at the beginning of this Session, things had got to a worse pass than ever. The Irish Party resolved to remain on the Opposition side of the House, true to their principle, that until Ireland receives Home Rule, they are in opposition to all and every form of Government from Westminster. The result was the bringing together of the strangest of bedfellows in all sections in the House. There is none so fiercely opposed to Home Rule as the Irish Orangeman. But the Orangemen are a portion of the Opposition as well as the Irish Nationalists, with the inconvenient result that there sat cheek by jowl men who had about as much love for each other's principles as a country vicar has for a Northampton Freethinker. On the other hand, a deadlier hatred exists between the regular Liberal and the Liberal Unionist than between the ordinary Liberal and the ordinary Tory. But by the irony of fate, the action of the Irish Party compelled the Unionists to sit on the Liberal benches again, with the result that men were ranged side by side, whose hatreds, personal and political, were as deadly as any in the House.

[Sidenote: Watchers for the dawn.]

As a result of all this, there occurred in the House on Tuesday morning, January 31st, a scene unparalleled since the famous day when Mr. Gladstone brought in his Home Rule Bill in 1886. Night was still fighting the hosts of advancing morn, when a Tory Member

—Mr. Seton-Karr—approached the closed doors of the House of Commons, and demanded admission to a seat. For nearly an hour he was left alone with



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the darkness, and the ghosts of dead statesmen and forgotten scenes of oratory, passion, and triumph. But as six o'clock was striking, there entered the yard around the House two figures—similar in purpose—different in appearance. Mr. Johnson, of Ballykilbeg, is by this time one of the familiar types of the House; and, from his evident sincerity, is, in spite of the terrible and mediaeval narrowness of his creed, personally popular. Mr. Johnson is an Orangeman of Orangemen. Now and then he delivers a speech, in which he declares that rather than see Home Rule in Ireland, he and his friends will line the ditches with riflemen. The Pope disturbs his dreams by night and stalks across his speeches by day; and there is a general impression about him that he is resolved, some time or other, to walk through a good large stream of Papist blood. He is also a violent teetotaler; and is so strong on this point that he is ready to shake hands, even with the deadliest Irish opponent, across the back of a Sunday Closing Bill. Like most Parliamentary fire-eaters, he is a mild-mannered man. Time hath dealt tenderly with him. But still he is well on to the seventies: his hair, once belligerently red, is thin and streaked with grey; and he walks somewhat slowly, and not very vigorously. Dr. Rentoul is a man of a different type. What Johnson feels, Rentoul affects. He is a tall, common-looking, heavily-built, blustering kind of fellow; great, it is said, on the abusive Tory platform, almost dumb and utterly impotent in the House of Commons. These were the vanguard of the Orange army, and they proceeded to appropriate the first and best seats they could lay their hands upon.

[Sidenote: Dr. Tanner and his waistcoat.]

Dr. Tanner, soon after this, appeared blazing on the scene; and sorrow came upon him that any of the enemy should have forestalled him. Like Mr. Johnson, Tanner is a Protestant—but, unlike him, is as fiercely Nationalist as the other is Orange; and, whenever the waves are disturbed by the Parliamentary storm, Tanner is pretty sure to be heard of and from. Viewing the scene of battle strategically, Tanner struck on an idea which was certainly original. Accounts differ as to whether he was the possessor of one hat or several; but tradition would suggest that he had more than one. It is certain, however, that he did take off his coat and waistcoat; and stretching these across the unclaimed land of seats, did thereby signify to all mankind that the seats thus decorated were his. But the novel form of appropriation—it suggests a wrinkle to prospectors in mining countries—was held to be illegal; and the poor doctor had to content himself with using the hat, or hats, as a means of securing seats.

[Sidenote: Colonel Saunderson.]



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Colonel Saunderson—another of the Orange army of fire-eaters—was early at the trysting-place; and this brought about one of the curiosities of the sitting. On the first seat below the gangway sat Dr. Tanner; on the very next seat, as close to him as one sardine to another in a box, sat Colonel Saunderson. Not for worlds would these two men exchange a syllable; indeed, it was a relief to most people to find that they did not break out into oaths and blows. What rendered the situation worse, was that Dr. Tanner has a fine exuberant habit of expressing his opinions for the benefit of all around him. At his back sat William O'Brien, with his keen thin face, his eyes full of latent fire, his stern, set jaw—his glasses suggesting the student and philosopher, who is always the most perilous and fierce of politicians; and to William O'Brien, Tanner made a running and biting commentary on the speeches—a commentary, as can easily be guessed, from the extreme National point of view. This was the music to which the Orange Colonel had to listen through the long hours that stretched between his early morning arrival and midnight. How men will consent to go through all this travail is, to easy-going people, one of the curiosities of political struggle.

[Sidenote: The Chamberlain Party.]

Meantime, there had been another and an equally important descent. Mr. Chamberlain made his son the Whip of the Unionist Party. The resemblance between father and son is something even closer than that usually noticed between relatives. The son looks a good deal more gentlemanly than the father. But the single eyeglass—which no man can wear without looking more or less of a snob—is even less becoming to the youthful Austen than to the parent; and gives him even a coarser air. There is a suspicion that young Chamberlain also came to the House armed with a goodly supply of hats; at all events, he and his friends managed to secure a large number of seats for the Unionists. Chamberlain and his friends sat together on the third bench below the gangway—a position of 'vantage in some respects—from which they could survey the House. The first seat was occupied by Mr. Chamberlain; next him was Sir Henry James, and then came Mr. Courtney, in a snuff-coloured coat and drab waistcoat; for all the world like an old-fashioned squire who has not yet learned to accommodate himself to the sombre garments of an unpicturesque age. The dutiful Austen left himself without a seat, and was content to kneel in the gangway, and there take sweet counsel from his parent.

[Sidenote: Enter the G.O.M.]

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Mr. Gladstone, as everybody knows, was not technically a member of the House of Commons when it met at the beginning of the Session. He had to be sworn, and the first business of the House was to witness this ceremony. I remember the first day I was a member of the House, and saw a similar spectacle—it was in 1880. Then the House was crowded, and there was a tremendous demonstration; but on the opening day of the Session just ended, the ceremony came off a little earlier than had been expected, and the House was not as full as one would have anticipated. Then there was a great deal of work to be done; every section of the House was busy with the attempt to get an opportunity of bringing in Bills. The Irishmen are always to the front on these occasions, with the list of a dozen Bills, which they seek to bring forward on Wednesdays—the day that is still sacred to the private member anxious to legislate. The Welsh members have now taken up the same lesson; the London members are likewise on the alert. Now, in order to get a chance of bringing in a Bill, it is necessary to ballot—then it is first come, first served. To get your chance in the ballot, you must put your name down on what is called the notice paper, where a number is placed opposite your name. The clerks put into the balloting-box as many numbers as there are names on the notice paper—they approached 400 on the day in question—and then the number is drawn out, and the Speaker calls upon the member whose number has proved to be the lucky one. A whole crowd of members were standing waiting their turn to do this the very moment when the Old Man walked up the floor of the House to take the oaths, and there was a great deal of noise and confusion; but his advent was noted instinctively and rapidly, and there was a mighty cheer of welcome.

[Sidenote: How he looked.]

Mr. Gladstone walks down to the House, unless on great occasions. Then there would be an obvious danger, from the enthusiasm of his admirers, if he were on foot. Whenever there is any chance of a demonstration, accordingly, he comes down in an open carriage, with Mrs. Gladstone at his side. On that 31st of January, the enthusiastic love of which he was the object, had several times overflowed; it had brought a huge crowd to Downing Street, and it had dogged the footsteps of the Prime Minister wherever he was seen. With bare head—with eyes glistening—with a cheek whose wax-like pallor was touched with an unusual gleam of colour—the Grand Old Man came down to his greatest Session, amid a thicket of loving faces and cheering throats. I fancy one of Mrs. Gladstone's heaviest tasks is to look after the clothes of her illustrious husband. He manages to make them all awry whenever he gets the chance. He may be seen at the beginning of an evening with a neat black tie just in its proper place; and towards the end of the evening the same tie is away under his jugular—as though he were trying experiments in the art of expeditiously hanging



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a man. But on these great occasions he is always so dressed as to bring out in full relief all the strange and varied beauty of his splendid face and figure. For nature—in the richness and abundance of her endowment of this portentous personage—has made him not only the greatest man in the House of Commons, but also the handsomest. He was dressed in the solemn black frock coat which he always wears on great occasions, and in his buttonhole there was a beautiful little boutonniere of white roses and lilies of the valley. The waxen pallor was still relieved by the glow caused by his enthusiastic reception from the people, as, with his son Herbert on the one side and Mr. Marjoribanks, the chief Liberal whip, on the other, he walked up the floor of the House.

[Sidenote: The new Ministry.]

One after another, the new Ministers followed—their receptions varying with their popularity—and at last they were all seated on the Treasury Bench. In their looks there was ample indication of the intellectual supremacy which had raised them to that exalted position. Mr. Gladstone had Sir William Harcourt—his Chancellor of the Exchequer—on his right, and on his left sat Mr. John Morley, with his thin face and smile, half ascetic, half kindly. Then came the newest man of the Government, that fortunate youth to whom power and recognition have come, not in withered or soured old age, but in the full prime of his manhood. Mr. Asquith takes his seat next Mr. Morley; and it is, perhaps, the close proximity which suggests the strong physical likeness between the two. Both are clean shaven; both have the long narrow profile that is called hatchet-faced; in both there is the compression of lips that reveals depths of strength and tenacity; both have the slightly ascetic air of the philosopher turned politician; both look singularly young, not only for their years, but for the dazzling eminence of their positions.

[Sidenote: Other groups.]

Meantime, there are other groups in the House that are gradually forming, and that have since played a momentous part in this great Session. Mr. Labouchere sits in his old place below the gangway—a seat which has become his almost by right of usage, but which he has to secure still every day, by that regular attendance at prayers which is so sweet to a devout soul. Next him sits Mr. Philipps—one of the younger generation of Radicals; and then comes Sir Charles Dilke—very carefully dressed, looking wonderfully well—rosy-cheeked, and altogether a younger-looking and gayer-spirited man than the haggard and pale figure which used to sit on the Treasury Bench in the days of his glory. John Burns is up among the Irish and the Tories, in visible opposition to all Governments. There is something breezy about John Burns that does one good to look at. He wears a short coat—generally of a thick blue material, that always brings to one's mental eye the flowing sea and the mounting wave.



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A stout-limbed, lion-hearted skipper—that's what John Burns looks like. There is plenty of fire in the deep, dark, large eyes, and of tenderness as well; and all that curious mixture of rage and tears that makes up the stern defender of the hopeless and the forlorn and weak. On the opposite side, in the Liberal ranks, sits Sam Woods—the miners' agent, who was sent from the Ince Division of Lancashire instead of an aristocrat of ancient race; also a remarkable man, with the somewhat pallid face of the life-long teetotaller, and eyes that have the mingled expression of wrath and pity common among the leaders of forlorn hopes and new crusades. Mr. Wilson, the member for Middlesbrough, is restless, and moves about a good deal. He has resolved to bring in a Bill to improve the wretched condition of "Poor Jack," in whose company he spent many years of his own hard life; and there is a gleam of triumph as an Irish member, in accordance with a previous arrangement, gives notice of a Bill for that purpose when the hazard of the ballot gives opportunity.

[Sidenote: Mover and Seconder.]

It is an honourable but a painful distinction to have either to move or to second the reply to the Speech from the Throne. One of the silly survivals of a feudal past still obliges men who have to perform this duty to make perfect guys of themselves, by wearing some outlandish uniform. Even the sturdiest Radical has to submit to this process; though I hope when John Burns comes to figure in that honourable position he will insist on retaining his breezy pea-jacket and his billycock hat. It was very late in the evening when Mr. Lambert—the victor in the great South Molton fight—had the opportunity of rising; and it was even still later when Mr. Beaufoy rose. I must pass over their speeches by saying that both speakers did extremely well. Even Mr. Balfour had to compliment them; and the Old Man almost went out of his way to express his gratification.

[Sidenote: Mr. Balfour.]

It was everywhere remarked that most of the leaders of parties began the Session in excellent fighting trim. Mr. Morley has been living in the pleasant green meadows and fields of the Phoenix Park, and looks five years younger than he did last year. The Old Man astounded everybody by his briskness; and Mr. Balfour also entered on the fray with every sign of being in excellent health and spirits. There had been a great roar of triumph when he came into the House, and throughout his speech—clever, biting, and adroit—his party kept up a ringing and well-organized chorus of pointed cheers. The speech was a significant departure from the ordinary stamp—a fact which Mr. Gladstone, who is notably a great stickler for tradition, did not fail to notice. For the almost unbroken tradition of the House of Commons is that the first night shall be one of almost loving-kindness between the one side and the other. I remember well *Punch* indicated this once by representing Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Disraeli beginning a Session

by presenting each other with roses, while behind their backs was a thick bundle of whips.



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[Sidenote: The fray opens.]

But Mr. Balfour is independent of tradition, and demonstrated it at once with a speech almost vehement, in part, in its attack. He had a whole host of flings at Mr. Justice Mathew and the Evicted Tenants' Commission—his hits, though sufficiently obvious, and almost cheap, being rapturously received. Altogether, it must be said the Opposition were in excellent form, and cheered their man with a lustiness which did them infinite credit. The Liberals, on the other hand, with forces somewhat scattered—the round Irish chorus being especially so, in the remote distance—did not seem equally well-organized from the point of view of the *claque*. With the dynamite prisoners Mr. Balfour dealt so gingerly that it was evident he knew the weakness of the Tory case, and was very apprehensive that Mr. Matthews would be found to have sold the pass. The ex-Home Secretary, meantime, was still disporting himself around the Red Sea or in the Straits of Bab-el-mandeb; and Mr. Balfour, who has notoriously a bad memory, was left groping in the cobwebs of his brain, trying to recollect which of the dynamitards it was Mr. Matthews intended to retain and which to release. Attacking the action of Mr. Morley with regard to the liberation of the Gweedore prisoners, Mr. Balfour brought upon himself a series of sharp interruptions from Mr. Morley; and there was some very pretty play, Mr. Balfour retorting now and then with considerable skill and readiness. Altogether it was an excellent fighting speech, and a good beginning. There were, in addition to what I have mentioned, plenty of shots about the foreign policy of the Government, especially in Uganda and Egypt; and it is needless to say that Mr. Balfour accused his successors of swallowing in office all the principles they had professed in Opposition.

[Sidenote: The Old Man rises.]

Mr. Gladstone had to stand silent for a few minutes in face of the thunderous welcome which he received from the Irish benches. Though the reception was gratifying, he seemed to be impatiently awaiting its termination, for he was full of vigour and eagerness for the attack, and never in his most youthful hours did he display a greater readiness to meet all assaults half-way. Those who are accustomed to the Old Man are in the habit of noting a few premonitory signs which will always pretty well forecast the kind of speech he will make. If he starts up flurried and excited, it is ten chances to one that the speech will not remain vigorous to the end; that there will be a break of voice and a weakening of strength, and that the close will not be equal to the opening. But when the voice is cold—though full of a deep underswell at the moment of starting—when Mr. Gladstone moves his body with the easy grace of perfect self-mastery, then the House is going to have an oratorical treat. So it was in this initial speech. There was just a touch of hoarseness in the voice, but it had a fine roll, the roll of the wave on a pebbly beach in an autumn evening; and he carried himself so finely and so flauntingly that there was no apprehension of anything like a loss or a waste of strength.



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[Sidenote: A pounce.]

At once he pounced on a passage in the speech of Mr. Balfour, who had made the statement that such a policy as Home Rule had always led to the disintegration and destruction of empires. He rolled out the case of Austria, which had been preserved from ruin by Home Rule; and when there was a sniff from the Tory benches, Mr. Gladstone, in tones of thunder, referred to the speech of Lord Salisbury in 1885, when he was angling for the Irish vote, and when he pointed to Austria as perhaps supplying some indication of the method of settling the Irish question. This was good old party warfare; the Liberals cheered in delight, and the old warrior glowed with all his old fire. There was a softer and more subdued tone when the Prime Minister referred to Foreign Affairs, speaking of these things with the slowness and the gravity which such ticklish subjects demand. But again Mr. Gladstone was in all the full blast of oratorical vehemence when he took up the attack that had been made on the Irish policy of Mr. Morley. Now and then prompted by that gentleman, and with an occasional word from Mr. Asquith, the Old Man gave figure after figure to show that Ireland has vastly improved since coercion had been dropped as a policy. Altogether it was a splendid fighting speech, and dissipated in a few moments all prophecies of gloom and forebodings of dark disaster which have been prevalent for so many weeks with regard to the health of the old leader. Thus in fire and fury began the Session, the leaders on both sides fully equal to their reputation and at their best, and all the dark and slumbering forces that lie behind them as yet an undiscovered country of grim and strange possibilities.

[Sidenote: Lord Randolph.]

But the solid and united ranks of the Tories were broken by one figure that was once the most potent among them all. I had been strangely moved at a theatre, a week or so before, as I looked at Lord Randolph Churchill. I remembered him twelve years ago—a mere boy in appearance, with clean-shaven face, dapper and slight figure, the alertness and grace of youth, and a face smooth as the cheek of a maiden. And now—bearded, slightly bowed, with lines deep as the wrinkles of an octogenarian, he sometimes looks like the grandfather of his youthful self. It is in the deep-set, brilliant eyes that you still see all the fire of his extraordinary political genius, and the embers, that may quickly burst into flame, of all the passion and force of a violently strong character. For the moment he sits silent and expectant. He has even refused to take his rightful place among the leaders of the party on the Front Opposition Bench. Still he sits in the corner immediately behind, which is the spectral throne of exiled rulers. He has the power of all strong natures of creating around him an atmosphere of uncertainty, apprehension, and fear. Of all the many problems of this Session of probably fierce personal conflict, this was the most unreadable sphinx.



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[Sidenote: Reaction.]

There came upon the House at the beginning of the following week a deadly calm, very much in contrast with the storm and stress of its predecessor. It is ever thus in the House of Commons. You can never tell how things are going to turn out, except to this extent—that passion inevitably exhausts itself; and that accordingly, when there has been a good deal of fire and fury one day, or for a few days, there is certain to come a great and deadly calm. Uganda is not a subject that excites anybody but Mr. Labouchere and Mr. Burdett-Coutts; and even on them it has a disastrous effect. Mr. Burdett-Coutts is always dull; but Uganda makes him duller than ever. Labby is usually brilliant; while he discoursed on Uganda he actually made people think Mr. Gladstone ought to have made him a Cabinet Minister—he displayed such undiscovered and unsuspected powers of respectable dulness.

[Sidenote: Still the seats.]

Nevertheless, there was still room for excitement and drollery in the perennial question of the seats. Mr. Chamberlain is not a man to whom people are inclined to make concessions; he is so little inclined to give up anything himself; and, accordingly, there arose a very serious question as to the first seat on the third bench below the Gangway, which he had taken all defiantly for his own. He counted without one of the oldest and most respected, but also one of the firmest, men in the House. Mr. T.B.—or, as everybody calls him, Tom Potter—sits for Rochdale; he was the life-long friend, and for years he has been the political successor of Cobden in the representation of Rochdale, and he is likewise the founder and the President of the Cobden Club. Every man has his weakness, and the weakness of Mr. Potter is to always occupy the first seat on the third bench above the Gangway. Everyone loves the good, kindly old man, the survivor of some of the fiercest conflicts of our time, and everybody is willing to give way to him. When the Liberals were in Opposition, there was a general desire among the Irish members to take possession of the third seat above the Gangway; and the first seat has enormous advantages—tactically—for anyone anxious to catch the Speaker's eye. But whenever the sturdy form of the member for Rochdale appeared, the fiercest of the Irishry were ready to give way; and from his coign of vantage, he beamed blissfully down on the House of Commons.

[Sidenote: Strong, but Merciful.]

Mr. Chamberlain had the boldness to challenge what hitherto had remained unchallenged; and Mr. Potter's wrath was aroused. He is not one of those people who require the spiritual sustenance of the Chaplain's daily prayers; and, accordingly, it was an effort to get down at three o'clock, when that ceremony begins; but his wrath upheld him; and thus it was that on a certain night, the thin form and sharp nose of Mr. Chamberlain peered out on the House from behind



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the massive form of the Member for Rochdale. It looked as if the unhappy Member for West Birmingham had undergone a sort of transformation, and had, like Mr. Anstey's hero in "Vice Versa," gone back to the tiny form and slight face of his boyhood. Mr. Potter, however, is merciful, and having asserted his rights, he surrendered them again gracefully to Mr. Chamberlain; and the perky countenance of the gentleman from Birmingham once more looked down from the heights of the third bench. It would take Mr. Chamberlain a long time to do so graceful an act to anybody else.

[Sidenote: "Ugander."]

But on the Monday night nobody need have been very particular as to what seat he occupied; for nothing could have been much more dull than the whole proceedings. I make only one or two observations upon Uganda. And first, why is it that so few members of the House of Commons can pronounce that word correctly? Mr. Chamberlain,—if there be anything illiterate to be done, he is always prominent in doing it—Mr. Chamberlain never mentions the word without pronouncing it "Ugand_er_." Mr. Courtney for a long while did not venture on the word; and therein he acted with prudence. It is a curious fact with regard to Mr. Courtney that when he first came into the House he had a terrible difficulty with his "h's." In his case it was not want of culture, for he was a University man, and one of the most accomplished and widely-read men in the House of Commons. But still there it was; he was weak on his "h's." He has, however, by this time overcome the defect. Mr. Labouchere talks classic English; was at a German university; has been in every part of the world; has written miles of French memorandums; has sung serenades in Italian; and, if he were not so confoundedly lazy, would probably speak more languages than any man in Parliament. But yet he cannot pronounce either a final "g" or allow a word to end in a vowel without adding the ignoble, superfluous, and utterly brutal "er." When he wishes to confound Mr. Gladstone, he assaults about "Ugand_er_"; when the concerns of our great Eastern dependency move him to interest, he asks about "Indi_er_"; and he speaks of the primordial accomplishments of man as "readin'" and "writin'."

[Sidenote: Sir Edward Grey.]

Ugand_er_ gave Sir Edward Grey his first opportunity of speaking in his new capacity of Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. There are some men in the House of Commons whose profession is written in the legible language of nature on every line of their faces. You could never, looking at Mr. Haldane, for instance, be in doubt that he was an Equity barrister, with a leaning towards the study of German philosophy and a human kindness, dominated by a reflective system of economics. Mr. Carson—the late Solicitor-General for Ireland, and Mr. Balfour's chief champion in the Coercion Courts—with a long hatchet face, a sallow complexion, high cheek-bones, cavernous cheeks and eyes—is the living



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type of the sleuth-hound whose pursuit of the enemy of a Foreign Government makes the dock the antechamber to the prison or the gallows. Sir Edward Grey, with his thin face, prominent Roman nose, extraordinarily calm expression, and pleasant, almost beautiful, voice, shows that the blood of legislators flows in his veins; he might stand for the highest type of the young English official. He has not spoken often in the House of Commons—not often enough; but he is known on the platform and at the Eighty Club. He has the perfect Parliamentary style, with its virtues and defects, just as another young member of the House—Mr. E.J.C. Morton—has the perfect platform manner, also with *its* virtues and defects. Sir Edward Grey speaks with grace, ease, with that tendency to modest understatement, to the icy coldness of genteel conversation, which everybody will recognize as the House of Commons style. This means perfect correctness, especially in an official position; but, on the other hand, it lacks warmth. It is only Mr. Gladstone, perhaps, among the members of the House of Commons—old or new—who has power of being at once, easy, calm, perfect in tone, and full of the inspiring glow of oratory.

[Sidenote: Pity the poor farmer.]

The agriculturists are not very happy in their representatives. A debate on agriculture produces on the House the same effect as a debate on the Army. It is well known that the party of all the Colonels is enough to make any House empty; and a debate on agriculture is not much better. The farmer's friends are always a dreadfully dull lot; and they usually lag some half-century behind the political knowledge of the rest of the world. It would have been impossible for anybody but the county members to attempt a serious discussion on Protection or Bimetallism as cures for all the evils of the flesh; but that is what the agricultural members succeeded in doing on a certain Monday and Tuesday night. Their prosings were perhaps welcome to the House; but it was a curious thing to see an assembly, as yet in its very infancy, so bored as to find refuge in every part of the building, except the hall appropriated to its deliberations. Mr. Chaplin is always to the front on such occasions; pompous, prolix, and ineffably dull. Mr. Herbert Gardner made his debut as the Minister for Agriculture, and did it excellently.

[Sidenote: Keir-Hardie.]

Mr. Keir-Hardie is certainly one of the most curious forms which have yet appeared on the Parliamentary horizon. He wears a small cap—such as you see on men when they are travelling; a short sack coat; a pair of trousers of a somewhat wild and pronounced whiteish hue; and his beard is unkempt and almost conceals his entire face. The eyes are deep-set, restless, grey—with strange lights as of fanaticism, or dreams. He rather pleasantly surprised the House by his style of speech. Something wild in a harsh shriek was what was looked



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for; but the wildest of Scotchmen has the redeeming sense and canniness of his race—always excepting Mr. Cunninghame Graham, whose Scotch blood was infused with a large mixture of the wild tribe of an Arab ancestress; and Mr. Keir-Hardie—speaking a good deal like Mr. T.W. Russell—made a foolish proposal in a somewhat rational speech. But he was unlucky in his backers. The Liberal benches sate—dumb though attentive, and not unamiable. Mr. Gladstone gazed upon the new Parliamentary phenomenon with interest, but the only voices that broke the silence of the reception were the strident tones of Mr. Howard Vincent, of Sheffield, and Mr. Johnston, of Ballykilbeg. Now Howard Vincent is known to all men as one of the people who speak in season and out of season, when once they mount their hobby. The other day I heard of a bimetallist who was so fond of discussing bimetallism that the railway carriage, in which he went to town every morning, was always left vacant for him; nobody could stand him any longer. Similar is the attitude of the House of Commons to Howard Vincent. Fair Trade is his craze. He proposes it at Tory Conferences—much to the dismay of Tory wire-pullers; he gets it into the most unlikely discussions in the House of Commons; and all the world laughs at him as though he were to propose the restoration of slavery, or chaos come again. Poor Mr. Johnston only cares about the Pope, and cheers Mr. Hardie simply as a possible obstruction to Mr. Gladstone. Ill-omened welcomes these for a friend of Labour.

[Sidenote: Sir John Gorst.]

Sir John Gorst occupies a curious position in his own party. He is one of their very ablest debaters; always speaks forcibly and to the point; rarely makes a mistake; and has a wonderfully good eye for the weak points in the armoury of his opponents. He was the really strong man in the old Fourth Party combination; but somehow or other he does not get on with his friends, and has been left without Cabinet office at a time when many inferior men have been able to get ahead of him. He has a cold, cynical manner; suggests usually the clever lawyer rather than the sympathetic politician; and altogether seems at odds with the world and with himself. He made a bold bid, however, for labour legislation; placed himself in a different position from the rest of his colleagues; and altogether made one of those speeches which are listened to in amused curiosity by political opponents, and in ominous silence and with downcast looks by political friends. Mr. Balfour's face was a study; but it was a study in the impassibility which politicians cultivate when they desire to conceal their hatred of a political friend. It is on the same side of the House that the really violent and merciless animosities of the Parliamentary life prevail. I should think that Sir John Gorst is the object of about as bitter a hatred among his own gang as any man in the House.

[Sidenote: Mr. George Wyndham.]



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In the happily-ended coercion days, letters constantly appeared in the newspapers, signed "George Wyndham." A certain flippancy and cynicism of tone, joined to a skilful though school-boyish delight in dialectics, suggested that though the name was George Wyndham, the writer was an eminent chief. When at last Mr. George Wyndham made his appearance in the House and delivered himself of his maiden speech, Mr. Campbell-Bannerman—one of the wittiest men in the House, though you would take him for a very serious Scotchman without a joke in him, at first sight—expressed his satisfaction to find that there was such a person as Mr. Wyndham, as he had been inclined to rank him with Mrs. 'Arris and other mythical personages of whom history speaks. Mr. Wyndham is a tall, handsome, slight fellow—with an immense head of black hair, regular features, hatchet but well-shaped face, and a fine nose, Roman in size, Norman in aquilinity and haughtiness. He is a smart rather than a clever man, but has plenty of vanity, ambition, and industry, and may go far.

[Sidenote: Who said "Rats"?)

Mr. Jesse Collings has changed from a respectable Radical, with good intentions and excellent sentiments, into a carping, venomous, wrong-headed hater of Mr. Gladstone and all the proposals which come from a Liberal Government. On the 8th of February, he gave an extremely ugly specimen of his malignant temper, by complaining that there was no care for the agricultural labourer on the part of a Government which has undertaken the largest scheme of agricultural reform ever presented to a House of Commons. This had the effect of rousing the Old Man to one of those devastating bits of scornful and quiet invective by which he sometimes delights the House of Commons. Jesse had spoken of the proposals of the Queen's Speech as a ridiculous mouse, and thereupon came the dread retort that mice were not the only "rodents" that infested ancient buildings; the words derived additional significance from the fact that, as he used them, the Prime Minister directed on Jesse those luminous, large, searching eyes of his, with all their infinite capacity for expressing passion, scorn, contempt, and disgust. The House was not slow to catch the significance of the phrase, and jumped at it, and yelled delightedly until the roof rang again.

[Sidenote: A tumble for Joe.]

This naturally called Joe, pliant creature, to the rescue of his beloved friend. That, however, was far from a lucky week with Joe; he had begun to look positively hang-dog, with baffled hate. He attempted to stem the splendid tide of enthusiasm on which the Grand Old Leader was swimming triumphantly, by stating that at one time Mr. Gladstone had separated himself from Mr. Collings's proposals for the reform of the position of the agricultural labourers. When anybody makes a quotation against Mr. Gladstone, the latter gentleman has a most awkward habit of asking for the date, the authority, and such like posers

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to men of slatternly memory, and doubtful accuracy. I have heard several of the wonderful Old Man's private secretaries declare that they had never been able to get over the dread with which this uncanny power of remembering everything inspired them—it was awe-inspiring, and produced a perpetual feeling of nervousness—as though they were in the presence of some extraordinary and incomprehensible great force of nature. It is rather unfortunate for Joe that nature did not endow him with any bump of veneration, and that he is thus ready to embark on hazardous enterprises, in which he oftens comes to grief. When he made this quotation against Mr. Gladstone, the Old Man at once pounced on him with a demand for the date and the authority. Joe was nonplussed, but he stuck to his point.

But on the following day Mr. Gladstone got up and in the blandest manner declared that he had since looked into the speech to which Mr. Chamberlain had alluded, and he found that what he had really said was, that Mr. Collings had been supposed to have advocated “three acres and a cow” as a policy, and to that policy Mr. Gladstone had declared he had never given his adherence. This was turning the tables with a vengeance. Jesse grinned and Joe frowned—the rest of the House was delighted.

[Sidenote: Mr. Asquith.]

The Home Secretary delivered a speech, which in one bound carried him to the front rank of Ministerial speakers. It was a triumph from beginning to end: in voice, in delivery, in language—above all, in revelation of character, it was an intoxication and a delight to the House of Commons. He swept over the emotions of that assembly like a splendid piece of music, and there was no room, or time, for reflection.

But there was an aftermath, and then it began to be hinted that it was the speech of an orator and an advocate rather than of a Minister, and that it was unnecessarily and unwisely harsh in tone; it uttered “no” and a “never”—which are the tombs of so many Ministerial declarations. The occasion was the motion of Mr. Redmond in reference to the release of the dynamitards. Mr. McCarthy, though he strongly disapproved of the motion, was forced to express regret that Mr. Asquith had closed the prison doors with a “bang;” and one or two of the supporters and friends of Mr. Asquith were also compelled to express their dissent, and to vote in the lobby against him. But undoubtedly that speech has immensely increased Mr. Asquith's reputation and strengthens his position. He is one of the strong and great men of the immediate future.

[Sidenote: Obstruction, naked and unashamed.]



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When the debate on amnesty was concluded, there came a climax to that system of obstruction in which the Tories and the Unionists indulged during the first fortnight; and there was indication of the growing exasperation of the Ministerial and the Irish members. Midnight had struck; and Mr. Balfour, on the part of the Tories, had the face to declare that it was impossible, at such a late hour, to do justice to the next amendment. As the next amendment dealt with the Gweedore prisoners, and as the House has heard of little else but the Gweedore prisoners for the last fortnight, the majority received this announcement with a fierce outburst of impatience, the Irish Bench especially being delighted at the opportunity of paying back to Mr. Balfour some of the insults he had poured on them so freely during his six years of power. Meantime, the Liberal temper had been roused to still more feverish heat by the splendid news from Halifax, followed by the even more unexpectedly good tidings from Walsall; and there was a determination to stand no nonsense. But Obstruction was determined to go on, and when it was two o'clock in the morning Sir William Harcourt declared that he would not persevere further. There arose a fierce shout of disappointment from his supporters and from the Irishry; but Sir William beamed pleasantly, and the majority submitted to the tyranny of the minority. And thus debating impracticable proposals, barely listening to long speeches, doing absolutely nothing, the days succeeded each other; and legislators who wanted work, longed for the steady and mechanical regularity of their well-ordered offices, their vast factories, their sanely-conducted communications with all parts of the world, to which English genius, sense, and industry have brought the goods of England. The contrast between the Englishman at business and at politics is exasperating, woeful, tragic.

CHAPTER II.

The home rule Bill.

[Sidenote: I remember.]

When I saw Mr. Gladstone take his seat in the House of Commons on February 13th, I was irresistibly reminded of two scenes in my memory. One took place in Cork some twelve years ago. Mr. Parnell had made his entry into the city, and the occasion was one of a triumph such as an Emperor might have envied. The streets were impassable with crowds; every window had its full contingent; the people had got on the roofs. It almost seemed, as one of Mr. Parnell's friends and supporters declared, as if every brick were a human face. Men shouted themselves hoarse; young women waved their handkerchiefs till their arms must have ached; old women rushed down before the horses of the great Leader's carriage, and kissed the dust over which he passed. And, then, when it was all over, Mr. Parnell had to sit in a small room, listening to the complaints and most inconvenient cross-questionings of an extremely pragmatical supporter,

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who would have been an affliction to any man from the intensity and tenacity of his powers of boring. As I looked at poor Parnell, with that deprecatory smile of his which so often lit up the flint-like hardness, the terrible resolution of his face—as varied in its lights and shadows as a lake under an April sky—I thought of the contrast there was between the small annoyances, the squalid cares of even the greatest leaders of men and the brave outward show of their reception by the masses. And the other scene of which I thought, was the appearance of Mr. Irving on a first night in some big play, say, like “Lear.” All the public know is that the actor is there, on the stage, to pronounce his kingly speech; but, before he has got there, Mr. Irving, perhaps, has had the sleepless nights which are required in thinking out the smallest details of his business; perchance, the second before he looks down on that wild pit, and up at that huge gallery, which are ready either to acclaim or devour him, he has been in the midst of a furious dispute about the price of tallow candles, or the delinquencies of the property-master.

[Sidenote: Tired eyelids upon tired eyes.]

So I thought, as I looked on Mr. Gladstone. For there was that in his face to suggest sleepless vigils, hard-fought fights—perhaps, small and irritating worries. Before that great moment, there had been consultations, negotiations, Cabinet Councils—perchance, long and not easy discussion of details, settlement of differences, composure of all those personal frictions and collisions which are inevitable in the treadmill of political life. Yes; it was the case of the actor-manager with the thousand and one details of outside work to attend to, as well as the great and swelling piece of magnificent work for which the great outside world alone cared—of which it alone knew. To anybody who knows politics from the inside comes ever some such haunting thought about the splendour and glory of popular receptions and public appearances. I must confess that I could not get rid of that impression when I looked on Mr. Gladstone on that Monday night. A deadlier pallor than usual had settled on that face which always has all the beautiful shade, as well as the fine texture of smooth ivory. There was a drawn, wearied look about the usually large, open, brilliant eyes—that rapt and far-off gaze which is always Mr. Gladstone’s expression when his mind and heart are full. There are two kinds of excitement and excitability. The man who bursts into laughter, or shouts, or tears, suffers less from his overstrained nerves than he whose face is placid while within are mingled all the rage, and terror, and tumult of great thoughts, and passions, and hopes. It struck me that Mr. Gladstone was the victim of suppressed excitement and overstrained nerves, and that it was only the splendid masculine will, the great strength of his fine physique, which kept him up so well.

[Sidenote: The sudden awakening.]



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Pallid, heavy-eyed, in a far-off dream—with all the world gazing upon him with painful concentration of attention and fixed stare—the Great Old Man sate, keeper still of the greatest and most momentous secret of his time, and about to make an appearance more historic, far-reaching, immortal, than any yet in his career. So, doubtless, he would have liked to remain for a long time still; but, with a start, he woke up, put his hands to his ear, as is his wont in these latter days when his hearing is not what it used to be, looked to the Speaker, and then to Mr. John Morley, and found that, all at once, without one moment's preparation, he had been called upon by the Speaker to enter on his great and perilous task. What had happened was this: The Irish members had put a number of questions on the notice-paper, but, anxious in every way to spare the Old Man, they quietly left the questions unasked; and so, when, as he thought, there was still a whole lot of preliminary business to go through, all was over, and the way was quite clear for his start. "The First Lord of the Treasury;" so spoke the Speaker—almost softly—and, in a moment, when he had realized what had taken place, the Old Man was upright, and the Liberal and Irish members were on their feet, waving their hats, cheering themselves hoarse. And yet an undercurrent and audible note of anxiety ran through all the enthusiasm. The honeymoon of Home Rule is over, and, curiously enough, the very sense of a great victory after a long struggle has always about it a solemnity too sad for tears, too deep for joy. The Liberals and the Irishry stood up; but, even at that hour, there were evidences of the fissures and chasms which the two great political disruptions—the disruption in the English Liberal and in the Irish party—have produced. On the third bench below the Gangway sate the Liberal Unionists, Mr. Gladstone's deadliest foes, with pallid-faced, perky-nosed, malignant Chamberlain at their head, the face distorted by the baffled hate, the accumulated venom of all these years of failure, apostasy, and outlawry. Not one of the renegade Liberals stood up, and there they sate, a solid mass of hatred and rancour. On the Irish side, Mr. Redmond and the few Parnellites kept up the tradition of their dead leader in his last years of distrust and dislike of Mr. Gladstone by also remaining seated.

[Sidenote: The speech.]

The first notes of the Old Man suggested he was in excellent form. It is always easy for those who are well acquainted with him to know when the Old Man is going to make a great, and when he will deliver only a moderately good speech. If he is going to do splendidly the tone at the start is very calm, the delivery is measured, the sentences are long, and break on the ear with something of the long-drawn-out slowness of the Alexandrine. So it was on this occasion. Sentence followed sentence in measured and perfect cadence; with absolute self-possession;

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and in a voice not unduly pitched. And yet there were those traces of fatigue to which I have alluded, and I have since heard that one of the few occasions in his life when Mr. Gladstone had a sleepless night was on the night before he introduced his second great Home Rule Bill. And it should be added that, stirring and eloquent as were the opening sentences, they were not listened to by the House with that extraordinary enthusiasm which, on other occasions, sentences of this splendid eloquence would have elicited. For what really the House wanted to learn was the great enigma which had been kept for seven long years—in spite of protests, hypocritical appeals, and, oftentimes, tedious remonstrance from over-zealous and over-fussy friends.

[Sidenote: The Bill.]

By the time Mr. Gladstone had got to the Bill, he had exhausted a good deal of his stock of voice, and yet he seemed to be less dependent than usual on the mysterious compound which Mrs. Gladstone mixes with her own wifely hand for those solemn occasions. It appeared that both she and her husband had somewhat dreaded the ordeal. The bottle which Mr. Gladstone usually brings with him is about the size of those small, stunted little jars in which, in the days of our youth, the young buck kept his bear's grease, or other ornament of the toilet. But on Monday Mr. Gladstone was armed with a large blue bottle—somewhat like one of those 8 oz. medicine bottles which stand so often beside our beds in this age of sleeplessness and worry. Nevertheless, Mr. Gladstone and his wife had miscalculated, for on two occasions only throughout the entire speech did he have to make application for sustenance to the medicine bottle. Another precaution which had been taken turned out also to be unnecessary. The Premier's eyesight is not as good as it was a few years ago; and he sometimes finds it difficult to read anything but the biggest print. For this reason, elaborate preparations had been made for helping his eyesight. On the table before the Speaker's chair there was a small lamp—somewhat like a student's lamp. This also turned out to be unnecessary, for the Old Man was able to read his notes without the smallest difficulty; and the speech had come to a conclusion long before the hour when the deepening shadows make it hard to read by the light from the glass roof of the House.

[Sidenote: The peroration.]

At last, the latest details had been given; the Old Man approached his peroration. By this time the voice had sunk in parts to a low whisper, and the deathly hue of the beautiful face had grown deeper. There was something that almost inspired awe as one looked at that strange, curious, solitary figure in the growing darkness. The intense strain on the House had finally exhausted it, and there had come a silence that had in it the solemnity, the strange stillness, the rapt emotion of some sublime service in a great cathedral rather than the beginning of

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one of the fiercest and most rancorous party conflicts of our time. To this mood Mr. Gladstone attuned the closing words of his speech. The words came slowly, quietly, gently, sinking at times almost to a whisper. What fantasies could not one's mind play as one listened to these words. There was underneath the language, the looks, the voice, the tragic thought that this was a message rather from the shadow-land beyond the grave than from this rough, noisy, material world. Imagine yourself in a country church, the sole visitor in the ghostly silence and the solemn twilight, with spectres all around you in the memorials of the dead and memories of the living, and then fancy the organist silently stealing, also alone, to the organ, and giving out to the evening air some beautifully solemn anthem with all the sadness of death, and none of the exultant joy of resurrection, and then you will get some faint idea of the pent-up emotion which filled every sympathetic heart in the great assembly as the Old Man finally came to the closing words of his great speech. It was not so much a peroration as an appeal, a message, a benediction.

At first, when the Old Man sat down, the pause followed that speaks of emotion too deep for prompt expression, and then once again a rush to their feet by the Irishry and the Liberals, loud cheering, and the waving of hats, and all those other manifestations of vehement feeling which alone Mr. Gladstone is privileged to receive. The Tories had kept very quiet; had conducted themselves on the whole very well. Once or twice came a high sniff of disgust, and now and then a younger member could not restrain himself from an exclamation. But, altogether, the Opposition was under the same spell as the rest of the House, and listened patiently to the end.

[Sidenote: Mr. Sexton.]

I may pass over all that occurred on that Monday evening, with the single exception of the very remarkable speech of Mr. Sexton. It was well known that Mr. Sexton had taken a prominent part in laying before Mr. Gladstone and his colleagues the views of the Irish party as to what would constitute a satisfactory Bill to the Irish people; and Mr. Sexton was authorised by his colleagues to state their views to the House. This he did slowly, deliberately, without the least attempt at oratory, but in language extraordinarily lucid, delicately shaded, touching on points with exquisite art. And what he said came to this; that the Bill was a good Bill; that in his opinion it could be accepted by the Irish people as a satisfactory settlement of their demands; but that in two points it needed careful watching, and perhaps considerable amendment: the financial settlement and the future of the Land Question.

[Sidenote: Mr. Balfour.]

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The Leader of the Opposition had not, so far, shone in his new position, and people were not slow in coming to the conclusion that he required the stimulus and the strength of a solid majority behind him to bring out his peculiar talents. At all events, his first speech following the introduction of the Home Rule Bill was a ghastly failure. It was listened to in almost unbroken silence from the beginning to the end—not that the speech had not plenty of cleverness in it, the small cleverness of small points—but it was badly delivered. It did not seem to rise to the heights expected on such an occasion; in short, it was a disappointment. Only once or twice did the Leader of the Opposition succeed in rousing his friends to even an approach to enthusiasm. Speaking of the amount of money put to the credit of Ireland, he declared the Government admitted they had been beaten in a conflict with the forces of law and order, and that this was the war indemnity which had to be paid—a hit that very much delighted Mr. Chamberlain. The portion of the speech which created sensation was that in which he alluded to the use of the veto. It had been contended by Mr. Sexton that the veto would never be used unless the Irish Parliament so abused its powers as to justify the use of it. This was an honourable bargain between the British Parliament and the Irish. To such a bargain Mr. Balfour declared he and his friends would be no parties. They would not let the weapon of veto rust in case it were put into their hands, and so on—a passage which excited some enthusiasm on the Tory benches and strong anger on the Irish.

[Sidenote: Mr. Bryce.]

The real framers of the Bill are understood to be Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Morley, and Mr. Bryce. No man in the House of Commons has so complete a knowledge as Mr. Bryce of the various forms of government in the world, especially in countries which have the complicated system that is about to be fashioned under the new Bill. Mr. Bryce is a professor and a student, and he has the manner of his calling and his pursuits. Arguing his case without passion, slowly, calmly, in excellently chosen language, he can speak on even the most violently contested measure as though it were a demonstration in anatomy. So he spoke on February 14th—making mince-meat with deadly tranquillity of manner of most of the objections of Mr. Balfour, and altogether strengthening the position of the Bill.

[Sidenote: Mr. Redmond.]

A speech which had been looked forward to with even greater curiosity was that of Mr. Redmond, the leader of the Parnellites. The Tories had settled themselves down in large numbers, counting on a great treat. And undoubtedly the opening of Mr. Redmond's speech was not auspicious. He thought that some recognition should have been given to the great dead Irishman as well as to the living Englishman who had brought the Home Rule question to its present position. The delighted Tories, not loving Mr. Parnell, but



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seeing in this the promise of a lively and unpleasant attack on the Bill, cheered lustily, and speeded Mr. Redmond on his way on the full tide of a splendid reception. But as time went on, their faces gradually grew longer, and when Mr. Redmond resumed his seat they had come to the conclusion that one of the strongest foundations on which they had built their hopes for wrecking the Bill had entirely gone. Summed up, what Mr. Redmond had to say came to this: that he saw many grave defects in the Bill; that he was especially dissatisfied with the financial arrangements; that he didn't approve of the retention of the Irish members in the Imperial Parliament; but that, nevertheless, it was a Bill to which he could give a general support. This speech was received with great though silent satisfaction on all the Irish benches; but the poor Tories were brought to a condition well nigh of despair. And thus, cheered heartily by both Irish sections and enthusiastically greeted by the Liberals, weakly fought, feebly criticised by the Opposition the Bill started splendidly on its perilous way.

CHAPTER III.

A sober and subdued opposition.

I have always held that the present Government would first begin to fix its hold upon the country when it was face to face with Parliament. It was, during the vacation, like a great firm that is expected by everybody to do a vast amount of business, but that has been unduly and unexpectedly delayed in building its works. A visit to the House of Commons during the week ending February 24th would have exemplified what I say. It is true there would have been missed all the intense fury and excitement which characterised one of the most exciting and interesting weeks the House of Commons has seen for many a day. There was a calm, the deadliness of which it is impossible to exaggerate. But periods of calm are much more interesting to Governments than to the public. When there are the noise and tumult of battle; when the galleries are crowded—when peers jostle each other in the race for seats—when the Prince of Wales comes down to his place over the clock, then you may take it for granted that the business of the country is at a standstill; and that just so much of the public time is being wasted in mere emptiness and talk. But when the House is half empty—when the galleries are no longer full—when debates are brief and passionless, then you can reasonably conclude that things are going well with the Government; that useful business is in progress; and that something is being really added to the happiness of the nation.

[Sidenote: The humbled Opposition.]



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So it was during the second week of the Home Rule Session. No great diplomats claimed their seats; the outer lobby was no longer besieged; there was no longer any ferocity of competition for seats; and the attendance at prayers visibly relaxed; but all the time more useful legislation was initiated in the course of the week than in any similar period for upwards of six or seven years of Parliamentary time. A good deal of the progress is due to the sober and subdued spirit of the Opposition. So long as Mr. Balfour was in power, the more democratic section of the Tory party was kept comparatively under; but with his fall came an outburst of freedom; and men like Sir Albert Rollit, who represent great constituencies, have been able to freely express their real opinions. Let me pause for a moment on Sir Albert Rollit, to say that he is a very remarkable type to those who have known the House of Commons for a number of years—as I have. It is rather hard to make a distinction between him and a moderate, and in some respects, even an advanced Liberal. He boasts, and rightly, that he represents as many working men as most of his Radical colleagues; and he certainly does sit for a place which is not inhabited by any large number of wealthy people. Disraeli, with his Household Suffrage; Lord Randolph Churchill, with his Tory Democracy, have brought this type of politician into existence, and now he is with us always. This is the answer to those who contend that because there will be always Tories and Whigs, it makes no difference what changes we make. The answer is Sir Albert Rollit; he is a Tory, but the Tory of to-day is pretty much the same as the Radical of a few years ago.

[Sidenote: The Registration Bill.]

The Government brought forward the first of their Bills, and at once the Tory Democrat showed what he was. For Mr. Fowler was able to quote opinions from Tories quite as favourable to reform of registration as from Radicals, and several Tories stood up to speak in favour of the measure. Opposition was really left to poor Mr. Webster, of St. Pancras; but, then, everybody knew what poor Mr. Webster meant, and nothing could better express the lowliness of the Tory party than that opposition to anything should be led by the hapless representative of St. Pancras. The consequence of all this was that the Registration Bill passed in the course of a few hours—the debate illumined by an excellent maiden speech from our John Burns—delivered in that fine, manly, deep voice of his—which always makes me think of a skipper on the hurricane deck in the midst of rolling seas and a crashing storm. Even a few briefer moments sufficed for the Scotch Registration Bill; and the House of Commons almost rubbed its eyes in astonishment to find that it had actually got through two great Bills and was about to listen to a third in the course of one evening.

[Sidenote: Employer's Liability.]



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But so it was; and there verily stood Mr. Asquith at the box in front of the Speaker's chair introducing the third great Bill of the Government in the same evening. Mr. Asquith's grasp of Parliamentary method increases daily. He is really a born Parliamentarian. It is certain that he has made up his mind to go back to the bar when his time for retiring from office comes; it will be a tremendous pity if he does. Such a man is wasted before juries and in the pettiness of *nisi prius*. For the moment, however, he sails before the wind. With his youthful—almost boyish face—clean-shaven, fair and fresh—with his light brown hair carefully combed, school-boy fashion, and with no more trace of white than if he were playing football in a school gymnasium—he is a wonderful example of early and precocious political fortune. There is in his face a certain cheery cynicism—a combination of self-confidence and perhaps of self-mockery, the attitude of most clear-sighted men towards fortune, even when she is most smiling. At the outset Mr. Asquith had to encounter an amendment from Mr. Chamberlain. It is needless to say that, while the most Radical Government which ever existed is proposing Radical legislation, the cue of Mr. Chamberlain will be now and then to “go one better”—to use the American phrase; and accordingly here was an amendment from Birmingham which went even further than the Bill of Mr. Asquith. With gentle but effective ridicule Mr. Asquith, riddled the Chamberlain amendment; but for the moment the amendment served the purpose of delaying further progress with the Bill.

[Sidenote: Another surprise.]

And there was another surprise—actually a fourth Bill—also from the Government Bench; and also proposing to make a further beneficial change in the position of working men. Mr. Mundella wanted to get power for the Board of Trade to regulate the hours of labour among poor railway men. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach—who burnt his fingers over Stationmaster Hood—rushed up after Mr. Mundella had sate down—to claim a portion of the credit for this beneficial change. Here, again, the Opposition showed that meekness which has come over its temper. For six years the Tories were in office, but there was no Bill. The moment he was out, Sir Michael was full of the best intentions. But his attempt to get credit for other men's work was vain; for he counted without Mr. Bartley—the gentleman whom North Islington sends to Parliament for the purpose of impeding all useful legislation. And that Bill also was delayed.

[Sidenote: The government and private members.]

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There is always something foredoomed about a night which ends in a count-out. You can almost feel its untimely end in the air at the very beginning of the sitting. There is always a great to-do about doing away with the privileges of the private member, but I have never really seen anything like a strong desire on the part of the House generally to keep the small quorum together which is necessary for giving the private member his opportunity. To the uninitiated, it is perhaps necessary to say that the sittings of the House are divided into two classes—what are called Government and what are called private members' nights. Government nights are Mondays and Thursdays. On these days, the Government is entirely master of the time of the House. They can bring on Government Bills and in whatever order they please. On Tuesdays and on Wednesdays the private member is master of the situation—that is to say, until the Government of the day get leave of the House to take all its time, and then the rights of private members disappear. On Fridays also the private member is in possession of most of the time of the sitting. That is the night on which the Government sets up Supply—that is to say, puts down the votes for the money required for the public service. It is a fundamental principle of the British Constitution that the demand for money involves the right to raise any grievance; and accordingly Supply on Friday night is always preceded by motions in reference to any subject which any member may desire to raise. These motions are put on the paper, but so inherent is the right to raise any grievance before giving money, that a member is entitled to get up, and without a moment's notice, raise any question which may appear to him desirable for discussion. As a rule, however, there is but one question fought out, and when that is decided the Government of the day is allowed to go on to the votes for money.

[Sidenote: Parliamentary Wednesdays.]

Wednesday is nearly always occupied with some Bill brought in by a private member, in which a large number of other members are interested. It used to be said that Wednesday was sacred to the churches and the chapels, and that only a religious debate could take place. This is still the case to a large extent; for instance, on Wednesday, February 22nd, they employed themselves at the House in discussing a Bill in which Dissenters are very much interested. Then, a division has to be taken at half-past five, and thus there is a good chance of a practical discussion with a practical result. The consequence is that Wednesday sittings are always looked forward to with a considerable interest, and it is always with a pang that the House gives up the right of the private member to them. A Wednesday sitting is rarely, if ever, counted out, and, indeed, I believe there is a rule which prevents them from being counted out before four o'clock, at which hour the late-comers find it possible to turn up. Friday sittings also

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rarely, if ever, end badly, for the Government is ever in want of money, and a Government has always forty staunch supporters who are ready to stay in the House in order to help it to get through its business. But Tuesday belongs to no man in particular. The Government don't bother themselves about it, because they don't have money to get at the end of it: instead of its being occupied with one Bill, which can raise a definite discussion, Tuesday has a number of motions on all sorts and kinds of subjects; and, in short, what's everybody's business is nobody's; and Tuesday constantly ends about eight or half-past eight o'clock in a count-out. The Government delightedly look on; it is an additional argument in favour of taking away the rights and privileges of private members and turning them into the voracious maw of the Government.

[Sidenote: Wales in a rage.]

A curious difference presented itself between the interior and the exterior of the House on the following day (February 23rd). Inside, there was for the most part a desert, yawning wide and drear, except on the benches which were occupied by the sons of Wales; while outside in the outer lobbies surged a wild, tumultuous, excited crowd, eagerly demanding admission from everybody who could be expected to have the least chance of giving it. Every Welshman in the world seemed to have got there. I saw Mr. Ellis Griffiths—an impassioned and brilliant Welsh orator who ought to be in the House; my friend, whom I used to know as Howell Williams, and I now have to call Mr. "Idris," as if he were an embodied mineral water, and many others. The secret was that the night was devoted to the Suspensory Bill for the Established Church in Wales, and anybody who knows Welshmen, will know that this is a question on which Welsh blood incontinently boils over. Terse, emphatic, business-like Mr. Asquith put the case for Disestablishment on the plain and simple ground that the Established Church was the church of the rich minority, and that the overwhelming majority of the Welsh representation had been returned over and over again to demand Disestablishment.

[Sidenote: The cynical Gorst.]

Sir John Gorst has an icy manner and generally the air of a man who has not found the world especially pleasant, and delights to take rather a pessimistic view of things. His great argument was that if this Bill were carried, young men would not find enough of coin to tempt them into the Church, and that accordingly it would languish and fade away. To such a prosaic view of the highest spiritual vocation, the unhappy Tories listened with ill-concealed vexation, and Gorst once more increased that distrust of his sincerity in Toryism which perhaps accounts for the small progress he has made in the ranks of his party.

[Sidenote: Randolph again.]

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Throughout the night the debate languished, though there was an excellent speech from Mr. Stuart Rendel on behalf of the Welsh party. This was practically the only speech from that side; for perceiving that the game of the Tories was to talk against time, the Welshmen wisely declined to aid them, and sate dumb, unless when they snorted defiance at some absurd claim or fanciful exaggeration on the other side. At ten minutes past ten, however, quite a different complexion was given to the whole debate by the rise of Lord Randolph Churchill. He had not yet recovered his old mastery of himself or the House; but his appearance was very different from what it was a few nights earlier. There was no longer that constant trembling of the hands which made it almost painful to look at him; the voice did not shake painfully, and there was a certain recurrence of that old self-confidence. But still he was far from what he used to be. The once resonant voice was somewhat muffled and hoarse, accompanied by a certain tendency to feverish exaggeration of language—in fact, the old Fourth Party methods of almost conscious playing to the gallery. However, it was a good fighting speech, and the Tories had been so depressed by the bad speaking on their own side, and by the solid bench opposite of cheering, snorting, defiant, but distinctly practical Welshmen, that they were delighted, and cheered admiringly.

[Sidenote: Olympian wrath.]

The intimates of Mr. Gladstone declare that composure is perhaps the most remarkable of his many qualities. In the midst of a Cabinet crisis he would hand you a postage-stamp as though it were the sole matter that concerned him. But it is also said by his intimates that he has possibilities of Olympian wrath which almost frighten people. He was certainly roused to a passion by Lord Randolph—very much to the advantage and delight of the House of Commons; for during the earlier portion of the evening, and especially while the speech of Mr. Asquith was being delivered, there was an impression that he did not look very happy. It is known that he is still fondly devoted to the Church, and it was suspected that though his convictions were settled on the necessity of doing away with the Establishment in Wales, it was not the kind of work to which he went with any zest. But Lord Randolph roused the Old Lion within him, and with flashing eye, with a voice the resonance of which echoed through the House as though he were twenty years younger—with abundance of gesticulation, and sometimes with swinging blows that were almost cruel—he slew the young intruder and wound up the debate on the Church in a frenzy of excitement and delight among his followers.

[Sidenote: Mr. Kenyon.]



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There came, then, a series of incidents which threw the House into convulsions of rancorous scorn and farcical laughter. Earlier in the evening there had been a speech by Mr. Kenyon. Words fail to describe the kind of speech Mr. Kenyon delivers. Sometimes one is doubtful as to the sex of the speaker, for he moans out his lamentations over “the dear old Church of England” exactly as one would imagine a sweet old lady with a gingham umbrella and a widow’s cap to intone it. Meantime, the rest of the House is convulsed with laughter, so that there is the curious contrast of one man—Punch-like in complexion and face—reciting a dirge while the rest of the House are holding their universal sides with laughter. The anger came when Sir Henry James and Mr. T.W. Russell were seen to be fluctuating between the Liberal and the Tory lobby. Joe wisely found a convenient engagement at Birmingham. At last Toryism prevailed, and amid a tempest of ironical cheers, the Liberal renegades went into the Tory lobby.

Then the Tories were beaten by a majority of 56, after which they tried a little obstruction. But it was promptly sat upon; the closure was moved; only the solitary and plaintive voice of Mr. Kenyon rose in protest against it, and so, amid shouts of laughter and triumph, the doom of the Welsh Establishment was pronounced.

CHAPTER IV.

The personal element.

[Sidenote: Small jealousies and great questions.]

It is one of the delights of Parliamentary life that you can never be sure of what is going to take place. The strongest of all possible Governments may be threatened, and even destroyed, in the course of a sunny afternoon, which has begun in gaiety and brightest hope; a reputation may grow or be destroyed in an hour; and an intrigue may burst upon the assembly in a moment, which has been slowly germinating for many weeks. Mr. Gladstone had a notice upon the paper on Monday, February 27th, the effect of which was to demand for the Government most of the time which ordinarily belongs to the private member. There is no notice which has more hidden or treacherous depths and cross-currents. For when you interfere with the private member, you suddenly come in collision with a vast number of personal vanities, and when you touch anything in the shape of personal vanity in politics you have got into a hornet’s nest, the multitudinousness, the pettiness, the malignity, the unexpectedness of which you can never appreciate. I sometimes gaze upon the House of Commons in a certain semi-detached spirit, and I ask myself if there be any place in the whole world where you can see so much of the mean as well as of the loftiest passions of human nature as in a legislative assembly. Look at these men sitting on the same bench and members of the same party—perhaps even with exactly the same great purpose to carry out in public policy, and neither really in the least dishonest nor insincere. They are talking in the



most amicable manner, they pass with all in the world—including themselves—for bosom friends; and yet at a certain moment—in a given situation—they would stab each other in the back without compunction or hesitation, to gain a step in the race for distinction.



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[Sidenote: The dearest foes.]

Between two other men there intervenes not the space of even a seat; they are cheek by jowl, and touching each other's coat-tails; and yet there yawns between them a gulf of deadly and almost murderous hate which not years, nor forgiveness, nor recollections of past comradeship will ever bridge over. And look at the House as a whole, and what do you see but a number of fierce ambitions, hatreds, and antipathies, natural and acquired—the play of the worst and the deadliest passions of the human heart? Above all things, be assured that there is scarcely one in all this assembly whose natural stock of vanity—that dreadful heritage we all have—has not been maximised and sharpened by the glare, the applause, the collisions and frictions of public life. I have heard it said that even the manliest fellow, who has become an actor, is liable to be filled to a bursting gorge with hatred of the pretty woman who may snatch from him a round of applause; and assuredly every nature is liable to be soured, inflamed, and degraded by those appearances before the gallery of the public meeting, the watchful voters, the echoing Press, and all the other agencies that create and register public fame.

[Sidenote: Blighted hopes.]

Think of all this, and then imagine what a Prime Minister does who proposes a scheme which will deprive some dozens of men of an opportunity of public attention for which they have been panting and working perchance for years. Recollect, furthermore, that the private member may be interested in his proposal with the fanaticism of the faddist—the relentless purpose of the philanthropist, the vehement ardour of the reformer. Then you can understand something of the danger which Mr. Gladstone had to face. For his motion came to this, that every member—except one—who had a resolution on the paper which he desired to bring before the House had to be either silenced altogether or pushed into a horrid and ghastly hour when either he would not be listened to by a dozen members, or would perhaps be guillotined out of a hearing by the count out. Let me further explain, for I wish to make the whole scene intelligible to every reader. Tuesdays and Fridays belong to private members as well as Wednesdays, and on Tuesdays and Fridays accordingly private members bring forward motions on some subjects in which they are especially interested. In order to get these Tuesdays and Fridays, they have to ballot—so keen is the competition for the place—and if a member be lucky enough to be first called in the ballot, he gives notice of his motion, and for the Tuesday or the Friday the best part of the sitting is as much his as if it belonged to the Government.

[Sidenote: Salaried Members—Railway Rates—Bimetallism.]



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Now several members are interested in the question of payment of members, and for Tuesday, March 21st, or some such day, there was a motion down for payment of members. Dr. Hunter is interested in the new railway rates, and for Tuesday, March 14th, he had a motion down in reference to railway rates. Finally, several members are interested in bimetallism, and for Tuesday, February 28th, a motion on this subject was designed. What, then, Mr. Gladstone proposed meant that Dr. Hunter could not propose his motion of railway rates; that the member interested in payment of members could not propose his motion; that the motion on bimetallism could not be proposed; in short, that these gentlemen, and their motions and their time, should be swallowed up by the voracious maw of the Government. This description will suffice to bring before the mind of any reader the difficulty and danger of the situation.

[Sidenote: Disappointed Office-seekers.]

I tread on somewhat delicate ground when I tell the story of the manner in which some members of the Liberal party utilised this situation. It is no secret that there are in this, as in every House of Commons, a number of gentlemen who do not think that their services have been sufficiently appreciated by the Minister to whom the unhappy task was given of selecting his colleagues in office. This is the case with every Government, and with every House of Commons—with every party and with every Ministry. You do not think that the favourite of fortune whom you envy has reached a period of undisturbed happiness when he sits on the Treasury Bench—even when he speaks amid a triumphant chorus of cheers, or drives through long lines of enthusiastically cheering crowds. He has to fight for his life every moment of its existence. He is climbing not a secure ladder on solid earth, but up a glacier with slipping steps, the abyss beneath, the avalanche above—watchful enemies all round—even among the guides he ought to be able to trust. Do you suppose that every member of the Liberal party loves Mr. Asquith, and is delighted when he displays his great talents? Do you think that none of the gentlemen below the gangway do not believe that in their mute and inglorious breasts, there are no streams of eloquence more copious and resistless? No, my friend, take this as an axiom of political careers, that you hold your life as long as you are able to kill anybody who tries to kill you, and not one hour longer.

[Sidenote: Powerful malcontents.]

It will be seen at once that a party of malcontents is especially powerful in a Parliament which has in hand the greatest task of our time, and which on the other side has a majority which revolt of even a small number can at any moment turn into a dishonoured and impotent minority. Such being the material, a nice little plot was concocted by which a certain number of young members, full of all that vague distrust of existing ministries which belongs to ardent young



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Radicalism, were to be induced to give a vote against Mr. Gladstone's proposal to take away the time of private members. And it is reported that one member of the Liberal party had begun operations as many as four weeks before Mr. Gladstone's Bill came on, and had tried to extort a number of pledges, the full meaning of which would only come upon the unhappy people who made them when they had endangered or destroyed the best of modern Ministries.

[Sidenote: The out-manoeuvred Tories.]

I think I have now said enough to explain what I am going to relate. Mr. Gladstone explained his proposal; which briefly was, that in order to get on with Home Rule it was necessary to take the time of private members. As will have been seen, the meaning of this would have been to have swept away at once all the private motions in which members were interested. When the motion came to be discussed, there was a very curious phenomenon. Everybody had been reading in the morning papers the chorus of disapproval in which the Tory press had been denouncing the leadership of the Tory party, liberals had been repeating to each other with delight the verdict of the chief Tory organ—the *Standard* newspaper—that the Tory party had been out-manoeuvred and beaten at every point in the struggle, and that the portentous promises of the recess had been utterly baffled by the superior judgment, the better concerted tactics, and, above all, by the unexpected solidity and cohesion of the Liberal party.

[Sidenote: Organized for obstruction.]

That all this had produced its effect on the Tory party as well was soon evident. An old campaigner in the House of Commons can soon tell when a party has been organized for the purpose of Obstruction. There is a feverishness; there are ample notes; there is a rising of many members at the same time when the moment comes to catch the Speaker's eye. Other indications presented themselves. Mr. Seton-Karr is, personally, one of the kindest of men—cheery, good-natured, full of the easy give-and-take of political struggle; but even he himself would not claim to be a Parliamentary orator. But on February 27th, he, as much as everybody else, must have been surprised to find that his utterances, which, in truth, were stumbling enough, should at every point be punctuated by a deep bellow of cheers such as might have delighted the most trained and the most accomplished orators in the House. The House itself was at first taken aback by this outburst of deep-throated and raucous cheers, and after it had sufficiently recovered from its surprise discovered that it all came from one bench—the front bench below the gangway. On this bench there were gathered together a number of the younger members of the Tory party.

[Sidenote: The clique in Parliament.]



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At once it was seen what had taken place; the Tories, stung to action by the taunts of their own press, had concerted a new system of tactics. And one portion of these tactics was to introduce into the House of Commons a phenomenon new to even its secular and varied experience—namely, an organized claque. It was really just as if one were in a French theatre. Uniformly, regularly, with a certain mechanical and hollow effect underneath its bellowings, the group below the gangway uttered its war notes. Beyond all question, recognizable by the unmistakable family features, it was there—the organized theatrical claque on the floor of the British House of Commons. There were other indications of the transformation on which the Tories were determined. When Mr. Seton-Karr sate down after a palpably obstructive speech, Mr. Bartley got up, and several other Tories at the same time. Mr. Bartley is not an attractive personality. He has a very strong rather than pleasant or intellectual face. There is plenty of bulldog tenacity in it—plenty of animal courage, plenty of self-confidence; but it has none of the rays of a strong intelligence, and not many glimpses of kindness or sweetness of nature. It is in the work of obstruction that one sees temperament rather than intellect in the House of Commons. Obstruction does not call for very high intellectual powers, though, undoubtedly, obstruction can at the same time display the highest powers.

[Sidenote: Artists in obstruction.]

For instance, Mr. Sexton made his first reputation in the House of Commons by a speech three hours in duration, which was regarded by the majority as an intentional waste of time and an obstruction of a hateful Bill, but which everybody had to hear from the sheer force of its splendid reasoning, orderly arrangement of material, and now and then bursts of the best form of Parliamentary eloquence. But the obstructionist wants, as a rule, strength of character rather than of oratory—as witness the extraordinary work in obstruction done by the late Mr. Biggar, who, by nature, was one of the most inarticulate of men. It was because Biggar had nerves of steel—a courage that did not know the meaning of fear, and that remained calm in the midst of a cyclone of repugnance, hatred, and menace. Mr. Bartley, then, has the character for the obstructive, and he rose blithely on the waves of the Parliamentary tempest. But he had to face a continuous roar of interruption and hostility from the Irish benches—those converted sinners who have abjured sack, and have become the most orderly and loyal, and steadfast of Ministerialist bulwarks. And now and then when the roar of interruption became loud and almost deafening, there arose from the Tory bench below the gangway that strange new claque which on that Monday night I heard for the first time in the House of Commons.

[Sidenote: Mr. James Lowther.]



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One other figure rose out of the sea of upturned and vehement faces at this moment of stress and storm. When the Irish Members were shouting disapproval there suddenly gleamed upon them a face from the front Opposition bench. It was a startling—I might almost say a menacing exhibition. It was the face of Mr. James Lowther. I find that few people have as keen an appreciation of this remarkable man as I have. In his own party he passes more or less for a mere comedian—indeed, I might say, low comedian, in the professional and not in the offensive sense. His tenure of the Chief Secretaryship of Ireland is looked back upon, in an age that has known Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, Mr. Balfour, and Mr. John Morley, as a sublime and daring joke by Disraeli which belongs to, and could only happen in an epoch when sober England was ready to allow her Oriental juggler and master to play any kind of Midsummer's Night's Dream pranks even with the sternest realities of human life. Yet sometimes the thought occurs to me that if he were a little more articulate, or, perchance, if the time came when a democracy had to be met, not with bursts of Parliamentary eloquence, but with shot and shell, and the determination to kill or be killed, the leadership of the party of the aristocracy would fall from the effeminate hands of the supersubtle and cultivated Mr. Balfour into the firm and tight grip of the rugged, uncultured country gentleman who sits remote and neglected close to him. There are the tightness and firmness of a death-trap in the large, strong mouth, a dangerous gleam in the steady eyes, infinite powers of firmness, inflexibility, and of even cruelty in the whole expression, not in the least softened, but rather heightened and exalted by the pretty constant smile—the smile that indicates the absence alike of the heat of passion or the touch of pity, and that speaks aloud of the unquestioning and dogged resolve of the aristocrat to fight for privilege to the death.

[Sidenote: What a cruel face!]

“Ah, what a cruel face!” exclaimed an Irish Member by my side as Mr. Lowther turned back and shouted, “Order, order!” at the Irish benches—the good-humoured smile absent for a few moments, and revelations given into abyssmal depths. But Mr. Lowther soon recovered himself, smiled with his usual blandness, and once more dropped the hood over his inner nature. But it was a moment which brought its revelations to any keen observer; especially if he could have seen the answering looks from a pair of blazing Celtic eyes—also characteristic in their way of all the passion, rage, and secular intrepidity of the smaller and weaker race that has carried on a struggle for seven centuries—over battlefields strewn with the conquered dead—past gallows stained by heroic blood—past prisons and hulks where noble hearts ate themselves wearily and slowly to death. It was as in one glance all the contrast, the antipathies, the misunderstanding which had separated one type of Irishmen from one type of Englishmen through hundreds of years.



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[Sidenote: The bond of the Railway Rates.]

These are somewhat remote reflections from the squat figure, the harsh and grating voice, and the commonplace rhetoric of Mr. Bartley—so far can fancy and insight lead one astray in that great stage of Titanic passions which is spread on the floor of the House of Commons. And what significance of great historic issues and reminiscences there were in the scene were likewise lost on Dr. Hunter. To him the universe at the moment—all the tremendous destinies on the knees of Mr. Gladstone—all the millionfold hopes and hungering longings that were involved—were as nought in comparison with the fact that the motion of Mr. Gladstone deprived him of the opportunity of raising a debate on Railway Rates. Coldly, calmly, self-confidently, Dr. Hunter attacked the Government in its weakest place, and drove the dagger home through the vulnerable side. The weakness of the position was this: there was a strong, vehement, and widespread revolt in the House against the exactions of the railway companies. Liberal members had on the subject exactly the same feelings as Tories; nightly a score of questions were asked on the subject. Altogether, indignation had broken down party lines, and against the railway companies Liberal and Tory made common cause. Unfortunately, Dr. Hunter's case had been strengthened by a somewhat weak yielding of Mr. Gladstone to a demand for a day on Bimetallism. This demand had, it is true, been urged upon him from various parts of the House, including his own, and he seemed to be yielding to a pretty universal demand. But Bimetallism was a craze with no chance of even distant success, while Railway Rates were at that very moment urgently calling for redress from hundreds of threatened industries. It would be seen then what a dexterous weapon for striking the Government the selection of the day for Railway Rates was.

[Sidenote: No Tory Leader.]

The Tories ought to have at once perceived the value of the weapon which a Liberal had thus placed in their hands. Some of them did so, and, undoubtedly, if a man with the Parliamentary instinct of Lord Randolph Churchill had been at their head, they would at once have made deadly and, haply, destructive use of the opportunity. But Mr. Balfour was away. Lord Randolph sat, dark and solitary, at a remote seat, and Mr. Goschen can always be confidently relied upon to do the wrong thing. It will be seen presently how he helped to save the Government it was his duty to destroy. No; the danger of the situation came not from the Tory, but from the Liberal benches. There are in the Liberal, as in every party of the House, a number of young and new members who have not yet learned the secret and personal springs of action, and who, moreover, do not at once realize the vast underlying issues on an apparently small question. To them the Liberal intriguers against the Government had steadily and plausibly addressed themselves, and many of them were under the impression that the question raised by Dr. Hunter would decide nothing more serious than the special purpose to which one day of the Session could be devoted.



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[Sidenote: A coming storm.]

But anybody with the slightest acquaintance with the House of Commons would have soon perceived that matter of much greater pith and moment was at stake. The Senior Ministerial Whip is the danger-signal of the House of Commons; and the danger-signal was very much in evidence. Mr. Marjoribanks—of all Whips the most genial, even-tempered, and long-suffering, as well as the most effective—was to be seen, rushing backwards and forwards between the lobby and the Treasury bench, where, with Mr. Gladstone, he held whispered and apparently excited conversations. Meantime, there grew up in the House of Commons that mysterious sense of coming storm which its quick sensibilities always enable it to see from afar. There came a sudden murmuring, and then a strange stillness, and older members almost held their breaths. From the Irish benches not a sound escaped. In most Parliamentary frays—especially when the storm rages—there are certain Irish members who are certain to figure largely and eminently; but on these benches there was a silence, ominous to those who are able to note the signs of the Parliamentary firmament. Anyone looking on could have seen that the silence did not come from inattention or want of interest, for the looks betrayed keen and almost feverish excitement.

[Sidenote: Ireland in danger.]

For what was going on was a fight whether Ireland was to be lost or saved, and lost through the folly, desertion, or levity of some of the men that had sworn to save her. Fortunately, the strains of the most tragic situations have their relief in the invincible irony of life, and there was a welcome break in the appearance on the scene of him whom all men know as “Alpheus Cleophas”—the redoubtable Mr. Morton. Some men are comic by intention, some are comic unconsciously and unintentionally, some men are comic half by intention and half in spite of themselves. To this last class belongs our Alpheus Cleophas. He played his part of comic relief with a certain air of knowing what was expected of him—you see this demoralizing House of Commons makes everybody self-conscious, and one could see that he himself anticipated the roar of laughter with which the House received his statement, “I have now a majority”—by which, for the moment, Alpheus appeared as the leader of the Government, and a party which controlled the destinies of the House of Commons.

[Sidenote: Mere comic relief.]

Still, as I have said, this was only comic relief—the jokes, oftentimes mechanical, by which the young men and women downstairs prepare to pass the time which is required for the preparation of the great scene, in which their principals have to enact their great situation. Still, the *denouement* of the drama was uncertain. Mr. Marjoribanks rushed from lobby to Mr. Gladstone, from Mr. Gladstone to lobby—and still there hung in the air the fatal question: “Was the Government going out?” Ah! think



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of it. Was Gladstone going to end his days in baffled purpose, in melancholy retirement, with the great last solemn issue of his life ended in puerile fiasco and farcical anarchy, instead of in the picture of two nations reconciled, an empire strengthened and ennobled, all humanity lifted to higher possibilities of brotherhood and concord, by the peaceful close of the bloody and hideous struggle of centuries? Think of it all, I say, and then go also in imagination to the door of the House of Commons, and see a Scotch Liberal fighting for dear life to bring into the Tory lobby the necessary number of misguided and ignorant neophytes to bring down this disastrous catastrophe.

[Sidenote: Why no signal?]

Meantime, confusion still reigned on the Liberal benches. Men were confused, and bewildered, and irresolute, and frightened, conscience of calamitous danger, and yet unable to understand it all. And here let me say that this state of confusion was due partly to bad leadership. There is a want of cohesion—on this day in particular—on the Treasury bench. Mr. Gladstone, like all ardent natures, takes too much on himself. He is, of course, a tower of strength—twenty men are not such as he. But the burden cannot all be borne by one shoulder—especially at a portion of the sitting when, by a strict interpretation of the rules of the House, Mr. Gladstone is allowed to speak but once. Why were these scattered and young and inexperienced troops not told, by their leaders, of the vast issues involved in this coming vote? Why were not all the sophistries brushed away, by which the conspirators against the Government were hiding the real effect and purpose of the votes? Sir William Harcourt is an old Parliamentary hand; Mr. John Morley is excellent when a few words are required to meet a crisis; Mr. Asquith—keen, alert, alive to all that is going on—sits at Mr. Gladstone's side. Why were all these lips dumb? It made one almost rage or weep, to see the uncertain battle thus left unguided and uncontrolled.

[Sidenote: Mr. Goschen to the rescue.]

At last a saviour, but he came from the ranks of the enemy. Mr. Goschen swept away the network of cobwebs under which Liberals had hidden the issues, and boldly declared the real issue. And that issue was, that Mr. Gladstone wanted time to push forward his Home Rule Bill, and that the Tory party was determined to prevent him getting that time if they could manage it. Where be now the hysterics about private members and simple issues and small questions? The issue lies naked and clear before the House. But still victory isn't assured. Mr. Goschen with his thick utterance, his muffled voice, his loss of grip and point, has ceased to be listened to very attentively in the House of Commons; and this speech—the most significant yet delivered—passes almost unnoticed, except by those who know the House of Commons and watch its moods and every word. The last and decisive word has yet to come.



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[Sidenote: Mr. Storey's contribution.]

At the same moment as Mr. Morton, Mr. Storey had risen from his seat, and demanded the word. There is a flutter of expectation. On this speech depended, at this moment, the fate of Home Rule and the Gladstone Government. What will it say? Mr. Storey always takes a line of his own; is a strong man with strong opinions, plenty of courage, not altogether free from the tendency of original natures, to break away from the mechanical uniformity of party discipline. Moreover, he is the chief among that sturdy little knot of Radicals below the gangway who are determined to make the Liberal coach go faster than the jog-trot of mere officialism. Will he call upon his friends to stand by the Government or to desert them—it is a most pregnant question.

It is not easy, in the midst of cyclones, to collect one's thoughts—to choose one's words—to hit straight home with short, emphatic blow. But this feat Mr. Storey accomplished. I have never heard, in my thirteen years' experience of the House of Commons, a speech more admirable in form. Not a word too much, and every sentence linked tight to the other—reasoning, cogent, unanswerable, resistless. And the point above all other things laid bare—are you Liberals going to help the Tories to postpone, if not finally overthrow Home Rule, or are you not? This, it will be seen, is but the emphasizing of the lead already given by the maladroit speech of Mr. Goschen. But Mr. Storey, clear, resonant, resolute, speaks to a House that listens with the stillness of great situations. Every word tells. The issue is understood and knit; and now let us troop into the lobbies, and proclaim to the world either our abject unfitness to govern an empire and pass a real statute, or let us stand by our great mission and mighty leader.

[Sidenote: John Burns's penetration.]

Not even yet do levity and faction surrender the final hope of doing mischief. At the door of the House, as I have already said, stands a Scotch Liberal doing the work of Tory Whips, and attempting to capture young members who have smoked their pipes or drank their tea, or wandered up and down the terrace by the peaceful Thames—all unconscious of the great and grim drama going forward upstairs. He catches hold of John Burns, among others—a sturdy son of the soil ready to receive, as might be hoped, anything which calls itself sturdy and independent Radicalism. Over honest John's manly form there is a fight; but he has a strong, clear, practical head over his muscular body, and at once penetrates to the underlying issue, and walks into Gladstone's lobby.

[Sidenote: The division.]



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At last the division is nearing its close, and the excitement—perhaps, because it is so painfully repressed—has grown until it has almost become unbearable. Whenever there is a close division like this, several things happen which never happen on other occasions. Members gather round the doors of the division lobbies, listening to the tellers as they count one, two, three, four, and so on, in the mechanical voice of the croupiers, bidding the gamblers to play with the dice of death. The Whips also are narrowly watched to see which return first to the House, for the first return means which lobby has been sooner exhausted, and the lobby sooner exhausted is necessarily the smaller lobby, and, therefore, the lobby of the minority. Mr. Marjoribanks, who has told for the Government at the door of the Tory lobby, has returned to the House first. That's a good sign. But still, if there be a majority, what is it going to be?—disastrously near defeat, or near enough to moral strength as to mean nothing? A few minutes more have to pass before this fateful question is settled. Mr. Thomas Ellis—light, brisk—walks up the floor to the clerk in front of the table. Then the numbers are whispered to Mr. Gladstone. The winning teller always takes the paper from the clerk. It is Mr. Marjoribanks who receives the paper, and the Government has won. A faint cheer, then an immediate hush; we want to know the exact numbers. Mr. Marjoribanks reads them out—a majority of thirty-one. We have won, and we who support the Ministry, cheer; but our majority has been reduced, so the Opposition burst their throats with defiant answer.

Then, with fatuous folly, the Tories insist on another division. Two Irish members, driving straight from Euston station to the House—John Dillon and Mr. Collery—have meantime been added to the Ministerial ranks. Some of the mutineers have come back, and the majority rises to forty-two.

And so ended the great intrigue of the Liberal malcontents against the Gladstone Government.

[Sidenote: Obstruction rampant.]

The word had gone forth—the Home Rule Bill was not to be allowed to pass the second reading before the Easter recess. The slings and arrows of the Tory press had at last begun to have their effect, and obstruction had now been entered upon thoroughly, fiercely, and shamelessly. The first specimen of it was on the following Thursday night, when Mr. T.W. Russell took advantage of an harangue by Mr. Justice O'Brien—those Irish judges are all shameless political partisans—to move the adjournment of the House. Mr. Morley was in excellent fighting form. T.W. Russell is a man peculiarly well calculated to draw out the belligerent spirit of any man, and the Chief Secretary, though he holds himself well under restraint, has plenty of fire and passion in his veins. He let out at T.W. Russell in splendid style, and the more the Tories yelled, the more determinedly did Mr. Morley



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strike his blows. Russell, he said, had spread broadcast phylacteries, and used his most pharisaical language. At this there were deafening shouts from the Tory benches of "Withdraw! Withdraw!" Mr. Morley's reply was to repeat the words "pharisaical language"—at which there was another storm. Then Mr. Morley quietly observed that if he were out of order, the Speaker was the proper person to call him to account; and as the Speaker made no sign, the Tories were reduced to silence. In a few sentences, Mr. Morley made mince-meat of the whole attack: showing that crime, instead of increasing, had actually diminished in Clare since he had come into office, and that Mr. Balfour and coercion had completely failed to do even as much as he had done. Mr. Balfour made a somewhat feeble reply. And finally, in spite of a strong whip, the Tories were beaten by forty-five—the normal Liberal majority.

[Sidenote: The loosing of the winds.]

But all this was but the preface to uglier and worse work which was to come later on. Supply is the happy hunting-ground of obstructives. The questions there are small, and so easily comprehended, that even the dullest man can talk about them, and it requires—as I have said above—not intellect, but temperament. For nearly four hours there was a discussion on an item of L100, which had been spent on improving the accommodation of the House of Commons. John Burns, disgusted at this palpable waste of time, four times moved the closure. Jimmy Lowther—who has come wonderfully to the front since obstruction and general rowdyism has become the order of the day with the Tories—instantly turned to John with the observation that this was not the County Council; whereupon John promptly retorted, "Nor are you on Newmarket Heath." At last, after the waste of these four mortal hours, the closure was moved, was resisted by the majority of the Tory party, but, at the same time, was so necessary and proper, that several Tories voted in its favour, and some disgusted Unionists actually left the House.

[Sidenote: A criminal combination.]

But even worse was still behind. Mr. Bowles—a new and clever Tory member—was anxious to raise the whole question of Egyptian policy on a small vote for meeting the expense of building a new consular house at Cairo. Thereupon, Mr. Mellor—as he was plainly bound to do—declared that a discussion of the entire Egyptian policy would not be in order on such a vote. Pale, excited, looking his most evil self, Mr. Chamberlain got up to base an attack on Mr. Mellor for this judgment. There was a delighted howl from the young Tory bloods who had been obstructing so shamelessly throughout the evening. Mr. Chamberlain's example was followed by Mr. Balfour, by Sir John Gorst—in short, the whole Tory and Unionist pack were in full cry after the Chairman. The inner meaning of all this, was the desire to discredit the new Chairman, and intimidate him, lest he should show a bold front



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against the shameless obstruction on which the Tories had resolved. Mr. Sexton put this point neatly. In view, he said, of the combined attempt and evident combination to intimidate and embarrass the Chair—but he could go no further: for at once there was a fierce hurricane of howls, “Withdraw! Withdraw!” and “Shame! Shame!” from the Tories and renegades, which drowned every voice. Tory after Tory got up; shouts deafening, passionate, ferocious, made everything inaudible; Mr. Chamberlain, paler even than usual, shouted with full mouth across the floor; altogether, the scene was one of almost insane excitement. Mr. Mellor—gentle, considerate, conciliatory—reasoned, explained, expostulated. What he should have done, was to have named half-a-dozen Tories, and showed the party of bullies that their day was past.

CHAPTER V.

Obstruction and its agents.

[Sidenote: The younger Tories.]

Obstruction is a thing rather of temperament than intellect. The occurrences of the early weeks of the Session of 1893 fully confirm this view. The Tory party and the Unionists vowed in their organs, and proved by their conduct in the House, that they determined to try and prevent, by obstruction, the second reading of the Home Rule Bill being taken before Easter. With this design they came down to the House every evening with a plan of attack. The consequences were somewhat serious to some members of the House. I saw young gentlemen suddenly developing activity whom I had beheld in the House for many years in succession without ever suspecting in them either the power or the desire to take any part in Parliamentary debate. The same gentlemen now rushed about with a hurried, preoccupied, and, above all, a self-conscious air that had its disgusting but also its very amusing side. For instance, Mr. Bromley-Davenport, during the six years of Tory Government, never spoke, and rarely even made his appearance in the House of Commons. His voice was as strange to the assembly as though he had never belonged to it. But this Session he is constantly getting up in his seat, and he rushes through the lobbies with the cyclonic movement of a youth bearing on juvenile shoulders a weight too heavy to bear. Mr. Bartley is about as dull a fellow as ever bored a House of Commons, and in the last Parliament even his own friends found him a trial and a nuisance. He has suddenly taken to making the House of Commons familiar with his voice at every sitting. Lord Cranborne has been remarkable for the boorishness and impertinence of his manners—or, perhaps, to be more accurate, want of manners. I have seen him interrupting Mr. Gladstone in the most impudent way with a face you would like to slap, and his hands deep down in the depths of his pockets. Lord Cranborne is now nightly in evidence, and leads the chorus of jeers and cheers by

which the more brutal of the Tory youth signalize the opening of the new style of Parliamentary warfare.



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[Sidenote: Jimmy.]

But of all the things which indicate the new state of affairs which has arisen, nothing is so significant as the change in the position of Jimmy Lowther. People think that I have attached too much importance to this extraordinary individual, and that he should be taken simply as the frank horse-jockey he looks and seems. I have given my reasons for believing that in a crisis Jimmy would develop a very different side of his character, and that he has in him—latent and disguised for the moment—all the terrible passions and possibilities of the aristocrat at bay. However, let that question rest with history and its future developments; his position at the present moment is very peculiar. There is a report that the desire of his heart is to sit on the first seat on the front bench below the gangway, which for seven years was occupied by Mr. Labouchere, and which for the five years of Mr. Gladstone's Ministry of 1880 to 1885 was occupied by Lord Randolph Churchill when he was the chief of the dead and buried Fourth Party. That seat is the natural point for a sharpshooter and guerilla warrior. Indeed, the first seat below the gangway seems just as marked out by fate for such a man as Jimmy Lowther, as one of the high fortresses on the Rhine for the work of the bold freebooter of the Middle Ages. But for some reason or other, Jimmy did not attain his heart's desire, and he is compelled to sit on the front Opposition bench. This would not seem an affliction to ordinary men. Indeed, the desire to sit on one of the front benches may be regarded as the root of all evil in Parliamentary nature—the desire to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge which is as fatal to nature born without original political sin as that disastrous episode in the annals of our first parents.

[Sidenote: A recollection of Disraeli.]

One of the most curious episodes in the career of Disraeli was that he insisted on sitting on the front Opposition bench before he had ever held office—an act of unprecedented and unjustifiable daring which throws a significant light on that habit of self-assertion to which he owed a good deal of his success in life. For what a seat on the front Opposition bench means is, that the holder thereof has once held office in an administration, and so is justified for the remainder of his days in regarding himself as above the common herd. But Jimmy isn't as ordinary men. A place on the front Opposition bench, with all its advantages, has the countervailing disadvantages of binding to a certain decency and decorum of behaviour, and nothing could be more galling to the free and full soul of the distinguished steward of the Jockey Club. It is said that in the same way his colleagues on the front Opposition bench would prefer Jimmy's room to his company. In Parliamentary politics, as in diplomacy, there is such a thing as having an agent whom you can profit by, and at the same time disavow—just as it may suit you. That



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is one of the many guileful methods of these crafty men who sit on front benches on both sides of the House. Obstruction is a thing too horrible to be practised by any man who has ever held responsible position, and it is delightful to see how Mr. Balfour repudiates the very idea of anything of the kind. It would, therefore, have suited Mr. Balfour a good deal better if Jimmy could have obstructed from some quarter of the House where his closeness of association would not so largely commit his more responsible colleagues to participation in his iniquities. However, it was not to be managed; and the leaders of the Opposition are bound to put up with the closeness of Jimmy's companionship.

[Sidenote: Mr. Lowther's intellect.]

Again I repeat, obstruction is a matter not of intellect, but temperament. Intellectually, I should put Jimmy in a very low place, even in the ranks of the stupid party. Temperamentally he stands very high. A brief description of his methods of obstruction will bring this home. First, it should be said that he is entirely inarticulate and, beyond rough common sense, destitute of ideas. He has nothing to say, and he cannot say it. There are men in the House of Commons who have plenty of thoughts, and who have plenty of words besides, and could branch out on any subject whatever into a dissertation which would command the interest even of political foes. But Jimmy is not of this class. He is capable, on the contrary, of bringing down the loftiest subject that ever moved human breasts to something stumbling, commonplace and prosaic. When he gets up, then, his speech consists rather of a series of gulps than of articulate or intelligible statements. But then mark the singular courage and audacity of the whole proceeding. There are traditions still in the House of Commons of the marvellously stimulating effect upon followers of leaders, who were proverbial for their oratorical impotence. Everybody remembers the scornful description of Castlereagh which Byron gave to the world; and yet it has been said in some memoirs that the moment Castlereagh stood up and adjusted his waistcoat, there was a thrill in the House of Commons, and his followers bellowed their exultation and delight. In a more recent day, Lord Althorpe was able to bear down the hostility of some of the most powerful orators of his time by a bluff manliness which no rhetoric could withstand. And so also with Jimmy—his sheer audacity carries him along the slow, dull, inept, muddy tide of his inarticulate speech.

[Sidenote: An irrepressible nuisance.]



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And curiously enough, it is impossible to put him down. On March 6th he was commenting on some item which he supposed was in a Post-office Estimate. It was pointed out to him that the item to which he alluded was not in that particular vote at all, but in quite another vote, which came later on. Jimmy, nevertheless, went on to discuss the item as if nothing had been said. Then the long-suffering Chairman had to be called in, and he ruled—as every human being would have been bound to rule—that Jimmy was out of order. Was Jimmy put down? Not the least in the world. He made an apology, and, as the apology was ample and his deliverance is slow, the apology enabled him to consume some more minutes of precious Government time. And then, having failed to find fault with the estimate for what it did not contain, he proceeded to assail it for what it did contain. Here again he was out of order, for the estimate was prepared exactly as every other estimate had been prepared for years. This answer was given to him. But Jimmy went on—gulping and obstructing, obstructing and gulping. It is amusing, perhaps, to you who can read this description as part of an after-dinner's amusement, but what is one to think of a Parliamentary institution that can be so flouted, and nullified by mere beef-headed dulness? This is a question to make any one pause who has faith in Parliamentary institutions.

[Sidenote: Mr. Balfour keeps away.]

During all these performances, Mr. Balfour keeps steadily away from the House. He never was a good attendant, even in his best of days, and now that he is relieved of responsibility, he naturally seeks to take advantage of it. But he doesn't take so much advantage as one would expect. He who used to be so indolent, has developed a feverish activity. He seems during some portions of every sitting to be ready to rise to his feet at the smallest provocation, and to interfere in the smallest matter of detail. It is this tendency which has hurried him into some of those ridiculous errors, which he has made so frequently. The explanation of it all, is that curious figure that sits so silent, remote, and friendless on the front Opposition bench. Lord Randolph is still the riddle which nobody can read. Whenever Mr. Balfour appears Lord Randolph does his best to efface himself, even in the places which men select on the front bench. Here is a hint of that eternal conflict and play of ferocious appetites and passions which is going on in the House of Commons. Everybody who has ever visited the House of Commons must have observed that pair of boxes which stand on the table in front of the Speaker's chair. These boxes mark to the outward world the positions of the most important men in the House of Commons—the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition. Mr. Balfour, whenever he is in the House, sits opposite his box, and so proclaims to all the world the lofty post he holds. And when this is the case, it is



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in almost the very last seat—separated by half a dozen other individuals—Lord Randolph is to be seen. To turn to another part of the House, it is the men in whom Mr. Gladstone most confides who sit on either side of him—Sir William Harcourt and Mr. John Morley. If on any day it were seen that either of these two men had left the side of their leader, and was separated from him by several others, the rumour would run like wildfire through the House of Commons that the relations of the Premier and one of his chief lieutenants were strained.

[Sidenote: Deadly foes.]

So Mr. Balfour watches Lord Randolph and Lord Randolph watches Mr. Balfour, with the deadly vigilance of two men who stand opposite each other in a wood with drawn swords in their hands. There is another gentleman, besides, whom the Tory leader has to watch, and, perhaps, more keenly. Lord Randolph Churchill is not always in his place, and his movements in these days are leisurely—I remember when they were electric in their rapidity and frequency. But Mr. Chamberlain is a distinctly ready man. Whatever gifts he has, are always at his command. He is like the shopman who puts all his goods in the window. The goods are not very fine nor very good, but they are showy and cheap, and, above all things, take the eye. Mr. Chamberlain in his day has been a poor attendant in Parliament—a friend of his used to tell him, when he was supposed to have the reversion of the Liberal leadership, that his inability to remain for hours in succession in the House of Commons would always stand in the way of his being the leader of that assembly. But he turns up now usually after dinner, and from his seat on the third bench below the gangway, on the Liberal side, watches the progress of battle. It is known to the intimates of Mr. Balfour that he has not a particularly high opinion of his partner in the work of obstructing the cause of Home Rule. Indeed, it is impossible that the two men should be really sympathetic with each other. With all his faults, Mr. Balfour does represent the literary and cultured side of political life; while Mr. Chamberlain is illiteracy embodied. Then, Mr. Chamberlain has a knack of attributing every victory to himself—modesty isn't one of his many virtues—and this cannot be particularly agreeable to the real leader of the Opposition. There is thus a constant competition between the two men as to which shall give the marching orders to the enemies of the Government.

[Sidenote: Mr. Chamberlain's slatternly inaccuracy.]

There was a singular scene on March 6th, which brought out the relations of the two in a singular manner. There appeared that day in the congenial columns of the *Times* a letter, a column in length, and set forth with all the resources of leaded and displayed type which the office could afford. In this letter Joe had lamented the disappearance of those courteous manners of an elder and more Chesterfieldian time,



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to which he suggested he belonged. The origin of this delicious lament over a venerable and more courteous past by so flagrant a type of modernity, was a statement that Sir William Harcourt had played the dirty trick of putting down a notice to suspend the twelve o'clock rule at a shorter notice than usual. The suspension of the twelve o'clock rule simply means that the Tories shall not be allowed to obstruct by the mere fact that the House is compelled automatically to close at midnight under the existing rules. Joe appeared in his place swelling with visibly virtuous indignation; evidently he had come, ready to bear down on Sir William and the Government generally with the cyclone of attack. But this notable design was prevented by two accidents. First, Sir William Harcourt got up and explained that the notice he had given was exactly the same kind of notice that was always, and had been always, given in like circumstances. Everybody who knows anything about Parliamentary matters knows that this was the literal truth. The dirty trick which Mr. Chamberlain had attributed to Sir William Harcourt existed only in his own uninstructed and treacherous memory; and so he was crushed. Still he wanted to have a word in, and more than once he showed signs of rising to his feet. But he stopped half-way, and, when he did finally get up, Mr. Balfour was before him, and he had to sit down again. Then his opportunity was lost, for Mr. Balfour had declared that he was perfectly satisfied with what Sir William Harcourt had done, and that prevented Joe from entering on the filibustering tactics which apparently he contemplated. This appeared to the whole House to be a very distinct and unpleasant snub for Joseph. A short time afterwards he and Mr. Balfour were seen in the lobby, engaged in a conversation that was apparently vehement, and everybody jumped to the conclusion that they were having it out, and that Joseph was resenting the rejection of his advice with that haughtiness of temper which is so well-known a characteristic of the Radical whom wealth has converted into a leader of the aristocracy. The papers afterwards contained an announcement that the two conspirators against Mr. Gladstone's Government were in the heartiest accord. This was one of the semi-official denials which are generally regarded as the best testimony to the truth of the report denied.

[Sidenote: Mr. Morley.]

If one were on the look-out for dramatic and instructive contrast in the House of Commons, one could not do better than study Mr. Morley and Mr. Chamberlain for a week. Mr. Chamberlain—glib, shallow, self-possessed, well-trained by years of public life—debates admirably. Nobody can deny that—not even those who, like myself, find his speaking exasperatingly empty and superficial and foolish. He is master of all his resources; scarcely ever pauses for a word, and when he is interrupted, can parry the stroke with a return blow of lightning-like rapidity. But



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when he sits down, is there any human being that feels a bit the wiser or the better for what he has said? And who can get over the idea that it has all been a bit of clever special pleading—such as one could hear in half-a-dozen courts of law any day of the week? And, finally, who is there that can help feeling throughout all the speech that this is a selfish nature—full of venom, ambition, and passion—seeing in political conflict not great principles to advance—holy causes to defend—happiness to extend—but so many enemies' faces to grind to dust?

Mr. Morley is a fine platform speaker, but as yet he is not nearly as good a debater as Mr. Chamberlain. He stumbles, hesitates, finds it hard often to get the exact word he wants. And yet who cannot listen to him for ten minutes without a sense of a great mind—and what to me is better, a fine character behind it all? This man has thought out—possibly in travail of spirit—and his creed—though it may not be the exultant cheerfulness of natures richer in muscle than in thought—is one for which he will fight and sacrifice, and not yield. In short, the thinness of Mr. Chamberlain—the depths of Mr. Morley—these are the things which one will learn from hearing them speak even once.

I have said that Mr. Morley is not as good a debater as Mr. Chamberlain; but if Mr. Chamberlain be wise, he will call his watch-dogs off Mr. Morley, for he is being badgered into an excellent debater. Every night he improves in his answers to questions. Tersely, frigidly—though there is the undercurrent of scorn and sacred passion in most of what he says—Mr. Morley meets the taunts and charges of the Russells, and the Macartneys, and the Carsons, and never yet has he been beaten in one of those hand-to-hand fights.

[Sidenote: Flagrant obstruction.]

There was a curious but instructive little scene towards the end of a sitting early in March. The Tories—headed by Jimmy Lowther—had been obstructing in the most shameless way for a whole afternoon. Towards the end of the evening Mr. Chamberlain had come down and joined in the fray—lending his authority to tactics which usually had been left to the rag-tag and bobtail of all parties. As I have already said, this kind of intervention had seriously diminished Mr. Chamberlain in the respect of the House. And the way in which he did his work was venomous as well as petty. The vote under discussion was a Supplemental Estimate for Light Railways in Ireland. Everybody knows that light railways were the policy of the late and not of the present Government. A supplemental estimate means simply a smaller sum by which the original estimate has been exceeded. It ought to have been a matter of course that this supplementary estimate should have been agreed to by the Tories, seeing that it was money necessary to carry out the programme passed by their own friends in the previous administration. But the Tories were in no humour to listen to such trifles as these, and carried on

lengthy discussions. Mr. Morley, having no responsibility for the policy which rendered such a vote necessary, was away in his room, attending to the duties of his laborious department. Mr. T.W. Russell assumed to be in a great pucker over this absence, and actually tried to stop the proceedings until Mr. Morley came back.

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[Sidenote: While a wronged nation waits.]

Mr. Morley did appear in due course, and then there was an attempt to assail him for his absence. There was also an attempt to take advantage of his presence to resume the discussion of the very topics which had already been discussed for many hours in his absence. Mr. Morley refused to fall into the trap. Speaking quietly, but with a deadly blow between every word, he declined to be a party to obstruction by answering again questions which had already been answered many times over. At this, there was a loud shout of approval from the Liberal benches—exasperated almost beyond endurance by the shameless waste of time in which the Tories, aided by Mr. Chamberlain, had indulged in for so many hours. Mr. Chamberlain professed to be greatly shocked. But the House was not in a mood to stand any more nonsense. Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Lowther, and the rest of the obstructive gang, had to submit to have the vote taken. In the meantime there stood the business of the country to be done. All its needs, its pressing grievances, its vast chorus of sighs and wails from wasted lives—rose up and called for justice; but tricksters, and self-seekers, and horse-jockeys stopped the way.

[Sidenote: Carlton Club echoes.]

There were signs of the meeting at the Carlton when the House met on Thursday evening, March 9th. The Tory benches were crowded; the young bloods were fuller than ever of that self-consciousness to which I have adverted, and there were signs of movement, excitement, and the spirit of mischief and evil in all their faces and in their general demeanour. There were nearly one hundred questions on the paper—and questions had become a most effective weapon of Obstruction. But there was a certain peculiarity about the questioning on this Thursday evening. A stranger to the House would have remarked that all the questions addressed to Mr. Gladstone were asked last. This was not an accidental arrangement. It was done in the case of every leader of the House, so as to leave him more time before coming down to the House of Commons. It was done in the case of Mr. Balfour when he was leader of the House, with the result that that very limp and leisurely gentleman never came down to his place until the House had been one or two hours at work. There was, of course, much stronger reason for that little bit of consideration in the case of Mr. Gladstone, than in that of a young man like Mr. Balfour.

[Sidenote: The epoch of brutality.]

But the Tories, in the new and brutal mood to which they have worked themselves up, have taken means for depriving Mr. Gladstone of what small benefit he got from this postponement of the questions to him till the end of question time. The puniest whipster of the Tory or the Unionist party now is satisfied with nothing less, if you please, than to have his questions addressed to and answered by Mr. Gladstone himself. One of this impudent tribe is a Scotch



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Unionist named Cochrane. The Scotch Unionist is one of the most bitter of the venomous tribe to which he belongs. Mr. Gladstone is a man of peace and unflinching courtesy, but the old lion has potentialities of Olympian wrath, and when he is stirred up a little too much his patience gives way, and he has a manner of shaking his mane and sweeping round with his tail which is dangerous to his enemies and a delight and fascination to his friends. He took up the witless and unhappy Cochrane, shook him, and dropped him sprawling and mutilated, in about as limp a condition as the late Lord Wolmer—I call him late in the sense of a person politically dead—when that distinguished nobleman was called to account for his odious calumny on the Irish members.

[Sidenote: Baiting the lion.]

At last, however, the Cochranes and the rest of the gang that had thought it fine fun to bait an old man were silenced; but even yet the ordeal of Mr. Gladstone was only beginning. I have seen many disgusting sights in my time in the House of Commons; but I never saw anything so bad as this scene. Mr. Gladstone looked—as I thought—wan and rather tired. He had been down to Brighton; and I have a profound disbelief in these short hurried trips to the seaside. But Mr. Gladstone seems to like them, and haply they do him good. He looked as if the last trip had rather tired him out. Or was it that he had had to sit for several hours the day before at a Cabinet Council? These Cabinet Councils must often be a great trial to a leader's nerves; for all Councils in every body in the world mean division of opinion, personal frictions, ugly outbursts of temper, from which even the celestial minds of political leaders are not entirely free. Anyhow Mr. Gladstone looked pale, fagged, and even a little dejected. You—simple man—who are only acquainted with human nature in its brighter and better manifestations, would rush to the conclusion that the sight of the greatest man of his time in his eighty-fourth year, thus wan, wearied, pathetic, would appeal to the imaginations or the hearts of even political opponents. Simple man, you know nothing of the ruthless cruelty which dwells in political breasts, of the savagery which lies in the depths of the horse-jockey squire or the overdressed youth—anxious to distinguish himself, if it be only by throwing mud at a stately column—you have no idea of these things.

[Sidenote: The lion lashes out.]

Time after time—again and again—in this form and in that—the Tories, young and old, experienced and senseless, rose to try and corner Mr. Gladstone. Mr. Frank Lockwood, examining a hostile witness in the divorce court, could not have been more persistent than the Lowthers, and the Cranbornes, and even Mr. Balfour. But he was equal to them all—met them man after man, question after question, and, though he had to be

on his feet a score of times in the course of a few minutes, was always ready, firm, alert. How we enjoyed the



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whole splendid display—a brilliant intellect playing with all the ease of its brightest and best powers; but, after all, what a flood of holy rage the whole thing was calculated to rouse in any but rancorous breasts. However, we had our revenge. The resurgence of Jimmy Lowther seems to be a phenomenon, as disturbing to his friends as to his foes. The ugly necessity for sharing responsibility for his vulgar and senseless excesses has come home to Mr. Balfour. There was something very like a scene this night between him and the Newmarket steward. Mr. Balfour was ready to accept the assurances which had been given to him by Mr. Gladstone—assurances which, if anything, erred on the side of conciliation—but Jimmy has entered on the frenzied campaign of obstruction to all and everything which his dull, narrow, and obstinate mind has mistaken for high policy. This led to a strange and striking scene. Mr. Balfour, speaking on some question, was interrupted by Mr. Lowther—and then, in front of the whole House—in words which everybody could hear, with gesture of his whole arm—sweeping, indignant, irritated—the gesture with which a master dismisses an importunate servant—the Tory leader rebuked the interruptions of Mr. Lowther.

[Sidenote: Jimmy flouts Mr. Balfour.]

But Mr. Lowther, in these days, is not to be put down, and doubtless he feels in his inner breast that wrong which has been done for years to his talents and his services; doubtless he remembers the silence and obscurity to which he has been condemned, while Mr. Balfour has been figuring largely before the general public, in the very situation which Jimmy held himself in days when Mr. Balfour stumbled and trembled from his place below the gangway. At all events, Jimmy has determined to revive; and in these sad days, when nothing but the sheer brutality of obstruction is required, he is not a man to be trifled with. And so he defied Mr. Balfour and insisted on a division. Mr. Balfour ostentatiously left the House, but the majority of the Tory party followed Jimmy.

[Sidenote: The pity of it.]

All this resuscitation of obstruction necessitated, on Mr. Gladstone's part, an extreme step. Before this time Mr. Gladstone was very rarely in the House after eight o'clock. About that hour, he silently stole away and left the conduct of the business of the House to Sir William Harcourt. He was thus able to get to bed at a reasonable hour, and to attend during the day to the business of the nation. But when the emergency arises, Mr. Gladstone is never able to listen to the dictates of prudence, or selfishness, or peril. He was determined to show the Tories that if they were going to play the game of obstruction, they would have to count with him more seriously than they imagine. To his friends—who doubtless were aghast at the proposition—he announced that he was going to break through those rules which had been imposed upon him by a watchful physician and by his age.



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At eleven o'clock he announced he would be in the House again, and accordingly, at eleven o'clock—quietly, unostentatiously, without the welcome of a cheer—he almost stole to his place on the Treasury Bench. Something about the figure of Mr. Gladstone compels the concentration of attention upon him at all times. He seems the soul, the inspiration, the genius of the House of Commons. He was not, as is usually the case with him in the evening, in the swallow-tail and large shirt-front of evening dress; he had the long, black, frock coat, which he usually wears on the great occasions when he has a mighty speech to deliver. Of course, Mr. Gladstone was immediately the observed of every eye; but, as I have said, there was no demonstration—the House of Commons is often silent at its most sublime moments.

[Sidenote: He pounces.]

But if there were silence, it was simply pent-up rage, fierce resolve. When, having brought the discussion down to past midnight, the Tories calmly proposed that the debate should be adjourned, the Old Man got up. He was very quiet, spoke almost in whispered lowliness; but he was unmistakable. The vote would have to be taken. An hour later—when the clock pointed to one—there was a second attempt. There was the same response in the same tone—its quietness, however, fiercely accentuated by Liberal cheers. And then, when the Tories still seemed determined to obstruct, came a division, then the closure, and at one o'clock in the morning Mr. Gladstone was able to leave the House. Thus was he compelled to waste time and strength, that Mr. Chamberlain might nightly hiss his hate, and Mr. Jimmy Lowther might gulp and obstruct, obstruct and gulp.

CHAPTER VI.

Gladstone the survival.

[Sidenote: From the past.]

What I like most about Mr. Gladstone is his antique spirituality. The modern politician is smart, alive, pert, up-to-date; knows everything about registration; hires a good agent; can run a caucus, and receive a deputation. With us, as yet, the modern politician has not wholly abandoned religious faith—as he has done among our neighbours on the Continent—and has not come to regard this solid earth of ours as the one standing-place in a universe alone worthy the consideration of intelligent men. But the English politician is so far suffused with the spirit of modernity as to prefer the newspaper to the book, to regard more closely registration records than the classics, and generally is wide awake rather than steeped in subtler and profounder forms of sagacity and knowledge. The Prime Minister is a Survival. With all his extraordinary adaptiveness,



he stands in many respects in sharpest contrast to his environment. I can never forget, as I look at him, all those years he spent in that vanished epoch which knew nothing of evolution or of science at all, and was content to regard a knowledge of the classics as the beginning

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and the end of a gentleman's education. After reading the life of Lord Aberdeen, I was brought back in spirit to all those years during which Mr. Gladstone was a member of the Tory party, and lived in an atmosphere of proud, scholarly exclusiveness—of distrust of the multitude—of ecclesiasticism in the home, in the forum, and as the foundation of all political controversy. When, therefore, Mr. Gladstone is going through a crisis, it is intensely interesting to me to watch him and to see how he carries himself amid it all; and then it is that this thought occurs to me of how differently and clearly he stands out from all his colleagues and surroundings.

[Sidenote: A reminiscence.]

Different things suggest early associations to different people. Mrs. Solness, in the "Master Builder," could think only of her dolls when she was telling the story of the fire that left her childless for ever. I have heard of a great lady who cannot see a shell without recalling the scenes of her dead youth before her. Next to the railway bridge which spans the river in my native town, there is nothing which brings back the past to me so palpably and so vividly—I might sometimes say, so poignantly—as the echoes of books. One of my clearest recollections is of a little room, looking out on a sunny and, as it appeared to me then, a beautifully-kept garden, with a small but glistening river in the distance, and the air filled, not only with the songs of birds, but all the intoxicating and inaudible music of youth's dreams and visions. All this phantasmagoria of memory is accompanied by the echo of a melodious, rich voice, rising and falling, in the to me unfamiliar but delightful accent of an educated Englishman: and the story of Ancient Greece—sometimes her poetry with the loves of her gods, the fights, the shouts of battle, the exhortations and the groans of her heroes—rises once more before me. Or, again, I hear the tale told anew of that great last immortal day in the life of Socrates, as the great Philosopher sank to rest in a glory of self-sacrificing submission, serenity, and courage—a story which moves the world to tears and admiration, and will continue so to do as long as it endures. The voice of the teacher and the friend still survives, which had this extraordinary power of giving in the very different tongue of England all the glories of the poetry and the prose of Greece; and other youths, doubtless like me, look out under the spell of its music to that same green garden in far-off Galway, by the side of Corrib's stream.

[Sidenote: Gladstone dreams.]



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Of all this I sate musing during some idle moments in the middle of March; for, as I looked at Mr. Gladstone, the whole scene was, by a curious trick of memory and association, brought back to me. Everyone who knew the great old Philosopher of Athens, will remember that he had his familiar *daemon*, and that he believed himself to have constant communication with him. If I remember rightly, there is a good deal about that *daemon* in his "Phaedo"—that wonderful story to which I have just alluded, and which lives so vividly in my memory. Sometimes I think that Mr. Gladstone has the same superstition. He has moments—especially if there be the stress of the sheer brutality of obstructive and knavish hostility—when he seems to retire into himself—to transfer himself on the wings of imagination to regions infinitely beyond the reach, as well as the ken, of the land in which the Lowthers, the Chamberlains, and the Bartleys dwell. At such moments he gives one the impression of communing with some spirit within his own breast—a familiar *daemon*, whose voice, though still and silent to all outside, shouts louder than the roar of faction or the shouts of brutish hate. Then it is that I remember what depths of religious fervour there are in this leader of a fierce democracy, and can imagine that oftentimes his communings may, perchance, be silent prayer.

[Sidenote: In contrast with Lowther.]

As I have said, there have been many such moments in those days in Parliament. Mr. Gladstone can be severe—wrathful—even cruel. It is not often that he is so, but sometimes he has, in sheer self-defence, to notice the dogs that yelp at his heels, and to lash out and maul them so as to keep off the rest. Nobody will forget how, in a few words, Mr. Gladstone mercilessly and for ever crushed that impudent young gentleman, who is titled and considered to-day largely because Mr. Gladstone was the patron of his sanctimonious father. Mr. Jesse Collings hides under a painfully extorted smile the agonies he endures on the few occasions when Mr. Gladstone deems it worth his while to scornfully refer to his apostasy. But, speaking generally, Mr. Gladstone uses his giant powers with extraordinary benignity and mercifulness, and is almost tender with even his bitterest opponents. When, therefore, Mr. Gladstone was being baited by beef-headed Lowther, he for the most part looked simply pained; and took refuge in that far-off self-absorption which enabled him to forget the odious reality in front of him. And assuredly, if you looked at the face of Gladstone, and then at the face of Lowther, and thought of the different purposes of the two men, you could not be surprised that Mr. Gladstone should desire to forget the existence of Mr. Lowther. Mr. Lowther's face, with its high cheek-bones, its heavy underhung lip, like the national bulldog in size, and in its impression of brutal, dull, heavy tenacity—its grotesque good-humour—its unrelieved coarseness—brings

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out into higher contrast and bolder relief the waxen pallor, the beautifully chiselled features, the dominant benignity and refinement of the face of Mr. Gladstone. And, then, think that the one man is fighting to maintain, and the other to put an end, and for ever, to the hateful, bloody, and, it might almost be said, bestial struggle of centuries; and you can understand the feeling of overwhelming loathing which sometimes rises in the breasts of those who see the two men pitted against each other.

[Sidenote: For Jimmy was leader.]

For this was what it had come to in the House of Commons. It was Jimmy Lowther against Mr. Gladstone. Mr. Balfour occasionally dropped in a perfunctory word; now and then even tried to raise the standard of revolt against Mr. Lowther; and, of course, had finally to accept the consequences of Mr. Lowther's acts. Joe was there too; much more active in sympathy with Jimmy than Mr. Balfour. With all his faults, there is a certain saving refinement in Mr. Balfour—it is not a refinement that has restrained him from being cruel with the hysteric violence of the effeminate, but it is a refinement that preserves him from the mere Newmarket horseplay of Jimmy Lowther, and the thin rancour of a Brummagem drummer. Joe, I say, was there, ready to back up Jimmy in his worst exploits, but, after all, Jimmy was the leader. In this mighty struggle—not merely for the reconciliation of England and Ireland, but for the existence of Parliamentary institutions—the stakes are no smaller—the gentlemen of England were represented by Mr. Lowther, and the rude democracy by Mr. Gladstone. Democrats need not feel much ashamed of the contrast.

[Sidenote: The apotheosis of Jimmy.]

But there Jimmy Lowther was, gulping and obstructing, obstructing and gulping. The deadly and almost animal dulness of the performance I must insist on again and again. Mr. Lowther does not speak—he is as inarticulate as one of the prize bulls which, I doubt not, he delights to view at Islington what time the Agricultural Hall opens its portals to fat men and fat beasts. He cannot stand on his legs for five minutes together without saying half-a-dozen times, "I repeat what I have already said;" he has no ideas, no language, nothing except sheer bull-headed power of standing on his legs, and occupying a certain amount of time. Everybody knows that Lowtherism reached its climax on Saturday, March 11th. On that day, men, who had held high office, were not ashamed to resort to so mean and palpable an obstructive expedient as to put on paper twenty-two questions to their successors in office. The previous Friday had been bad enough. That was the day which tried Mr. Gladstone more, perhaps, than any day for many a year; and, indeed, it tried others as much as he, though not everybody bore it with the same iron and inflexible courage. There were large absences—some of the Irish away at conventions in Ireland, others

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without that legitimate excuse; there were Liberal absentees as well. Obstruction, meantime, stalked triumphantly; and when the divisions came, our strength sank down to almost invisible figures. Ah! it was saddening to look at Mr. Gladstone's face throughout that long morning sitting of Friday, March 10th. There are some days that live in one's memory, not so much as days as nights—with the ghastly spectres of darkness—nightmares—hauntings of a hideous past—anticipations of a joyless future. Such that Friday remains in my memory—with Mr. Gladstone's face standing out from the surrounding figures—pale, remote, pained.

[Sidenote: The G.O.M. as a lecturer.]

The announcement of the following Monday came only as a surprise to those who had not been fully behind the scenes. There were few, who knew the impression that the Friday had made, who did not feel sure that the game of pushing the Home Rule Bill on before Easy Easter was up, and that Mr. Gladstone had been beaten by the sheer brutality of Obstruction. But still hope springs eternal in the Irish breast, and there was still the lingering feeling that Mr. Gladstone would make a further and more desperate effort to break down one of the most shameless crusades of Obstruction on which a great party had ever entered. Indeed, Mr. Gladstone himself was responsible for a rise in the temperature of his own party on the very evening of that fateful and fatal Friday morning, when obstruction and the abandonment of their own friends had so nearly driven the Government out of office. I could scarcely believe my eyes when at nine o'clock on that day I came down to the almost empty House—in these evening sittings the House always looks about as cheerful as a theatre at mid-day—and saw Mr. Gladstone on the Treasury Bench, almost radiant, and evidently full of speech, go, and spirit. There wasn't really the smallest necessity for his presence. Nothing stood on the paper save one of those harmless, futile motions which are discussed with about as much interest by the House generally, as "abstract love"—to use a bold figure of Labby in a recent debate. It was a motion which complained that private members did not get sufficient time. Considering that private members had used their privileges for some two weeks previously to destroy the very foundation of all representative Government—namely, that the majority shall prevail—the complaint seemed a little audacious. Anyhow, a debate upon it could lead nowhere. But the moment the resolution was proposed, up stood the Grand Old Man, and delivered a bright, sparkling little academical address, for all the world like the lecture of a very *spirituel* French professor to a parcel of boys from the Quartier Latin. For the moment you could actually imagine that the Old Man had forgotten that there were such things in the world as Home Rule, Obstruction, Newmarket Lowther, and Brummagem Joe. And all the time here were we, who could be his sons, grinding our hearts in despair—in futile anger—in melancholy retrospect.



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[Sidenote: An hour of gloom.]

With the Monday, however, came a biting frost. The news that Mr. Gladstone had been struck down from the fray, was sufficient to prepare anybody for the final announcement. With him leading the Liberal hosts, one could feel that obstruction could finally be beaten, however obstinate might be its resistance—for he has the faith that moves mountains. Then came the announcement that the second reading of the Home Rule Bill had been postponed till after Easter. The Tories and the Unionists were apparently taken by surprise; so much so that they did not seem to have the power of yelling forth their delight at the triumph of their policy with that full chorus which one would have expected. Altogether, the announcement came upon the House, and passed the House, with a quickness and a greater quietness than one might have expected. The consequences were too serious to be grasped immediately; and men were almost anxious to get to the lobbies for the purpose of discussing it in all its bearings.

The rest of the week was but a poor falling-off after the heroic and tragic fever of its opening, and of the week which preceded it. One could see that in the Liberal ranks there had succeeded to the fierce fighting spirit of the previous days a certain lassitude and disappointment. What their faces told in the House their lips more freely uttered in the lobbies. For a time, indeed, there was a feeling of almost unreasoning despair, and that full, frank, unsparring criticism to which every Government is subject from its friends when the winds blow and the waves are high. It was said that the Government had committed the mistake of making too many targets at once; that they had first infuriated the Church by the Welsh Suspensory Bill; that they had followed this up by infuriating the publicans and the brewers by the Veto Bill; that, meantime, there was very little chance of their being able to obtain the compensatory advantage of getting these Bills passed into law. There were grumbings about the Registration Bill; in short, nothing and nobody were spared in this hour of gloom and disaster.

[Sidenote: "Herr Schloss."]

But the House of Commons—as I have often remarked—is like a barometer in the promptitude of its reflection of every momentary phase, and all these things are duly discounted by old Parliamentary hands accustomed to panics when a check comes to what has been a most successful campaign on the whole. And in the meantime, if there had been any tendency to disintegration, it was soon restored by the conduct of the Tories. For, the old game of obstruction and vituperation went on just as strongly as if no concession had been made, and no victory gained. The Monday night had been reserved for a debate on the Evicted Tenants' Commission. And Mr. T.W. Russell, brimful of notes and venom, sate in his place, as impatient to rise as the captive and exuberant balloon which only strong ropes and



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the knotted arms of men hold tight to mother earth. Jimmy, however, has a passion for his ignoble calling; he sings at his work like the gravedigger in "Hamlet." And before the inflated Russell was able to explode, Jimmy had an hour or so to himself in the discussion of Mr. Mundella's efforts to deal with labour. It was on this occasion that Jimmy spread something like dismay in the bench on which he sate. Mr. Schloss, who had been appointed as a correspondent by Mr. Mundella, has a name which shows a German origin. Jimmy insisted on speaking of him accordingly as "Herr Schloss." And there, not a yard from Jimmy, sate the Baron de Worms, one of the most portentous and pretentious of English patriots, who bears not only a German name, but a German title. I don't know whether "Herr" Goschen was in the House at the same time; if so, his feelings must have been very poignant. Mr. Mundella doesn't know how to treat these Obstructives. The main thing is not to take them seriously. Jimmy, to tell the truth, makes no pretence of taking himself seriously, and grins through a horse-collar most of the time he is speaking. But the poor President of the Board of Trade is conscious of doing everything man can do to help to the solution of the vexed questions of the time. He cannot avoid allowing himself to be worked up into a frenzy by imputations which he ought to know are simply intended for the purpose of getting him out of temper, and so prolonging debate.

[Sidenote: Sir John Gorst.]

Sir John Gorst is one of the men who have again been brought much into evidence by the turn events have taken. I remember the time when he first made a Parliamentary figure. It was in the days when Lord Randolph Churchill started out on his great and meteoric career, at the beginning of the Parliament of '80. Sir John Gorst was, in many respects, the cleverest of the brilliant little group—at least, at the work which they were then doing. He is cold-blooded, quick, and dexterous, and, above all things, he has supreme pessimism and cynicism. To him, all political warfare is a somewhat squalid struggle, in which everybody is dishonest, and everybody playing for his own hand. It is an advantage in some respects to take that view; it saves a man from anything like unduly passionate convictions—enables him to keep cool even in trying circumstances. I have seen Sir John as cold as ice in the very height and ecstasy of the most passionate moments in the fierce Parliament of 1880 to 1885, and a man who remains so cool is sure to be able to strike his blows deliberately and home. My poor friend, Mr. Mundella, sometimes forgets this. When Sir John Gorst accused him of slighting somebody—I don't know who; and, really, it doesn't matter, for Sir John Gorst knew very well that the charge was entirely unfounded—when, I say, Sir John did this, up jumped honest Mr. Mundella to indignantly deny that he had ever done anything of the kind. Of course, he hadn't, and Sir John Gorst knew that as well as Mr. Mundella. But then, ten minutes were wasted in the encounter; and even ten minutes are not despised by Jimmy and his compeers.



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[Sidenote: T.W. Russell.]

At last, this was got over, and the time came for T.W. Russell. There are few men in the House of Commons who excite such violent dislike on Liberal and Irish Benches as this pre-eminently disagreeable personality. The dislike is well founded. It is not because Mr. Russell is rancorous, or has strong opinions; it is because nobody has any faith in his sincerity. For many years of his life he was a paid teetotal lecturer. Teetotalism is a counsel of perfection, and teetotallers are estimable men, but the paid platform advocate of teetotalism is never a very attractive personality. This tendency to shout, and thump the table, and work up the agony—this eternal pitching of the voice to the scream that will terrify the groundlings, appal the sinner, and bring down the house—all these things produce a style of oratory which is about as disagreeable as anything in the shape of oratory can be. Above all things, it is difficult to take the itinerant lecturer seriously, with his smoking meal at home as a reward for his philanthropic efforts. The whole thing produces on the mind the impression of a clap-trap performance, with no heart or soul underneath all its ravings, bellowings, and dervish-like contortions.

Mr. Russell has ceased to be a teetotal lecturer, and has become a stump orator for the Unionist party, but the scent of the teetotal platform hangs round him still. He yells, bellows, and twists himself about, puts all his statements with ridiculous exaggeration—altogether, so overdoes the part that it is only the wildest and emptiest Tory who is taken in by him. What spoils the whole thing to my mind is that it is all so evidently artificial—so palpably pumped up. Clapping his hand on his breast, lifting his shaky fingers to Heaven, Mr. Russell is always in a frenzied protestation of honesty, of rugged and unassailable virtue, of bitter vaticination against the wickedness of the rest of mankind. No man could be as honest as he professes to be, and live. The whole thing would be exquisite acting if, underneath all this conscious exaggeration, you did not see the mere political bravo. You turn sometimes, and sicken as though you were at the country fair, and saw the poor raucous-throated charlatan eating fire or swallowing swords to the hideous accompaniments of the big drum and the deafening cymbal.

[Sidenote: Mr. Carson.]

No—Mr. T.W. Russell is the mere play-actor. If you want one of the real actualities in the more sinister side of Irish life, look at and study Mr. Carson. It is he who winds up the debate on the commission of Mr. Justice Mathew—a debate made memorable by the ablest debating speech Mr. Morley has made in the whole course of his Parliamentary career. I see men talking to Mr. Carson that belong to an opposite side of politics. I confess that I never see him pass without an internal shudder. Just as the sight of an abbe gave M. Homais, in “Madame



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Bovary,” an unpleasant whiff of the winding-sheet, there is something in the whole appearance of Mr. Carson that conveys to me the dank smell of the prison, and the suffocating sense of the scaffold. Do you remember that strange, terrible day in the “Derniere Incarnation de Vautrin,” in which Balzac describes Vautrin’s passage through the ranks of the gaol-birds and gaol officials among whom he had passed so much of his life? Above all, do you recall that final, and supreme, and awful touch in which, addressing consciously the handler of the guillotine, he professes to take him for the chaplain, and, bringing the poor executioner for once to confusion, is addressed with blushing face and trembling lips with the observation, “Non, Monsieur, j’ai d’autres fonctions”?

[Sidenote: Green Street Court-House.]

Mr. Carson, doubtless, has “autres fonctions” than that of Jack Ketch—who has always been so efficient and constant an instrument of Government in Ireland—but I am never able to regard one part of the official machinery by which wronged nations are held down as very different from the other. Above all, I am unable to make much distinction between the final agent in the gaol and those other actors who play with loaded dice the bloody game in the criminal court with the partisan judge and the packed jury. Doubtless, happy reader, you have never been in a place called Green Street Court-House, in Dublin. If you ever go to the Irish capital, pay that spot a visit. It will compensate you—especially if you can get some *cicerone* who will tell you some of the associations that cling around the spot. It is in a back street—narrow, squalid, filthy—surrounded by all those signs of crumbling decay which speak more loudly to the visitor to Dublin of the decay and destruction of a nation than fieriest orator or solidest history. And in no part of Dublin have Death’s effacing fingers worked with such destructiveness as in all the streets that surround the Green Street Court-House. Palatial mansions are windowless, grimy, hideous—with all the ghastly surroundings of tenement homes of the very poor.

It is in Green Street Court-House that the political offenders in Ireland are tried. Within its narrow and grimy walls I saw many a gallant Irishman, when I was a young reporter, pass through a foregone and prearranged trial to torture, agony, madness, premature death. I can only think of it as of a shambles, or, perhaps, to put it more strongly, but more accurately, as I think of that wooden framework in which I saw the murderer, Henry Wainwright, hanged by the neck one foggy morning years ago, a gallows. The jury was packed, and the judges on the bench were as much a part of the machinery of prosecution as the Counsel for the Crown. The whole thing was a ghastly farce—as ghastly as the private enquiries that intervene between the Russian rebel and the hunger, and solitude, and death of the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, or the march to Siberia.



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[Sidenote: The lawyer and the hangman.]

In all such squalid tragedies, men of the Carson type are a necessary portion of the machinery, as necessary as the informer that betrays—as the warder who locks the door—as the hangman who coils the rope. Mark you, all the forms—all the precautions—all the outward seeming of English law and liberty—are in these Irish courts. The outside is just the same as in any court that meets in the Old Bailey; but it is all the mask and the drapery, behind which the real figures are the foregone verdict, the partisan judge—the prepared cell or constructed gallows. In the regime of coercion which has just expired, the whole machinery was in motion. The last sentence of the law was not resorted to in political offence, for the days of rebellion in the open field had passed. But there were the Resident Magistrates ready to do their master Balfour's bidding, and to send men to imprisonment, in some cases followed by bread-and-water discipline—by stripping of clothes and other atrocities, which made the court of the Resident Magistrate the antechamber to the cell, and the cell the antechamber to the tomb. In all these ghastly and tragic dramas, enacted all over Ireland, Mr. Carson was the chief figure—self-confident, braggart, deliberate—winding the rope around his victim's neck with all the assured certainty of the British Empire, Mr. Balfour and the Resident Magistrates behind him.

[Sidenote: Mr. Carson's exterior.]

Nature has stamped on Mr. Carson's exterior the full proclamation of his character and career. There is something about his appearance and manner that somehow or other seems to belong rather to the last than the present century. He is a very up-to-date gentleman in every sense of the word—clothes included. But the long, lantern, black-coloured jaws, the protruding mouth, the cavernous eyes, the high forehead with the hair combed straight back—all seem to suggest that he ought to be wearing the wig, the queue, and the sword of the eighteenth century. He looks as though he had come from consultation, not with Mr. Balfour, but Lord Castlereagh, and as if the work he were engaged in was the sending of the Brothers Sheares to Tyburn, not William O'Brien to Tullamore, and as though he had stopped up o' nights to go over again the list of the Irishmen that could be bought or bullied, or cajoled into the betrayal of Ireland's Parliament.

Look at him as he stands at the box. You can see that he has been bred into almost impudent self-confidence, by those coercion tribunals, in which the best men of Ireland lay at the mercy of a creature like Mr. Balfour and the meaner creatures who were ready to do Mr. Balfour's work. Mr. Carson, not a year in the House, places his hands on the box, then on his hips, with all the airs of a man who had been in Parliament for a lifetime—attacks Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Morley, Mr. Justice Mathew—three of the highest-minded and ablest men of their time—as though he were at Petty Sessions, with Mr. Cecil Roche dispensing justice. It is an odious sight. It makes even Englishmen shudder. But it has its uses. It throws on to the floor of the House of Commons with all the

illumination of those great times, the abysses and passions and sinister figures in Ireland's moving tragedy.



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CHAPTER VII.

A FORTNIGHT OF QUIET WORK.

[Sidenote: Dulness.]

The House did very good work during the last fortnight in March. This has a corollary more satisfactory to the public than to the journalist; for, whenever business is progressing, it invariably means that the proceedings have been extremely dull. It is a well-known phenomenon of the House of Commons, that the moment there is a chance of anything like a personal scene—though the encounter be of the smallest possible moment and affect nothing beyond two personalities of no particular importance—it is well known that whenever such scene is promised, the benches of the House of Commons prove too small for the huge crowds that rush to them from all parts. Mr. Fowler introduced one of the most revolutionary measures ever brought into the House of Commons—revolutionary I mean, of course, in the good sense—and yet he delivered his new gospel of emancipation to a House that at no period was in the least crowded, and that was never excited. Happy is the country that has no annals, fruitful is the Parliament that has no scenes.

[Sidenote: Uganda again.]

But there were signs of something like storm at certain portions of the sitting on March 20th, for there stood on the paper the Estimate which raised the difficult question of Uganda, and on that question, as everybody knows, there is a yawning gulf between the opinions of Mr. Labouchere and a number of Radicals below the gangway, and the occupants of the Treasury Bench. Of Mr. Labouchere the saying may be used, which is often employed with regard to weak men—Mr. Labouchere is far from a weak man—he is his own worst enemy. His delight in persiflage, his keen wit—his love of the pose of the bloodless and cynical Boulevardier—have served to conceal from Parliament, and sometimes, perhaps, even from himself, the sincerity of his convictions, and the masculine strength and firmness of his will. Somehow or other, he is least effective when he is most serious. His speech on Uganda, for instance, was admirably put together, and chock full of facts, sound in argument, and in its seriousness quite equal to the magnitude of the issues which it raised. But no man is allowed to play “out of his part”—as the German phrase goes. Labby has accustomed the House to expect amusement from him, and it will not be satisfied unless he gives it. When, therefore, he does make a serious speech, the House insists on considering it dull, and rarely lends to him its attentive and serious ear.

[Sidenote: Which is the buffoon?]



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Great and yet fatal is the power of oratory. In the course of this same night's debate, Mr. Chamberlain also made a speech. During portions of it he delighted the House, and it was extremely effective as a party speech. In the course of his observations, Mr. Chamberlain, alluding to some jokelet of Labby, declared that a great question like Uganda should not be treated in a spirit of "buffoonery." That observation was rude, and scarcely Parliamentary. But that is not the point—nobody expects gentlemanly feeling or speech from Mr. Chamberlain. The point is that the observation could have been applied with much more truth to the speech of Mr. Chamberlain than to that of Labby; for Mr. Chamberlain's speech consisted, for the most part, of nothing better than the merest party hits—the kind of thing that almost anybody could say—that hundreds of journalists nightly write in their party effusions, and for very modest salaries. But the heart and soul of the question of Uganda were not even touched by Mr. Chamberlain. Labby may have been right or wrong; but Labby's was a serious speech with a serious purpose. Mr. Chamberlain's speech was just a smart bit of party debating. The buffoonery—in the sense of shallowness and emptiness—was really in the speech that everybody took to be grave. The seriousness was in the speech which, amid the delighted applause of the Tories, Mr. Chamberlain denounced as buffoonery.

[Sidenote: The grip of Labby.]

In some respects Mr. Labouchere reminds me of the late Mr. Biggar. Underneath all his exterior of carelessness, callousness, and flippancy, there lies a very strong, a very tenacious, and a very clear-sighted man. There are times—especially when the small hours of the morning are breaking, and Labby is in his most genial mood—when he is ready to declare that, after all, he is only a Conservative in disguise, and that his Radicalism is merely put on for the purpose of amusing and catching the groundlings. As a matter of fact, Labby is by instinct one of the most thorough Radicals that ever breathed. His Radicalism, it is true, is of the antique pattern. He is an individualist without compromise or concession. Life to him is to the strongest; he has no faith save in the gospel of the survival of the fittest. Equable and even cheery, he does not take a particularly joyous view of human existence. I have heard him speak of the emptiness and futilities of human existence in tones, not of gloom, for he is too much of a philosopher to indulge in regrets, but with a hearty sincerity that would do credit to the Trappist monk who found everything vanity of vanities in a sinful world. Despising honours and dignities, he positively loathes outward show; he is a Radical by instinct and nature. Though one of the wealthiest men in the House of Commons, nobody has ever known him guilty of one act of ostentation. Probably he loves power. I have not the smallest doubt that he would enjoy very well being a Cabinet Minister. But for social distinction, for the frippery and display of life, he has a positive dislike. He is like Mr. Biggar also in tenacity.



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[Sidenote: And the grit.]

It must have been a disappointment to him—it was certainly a disappointment to his many friends—that he was not a member of the Ministry which he did so much to bring into existence. But the very day the House met after the formation of the Government, Labby was in his old place on the front bench below the gangway as if nothing had occurred—just as ready as ever to take his share in the proceedings of the House of Commons. And every succeeding evening saw him in his place—listening with commendable piety to the exhortations of Holy Writ—given forth in the fine resonant voice of Archdeacon Farrar—ready to seize a point—to take advantage of a situation, eagerly interested in everything that is going on. Some people may regard this as a very common gift. It is nothing of the kind. I know no place in the world which is a severer test of a man's tenacity of purpose, than the House of Commons. I suppose it is because we see the men more publicly there than elsewhere; but I know no place where there are so many ups and downs of human destiny as in the House of Commons—no place, at all events, where one is so struck with the changes, and transformations of human destinies. The man who, in one or two Sessions, is on his legs every moment—who takes a prominent part in every debate—who has become one of the notabilities of the House—in a year or two's time has sunk to a silent dweller apart from all the eagerness and fever of debate, sinks into melancholy and listlessness, and is almost dead before he has given up his Parliamentary life. Staying power is the rarest of all Parliamentary powers; Labby has plenty of staying power.

[Sidenote: Sir Charles Dilke.]

Another figure which the new House of Commons is gradually beginning to understand is Sir Charles Dilke. He is one of the men who seem to have no interest in life outside politics. When one thinks that he has wealth, an immense number of subjects in which he can find instruction and occupation, that he is familiar with the languages, literature, and life of several countries, it is hard to understand how he could have had the endurance to go through the hurricane of abuse and persecution which he has had to encounter in the last seven years. There are traces in his face of the intense mental suffering through which he has passed; there are more lines about the eyes than should be in the case of a man who is just fifty. But, otherwise, he positively looks younger than he did when he was a Cabinet Minister. There is colour where there used to be nothing but deadly pallor—freshness where the long and terrible drudgery of official life had left a permanent look of fag and weariness. Sir Charles Dilke has taken up the broken thread of his life just as if nothing had occurred in that long period of exile and suffering. He is never out of his place: attends every sitting as conscientiously as if he were in office and responsible for everything that



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is going on; and has his eye on subjects as wide apart as the parish councils and Newfoundland, army reform and the occupation of Uganda. It is curious to see, too, how he is regaining that ascendancy over the House of Commons which he exercised formerly. It is an ascendancy not due in the least to oratorical power. Sir Charles Dilke never made a fine sentence or a sonorous peroration in his whole life. It is that power of acquiring all the facts of the case—of being thoroughly up in all its merits—in short, of knowing his business—which impresses the House of Commons, which, after all, though it may cheer the gibes of a smart and pert debater like Mr. Chamberlain, is most happy when it hears a man talking of something which he understands thoroughly.

[Sidenote: Joe as a Jingo.]

Mr. Chamberlain spoke, as I have said, in the debate. It was a very characteristic speech. I know people think I am prejudiced about this gentleman. Not in the least. I recognize that he has many splendid qualities for political life. They are not qualities which I think highest either in the oratorical or the intellectual sense. He also has staying power, and has gone through seven terrible years. There is the trace of all the bitterness of that struggle in his face—which has lost in these years the almost boyish freshness of expression and outline, which bears in every deep line a mark of the ferocity of the passions by which his breast has been torn. He is one of the many men in the House of Commons that give one the impression of being hunted by the worst and most pitiless of all furies—violent personal passion—especially for power, for triumph, for revenge. But still, there he is—ready as ever to take part in the struggle—still holding the position he held seven years ago—with no sign of weakening or repentance, though there be plenty of the hunger of baulked revenge.

[Sidenote: The tragedy of politics.]

What a pity it is we can't see some of those great political figures in the nudity of their souls. They must have many a bitter moment—many an hour of dark and hopeless depression—probably far more than other men; for them emphatically life is a conflict and a struggle. And the conflict and the struggle often kill them long before their time. Was there ever anything much more tragic than the cry of M. Ferry for "le grand Repos," as he lay stifling from the weakening heart which the bullet of a political enemy and the slings and arrows of years of calumny and persecution had at last broken? To any man with ordinary sensitiveness of nerves, a political career is a crucifixion—many times repeated. But Mr. Chamberlain, probably, has not the ordinary sensitiveness of nerves. Combative, masterful, with narrow and concentrated purpose, he pursues the game of politics—not without affliction, but with persistent tenacity and a courage that have rarely shown any signs of faltering or failing.



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All these things must be granted to Mr. Chamberlain; but when I come to speak of him intellectually, I cannot see anything in him but a very perky, smart, glib-tongued “drummer,” who is able to pick up the crumbs of knowledge with extraordinary rapidity, and give them forth again with considerable dexterity. His speech on Uganda, so far as its thought and its phraseology were concerned, was on the level of the profound utterances with which Sir Ashmead Bartlett tickles and infuriates the groundlings of provincial audiences. But it took the House—at least, it took the Tories; and, after all, what party orators who have not the responsibilities of office have to do, is to get cheers and embarrass the Government.

[Sidenote: Another hymn to the G.O.M.]

The reader must not be either exasperated or bored if he finds continuous mention of the G.O.M. in these pages, for he is, to a great extent, the House of Commons. I remember hearing Mrs. Gladstone once use of her distinguished husband a phrase which gave tersely and simply a complete idea of a side of his character. It was just before his historic visit to Birmingham, and there was anxiety as to the vast size of the great Bingley Hall in which it had been decided he was to speak. “He has such heart,” said Mrs. Gladstone of her husband—meaning that whatever was the size of the hall, he would do his best, at whatever cost, to fill it with his voice. It is this mighty heart of his which carries him through everything, and which largely accounts for the hold he has over the imaginations and hearts of the masses. Well, one can see proof of this in his conduct whenever he is leader of a Government. Other Prime Ministers and leaders of the House are only too willing to leave as much of the work as possible to their subordinates. Disraeli used to lie in Oriental calm during the greater part of every sitting, leaving all his lieutenants to do the drudgery while he dosed and posed. Not so Gladstone. He is almost literally always on his legs. The biggest bore—the rudest neophyte—the most gulping obstructive is certain of an answer from him—courteous, considerate, and ample. No debate, however small, is too petty for his notice and intervention; in short, he tries to do not only his own work, but everybody else’s.

[Sidenote: His justification.]

I have once or twice gently suggested that I thought the G.O.M. might leave a little more to his subordinates, and spare that frame and mind which bears the Atlantean burden of the Home Rule struggle. But Mr. Gladstone is able to unexpectedly justify himself when his friends are crying out in remonstrance; and it is, too, one of the peculiarities of this extraordinary portent of a man—extraordinary physically as much as mentally—that the more he works, the fresher and happier he seems to be. If you see him peculiarly light-hearted; if he be gesticulating with broad and generous sweep on the Treasury Bench;



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if he be whispering to Sir William Harcourt, and then talking almost aloud to Mr. John Morley—above all, if he be ready to meet all comers, you may be quite sure that he has just delivered a couple of rattling and lengthy speeches, in which, with his deadly skill and perfect temper, he has devastated the whole army of false arguments with which his opponents have invaded him. So, for instance, it was on March 28th. It was noticed that he was not in the House for some hours during the discussion of the Vote on Account. But, as evening approached, there he was in his place—fresh, smiling, happy, every limb moving with all the alertness of auroral youth. In the interval between his first appearance in the House and then later, he had delivered two lengthy speeches to two deputations of deadly foes; but he came down after this exertion just as if he had been playing a game of cricket, and had taken enough physical exercise to bring blitheness to his spirits and alacrity to his limbs.

[Sidenote: His unending progress.]

And then the best of it all is that Mr. Gladstone justifies his speech-making by improving every hour. It would scarcely seem credible that a man with more than half-a-century of speech-making and triumphs behind him would have been capable of making any change, and especially of making a change for the better. But the peculiarity of Mr. Gladstone is that even as a speaker he grows and improves every day. I have been watching him closely now for some sixteen years in the House of Commons, and I thought that it was impossible for him to ever reach again the triumphs of some of his utterances. I have heard people say, too, that they felt it pathetic to hear him deliver his speech on the introduction of the Home Rule Bill, and to remember the vigour with which his utterances on that occasion stood in such a contrast. This was superficial and false criticism. It is quite true that the old resonance of the voice is not there, and it is true that now and then he shows signs of physical fatigue, and that recently after his cold there were some days when his voice was little better than a very distinct, but also a very pathetic, whisper. But there is another side. Age has mellowed his style, so that now he can speak on even the most contentious subject with a gentleness and a freedom from anything like venom—with an elevation of tone—that make it almost impossible for even his bitterest opponent to listen to him without delight and, for the moment at least, with a certain degree of assent. If anybody really wishes to find out what constitutes the highest and most effective form of House of Commons' eloquence, he should spend his days in listening to Mr. Gladstone in the most recent style he has adopted in the House of Commons. And the lessons to be derived are that House of Commons' eloquence should be easy, genial in temper, reserved in force—in short, that it should put things with the agreeable candour, and passionlessness want of exaggeration which characterise well-bred conversation.



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[Sidenote: To the slaughter.]

A foredoomed sheep could not have been brought more unwillingly to the slaughter than was Mr. Balfour to the debate on the Vote of Censure. He had nothing new to say, and unfortunately he felt that as keenly as anybody else. Every single topic with which he had to deal had been discussed already, until people were positively sick of them—in short, poor Mr. Balfour was in the position of having to serve up to the House a dish that had been boiled and grilled and stewed, and yet stewed again, until the gorge rose at it in revolt and disgust. The late Chief Secretary has the susceptibility of all nervous temperaments. The men are indeed few who have equal power with all kinds of audiences—with an audience that is friendly and that is hostile. Still more rare is it to find a man who can face an audience even worse than a downright hostile one, and that is an audience which is indifferent, There are very few men I have known in my Parliamentary experience who could do it.

[Sidenote: A memory of Parnell.]

Mr. Parnell was one. I have seen him speak quite comfortably to an audience which consisted of himself, Mr. Biggar, the Minister in attendance, and the Speaker of the House—in all, four, including himself. Indeed, he often said to me that he rather liked to have such an audience. Speaking was not easy or agreeable to him, and his sole purpose for many years in speaking at all was to consume so much time. Parnell was a man who always found it rather hard to concentrate his mind on any subject unless he was alone and in silence. This was perhaps one of the many reasons why he kept out of the House of Commons as much as he could. Anything like noise or disturbance around him seemed to destroy his power of thinking. For instance, when he was being cross-examined by Sir Richard Webster in the course of the Forgeries Commission, his friends trembled one day because, looking at his face, with its puzzled, far-away look, they knew that he was in one of those moods of abstraction, during which he was scarcely accountable for what he said. And sure enough he made on that day the appalling statement that he had used certain language for the purpose of deceiving the House of Commons. He said to me that he liked to speak in an empty House because then he had time to collect his thoughts. Joe Biggar, his associate, was also able to speak in any circumstances with exactly the same ease of spirit. To him, speaking was but a means to an end, and whether people listened to him or not—stopped to hang on his words or fled before his grating voice and Ulster accent—it was all one to him. Two other men have the power of speaking always with the same interest and self-possession. These are Sir Charles Dilke and Mr. O'Connor Power.

[Sidenote: The Sensitiveness of Mr. Balfour.]



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But Mr. Balfour is like none of these men. He requires the glow of a good audience—of a cheering party—of the certainty of success in the division lobby—to bring out his best powers. The splendid, rattling, self-confident debater of the coercion period now no longer exists, and Mr. Balfour has positively gone back to the clumsiness, stammering, and ineffectiveness of the pre-historic period of his life before he had taken up the Chief Secretaryship. That was bad enough; but what is worse is that the House is beginning to feel it. If you lose confidence in yourself, the world is certain to pretty soon follow your example. And so it is now with Mr. Balfour, for when he stood up to speak on March 27th there was the sight—which must have made his soul sink to even profounder depths of depression—of members leaving the House in troops and rushing to the lobby, the library, or the smoke-room, rather than listen to a debater whose rise a few months ago would have meant a general and excited incursion of everybody that could hear. Starting thus, Mr. Balfour made the worst of a bad case, his speech was a failure, and as the American would put it, a fizzle; in short, a ghastly business.

[Sidenote: The G.O.M.'s outburst.]

It was in the midst of this debate that Mr. Gladstone made his magnificent and unexpected outburst. He had been paying attention to the debate—but very quietly, and not at all in a way that suggested an idea of intervening in it. It was, too, about nine o'clock when Mr. Gladstone stood up, and anybody acquainted with the House of Commons knows that nine o'clock is in the very crisis of that dinner hour which nightly makes the House of Commons a waste and a wilderness. Nor, indeed, was there much in the opening sentences that seemed to indicate the fact—the great fact—that the House of Commons was about to listen to one of the most extraordinary manifestations of eloquence it has ever heard during its centuries of existence. For the Old Man was in his most benignant mood. He spoke of his opponents and their case in sorrow rather than in anger. Evidently, the House was about to listen to one of those delightful little addresses—half paternal, half pedagogic—to which it has become accustomed in recent years, since Mr. Gladstone threw off the fierce, warring spirit of earlier days, and became the honey-tongued Nestor of the assembly. But, as time went on, the House began to perceive that the Old Man was in splendid fighting trim, and seized with one of those moments of positive inspiration, in which he carries away an assembly as though it were floated into Dreamland on the waves of a mighty magician's magic power. Smash after smash came upon the Tory case—as though you could see the whole edifice crumbling before your eyes, as though it were an earthquake slitting the rocks and shaking the solid earth. And, all the time, no loss whatever of the massive calm, the imperturbable good-humour, the deadly politeness which the commercial gentlemen from Ulster have also found can kill more effectively than the shout of rhetoric, or the jargon of faction, or the raucous throat of bigotry.



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[Sidenote: In the Emphyrean.]

At last the Old Man had come to a contrast between the action of the Tory Government of 1885 and the Liberal with regard to the treatment of prisoners in Ireland. The history of that period is one upon which Mr. Gladstone is now able to speak without feeling; but he dragged out from that period and its hidden recesses the whole story of the negotiations between Parnell and Lord Carnarvon, and all the other circumstances that make that one of the most remarkable epochs in the history of English parties. He was now sweeping all before him. This Lord Randolph felt, and it was almost timorously he rose to make an interruption. The Old Man courteously gave way; but it was only to jump up again and pour on his young opponent a tide of ridicule and answer which overwhelmed him. Higher and higher he soared with every succeeding moment, and stranger and more impressive became the aspect of the House. There is nothing which becomes that assembly so much as those moments of exaltation during which it is under the absolute spell of some great master of its emotions. Then a death-like stillness falls upon it—you can almost hear the same heavy-drawn sighs as those that in a Paris opera-house tell of all the passion, the flood of memory and regret, and the dreams which are evoked by the voice of a Marguerite before her final expiation—of a Juliet before her final immolation. Laughter and cheers there were in abundance during this portion of Mr. Gladstone's speech; but the general demeanour was one of deadly stillness and rapt emotion—the stillness one can imagine on that Easter morning when De Quincey went forth and washed the fever from his forehead with the dew of early day.

[Sidenote: An episode.]

And in the midst of it all there came one of the most pathetic little episodes I have seen in the House of Commons of recent years. Mr. Gladstone has somewhat changed his habits in one respect. There was a time when he rarely came to the House to deliver a great speech without a little bottle—such as one sees containing pomade on the dressing-table of the thin-haired bachelor. Of late, the pomade-bottle has disappeared. The G.O.M. is now content to take the ordinary glass of water. It is very seldom that he requires even that amount of sustenance during his great speeches. However, he had been doing a good deal that day—he had already made a long speech to his supporters in the Foreign Office—and he required a glass of water. He called out for it, and, at once, there was a rush from the Treasury Bench to the lobby outside. But, before this could be done, the very pleasant little episode to which I have alluded took place. There stood opposite Mr. Jackson, the late Chief Secretary, an untouched glass of water. When he heard the cry of the Old Man, Mr. Jackson—who has plenty of Yorkshire kindness, as well as Yorkshire bluntness—at once took up the glass that stood before him, and handed it across the table.

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With a bow, and a delighted and delightful smile, the Old Man took the glass, and drank almost greedily. And then, turning to his opponents, he said, "I wish the right hon. gentleman who uses me so kindly, were as willing to take from my fountainhead as I am from his." The grace, the courtesy, the readiness with which it was said, took the House by storm, and it was hard to say whether the delighted laughter and cheers came in greater volume from the Tory or the Liberal side of the House.

[Sidenote: The peroration.]

And Mr. Gladstone's power increased with his power over the House. It looked as if you were watching some mighty monarch of the air that rises and rises higher, higher into the empyrean on slow-poised, even almost motionless, wing. Leaving behind the narrow issues of the particular motion before the House, Mr. Gladstone entered on a rapid survey of the mournful and touching relations between English officialism and Irish National sentiment. From the dead past, he called up the touching, beautiful, and sympathetic figure of Thomas Drummond, and all his efforts to reconcile the administration of the law with the rights and sentiments of the Irish people. The time for cheering had passed. All anybody could do was to listen in spellbound silence, as sonorous sentence rolled after sonorous sentence. And then came the end, in a softer and lower key. It was a direct personal allusion to Mr. Morley. It was the whole weight of the Government and of its head thrown to the side of the Chief Secretary in the new policy in Ireland. "We claim," said Mr. Gladstone, "to be partakers of his responsibility, we appeal to the judgment of the House of Commons, and we have no other desire except to share his fate." And then a hurricane of applause.

[Sidenote: A first experience.]

It was impossible not to feel sympathy for Lord Randolph Churchill in the difficult task of following such a speech. The first thing he had to do was to bear testimony to the extraordinary effect the speech had made upon the House of Commons. It was, he said, a speech "impressive and entrancing"—two most happily-chosen epithets to describe it. And then Lord Randolph told a little bit of personal history which was interesting. In all his Parliamentary career, this was the first time he had been called upon to immediately follow a speech of Mr. Gladstone. He would willingly have abandoned the opportunity, for it was a speech which no man in the House of Commons was capable of confronting. After it, everything else was bound to fall flat, dull, and unimpressive. Lord Randolph had the misfortune of having prepared a speech of considerable length—going into the dead past, forgotten things, and found himself—almost for the first time in his life—incapable of holding the attention of the House of Commons. Then the division followed, with 47 of a majority—and loud ringing cheers came from the friends of the Government—and especially from the Irish benches—

represented in the division by every single member of the party, with the exception of one, absent on sick leave.



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CHAPTER VIII.

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM.

[Sidenote: Still holiday-making.]

The Easter holidays were slow in coming to an end. People who were fortunate enough to obtain pairs, lingered by the seaside or in the country house. Others were busy with the work which the recess now imposes as much as in the most feverish Parliamentary times on leading political men. Mr. Balfour was away in Ireland, among the Orangemen of Ulster and the Loyalists of Dublin; Lord Randolph Churchill was at Liverpool making silly and violent speeches; Mr. Chamberlain was *colloguing*—to use an excellent Irish phrase—with the publicans of the Midlands. The Irish were especially conspicuous by the smallness of their attendance. They had been months away from business, wives, children, and naturally they were anxious to take advantage of the brief breathing space which was left to them before that time came when they could not leave Westminster for a moment in the weeks during which the Home Rule Bill was in Committee!

[Sidenote: Return of the G.O.M.]

Mr. Gladstone, of course, was in his place. Down in Brighton, in a pot-hat, antediluvian in age and shape, he had been courting the breeze of the sea under the hospitable wing of Mr. Armitstead; escaping from the crowds of hero-worshippers, and attending divine service sometimes twice in the same day. He had not been idle in his temporary retreat. When the day comes to record his doings before the accurate scales of Omnipotent and Omniscient Justice, he will stand out from all other men in the absolute use of every available second of his days of life. It was clear that during his retreat, as during his hours of official work, his mind had been busy on the same absorbing and engrossing subject. He was armed with a considerable manuscript, and had evidently thought out his sentences, his arguments, his statements of facts with intense devotion and thought.

This is one of the things which distinguishes him from other public men of his time. There are men I wot of—and not very big men either—who are nothing without their audience. They deem their dignity abused if there be not the crowded bench, the cheering friends, the prominent and ostentatious place. Not so Mr. Gladstone. Perhaps it is the splendid robustness of his nerves, perhaps the absorption in his subject to the forgetfulness of himself; whatever it is, he faces this small, *distrain*, perhaps even depressed, audience with the same zest as though he were once again before that splendid gathering which met his eyes on the memorable night when he brought in his Home Rule Bill. Who but he could fail to have noticed the contrast, and noticing, who but he could remain so loftily unobservant and unimpressed?

[Sidenote: In splendid form.]



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But then Mr. Gladstone has too much of that splendid oratorical instinct not to fashion and shape his speech to the change in the surroundings. He has an impressionability—not to panic, not to depression, not to wounded vanity, but to the appropriateness and the demands of an environment, which is something miraculous. I have already remarked, that the infinite variety of his oratory is Shakespearian in its completeness and abundance. The speech on April 6th was an additional proof of this. Comparisons were naturally made between this speech and the speech by which he introduced the Bill, and everybody who was competent thought that the second speech was the finer and better of the two. Stories have trickled through to the public of the anxieties and worries with which Mr. Gladstone was confronted—not from the Irish side—on the very night before he had to bring forth this prodigious piece of legislative work. It is these small worries that to many Statesmen are the grimmest realities and the most momentous and effective events of their inner lives. It is reported that one of the few sleepless nights which have ever disturbed the splendidly even and sane and healthy tenor of this tempestuous and incessantly active life, was the night before the introduction of the Home Rule Bill. There are points to be finally settled—clauses to be ultimately fixed—phrases to be polished or pared at the eleventh hour in all human affairs. Measures finally settled and fixed for weeks before the last hour exist—like all perfection—only in the brains and pages of dramatists and novelists.

[Sidenote: Sunburnt, vigorous, self-possessed.]

It was not unnatural under these circumstances that when Mr. Gladstone made his speech introducing the Home Rule Bill there should have been on his cheek a pallor deadlier even than that which usually sits upon his brow. That pallor, by the way, I heard recently, has been characteristic of him from his earliest years. A schoolfellow from that far-off and almost pre-historic time when our Grand Old Man was a thin, slim, introspective and prematurely serious boy at Eton, tells to-day that the recollection he has of the young Gladstone is of a slight figure, never running, but always walking with a fast step, with earnest black eyes, and with a pallid face—the ivory pallor, be it observed, not of delicacy, but of robustness. Still there was on that Home Rule night, a pallor that had the deadlier hue of sleeplessness, worry, over-anxiety—the hideous burden of a great, weighty, and complex speech to deliver.

On April 6th all this was gone. The fresh, youthful, cheerful man who stood up in his place had drunk deep of the breezes that sweep The Front at Brighton; his cheeks were burned by the blaze of a splendid spring sun; in the budding, blossoming vital air around him he had taken some of that eternal hopefulness with which the new birth of nature in the spring inspires every human being with any freshness of sensation left. Perchance from his windows in the Lion Mansion he had looked in the evening over the broad expanse of frontierless waters, and risen to the exaltation of the chainless unrest, the tireless and eternal youth, the illimitable breadth of the sea. At all events, he stood before the House visibly younger, brighter, serener than for many a day.

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The voice bore traces of the transformation of body and soul which this short visit to the sea has produced. It was soft, mellow, strong. There were none of the descents to pathetic and inaudible whispers which occasionally in the hours of fag and fatigue have painfully impressed the sympathetic hearer. As Mr. Gladstone subdued himself to the temper of the House, the House accommodated itself to the tone of Mr. Gladstone. I have heard his speech on the second reading described as a pleasant, delightful, historical lecture. Certainly, no stranger coming to the House would have imagined that these sentences, flowing in a beautiful, even stream, dealt with one of the conflicts of our time which excite the fiercest passion and bitterest blood. It is this calmness that is now part of Mr. Gladstone's strength. It soothes and kills at the same time.

[Sidenote: The Nestor-patriot.]

The evening was soft and sunny, the air of the House subdued, and the absence of anything like large numbers prevented outbursts of party passion. And yet all this seemed to heighten the effectiveness of the scene and the speech. Once again one had to think of Mr. Gladstone—as posterity will think of him at this splendid epoch of his career—not as the party politician, giving and receiving hard blows—riding a whirlwind of passion—facing a hurricane of hate—but as the Nestor-patriot of his country, telling all parties alike the gospel that will lead to peace, prosperity, and contentment. The Tories, doubtless, see none of this; but even they cannot help falling into the mood of the hour, and under the fascination of the speaker. Now and then they interrupt, but, as a rule, they sit in respectful and awed silence. Whenever they do venture on interruption, the old lion shows that he is still in possession of all that power for a sudden and deadly spring, which lies concealed under the easy and tranquil strength of the hour. He happens to mention the case of Norway and Sweden as one of the cases which confirm his contention that autonomy produces friendly relations. He has to confess, that in this case some difficulties have arisen; there is a faint Tory cheer. At once—but with gentle good humour—with an indulgent smile—Mr. Gladstone remarks that he doesn't wonder that the Tories clutch at the smallest straw that helps them to eke out a case against autonomy, and then he proceeds to show that even the case of Norway and Sweden doesn't help them a bit.

[Sidenote: A vivid gesture.]

There is another little touch which will bring out the perfection and beauty of the speech. One of the things which tell the experienced observer that Mr. Gladstone is in his best form, is the exuberance and freedom of his gesture. Whenever he feels a thorough grip of himself and of the House, he lets himself go in a way upon which he does not venture in quieter moods. He was dealing with the question of our colonies and of the difference which had been



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made in them by the concession of Home Rule. It was while thus engaged that he made one of those eloquent little asides, which bring home to the mind the vastness and extent of this great career. Nearly sixty years ago—just think of it, nearly sixty years ago—he had been associated with the Government of the Colonies—referring to the time when Lord Aberdeen was his chief, and he held office for the first time as an Under-Secretary. And then he made from Lord Aberdeen a quotation in which the Colonial Secretary calls delighted attention to the fact that Heligoland is tranquil—the single one of all the dependencies of the Crown of which that could be said at that moment.

But it was not at this point that the significant gesture came in, to which I have alluded. Mr. Gladstone had another document to read. By the way—even over the distance which divides the Treasury Bench from the Opposition Benches below the gangway, where we Irishry sit—I could see that the document was written in that enormous handwriting, which is necessary nowadays when the sight of the Prime Minister is not equal to the undimmed lustre of the eagle eye. This letter, said Mr. Gladstone, was not addressed to him. It was not addressed to a Home Ruler. By this time, curiosity was keenly excited. But Mr. Gladstone—smiling, holding the House in firm attention and rapt admiration—was determined to play with the subject a little longer. The letter was not directed even to the Commoner. It was directed to a “Peer;” and as he uttered this sacred word, with a delicious affectation of reverence, he raised the index finger of his hand to high heaven, as though only a reference to a region so exalted could sufficiently manifest the elevation of the personage who had been the recipient of the letter. The House saw the point, and laughed in great delight. It is on occasions like these that one sees the immense artistic power which lies under all the seriousness and gravity of Mr. Gladstone—the thorough exuberance of vitality which marks the splendid sanity of his healthy nature.

[Sidenote: Mr. Birrell.]

I always tremble when I see a literary man, and especially a literary man with a high reputation, rise to address the House of Commons. The shores of that cruel assembly are strewn with the wrecks of literary reputations. It was, therefore, not without trepidation that I saw Mr. Augustin Birrell—one of the very finest writers of our time—succeed in catching the Speaker’s eye. My misgivings were entirely unnecessary. With perfect ease and self-possession—at the same time with the modesty of real genuine ability—Mr. Birrell made one of the happiest and best speeches of the debate. Now and then, the epigram was perhaps a little too polished—the wit perhaps a trifle too subtle for the House of Commons. But careful preparation always involves this; and every man must prepare until he is able to think more clearly on his legs than sitting down. It was just the kind of speech which was wanted at a moment when the general air is rent with the rhodomontade and tomfoolery of Ulster. Applying to these wild harangues the

destructively quiet wit of *obiter dicta*, Mr. Birrell made the Orangemen look very foolish and utterly ridiculous. Mr. Gladstone was one of Mr. Birrell's most attentive and cordial hearers. Mr. Birrell is going to do great things in the House of Commons.



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[Sidenote: In penal servitude.]

The keen, playful, and penetrating wit of Mr. Birrell did not do anything for Mr. Dunbar Barton. Mr. Barton is—as he properly boasted—the descendant of some of that good Protestant stock that, in the days of the fight over the destruction of the Irish Parliament, stood by the liberties of Ireland. He is a nephew of Mr. Plunket—he inherits the talent which is traditional in the Plunket family, and is said not to be without some of the national spirit that still hides itself in odd nooks and corners of estranged Irish minds. But he has none of the saving grace of his country or family. A solemn voice that seems to come from the depths of some divine despair, and from the recesses of his innermost organs, together with a certain funereal aspect in the close-shaven face, gives him an air that suggests the cypress and the cemetery. But with deadly want of humour, he spoke of the possibility of his spending the remainder of a blameless life in penal servitude, and was deeply wounded when the uproarious and irreverent House refused to take the possibility seriously.

[Sidenote: Mr. Stansfeld.]

The following Friday was made memorable by a fine speech from Mr. Stansfeld. Full of activity, with undimmed eye, with every mental faculty keen and alert, with every lofty and generous aspiration as fresh as in the days of hot and perilous youth, Mr. Stansfeld yet appears something of a survival in the House of Commons. His appearance, his style of speech, even the framework of his thought, seem to belong to another—in some respects a finer and more passionate period than our own. The long hair combed straight back—the strong aquiline nose—the heavy-lined and sensitive mouth—the subdued tenderness and wrath of the eyes—even the somewhat antique cut of the clothes—suggest the days when the storm and stress of the youthful century were still in men's souls, and were driving them to conspiracy, to prison, to scaffold, to barricades, to bloody fields. There is also a deliberation in the delivery—a sonorousness in the phraseology—that has something of a bygone day. But all this adds to the impressiveness of the address. The fervour is all there, the unalterable conviction, the lofty purpose. There is reason for the warm note of welcome which comes from the Irish benches; for this man—perhaps disappointed—perchance not too well used—stands up to defend his principles with the same utter forgetfulness of self which belongs only to the finest and the truest natures.

[Sidenote: Commercial culture.]

Mr. Chamberlain has not a wide range of ideas, and his small stock has not been increased by anything like extensive reading. The House was relieved to find after his return to Westminster on the 10th of April that he had just begun to read Tennyson. It is always easy to know when Mr. Chamberlain is making the acquaintance of an author for the first time. Strictly business-like in even his reading,



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he apparently first thinks of reading a book when he has somewhere seen a quotation from it which might be worked into a speech; the next and almost immediate process is to transfer it to one of his speeches. This is one of the many differences between him and the exhaustless brain and universal reading of Mr. Gladstone. It was, therefore, not much of a surprise to those who had watched Mr. Chamberlain for years, to see that he was making a very bad and poor speech on the second reading of the Home Rule Bill—a speech certainly far inferior to that which he had delivered on the first reading. He had exhausted the poor soil; he had really no more to say. He was unfortunately helped by Mr. Gladstone, who, instead of listening in silence to attacks grown stale by their infinite repetition, attempted to correct some of Mr. Chamberlain's statements. This was especially the case in reference to the famous speech in which Mr. Parnell is spoken of as passing "through rapine to dismemberment." Mr. Chamberlain wished to insist that the language had been applied to all the Irish leaders: Mr. Gladstone insisted that they were applied to Mr. Parnell alone. This controversy between the Prime Minister and Mr. Chamberlain gave a little life to a speech that hitherto had been falling desperately flat, and as such the interruption was a tactical mistake.

[Sidenote: De mortuis.]

But it brought with curious unexpectedness a scene not without pathos and significance. In the midst of the thrust and ripost of Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Chamberlain, a strange and yet familiar voice was heard to shout out, "They put all the blame on Parnell because he is dead." It was a startling—even an embarrassing interruption. The memory of Parnell is still dear to the vast majority of the old comrades who were compelled to separate themselves from him in the Great Irish Disruption. At the time when Mr. Gladstone made the speech quoted, Mr. Parnell was the loved leader of the whole Irish people and a united Irish party; and the speech was made at a moment particularly solemn and glorious in the strange life and career of Parnell. The great controversy between the English and the Irish leader, which Mr. Chamberlain had raked up from the almost forgotten past, took place at the moment when Mr. Parnell had gone from town to town and county to county in Ireland, in the midst of vast and enthusiastic receptions—imperial demonstrations—with salvoes of cheers, enthusiasm, and auroral hope such as have taken place so often in Irish history on the eve of some mighty victory or hideous disaster. And, then, immediately after came Parnell's imprisonment, which he bore so well—the suppression of the National Land League, and the era of unchecked and ferocious coercion in which the good intentions and kindly feelings of Mr. Forster finally were buried. To separate themselves from Mr. Parnell at that great moment in his and their life, was a thing which none of Parnell's old comrades could do; and when this startling interruption came, it was the spoken utterance of many of their thoughts brought back by Mr. Chamberlain's venomous tongue in painful reverie over a glorious but dead moment, and a tragically wrecked and superb career.



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[Sidenote: Crocodile tears.]

There was a painful pause, and then came, however, an antidote. It was not in the Irish Nationalist party—it was not in even his own colleagues in the small band of Parnell's supporters, that Mr. Redmond's observation found a responsive echo. A tempest of cheers broke forth from the Tory Benches—from the backers of the *Times* and the supporters of Piggott; and to add to the painful and almost hideous irony of the situation, Mr. Chamberlain made unctuous profession of sympathy with the vindication of Parnell's memory. To those who know that of all the fierce animosities and contempts of Parnell, Mr. Chamberlain's was perhaps the fiercest—to those who remember that strange and almost awful scene when Mr. Parnell—in one of those outbursts of concentrated rage which it was almost appalling to witness—turned and rent Mr. Chamberlain as first false to his colleagues and then false to Parnell himself—to those who remembered that deadly pallor that made even more ghastly the ordinarily pale cheek of Mr. Chamberlain beneath this withering attack—to those, I say, who remembered all this, nothing could be more grotesque than Mr. Chamberlain shedding a pious tear over Parnell's grave.

[Sidenote: Mr. Gladstone and Parnell.]

The situation passed off, but in many breasts it had left its sadness and its sting behind. And then it was that once more the Old Man brought back the House to the temper from which it had been carried by the malignities of Mr. Chamberlain. Very pale, very calm, and, at the same time, with evident though sternly repressed emotion—even in the very height and ecstasy of Parliamentary passion there is a splendid composure and self-command about Mr. Gladstone that conveys an overwhelming sense of the extraordinary masculinity and strength of his nature—very pale, and very calm, Mr. Gladstone stood up. Speaking in low and touching tones he asked to make an explanation, because he feared that some observations of his might have given pain to gentlemen who were deeply attached to the memory of Mr. Parnell. Then he stated that while he had formed an opinion, which might be right or wrong, with regard to Mr. Parnell before his imprisonment in Kilmainham, he had always believed, after his release, that Mr. Parnell was working honestly for the good of Ireland; that he had made a communication to Mr. Parnell to that effect through a friend; and that from that time forward no hard word could be found in his speeches with regard to the Irish leader. This little speech was uttered with exquisite dignity and kindness, and Mr. Redmond received it with the handsomest acknowledgment of its gentleness and grace.

[Sidenote: No manipulating.]



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This episode has made me anticipate a little, and almost tempted me to pass by one of the incidents in the speech of Mr. Chamberlain. But that would have been a mistake, for it is an incident that brings out fully the reason why he is so utterly disliked and distrusted even in those Tory circles which, for the moment, are making use of him. It is an incident that likewise throws a flood of light upon the inner, hidden, dark depths of his sinister nature. He was arguing on the financial aspects of Mr. Gladstone's Bill. Under this portion of the Bill the trader who has residences in both countries is entitled to make his return for his income-tax in either England or Ireland. Mr. Chamberlain proceeded to put the case of a trader in that position who wished to embarrass the Irish Government, and who would wish accordingly to give England, and not the Irish Exchequer, the advantage of his income-tax. This he could do, Mr. Chamberlain pointed out, in the easiest manner imaginable; he could "manipulate his books." There it stands; these are the very words he used. Incredible, everybody would say who didn't know Mr. Chamberlain, and wasn't told by the evidence of eyes and ears that the words had actually been uttered. The Irish members were not slow to seize the point, and to shout aloud at this revelation of Mr. Chamberlain's nature; and even his Tory friends shuddered at such a manifestation of the real kind of man that lies hidden under Mr. Chamberlain's oily and smooth exterior. At first, he seemed surprised at the visible shock and tremor and involuntary sense of repulsion which this odious suggestion awakened on all sides—then he slowly realized that he had made a mistake; and, for once, this readiest of debaters was nonplussed, and even a little abashed.

[Sidenote: The Irish Members and the Bill.]

Mr. MacCarthy followed Mr. Chamberlain; he spoke just from ten to fifteen minutes—plainly, simply, to the point, and what he had to say was that he and his friends did look on this Bill as a final settlement, which Ireland would be honourably pledged to carry out. Unselfish, straightforward, unpretentious, kindly, Mr. MacCarthy brought into more vivid contrast the personal venom—the ruthless hunger for vengeance and the humiliation of his enemies—which came out with almost painful vividness from the speech to which we had just ceased to listen. Mr. Gladstone, sitting opposite, attentive and watchful, was evidently much pleased at the heartiness of Mr. MacCarthy's acceptance of his great measure.

[Sidenote: Sir George Trevelyan.]

The night wound up with the very best speech I have ever heard Sir George Trevelyan deliver. Sir George had to answer violent, fierce, almost malignant assault; but he did so without ever uttering a harsh word—without losing one particle of his courteous and admirable self-control—he raised the debate of a great issue to the high place of difference of principles and convictions, instead

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of personal bickerings and hideous and revolting personal animosities. It is the vice of Sir George Trevelyan as a speaker that he over-prepares—writing out, as a rule, nearly every word he has to utter, and often some of the very best speeches I have heard him deliver have been spoiled by giving the fatal sense of being spoken essays. The speech was carefully prepared, and, so far as I could observe, was even written out; but its grace of diction, its fine temper, above all, its manly explanation of a change of view and its close-knit reasoning, made it really one of the very finest addresses I have heard in the course of many years' debating.

[Sidenote: Toryism of the gutter.]

And, then, if you wanted to appreciate Sir George Trevelyan the more, you had only to wait for a few moments to hear the man who followed him. I am told on pretty good authority that, next to Lord Randolph Churchill, the favourite orator of the Tory provincial platform is Sir Ashmead Bartlett. I can well believe it. The empty shibboleths—the loud and blatant voice—the bumptious temper—that make the commoner form of Tory—all are there. He is the dramatically complete embodiment of all the vacuous folly, empty-headed shoutings, and swaggering patriotism which make up the stock-in-trade of most provincial Tories. Poor Mr. Balfour was caught by Sir Ashmead before he had time to escape, and in sheer decency had to remain while his servile adulator was pouring on him buckets of butter, which must have appalled and disgusted him. Indeed, the effect of the bellowings of the man from Sheffield could be seen in the bent back, the depressed face, the general air of limpness which overcame the Tory leader—as helpless, dejected, bent double, he looked steadily at the green bench underneath him, and concealed from the House as much as possible the tell-tale horror of his face.

[Sidenote: A portrait of Michael Davitt.]

On an assembly which had been jaded and almost tortured by this tremendous display, it was Mr. Davitt's fortune to come with his first speech in Parliament. For hour after hour he had sat, very still, with deeply-lined face, but with a restless and frequent twist of the heavy dark moustache, that spoke of the intense nervous strain to which this weary waiting was subjecting him. Davitt is a man whose face would stand out in bold relief from any crowd of men, however numerous or remarkable. He has a narrow face, with high cheek-bones, and the thick, close black whiskers, beard and moustache, make him look almost as dark as a Spaniard. The eyes are deep-set, brilliant, restless—with infinite lessons of hours of agony, of loneliness, torture in all the million hours which filled up his nine years of endless and unbroken gloom in penal servitude. The frame is slight, well-knit—the frame of a sturdy son of the people—kept taut and thin by the restless nervous soul within. An empty sleeve hanging by his side tells the tale of work in the factory in childhood's years, and of one of the accidents which too often maim the children of the poor in the manufacturing districts of England. The voice is

strong, deep, and soft; the delivery slow, deliberate, the style of the English or American platform rather than of the Irish gathering by the green hillside.



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[Sidenote: Dartmoor.]

Altogether, never did there stand before this British assembly in all its centuries of history, a figure more interesting, more picturesque, more touching, above all, more eloquent of a mighty transformation—of a great new birth and revolution in the history of two nations. Go back in memory to the day, when with cropped hair—with the broad-shouldered coat, the yellow stockings—this man dragged wearily the wheelbarrow in the grim silences under the sinister skies of Dartmoor, with warders to taunt, or insult, or browbeat the Irish felon-patriot—with the very dregs and scum of our lowest social depths for companions and colleagues—and then think of this same man standing up before the supreme and august assembly where the might, sovereignty, power, and omnipotence of this world-wide empire are centred, and holding it for more than an hour and a half under a spell of rapt attention that almost suggested the high-strung devotion of a religious service in place of a raging political controversy—think of this contrast, and then bless the day and the policy that have made possible such a transformation.

[Sidenote: Westminster.]

I cannot attempt to give all the strong points of a speech which bristled with strong points at almost every turn. To the House its entire character must have come as a surprise. The mass of members that crowded every bench, and filled the vacancies which Ashmead Bartlett had made—Mr. Gladstone sitting attentive on the Treasury Bench—Mr. Balfour listening with evident friendliness and sympathy—all these were enough to transport any orator into the realms of high stirring rhetoric, and to attune the nerves to poetic and exalted flight. But Davitt's nerves stood the test. Slowly, deliberately, patiently, he developed a case for the Bill, of facts, figures, historical incident, pathetic and swift pictures of Irish desolation and suffering, which would have been worthy of a great advocate placing a heavy indictment. Now and then there was the eloquence of finely chosen language—of a striking fact—even of a touching personal aside—but, as a whole, the speech was a simple, weighty, careful case against the Union—based on the eloquent statistics of diminished population, exiled millions, devastated homesteads.

[Sidenote: Tragic comedy.]

There were plenty of lighter strains to relieve the deadly earnestness of a man who had thoroughly thought out his case. And, curiously enough, these pleasant sallies nearly all had allusion to those tragic nine years of penal servitude through which Davitt has passed. Mr. Dunbar Barton, one of the Orange lawyers, had spoken of himself as likely to spend the remainder of his days in penal servitude. Mr. Davitt put the threat gently aside, with the assurance that the hon. and learned gentleman would probably be one day on the bench, and that he would advise him not to try to reach the bench by the dock. The same gentleman had expressed a doubt whether any constitutional lawyer would hold that he was guilty either of treason or treason felony, if he took up arms

against Home Rule after it had been passed by both Houses of Parliament. “Would,” said Mr. Davitt, with quiet pathos, “I had met such a constitutional authority in the shape of a judge twenty-three long years ago.”

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[Sidenote: A vulgar and caddish interruption.]

And, finally, what contributed to the marvellous effect of this speech was its temper and one interruption. In all the speech there was not one trace of the bitterness that must often have corroded that poor soul during the nine years of living death—even the allusions to political opponents of to-day were kindly and gentle. Above all things, the speech was one—not merely of an Irish Nationalist, but of a true Democrat—as desirous of the happiness of other nationalities and other peoples as of his own. It was while every part of the House was listening to this beautiful and touching speech, that a gentleman called Brookfield—one of the most offensive of the narrow and malignant section of Tories—rose and tried to trip Davitt up, by alleging that he was reading his speech. I am told that Mr. Balfour sprang in anger from his seat—there was a significant and a pained silence on the Tory Benches—there was a loud shout of anger and disgust from the Liberal and the Irish seats—with William O'Brien's voice shouting hoarsely above the tempest, "The party of gentlemen!" The Speaker showed what he thought, in that deadly quiet way with which he can administer a snub, that will never be forgotten. It was all that was wanted to complete the success of this wonderful speech.

[Sidenote: Sir John Rigby.]

Then came hand-shakings and clappings on the back, and a light in the eyes of Irish members that told of a great step forward in the progress of their cause. To a house thinned by the endless rhodomontade of a dull Orangeman—with a style of elocution to which the House is unaccustomed, and which has almost every fault delivery could have—the speech of Sir John Rigby, the Solicitor-General, was one of the finest and weightiest utterances delivered on the Bill. The massive head, the fine face, the rugged sense and leonine strength in face and figure, lent force to a criticism of extraordinary effectiveness on the attacks levelled against the Bill. First, the Solicitor-General took up the wild and whirling statement of one of the opponents of the Bill, and then coolly—as though it were a pure matter of business—he put in juxtaposition the enactments of the Bill, and the contrast was as laughter provoking with all its deadly seriousness, as the conflict between the story of Falstaff and the contemptuously quiet rejoinder of Prince Hal. Lord Randolph was taken in hand; he was soon disposed of. Then Mr. Dunbar Barton was crumpled up and flung away. Sir Edward Clarke ventured an interruption; he was crushed in a sentence. It was an admirable specimen of destructive criticism, and it hugely and palpably delighted Mr. Gladstone.

[Sidenote: Mr. Asquith.]



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Mr. Asquith had intended to speak on April 14th, evening, but the portentous and prolix Courtney had shut him out, and he had to wait till the following evening. The change was, perhaps, desirable, for Mr. Asquith had thus the opportunity of addressing the House when it was fresh, vital, and impressionable. In these long debates the evenings usually became intolerably dull and oppressive. Though Mr. Asquith was an untried man when he went into office, in two speeches he succeeded in placing himself in the very front rank of the debaters and politicians in the House. Let me say at once that the speech was a remarkable triumph, and placed Mr. Asquith at a bound amid not only the orators, but the statesmen of the House of Commons—the men who have nerve, breadth of view, great courage, enormous resource.

[Sidenote: Joe's dustheap.]

One of the discoveries of the speech must have been particularly unpleasant to Mr. Chamberlain. The gentleman from Birmingham has at last found a man who does not fear him—who has a much finer mind—wider culture—who has judgment, temper, and a vocabulary as copious and as ready as that of Mr. Chamberlain himself. One had only to look at Mr. Chamberlain throughout the speech to see how palpable, how painful this discovery was—especially to a man to whom politics is nothing but a mere conflict between contending rivalries and malignities. Mr. Asquith—calm, self-possessed, measured—put Joe on the rack with a deliberation that was sometimes almost cruel in its effectiveness and relentlessness; and Joe was foolish enough to point the severity and success of the attack by losing his self-control. When Mr. Asquith said that Joe could find no better employment than that of “scavenging”—here was a word to make Joe wince—“among the dustheaps” of past speeches, Joe was a sight to see. A “scavenger”—this was the disrespectful way in which those quotations were described which had often roused the Tory Benches to ecstasies of delight. Joe was so angered that he could not get over it for some time. “Dustheaps!” he was heard to be muttering several times in succession, as if the word positively choked him. Indeed, throughout Mr. Asquith's speech, whenever the allusions were made to him, Joe was seen to be muttering under his teeth. It was the running commentary which he made on the most effective attack that has been uttered against him; it was the highest tribute to the severity and success of the assailant.

[Sidenote: Limp Balfour.]

Badly as Mr. Chamberlain bore his punishment, Mr. Balfour was even worse. It is seldom that the House of Commons has seen a more remarkable or more effective retort than the happy, dexterous, delightful—from the literary point of view, unsurpassable—parody which Mr. Asquith made of Mr. Balfour's flagitious incitements to the men of Belfast. Mr. Asquith put the case of Mr. Morley going down to a crowd in Cork, and using the same kind of language. Mr.



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Balfour, in his speech, had over and over again used the name of the Deity. "I pray God," said the pious leader of the Tory party, as he addressed the Orangemen. When, in the imaginary speech which Mr. Asquith put into the mouth of Mr. Morley, he recurred again and again to the phrase, "I pray God," there was just the least lifting of the eyes and lowering of the voice to the sanctimonious level of the Pharisee which made this part of the speech not merely a fine piece of oratory, but a splendid bit of acting. Mr. Balfour's appearance during this portion of Mr. Asquith's speech was pitiable. His face, with its pallor—look of abashed pain—was tell-tale of the inner shame which he felt, as thus calmly, coldly, cruelly—with extraordinary art, and amid a tempest of cheers—he was brought by his opponent face to face with realities which lay underneath his bland and oily phrases.

[Sidenote: Another unmannerly interruption.]

In the midst of the calm and stately flow of Mr. Asquith's speech, while the House, spellbound, listened in awe-struck and rapt silence, suddenly, there was a commotion, a shout, then the roar of many voices. The whole thing came upon the House with a bewildering and dumbfounding surprise; it was as if someone had suddenly died, or some other sinister catastrophe had occurred. In a moment, several Irish members—Mr. Swift McNeill, Mr. Crilly, and others—were on their feet, shouting in accents hoarse with anger, inarticulate with rage. The Speaker was also on his feet, and, for a while, his shouts of "Order! Order!" failed to calm the sudden, fierce cyclone. Above the din, voices were shouting, "Name! Name!" with that rancorous and fierce note which the House of Commons knows so well when passion has broken loose, and all the grim depths of party hate are revealed. At last, it was discovered that Lord Cranborne was the culprit, and that when Mr. Asquith, amid universal sympathy and assent, was alluding to the beautiful speech of Mr. Davitt, this most unmannerly of cubs had uttered the word, "Murderer."

[Sidenote: A whipped hound.]

If he had not been so unspeakably rude, vulgar, odious, and impertinent, one might have almost felt sympathy for Lord Salisbury's son in the position in which he found himself. His face is usually pale, but now it had the deadly, ghastly, and almost green pallor of a man who is condemned to die. But, amid all the palpable terror, the Cecil insolence was still there, and Lord Cranborne declared that, though he had used the phrase, he had not intended it for the House, and that it was true. Since his relative, Lord Wolmer, made the lamest and meanest apology the House of Commons had ever heard, there never had been anything to equal this. The House groaned aloud in disgust and contempt; even his own side was as abashed as when Brookfield sought to interrupt Mr. Davitt. The Speaker, quietly, but visibly moved and disgusted, at once told the insolent young



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creature that this was not sufficient, and that an apology was due—to which the Cecil hoping proceeded to do with as bad a grace and in as odious a style as it was possible for it to be done. Mr. Asquith's splendid self-control and mastery of the House bore the ordeal of even this odious incident, and he wound up the speech with one of the finest and most remarkable perorations which has ever been heard in that great assembly. Calm, self-restrained, almost frigid in delivery, chaste and sternly simple in language, Mr. Asquith's peroration reached a height that few men could ever attain. The still House sat with its members raised to their highest point of endurance, and it was almost a relief when the stately flow came to an end, and men were able to relieve their pent-up tide of feeling.

CHAPTER IX.

THE END OF A GREAT WEEK.

[Sidenote: Mr. Goschen.]

The Tories were not in good heart at the beginning of the week which saw the second reading of the Home Rule Bill carried on April 21st, and perhaps it was owing to this that they put up one of their very best men. Mr. Goschen I have always held to be one of the really great debaters of the House of Commons. It is true that he has almost every physical disadvantage with which an orator could be cursed. His voice is hoarse, muffled, raucous, with some reminiscences of the Teutonic fatherland from which he remotely comes. His shortness of sight amounts almost to a disability. Whenever he has anything to read he has to place the paper under his eyes, and even then he finds it very difficult to read it. His action is like that of a distracted wind-mill. He beats the air with his whirling arms; he stands several feet from the table, and moves backwards and forwards in this space in a positively distracting manner. And yet he is a great debater.

[Sidenote: In Opposition.]

But Mr. Goschen, like every other orator of the Opposition, has fallen on somewhat evil days, and is not at his very best now. "The world," said Thackeray long ago, "is a wretched snob, and is especially cold to the unsuccessful." This applies to that portion of the world which changes sides in the House of Commons according to the resolves of the popular verdict. Mr. Goschen, then, is not seen at his best in these days when all his arguments can receive the triumphant and unanswerable retort of a majority in the division lobbies. But still, the speech of Mr. Goschen on April 17th was an excellent one; it was really the first, since the beginning of this debate, which struck me as giving something to answer. Acute, subtle, a dialectician to his finger-tips, Mr. Goschen is best as a critic, and as a bit of criticism, his attack on the Bill was excellent. Mr. Morley found

himself compelled for the first time for days to take serious notes; here at last were points which it was necessary to confront. After all the dreary platitudes of many days, this was a mercy for which to be thankful.



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[Sidenote: Randolph dull.]

Lord Randolph Churchill, rising on the following evening, was not at his best. He has been passing through what Disraeli once called a campaign of passion in the provinces; and his speeches have been full of the wildest fury. But all the fire had become extinguished. When Lord Randolph Churchill makes up his mind to be rational, few people in the House of Commons can be more rational; but when he makes up his mind to throw prudence, sense, and reserve to the winds, nobody can rise to such heights and descend to such depths of wild, unreasonable, bellowing Toryism—always, of course, excepting Ashmead-Bartlett. But when he is rational he is often dull—when he is unreasonable he is often very entertaining. The speech of April 18th was a rational speech—it was, therefore, a dull one. Lord Randolph is not what he was. The voice which was formerly so resonant has become muffled and sometimes almost indistinct, and the manner has lost all the sprightliness which used to relieve it in the olden days. The House of Commons is like the Revolution—it often swallows its own children.

[Sidenote: Father and son.]

Mr. Chamberlain might have been seen in two very different characters in the course of that same evening. He is not a soft man—amid sympathetic sniggers from all the House, Mr. Morley at a later stage referred sarcastically to the “milk of human kindness” which flowed so copiously in his veins—but he is a man of strong and warm domestic affections. He has the proud privilege of having in the House of Commons not only a son, but one who, in many respects, seems the very facsimile of himself, for the likeness between Mr. Austen Chamberlain and his father is startlingly close. This likeness is heightened by the similarity of dress—by the single eyeglass that is worn perennially in both cases, and, to a certain extent, by the walk. When the son began to speak this Tuesday night, there was even a stronger sense of the resemblance between the two. The voice was almost the same, the gestures were the same—the diction was not unlike—nearly all the tricks and mannerisms of the elder man were reproduced by the younger. For instance, when he is going to utter a good point, Mr. Chamberlain makes a pause—the son does the same: when Mr. Chamberlain is strongly moved, and wishes to drive home some fierce thrust, there is a deep swell in his otherwise even voice, and there is the same in the voice of the son. Then there is the same crisp, terse succession of sentences—altogether the likeness is wonderful.

[Sidenote: Mr. Chamberlain pleased.]

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It was pleasant, even to those who do not love Mr. Chamberlain either personally or politically, to watch him during this episode. When the son first stood up, the pallor of the face, the unsteadiness of the voice, the broken and stumbling accents, told of the high state of nervous strain through which he was passing, and it was easy to see that the emotions of the son had communicated themselves to the father. Mr. Chamberlain had his hat low down on his forehead so as to conceal his face and its tell-tale excitement as much as possible. But it turned out that he need not have been in the least alarmed. The speech of young Mr. Chamberlain, for a maiden speech, was really wonderful. It was lucid, well knit, pointed, cogent. Its delivery was almost perfect; it had the true House of Commons air and manner. This young man will go far. I shouldn't be surprised if he became in time even a better debater than his father. His education, I should say, is broader and deeper, his mind finer, and his temper sweeter and more under control. During the latter portion of the speech his father's face had a smile, pleasant to behold; one could forgive him a great deal of his hardness, rancour, even ferocity, for this manifestation—open and frank—of kindly human-feeling.

[Sidenote: And angry.]

But, as I have said, there was another manifestation of Mr. Chamberlain in the course of this very evening. Shortly before ten o'clock Mr. Morley rose to make his reply. It was twenty minutes to ten when he rose. It was close upon midnight when he sat down. And yet there wasn't one word too many—indeed, Mr. Morley might have gone even longer without wearying the House, for it was a speech which, although not free from some of the besetting weaknesses of his oratory, was an eloquent, impressive and convincing addition to the great argument on the Irish question. Giving himself a certain freedom—departing from the over-severe self-restraint which he so often imposes upon himself—abandoning the frigidity of manner which conceals from so many people his warmth of heart and of temper, he spoke with a go, a fire and a force of attack not very common with him. Above all things the speech gave the impression of one who spoke from the inside—who knew the subjects of which he was talking, not merely in their general aspects, but in their dark recesses—in their latent passion—in their awful and appalling depths. It was while this fine speech was being delivered that the other and the darker side of Mr. Chamberlain's nature was to be seen. There are no such enmities as those between relatives or former friends; and so it apparently is between Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Morley—though it should be said most of the bitterness of the hatred seems to be on the one side. While Mr. Morley is speaking there is a frown on the face of Mr. Chamberlain that never lifts. Now and then, the sulky and sullen and frowning silence was broken by an observation



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evidently of bitter scornfulness addressed to Sir Henry James, and once there seemed even to be an angry interchange between him and Mr. Courtney because Mr. Courtney had ventured to put a civil question to Mr. Morley. Mr. Morley had to address a few words of hearty congratulation to Mr. Austen Chamberlain on his very successful speech. He spoke with the slowness, hesitation, and effort that betrayed a certain glimpse of the pain and grief that the political separations of life produce in all but the hardest and coldest natures. It was a graceful, generous, feeling tribute, but it did not soften Mr. Chamberlain—the same steady unlifting frown was there—the same “puss”—and when Mr. Morley had finished, there was a repetition of the evidently scornful comment of Mr. Chamberlain.

[Sidenote: A hit at Mr. Chamberlain.]

But Mr. Morley may well bear all this, for he was able to strike some very effective blows at Mr. Chamberlain, and Mr. Chamberlain for a hard-hitter has a wonderfully keen appreciation and a very sensitive skin for anything like a dexterous hit at his own expense. Alluding to the favourite argument of Mr. Chamberlain, that the speeches of Irish members in the past may have been deplorable, Mr. Morley asked were they the only people who had made such speeches? They might be repentant sinners, but who so great a prodigal as the member for Birmingham? The loud and triumphant laughter which this produced at the expense of Mr. Chamberlain, was followed up by another even more victorious thrust. The Irish members had abandoned prairie value in the same way as the member for Birmingham had surrendered the doctrines of “ransom” and natural rights. Mr. Chamberlain was very uncomfortable, and soon showed it by an interrupting cheer. “Seriously,” said Mr. Morley, passing from this lighter, but very effective vein. And then he was interrupted by his foe. “Hear, hear,” shouted Mr. Chamberlain in that deep, raucous, fierce note, in which he reveals the fierceness of his hatred, as though to say that it was time for Mr. Morley to address himself to serious things.

[Sidenote: Mr. Sexton.]

So the debate proceeded during the earlier part of the week; as it neared its close it increased in brilliancy, until in the last night it went out in a blaze of splendour and glory. On the Thursday evening Mr. Sexton was the speaker. He made a speech which was two hours and a half in duration; it was in my opinion too long—I think that except in the most exceptional cases no orator ought to speak more than half an hour. And yet I would not have had the speech shorter by one second; and it is a singular proof of the extraordinary command which this man holds over the House of Commons that he kept its attention absolutely without a moment’s pause or cessation, during every bit of this tremendous strain upon his attention. With the exception of Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Sexton is the one man in the House who is capable of such a feat. This is largely



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due not merely to his oratorical powers but to the extraordinary range of his gifts. To the outside public—even to the House of Commons—he is chiefly known by his great rhetorical gifts; but this is only a part, and a small part, of his great mental equipment. His mastery over figures in its firmness of grasp, its lightning-like rapidity, its retentiveness, is almost as great as that of a professional calculator. He has a judgment, cold, equable, far-seeing, and he has a humour that is kindly but can also be scorching, and that has sometimes been deadly enough to leave wounds that never healed.

[Sidenote: Mr. Chamberlain's arithmetic.]

Perhaps not even Mr. Gladstone—certainly not Mr. Goschen—though he, too, is a past master in figures—is as formidable and destructive a gladiator in a fight over figures as Mr. Sexton; I pity any mortal who gets into grips with him on that arena. Mr. Chamberlain was the unhappy individual whom Mr. Sexton took in hand. Mr. Chamberlain has the reputation of being a good man of business, he certainly was a most successful one; and one would expect from him some power, at least, of being able to state figures correctly. When the figures he had presented to the country in a recent speech at Birmingham came under analysis by Mr. Sexton, Mr. Chamberlain was exposed as a bungler as stupid and dense as one could imagine. Mr. Chamberlain's mighty fabric of a war indemnity of millions which the financial arrangements of this Bill would inflict on England, melted before Mr. Sexton's examination—palpably, rapidly, exactly as though it were a gaudy palace of snow which the midsummer sun was melting into mere slush. The cocksureness of Mr. Chamberlain makes his exposure a sort of comfort and delight to the majority of the House; but still, the sense of his great powers—of his commanding position as a debater—of his formidableness as a political and Parliamentary enemy—made the House almost unwilling to realize that he could be taken up and reprimanded, and birched by anybody in the House with the completeness with which Mr. Sexton was performing the task. Mark you, there was nothing offensive—there was nothing even severe in the language of Mr. Sexton's attack. It was simply cold, pitiless, courteous but killing analysis—the kind of analysis which the hapless and fraudulent bankrupt has to endure when his castles in the air come to be examined under the cold scrutiny of the Official Receiver in the Bankruptcy Court.

[Sidenote: Johnston of Ballykilbeg.]

A different tone was that which Mr. Sexton assumed to Mr. Johnston of Ballykilbeg. Mr. Johnston, known to the outer world as a fire-eater of the most determined order, inside the House is one of the most popular of men, and with no section of the House is he more popular than with those Irish Nationalists for whose blood he is supposed to thirst. With gentle and friendly wit Mr. Sexton dealt with the case of Mr. Johnston lining the ditch, declaring amid sympathetic



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laughter that the one object of any Irish Nationalist who should meet the Orangemen in such a position would be to take him out, even if he had to carry him to do so. This reduction of the militancy of Ulster down to the level of playful satire did much to relieve the House from the tension which the wild language of Ulsteria had been calculated to provoke. Finally, there came a beautiful peroration—tender, touching, well sustained—which was listened to with breathless attention by the House, and produced as profound a depth of emotion on the Liberal as even on the Irish Benches. It was a peroration which lifted the great issue to all the heights of solemnity, nobility, and supreme interest which it reaches in the mouth of an eloquent orator. This tremendous speech—in its variety, in its power—in its alternation of scathing scorn, copious analysis, playful and gentle wit—was perhaps the most remarkable example in our times of the sway which an orator has over the House of Commons.

[Sidenote: Mr. Carson.]

Mr. Carson was unfortunate in every sense in having to follow an oration of such extraordinary power, and in having to follow it at that dread hour when every member of the House of Commons is thinking of his long-postponed dinner. The audience of “the Sleuth Hound of Coercion”—as Mr. Carson is usually called—if it was select, was at the same time, enthusiastic and appreciative. The little band of Unionists, who get very cold comfort, as a rule, during these hard times, sate steadily in their seats and eagerly welcomed and warmly cheered Mr. Carson. Behind him, too, was a pretty strong band of Tories, and Mr. Balfour sate throughout his entire speech listening to it with the keenest and most evident appreciation. I have already described the appearance of Mr. Carson and the impression he makes upon me; curiously enough, this impression was confirmed by an experience that afternoon. I happened to stand at a point of the House where I saw Mr. Carson from profile as he was speaking. He had just got to the point where, with a hoarse and deep note in his usually cold voice, he said to Mr. Morley that if the Chief Secretary would move the omission of all the “safeguards” from the Bill, he would vote along with him. There was a tone almost of ferocity—the tone which conveyed all the rage and despair of the Ascendency party in Ireland at the prospect of departing power—the fury of the Castle official that saw the approaching overthrow of all the powerful citadel of fraud and cruelty and wrong, of which he had been one of the chief pillars. And as Mr. Carson was uttering these words, I saw his profile—which often reveals more of men’s natures than the front face.

[Sidenote: A curious reminiscence.]



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I suppose I shall be considered very fantastic—but do you know what I thought of at that very moment? Some years ago, I stood at Epsom close to the ropes and saw Fred Archer pass me as he swept like the whirlwind to the winning-post in the last Derby he ever rode. Between Mr. Carson and Mr. Fred Archer, especially in the profile, there is a certain and even a close resemblance; the same long lantern face, the same sunken cheeks, the same prominent mouth, the same skin dark as the gipsy's. Never shall I forget the look on Fred Archer's face at the moment when I saw it—it was but for a second—and yet the impression dwells ineffaceable upon my memory and imagination. There was a curious mixture of terror, resolve, hope, despair on the sunken cheeks that was almost appalling—that look represented, embodied, summed up, as though in some sudden glimpse of another and a nether world, all the terrible and awful passions that stormed at the hearts of thousands in the great gambling panorama all around. And there was something of the same look on the profile of Mr. Carson—I could almost have pitied him and the party and traditions and past which he represented as I saw its death-throes marked on his suffering and fierce face.

But the speech of Mr. Carson was a clever one. Whatever the inner eye may see in the depths of Mr. Carson's soul, to the outward eye he has an appearance of a self-possession amounting almost to the offensive. He is dressed almost as well as Mr. Austen Chamberlain, but, unlike Mr. Chamberlain's promising lad—who still has much of the graceful shyness and unsteady nerve of youth—Mr. Carson has all the coolness, self-assertion, and hardness of the man who has passed through the fierce and tempestuous conflicts of Irish life. Mr. Carson stands at the box and leans upon it as though he had been there all his life; he shoots his cuffs—to use a House of Commons' phrase—as dexterously and almost as frequently as Mr. Gladstone; his points are stated slowly, deliberately, with that wary and watchful look of the man who has been accustomed to utter the words that consigned men to the horrors of Tullamore. The speech of Thursday evening was a clever speech. It wasn't broad—it wasn't generous—there was not a note in it above the tone of the Crown Prosecutor, but it was subtle, well-reasoned—the blows were happy, and told—and the Tories and Unionists were hugely and justly delighted.

[Sidenote: The approach of the division.]

At last we are within sight of the end. Friday had come, and everybody knew that this was the day which would see the division; and, after all, the division was the event of the debate. In moments such as these you can hear the quickened throb of the House of Commons, and if you fail to notice it you soon learn it from the public. In the lobbies outside stand scores of excited men and women begging, imploring, threatening—using every means to get admission into the galleries to witness a historic



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and immortal scene. Outside there is an even denser crowd—ready to hoot or cheer their favourites. The galleries are all crowded; peers stand on each other's toes, and patiently wait for hours. About ten o'clock a man rushes into the lobby, and there is a movement that looks most like a scare—as though the messenger were some herald of disaster. In a few minutes you see a great stir and a curious suppressed excitement in the lobby, and then you observe that the Prince of Wales has come down to pay the House one of his rare visitations, and to take that place above the clock which it is his privilege on these occasions to occupy.

[Sidenote: Sir Henry James.]

The evening began with a speech of Sir Henry James for the Unionist party—legal and dry as dust, but, towards the end, reaching a height—or shall I say a depth—of fierce party passion. In language more veiled, more deliberate, but as intelligible as Mr. Balfour's and Lord Randolph Churchill's, the ex-Attorney-General called upon the Orangemen to rise in rebellion. And, working himself up gradually from the slow and funereal tones which he usually employs, Sir Henry James wound up with a fierce, rude, savage gibe at Mr. Gladstone. Almost shouting out the word, "Betrayed!" he pointed a threatening and scornful finger at the head of Mr. Gladstone, and the Tories and Unionists frantically cheered.

It was more than ten o'clock when Mr. Balfour rose. The assembly was brilliant in its density, its character, its pent-up emotion, and in many respects the speech was worthy of the occasion. He was wise enough not to entangle himself in the inextricable network of clauses and sub-sections. In broad, general lines he assailed the policy of the Bill and of the Government, and now and then worked up his party to almost frenzied excitement. The cheers of the Tories were taken up by the Unionists, who thronged their benches with unusual density of attendance. Now and then there were fierce protests from the Irish Benches; but, on the whole, they were patient, self-restrained, and silent.

[Sidenote: Gladstone.]

Mr. Gladstone, meantime, was down early, after but a short stay for dinner. His face had that rapt look of reverie which it wears on all these solemn and great occasions, and there was a slightly deadlier pallor on the cheek. Mr. Balfour persisted with his speech to the bitter end, and now and then Mr. Gladstone gave an impatient and anxious look at the clock. The hands pointed to ten minutes to midnight before this man of eighty-three was on his legs to address a crowded, hot, jaded assembly in a speech that would wind up one of the great stages in the greatest controversy of his life.

[Sidenote: The opening.]



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We who love and follow him hold our breaths, and our nervous anxiety rises almost to terror. Can he stand the strain?—will he break down from sheer physical fatigue and the exhaustion of long waiting? The first few notes of the deep voice are reassuring. The opening sentences also have that full roll which nearly always is inevitable proof that the great swelling opening will carry him on to the end; and yet there is anxiety. Those who know him well cannot help observing that there is just a slight trace of excitement, nervousness, and anxiety in the voice and manner. He has evidently been put out by the lateness of the hour to which the speech has been postponed. There is beside him a vast mass of notes, and then, before he reaches that, there is the long speech to which he has just listened, many points of which it is impossible to leave unnoticed. And so the first ten minutes strike me as rather poor—poor, I mean, for Mr. Gladstone—and my heart sinks. In memory I go back to that memorable and unforgettable speech on that terrible night in 1886, when, with dark and disastrous defeat prepared for him in the lobbies the moment he sat down, Mr. Gladstone delivered a speech, the echoes of whose beautiful tones—immortal and ineffaceable—still linger in the ear. And now the moment of Nemesis and triumph has come, and is he going to fall below the level of the great hour?

Ah! these fears are all vain. The exquisite cadence—the delightful bye-play—the broad, free gesture—the lofty tones of indignation and appeal—but, above all, the even tenderness, composure, and charity that endureth all things—all these qualities range through this magnificent speech. Thus he wishes to administer to Sir Henry James a well-merited rebuke for his terrible and flagitious incitements, and, with uplifted hands, and in a voice of infinite scorn, Mr. Gladstone turns on Sir Henry, and overwhelms him, amid a tempest of cheers from the delighted Irishry and Liberals.

[Sidenote: Chamberlain touched.]

But there is another and an even more extraordinary instance of the power, grace, and mastery of the mighty orator. The G.O.M. had made an allusion to that pleasant and promising speech of young Austen Chamberlain, of which I have spoken already. Just by the way, with that delightful and unapproachable lightness of touch which is the unattainable charm of Mr. Gladstone's oratory, he alluded to the speech and to Mr. Chamberlain himself. "I will not enter into any elaborate eulogy of that speech," said Mr. Gladstone. "I will endeavour to sum up my opinion of it by simply saying that it was a speech which must have been dear and refreshing to a father's heart." And then came one of the most really pathetic scenes I have ever beheld in the House of Commons—a scene with that touch of nature which makes the whole akin, and, for the moment, brings the fiercest personal and political foes into the holy bond of common human



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feeling. Mr. Chamberlain is completely unnerved—I should have almost said for the first time in his life. I have seen this very remarkable man under all kinds of circumstances—in triumph—in disaster—in rage—in composure—but never before—not even in the very ecstasy of the hours of party feeling—never before did I see him lose for a moment his self-possession. First, he bowed low to Mr. Gladstone in gratitude—and then the tears sprang to his eyes; his lips trembled painfully, and his hand sprang to his forehead, as though to hide the woman's tears that did honour to his manhood. And, curiously enough, the feeling did not pass away. I know not whether Mr. Chamberlain was out of sorts on this great night; but his manner was very different on this night of nights; indeed, from what it has been at every other period of this fierce, stormy Session. He cheered as loudly and as frequently as the best of the rank and file—interrupted—in short, manifested all the passions of the hour. But on that Friday night—specially after this allusion of Mr. Gladstone's to his son—he sate silent, and in a far-off reverie.

But the Old Man still passes on his triumphant way—now gently, now stormy—listened to in delight from all parts; and when he is now and then interrupted by some small and rude Tory, dismissing the interruption with delightful composure and a good humour that nothing can disturb. It is only the marvellous powers of the man that can keep the House patient, for it is pointing to one o'clock, and the division has not yet come. But at last he is approaching the peroration. It has the glad note of coming triumph—subdued, however, to the gentle tone of good taste. It is delivered, like the whole of the speech, with extraordinary nerve, and without any abatement of the fire, the vehemence, the sweeping rapidity of the best days. And it ends in notes, clear, resonant—almost like a peal of joy-bells.

[Sidenote: The division.]

Then there are the shouts of "Aye" and "No," with "Agreed, agreed!" from some Irish Benches—a humorous suggestion that highly tickles everybody. Mr. Gladstone is almost the last to enter from the lobby of the majority. Alone, slowly, with pale face, he walks up the floor. The significance of the great moment, the long years of struggle, of heroic courage, of inflexible temerity, of patient and splendid hope, all this rushes tumultuously to the minds of his friends and followers, and, in a second, without a word of warning or command, the Liberals and the Irish have sprung to their feet, and, underneath their cheers—their waving hats, their uplifted forms—Mr. Gladstone passes through to his seat as under a canopy.

At last, Tom Ellis, the Junior Liberal Whip, quickly comes up the floor—the paper is handed to Mr. Marjoribanks—this announces we have won—a good cheer, but short, for we want to know the numbers—and then they are read out.



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For the second reading 347

Against 304

The majority is 43. The Lord be praised! we have polled all our men! And then more cheers—taken up outside in the deeper bellow of the big crowd, and then more waving of hats and another great reception to Mr. Gladstone. And so, as the streaks of day rose on this hour of Ireland's coming dawn, we went to our several homes.

CHAPTER X.

THE BUDGET, OBSTRUCTION, AND EGYPT.

[Sidenote: Sir William.]

Sir William Harcourt, on April 24th, had the double honour of speaking before the smallest audience and making the best Budget speech for many years. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has two manners. He can be as boisterous, exuberant, and gay, as any speaker in the House, and he can also be as lugubrious as though his life had been spent in the service of an undertaker. He was in the undertaker mood this evening. Slowly, solemnly, sadly, he unfolded his story of the finances of the country. He had taken the trouble to write down every word of what he had to say—an evil habit to which he has adhered all his life. But, notwithstanding these two things—which are both, to my mind, capital defects in Parliamentary speaking—Sir William put his case with such extraordinary lucidity, that everybody listened in profound attention to every word he uttered; and when he sat down, he was almost overwhelmed with the chorus of praise which descended on his head from all quarters of the House.

Sir William Harcourt imitated most Chancellors of the Exchequer, in keeping his secret to the latest possible moment. Like a good dramatist also, he arranged his figures and the matter of his speech so well that the final solution became inevitable, and the final solution, of course, was the addition of a penny to the income-tax. The debate which followed the Budget speech was quiet, discursive, friendly to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Mr. Picton is a formidable man to Chancellors of the Exchequer—for he has very strong ideas of reform—especially on the breakfast-table; but Mr. Picton is rational as well as Radical; and he cordially acknowledged the duty of postponing even the reforms on which Radicals have set their hearts until more convenient times and seasons.

[Sidenote: Belfast.]



It was after midnight when a very serious bit of business took place. The House gets to know beforehand when anything like serious debate is going to take place—even though there be no notice. Accordingly, in spite of the lateness of the hour, the House was pretty full, and there was a preliminary air of expectation and excitement. One of the iron rules of the House of Commons is that the Speaker cannot leave the chair until a motion for the adjournment of the House has been carried. This is always proposed by the senior Government Whip. The motion is usually carried in dumb show, and with that mumble



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in which business is carried through in the House when there is no opposition. But it is one of the ancient and time-honoured privileges of the House of Commons to raise almost any question on the motion for the adjournment of the House. The reason, I assume, is that the representatives of the people—when about to separate—thought in the olden days that it ought to be their right to raise any question whatsoever, lest the king in their absence should take advantage of the situation. Many of the rules of the House—including several which lend themselves to obstruction—are due to this feeling of constant vigilance and suspicion towards the Crown.

Mr. Sexton is one of the men whose life is centred in the House of Commons. He will attend to no other business, except under the direst pressure—he has no other interests—though he used to be one of the greatest of readers, and still can quote Shakespeare and other masterpieces of English literature better than any man in the House except Mr. Justin McCarthy. Thus, when he rose after midnight, he had in his notes before him a perfectly tabulated account of the riots in Belfast, so that every single fact was present to his mind. The story he had to tell is already known—the attacks on Catholic workmen—on Catholic boys—on Catholic girls—by the sturdy defenders of law, loyalty, and order in Belfast. It was not an occasion for strong speech—the facts spoke with their silent eloquence better than any tongue could do. The business was all done very quietly—it had the sombre reticence of all tragic crises; everybody felt the importance of the affair too deeply to give way to strong manifestation of feeling. But there were significant and profound, though subdued, marks of feeling on the Liberal Benches; and everybody could see what names were in the minds of everybody.

[Sidenote: Mr. Asquith as leader.]

Mr. Asquith was for the moment the leader of the House. Though he has still some of the ingenuous shyness of youth—though he is modest with all his honours—though he has charmed everybody by the utter absence of swagger and side in his dazzling elevation—there is a ready adaptability about Mr. Asquith to a Parliamentary situation, which is as astonishing as it is rare in men who have spent their lives in the atmosphere of the law courts. The aptitude with which the right word always comes to his lips—his magnificent composure, and, at the same time, his power of striking the nail right on the head and right *into* the head—all these things come out on an occasion such as that of April 24th. Very quietly, but very significantly, he told the story of the riots; and very quietly and very significantly he spoke of the responsibility of the Salisburys, and the Balfours, and the Jameses, whose wild and wicked words had led to this outburst of medieval bigotry.

[Sidenote: Mr. Dunbar Barton.]



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Mr. Dunbar Barton made a valiant but vain attempt to stem the tide against him, but he, like every other Unionist, was weighted down by the feeling that the Orangemen were doing immense service to the cause of Home Rule by their brutality. However, the fumes of Unionist oratory seem to have ascended to the heads of all the excitable young men of the Tory party. Mr. Dunbar Barton, personally, is one of the gentlest of men; his manners are kind and good-natured enough to make him a universal favourite—even with his vehement Nationalist foes; and he speaks with evident sincerity. But he had so worked himself up that he babbled blithely of spending a portion of his days in penal servitude—talked big about a mysterious organization which was being got ready in Ulster, and declared that the day would come when he would stand by the side of the Orangemen in the streets of Belfast. He was listened to for the most part in silence, until he tripped into an unseemly remark about Mr. Gladstone, when the much-tried Liberals burst into an angry protest.

[Sidenote: Mr. Arnold Forster.]

Very different was Mr. Arnold Forster. I must be pardoned if, as an Irishman, I always see something genial and not wholly unlovely even in the most violent Irish enemy. We all like Johnston of Ballykilbeg—most of us rather like Colonel Saunderson, and Mr. Dunbar Barton is decidedly popular. But this Arnold Forster—with his dry, self-complacent, self-sufficient fanaticism—is intolerable and hateful. He never gets up without making one angry. There is no man whose genius would entitle him to half the arrogant self-conceit of this young member. Acrid, venomous, rasping, he injures his own cause by the very excess of his gall and by the exuberance of his pretension. He also saw that the riots would do no good, and he hinted darkly of what he called “ordered resistance,” whatever that means. But, on the whole, the advocates of the Orangemen made a very poor show.

[Sidenote: Tory obstruction.]

The Tories thus early developed the policy of preventing the Government passing any Bill—English or Irish—good or bad. Whenever a good English Bill stood as the first order—a Bill which they did not dare to oppose—they found some excuse for moving the adjournment of the House. This is a privilege which was intended to be used very rarely, but in the course of the present Session it has been very freely resorted to—especially when it has afforded a chance of keeping off good Government business. On Tuesday, April 25th, the excuse given was that Mr. Bryce had been guilty of political partisanship in adding a batch of Liberals to the Bench in Lancashire over the head of Lord Sefton—the Tory or Unionist Lord-Lieutenant of the county. Mr. Legh, a young, silent, and retiring Tory member, began the attack, and did so in a very neat, well-worded, and pretty little speech. Mr. Hanbury—who is making his fame as a champion obstructive—followed

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this up, and Mr. Curzon addressed the House in his superior style. Mr. Bryce was able to blow to pieces the fabric of attack which had been so laboriously erected against him by stating a few facts, of which these may be given as a fair specimen. When Mr. Bryce came into office, of the borough magistrates in Lancashire 507 were Unionists and only 159 were Liberals. On the county bench there were 522 Unionists and 142 Liberals. This was a crushing reply, and an even more satisfactory retort came in the shape of the division, when 260 voted for the Government, and only 186 against.

[Sidenote: Tommy “Burt.”]

Nearly three hours of precious public time had been wasted over this wretched business, and at last, for the third or fourth time, the debate was resumed on the second reading of the Employers’ Liability Bill. An amendment of Mr. Chamberlain’s had been the obstacle which stood in the way of the Bill all this time. After the debate had gone on for hours, Mr. Chamberlain got up and declared that his amendment had served its purpose—an awkward way of putting it, which the Liberals were not slow to take up. The debate was made remarkable by the first speech of any importance made by Mr. Burt since he became a member of the Ministry. Mr. Burt is the most popular of members, and there was a ring of genuine delight in the welcome given to the honest, modest, genuine working man standing at the Treasury Bench, and symbolising the revolution of the times. Mr. Burt spoke ably and well, but it was in a foreign tongue—which it takes a little time for even a quick linguist to understand. This Northumbrian burr is the strongest accent in the House; even the broadest Scotch is less difficult to catch. It is curious how the different parts of the country betray themselves by their speech. There are Scotchmen whom it is not easy to follow, and there are very few of them who speak with anything like an English accent. Even the most fluent of the Welshmen speak with a certain hesitation, betraying their bilingual infancy and youth. The Irish have as many accents nearly as there are members. The Northumbrian burr, however, is a tongue apart. It has the pleasantness of every foreign tongue, and since Mr. Joseph Cowen left Parliamentary life, Mr. Burt is the only member who speaks it in its pristine purity. The Tories were closed finally, though they had their revenge by preventing the Bill from going to the Grand Committee, and the work of justice is a little longer postponed.

[Sidenote: Mr. Goschen playful.]

On Thursday, April 27th, the debate began on Sir William Harcourt’s Budget; and it found Mr. Goschen in an unusually playful mood. He had a task for which his talents eminently fitted him. Irresolute, timid, changeable, he is the very worst man in the world for constructive legislation; but give him the opportunity of criticising what somebody else has proposed, and he is in his real element, and is, perhaps,



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the very best man in the House of Commons. There wasn't much to criticise in the Budget of Sir William Harcourt from the Tory point of view. Finding himself with a deficit the Liberal leader was unable to go in for any startling novelty, especially in a Session when everything is to be opposed in order that Home Rule may be defeated. But one would have thought that this would have delighted the timid and conservative soul of Mr. Goschen. Not a bit of it. Taking cleverly the rather auroral promises of the election period, Mr. Goschen contrasted all these hopes and glowing prospects with the thin and meagre fare of Sir William's Budget. It was very well done—full of unwonted fire, of biting and effective raillery and of excellent party hits; it lit up for a brief space the sombreness which has fallen so completely on the Tory Benches in this year of wails and lamentations.

[Sidenote: Sir William as an early Christian.]

But the debate soon relapsed under a soporific speech from Sir John Lubbock, who made an insinuating proposal to open a discussion on Home Rule in the midst of the debate on the Imperial Budget. Sir William was a delight during these proceedings. Everybody knows that he has both a warm heart and a warm temper, and there have been times when the collisions between himself and Mr. Goschen have seemed to indicate a violence of personal as well as of party antagonism. But the duty of great ministers is to practise the scriptural principle of turning the other cheek to the smiter. It is wonderful, indeed, to see how humanity can attune itself to a situation. The most violent and vehement free-lance below the gangway sobers down in office to politeness, and peace with all men of good or bad will. Sir William, sitting on the Treasury Bench that night—beneath the wild tirade of Mr. Goschen—under the dreary drip of Sir John Lubbock—was a sight that a new Addison might show to his child; not that he might see how a Christian might die, but how a great Christian official could suffer with all the patience of silent and suffering merit. There was a look of almost dazzling and beatific sanctity on Sir William's face that was perfectly delightful to behold. And when he got up to reply to Mr. Goschen and to Sir John Lubbock, whither had departed that splendid rotundity of voice—that resonant shout of triumph or of defiance? Sir William coo'd gently as the white-feathered dove; and the Tory Benches, which had been ebullient with excitement a few moments before, could not find it in their hearts to do other than listen reverently to this good and holy man expostulating with heathen foes. And thus the first resolution of the Budget got quietly through, which was exactly what the Chancellor of the Exchequer wanted; whereupon there might have been observed, perhaps, by a close looker-on, a sinking of one of Sir William's eyelids, which might have suggested in a lesser mortal the wink of the man who takes off the mask when the comedy is over. Sir William is a splendid artiste.

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[Sidenote: A great night.]

It was probably under the influence of Sir William that this turned out to be the greatest and best night the Government had had so far. The Railway Servants' Bill got through its third reading amid cheers, and then, before it knew where it was, the House found itself actually in the same night discussing a third Ministerial measure—the Scotch Fisheries Bill. It is one of the privileges of Scotland that nobody takes the least interest in her measures outside her own representatives, and that even they are sombre and joyless in the expression of their delight. The demand for Scotch Home Rule does not come assuredly from the intervention of English or Irish speech. I have never seen the House with more than a score or two of members when a Scotch question is under discussion, and on the rare occasions on which a Southron does dare to intrude upon the sacred domain, it is with the most shamefaced looks. And so Sir George Trevelyan and his Scotch friends were allowed to have their nice little tea-party without any interruption, and the Bill got very nicely through. Thus ended a remarkable night.

[Sidenote: The bullet in Downing Street.]

And now I come to the point which, after all, had been the most interesting during the week, and which, though rarely mentioned, was in everybody's mind. It was on the Thursday evening that Mr. Sexton got up quietly to ask whether the reports published in the evening papers were true, that a man had been arrested the previous night in Downing Street, who had apparently intended to attempt the assassination of the Prime Minister. There was death-like stillness all over the House as Mr. Sexton put his question—picking his words slowly and deliberately. If men were not so anxious and so shocked there might have been some demonstration of the vehement anger which was felt in so many breasts as Mr. Sexton brought out the words which put in collocation in the mind of the unfortunate lunatic the idea of attempting to kill Mr. Gladstone, and the phrase of Sir Henry James during the debate on the Home Rule Bill. But feeling was too intense and solemn for outspoken or loud utterance, and Mr. Sexton was allowed to put his question to the end without any interruption from the intensely excited and profoundly thrilled assembly. This is one of the curiosities of Parliamentary and British nature—that the moments of tensest feeling are so often those which, to a stranger, would appear listless, indifferent, impassive. Mr. Asquith spoke in tones suitable to the temper of the assembly. This was a very grave matter, he said; but it was for the moment before the courts of law, and his lips were sealed. And so the subject dropped.

[Sidenote: Mr. Gladstone.]



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The people were asking themselves what would happen, when Mr. Gladstone entered the House; but if there had been any desire to mark the occasion, he himself prevented it. He dropped more quietly into his seat than usual, and at the moment when, to a thin House, Sir William was giving one of those gentle and beatific answers to which I have already alluded. To judge by Mr. Gladstone's quietness of entrance, nothing unusual had happened to him, and he himself had declined even to talk about the matter. And yet there was a certain look as of reverie on his face—as though of a man who had looked into that dark and hideous abyss called Death. He had not been looking very well for some days, and perhaps there was not—though imagination saw it—a deadlier pallor than usual on the face. But it was only when he was sitting on the deserted bench beside Sir William Harcourt that one had an opportunity of detecting any difference between his usual appearance and his appearance at that particular moment. The minute he had any part to take in the proceedings of the House, he was just as alert, cheerful, self-composed as ever. This wonderful man is as much a miracle physically as mentally. The giant intellect is backed by a steady nerve, the perfect mind by the perfect body. And thus he is able to go through trials, dangers, fatigues, which would destroy any ordinary man, as though nothing had occurred. During this week, indeed, he was especially playful. On the Tuesday night, when the onslaught was being made on Mr. Bryce, Sir Henry James spoke of Lord Sefton as being a strong Liberal. Mr. Gladstone uttered a quiet, gentle, deprecatory “Oh!” whereupon Sir Henry James reiterated his statement with a look of surprise and shock. Mr. Gladstone didn't depart from his attitude of gentle and almost plaintive remonstrance. He waved his hand mildly, and with a smile, and Sir Henry James was allowed to proceed to the solemn end of his solemn harangue.

[Sidenote: A visit to the Lords.]

It is not often that a rational man takes the trouble of paying a visit to the House of Lords. But that assembly was certainly worth a visit on May 1st. When the fight in Woodford, County Galway, was at its height, and everybody was repeating the name of Lord Clanricarde, people began to ask if there were ever such a person, or if he were not merely the creation of some morbid imagination—desirous of conjuring up a human bogey for the purpose of demonstrating the iniquities of Irish landlordism. The story on the estate which he owned, and whose destinies he controlled, was that, on one occasion, a strange spectral figure had been seen following the coffin of the old Clanricarde to the tomb of his fathers; that the figure had disappeared as suddenly and as noiselessly as it had come; that it had not reappeared even on the solemn occasion when again the historic and century-old vaults of the family graveyard had opened to receive the late lord's wife and the



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existing lord's mother. Writing his missives from afar—invisible, unapproachable, unknown—or known, rather, only by harsh refusal—by dogged, obdurate rejection of all terms—save the full pound of flesh—not even rendered human by passionate and eloquent outburst of remonstrance, but represented by thin, brief, business-like and curt notes as of a very crusty solicitor—such Lord Clanricarde appeared to the imaginations of the people of the district of which he was almost the supreme master. There were riots—fierce conflicts extending over days—then dreary sentences of lengthy imprisonments, with gaol tragedies; but still this strange, dry, inarticulate, obstinate figure remained immutable, always invisible, unapproachable, obdurate, spectral. Even the Tory leaders were disgusted and wearied, and Mr. Balfour was careful, in the very crisis and agony of his fight with the National League, to disavow all sympathy with the strange being that was bringing to his assistance all the mighty resources of an Empire's army, an Empire's exchequer, and an Empire's overwhelming power to crush in blood, in the silence of the cell and the deeper silence of the tomb, all resistance to his imperious will.

[Sidenote: Entry of a ghost.]

It must have been with something of a shock that the House of Lords, with all its well-trained and high-bred self-control, found that this curious and fateful figure was within its gates. Probably, to scarcely half-a-dozen of his colleagues and fellow-peers, was this figure anything but a strange and unexpected incursion from the dim ghost-land, in which, hermit-like, he seems to dwell. Indeed, the Marquis of Londonderry was careful to explain that he had no personal acquaintance with the man whose case he was defending against the action of the Commission presided over by Mr. Justice Mathew. And it was easy to see, that Lord Clanricarde was a stranger, and a very lonely one, too, in that assembly in which he is entitled to sit and vote on the nation's destinies. On a back seat, on the Liberal side of the House, silent, forlorn, unspeaking and unspoken to, he sat throughout the long and tedious debate in which he was a protagonist. There was, indeed, something shocking to the sense—shocking in being so surprising—that this should be the figure around which one of the fiercest and most tragic political struggles of our time should have surged. He is a man slightly above the middle height, thin in face and in figure. Somehow or other, there is a general air about him that I can only describe by the word shabby—I had almost ventured on the term ragged. The clothes hang somewhat loosely—are of a pattern that recalls a half century ago—and have all the air of having been worn until they are positively threadbare. Altogether, there is about this inheritor of a great name—of vast estates—of a title that in its days was almost kingly—an air that suggests a combination between the recluse and the poor man of letters, who makes his home in



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the reading-room of the British Museum. It was also a peculiarity of the position that he seemed an almost unwelcome visitant, even to those who had to defend him. There was an awful pause when he rose, silently and so spectre-like, from his seat in the dim land of the back benches, and passed to the seat immediately behind the Marquis of Salisbury. Lord Salisbury made a very vivid and amusing speech in the course of the evening, in defence of Lord Clanricarde and in an attack on Mr. Justice Mathew; but observers thought they saw a look of palpable discomfort pass across his face at the approach of the Marquis of Clanricarde. The Lord of Woodford handed to Lord Salisbury a little bundle of papers; in the distance, the bundle had an inexpressibly shabby look—the look one might expect on the bundle which some Miss Flit of the Legislature would bring every day, as the record of her undetermined claim. Altogether, this appearance of Lord Clanricarde in the glimpses of the moon, rather added to the mysterious atmosphere in which he loves to live.

[Sidenote: Sir Charles Dilke.]

In the meantime, a very interesting debate was going on in the House of Commons. I have already remarked that Sir Charles Dilke has, in an extremely short time, re-established that mastery over the ear and the mind of the House of Commons which he used to exercise with such extraordinary power in the old days before misfortune overcame him. It is a power and mastery derived from a perfect House of Commons mind. Sir Charles Dilke, doubtless, has written on many subjects outside mere politics; but in politics his whole heart and soul are concentrated. There is no man in the House of Commons so thoroughly political. It would be bewildering to give even the heads of the subjects on which he has written and in which he is profoundly learned. He has written about our Army—he could tell you everything about every army corps in the German Army—he knows all about every fortress on the French frontier—he can convey to you a photographic picture of every great public man on the Continent—he would be able in the morning to take charge of the Admiralty, and over and on top of all this knowledge he could tell you every detail of the law of registration, of parochial rating, of vestry work, and all the rest of that curious technical, dry, detailed information which raises the ire of parish souls, and forms the fierce conflicts of suburban ratepayers.

[Sidenote: Egypt.]

It could be seen after he had been five minutes on his legs that Sir Charles Dilke was about to give on Egypt a speech which would suggest this sense of easy and complete mastery of all the facts, and that, therefore, the speech would be a thorough success. And so it was—so successful, indeed, that it was listened to with equal attention by the Tories as by the Liberals, though nothing could be more abhorrent to the Tory imagination than the proposal by Sir Charles Dilke of an early evacuation of Egypt.

Perhaps their indignation was a little mitigated by the fact which Sir Charles Dilke brought out with such clearness, that Lord Salisbury was just as deeply committed to the eventual evacuation of Egypt as any other public man.



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[Sidenote: An awkward situation.]

It was curious to watch the House of Commons during this debate. There is no doubt that a very awkward situation was before that assembly. On the one hand, there were the interests of the country—as they are understood by the Tory party; on the other, there was a very difficult party situation—a situation difficult enough to tempt even the most patriotic, self-denying, and impartial Tory to gaze on the Liberal leaders opposite with a certain amount of mischievous curiosity. How was Mr. Gladstone going to make a speech which would fulfil those extremely diverse purposes? First, leave the door open for a continued stay for some time longer, and at the same moment for final evacuation; secondly, please Sir Wm. Harcourt on the one side, and Lord Rosebery on the other; thirdly, keep together a party which ranges from the strong foreign policy of moderate men to the ultra-nonintervention of Mr. Labouchere. Mr. Gladstone had, however, to do a good deal more than this. For it was easy to see from the condition of the Tory seats, and especially from the attitude of the front Opposition Bench, that party instinct had suggested that this was just one of the occasions on which the Government might be put in a very tight place. Let Mr. Gladstone say something which would satisfy Mr. Labouchere, and immediately Mr. Goschen would be down upon him—the late Chancellor of the Exchequer had the air of a man who was thoroughly primed for damaging criticism and ardent attack—with a philippic charging him with abandoning the most sacred interests of the country. Indeed, it was quite evident that Mr. Gladstone had to face a very ugly little question, and that his political foes had come down in full force to enjoy the spectacle of a Christian flung to the lions.

[Sidenote: A historic triumph.]

I cannot tell you how it was done—I have read the speech in the *Times* report—and I know that some people brought away from the speech no other impression than that it was delivered in a low tone of voice, and was not easily grasped; but the fact is, that judged by results this little speech, not much above half-an-hour in duration, was one of the most extraordinary triumphs of Mr. Gladstone's long oratorical life. What constitutes the greatest of all Parliamentary triumphs? It is that without abandoning your own principles, you shall so state a case that even your bitterest political opponents will rest contented with, and be ready to accept, your speech as the expression of their views. And this is just what occurred. Mr. Goschen, I have said, came down to the House chock-full of attack—I have, indeed, heard that he has confessed to having been prepared to make a speech of some length. On the other side of the House there sat Labby—full of that dogged, immutable Radicalism which will make no distinction between Liberal and Tory when his principles of foreign policy are at stake; and he was ready to pounce upon the



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Prime Minister if he had detected any departure from the narrow and straight path which leads to Radical salvation. In the background were the dim forces of Unionism, more eager—perhaps even more reckless—in readiness to attack Mr. Gladstone than his opponents on the opposite benches. And behind them and above them, in all parts of the House, was that countless host of busybodies, bores and specialists who see in Egypt an opportunity of airing fads, fanaticism, or vanities.

[Sidenote: A great eirenicon.]

The paper which contained the list of pairs for the night was crammed with the names of members from both sides, who, anticipating a debate of hours' duration, had wisely resolved to spend the interval between the motion and a division in the bosoms of their families—miles away from the floor of the House of Commons. The Whips had prepared their followers for a big division somewhere about midnight. And, lo! on all this vast and turbulent sea of conflicting waves the Prime Minister poured half an hour of oratorical oil, and the waters were stilled, and the great deep at perfect rest. In other words, Mr. Goschen threw away his notes; Labby advised Sir Charles Dilke not to go to a division; the debate had not begun and then it was over, and all that followed was addressed to a House empty of everybody. The Old Man—dexterous, calm, instinctive—had spoken the right word to meet every view, and there was nothing more for anybody to say. There is nobody else in the House who can do it; when his voice is stilled, the greatest of all Parliamentary secrets will die with him—the secret of saying the exact thing in the most difficult and embarrassing of situations. To the outside public, perhaps, this speech appeared nothing remarkable, and the allusions to it I have seen in the press have been few and perfunctory. You should hear House of Commons' opinion; you should listen to Unionists who hate him, to Tories who distrust him, to know what an estimate was formed of this marvellous speech by House of Commons' opinion.

[Sidenote: The triumph of the miners.]

On the Wednesday, again, Mr. Gladstone gave another example of his extraordinary dexterity. The miners had come down in full force to demand a legal eight hours. Sam Woods, of the Ince Division, on the one side, John Burns, of the Battersea Fields, on the other, frowned on the Old Man and bade him surrender. Behind him sat the great Princes of Industry—silent, but none the less militant, fierce, and minatory; opposite him was Lord Randolph Churchill, ready to raise the flag of Social Democracy and to wave it before the advancing masses against the Liberal party. Out of this difficulty, Mr. Gladstone rescued himself with all that perfect, that graceful ease which he most displays when situations are most critical. The debate was further made remarkable by a speech from Lord Randolph Churchill, who, amid the grim and ominous silence of the Tory Benches, thundered against Capital and Capitalists in tones for which Trafalgar

Square or the Reformers' Tree would be the appropriate environment; and then came the remarkable division, with 279 for the Bill and 201 against.



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[Sidenote: Hull Again.]

This was not the only victory which Labour was able to win in the course of this week. The House presented a very notable spectacle on May 4th. It was only by the aid of the Irish members, it is true, that Mr. Havelock Wilson was able to get the necessary forty to procure the adjournment of the House for the discussion of the Hull strike; but then, when Mr. Wilson was enabled to bring the subject before the House, he was listened to with an attention almost painful in its seriousness and gravity. Nothing, indeed, shows more plainly the vast social and political changes of our time, than this transformation in the attitude of the House of Commons towards labour questions. There was a time—even in our own memory—when such a question as the strike at Hull would have been promptly ruled out of order; and when the workmen who rose to call attention to it would have been coughed or even hooted down; and he would be certain to receive very rough treatment from the Tory party. The Tory party still remains the party of the monopolists and the selfish, but it has learned that household suffrage means a considerable weapon in the hands of working men, and, accordingly, though it may put its tongue in its cheek, it keeps that tongue very civil whenever it begins to utter opinion. To Mr. Wilson, then, the Tories, as well as the Liberals, listened with respectful and rapt attention as he made his complaint of employment of the military and naval forces of the Crown in—as he alleged—the buttressing of the case of the employers. And yet there was a something lacking. Mr. Asquith was able to show that he had done no more than he was compelled to do by the obligations of his office; and entirely repudiated any idea of allowing the forces of the Empire to be ranged on the one side or the other. Mr. Mundella was able to make a good defence of his officials against the charge which had been brought by Mr. Wilson. There was a good speech from John Burns, and it looked as if not another sympathetic word was going to be said for those starving men and women, who are making so heroic a fight for the right to live. Altogether, the situation was awkward and even distressing. The House, divided between the desire to remain neutral and to be sympathetic, was puzzled, constrained, and silent. It was at this moment that Mr. Lockwood made a most welcome and appropriate intervention. Gathering together the scattered and somewhat tangled threads of the debate, he put to Mr. Mundella several pertinent questions—among others, the very relevant one, whether or not the Shipping Federation had the right to employ sailors, whether they are not violating the law against “crimping” in so doing. Incidentally, Mr. Lockwood remarked, amid cheers from the Radical Benches—delighted at this opportunity of departing from its painful and embarrassed silence—that Liberal members had been returned to support the cause of labour, and that they ought to be true to their pledges. Mr. Gladstone at once grasped the situation with that unerring instinct which he has displayed so splendidly in the present Session, and at once undertook that the point raised by Mr. Lockwood should be considered; and so, with a word of sympathy and hope to the strikers, Mr. Gladstone rescued the House and himself from a painful situation.



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CHAPTER XL.

THE BILL IN COMMITTEE.

[Sidenote: The first fence.]

Yes, there was something intoxicating to an Irish Nationalist—after all his weary years of waiting—in seeing the House of Commons engaged in Committee on the Bill which is to restore the freedom of Ireland. And as I looked across the House on May 8th, with every seat occupied—with galleries crowded—with that air of tense excitement which betokens the solemn and portentous occasion—there rose to my brain something of the exaltation of passion's first hour. The Unionists might rage—the Tories might obstruct—faction might bellow its throat hoarse—Orangemen swear that they would die rather than see Home Rule—for all that, nobody could get over this great fact, of which I saw the palpable evidence at that solemn and historic hour.

But if for a few brief moments one was inclined to abandon oneself to the intoxication of this great hour, there was plenty to bring one very quickly back to solid earth, and to the sense of the long, dreary, and thorny road which Home Rule has yet to traverse.

Time after time Mr. Chamberlain gets up to continue the obstructive debate. Gravelled for matter, he clutches any topic as a means of lengthening the thin chain of his discourse. Mr. Redmond—the Parnellite leader—happens to be for a few moments out of the House. Here at once, and with eager welcome, Mr. Chamberlain seizes upon this fact to string a few sentences together—something after this fashion:—"I observe that the hon. and learned member for Waterford is not in his place. This is very remarkable. Indeed, I may go further and say that this is a most sinister fact. For we all know what the hon. and learned gentleman has said with regard to the kind of Parliamentary supremacy which alone he will accept. Well, now we are discussing this very point of the Imperial supremacy, and the hon. and learned gentleman is not in his place. I repeat, Mr. Mellor, it is a very remarkable, a very significant, a very sinister, and instructive fact!" And so on and so on.

[Sidenote: The stony silence of the Irishry.]

This kind of speech had another object—it was to provoke Mr. Redmond into a speech. For it was all the same to the Obstructives who spoke—provided only there was a speech. For, first, the speech of the Irish or the Liberal member consumed so much time in itself—and then one speech justified another; and thus the speech by the Irishman, or the Liberal, would give an excellent excuse for another series of harangues by the Obstructives. And this brings me to describe one of the portents of the present House of Commons which has excited a great deal of attention and a great deal of unfeigned admiration. As speakers of eloquence—as Obstructives—as

Parliamentarians of exhaustless resources—as gladiators, tireless, brave, and cool—
and, again, as stormy Parliamentary petrels—fierce,



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disorderly, passionate—the Irish members have been known to the House of Commons and to all the world during all the long series of years through which they have been fighting out this struggle. In this Parliament, and at this great hour, they appear in quite another, and perfectly new character. Amid all the groups of this House they stand out for their unbroken and unbreakable silence, for their unshakable self-control. Taunts, insults, gentle and seductive invitations, are addressed to them—from the front, from behind, from their side; they never open their lips—the silent, stony, and eternal silence of the Sphinx is not more inflexible. And similarly men rage, some almost seem to threaten each other with physical violence; *they* sit still—silent, watchful, composed. Not all, of course. There are the young, and the vehement, and the undisciplined; but that Old Guard which was created by Parnell—which went with him through coercion, and the wildest of modern agitations—which contains men that have lived for years under the shadow of the living death of penal servitude—men who have passed the long hours of the day—the longer hours of the night—in the cheerless, maddening, spectral silence of the whitewashed cells—the Old Parliamentary Guard is silent.

I have been in the House of Commons for upwards of thirteen years; and in the course of that stormy time have, of course, seen many scenes of passion, anger, and tumult; but the scene which ensued on May 8th, after Mr. Morley's motion, was the worst thing I have ever beheld. I am a lover of the British House of Commons—with all its faults, and drawbacks, and weaknesses, it is to me the most august assembly in the world, with the greatest history, the finest traditions, the best oratory. And, verily, I could have wept as I saw the House that night. It was not that the passion was greater than I have ever seen, or the noise even, or the dramatic excitement, it was that for hours, there was nothing but sheer downright chaos, drivel, and anarchy.

[Sidenote: The unloosing of anarchy.]

It began when Mr. Mellor accepted the motion for closure. At once there arose from the Tory Benches wild, angry, insulting cries of "Shame! shame! scandalous! the gag! the gag!" This would have been all right if it had been addressed to Mr. Gladstone. Party leaders have to give and take, and in moments of excitement they must not complain if their political opponents denounce them. But closure is the act of the presiding officer of the House, and it has been an almost unbroken rule and tradition of Parliament that the presiding officer shall be safeguarded against even an approach to attack or insult. It is a tradition that has its weak side; but, on the whole, it is in accordance with that great national English characteristic of subordination to necessary authority and the maintenance of order, decency, and self-control as the trinity of public virtues and personal demeanour. If Mr. Peel had been in the chair he would have called those Tories to order; and if they had persisted as they did, he would have promptly named the highest among them. Mr. Chamberlain was not ashamed to join in those hoarse

and disorderly shouts; and it was in this temper that the different sides walked slowly, silently, and frowningly to the division lobbies.



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The moment the division was over, the storm which had been stilled broke forth again, and with wilder fury. Lord Randolph Churchill, as I have several times remarked, is not the man he was. I remember the time when in such a scene he would have been perfectly at home; self-restrained, vigilant, and effective. But on this night it was nothing above mere inarticulateness—hoarse and ineffective fury—an almost painful exhibition. Sometimes his lisp became so strong that he was scarcely able to utter the words he desired to bring out. The Prime Minister became “The Primisther,” the Chief Secretary the “Cheesesecriy,” and all this impotence was made the more manifest by thundering on the box with his open hand—in short, it was all inarticulate, painful, perplexing emptiness, weakened and not fortified by prolific tub-thumping. A poor—sad—nay, a tragic business.

[Sidenote: The young man and the old.]

Such was the young man; and then came the old. To all this inarticulate, hoarse, stammering passion, Mr. Gladstone opposed a speech gentle, persuasive, self-possessed; as admirable in its courtesy as in its reserve of gigantic strength. With the deadly pallor of his face more remarkable than ever—the white hair shining out, as it were, with the peaceful suggestion of calm and strong old age—in a voice, low, soft, gentle—Mr. Gladstone uttered a few words which revealed all the great depths. In completely quiet, almost inaudible tones, he uttered these pregnant words: “As to other passages in the noble lord’s speech, I do not know whether he intended to intimidate me; but if he did, I do not think he will succeed.” There they are—these few words—so simple, plain, even commonplace; but what a history—what a character—what a grandeur there is behind and beneath them! So splendid are they that even Lord Randolph is touched to the quick, and he rises to explain. The Old Man—suave, calm, unutterably courteous—hears him politely; and then puts the whole case of the Government in a few, dignified, and tranquil words.

[Sidenote: In the depths.]

But the House, exalted to a higher plane of feeling by this great little speech, was soon dragged down again to the arena of chaos let loose; and, of course, Mr. Chamberlain was the person to lead the way to the dusty pit. Mr. Mellor had very properly attempted to stop the disorderly discussion of the closure; but Mr. Chamberlain was not in the mood to respect the authority of the chair or the traditions of the House of Commons, and audaciously, shamelessly—with a perky self-satisfaction painful to witness—he proceeded to violate the ruling of the chair—to trample on the order of Parliament, and to flout the Chairman. And then the waters of the great deep were loosed. A hurricane of shouts, yells, protests arose. Member got up after member—here, there, everywhere—always excepting the sternly silent Irish Bench, where sate the Irish leaders. A half-dozen men were on their feet—all shouting, gesticulating, speaking at the same time. In short, it was utterly unlike anything ever seen before in the House of Commons; it

brought vividly back to the mind the tumultuous French Convention in the days of the French Revolution.



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[Sidenote: Deeper and deeper still.]

It was almost a welcome break in this passionate and scarcely civilized din that a personal encounter between Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Byles for a moment interrupted the tempest. Mr. Chamberlain, in his characteristically genial way, had spoken of the Irish members as having been “squared.” The Irish members, habituated to insult—conscious of Mr. Chamberlain’s object—had allowed the observation to pass unnoticed; but Mr. Byles—ardent, sincere, an enthusiast on the Irish question—shouted out, “How much would it take to square you?” At once there rose a fierce tropical storm. There were loud shouts of approval—equally loud shouts demanding an instant withdrawal; members rose from every part of the House; in short, it was Bedlam let loose, and a scene impossible to describe.

This was deep enough, but there was a lower depth still to be sounded; and again it was Mr. Chamberlain’s plummet that descended down to the unfathomable bottom. “I do not,” he said to Mr. Byles, “object to the question, and I will answer it by saying that it would take a great deal more than the hon. member for Shipley will ever be able to pay.” There the words stand—in the immensity of their vulgarity, in their unsurpassable degradation, let them lie.

[Sidenote: The first fence.]

Finally, May 10th saw the first fence taken. The genial and gentle T.W. Russell proposed the removal from the Bill of the Second Chamber—the Chamber specially created for the protection of the loyal minority. With similar and strange unscrupulousness, the Tories all trooped into the lobby against their own principles. They were accompanied by a few foolish Radicals—indeed, it was the hope of detaching a sufficient number of Radicals to place the Government in a minority which produced the Tory apostasy from their own principles. There was a little uncertainty as to the result, and everybody expected that the Government majority would have been reduced to a dangerously low figure. When Mr. Marjoribanks read out a majority of 51—or a majority bigger than the usual one—there was a loud halloo of triumph and delighted surprise from the Liberal and the Irish Benches; and so the first big fence in the Home Rule Bill was easily taken.

[Sidenote: Obstructive Chamberlain.]

By the middle of the sitting on the following day the House of Commons stood face to face with the first clause. Under ordinary circumstances, the clause would have been passed after a few speeches—especially and definitely directed to the words of the clause; Mr. Chamberlain demanded the right on this clause to discuss, not only the whole Bill with all its other clauses, but the past and future of the whole Home Rule struggle. He quoted passage after passage from speeches delivered by Irish members

years and years ago; in short, he entered upon a survey of the whole controversy. There were countless interruptions



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from the Irish Benches—not in the least because the Irish members cared for Joe's attacks, but because such a roundabout discussion was altogether a revolutionary departure from all previous precedents; and would have been held distinctly out of order by any of the predecessors of Mr. Mellor in the chair. That good-natured and easy-going official, however, gave Mr. Chamberlain his head; and so, for an hour, he poured forth a stream of clever, biting, but mean and irrelevant vituperation.

[Sidenote: The G.O.M.'s greatest speech.]

It was well that it should have been so; for to this speech the House of Commons owes one of the most remarkable and historic scenes in its long history. Every reader of Parliamentary reports knows what it means to speak at eight o'clock. By that time, three out of five at least of the members of the House have gone to their dinners in all quarters of London, and the assembly is given up to the faddists and the bores, who never get another opportunity of delivering themselves. Nothing, therefore, could have been more unexpected than a speech from Mr. Gladstone at such an hour, and especially a speech which, in the opinion of many, leaves far behind anything he ever did. But, indeed, it is probable that Mr. Gladstone himself had no notion when the sitting began, or even a few minutes before he rose, that he would say anything very special. It is one of the peculiarities of this extraordinary man to be always surprising you. His infinite variety, his boundless resource, seem to be without any limitations. By this time, you would have expected that one who had listened to him for nearly twenty years would imagine that he had no further oratorical worlds to conquer, and that he certainly would not have waited to his eighty-fourth year to do something better than ever he had done before. But so it was. In passion, in destructive sarcasm, in dramatic force, in the rush and resistless sweep of language, Mr. Gladstone was more potent in the dinner hour of that Thursday night than he was ever at any other single moment in his almost sixty years of triumphant oratory.

[Sidenote: His powers as a mimic.]

Observers are divided as to his temper when he rose. Some onlookers, observing the tremendous force of voice and language—the broad, ample, and frequent gestures—the tremulousness that sometimes underlies the swell of passion—the deadly and startling pallor of the face—thought that he was suffering from excitement almost touching and perhaps affrighting to behold; while others thought that the chief and most impressive feature of this perfect tornado of triumphant eloquence, was the perfect calm that lay in the heart and bosom of all that storm. There are two things which will tell you of the omnipotence of an orator—one is the effect of his speech on foes as well as friends, and the other is its effect upon himself. Both these evidences were present, for the Tories seemed to have been swept away by the



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cyclone as resistlessly as the Liberals and the Irish, and the Tory paeans in honour of the Old Man which were to be found in the Tory organs next day only echoed the bounteous and generous recognition of his matchless powers which one heard from Tories in the lobbies throughout the evening. And as to the effect of the speech on Mr. Gladstone himself, it was to bring out a dramatic and mimetic power on which he very rarely ventures, and which in anybody but a perfect master of the House of Commons might descend into bad taste and bad tact. I know that Mr. Gladstone is really triumphant when he brings these qualities into requisition. I remember the last time he used them with any approach to the abundance of this occasion was when he was making the great speech which preceded his defeat in 1885 and the fall of his Government. On that occasion I remember very well that the Old Man puckered up his forehead into a thousand wrinkles, turned and twisted that very wonderfully mobile mouth of his—with its lips so full with strength and at the same time so sensitive with all the Celtic passion of his Highland ancestry—until sometimes you almost thought it a pity he had not taken to the Lyceum and some of the great parts in which Mr. Henry Irving has made his fame. There was another occasion which dwells in my memory. It was on one of the nights of the debate on the Coercion Bill. He was describing the promises of equal laws to Ireland, with the restrictions on Irish liberty which were contained in the Bill, and as he described restriction he gradually raised the fingers on one hand, then turned them spiral fashion until he had pointed the index finger to the roof—as though he were describing the ascent of a funambulist to the top of spiral stairs. It was at once eloquent and grotesque, and the House cheered and cheered yet again without any distinction of party—the friends in admiration of the splendid eloquence of the gesture, the foes in hearty admiration of the great and perennial spirit of the great Old Man.

[Sidenote: Comedy.]

But on May 11th there was a new and a bolder departure. Most of my readers have seen that remarkable little lay written by Mr. Gilbert for Miss Anderson to display the range and variety of her powers—"Comedy and Tragedy." Mr. Gladstone gave proof of powers of equally wide versatility; and all at the expense of poor Joe. First for the Comedy. I must quote the passage of the speech to explain what I mean:—

"My right hon. friend has a bundle of quotations. He says he has fortified himself. (Laughter.) He said he had fortified himself against me when I said there could be no supremacy without the presence of Irish members in this House. I never asserted anything of the kind. (Cheers.) 'Oh,' he said, 'I have got the papers'—(laughter)—and the party opposite cheered at the expected triumph. (Laughter.)"



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When Mr. Gladstone came to the words. “‘Oh,’ he said, ‘I have got the papers,’” Mr. Gladstone began fumbling in his pockets, just as Mr. Chamberlain had done—with that air of distraction and coming despair which appears on everybody’s face when he is anxiously seeking for an important but mislaid paper; and the resemblance, heightened by just the least imitation of Mr. Chamberlain’s voice, was so striking, so startling, so melodramatic, that the whole House, Tories and all, joined in the wild delight of laughter and cheers—laughter at the comic power, delight at the splendid courage and exuberant spirit of the prancing old war-horse, delighted, exhilarated, and fortified by the joy of battle and by the richness of his own powers and courage. Even yet the comic vein was not exhausted. Mr. Chamberlain—as I have said—had made copious quotations from past Irish speeches, and asked that they should be retracted. “If the work of retraction were to begin, is my right hon. friend,” asked Mr. Gladstone, with scorn in every tone, “willing to submit himself to the same process of examination? If the work of retraction were to begin he would have a lot to do.” And then came the passage which has already passed into Parliamentary history. “If we are to stand in white sheets, my right hon. friend would have to wear that ornamental garment standing in a very conspicuous position.”

[Sidenote: and Tragedy.]

And then came the other and the tragic note. Again I have to quote the exact words to convey the impression and explain the description:—

“If I were in the position of one of those gentlemen—if I had seen the wrongs and the sufferings of Ireland in former times, if the iron had entered into my soul as it had entered into theirs, it would have been impossible. I should not have been more temperate possibly than some of them under those circumstances of the language I used. (Cheers.)”

It was when he uttered the words, “if the iron had entered into my soul,” that Mr. Gladstone ventured on the bold gesture of striking his hand against his breast—a simple gesture, and not an uncommon gesture in itself—but you should have heard the resonant and thrilling voice—you should have been under the entrancing and almost bewildering spell beneath which at this moment all the imagination and emotion of the House lay supine, helpless, and drugged—to have understood the shiver of feeling which passed through everybody. And so he went on—rising higher and higher—a deeper harmony in every note—a more splendid strength in every sentence—till you almost thought you were looking at some great bird—with the strength and splendour of the eagle, the full-hearted and passionate melody of the lark—as it soared on, on its even and well-poised wing, higher and higher to the dim and blue ether of the upper air.

[Sidenote: A strange scene.]



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Right to the last word, there was the same unbroken, passionate strength and fervour, so that when it was all ended the House gave a start as though it had to rouse itself from some splendid vision. And then came that rude and quick awakening which, in the world of actualities, always bursts in upon the most solemn and moving hours. At about half-past eight every evening the Speaker or Chairman—whichever is in the chair—gets up and goes out to tea. Before doing so the presiding officer calls upon the next speaker, and when the speaker has been named, cries “Order, order!” and promptly disappears into the room where his meal is laid. Scarcely had Mr. Gladstone sat down when Mr. Mellor called upon Sir Richard Temple, then cried “Order, order!” and, almost within a couple of seconds after Mr. Gladstone had concluded, had vanished from the House. This was immediately followed by the stampede of the rest of the House—for by half-past eight everybody was famished with hunger—and the Chamber was left empty, silent, and dim, with a suddenness that was startling, disconcerting, and a little disillusioning. And then it was that the strongest proof was given of the effect of the speech.

[Sidenote: The outburst.]

The House, I say, became empty—but not altogether. The Irish Benches, which had become crowded as the great apology for Ireland was being pronounced, remained still full—full, but silent. There was something strange, weird, startling in those benches, full and yet silent, amid all this emptiness and almost audible stillness; and some of the Liberal members, who had left the House in the mad rush to dinner, quietly stole back to see what was going to happen. The explanation of the mystery soon came. After he sat down, ghastly pale, almost painfully panting after this tremendous effort, Mr. Gladstone tarried a little to recover himself—to say a few words to Mr. John Morley—to scribble a note. At last he rose, and then came the moment for which those silent Irish Benches had been waiting. With one accord, with one quick and simultaneous spring, the Irish members were on their feet—hats and handkerchiefs were waved; there was the suggestion of tears under the swelling cheers. Nor were the Irish left alone. The Liberals who had slipped back joined in. The effectiveness of their cheers was heightened by the fact that they were not in their places, but standing on the floor. From out their cheering ranks stood the splendid figure—the broad shoulders, the massive head, the shaggy beard and hair, all the virility and sensitiveness that are found in the splendid form of Mr. Allen—manufacturer and workman, poet and Radical. The Old Man, splendidly composed, and yet profoundly moved, looked back, gave a courtly bow, and then went out. And here it was that a little scene took place of which the public prints have hitherto contained no mention. In her corner place in the gallery had sat throughout this dazzling speech that best of friends and truest of wives, who has been the guardian angel of Mr. Gladstone’s life; and with outstretched hands and dim eyes, she received her triumphant husband in the corridor, where she had been waiting for him.



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[Sidenote: Deeper and deeper.]

Friday, May 12th, I may dismiss in a few words. As the closure had been refused on Thursday night, the Obstructives started again on the first clause on Friday afternoon—Mr. T.W. Russell leading the van. He had nothing to say beyond what he had said a hundred times already, even in the course of the present Session; and his speech would have passed unnoticed had it not been for a brisk but odious and ignoble little storm which he and the Tories managed to raise between them. Mr. Russell declared that he heard the phrase across the floor, “What the devil are you saying?” and stopped as if the heavens and the earth must refuse to go round on their axes because of this introduction into Parliament of the negligences of private conversation. Mr. Gibbs—a very pestilent and very empty member of the young army of silly obstructives—moved that the words be taken down—an ancient formula not heard of for years till the present Session, when everything is turned to account for the purpose of occupying time and breaking down the House of Commons, and at the same time accused Mr. Swift McNeill of having used the words. Mr. McNeill indignantly denied the charge: then Mr. Macartney attributed them to Mr. Sexton—another and equally indignant denial; and then much uproar and contradictions and apologies—the lubberly and unmannerly interventions of Lord Cranborne as usual conspicuous—and, finally, the end of the storm in a teacup. Positively loathsome—the whole business methods of the Tories to grasp at everything to rouse a storm or provoke a scene; and altogether disheartening to those who don’t wish to see the House of Commons reduced to the drivel and turbulence and anarchy of a French Convention. Finally, a little after six o’clock, the first clause of the Bill had passed, with a majority of 42. The House of Commons had decided that there shall be established in Ireland a Legislature of two Chambers. Then in a graceful, well-delivered, and pleasant little speech, Mr. Victor Cavendish opened the fight on the second clause. The evening was devoted to the Anti-vaccinationists—answered triumphantly in an admirable and unanswerable little speech by Sir Walter Foster—with as many as seventy men voting against vaccination. I had no idea previously that the proportion of lunatics in the Assembly was so large.

CHAPTER XII.

RENEWAL OF THE FIGHT.

[Sidenote: A fresh start.]

Nothing of memorable importance occurred during the week before the Whitsuntide holidays, but with Tuesday, May 30th, came the renewal of the great battle over Home Rule. The Old Man was first to be observed. He looked very fresh and sunny, but, at the same time, had that slightly deepened pallor which he always has on the first day of a Session—the result of the long day’s journey which he has gone through in coming from his country house. Mr. Balfour



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was also in his place, looking as though the open rivalry of Lord Randolph Churchill had not much affected his spirits. Mr. Chamberlain nearly always looks the same. He has himself informed the world that he does not take exercise in any shape or form whatsoever, and there is never therefore, on his cheek that look of deep-drunk sunshine which marks the cheeks of more active men. But he was ready for the conflict, and as the night went on showed there was no decrease in either the venom or the vehemence with which he means to fight against the Home Rule Bill. On the Irish Benches nearly every man was in his place, and the Tories had so far benefited by their buffetings from the *Times* as to make a braver show than they usually do in the early days after vacation.

[Sidenote: Home Rule once more.]

When the House separated, the subject under debate was an audacious proposal to postpone Clause 3. There was nothing whatever to be urged in favour of such a proposal; it was pure, unadulterated, shameless obstruction. But Sir Richard Temple is not gifted with a sense of humour, and on this amendment he wandered and maundered away for the better part of an hour. The House has yet no power to prevent a bore from consuming its time; but it is free to save itself from the yoke of attention. By a sort of general spontaneity, everybody left his seat; and though hapless Mr. Balfour was forced by the hard necessities of his official position to remain in his place, nobody else was compelled to do so; and Sir Richard addressed the general, void, encasing air. There was some more speech-making of the like kind—still to empty air—when suddenly and almost unexpectedly the debate was allowed to collapse. At first, this was unintelligible—for, senseless as was the amendment, it was no worse than scores of others which the Tories have made the pretext for endless debates.

[Sidenote: A tight division.]

However, the division revealed the secret. It is one of the peculiarities of this strangely interesting Session that nearly every division is a picturesque and portentous event. With a majority so small as forty, the turnover of a very few votes from one side to the other may mean the defeat of Home Rule, the downfall of Gladstone and his Government, and chaos come again. And these accidents are always possible. Death knocks at the door of the families of members of Parliament as of other people; and often, when one of the great divisions is pending, the Whips have to consider the grim and painful question whether they can allow a man to remain by the rack on which a wife lies tortured, or receive a loving mother's parting sigh. For some reason or other, Tuesday was a bad day for the Liberals, and there was a series of ugly and annoying little mishaps. Thus, in the first division, which was snatched quickly by the Tories, informed by their scouts of what was going on, the majority sank to thirty-three. This was a bad beginning, but worse, as will be seen, remained behind.



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[Sidenote: Lord Wolmer.]

The Committee was now on Clause 3. This is the clause which contains the list of the subjects on which the Irish Legislature is not to have the right to legislate—such questions as the succession to the Crown, questions of peace and war, foreign treaties, coinage, copyright, trade, *etc.* The list is comprehensive enough, but it was not comprehensive enough for Lord Wolmer; for he had an amendment to the effect that the Irish Legislature should not be allowed to pass even resolutions on these subjects. But even his own amendment did not satisfy him. He amended the amendment by further proposing that the Irish Legislature should not be allowed even to “discuss” any of these questions. The speech in favour of these proposals started from the point of departure common to all the Unionists, namely, that the Irish people were hereditary and irreconcilable enemies, and that the moment they had a native Legislature, it would immediately proceed to make alliances with every Power in the world which was hostile to the British Empire. There was France; of course, the Irish Legislature would pass a resolution of sympathy with France in case there was a war between France and England. Then there was the United States; what was there to prevent the Irish Executive from sending an envoy to the United States? And so on, through all the possibilities and all the insanity and malignity of which an Irish Legislature could be held capable.

[Sidenote: Sweet and low.]

Mr. Gladstone on one or two points was able to overthrow the whole case so elaborately made up. The Irish Parliament could not send representatives to a foreign Power, because they could not vote the money for such a purpose under the Bill. “Ah, but”—interrupted the incautious Wolmer—“could they not send envoys who were unpaid?” “No,” promptly responded the Old Man, “because they had no power under the Bill to ‘accredit’ envoys, and a foreign Power could not receive an envoy who was not accredited.” All this argument—broad, acute, tranquil—was delivered in a voice that now and then was painfully low, and sometimes you had to strain your ears. But then it was worth your while to strain your ears, so that you might master all the supremacy of the art and skill and knowledge of the whole speech.

For instance, he puts the question to Lord Wolmer, if he seriously means that the Irish Legislature is not to have the right to petition? Lord Wolmer answers that the Irish members will be in the Imperial Parliament. “Ah! that’s an argument, not an answer,” says the Old Man; and then, with the spring of a tiger, he pounces on the hapless Wolmer with the question: “Is the right of petition, then, to be taken away in every case where there is representation?”—a question which, with petitions pouring in by the thousand to the House of Commons from the Ulstermen and others, a Unionist like Lord Wolmer finds it impossible to



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answer. And it is in connection with this point a little scene occurs which brings out many of the points in this remarkable speech, which I have been trying to make clear. Mr. Bryce disappears from the House; then he returns: Mr. Gladstone asks him a question; the answer is apparently not satisfactory, for the Old Man lifts his hands to heaven in playful exaggeration of surprise. The House, puzzled, does not know what it means; but the Old Man soon explains. He had sent Mr. Bryce to the Library to get a copy of the recent *Life of Lord Sherbrooke—Robert Lowe*, that was—and Mr. Bryce had brought back the discomfiting intelligence that the book was not there. However, with such a memory as Mr. Gladstone's, this does not matter, for he is able to point out that an Australian Legislature had at one time passed a resolution, and agreed on a petition to the Imperial Parliament, in reference to the Corn Laws. Just fancy the keenness, the omnivorousness, the promptitude of that marvellous Old Man, who had read one of the most recently published works, and had promptly seized on a point bearing reference to a detail in his Bill.

[Sidenote: A pathetic scene.]

And then came the pathetic scene, in which again Mr. Bryce figured, and which once more brought out the marvellous grasp, the tenacious and inevitable memory of the splendid Old Man. The amendment of Lord Wolmer was, declared Mr. Gladstone, against "the law of Parliament," and, by way of emphasizing this point, he wanted to have a quotation made from Sir Erskine May's *Book on Parliament*. But the eyesight of age is weak, and there is in the House of Commons, until the gas is lit, something of the dim, religious light of a cathedral, and, accordingly, Mr. Gladstone had to rely on the younger eyes of Mr. Bryce. The scene which followed might be described as out of order, for there were two members standing at the same time. But the vast ascendancy of Mr. Gladstone over the assembly—the profound reverence in which all, save the meanest, bow before his genius, character, and age—enable him to do things not permitted to common men. In the rapt and serious face, in the attentive look, in the fingers beating the table as word followed word in confirmation of this view—in the curious, almost weird and unusual sight of two men standing side by side, Mr. Gladstone silent, Mr. Bryce speaking—there was a scene, the impressiveness, poetry, and pathos of which will never pass from the memory of those who saw it. And the House—so quick, with all its passion, and fractiousness, and meannesses, at grasping the significance of a great and solemn moment—marked its sense of the scene by a stillness that was almost audible—a hush that spoke aloud.

[Sidenote: And yet another.]



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There was just one other incident in this marvellous little speech which must be noted. I have remarked the oftentimes the voice of Mr. Gladstone was so low, that it was with difficulty one could hear him. The reason is curious, and is revealed in a little gesture that has only come in recent years, and that has a melancholy interest. Often now, when he is speaking, Mr. Gladstone puts his hand to his right ear, as men do who are making a laborious effort to catch and concentrate sound. The cause of this is that Mr. Gladstone's hearing has become defective, and he has to adopt this little stratagem to make his own voice audible to himself. You should see the Old Man with his hand to his ear, with the look of gentle anxiety on his face, to understand all this little gesture conveys; and how it exalts your sense of the mighty courage of this great Old Man, who is able to rise thus superior to all obstacles, to all foes, to all weaknesses of the flesh, all devices of the enemy.

[Sidenote: Mr. Balfour.]

Mr. Balfour, I have said more than once, does not display his talents best in Opposition. In his desire to be effective, he strains a not very strong voice until, it sounds almost like a shriek. I do not wish to be unfair to Mr. Balfour. There is, as I have often said in these columns, a certain distinction in all he does. I often think he is wanting in that consideration and reverence for the mighty old gladiator whom it is his duty to oppose; but for all this I make allowance, as it is his duty to oppose Mr. Gladstone, and in doing that, he may sometimes appear unintentionally irreverent. But the fact is, Mr. Balfour is thin, narrow, and does not get at the reality of things. Many people say he is very inferior to Mr. Chamberlain; but most assuredly I do not in the least agree with this opinion. To me the difference between the two men is the difference between a scholar and a counter-jumper—I mean a counter-jumper of the Senate, and not of the shop. But though that is my opinion, I cannot refrain from saying that Mr. Balfour contrasts very unfavourably with Mr. Gladstone in this struggle of giants.

[Sidenote: An ugly moment.]

It was during the speech of Mr. Balfour that a little incident took place, the full significance of which would probably not be grasped by the non-Parliamentarian. Mr. Balfour was arguing that it was impossible to properly discuss the amendment of Lord Wolmer until the House knew whether or not the Irish members were going to be retained in the Imperial Parliament. I do not know whether it was because there was something provocative in the manner in which Mr. Balfour referred to this subject, but it had the effect of rousing the once vulnerable, but now admirably controlled temper, which has played such a part in Mr. Gladstone's career. Rising with a certain deepened pallor, and with that feverish rush in his voice which those who watch him know so well he said that the Ministry



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meant to stick by the ninth clause, and would do their very best to get it accepted by the House. Here was a most portentous announcement—the portentousness of which the careful observer could see at once, by the sudden stillness which fell upon the House. Whenever a Minister, or even a politician of small importance who is not a Minister, makes a statement full of portentous possibilities as to the future, the House suddenly becomes still and tense, and you can hear a pin drop. It is the prompt and sometimes almost irresistible expression of the feeling that Destiny is throwing the die, and that you have to watch the grim and fateful result.

[Sidenote: The Treasury Bench looks awkward.]

And if you looked on the Treasury Bench, you could see that the feeling was not altogether comfortable. It was no secret that the ninth clause was the one which offered to the Government the one perilous fence they had still to take—that is to say, so far as their own followers were concerned. Hitherto the attitude of the Government was quite unknown; and, indeed, it was quite probable that the Government themselves had not finally decided what their attitude should be. But when Mr. Gladstone—pale, excited, and angry—jumped in with this outburst, it seemed all at once as if the fateful and final word of Destiny had been spoken, and as if the whole fate of Ireland, of Mr. Gladstone, of this great Ministry, and of this mighty Bill, had been definitely pledged to one throw of the dice. Imagine one of those contests which you find in the pages of Turgenieff or Tolstoi, which perchance you may have seen at Monte Carlo, which in the last few days may have been observed at Epsom Downs—in which life or death, ruin or halcyon fortune, depended on one throw—and you can have some sense of all that passed through the imagination of the House and that made it almost audibly shiver when Mr. Gladstone made this slight and terse interruption. Mr. Morley's face—serious, often sombre—cast in a mould and reflective of a soul inclined to the darker rather than the more cheerful view of life's tangled and unsatisfactory workings—grew black and troubled; the other Ministers who were present looked—not so eloquently, but still perceptibly—uncomfortable; Mr. Asquith—who had been a close observer—could not keep his keen anxiety from breaking through the mask of easy equanimity with which he is able to clothe his readiness to meet fortune in all her moods; in short, it was for Ministerialists one of those uncomfortable quarters of an hour in which life seems to concentrate all its bitterness, sorrow, and anxieties within a terribly brief space of time. And if you wanted to know further what was the full significance of what had taken place, you saw it in the open and almost indecent joy of Mr. Chamberlain's face; in the more subdued but a still unctuous look of Mr. Courtney; and you could hear it in the shriller pitch of Mr. Balfour's voice.



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[Sidenote: A false alarm.]

But all the same, it was a false alarm. For if the Old Man had tripped, he was able to recover himself very soon. Mr. Balfour was foolish enough to try and dot the "I's," and to put into Mr. Gladstone's mouth that which his enemies hoped he had said. For Mr. Balfour, remarking that Mr. Gladstone had made a more explicit declaration than any which had yet come from his lips—this was all right, and was quite true—went on to the further statement that the Old Man had now committed himself to standing or falling by the ninth clause "in its present shape." This, you will see, was the whole crux of the situation. If Mr. Gladstone had said this, then, indeed, it might go hard with him by-and-bye, for whether the Liberal party would accept the ninth clause in its present shape was one of the questions yet to be decided. The Old Man, however his words might have been open to this construction, had not in reality said anything of the kind. And, at once, he was prompt to see how necessary it was to correct this error, for he immediately rose to his feet to say that he had never said anything of the sort. What he had said was that the Government intended to stand by the principle that the Irish members were to have a place in the Imperial Parliament, which, it will be seen, leaves open the perilous and perplexing question: what form that representation in the Imperial Parliament is to take. At once there was a heavy sigh of relief, and most of all on the Irish Benches. Among the Irishry, the declaration of Mr. Gladstone had produced a moment of something like panic; the only exhibition of which was a certain impatience with the attempt of Mr. Balfour to pin the Old Man down to the most literal interpretation of his words. The panic soon passed away. It was all, I say, a false alarm. Vulnerable though his temper—though there was in him still enough of the hot onrush of battle and of resistance under all the snow of advancing years—the great old tactician had not forgotten his cunning. He at once seized the opportunity of saying he was not finally committed to the ninth clause in its present shape, and so we once more breathed freely.

[Sidenote: Joe comes back from dinner.]

This was the end of the important part of the debate before the dinner hour. It is one of the peculiarities of Mr. Chamberlain that no stress of a Parliamentary situation induces him to seriously interfere with his habits. When the clock points to ten minutes to eight any evening of the week, he may be seen to rise from his place with the inevitableness of fate, and to disappear for a couple of hours. I have seen him do this even when the fortune of a most important amendment seemed to lie trembling in the balance—the one occasion on which I have known him to break through that rigid rule was when his son was about to make that maiden speech which started that promising young fellow on his Parliamentary career. Coming back



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like a giant refreshed about ten o'clock, Mr. Chamberlain contrived to once more set aflame the embers of dying passion; and he threw himself into the fight over Lord Wolmer's amendment at the moment when all life seemed to have gone out of it. His speech was full of cleverness—of what the Americans call smartness, and it had all that point, personal and party, which sets your friends in a roar. The Tories cheered him vociferously, and point after point of brilliant and effective invective pleased the House—always anxious with its jaded appetite for a sensation. But when you had time to compare, it with that little speech delivered by Mr. Gladstone earlier in the evening—when you contrasted its fitful and gaudy brilliancy with the sober and broad wisdom of Mr. Gladstone's utterance—then, indeed, you were able to see what a gulf there is between the smart debater and the genuine statesman.

[Sidenote: A narrow shave.]

At last the debate was over; and then came what was, perhaps, the most exciting and most momentous incident of the evening. I have already spoken of the interest with which every division is regarded. The interest in this particular division was fully justified when the numbers were told; for the Government majority had fallen to twenty-one. At once there was a wild outburst of cheering from the Tory Benches. Some wits ventured on the cry, "Resign! Resign!"—altogether, the Tories had the best quarter of an hour they have enjoyed since that hideous afternoon before the Easter vacation, when, after a prolonged fight, the Old Man had to announce that he could not propose the second reading of the Bill until after Easter. It was all more or less of an accident; there were plenty of things to account for it—a reception at the House of a prominent Liberal lady, and many other explanations: but, all the same, it was a very ugly little incident; and though Mr. Gladstone carried it off with that indomitable courage of his, which doesn't know what a confession of defeat means, one could see that he did not like it; and for the rest of the evening there was a visible gloom in the Liberal ranks.

[Sidenote: Happy again.]

But May 31st brought the Derby, and with the Derby there came upon the Tory Benches one of those moments of temptation which the natural man is utterly unable to resist. The amendments followed each other in rapid succession; division came on top of division; and in them all the Liberals jumped back to their old superiority of numbers. In the earlier part of the day, when the fortunes of Isinglass were still undetermined, the majorities were enormous; and though there was a certain falling off when sporting gentlemen began to get back from the dusty Downs, the average was well kept up; and it was with a distinct rise in the temperature of Liberal hopes and confidence that this stage was reached. On the following day the lowness of the voice in the Old Man was a little

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more perceptible, and when it got to midnight, he seemed painfully fagged and exhausted. It was, perhaps, because he was in that mood that he made some concessions to the Unionists, which have been somewhat resented. But as these concessions, according to Mr. Gladstone himself, only carried out what the Government had intended from the first, these things may be passed. They had reference chiefly to prohibition of raising in Ireland anything like a military force—even in the shape of a militia or volunteer force. On June 2nd, there was one of those transformations in which the Old Man is constantly surprising friends and foes. He was alert, vigorous, watchful of everything that went on, and the voice rose to its old strength and resonance. It was during that afternoon that there was a slight indication for the first time throughout the progress of the whole Bill of any dissatisfaction on the part of the Irish members. Mr. Byrne—one of the Unionist gang of lawyers—proposed a ridiculous amendment, the effect of which would have been that the Irish Legislature would not have had the right to give a license for a fowling-piece, or to arm their police to meet a rising of the Orangemen.

[Sidenote: Mr. Sexton intervenes.]

It was then that Mr. Sexton intervened with a word of warning against such a restriction. In burning though carefully restrained language, Mr. Sexton replied to a taunt of Mr. Chamberlain at the silence of the Irish members. Their silence, said Mr. Sexton, was due to their knowledge that Mr. Chamberlain and his confederates had entered into a conspiracy to destroy the power of the House of Commons, and to defeat the mandate of the nation by obstructing a Bill they could not otherwise defeat. Spoken with great fire—with splendid choice of language—with biting sarcasm, of which he is a master—the speech was an event. Mr. Gladstone promptly recognized its spirit; thanked the Irish members for their consideration; and then declared, amid a great sniff from Joe's upturned nose, that if the Irish members desired to express their opinions on any amendment, he and his colleagues would wait before expressing their own views. There seemed to be a slight hope among the Tories and the ever-venomous Joe that this meant a rift in the lute between the Irish members and the Government; but they were woefully disappointed—especially when the amendment was indignantly rejected by the House.

[Sidenote: The "Daily News."]

It is the outspoken, rather than the loudly uttered, that is often the important thing in a House of Commons discussion. This was the case with the curious little debate which Mr. Chamberlain initiated on June 6th. The *Daily News* had published a little article describing the manner in which the Tories had shouted at—hooted—interrupted—Mr. Gladstone on the Thursday night previous. It may at once be asked why Mr. Chamberlain should have thought it necessary to notice the article. He



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boasted that he was not in the habit of noticing what appeared against him in the newspapers—which is not true to a certain extent, or at least is not generally so thought, for it is understood that no man reads more carefully the extracts sent to him by those press-cutting agencies which have added either a new luxury or a new terror to public life. But Mr. Chamberlain's action had many roots. First, like many others, very free in their comments and attacks, he is almost childishly sensitive. Watch him in the House of Commons when an attack is being made upon him which he does not like, and the fierce and domineering temper reveals itself in the fidgety movement, the darkened brow, the deeper pallor on the white-complexioned face. When he was a Cabinet Minister he could never, or rarely, be got to remain in the House of Commons during the whole of the evening; and one of the chief reasons, I have heard, he gave for thus absenting himself was that he could not stand the talk from the opposite side—it made him so angry.

[Sidenote: Joe's motives.]

But there were other and more immediate reasons for his anger with the *Daily News*. Joe was conscious of the growth of two feelings—either of which was very perilous to him. First, he began uneasily to feel that the country—watching the struggle between him and the Old Man—was getting a little disgusted at the business; and saw in it a want of that chivalry and fair play which it desires to see even in the fiercest political controversy. This was not a pleasant sentiment to have growing up against one; and Joe felt that it has serious perils to his future political position. And, secondly, he was conscious that the majority of the House of Commons was growing very restive under the desperate obstruction of which he had made himself the champion, and that this feeling might soon become strong enough to carry Mr. Gladstone and the Ministers off their feet, and compel drastic measures which had hitherto been steadily refrained from. This would not suit the book of Joe at all, whose object it was to keep the struggle going as long as he possibly could manage it, careless of the traditions of Parliament, of the dignity and decency of the House of Commons, of the life and strength of Mr. Gladstone, of everything except his own greedy desire for personal revenge and triumph.

[Sidenote: Mr. Gladstone's gentleness.]

This was what lay behind the plausible and honeyed words in which Mr. Chamberlain attacked the article in the *Daily News*. And here a curious difficulty arose which rather helped Joe, and almost enabled him to score a great triumph. Everybody knows that between the temper of Mr. Gladstone and that of his friends and supporters there is an impassable gulf. That mastery of a vulnerable temper, which accounted for many of the troubles of his earlier political career, which he himself has acknowledged in many a pathetic passage in his correspondence—that



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mastery of the vulnerable temper is now so complete that the Old Man glides through scenes of insult and passes over what the humblest member of the House would often find it hard to endure. There is something indeed strange, wistful, almost uncanny, in the unbreakable gentleness of that white figure, with the ivory complexion, the scant white hair, the large white collar and broad white shirt-front—there is something which becomes almost an obsession to the observer in watching the figure with its strangely tranquil and gentle expression in the heat and centre of all this fierce Parliamentary battle.

[Sidenote: And eagerness.]

And what makes it all the more peculiar is that this strange gentleness does not go side by side with want of interest in the struggle. On the contrary, all those around him and near him declare that never has Mr. Gladstone been more keen of any subject than he has been on this Home Rule Bill. He thinks of nothing else; he enjoys it all. I saw a curious instance of this intensity of his interest about that time. Having a word to say to one of the Ministers, I was seated for a moment on the Treasury Bench just beside the Chairman—Mr. Mellor. Mr. Gladstone had gone out for a few minutes. Sir William Harcourt was in charge of the Bill, and he was replying to some argument of the Unionists opposite. Sir William Harcourt has an excellent method of dealing with futile and dishonest amendments. He declines to argue them in detail. With that rich humour of which the public know less than his friends and intimates, Sir William airily dismisses the whole business, and with a laugh brings down shivering to the ground a whole fabric of laboriously constructed nonsense. Well, Sir William was in the middle of a sentence in which he was speaking of the absurd suspicion of the Irish people which was entertained by the Tories—and Mr. Gladstone, entering from behind the Speaker's chair at that very moment, just caught that one phrase. It was impossible for him to hear more than that one word "suspicion"; but at that word he pricked up his ears, and while he was still walking to his place—before he had seated himself—"Hear, hear," he cried. His eagerness would not let him wait till he had taken his seat. His absolute absorption in the Bill before the House was so complete that, as he walked to his seat, you could see the rapt and concentrated look, which showed that, even during the few minutes he had been away, the brain had never left for one second its absorbing theme.

[Sidenote: The consolations of old age.]

But—as I have indicated—this complete subjugation of temper which Mr. Gladstone has achieved, has its disadvantages when such a conflict is provoked as that with Mr. Chamberlain on the article in the *Daily News*. Mr. Gladstone himself spoke of the consolations of old age; there is one consolation he did not mention. His absorption in the Bill and the slight deafness in one of his



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ears do not allow him to perceive so plainly the rude noises and interruptions by which he is often assailed from the Tory Benches. Moreover, the native chivalry of his disposition, the curious simplicity which has remained his central characteristic, in spite of all the experiences of the baser side of human nature which must have been crowded into all that half a century of official and Parliamentary life—that unwillingness to see anything but deplorable error in his most rancorous, meanest, and most malignant opponent—all these things make it difficult for him to understand the ugly realities whose serpent heads show themselves plainly to almost every other eye but his.

There is a dispute among the authorities as to the incidents of that Thursday night—some, even among those friendly to the Prime Minister, declaring that there was nothing unusual in the interruptions of that night. My own recollection is clear that there was a great deal of noise, and that it was so bad that Mr. Chamberlain tried to explain it away, and was careful to absolve himself and his friends from all responsibility for it. In the general body of the Liberal party there is no doubt whatsoever about that business. Liberal after Liberal came up to me afterwards, in allusion to a few remarks I felt it my duty to make, to declare their entire agreement with the view I had put forward—that the description of the *Daily News*, though consciously and obviously written in the vein of parody, was a fair and just description of what had taken place. Sir Henry Roscoe is not an excitable politician, though no man holds to the Liberal faith more firmly. He was met on the following Sunday by a friend, and when asked how he viewed the situation, declared that he was rather “low!” Why? he was asked. Because his heart was saddened and enraged by the treatment of the splendid Old Man by Mr. Chamberlain and the Tories. To a leading Liberal Minister, two Tories privately declared that their pain and shame and disgust with the conduct of their own side to Mr. Gladstone was so profound, that they had to get up and leave the House to control their feelings.

[Sidenote: A complex situation.]

When, therefore, Mr. Chamberlain came forward with his audacious complaint, this was the curious situation: that the bulk of the Liberal party, and many even of their opponents, were convinced that the comments of the *Daily News* were more than justified. The frantic cheers with which each successive sentence of the scathing attack in the description was punctuated by the Liberal and Irish Benches, as Joe, with affected horror, read them out, sufficiently indicated what they thought. And, on the other hand, the man in whose defence this reply to his assailants was made was just as convinced that his enemies had been unjustly assailed, and that he himself had been well and courteously treated. In such a situation it was just possible that Mr. Chamberlain would escape



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from his position with flying colours; would have the *Daily News* censured for falsehood by a House of Commons that believed in its truth; and have himself declared chivalrous by a Parliament that knows him to be malignant, unscrupulous, and merciless. To prevent such a catastrophe it was a painful but necessary duty to bring out the realities of the case; and not only a painful but also a thankless duty in face of what everybody knew would be the attitude of Mr. Gladstone himself.

[Sidenote: Mr. Gladstone shakes his head.]

For Mr. Gladstone did not delay long in indicating to the House what his attitude would be. When I was speaking and denouncing the rude interruptions of the eventful Thursday night, he shook his head ominously and in contradiction—though manifestations which came from Liberal and Irish Benches showed that he stood alone in his view of the events of that night. And it was no surprise to the House, therefore, when he stood up and said that he entirely disclaimed any feeling of resentment for anything that had been done to him, and that he confessed he had not perceived the interruptions to which the report of the *Daily News* had called attention. After this, there seemed no more to be said; but the battle was not yet over. The Tories had been charged both by the *Daily News* and by a speech in the House with want of courtesy to Mr. Gladstone. Nobody knew better than Mr. Balfour how much ground there was for such a charge; for often in the course of the present Session—with a dark frown on his face, with an almost violent gesture—he has called on his unruly followers behind him to conduct themselves. The effect of what had taken place was to extort from Mr. Balfour a tribute to the universal respect in which the Prime Minister was held—a tribute which the splendid Old Man acknowledged by a low bow; and, in short, the Tories had to bind themselves over to keep the peace by their professions of a chivalrous desire to respect the person and the feelings of the great Prime Minister. And thus it was that it ended for the moment in a drawn battle—Mr. Chamberlain having to withdraw his motion, and I my amendment.

[Sidenote: Slow progress.]

But in the meantime the progress with the Bill was terribly slow. We were now on the second week with the third clause. Amendments were disposed of one night only to find that the next day the number of amendments, instead of being diminished, had been increased. It would be a sheer waste of time and space to go into detail about these amendments. The third clause is the clause which deals with the questions that are to be excluded from the Irish Parliament. The list is sufficiently long—peace and war—the Crown—the Lord-Lieutenancy—trade and commerce—the coinage and the currency—copyright and navigation—treason and treason felony. But even this list was not sufficiently long for the Unionists. They propose to increase this list



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of exemptions until, if they succeeded, the Irish Legislature would have to shut up shop for want of business to attend to. One man gravely proposed that the Irish executive—being made responsible for the peace, order, and good Government of Ireland—should not have the right to settle the procedure in the Irish criminal courts. Another gentleman proposed that all cases referring to criminal conspiracy should be left to the Imperial Government and Parliament. The meaning of all this was that the Unionists wanted to draw a ring fence around the Orangemen of Ulster, who had been threatening rebellion. First, by one set of amendments the Irish Government was not to have a police able to put them down, and then the Irish courts were not to be able to convict them when they broke the law.

[Sidenote: The hours of labour.]

On June 9th the Unionists were on another line. They professed to think that if the Irish Legislature were not compelled to do so they would not prevent overwork and long hours. This led to the proposal that all legislation on hours of labour should be taken out of the hands of the Irish Parliament. Mr. Chamberlain argued this with his tongue in his cheek—professing to dread the unequal competition in which poor England would be placed if wealthy Ireland were allowed to compete unfairly by longer hours. He urged this in a speech directed to every absurd prejudice and alarm which the ignorant or the timid could feel—altogether made a most unworthy contribution. John Burns—breezy, outspoken—not friendly to all things done by the Liberals in the past, but firm in his Home Rule faith—went for Mr. Chamberlain in good, honest, sledge-hammer, and workmanlike fashion. The member for Battersea even dared to blaspheme Birmingham—the Mecca of the industrial world—for its notoriously bad record in industrial matters—an attack which Joe seemed in no way to relish. And all the time the Old Man—with his hand to his ear, and sitting on the very end of the Treasury Bench, so as to be nearer the speaker—listened attentively, sympathetically, occasionally uttering that fine leonine cheer of his. It was on this amendment that the Ministerial majority fell, owing to various accidents, to 30, and the Tories cheered themselves into a happy condition of mind for a few minutes.

[Sidenote: The guillotine—but not yet.]

Towards the end of the sitting there was a certain feverishness of expectation. Dr. McGregor, a Scotch Highland member, had announced that at half-past six he would move the closure of the third clause—on which we had now been working for a fortnight. But Mr. Mellor refused to put such a drastic proposal on the suggestion of a private member. There was, however, a very plain intimation that if a Minister were to make such a proposal it might be considered differently; all of which meant that we were approaching—slowly, patiently, forbearingly—but still approaching the moment when drastic steps would be taken to accelerate progress.



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CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEXTON INCIDENT.

[Sidenote: Mr. Sexton.]

The resignation of Mr. Sexton, early in June, seemed to point to one of those disastrous splits in the Irish ranks which have always come at the wrong moment to spoil the chances of the Irish cause. There were many whose memories were brought back by the event to that trying and strange time when Mr. Parnell fought his desperate battle for the continuance of his leadership. But then there were many modifications of the position, and the chief of these was the much greater tranquillity with which the affair was regarded; and the general faith that the Irish members would be wise enough to settle their differences satisfactorily. Still there were some very ugly moments.

[Sidenote: A Conservative opportunity.]

Nothing could be more galling, for instance, to those who had charge of the Home Rule Bill, than to look across at the Irish Benches and see a vast and aching void in the places where the representatives of the people mainly concerned are accustomed to sit. The Tories were not slow to utilise the moment; and if things had been different—if the Home Rule cause had not got so far—they would probably have been able to stop progress with the measure altogether. But fortunately the Home Rule Bill was in committee—and whether men like it or not, it is impossible for them to avoid something like business discussion when a Bill is in committee. There is the clause under discussion; there are the amendments to it, which stand on the paper; the clause and the amendments have to be spoken to; and it is impossible, within the limits of a discussion so defined, to introduce a subject so extraneous as a domestic difficulty in the Irish ranks. But, at the same time, the opportunity was too tempting to be altogether passed without notice. Sir John Lubbock has taken a prominent part at times in opposing the Home Rule Bill. Sir John is a most estimable man, has written some very entertaining books, and in the City has appropriate rank as both an erudite and a rich banker. But he does not shine in the House of Commons. His voice is thin and feeble, and his arguments, somehow or other, always appear wire-drawn. And then the House of Commons is a place, above all others, where physical qualities go largely towards making success or failure. A robustious voice and manner are the very first essentials of Parliamentary success; and no man who is not gifted with these things has really much right to try Parliamentary life. However, Sir John Lubbock was not strong enough to withstand the temptation of making capital out of Irish misfortunes; and he pointed to the Irish Benches, with their yawning emptiness, as a proof that the Irish members took no interest whatsoever in the Home Rule Bill.

[Sidenote: Irish objections to divorce.]



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Meantime, in the House itself the Home Rule Bill was crawling slowly along. The Unionists were at their sinister work of delaying its progress by all kinds of absurd and irrelevant amendments. For instance, one Unionist wished to restrict the Irish Legislature as to the law of marriage and divorce. Mr. Gladstone has over and over again pointed out that, as the Irish have one way of looking at these things, and the English another, it would be absurd not to allow the Irish Legislature to settle such a matter in accordance with Irish feeling. Curiously enough, the Unionists did not receive much encouragement on this point from the Irish branch of the enemies of Home Rule. Mr. Macartney, an Irish Orangeman, proclaimed on the part of his co-religionists that the Irish Protestants had nearly as much objection to divorce as the Irish Catholics; and, so far as that part of the amendment was concerned, he had no desire to see it pressed. What he apprehended was a change in the law for the purpose of prejudicing mixed marriages—marriages between Catholics and Protestants. Mr. Gladstone, it is well known, on the question of divorce is a very sound and very strong Conservative. The sturdy fight he made against divorce still lives in Parliamentary history, and has often been brought up—sometimes in justification of equally stubborn fights—against him. It is one of the points on which he does not seem to have much modified his opinions, in spite of the advance of time, and all that has taken place in the long stretch of years between now and the day when an unbelieving and pagan minister like Lord Palmerston enabled men and women to get rid of adulterous spouses. But Mr. Gladstone declined to be drawn.

[Sidenote: Disestablishment.]

On June 18th, Mr. Bartley proposed an amendment to a restriction in the Bill with regard to the establishment and endowment of any church. By the Bill—as is pretty well known—the Irish Parliament are forbidden to confer on any church the privilege of State establishment and State endowment. To this restriction no Irish member has ever raised the least objection. It was reserved for Mr. Bartley—one of the most vehement opponents of Irish nationality and an Irish Parliament—to declare that such a restriction would make the Parliament unworthy of the acceptance of a nation of freemen, and to propose that accordingly it should be removed. The position, then, in which the Irish opponents of the Bill were placed, was this—that while denouncing the supremacy and encroachments of the Catholic Church as one of the main objections against the Bill, they proposed that the Irish Parliament should have the right to establish and endow that very Church. Mr. Balfour perceived—under the light thus borne in upon him—that this was not an amendment which the Tory party could safely support; and he accordingly advised Mr. Bartley to withdraw it. Mr. Gladstone made a few scornful observations; and, without a division, the proposal was huddled out of sight. It was almost a pity. It would have been such an instructive spectacle to see the whole Tory party voting that the Catholic Church in Ireland should have the right to be endowed and established; and some of the Irish members felt this so much, that they were very much inclined to force the Tories to a division. But they let the incident pass.



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[Sidenote: The triumph of the tweed coat.]

It is one of the curious things about Parliamentary life in England, that the smallest detail of personal habit attracts the all-searching gaze of the entire world. Let a man change the shape of his hat, the colour of his clothes, the style even of his stockings, and the world knows it all before almost he is himself conscious of the change. And then, though the House of Commons consists for the most part of men well advanced in middle life—men who have made their pile in counting-house or shop, before devoting themselves to a Parliamentary career—it is also a House where wealth and fashion are very largely represented. It is often a very well-dressed body; and in this House of Commons, in particular, there is a very large proportion of well-tailored and well-groomed young men—especially, of course, on the Tory side. The consequence is, that you are able to trace the transformations of fashion, the processions of the seasons, the variety of appropriate garbs which social and other engagements impose, as accurately in the House of Commons as in Rotten Row.

[Sidenote: The old order.]

The ordinary tendency of the Parliamentary man is towards the sombre black, and the solemnity of the long-tailed frock-coat. There have been times when if a member of Parliament did venture to enter the House of Commons in a coat prematurely ending in the short tails of the morning coat, or in the tail-less sack-coat, he would have been called up to the Speaker's chair and as severely reprimanded as though he had committed the most atrocious offence—in those far-off days—of wearing a pot-hat. But in these democratic times one can do anything; and low-crowned hats, sack-coats, homespun Irish tweeds, affright and shock the old aristocratic Parliamentary eye. When summer approaches, the whole aspect of the House changes. The sombre black is almost entirely doffed; and you look on an assembly as different in its outward appearance from its antecedent state as the yellow-winged butterfly is from the grim grub. Indeed, members of Parliament seem to take a delight in anticipating the change of dress which the change of season imposes. There are members of the House of Commons who can claim to wear the very first white hat of the season. Sir Wilfrid Lawson has a sombre creed and a Bacchanalian spirit; and, accordingly, the very first time a mere stray gleam of sunshine streaks the wintry gloom Sir Wilfrid wears an audaciously white hat.

[Sidenote: Mr. Gladstone's rejuvenescence.]

Mr. Gladstone is a curious mixture of splendour and carelessness. He nearly always wears a small, narrow black tie, which brings into greater relief the Alpine heights and the measureless width of his big shirt-collars, and the broad expanse of his shirt-front. But this tie—though it marks a pleasant and becoming individuality of dress—loses half its effect by nearly always getting out of its



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place; when night is advanced, the knot is always about half across Mr. Gladstone's neck. On the other hand, he is nearly always very carefully dressed; his black frock-coat—a little ancient in make, and always of the smooth black, which has given way with younger men to the diagonals—is a well-known feature of every great debate, and adds grace to his appearance and delivery. When summer comes, however, he bursts into an almost dazzling glory of white waistcoats, grey cashmere coats, and hats of creamy-yellow whiteness, ethereal and almost aggressively summery. The younger men are not slow to follow so excellent an example—though generally there is the tendency to the dark grey, which is a compromise between the black of winter and the fiery white tweed which the man in the street is wont to wear. Sir Charles Russell—who, returning from Paris on the same day as Mr. Sexton, received a very warm welcome—is also a child of his age in his clothes. Time was when a great legal luminary—especially if he were on the bench—was supposed to be violating every canon of good taste if he did not wear garments which might be described as a cross between the garb of a bishop, an undertaker, and a hangman. The judge on the bench, in fact, was always supposed to be putting on the black cap figuratively, and, therefore, was obliged to bear with him the outward sign of his damnable trade. The late Lord Cairns was the first to break through this tradition, and affect the style of the prosperous stockbroker. Sir Charles Russell is different, for he dresses in thorough taste; but when one saw him in the House of Commons in a grey suit and a deep-cut waistcoat, one might have taken him for a gentleman squire with a taste for study, varied by an occasional visit to Newmarket.

[Sidenote: Mr. Morley's tweed suit.]

All these observations have been suggested by the portentous fact that on June 15th Mr. John Morley startled the world of Parliament by appearing in a very neat, a very well cut, and a very light tweed suit. If Mr. Morley figures in many Tory imaginations as a modern St. Just, longing for the music of the guillotine and the daily splash of Tory and orthodox blood, it is much more due to his clothes than to his writings; for ordinarily he is dressed after the fashion which one can well suppose reigned in the days when the men of the Terror were inaugurating a reign of universal love, brotherhood, and peace through the narrow opening between the upper and the lower knife of the guillotine. His coat is blue: so is his waistcoat; and his nether garments are of a severe drab brown. It is impossible to imagine that any man who assumes such garments could be otherwise than a severe and sanguinary doctrinaire, anxious for his neighbours' blood. The genial smile with which the House of Commons has become familiar has invalidated the Tory estimate of Mr. Morley, but it was that memorable Thursday that completed the transformation of judgment. No man could be a



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lover of the guillotine who could wear so airy, so gay, and, above all, so juvenile and well-cut a suit of clothes. Mr. Morley himself was overwhelmed with the amount of attention which his new suit attracted. He, poor man, did not see the portentous political significance of the transaction, and almost sank under the multitude and variety of congratulations which he received from watchful friends. He has done many great and successful things in the course of his brilliant career—but he never achieved a triumph so complete and so prompt as he did when he put on his light tweed suit, and steered under its illuminating rays the Home Rule Bill through the rocks and shoals, the eddies and the cross-currents of the House of Commons.

[Sidenote: A brilliant pas de deux.]

On the following afternoon there was another scene in which clothes had their share. At about three o'clock there entered the House together two slight, alert figures—in both cases a little above the middle height, and both clothed in a suit of clothes the exact counterpart of each other in make, shape, and colour. There was a dominant and almost monotonous grey in their appearance; but there was little of grey in their looks. When at once there burst from the Tory and Unionists Benches a loud, wild, prolonged huzzah, it was seen that this theatrical little entrance at one and the same time of Joe and Mr. Balfour, was their method of accentuating the Tory triumph in Linlithgow. The two gentlemen seen entering together separated as they walked up the floor—the Tory going to his place on the front Opposition Bench, the Unionist to his corner seat on the Liberal side. It was a very skilfully arranged bit of business, though there were critics who thought its histrionic element a little out of place in the sombre and solemn realities of public life, and a great national controversy. In the midst of it all I looked at Mr. Gladstone. It is in such moments that you are able to get a glimpse into all the great depths of this extraordinary nature. And I have written more than once in these columns that the greatest of all his characteristics is composure. This mighty, restless, fiery fighter against wrong—this stalwart and unconquerable wrestler for right, this Titan—I might even say this Don Quixote—who has gone out with spear and sword to assault the most strongly-entrenched citadels of human wrongs—who has faced a world in arms—this man has, after all, at the centre of his existence, and in the depths of his nature, a gospel which sustains him in the hours of defeat and gloom, and makes him one of the most restless of combatants, and the most tranquil.

[Sidenote: The grand old philosopher.]



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Devotional, almost pietistic, introspective, accustomed, I have no doubt, from that early training of domestic piety and sacerdotal surroundings, to see all this gay, vast phantasmagoria of life the antechamber to a greater, more enduring, and better world beyond those voices, Mr. Gladstone—at least that is my reading of his character—looks at everything in human existence with the power of self-detachment from its garish moments and its transient interests. Behind this constant warfare, underneath all this public passion and sweeping resolves, there is a nether and unseen world of thought, emotion, hope, and in that world there is ever calm. It is a tabernacle in his soul where only holy thoughts may enter. Outside its impenetrable and echoless walls are left behind the shouts of faction, the noise of battle, the rise and fall of the good and ever-enduring fight between wrong and right. Within that tabernacle Mr. Gladstone has the power of withdrawing himself at will, just as in the Agora of Athens, and on the last great day when he discoursed on immortality, and drank the mortal hemlock, Socrates could withdraw himself, and listen to the inner whisper of his daemon. All this, I say, you could see in the abstracted, resigned and composed look of Mr. Gladstone at the moment when his triumphant enemies, in their summer garb, with their smiling faces, and strutting walk, entered the House of Commons. If you wanted to see at once the contrast, not only of the temper of the hour, but the still greater and more momentous contrast of temperaments, you had only to look from the face of Mr. Gladstone to that of Mr. Chamberlain. The contrast of their years—the deeper contrast of their natures—above all, the profounder contrast of their worlds of thought, training and environment—all were brought out. In that perky, retrousse-nosed, self-complacent, confidently smiling man you saw all the flippancy—so-called realism—the petty commercialism of the end of the middle of the nineteenth century. The mysticism, the poetry, the rich devotion, the lofty and large ideals of the beginning of the century—of the time that remembered Byron and produced Newman—all these things were to be seen in the rapt look of that noble, beautiful and refined face on the Treasury Bench. And yet there was something more. The brilliant light of the early days of our century has become dim and cold in those hearts and minds which have not had the power to grow and expand with their ages. But with that splendid sanity of body as well as mind which belongs to him, Mr. Gladstone is the creature of the ending of the nineteenth as of the beginning of the twentieth century. Like the man of Arctic climes, he stands almost at the same moment in the sunset of one great century and the heralding light of the sunrise of another.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BURSTING OF THE STORM.

[Sidenote: An Indian summer.]



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There is a striking description in one of Mr. Rudyard Kipling's stories of a night in an Indian city when the dog star rages. Luridly, but vigorously, the author brings home to you the odious discomfort, the awful suffering, and, finally, the morose anger and almost homicidal fury, which the sweltering light produces in the waking soldiers. This would have been something like the temper of the House of Commons on June 18th, if that assembly had not recently discovered methods of saving its temper and pleasantly spending its vacant hours. For the dog star—raging, merciless, sweltering—ruled everywhere within Westminster Palace. On the floor of the House itself, men sweltered and mopped their foreheads; in even the recesses of the still library they groaned aloud; then down on the Terrace, and with the river sweeping by, there was not a particle of air; and the heat of all the day had made even the stony floor of that beautiful walk almost like the tiles of a red-hot oven. In short, it was a day when one felt one's own poor tenement of clay a misery, a nuisance, and a burden; and the mind, morose, black, and despondent, had distracting visions of distant mirages by the seashore or under green trees. It was natural, under such circumstances, that everybody who could should desert the House of Commons. And this sudden desertion of the House will be always remembered as one of the many peculiarities of the Annus Mirabilis through which we are passing. It has not been unusual for some years for members to take a turn on the Terrace now and then. I have paced its floor at every hour of the night and the day—from the still midnight to the delightful moments before breaking day; and I still remember the beautiful summery morning when, after a hard night's fight, an Irish member rushed down to the Terrace to tell Mr. Sexton and myself that we were just being suspended—an operation not yet grown customary. But this Session the majority of the House of Commons is always on the Terrace; and woman—that sleuth-hound of every new pleasure—has discovered this great fact, and utilised it accordingly.

[Sidenote: Tea on the Terrace.]

The afternoon tea—the strawberries and cream which make a coolness and delight in the midst of the raging day—has been erected by woman into one of London's daily social events; and though the novelist has not discovered the fact up to this moment—Mr. McCarthy has made a very pretty love scene on the Terrace, but it is at the witching hour of night—though this discovery has yet to come, the respite is brief, and in a short time we shall have the hero and the heroine passing through all the agonies of three-volume suffering, to the accompaniment of the division bell and the small tea-table of the Terrace. But though woman has many slaves she has her watchful enemies. The great order of curmudgeon is wide and vigilant and crusty, and the curmudgeon has found that the vast crowds of ladies who have invaded the Terrace



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have at last begun to interfere with that daily constitutional along its stretching length, which is the only exercise most members of Parliament are able to take in these fierce days. Accordingly, there appeared an ominous notice-board with the words, "For members only," at a particular point in the Terrace. Within the space, before which this notice stood as a fiery sword, woman was not allowed to intrude; and from out its sacred enclosure—guarded by nothing but the line of the notice and the Speaker's wrath—the confirmed bachelor, the married cynic, smoked his cigarette, and looked lazily through at the chattering, tea-drinking, bright-coloured crowd immediately beyond.

[Sidenote: Demos and dinner.]

I regret to say that the great Demos had an opportunity of seeing the legislator at work and play, and that the remarks of that extremely irreverent person were not complimentary. Reading, doubtless, in the papers something of the fatiguing labours—of the stern attention to business—of the long and dreary hours which the patriots of the House of Commons were devoting to the work of the country, Demos was shocked and scandalised to behold this giddy, fashionable, and modish crowd. Demos, sweltering on the passing steamboat—able to see, and, at the same time, free from interference on his watery kingdom—jeered aloud as he passed close to the Terrace, and mocked with loud laughter that betokened not only the vacant but the insulting mind. The skippers of the steamboats—hardened Cockneys with an eye to business—knew what a delight this baiting of the august assembly would be to the most democratic and most sarcastic crowd in Europe; and accordingly it became the "mot d'ordre" with the steamboat skipper, when the tide was full, to bring his vessel almost to the very walls of the Terrace, and thus to give the tripper the opportunity of gazing from very near at the lions at food and play. If Demos could have come and seen as plainly at night in those days as during the afternoon, his shocked feelings would have been even more poignant and his language more irreverent. Tea is, after all, a simple drink that makes the whole world akin; and even strawberries in this great year were within reach of the most modest purse. But at night, entertainment is more costly. Along the Terrace there is now, as everybody knows, a series of small dining-rooms; and here every night you might have listened to the pleasant music of woman's laughter, punctuated by the pop of the champagne bottle. Time was—I remember it well—when a member of Parliament who knew that there was any place where a lady could get something to eat was pointed to as a Parliamentary marvel, who knew his way about in an uncanny fashion; when the room in which a lady could dine had been seen by but few eyes and, indeed, was little better than a coalhole, low-roofed, dimly lit, buried in dark and deep recesses of an underworld of the House of Commons, as little known to the general



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member as the sewage catacombs of London to the ordinary citizen. But all this has been changed; and now the dinner to ladies at the House of Commons has become, like the afternoon tea, one of the best recognized of London's social festivities. And so great is the run on these dinners that it takes a week's—or even two weeks'—notice to secure a table. Mr. Cobbe—a stern and unbending Radical, with a hot temper and unsparing tongue—might have been seen one of those June days with a menacing frown upon his rugged Radical forehead, and by-and-bye in serious converse with the Speaker. And the cause of his anger was that he had found all the dining-tables ordered for two weeks ahead.

[Sidenote: A wild scene.]

Speaking on the Freemasons, on June 22nd, Mr. Gladstone related the interesting autobiographical fact that he himself was not a Freemason, and never had been; and, indeed, having been fully occupied otherwise—this delicate allusion to that vast life of never-ending work—of gigantic enterprises—of solemn and sublime responsibilities, was much relished—he never had had sufficient curiosity to make any particular inquiries as to what Freemasonry really was. I don't know what came over Mr. Balfour—some people thought it was because he expected to detach some Freemason votes from the Liberal side; but he was guilty of what I admit is an unusual thing with him—an intentional, a gross, an almost shameful misrepresentation of Mr. Gladstone's words. Making the same interesting personal statement as Mr. Gladstone, that he was not himself a Freemason, he went on to suggest that Mr. Gladstone had made a comparison between a fraudulent Liberator Society and the Freemasons. At this thrust there was a terrible hubbub in the House, and that fanaticism with which the Mason holds to his institution was aroused; indeed, for a little while, the scene was Bedlam-like in its passion and anarchy. In the midst of it all, facing the violent howls of the excited Tories, pale, disturbed, hotly angry underneath all the composure of language and tone, Mr. Gladstone exposed the shameful and entirely groundless misrepresentation. Mr. Balfour's better angel intervened; he got ashamed of himself, and at once apologized. But the hurricane of passion which had been let loose was not to be so easily appeased; and when, presently, Mr. John Morley put an end to the ridiculous and irrelevant discussion which threatened to land the House of Commons into the consideration of the arcana of a Freemason's Lodge, there burst from the Tory benches one of the fiercest little storms of remonstrance I have ever heard. When the closure is proposed, there is but one way of expressing emotion. Under the rules of the House, the motion must be put without debate. So when the word of doom is pronounced by the Minister, all that remains is for the Speaker or Chairman to refuse or accept the motion; and if he accept the motion, he simply rises, and, uttering the fateful words,

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“The question is that the motion be now put,” guillotines all further speech. But then he has to put the question, and in the answering words of “Aye” or “No,” there can be put an immense fund of passion. So it was that night. The answering “Noes” reached the proportions of a cyclone; you could see men shrieking out the word again and again, almost beside themselves with rage, and with faces positively distorted by the intensity of their feelings. And the tempest did not end in a moment; again and again the Tories shouted their hoarse and tempestuous, and angry “No, no!”—the word sometimes repeated like a volley: “No, no-o-o, no-o-o-o-o!”—this was the noise that rose on the Parliamentary air, and that gave vent to all the passion which had been excited. And then came the division and a restoration of calm.

[Sidenote: Charwomen and ratcatchers.]

The Whip is a cunning dog, especially if he be the Whip of the party in power; and you have to be a long time in Parliament before you know all his wiles, and fully appreciate their meaning. For instance, few innocent outsiders would understand why it is that the Whip always puts down Estimates for a day immediately after the end of a vacation. The reasons are two. First, because Estimates give more time and opportunity for the mere bore and obstructive than any other part of Parliamentary business. On the Estimates, as I have often explained, every single penny spent in the public service has to be entered. Whether that sum be large or small makes no difference. For instance, there is a charwoman at the Foreign Office; the charwoman’s salary appears in the accounts just as bold and just as plain as the five thousand a year which the country has to pay for Lord Rosebery—who is cheap at the money, I must say, lest I be misunderstood. There is associated with Buckingham Palace a most worthy and useful individual called the ratcatcher. Everybody can see why in such a vast and generally untenanted barrack, there should be a ratcatcher. Well, Master Ratcatcher appears on the Estimates for Buckingham Palace just as regularly, as plainly, in as much detail, as my Lord High Chamberlain, Lord Carrington. There is no reason whatever why a whole evening should not be spent in the discussion of the ratcatcher’s salary. Perhaps the reader may have heard that, in common with many sobered and middle-aged gentlemen, I have had a pre-historic period when I was accused—of course, unjustly—of interfering with the progress of public business. In that period, I remember very well, the ratcatcher of Buckingham Palace loomed largely, as well as many other strange and portentous figures now vanished into the void and the immensities. I don’t know whether we were able to keep the Ministry going for a whole night on the subject or not; but still we managed to get some excellent change out of the business.

[Sidenote: The wistful Whip.]



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This brief explanation will make the reader understand what it is you can do on the Estimates, and therefore bring home to your mind the will of the Ministerial Whip. For his second reason for putting down the Estimates until after vacation is, that he knows there will be a very small attendance of members, and that thus he will be able to sneak through his Estimates more quickly than usual. When, therefore, you hear of a vacation in the House of Commons, you will always find that the members ask with peculiar anxiety what is to be the first business on the day on which the vacation concludes; and you will hear the audible sigh of relief which will rise from hundreds of oppressed bosoms when the Leader of the House for the time being announces that it will be Estimates. Members then know that they need be in no violent hurry to get back, and that things will go right, even though they should tarry that additional day, or even two days, longer by the sad sea waves or amid the tall grass.

[Sidenote: To thy orisons.]

It is one of the peculiarities of the House of Commons that the men who are most in want of spiritual assistance and providential guidance, never seek the assistance of prayer. However terrible the crisis, however crowded every other inch of space in the House of Commons may be, though the ungodliest member may be in his place listening to the rich resonance of Archdeacon Farrar's voice, the Treasury Bench is always empty. To an outsider the explanation may be here revealed; which is, that if you attend prayers you are entitled to a seat for the remainder of the evening, whereas if you are absent, you are liable at any moment to be turned out by your more pious brother. But Ministers are exempt from this general law, for their places are fixed for them on the Treasury Bench, whatever may happen, and, accordingly, they invariably—I had almost said religiously—keep away from prayers. Lest I should appear to do injustice, I may say that the leaders of the Opposition are just as ungodly, and for precisely the same reason; their seats also are secured to them by standing order; and, accordingly, they also never enter the House until its devotions for the day are over. There was just one exception to this. For some reason best known to himself, Sir John Gorst (he is usually at variance with his friends) had come down early on June 28th, and was in his place with edifying aspect to listen to the solemn exhortation and the soft responses.

[Sidenote: The shout of battle.]

At twenty minutes past twelve there is a roar in the House; the Old Man has arrived; and there ascends that bracing cheer with which in our still barbarous times we welcome our champions on the eve of a big fight. The Old Man has hurried, for he is out of breath; and the deadly pallor of his cheek is almost affrighting to see. But he soon recovers himself, though when he rises to speak the breathlessness is still very apparent, and he has to gasp almost now



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and then for more voice. Fortunately on this occasion we have not long to wait for the big announcement which everybody is so anxiously expecting. It is usually the fate of the House of Commons, whenever something very momentous is under weigh, to have a thousand trivialities in its path before it gets on to the real business. I have heard something like a hundred questions asked, most of them very trivial, on more than one night, when the whole of the civilized world was waiting for the Minister to develop some great plan of Governmental policy. The bore, the faddist, the empty self-advertiser, is as inevitable on such occasions as the reportorial dog that always rushes along the Derby course at that dread moment when you can hear the beating of the gamblers' hearts.

[Sidenote: To business.]

But on this fateful Wednesday there is no such ridiculous intervention. There are only two questions altogether on the paper; and both of those refer to the great issue of how obstruction is to be put down. Mr. Gladstone answers the questions very briefly; but there is hidden and fateful meaning in every syllable he utters; and the House of Commons, looking on, shows itself in one of those moments which bring out all its picturesqueness—its latent passions—its very human characteristics. There is the eager strain of curiosity. Every face is turned to that of the single pale white solitary figure that stands out from the Treasury Bench, dressed, I may add, in the sober but light grey suit of the summer season, in spite of his being a messenger of such doom to Tory obstruction. There is a hush, but a hush never lasts long in the House of Commons when a great party blow is going to be struck. The nerves of the House, raised to expectancy—tension, almost hysteria, by the joy of the one side, the anger and dread of the other, have a preternatural readiness in catching points, in producing outbursts of feeling. And so it is to-day. The Prime Minister has scarcely uttered the words which reveal the determination of the Government to resort to the most extreme measures, when there burst simultaneously from the Irish and the Tory Benches cheers and counter cheers—the cheer of pride, joy, and delirium almost, in the one case; the answering cheer and counter cheer of haughty and angered defiance in the other.

[Sidenote: Balfour the unready.]

The Old Man bears himself splendidly amidst all this. He is very excited and very resolute—you can see that by the very deadliness of tranquillity which he seeks to put in his voice, by the gentleness of his tone, by the almost deprecatory smile. All the same, the prevalent note of his voice and manner is composure. For the moment, either from surprise, relief, the joy they can badly conceal—whatever the reason, the Tories seem to be nonplussed. The audacious ally who is always ready to rush rashly into the breach on such occasions is away in Birmingham; and with all his excellent qualities, Mr. Balfour is



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not remarkable for readiness. Accordingly there is an awkward pause, and no one rises from the Opposition Benches. This is serious, for first blood tells in Parliamentary as in other prize fights. The Old Man, however, is all alive. He passes on from this mighty announcement as though he had said nothing in particular, and taking a bundle of notes—put together with characteristic care and neatness even in the very centre of all this storm—he proceeds to tell Mr. Goschen something about the currency question, and the state of the silver market in India. The currency—who cares about the currency now? Even the hardest bimetallist cannot be got to think of his hobby in the face of the dread news just heard. By the time Mr. Gladstone has given his answers, Mr. Balfour has managed to slightly recover himself, and has framed a question to the Old Man.

[Sidenote: The precedent of 1887.]

When at last the question does come, it is of a very innocent character. The Old Man has declared that he had not the terms of the resolution ready, but that they would be announced to the House before its rising in the evening. All Mr. Balfour wishes to know is, what time it will be when these terms are given. Such is the simple question; but the reply is of a very different character. It was delivered in studiously moderate terms; the voice of Mr. Gladstone never rises above a sweet coo; but there is fire, defiance, inflexible determination in every syllable, and the first blow is struck when the wily Old Man announces—as though it were the merest business affair—that the closure resolution which the Government will introduce, is founded upon the principle of the resolution of 1887. He can go no further for several seconds. The Irish, with their ready wits—their fierce and keen memories—have caught the point at once; and they burst into a cheer—loud, fierce, and prolonged. What it means is this: In 1887, the Tories had carried a closure resolution for the purpose of forcing through the Coercion Bill of that year; and it was under the working of that closure resolution that the Bill had finally passed the House of Commons, with several of its clauses undebated. What, then, this fierce Irish cheer meant was that the chickens were coming home to roost; and that the Tories were now reaping the harvest of their own sowing. With grave face the Old Man waited until the storm had spent itself, and then he went on to make a little slip, which for the moment gave his enemies an excellent opening.

[Sidenote: Revolution or resolution.]

He spoke not of the resolution, but of the revolution. He corrected the slip with great rapidity, but he was not quick enough for his watchful enemies, and loudly—discordantly—triumphantly—they repeated the word after him—Revolution—Revolution. However, Mr. Gladstone, after his Socratic fashion, lowered his eyes for a moment and went off into one of those abstract reveries whither he always allows



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his fancy to wend its way whenever his opponents are particularly rancorous. Then he described the resolution—not the revolution—as in the interest of the convenience and liberty of the House. But he immediately added—with the sweetest smile—that Mr. Balfour would doubtless form his own judgment on that point; and then, still calm, sweet, with the tendency to the reverie of the good man grossly misjudged by sinful opponents, he sat him down.

[Sidenote: An awkward moment.]

In the midst of the exultation which the announcement of the Government had produced in the Liberal ranks, there came a difficulty and a humiliation. An amendment had been proposed, Mr. Gladstone had twice opposed it, everything pointed to its ignominious rejection, and, in view of the coming closure, everybody seemed to want rapid despatch. And thus a division was immediately called. The House was cleared; members rushed in, and, indeed, had already begun to pass through the lobby; when suddenly there was a complete change of tactics; Mr. Marjoribanks, rushing to the Treasury Bench, called upon the Government to capitulate. The fact got out; the Government were in a minority—their forces had not come in time, and the Tories would have beaten us if they had been allowed to go to a division. It was one of the narrowest shaves—one of the most uncomfortable quarters of a minute—we have had in the House of Commons for many a long day.

[Sidenote: The fateful moment.]

But half-past five comes at last; then the discussion on the Home Rule Bill has to come to an end, and the Speaker takes the chair. Members think there is a look of unusual excitement on his face, that its air is angry; and the Unionists take comfort from the idea that this step is against his judgment. But, then, it is a matter for the House itself and not for the decision of the chair, and so we go ahead. Mr. Morley is put up by Mr. Gladstone to read the words of the resolution. The Old Man himself is composedly writing that letter to the Queen which it is still his duty daily to indite. Mr. Morley's face betrays under all its studied calm, the excitement of the hour, and he reads every separate announcement with a certain dramatic emphasis that brings out all the hidden meaning; and the document is one, the reading of which lends itself to dramatic effect and to dramatic manifestations. For each clause winds up with the same words, at "ten of the clock," until these words come to sound something like the burden of a song—the refrain of a lament—the iteration of an Athanasian curse against sinners and heretics. The House sees all this; and each side manifests emotion according to its fashion. The Irish cheer themselves hoarse in triumph; the Tories answer back as defiantly and loudly; and so we enter, with clang of battle, with shouts and cheers, and hoarse cries of joy or of rage, into the second great pitched battle on Home Rule.

CHAPTER XV.



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MR. DILLON'S FORGETFULNESS.

[Sidenote: Mr. Dillon.]

Everybody who has ever met Mr. Dillon knows that he has a singularly even and equable temper, except at the moments when he has been stung to passion by the sight of some bitter and intolerable wrong. When, therefore, Mr. Chamberlain made him the subject of a fierce attack on account of a past utterance, he was dealing with a man who was as little influenced by such attacks as anybody could well be. For days Mr. Chamberlain had been trying to bait Mr. Dillon into speech; and for days Mr. Dillon had positively refused to be drawn. At last it seemed to some friends of Mr. Dillon that if he did not speak his attitude might be misunderstood, and that he would be supposed to entertain, as part of a settled policy, what he had really uttered on the spur of the moment and under the influence of intolerable wrong and provocation. But when in the last days of June Mr. Chamberlain made his attack, and Mr. Dillon had listened to it and asked for dates, Mr. Dillon thought that the matter would not be worth further attending to, and relapsed into his old attitude of easy contempt.

[Sidenote: The outbreak.]

This will account for what would otherwise be inexplicable; namely, that, having had a week to prepare his defence, Mr. Dillon should on July 3rd have fallen into a dreadful, and, for the moment, disastrous blunder. The truth was, Mr. Dillon had never thought of the subject for more than a few moments between the date of the challenge and Mr. Chamberlain's renewal of the attack, and, if he had been left free to exercise his own judgment, would have allowed the whole thing to lapse into the nothingness into which every such charge finally falls. On this Monday night Mr. Chamberlain was in his most venomous mood. He had come down to the House with the set determination to get up a row somehow or other. There was evil in his eye; there was rancour in his voice; there was the hoarse rage which always shows in him whenever he feels that he has been beaten. His judgment is so shallow—his temper so rash and violent—that some people think he actually counted that the Government would never have dared to interfere with his obstructive plan of campaign, and that he would have been permitted to bury the Bill under the vast hedge of amendments. To him, then, the strong and drastic action of the preceding week had come as a painful and most exasperating surprise.

[Sidenote: Joe's weakness.]

It is one of the many bad turns that Joe's temper does him to always lead him into overdoing his part. The wild outbursts of his venom—the ferocity which he puts into his personal attacks—these things have the effect of producing a certain amount of reaction; and thus his blows often suffer from the very violence with which they are dealt. A real master of Parliamentary craft, like Mr. Gladstone or Mr. Sexton, has



learned the lesson—the lesson which all orators of all ages have learned—that there is nothing so deadly as moderation; that he destroys the effectiveness of a passion by tearing it to pieces, and that you are really effective when you have complete control of your temper, your voice and your language.



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[Sidenote: Mitchelstown.]

Mr. Dillon, rising—pale, high-strung, and nervous—was a sympathetic sight, and the House was ready to listen to him with the greatest attention. The Old Man was specially interested. Whenever nowadays, when his hearing has become somewhat defective, he wants particularly to hear a speech, he has to change his place; usually, as everybody knows, he sits exactly opposite the box on the Speaker's table. This evening he went to the last seat on the Treasury Bench—the seat nearest to the spot from which Mr. Dillon was about to speak, and with his hand to his ear he prepared himself to catch every word that Mr. Dillon was about to utter, and the speech of Mr. Dillon was—in spite of the halting tones which excitement, unpreparedness, the sense of his responsibility produced—singularly effective. The passionate and transparent sincerity of the man—the sense of all the years of suffering through which he passed—the recollection of all the risks he has run in the great contemporary Irish Revolution—all these things spoke in his favour. Especially was he effective when he described the circumstances under which he had delivered the speech, a passage from which had been incriminated by Mr. Chamberlain. He had been told just half-an-hour before he rose to speak, of how a poor mother had been torn from her babe; how the two had been taken over a long journey together, and had both been finally lodged in the same cell. And he asked with a passionate thrill in his voice, that carried away the House with him, whether anybody else under the same circumstances would not have protested in language of violence and vehemence against the cruelty and official brutality which allowed such things to be. Would not anybody have protested that the officials who were guilty of these things had not to look to reward or promotion from a popular Irish Government.

[Sidenote: The fatal mistake.]

So far, Mr. Dillon had the House completely with him. He also scored for a second or two. He went on to remark that he had been under the influence of the massacre at Mitchelstown; but scarcely had these words proceeded from his lips than a look of dismay passed over the faces of his Irish colleagues. Close beside him were several men who, like himself, had stood on the platform of the historic square when the police descended upon the meeting, and which ended in the death of three innocent men. They at once perceived that Mr. Dillon, by some break of memory, had made a mistake in his dates. The incriminating speech had been delivered in December, 1886, and the Mitchelstown massacre took place in September, 1887. If the Irish members had not perceived this blunder immediately they would soon have been brought to a sense of coming disaster by the movements on the opposite side.

[Sidenote: Chamberlain on the spring.]



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Mr. T.W. Russell is always at the service of Mr. Chamberlain at such a moment. A platform speaker by training and by years of professional work, accustomed to make most of his case against Home Rule depend on the characters, the words, the acts of the Irish members, he has, of course, at his fingers' ends, all the useful extracts of the last thirteen years. At once he was seen to rush excitedly from the House. Every Irishman knew at once that he was going to the library to reinforce his memory with regard to the date of Mitchelstown. A murmur arose on the Irish Benches; slips of paper were passed up to Mr. Dillon to recall to him the facts of the case; but, either in the hurry and excitement, or because he did not appreciate the situation immediately, Mr. Dillon went on with his speech—unconscious of the abyss that opened up before him. Meantime, Mr. Chamberlain—pale, excited, his face torn with the workings of gratified hatred and coming triumph—sat forward in his seat, his eyeglass shining from afar, eagerness in every look, pose, movement.

[Sidenote: Chamberlain pounces.]

At last Mr. Russell was back in his place; it did not require much second sight to see that his quest had been successful, and that he had brought to Mr. Chamberlain the ammunition he required in order to slay John Dillon. The moment Mr. Dillon sat down, Mr. Chamberlain was on his feet. He worked up to the situation with some skill; but, after all, with that overdone passion which, as I have already said, spoils some of his greatest effects—he did not expose the mistake in his first few sentences. He worked up the agony, so to speak. First he recalled to the Liberals—whose hatred to him he feels and returns with interest—the fact that they had cheered Mr. Dillon's allusion to the effect Mitchelstown had had on him in provoking the violence of his speech. And then when he had created his situation, he pounced down on the House with the climax—the speech had been delivered in 1886, the Mitchelstown tragedy had taken place in the following year. It would be idle to deny that Mr. Chamberlain had then one of the most triumphant moments of his life. It was a small point, after all, and, as everybody soon knew, it was all the result of a natural and a perfectly honest mistake. But the House of Commons is not particular in weighing things in judicial scales at moments of intense political passion. There rose from the Tory and the Unionist Benches one of the longest, fiercest, most triumphant shouts that was ever heard in the House of Commons. But then, as I again must say, and as will soon be seen, the passion was overdone, and a swift retribution came by-and-bye. For the moment, however, it was giddily, dazzlingly triumphant, and Joe had one of the few moments of his life which were unrelieved by disaster.

[Sidenote: A diversion.]



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It was at this moment—and, curiously enough, his victory was very soon dashed to the ground—that Mr. Harrington, one of the Parnellites, struck in with a blow. In Parliamentary, as in other tactics, one of the wisest expedients—especially if things are going rather wrong with yourself—is to carry the war into the enemies' country. And this is exactly what Mr. Harrington did. He turned upon Joe and denounced him for seeking at one time to obtain the alliance of these very Irish members whom now he was denouncing. He accused him of sending ambassadors to them when they were in prison, and, in short, brought Joe face to face with an almost forgotten period of his history. Then he was almost a Home Ruler in profession, and looked to the Irish members as a portion of the force he would by-and-bye marshal in his own army.

[Sidenote: A quid pro quo.]

Joe grew pale. It is a curious fact that, whenever any allusion is made to this special period of his life, Mr. Chamberlain becomes particularly disturbed; possibly, it is that he is conscious of the rash things he has said at this period; possibly, it is that it can be proved to the world that he was at this period in favour of the principles and the men he now so loudly denounces. Whatever the reason, it is perfectly certain, if you want to put Mr. Chamberlain into a rage, and what sailors call a funk, allude to the period of Parnell's imprisonment in Kilmainham, and Mr. Duignan's letter on the Irish question. The transformation from the exalted look a few moments before to the pale, cowed aspect which Mr. Chamberlain wore was one of the most sudden transformations I have ever seen in the House of Commons. He could scarcely sit in his seat while Mr. Harrington was speaking; again and again he rose to interrupt him altogether, and gave signs of unusual excitement and disturbance. But Mr. Harrington is a deft and tenacious combatant. In spite of all attempts to stop him, in spite of the tremendous uproar raised by the Unionists and Tories, he managed to get out what he had to say. He brought Mr. Chamberlain face to face with this spectre of his dead past.

[Sidenote: Mr. Balfour does not score.]

Meantime, Mr. Balfour made a great mistake. He had listened to the speech of Mr. Chamberlain, and had been one of those who had joined in the cheers at the exposure of Mr. Dillon's accidental mistake. There he should have left it, but, carried away by the hope of driving the point home against a political enemy, he needs must add something to what Mr. Chamberlain had said. Now Mr. Balfour is in many points very superior to Joe. He should leave personal vituperation to him: he is more active, defter, and more willing to do such dirty work. Moreover, it is in the recollection of the members that, in the Coercionist struggle, Mr. Balfour seemed to have towards Mr. Dillon an unusual amount of personal animosity. Speaking with want of grace and personal courtesy, which are things, I am bound to say, uncommon with him, he accused Mr. Dillon of deliberate and conscious hypocrisy. This also was a tactical blunder, and will largely account for the transformation following, to which I am going to refer.



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[Sidenote: The transformation.]

The House on the following day, July 4th, was very still when Mr. Dillon rose—evidently to refer to the incident of the previous night. His address was quiet, brief, and graceful. With charming modesty, he acknowledged the mistake he had made, and explained how, in running over in memory the hundreds of speeches he had delivered, he had confounded one speech with another. He was unable to understand how his memory, which never before had played him false, had done him this ill turn, and he appealed to the House generally, and declared that there was not even amongst his bitter political foes one who would think him capable of trying to palm off on the House a speech which could be so palpably and so readily exposed. In these few sentences, Mr. Dillon brought before the House his strange, picturesque, and chequered career. His oratory was such that the explanation was considered the best ever given in the House of Commons.

[Sidenote: Joe is absent.]

This was a recovery of some ground lost on the previous night. But there was even better to come. Mr. Harrington's accuracy and veracity as to Mr. Chamberlain's dealings with the Irish members had been challenged, as I have said, by Mr. Chamberlain, and he now rose to read the historic letter of Mr. Duignan, which, he claimed, justified his account. Several attempts were made to stop Mr. Harrington, and the Tories during this were decidedly annoyed and embarrassed because Mr. Chamberlain happened not to be in his place. But doggedly and persistently Mr. Harrington held to his ground, and at last the Speaker allowed him to read the letter. The reading of the letter led to various scenes, because it was one of those balanced utterances in which Mr. Chamberlain used to try to hold one foot in the Unionist and to place the other in the Home Rule camp. There were speeches about the County Councils, and there had been Unionist and Tory cheers in relief; but when immediately afterwards there were allusions to Home Rule, very little different in scope or character from that proposed by Mr. Gladstone, there was a triumphant rejoinder from the Liberal and Home Rule Benches. Austen Chamberlain, excited, nervous, angered, flitted to and fro in the attempt to gather forces to defend his absent parent. At last Mr. Courtney took up his case. There was not very much in what he said, and while he was speaking Mr. Chamberlain entered the House. He was pale, excited, and unnerved. He endeavoured to carry the whole thing by a jauntiness which was too easy to see through. Mr. Courtney had been waving furiously a telegram towards the Speaker, and asked that he might have the privilege of reading it. Austen Chamberlain snatched the telegram from Mr. Courtney, and gave it to his father just as he had taken his seat. Mr. Chamberlain had not a moment to spare; he had just time to glance at the contents of the telegram when he rose to speak, and all he did was to read the telegram, which was a confirmation by Mr. Duignan of the general accuracy of the previous evening. This was a score for Joe, and his friends were delighted to recover something of their lost spirit.



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[Mr. Conybeare and the Speaker.]

Mr. Conybeare had written a letter to the *Chronicle* denouncing the Speaker. Mr. Tritton, a Tory member, insisted the letter should be read, and this gave the Speaker one of those few opportunities which his position allows him. In disclaiming this charge he showed his great powers of oratory and the splendid and thrilling notes of his fine voice. He defended himself at once from the charge of undue partiality with strong passion and deep emotion, which lie hidden beneath his deep reserve. With a face ghastly almost in its greyness, in its deepening glows and manifest passion, he repudiated the charge of unfairness; he vehemently struck his hand on the order paper which he held, and as he neared to the end of his little speech there was a ring in his voice dangerously near a sob or a tear. It is on such occasions that Mr. Gladstone's sonorous and splendid diction and delivery come most to the front; beginning a little awkwardly, hesitatingly, he warmed as he went along, and there came to him the strange power of collecting his thoughts and measuring his language which long years of Parliamentary training has made a second nature. The House listened—rapt, hushed, spellbound. And then there was no more to be said beyond a few perfunctory observations from Mr. Balfour and the dismissal of the whole subject.

[Sidenote: Another scene.]

And now we were once more in the thick of a fierce and passionate encounter. Mr. Arnold Forster had an amendment, the effect of which was to remove the exercise of the prerogative of mercy from the hands of the Irish members to those of the English Secretary of State. Into this innocent amendment he sought to drag discussion of the doings of the Land League twelve years ago, and concentrated on Mr. Sexton a violent attack. He was not allowed to proceed to the end of his chapter. The charge was heinous, vile, and such as has rarely been introduced in the House in such a fashion, and soon the temper rose to a fever heat. Mr. Sexton is a dangerous man to tackle in this guise.

In justifiable rage, quivering with wrath, he yet managed to preserve that cold and even tenour of language so perfect to his heart and his words. Again and again the Tory and Unionist party cheer for Mr. Balfour, Mr. Courtney, and Mr. Chamberlain, but Mr. Sexton is not a man to suffer such a statement to go unchallenged, and he succeeded in grasping the whole thing and stamped the charge with the terms, base and infamous. This led to other scenes, men rising and talking together.

Mr. Chamberlain turned fierce in fore front. Again and again Mr. Gladstone arose to try and end the scene, and again and again he was prevented by Mr. T.W. Russell at one point, Mr. Chamberlain at another, and Mr. Balfour at a third, to seek to bring the struggle back to the fierce temper it was about to leave. But the Old Man at last got up, and in measured language and tones which betrayed profound emotion, he scathingly denounced the attack of Mr. Forster as wanton and mischievous. Here again there was



another uproar. The Old Man pursued his way, but Mr. Chamberlain again tried to get Mr. Sexton called to order, but the charge had been too coarse, and Mr. Mellor declined to interfere.



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CHAPTER XVI.

REDUCED MAJORITIES.

[Sidenote: The week before.]

On Friday, July 7th, we just entered on the fringe of the ninth clause. The ninth clause had all along been held to be, perhaps, the very gravest rock ahead of the Government. This is the clause which regulates the position of the Irish members at Westminster after Home Rule has been passed. There were as many plans for settling this question as there were members of the House of Commons, and all plans were alike in being illogical, unsymmetrical, and, therefore, liable to attack from a dozen different quarters. Already within a few days of each other, there had been two divisions, on which everybody felt it to be quite possible that the Government would go down, and that we should once more go back face to face with the country and probably with a new and a stronger Tory Government than ever. The first occasion was the clause dealing with a Second Chamber. Then a certain number of irreconcilable Radicals, in their hatred of all Second Chambers, voted against the Government and reduced their majority to 15. This was a very tight squeeze; but, after all, everybody had been prepared for it, and when the hour came, we all knew pretty well where we should be. There might be one or two men more or less in the Tory lobby, but we had sized them up carefully. When, however, July 19th, and the ninth clause came we were face to face with a very different state of affairs. Then we had to face absolute uncertainty—and uncertainty not in one, but almost every part of the House. And the curious thing about it all was, that this uncertainty was aggravated by a little fact which had entered into nobody's calculations, and this was the highly technical rule with regard to the manner in which questions are put when the House is in committee.

[Sidenote: Technicalities.]

I despair of ever being able to make this matter clear to an outsider; and, indeed, to be quite honest, I am not always sure that I understand the affair myself. It will probably be sufficient for my purpose if I say that the chairman has to put an amendment in such a way that sometimes you find you are really precluded from voting on the direct question which you wish to challenge. You are within the ring-fence of a technical rule, which compels you to fight your issue there and not one inch outside of it. This often means that questions are raised in the most indirect way—that you seem to be voting for one thing while you really mean another, and that if you do not vote that way, you cannot vote any other. So it happened on this occasion. And we drifted about for the best way of raising the question of the presence of the Irish members, and the Government were for a while in a state of absolute and painful uncertainty. Then came one of those desultory conversations on points of order, in which so large a body as the House of Commons cannot shine—one man suggesting one method, one man another; half-a-

dozen different methods proposed in as many minutes by half-a-dozen different members.



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[Sidenote: 103 v. 80.]

At last Mr. Redmond seemed to hit off the situation by a proposal to omit a couple of sub-sections in the ninth clause. But Mr. Redmond had scarcely spoken when the House found itself in an extraordinary and most embarrassing dilemma. The object of Mr. Redmond was plain enough; what he desired to do was to retain the Irish members in the Imperial Parliament in their present, that is to say, in their full, strength—103 they are now, 103 he wanted them to remain. The position of the Government was equally clear. With emphatic language—with a superabundance of argument—Mr. Gladstone stated his conviction that the Irish members should not remain in such large numbers and that the number should be 80. This was all clear enough; but what about the position of all the other parties in the House?

[Sidenote: Tot homines, tot sententiae.]

At first sight, it would appear that this ought to be very clear. The Tories and the Unionists had several amendments on the paper. One wanted the Irish members reduced to 48, one wanted to have them reduced to 40, and several of them desired that they should be reduced still further—in fact, should reach the irreducible minimum of none at all. It was assumed, of course, that gentlemen who had thus indicated their desire for the reduction of the Irish members, or for their disappearance altogether, would vote against a proposition which asked that they should remain in full force. If this course were adopted, Mr. Redmond would be crushed under a combination of the Liberals, who wanted the numbers to be 80, and the Tories who wanted the Irish members to disappear altogether; but in these days, and with such an Opposition as we have now in the House of Commons, it is not possible to make any calculations on what course we would adopt. To the amazement of the House—above all things to the amazement of Mr. Gladstone—who has not yet entirely got over the traditions of the past, and, therefore, over-sanguine expectations as to the scruples of his opponents—Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Balfour both announced that they were ready to go into the same lobby as Mr. Redmond. And so those who wanted all the Irish members, and those who wanted none, were both going to vote exactly the same way.

[Sidenote: A bolt from the blue.]

For a moment everybody was staggered by this declaration; and it produced a combination which anybody could forecast, and for which nobody was prepared. There came accordingly something like a panic over the House. Here we were face to face with a Ministerial crisis, with doom and the abyss and the end of all things. Unexpectedly, in a moment, without a second's warning, this state of things led to a phenomenon which belongs to the House of Commons alone. Councils of war are usually held in the silence and secrecy and beneath the impenetrable walls of the council chamber. But sudden councils of war, called for by unexpected events, have to be held



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in the open in the House of Commons. The world—the world of strangers, of ambassadors, of peers, of ladies, of the constituents, and, above all, the world of watchful, scornful, vindictive enemies—can look on as though the leaders of the parties were bees working in a glass hive. And it is impossible for even the best trained men to keep their air and manners in such dread circumstances from betraying the seriousness and excitement and awe which the gravity of the events are exciting in them.

[Sidenote: Mr. Gladstone's attitude.]

On the Treasury Bench there was a good deal of excitement, but it was pretty well repressed: and in the midst of it all is the face of Mr. Gladstone, over-pale, with a strange glitter in the eyes that made them look unnaturally large, two jets of lambent and almost dazzling flame, but otherwise very composed, deadly calm. On the Irish Benches the excitement was more tense, for their course was even more difficult than that of the Government. The Government had stated their decision that they wanted only eighty members. But there was an Irish member, a leader of a party which seeks to claim Irish support as a better Irish party than the other, proposing that Ireland should have her full total of members. The Irish members naturally would be inclined to support their countrymen, if not to seek to keep the Irish representation as high as it could possibly be.

[Sidenote: A splendid gambler.]

On the other hand, if all the Irish members went the same way it was all up with the Government. Some fifty to seventy British Liberals adopt the same policy as the Irish members with regard to the Irish question and the Home Rule Bill, and if the Irish members only give the word, they also would vote with Mr. Redmond, and the Government would be "snowed under," to use an expressive Americanism, a majority of upwards of two hundred against them. Mr. Gladstone had evidently made up his mind that this was the situation he would have to face, and played his last, his supreme, his desperate card. You could see that he himself felt that this was the kind of card he was playing from his look as he played it. There was outward calmness in the face, there was the same evenness of tone in the voice; he built up his case with the same unbroken command of his language and ideas as is his usual characteristic. His statement of his position was admirable in its lucidity, its temper, and its courage. But he was excited. Just as he rose up, Sir William Harcourt jumped up, and in a state of impatience and excitement that was palpable, asked for something. It was a glass of water for Mr. Gladstone. The glass of water was brought in; it was put in front of Mr. Gladstone; he sipped it just as he was about to start on his perilous oratorical voyage, and then, clearing his throat, he made the fateful announcement which possibly was to wreck his measure and himself. And the statement came to



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this: If the Government were defeated, it would be by a combination of different parties, but they would all agree in supporting 103 as against 80 Irish members; and if they did that, why the House was master. This was ambiguous, and yet it was pretty plain. The Government declined to accept as a vote of want of confidence in them a majority which was obtained by so dishonest and treacherous a combination as men voting together who were at such opposite poles of thought; and the Government would just checkmate the little game by accepting the 103 members as what the House preferred to the Government plan of 80.

[Sidenote: The fall of the flag.]

There was a gleam of almost sardonic triumph in the Old Man's eye as he sat down, having shot this bolt; and he looked as if he had thoroughly discomfited his enemies. But his enemies were not so easily discomfited. Treacherous, base, unscrupulous, call it what he liked, they were not going to miss the opportunity of baiting him: and Mr. Chamberlain's pale face wore a deadlier pallor. There was even a colder and fiercer ring than usual in his clear, cruel voice; his always saturnine look deepened as he seemed to grasp beforehand his great and long delayed hour of vengeance. Mr. Balfour adopted the same tactics. In favour of 103 members? Not at all—the vote would mean nothing of that kind—it would simply mean that they were opposed to the plan of the Government; in short, there was the issue quite plain. The Tories and the Unionists would vote black was white, wrong was right. This way one moment, the other way the next—they would do anything, provided only they could turn the Government out, defeat the Bill, and humiliate the Old Man. And so the situation grew more difficult every moment.

For it was now plain that the Government were most certain to be beaten, and that if they were beaten, there must be an end of Home Rule. It might be good Parliamentary tactics to say that the Government would accept the decision of the House, but everybody knows what moral authority, what reality of strength, there is in a Government which has been “snowed under” by a majority of 200.

[Sidenote: Mr. Sexton makes the running.]

It will now be understood what tremendous issues rested on the speech which Mr. Sexton rose to deliver. In moments of stress and difficulty he is the man always selected by his colleagues to state the Irish case. Never in his chequered and stormy early career did that wonderful Parliamentarian have a task more difficult than that by which he was now confronted. In front of him was the Government in the very panic of impending ruin. He had only to look across the floor of the House, and he could see the pallid face of that mighty statesman who lives so high in the hearts and affections of the

people whom Mr. Sexton represents, and who at that moment was in his hour of agony, if not of final and irretrievable ruin. Behind the Prime Minister were other men—equally



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eager to hear what he had to say—that sturdy band of Radicals, mostly from Scotland, who only wanted the word to desert their own leader and follow the guidance of the Irish members. And behind Mr. Sexton was the grimmest enemy of all—the men from his own country, who were resolved, on this occasion, to push the demand of Ireland to the extreme point, and who held that he would betray the Irish cause if he backed, not them, but Mr. Gladstone and the British Government.

[Sidenote: And takes the lead.]

It required all the dexterity, all the coolness, all the splendid equanimity and courage of the man of genius at such a fateful hour to keep his head. Mr. Sexton was equal to the occasion. He spoke slowly, and there was a hush in the House to catch his every syllable, for his words were the harbingers of fate. As he spoke so would be decided one of the most momentous and indeed tragical of human issues. He spoke, I say, slowly—but at the same time it was evident that he had his mind well fixed on the end which he wished to reach. Nothing adds so much to the effectiveness of oratory as the sense that the man who is addressing you, is thinking at the very moment he is speaking. You have the sense of watching the visible working of his inner mind; and you are far more deeply impressed than by the glib facility which does not pause, does not stumble, does not hesitate, because he does not stop to think. Many people, reading so much about Mr. Sexton's oratory, will be under the impression that he is a very rapid and fluent speaker. He is nothing of the kind. He speaks with a great slowness, grave deliberation, and there are often long and sometimes even trying pauses between his sentences. He could not conceal on this great occasion the anxiety and the seriousness of the situation; but the mind was splendidly clear, the language as well chosen as though he were sitting in a room and holding discourse to a few admiring friends; and what Mr. Sexton had to say was, that he would not go into the same lobby with Chamberlain and Balfour in order to defeat the Government; in short, that he was going to vote with Mr. Gladstone. A long-drawn sigh of relief. The Government is saved.

[Sidenote: The field unsteady.]

But hush—not yet. There are still some of the hard Radicals from Scotland who have never wavered in the idea that the Irish members ought to remain at their full total. They have been partially relieved by what Mr. Sexton had said. But then Scotchmen are proverbially tenacious of opinion; and not even his appeal—joined to the appeal of their leader—will altogether change the purpose of those rugged sons of bonnie Scotland. And so, Mr. Shaw, the member for Galashiels, gets up to ask a question. He plainly declares that according to the answer given to this question, his vote would be given for or against the Government. So we are still in all the agonies of possible delay, for we know that seven Parnellites will go against the



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Government—that counts fourteen on a division; and if only seven or ten more go the same way, there is a majority against Mr. Gladstone, and we are lost. Mr. Mellor has to answer this fateful question, and everybody cries “Order, order,” which is the House of Commons way of saying that people are very anxious to hear what is about to be said. Mr. Mellor gives an answer that satisfies Mr. Shaw. Mr. Dalziel—another sturdy Scotch Radical—is also satisfied; and so we have all the Liberal vote, with the single exception of Labby—who quickly—furtively—almost shamefacedly—rushes off into the Tory lobby.

[Sidenote: Hoisting the numbers.]

And now the division takes place. There have been several speeches—usually of a minute each—before the final hour comes; but we are all so anxious to know what fate is in store for us, that we cannot stand the strain any longer. The division—the division—let us know the worst. Be it good, or be it ill—let it come at once. The Whips from the two lobbies enter almost simultaneously—this shows plainly enough that it has been a very near thing; then a dreadful hush as the numbers are announced; we have won—aye, but we have by only fourteen! There is a burst of cheers from the Irish Benches; Sir William Harcourt laughs aloud in his triumph; the composure of the Old Man’s face remains unchanged; you see he has gone through a great many things like this; and that great heart and sane mind are prepared for any fate. Mr. Chamberlain says nothing; but looking into the recesses of his amendment paper, attempts to hide the choking rage of disappointment that has come over him at this final defeat of his brightest hopes of trampling his former friend and his former chief in the dust.

[Sidenote: A squabble.]

And now comes the squalid sequel to all this glorious and splendid fight—the disorderly—the chaotic—the anarchic scene of the 11th of July. The whole thing began simply enough. Mr. Brodrick, the son of an Irish landlord—a very light, though very serious young man—managed in the course of his speech to speak of the people from whom he springs as “impecunious and garrulous.” At first nobody took any notice of what was probably a mere *mauvaise plaisanterie*; and the incident would have passed altogether had not Mr. Brodrick immediately afterwards made a more direct appeal to the Irish Members. This elicited from Mr. Sexton the retort that he need not make any appeal to the Irish Benches after the “grossly rude” allusion he had made to the Irish people. On this there was a mild hubbub on the Tory Benches. The House was very thin and very listless, and really not in the mood to take anything very tragically. But Mr. Sexton resolutely refused to withdraw unless Mr. Brodrick gave the example. Mr. Mellor then—acting somewhat precipitately—ruled that Mr. Sexton was out of order, and should withdraw his words.

[Sidenote: Mr. Sexton defies the chair.]



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This created a new situation. Mr. Sexton had now to fight, not Mr. Brodrick, not even Mr. Balfour—but the chair; and to fight the chair is to enter into a contest with the Grand Llama of the House of Commons. Meantime the House had filled; and every nook and cranny was occupied; a large number of members were standing up; and there was that intense thrill of excitement which always forecasts a great outburst, and the outburst came when Mr. Sexton—resolute and composed—gave it plainly to be understood that he would not obey the ruling of the chair; and that he must first get an apology from Mr. Brodrick, as the original offender, before Mr. Brodrick got any apology from him. Then was the cyclone let loose; and there began a series of the wildest, most violent, most angry, and disorderly scenes I have ever witnessed. Scores of members were on their legs at the same time; men hitherto quiet, composed, and good-natured, began to raise cries hoarse with rage, and finally four or five hundred voices were united in producing the deafening and discordant din of angry and contradictory voices. Nor was this all. In some parts of the House men began directly to assail each other—to exchange language of taunt, and insult, and defiance; and, in more than one corner, there were the signs of impending physical conflict. The one relief of the situation was that some men kept their heads and looked on in sadness, while others, seeing only the comic side of the situation, smiled upon it all.

[Sidenote: Gladstone to the rescue.]

Mr. Gladstone, who had been away to dinner, had meantime entered, and a look of pain and solicitude crossed his white face. There is so much of innate gentleness—of inexhaustible kindness, and of high-bred and scholastic spirit beneath all the vehemence of his political temper and the frenzied energy of his political life—that for such scenes he has never any stomach; and they always bring to his face that same look of shock and pain and humiliation. And he it was who finally saved the situation. Several times Mr. Brodrick would have been willing to withdraw, but Mr. Balfour was resolved to get Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Sexton into a difficulty, to convict Mr. Sexton of disobeying the chair, to compel Mr. Gladstone to take action against his most useful friend and most powerful ally. Over and over again, then, he refused to allow Mr. Brodrick to get rid of the whole situation by withdrawing his language, and so enabling Mr. Sexton to follow the example. Meantime, Mr. Mellor had ruled that Mr. Sexton had been guilty of gross disorder, and had called upon him to leave the House. Mr. Sexton had steadily refused, basing his refusal on the demand that there had been no vote of the House. The point was this: There are two rules for dealing with disorder. Under the one a member is named, and then a division takes place, in which the House may refuse or consent to the suspension of a member. Under the other rule, the presiding officer has the

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right to suspend on his own motion, and without any appeal to the House. The latter rule was that under which Mr. Mellor acted. Mr. Sexton demanded that he should be treated under the other rule, believing that if a division had taken place the majority of the House, or at least a very big minority, would have refused to sanction the action of the Chairman. This would have meant that Mr. Mellor would have been censured, and thereby compelled to resign the Chairmanship.

Mr. Gladstone, I say, saved the situation. In language of touching delicacy and grace, he appealed to Mr. Sexton to obey the chair. Mr. Sexton at first would not yield; but when the appeal was renewed—when it was backed by all the resources of that thrilling and vibratory voice of Mr. Gladstone, his stubborn resolve gave way. He rose from his seat—several Liberal members got up and waved their hats; the Irishmen followed their example. And then Mr. Brodrick was able to make his tardy apology, and the matter for the moment was ended.

[Sidenote: The interfering Milman.]

There had been one little scene fiercer almost than any of the others. When Mr. Mellor proceeded to call Mr. Sexton to order, Mr. Milman, the clerk at the table, handed to him, with some appearance of ostentation and of eagerness, the rule which allowed him to compel Mr. Sexton's withdrawal without an appeal to the House. This provoked some now fiercely excited Irishmen to an outburst of blind rage. They shouted at Mr. Milman fiercely, desperately—called upon him to leave the Chairman alone, to take the chair himself; and Mr. Sexton made a bitter little speech to the effect that it was Mr. Milman's malignant interference which had produced his suspension. It was thought that on Wednesday this matter would be again raised; and even as early as noon there was a big array of members, expecting another outburst. But Mr. Balfour held his peace. Mr. Sexton asked a formal question, and gave notice of a motion of censure on the Chairman. Mr. Mellor took the chair amid a wild outburst of Tory cheers; and we got back to the tranquil consideration of clause nine, and to a delightful, good-humoured historical speech by Mr. Swift McNeill on the representation of Trinity College, Dublin.

[Sidenote: Divisions.]

The old story came back to our minds on July 13th of the historic scene at Tyburn when all the traitors were hanged in succession. When the first head was held up there was an awful shudder; the shudder was less vivid when the second head was held up; and when the executioner accidentally dropped the third there was a loud and mocking shout of "Butter-fingers." So it was in the House that night until the dinner hour came; but as ten o'clock approached, the House filled and there was a rise in the excitement. The scene, however, bore no comparison to the frenzied excitement of the preceding Thursday—it was evident we were going to have an anti-climax,



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and the whole arrangement of the Opposition broke down in an important and essential point. On the previous occasion Mr. Balfour, by preconcerted plan, was speaking at the moment when the guillotine fell—with the idea, of course, of bringing into greater relief the wickedness of the Government. Mr. Goschen was marked out to perform the same task this Thursday, but who should get up but Atherley Jones. The delighted Liberals cheered him to the echo. Mr. Goschen had to sit down, and so the whole denouement collapsed, and the curtain fell not on the lofty and eminent form of a former Chancellor of the Exchequer, but on the less imposing figure of the disgruntled Liberal, who is always anxious to strike his party a blow.

Then comes the division. There is some excitement, though we know we have won. And then we cheer, as we hear that we have won by 27! Clause 9 is now put as a whole. Our majority rises to 29—we cheer even more loudly.

[Sidenote: Tramp, Tramp, Tramp.]

We go through the lobbies in eight more successive divisions. It is the dreariest performance. "That Clause so-and-so stand part of the Bill," says the Chairman. A shout of "Ayes!" followed by a shout of "Noes!"—then a cry of "Division!"—then the same thing over again—and again—and again. We stand at 85 majority in nearly every division. But we don't cheer, for it is too monotonous; and as for the poor Tories—where be the wild shouts of "Gag, gag!" with which they rent the general air—their hoarse cries of "Shame, shame"—their open and foul taunts in the face of the G.O.M.? Silent—sombre—dogged—we go through the dreary round. Tout casse—tout passe—tout lasse.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIGHT IN THE HOUSE.

[Sidenote: The fatal Thursday.]

By this time everybody has read to his heart's content all the proceedings of that historic and dreadful Thursday night. I have already published elsewhere an account of my experiences; and within my limits here I must somewhat curtail the story. But it is well to correct some of the many errors which have found their way into the press. In the slight reaction which has followed the first wild outburst, it is now seen that there were certain exaggerations in the accounts. For instance, though there was an exchange of blows, altogether not more than five people were concerned in this most odious part of the whole transaction.



[Sidenote: Herod—Judas.]

The row began in a curious kind of way; and, indeed, to properly understand the events of the night, it is necessary to make a perfectly complete separation between two distinct periods. The fall of the guillotine is always certain to be accompanied by a scene of some excitement and violence. The violence has been diminishing steadily, as the different compartments have succeeded each other; and though there were some ugly rumours, the general expectation was that things



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would not be so very bad. And, indeed, without any desire to make party or personal capital, I may state that undoubtedly they would not have been so bad if Mr. Chamberlain had not intervened at the last moment. Opinion is unanimous that up to the time he spoke the feeling in the House was, though boisterous, rather good humoured. There was a conflict of opinion, there were some shouts, there was that general din in the air which always marks the inspiration of a momentous event, but there was no ill-temper. In a few moments Mr. Chamberlain had, to a certain extent, changed this; but even as to the period when he was speaking, I feel bound to correct the general impression and to say that my own opinion was that the general spirit was one of frolicsome enjoyment rather than of the seriousness of real passion. Mr. Chamberlain himself, to do him justice—though he had elaborated a series of the most taunting observations, though sentence after sentence was intended to be an assault and a barbed taunt—Mr. Chamberlain, I say, seemed himself to regard the whole affair rather from a comic than a tragic point of view. Under the bitterness of his language, the tone was not that of seriousness—and, indeed, it is very hard for any man to be perfectly serious when he knows that he is speaking for a certain number of allotted minutes, and instead of addressing himself to the particular question before the House, he has to make something in the shape of a last dying speech and declaration. The speech, however, was admirable in form, and still more admirable in delivery; the cold, clear voice penetrated to every ear, and some of the sentences were uttered with that deep, though carefully subdued swell which adds intense force by its very reserve, to the rhetoric of passion.

[Sidenote: Joe's beautiful elocution.]

Indeed, if I were a professor of elocution, I should feel bound to say that if a pupil required a lesson in the highest art of delivery, he could do nothing better than listen to Mr. Chamberlain's delivery of this bitter little speech of his; and, above all, that he could nowhere and in nowise better learn the lesson of the extraordinary increase there is in the force of a speech by careful self-suppression on the part of the speaker. There were one or two marvellous examples of Mr. Chamberlain's extraordinary readiness in taking a point. I think Mr. Chamberlain an extremely shallow man. I believe his knowledge to be slatternly, his judgment to be rash, his temper to be dictatorial and uncertain, but as a debater he stands, in readiness, alertness, and quickness in taking and utilising a point, supreme over anybody in the House of Commons, with the one exception of Mr. Gladstone. Thus when one or two Liberals made somewhat foolish interruptions on July 27th he turned upon them and exploited their interruption with an art that was almost dazzling in its perfection. For instance, when he denounced the Liberals for accepting



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some clause as the best that could be proposed by man, some Liberals cried out, "Under the circumstances." "Under the circumstances," said Mr. Chamberlain, with that strange, eloquent, deep swell in his voice, which adds so much to its effectiveness, and then he took the phrase, repeated it, and reiterated it, and turned it upside down, until even his bitterest enemy could not help enjoying the perfection of the skill with which he played upon it.

[Sidenote: Joe smiles.]

Finally he came to the passage in which he drew an elaborate comparison between Mr. Gladstone and Herod. I had no doubt at the time, and my impression has since been corroborated by words reported to have been used by Mr. Chamberlain himself—that he used the word "Herod" in a moment of happy and almost impish inspiration with a view to provoking the retort which was so obvious. There was a self-conscious smile on his face when he uttered the words, and he seemed to be quite prepared, and almost delighted by the retort which followed so promptly. Furthermore, when several Tories rose to denounce the interruption he beckoned to them with his hand; there was a gratified smile on his face; and his whole air suggested that he was so delighted with the success of his little manoeuvre that he thought it a pity anybody should spoil it; and especially as the result was to create such a din as to prevent him from finishing his final sentence. And he wanted very badly to finish that sentence; for over and over again, with an obstinacy that suggested the delighted author, he sought to get the sentence out; and no doubt he was very disappointed that the guillotine finally fell upon him with that sentence still unuttered. And there is one other point about this moment which I see has been completely lost. It is supposed that I and the others who shouted "Judas, Judas," did so in pure provocation—with deliberate intent to apply the word to Mr. Chamberlain personally and with fierce political and personal passion. That was not my impression of what was meant; and that certainly was not what I meant. I took Mr. Chamberlain's mood as I think anybody looking at him could see that he meant it to be taken; that is to say, I did not regard his speech as in the least serious; and his allusion to Mr. Gladstone as "Herod" appeared to me a self-conscious joke, and not, as some earnest Liberals seemed to think, a gross, foul, and deliberate insult. Indeed, I believed—and subsequent events have confirmed that view—that Joe was thinking a good deal more of himself as the centre of a dramatic and historic scene than of wounding Mr. Gladstone. And, then, the use of the word "Judas" must be taken with the context. Mr. Chamberlain was talking of the "days of Herod," and when I called out "Judas," what I really meant was why not select Judas, and not Herod, who was his contemporary, if you will refer to this particular epoch of human history. I say all these things, not by way of extenuation; for really I regard the incident as closed; not by way of defending myself from rancour, for I felt none; but with a view to preventing an entirely incorrect view and impression of an historical evening from being stereotyped.



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[Sidenote: "I used it on purpose."]

And I can call a very potent and trustworthy witness as to this being the proper view of the incident; for I understand that, almost immediately after the scene, a good-natured Liberal said to Mr. Chamberlain that he must confess that the use of the word "Herod" was calculated to produce the retort of "Judas"; and the report is that Mr. Chamberlain replied, "I used it on purpose," or "That was my intention," or some such phrase as that, which implied that he was neither surprised nor annoyed by the retort, but had rather invited it. I lost sight of Joe for a good time after this—there were other things which had to be looked after; but I am told by those who were able to watch him closely, that his face wore all through the scene which followed a look of almost beatific happiness—the happiness of an artist who saw slowly unfolding the drama to which he had given the impetus, and which he had fashioned out in his own reveries.

[Sidenote: Opening of the row.]

At all events, it was not either Mr. Chamberlain's use of the word "Herod," nor my use of the word "Judas," which really brought about the subsequent row—except in the most indirect and remote way. Mr. Vicary Gibbs seemed possessed by the idea that he should call the attention of the Chairman to the use of the word "Judas"; and he singled me out—although, of course, he knew that I was only one of many who had used the word. I don't complain of this—I merely state a fact—a fact which, laughingly, was admitted later in the evening; for here I may say in passing that such is the extraordinary volatility and such the real good-nature of the House of Commons, this terrible evening ended up in the exchange of hearty and friendly jokes between some of the fiercest combatants in the whole business. I had not the least idea of what Mr. Gibbs was saying—what his complaint really was I knew for the first time after the whole row was over; indeed, nobody could hear anything in the din that was almost deafening. Mr. Mellor made several attempts to catch Mr. Gibbs's statement; and only when, after straining his ears to the utmost, he failed to catch one single word, did Mr. Mellor resolve to take no notice of what Mr. Gibbs was trying to say. This seemed to drive Mr. Gibbs almost beside himself—he shouted angrily and wildly, at the top of his voice, with fierce and almost frenzied gesture; and, after a while, he rushed down with every appearance of passion to the Front Opposition Bench to renew his attempts to make his point of order. All this time his passion had been rising higher and higher—until, in the end, he was almost a painful sight to witness. His own friends were foremost in trying to bring him back to composure; and Lord Randolph Churchill expressed, with the fine, full-flavoured plainness of ancient speech, his opinion of the conduct of his friends.

[Sidenote: Keeping the seats.]



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This plain-spoken opinion of Lord Randolph Churchill was induced by the fact that Mr. Gibbs and his friends had now resolved on a desperate step to secure attention to his complaint. This was no other than refusing to leave the House, and take part in the division. It is more than twelve years since this extreme, violent, and almost revolutionary step was adopted before. On the dreadful night—how well I remember it!—when the news came that Michael Davitt had been sent back to penal servitude, the information sent a thrill of such horror and almost despair amongst the Irish Benches, that some method of manifesting their feelings became inevitable. By a series of circumstances, into which I need not now go, the manifestation took the shape of refusing to go into the division lobby, and retaining our seats. We were all suspended in turn, and removed from the House by the Serjeant-at-Arms.

[Sidenote: Logan.]

Meantime, the unexpected and extraordinary delay in taking the division had brought back some members from the division lobbies; and some had actually recorded their votes, and were returning in the ordinary course to their seats. Among these was Mr. Logan. Mr. Logan peered somewhat curiously at the angry faces and the shouting figures on the Tory Benches, and approached them with the view of finding out what it was all about. His air, somehow or other, suggested—quite wrongly, as it turned out—to the Tories that he was meditating an assault upon some of them: and there rose angry cries from them of “Bar! Bar!” This, in Parliamentary language, means that the member is violating the rule against any member standing on the floor of the House, except in the narrow and short interspace which lies between the entrance door and the bar—a very small bit of free territory. Logan, in his turn, was exasperated by these remarks, and used some retort. Then there were renewed cries that he was not in order in standing up on the floor, together with a multitude of expletives at the expense of his party and himself. And Mr. Logan thereupon said he would put himself in order, and sat down on the Front Opposition Bench. In doing so, he certainly did put himself in order, for a member can take his seat where he likes during the progress of a division. But this step is what led to the violent and unprecedented scene which followed. For Mr. Hayes Fisher immediately caught hold of Mr. Logan by the collar, Ashmead Bartlett, I understand, followed suit, and thus the first blow was struck.

[Sidenote: Colonel Saunderson hits out.]

It was partly curiosity—it was partly, I have no doubt, indignation—it was partly the determination to rush to the assistance of a friend—that led to the moving of the Irishmen from their own seats to the benches above the gangway, which are occupied by their political opponents. In making this move they had no intention whatsoever, I believe, of striking or even hustling anybody, but the result of



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it was that Colonel Saunderson was violently pushed and his hat knocked off. I really believe that the person next him, who gave him the final push, must have been one of his own friends; but angry, excited, and hot-tempered, he jumped to his feet. Mr. Austin, an Irish member, was at that moment standing in the gangway, as innocent of offence as anybody in the House, and he it was who received the blow from Colonel Saunderson's clenched fist. Mr. Austin fell, and immediately Mr. Crean rushed forward, and in quick succession gave Colonel Saunderson two hard and resounding blows—one of which drew blood.

[Sidenote: The bursting of the cyclone.]

Then the cyclone burst. When the sound of blows was heard; when Colonel Saunderson was seen to be in grips with another member, anger—shame—horror, took possession of everybody; some men lost their heads, determined to have their share in the fray, and for a brief second or two a solid cohort on either side—the Tories on one side, the Irish on the other—stared and glared at each other, with pallid, passion-rent, and, at the same time, horror-stricken faces—ready to descend into the abyss, and yet standing in the full consciousness of horror at its brink. William O'Brien, John Burns, Mr. Bowles, Mr. Healy, Tom Condon, a stalwart and brave Tipperary man ready for peace, ready for war, and several others—myself included—rushed to separate and remonstrate, with the result that the scene came to an end in a space which was extraordinarily short, considering the circumstances, but terribly long to those who lived through its horror. Really only three people were in that scrimmage—Mr. Austin, Colonel Saunderson and Mr. Crean. There was, I believe, some hustling, but of even that I saw little. Whether it was at this moment, or when Mr. Hayes Fisher laid hands on Mr. Logan, the hissing came from the gallery, I do not know; but it was at either of these two moments—a sound hideous, unparalleled, sufficient to bring the maddest man back to reason. And then, thinking once more that it was all over, we went into the division lobbies again.

[Sidenote: The Speaker appears.]

In common with most people, I had by this time forgotten all about Mr. Chamberlain—all about Herod—all about Judas; thinking the whole affair was over and done with; that the incident had been submerged under the row; and all I expected we had now to do was to trudge drearily and wearily through the lobbies in the long series of divisions which would precede the final passage of the Bill through Committee. It was only the wild cheering which announced the advent of the Speaker that brought me back to the House, and gave me some idea of what had gone on. If you want to understand why France welcomed Napoleon after the Terror, you had only to be in the House at that moment, and understand the sense of relief, joy, and confidence which came over it when the presence of the Speaker brought it to the sense that at last

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the reign of Anarchy was over, and order was in the hands of one who could maintain it against all men, and against the whole House if needs be. And then, to my astonishment, Mr. Gibbs complained of my use of the term “Judas” to Mr. Chamberlain. As I have said, all this had passed from everybody’s memory, it really had nothing to do with the awful scene which had just been enacted, and, in fact, it was like some sudden return to ancient and forgotten history. Moreover, it had the disadvantage of conveying an entirely wrong impression of what had really taken place; it shifted back the attention to what was after all more or less playfulness, or at the worst, mere verbal disorder, from the odious, brutal resort to physical violence which had just taken place. Moreover, it put a wrong complexion on even the verbal disorder, for it put the initiative with me instead of with Mr. Chamberlain, and, finally, it entirely removed from view the gross and scandalous breach of order which Mr. Gibbs and his friends had committed by retaining their seats and refusing to leave the House.

[Sidenote: My apology.]

But the great consideration with the Speaker—and, indeed, with everybody else who had the dignity and honour of the House of Commons at heart—was to shove underground as soon, as promptly, as roughly as possible, the corpse of its dignity and reputation; and without making any attempt to explain my conduct—to shift on the responsibility to where it really lay—to draw attention, except by a mere sentence, to that scene of physical violence—I made my apology. I cannot claim that it was all that I ought to have said; several people have blamed me for not calling attention to the use of the word “Herod” by Mr. Chamberlain. But really the Speaker was so generous; I entered so fully into his idea that recrimination would only prolong an odious, detestable, and degrading scene—that I could not haggle about terms; and was determined to do my part towards getting back the House to a sense of its honour, dignity, and self-respect.

[Footnote: Mr. Hayes Fisher.]

There were some allusions to the deplorable business of July 27, during the following week. But the allusions were few—very brief, and very shamefaced. Indeed, the House of Commons was so heartily ashamed of itself that it had not the strength nor the courage to face its own ill-doing, and wanted to get away from the horrid thing as soon as it possibly could. Yet there was a strong sense that an incident so unprecedented—so disgraceful, so utterly lowering to the dignity of a great, august and historic assembly—should not, and could not be allowed to pass as though nothing had occurred. It was also pretty clear, amid so many conflicting statements, that the responsibility for the passing over the gulf between mere verbal encounter and physical violence rested with Mr. Hayes Fisher, and that, therefore, it was on him any punishment should be visited which the House of Commons deemed necessary for the protection of its outraged

dignity. However, as I have said, the House of Commons was so heartily ashamed of itself, and desired to get its shame out of sight and out of memory as soon as possible.



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[Footnote: A lame apology.]

But Mr. Hayes Fisher did not act particularly well. It was he who had taken Mr. Logan by the collar, and therefore, it was he who had struck the first blow. There was some execrable haggling as to whether Mr. Hayes Fisher or Mr. Logan should make the first apology—execrable, I say, because a gentleman never ought to haggle over an apology if he feels that he has been in the wrong, and because nobody could deny that Mr. Fisher had been the original wrongdoer. The result was that when Mr. Gladstone came into the House on July 31st, and was asked questions about the business, the Old Man, for once, found himself in a difficulty. He had been told that apologies were going to be made; but Mr. Fisher made no sign, and, indeed, it looked very much as if he would do nothing at all. Labby intervened at this psychological moment by reading that extract from the account in the *Pall Mall Gazette* which fixed Mr. Fisher's responsibility under his own hand, and it was seen that something would have to be done. Then—and not till then—did Mr. Fisher speak and make his apology. Mr. Logan—who had very properly refused to take the initiative—then made a very brief but a very handsome explanation of what he had done, and after a few lofty words from Mr. Gladstone and the Speaker the matter was allowed to drop into the dark abyss of oblivion. But we can't forget it.

[Sidenote: Messrs. McCorquodale & Co.]

On August 3rd there was a most instructive and important little debate on a Labour question. It had reference to the dismissal by the firm of the McCorquodales of several trade unionists. Suffice it to say, that the chief opposition to the claims of Labour came from Sir James Fergusson, whose remarks were ardently cheered by the Tories; and that Sir John Hibbert was finally pressed by Sir Charles Dilke into a promise which binds the Government practically to refuse contracts in future to any firm which acts like the McCorquodales. It was a great victory for Labour—not the less great because it was all so quietly done.

[Sidenote: A Government defeat.]

There was a curious little incident on the following day—nothing less than a defeat of the Government. It arose on a small local Irish Bill. Blackrock is a small seaside place just outside Dublin. The Tories, who occupy a good many of the villas, have kept the whole government of the place in their hands by maintaining a high property qualification for votes for the Town Commissioners. On this day they brought forward a Bill; but it was opposed until they had mended their ways with regard to the government of the town. Mr. Morley, acting on the official view, urged that the Bill might be passed and this other question dealt with separately, but the Irish refused to be pacified, they went to a division, and with the aid of the Radicals they managed to defeat the Government by nine votes. They celebrated the event by a hearty cheer.



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[Sidenote: And so to the end.]

The penultimate week in August went on—wearily, tamely, and monotonously. It was, perhaps, the presence of the Speaker—it was, perhaps, the painful recollection of the scene of violence on a previous occasion—it was, perhaps, the universal exhaustion of the House; whatever the cause, the excitement on the night of August 25th was infinitely below what anybody would have expected. Throughout the whole evening there was exactly the same spectacle as on previous evenings—that is to say, there was the same old obstructive group discussing exactly the same topics; raising the same objections; going into the same subtleties as if the Bill were just in its first stage; and there was the same dreary and universal emptiness of the House generally. At last, as eleven o'clock approached, the Unionists prepared themselves for a dramatic effort. Mr. Chamberlain prepared an educational bombshell, but Mr. Healy hoisted the engineer with his own petard.

Then, quietly and noiselessly, we went through a couple of divisions; and before we knew where we were, Mr. Morley was standing at the table, and moving that the third reading of the Bill should take place the following Wednesday. Nearly every one of the most prominent debaters had by this time cleared out. The Irish Benches, however, remained full, and from them came a triumphant cheer as, at a quarter to twelve, the motion was carried, and the second stage of the great measure of Irish emancipation was completed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IRELAND'S CHARTER THROUGH.

[Sidenote: A dull beginning.]

Inspidity, weariness, and dulness marked the commencement of the concluding week of the Home Rule Bill in the House. There was no private business on the Monday, and accordingly for nearly a quarter of an hour—it seemed infinitely longer to the little group of members present—the House sat in sedate and solemn silence. Then commenced questions, and in a moment half-a-dozen members were buzzing with gnat-like pertinacity about the impassive figure of the Postmaster-General. Mr. Arnold Morley was continually on his legs. For instance, Mr. Bousfield wanted to know what rule there was which forbade Post Office employes to approach the House of Commons directly, or to sign a petition to the House with reference to any grievance, after having unsuccessfully petitioned the Postmaster-General. Mr. Morley replied laconically, "There is no such rule." Then several of the Tory members attempted to corner Sir U.K. Shuttleworth about the quantity of coals consumed in the "Majestic" while going at full speed. Sir Edward Harland was cautious, and Mr. Gibson Bowles, whose rising was the signal for derisive cheers, was pertinacious. The Secretary to the Admiralty, always

dignified, was grave and serious. He was not to be tripped up, and discreetly declined to be drawn.



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[Sidenote: Our first line of defence.]

It is one of the well-known peculiarities of the House of Commons that its attendance is usually in inverse line of proportion to the importance of the subject which it is discussing. On August 28th the House was engaged in debating the question which above all others ought to interest the people of this country—the state, namely, of our Navy. Yet the House was almost entirely empty throughout the whole evening, and the speeches were generally confined to the somewhat inarticulate representatives of the services, and to the dullest and smallest men in the whole assembly. It is obviously inconvenient—perhaps it is even perilous—that interests so grave and so gigantic should fall for their guardianship into hands so incompetent and so petty. It may be an inevitable accompaniment of our Parliamentary system that the naval debates should be so conducted; if so, one must put it down as one of the evils which must be taken as part of the price we pay for the excellences of a representative system.

[Sidenote: Sir Edward Reed as an alarmist.]

I may dismiss the debate on the Navy with one or two further observations. Sir Edward Reed, though he knows a good deal about ships—for he has had something to do with them all his life—is not an authority whom one can implicitly accept. He is not a politician who has prospered according to what he believes and what are doubtless his deserts, for he is a very clever man, and politicians who are a little disappointed have a certain tendency to ultra-censoriousness, which damages the effectiveness and prejudices the authority of their criticisms. Thus, Sir Edward has been always more or less of a pessimist with regard to the doings of other men. On August 28th he spoke in decidedly alarmist terms of the lessons which should be taught to us by the loss of the “Victoria.” Speaking with the modesty of a mere layman on the subject, I should have been inclined to think that the chief moral to be drawn from that terrible and tragic disaster was the terribly important part which the mere personality of the individual in command still plays in deciding the fate of hundreds of lives; that, in short, the personal equation—as it has come to be called—is still the supreme and decisive factor in all naval enterprises. But there may be some grounds for the alarmist views of Sir Edward Reed, and I see no reason why his views should not receive prompt, candid, and independent investigation. The officials may oppose such an investigation; but officials are always optimists, and the cold draught of outside criticism does them an immense deal of good.

[Sidenote: The Grand Old Chieftain and his tactics.]



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At an early hour in the evening there was a very significant question, and an equally significant answer. Sir Charles Dilke called attention, with characteristic adroitness to a weapon which the Tories placed in our hands for dealing with such an emergency as that by which we were at the moment confronted. It was Lord Salisbury who made the most excellent suggestion that when a Bill had gone through all its stages in one Session of Parliament it should not be necessary to repeat the process in the next, but that a mere resolution should bring the Bill once again into the fulness of life. Would it not be possible for the Government, asked Sir Charles, to adopt the proposal with regard to their measures? The answer of the Old Man was cautious, vague, and dilatory. It is one of his well-known peculiarities not to arrive at the solution of a tactical difficulty one moment too soon; and this is a rule which, generally speaking, acts extremely well. I dare say Sir Charles Dilke did not expect any other answer; and nobody in the House was surprised that the Old Man answered as he did. But all the same, one could read between the lines, and it was pretty clear that the Old Man was preparing to face the situation by remedies drastic enough to meet even so revolutionary a situation.

[Sidenote: A great Parliamentarian.]

Everybody was delighted—that is to say, everybody on the Liberal side of the House—to see that the great old leader was displaying on this question the same unerring tactics, the same resources the same willingness to learn, and the same elasticity of mind as he has manifested throughout his whole life—or at least throughout all that part of it which dates from his escape from the shackles of his early and obscurantist creed. He has never concealed the fact that he departed from the old rules of the House of Commons with misgiving reluctance, and even repulsion. It would have been strange, indeed, if he could have felt otherwise after all his long years of glorious service in that august assembly. But then, when the time did come for taking the plunge, he took it boldly and unshrinkingly. It was a delight to watch him during this Session, and especially when it became necessary to use the guillotine against the revolutionary and iniquitous attempt to paralyse the House of Commons by sheer shameless obstruction. The “guillotine” was a most serious, a most momentous, and even portentous departure from all precedent, except, of course, the Tory precedent of 1887; but the Old Man, when the proper time came, proposed the experiment with the utmost composure—with that splendid command of nerve—that lofty and dauntless courage—that indifference to attack, which explains his extending hold over the imaginations and the hearts of men.

[Sidenote: The plain duty of Liberals.]



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I have little doubt that he will be quite equal to any further steps which may be necessary to vindicate the authority of the majority in the House of Commons, and nobody doubts that such further steps may be necessary. The real and fundamental question—as I put it over and over again—is whether the Liberal party and the Liberal majority shall go before the country at the next election with the charge made good against them of lack of will, competence, and energy. If once that charge can be substantiated, I regard the Liberal cause as lost—and lost for many a year to come. Any Government almost is better than a Government which cannot govern; and the sentiment is so universal that I have no doubt the shifting ballast, which decides all elections, would go with a rush to the Tory side, and would enthrone in the place of power a strong Tory majority and an almost omnipotent Tory Government. The Tories know this, and calculate upon it, and will devote all their energies, therefore to reducing the present House of Commons and the present Ministry to discredited impotence, contemptible paralysis. Such a conspiracy must be met in the proper manner. Obstructive debate must be mercilessly closed; old rules must be abandoned without a sigh, and give way to others more adapted to the necessity of the time. Above all things the House of Lords must be flouted, humiliated, and defied. It is on the spring-tide of popular democratic and anti-aristocratic passion we shall have to float the next Liberal Government into power.

[Sidenote: Nepotism in the army.]

When business commenced on August 29th, there was a beggarly array of empty benches. For some time, the only Tory defenders of the Constitution were the ubiquitous George Christopher Trout Bartley and the valiant Howard Vincent. Questions showed more inclination than ever to wander into the purely parochial. Presently Mr. Burnie came along with an inquiry addressed to the War Minister whether it was correct the Duke of Connaught had been appointed to the chief command of the army at Aldershot; and, if so, on what grounds he had been selected for this important position. Several other vigorous Radicals were on the same scent. Mr. Campbell-Bannerman said it was quite true the Duke had become Commander-in-Chief. This was because of his fitness; because he was practically the senior officer available, and because he had gained experience in both regimental and staff duties, having filled with great credit the high office of Commander-in-Chief at Bombay. Herculean Mr. Allan, of Gateshead, sought for information how many months the Duke of Connaught was absent from his duties when he commanded at Portsmouth. Young Mr. Dalziel also came forward, wanting to know whether the Duke would receive the salary of a General or a Lieutenant-General. Mr. A.C. Morton, who had appropriated for the nonce Mr. T.W. Russell's usual seat, was anxious for a further explanation of what was meant by the



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Duke being practically the senior officer available. He also wanted to know what experience he had had in real fighting. The reply of the War Minister was conciliatory. There were, he explained, one or two generals senior to H.R.H., but who were at present discharging duties from which it was not desirable they should be removed. The pay would be that of a Lieutenant-General. Owing to domestic circumstances, the Duke lived out of Portsmouth, but he was little out of the district he commanded. He served in the Egyptian campaign, which was the only opportunity he had had during his career in taking part in active warfare. This did not satisfy either Mr. Allan or Mr. Morton. The member for Peterboro' wanted to be precise. How far was H.R.H. away from the real fighting? The War Minister could only smile and shake his head. Mr. Allan expressed his dissent, and Mr. Morton, derisively cheered by a handful of Tories, solemnly begged to give notice that on the Army Estimates he would again raise the question of this flagrant job.

[Sidenote: A triumph for Mr. Burns.]

The evening was notable for a splendid triumph achieved by that fine Democrat, John Burns. It arose out of the Navy Estimates. The conditions of labour in the Government dockyards have long been crying out for remedy, and Mr. Burns presented the case for the men with a force and lucidity that carried conviction home to the minds of a crowded House, among whose members his is one of the most magnetic personalities. The member for Battersea pointed out that, whilst he strongly approved of the attitude of the Government in adding £30,000 to the wages of the men, the real step they should have taken was to ignore the opinion of the permanent officials, those bugbears of all reformers, past, present, and to come—pay the trades union rates, and abolish classification altogether. A very excellent smack at Sir John Gorst, Mr. A.B. Forwood, and other standbacks on the Opposition side was the remark:—"I would rather have the rate of wages in dockyards regulated by trades unions than made the sport of party politicians and put up as a kind of Dutch auction." What have the Government to fear in this matter? The trade unions must always have to face competition and trade rivalry, and these elements alone are more than sufficient to keep down wages. So great was the impression made by Mr. Burns's speech, that official notice of it was inevitable, and Mr. E. Robertson was able to make an announcement which gave, if not absolute satisfaction, at least a measure of it to the champions of the artificers and labourers in our dockyards.

[Sidenote: Home Rule again.]

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It was only the Old Man would have had the daring to begin the third stage of the greatest Bill of modern times at an hour so inauspicious—noon on a Wednesday sitting. Everybody knows that among all the dead hours of the House of Commons, there is no hour so utterly dead as that. Indeed, very often such is the disinclination of the natural man for unreasonable and unseasonable hours—it is very often extremely difficult for the Whips of the Government to get together the forty members who are necessary to form the quorum for the starting of business; and I have known cases where it was close upon two o'clock—if not even later—before there was a sufficient muster for the beginning of the day's business. However, Mr. Gladstone calculated correctly on the magic of his name and the witchery of his oratory; for by a few minutes past twelve, when he rose to make his speech, the House was crowded in almost every part, and he had an audience not only unprecedented in its fulness at such an hour, but also delightfully stimulating in its general responsiveness and sometimes even its ready enthusiasm.

[Sidenote: A mighty speech.]

The speech of the Old Man was worthy of the occasion. For some hours after it had ended nobody had anything to say about anybody or anything else; it was one of those speeches that create something like rapture; and that oft-repeated declaration that he had never done anything like it before—a declaration I have heard too many times to now altogether accept. The voice was splendid, the diction very fine, the argument close and well knit, the matter carefully prepared without any selfish adherence to the letter of a manuscript—a fidelity which always spoils anything like spontaneity of oratory. And the Old Man was in splendid physical condition and in the brightest of spirits. Indeed, I was never more struck with the extraordinary physical perfection which Mr. Gladstone's frame has maintained after his eighty-three years of full active and wearing life. The back was straight, the figure erect, the motions free, unconstrained, easy; the gestures those of a man whose every joint moved easily in a fresh and vigorous frame. And the face was wonderfully expressive, now darkened with passionate hatred of wrong, now bursting into the sunshine of genial and pleasant smiles. And—as is usual when he is in this mood—he was extraordinarily quick at taking interruptions; he was, indeed, almost boisterous in his manner, and seemed to positively invite those interjectional interventions from the other side, which, in less exuberant moods he is sometimes inclined to resent. Mr. Chaplin had quoted a portentous passage from Cavour to show that the great Italian statesman had declared against Home Rule. Mr. Gladstone was able to cap this with another passage—which, beginning with a strong indictment of English methods of government in Ireland, wound up with the declaration that Ireland ought to be treated with the same justice

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and generosity as Canada. While the Liberals were still cheering this thrust, Mr. Chaplin got up to make the remark that Cavour had said other things quite contradictory of this, whereupon the Old Man—still with a smile of deadly courtesy—pounced upon Mr. Chaplin with the remark, “Is it your case, then, that Cavour contradicted himself?”—a retort, the rapidity and completeness of which crushed Mr. Chaplin for the moment.

[Sidenote: Cowed silence of the Tories.]

When he dealt with the charge that the Government had unduly curtailed debate, the Old Man had made up his case very thoroughly, and as he read the damning indictment which showed the wild multitudinousness, the infinite variety and the prolonged duration of the speeches of the Opposition, there was plenty of encouraging cheers from the Liberal side; while on the Tory Benches they sat in dumb and stricken silence. Indeed, throughout the whole speech, the Tories were singularly quiet. Perhaps it was that they too were carried away by the witchery and the spell which the Old Man had cast over the rest of the House; and, while disagreeing with him, were still sufficiently wound up to the lofty and more empyrean heights which the orator reached to feel that there would be something jarring and even common in a note of dissent. Whatever the reason, they remained uncommonly silent throughout the whole speech; and, sometimes, when one or two of the more ebullient members spoke, the interjectors got very little change for their pains.

[Sidenote: The readiness of the Old Man.]

And this silence was the more remarkable in one or two of the most important passages of the Bill, for the Old Man challenged interruption. Thus he ranged the objections to the Bill under seven separate heads, and then he proceeded to read out these heads. They were all a perfectly faithful representation—in some cases even a repetition—of what the Tories had said; but stated baldly, nakedly, in the cold light of early day, they sounded intensely ridiculous. It was impossible, for instance, to take seriously the resounding proposition that the Bill “would break up the Empire”—that under the Bill the loyal minority would incur loss of life, liberty and property, and so on. As Mr. Gladstone read out these propositions there was a deadly chill, a disheartened silence, on the Tory Benches which had its importance, for it showed plainly that, however ready they were to mouth these things on platforms they felt a little ashamed of them in their more sober moments. Just once or twice, a stray Tory did venture to signify by a timid and faint cheer his acceptance of the ridiculous litany of prophecy and reprobation which Mr. Gladstone was repeating to him. And then the Old Man was delightful; he smiled all over his face until its features were one vast mass of corrugated wrinkles; then he waved his hand a little to the other side, and finally congratulated himself on being in the happy position of being even partially corroborated by gentlemen of opposite opinions, Whereupon, of course, the whole House laughed, including the very member whom the

Old Man had thus toasted. In short, as will have been seen from my description, the Old Man was in his very best form, in full command of himself, of his friends, and even of his enemies.



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[Sidenote: A solemn peroration.]

Finally, there came a peroration—lofty, almost inspired—splendidly delivered, rapturously applauded. It rang out a note of perfect confidence—of early and complete victory—of righteous trust in a righteous cause. And the House which had followed the great orator in rapt attention so long could not tire of cheering this glowing and inspiring end. For several minutes the cheers were given—and again given, and again. Meantime, poor Mr. Courtney had been standing—waiting for silence. To him had been entrusted the task of moving the rejection of the measure. He was dull, pedantic, and rather embarrassed after this great effort of Mr. Gladstone, and the House emptied. There was a certain stir of curiosity as the name of “Mr. Disraeli” was called by the Speaker; and then the bearer of one of the greatest names of our times, stood up. His speech was brightish, cleverish, and yet there was something wanting. Mr. Redmond was critical, cautious, severe on the financial clauses, but finally pronounced for the Bill. And so we started the first day of final debate on the Home Rule Bill.

[Sidenote: The last lap.]

There was no doubt about it; the House was thoroughly jaded, and it would have been beyond the power of the most Demosthenic orator to rouse it to anything like enthusiasm. Several of the speeches throughout the following evening were of a high order; but still there was no response—it was speaking from a rock to the noisy, unlistening, and irresponsive sea. The night of September 1st began with a brief, graceful, finely-phrased and finely-tempered speech by Mr. Justin McCarthy, which confirmed Mr. Dillon’s frank expression of the Bill as a final measure of emancipation to the Irish people. The obvious sincerity of the speaker—the high character he has, his long consistency, and, above all, the sense of his thorough unselfishness, procured for Mr. McCarthy a respectful and even a sympathetic hearing from all parts of the House, and he had an audience silent, attentive, and admiring.

[Sidenote: Joe’s parting bolt.]

The contrast between the kindness, the sincere judgment, and the kindly disposition of Mr. McCarthy and the somewhat raucous and malevolent accents of Mr. Chamberlain, was very marked. Not that Mr. Chamberlain was by any means so nasty as usual; it looked as if he had been taught by the failure of his last utterance into learning at last that malevolence in the end defeats itself by its very excess, and he evidently had resolved to put a very severe restraint upon himself, and attuned his oratory to a very minor key. But this new tone was just as unsuccessful as the other, and there is a second unsuccessful and flat speech to be put to his credit. Many of the ideas, many of the phrases, were repetitions of things he had already said a hundred times over in the course of the previous debates; in short, the speech was a revelation of the fact, known to those who have watched



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Mr. Chamberlain carefully, that the soil is very barren and very thin; and that after a few oratorical crops it becomes exhausted. Perhaps the failure of the speech was also largely due to the fact that the Irish and the Liberal members, taught by previous experiences, resolved to also put restraint on themselves. They have learned by this time that interruptions do Mr. Chamberlain a great deal of good; and that his great nimbleness and readiness never come out so well as when he has suddenly to answer such an interruption. Addressing benches—blank, silent and irresponsive, he laboured rather heavily throughout the whole of his address; and there was a complete absence even from the Tory benches of that loud and frequent accompaniment of cheers to which Mr. Chamberlain is usually treated. In short, it was a dull, ineffective speech, mostly listened to in silence.

[Sidenote: A coming man.]

Sir Edward Grey delivered an admirable reply. In his case—as in that of Mr. Chamberlain—there was an immense disadvantage of a tired House, and the audience had thinned somewhat after Mr. Chamberlain had sat down. But those who remained were fortunate enough to hear one of the most perfect specimens of House of Commons eloquence that has been heard in Westminster for many a day. Indeed, there are few men in the House who have so perfect a command of what I might call the true, genuine, and even grand style of Parliamentary eloquence. Sir Edward Grey speaks with a perfectly unbroken, level tone; his language is moderate and reserved, and he has the great art of using language which implies and suggests more than it actually says. In short, his eloquence is that of perfect high-bred conversation, discussing questions with that complete self-command and composure of the man of the world who disdains to use, even of the greatest affairs, and of the strongest emotions, language of passion or exaggeration. Such a style is wonderfully effective in a business assembly, where men feel, even when they are under the glow of splendid eloquence, that there is behind the words a thinking, reflective, and composed mind. The speech gained enormously by the contrast of its composure—its fine temper, its calm and broad judgment—from the somewhat pettish, personal, and passionate utterances of Mr. Chamberlain. This young man will go very far—very far indeed.

[Sidenote: Wearisome Wallace wit.]

Then there was the interval of the dinner-hour—wound up with a speech from Mr. Wallace. The iniquity of the abandonment of the In-and-Out clause of the Bill was again the burden of his theme. He brought to the subject the same quaint, rich, but somewhat elaborate humour which made the success of his previous speech; and the Tories were more than delighted with some telling hits which he gave to Mr. Gladstone for the change of front. But Mr. Wallace made two mistakes. It is not given to any man to make a success twice over on the same theme; and he spoke at much too great a

length. In the end he somewhat wearied the House, and altogether the second speech was not equal to the first, though it had a great deal of ability in it, and *The Sun* was obliged next day to acknowledge with gratitude the great gratuitous advertisement which it received by numerous quotations from its columns.



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[Sidenote: Balfour at a disadvantage.]

It was half-past ten o'clock when Mr. Balfour rose. By this time the heat, which had set in with quite tropical fervour, became almost overpowering, and the House, which began by being tired, had become almost exhausted. It was under these depressing circumstances that the Leader of the Opposition started on what must have been to him something of a corvee, and for a considerable time—although the speech was not wanting in some very telling hits and bright sayings—he laboured very heavily; he could not arouse the enthusiasm even of his own followers, and was thus wire-drawn and ineffective.

[Sidenote: Honest John in fighting form.]

If Mr. Balfour was at his worst, Mr. Morley was at his best. The speech which he delivered at Newcastle, during the previous week, placed Mr. Morley definitely in the very front rank of platform orators. After his speech of September 1st, he made a distinct and great advance in his position as a Parliamentary debater. His great defect as a speaker has been a certain want of nimbleness and readiness. He has infinitely wider and larger resources than Mr. Chamberlain, who, nevertheless, excels in the alertness which is often the accompaniment of shallowness. On this occasion Mr. Morley was rapid, prompt, crushing. As thus: Mr. Balfour had spoken of the people who denounced Dublin Castle as “third-rate politicians.” “Who is the third-rate politician?” asked Mr. Morley, looking towards Mr. Chamberlain—everybody knows that he used to denounce Dublin Castle—and peal on peal of laughter and cheers followed from the Liberal and Irish Benches. Mr. Morley followed up his advantage by saying, with a comic air of despair, “It is very awkward to have coadjutors using this kind of language about each other.”

[Sidenote: A reminiscence of 1885.]

This is just the kind of thing which rouses even the most tired of the House; there was an immediate rise the temperature; the Liberals and the Irish were ready to delightedly cheer; the Tories, who always get restive as they approach the final hour of defeat, grew noisy, rude, and disorderly. Then Mr. Morley turned to the charges against the Irish members, and asked the Tories if their own record was so white and pure that they could afford to throw stones. This brought an allusion to the Tory-Parnellite alliance of 1885, which always disturbs, distracts, and even infuriates the Tories. They became restless and noisy, and Mr. Balfour and Mr. Goschen began to rise and explain. Well would it have been for Mr. Goschen had he resisted this inclination. Mr. Morley was alluding to the Newport speech of Lord Salisbury, and Mr. Balfour was defending it. “Ah, but,” said Mr. Morley, “did you not”—meaning Mr. Goschen—“did you not yourself attack Lord Salisbury for that very speech?”—a retort that produced a tempest of cheers. There were then some scornful and contemptuous allusions



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to Mr. Russell—to his stale vituperation, and, above all, to his grotesque charge against Mr. Morley of making himself the tool of clericalism. “There are more kinds of clericalism than one,” said Mr. Morley, alluding to the violent partisanship of the Presbyterian clergymen of South Tyrone. Finally, the speech ended in a lofty, splendid, and impressive peroration. When tracing the progress of the cause for the last seven years, Mr. Morley spoke with the fine poetic diction in which he stands supreme, of “starless skies” and a “tragic hour”—meaning the Parnell crisis—and then he used the words which more than any other thrilled the House. “We have,” he cried, “an indomitable and unfaltering captain,” and cheer on cheer rose, while the Old Man sat, white, silent, with a composed though rapt look.

There was the bathos of a poor speech from Colonel Nolan, and then the division. Everybody has the numbers now—34 majority—34 in spite of Saunders and Bolton, of absent Wallace, and unpaired Mr. Wilson. We cheer, counter cheer; we rise and wave our hats; and then quickly, quietly, even with a subdued air, we walk out and leave the halls of Parliament silent, dark, and echoless.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOME RULE IN THE LORDS.

[Sidenote: A brilliant scene.]

The brilliancy of the scene in the House of Lords on September 4th, when the fight over the Home Rule Bill began, was undeniable. Standing at the bar, in that small space which is reserved for members of the other Chamber, and looking out at the view, it was, I thought, one of the most picturesque and brilliant spectacles on which my eye had ever rested. The beauty of the House of Commons is great. But it is undoubtedly inferior in beauty to the House of Lords. In the House of Commons the roof is a false one, for the original loftiness of the ceiling was found too great to allow anyone to be properly heard. But in the House of Lords, where the acoustic properties are still extremely bad, the anxiety to hear its members has not yet proved great enough to induce them to make any change in the roof, with the result that the Chamber gives you an impression of loftiness, spaciousness, and sweep, such as you do not find in the other. And then the walls at the end obtain additional splendour from the fine pictures that there stand out and confront you—pictures full of crowded life, movement, and tragedy. The Throne, too, with all its gilded splendour, remains, even in its emptiness, a reminder of that stately and opulent lordship which our institutions give to a great personage above all parties and all classes.

[Sidenote: Lovely woman.]



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In addition to all this, the House of Lords has made provision for the appearance of lovely woman, which contrasts most favourably with the curmudgeon and churlish arrangements of the House of Commons. In the House of Commons women have to hide themselves, as though they were in a Mahomedan country, behind a grille—where, invisible, suffocated, and crowded, they are permitted to see—themselves unseen—the gambollings of their male companions below. In the House of Lords, on the other hand, there is a gallery all round the house, in which peeresses and the relatives of peers are allowed to sit—observed of all men—prettily dressed, attentive—a beautiful flower-bordering, so to speak, to the male assemblage below. The variety and brilliancy of colour given by their fashionable clothes adds a great richness and opulence and lightness to the scene; in fact, takes away anything like sombreness, in appearance and aspect at least, from an assembly which otherwise is calculated to suggest sinister reminiscences of coming trouble and the approaching darkness of political agitation. The benches, too, have a richness which is foreign to the House of Commons, as the members of the popular assembly sit on benches covered with a deep green leather, which is dark, modest, and unpretentious. There is always something, to my eye at least, that suggests opulence in the colour crimson, and the benches of the Upper Chamber are all in crimson leather, and the crimson has all the freshness which comes from rarity of use. In the House of Commons, with all its workaday and industrious life, the deep and dark green has always more or less of a worn and shabby look. In the Upper Chamber the original splendour of the crimson cloth is undimmed; for most of the benches remain void and unoccupied for 999 nights of the thousand on which their lordships meet.

[Sidenote: The two chambers—a contrast.]

Whatever the cause I always associate the House of Lords in my mind with emptiness and silence, and the gloomy scenes of desertion. And, therefore, when I see it crowded as it was on this historic Monday evening, the effect it produces is heightened by the recollection and the sense of the contrast it presents to its ordinary appearance. The House of Commons has a certain impressiveness and splendour of air when it is very full; I always have a certain sense of exaltation by the mere looking at its crowded benches on these nights when the excitement of the hour brings everybody to his place. But then the House of Commons is frequently full, and there is no such sense of unusualness when you see it thus that you have when you look on the House of Lords with benches teeming with multitudinous life which you have seen so often empty, lifeless, and ghostly. Thus splendid was the scene, and yet it gave you a prevailing and unconquerable impression of gloom and lifelessness. In the House of Commons, the member addressing the assembly is like the wind



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which passes through an AEolian harp. You cannot utter a word which does not produce its full and immediate response. You say a thing which has the remotest approach to an absurdity in it, and the whole House laughs consumedly and immediately. You utter a phrase which excites party feeling, and at once—quick as lightning falls—comes back the retort of anger or approval; your way is studded and punctuated with some response or other, that signifies the readiness and the depth and amplitude of emotion in one of the most emotional, and noisy, and responsive assemblies in the world. It is a curious change from all this to look on all these crowded benches sitting in a silence that is unbroken more than once in the course of half an hour.

[Sidenote: Spencer's serene courage.]

I have often had to admire Lord Spencer—to admire him when he was a political foe as well as when he has been a political friend; but I don't think I ever admired him so much as when he stood up on September 4th to address this strange assembly. Hours he has passed through of all-pervading and all-surrounding gloom, danger, and assassination; but I do not suppose his nerve was ever put to a test more trying than when he confronted those large battalions of uncompromising and irresponsible foes. There were foes on all sides of him. They filled the many benches opposite to him; they filled, with equal fervour and multitudinousness, the benches on his own side. It was remarkable to see the thoroughness with which the Tories had mustered their forces; but the spectacle of the Liberal Unionists' Benches was even still more remarkable, for there was not a seat vacant; they had all come—those renegade and venomous deserters from the Liberal ranks—to do their utmost against the Liberal party and their mighty Liberal leader. And what support had Lord Spencer against all these foes—before him, around him—on all sides of him? On the benches immediately behind him there was a small band of men—not forty all told—looking strangely deserted, skeleton-like, even abashed in all their loneliness and isolation. These were the friends—few but faithful—amid all the hundreds, who alone had a word of cheer for Lord Spencer in a long and trying speech he had to address to his irreconcilable foes. But if there was any tremor in him as he stood up in surroundings so trying, I was unable to detect it. Indeed, at the moment he rose, there was something very fine and very impressive in his figure. He is, as most people know, a man of unusual height; hard exercise and the ride across country have kept him from having any of that tendency to *embonpoint* which destroys in middle age so many a fine figure. On the contrary, there is not a superfluous ounce of flesh on that tall, alert figure; it is the figure of a trained athlete rather than the figure one would associate with a nobleman in the end of a self-indulgent and ever-eating and over-drinking century. The features, strong yet gentle, though far from regular, have considerable distinction, and the flowing red beard makes the face stand out in any assembly. Carefully but plainly dressed, erect, perfectly

composed, and courteous in every word and look and gesture, Lord Spencer made his plea for justice to the nation where once his name was the symbol for hatred and wrong.



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[Sidenote: A man of deeds, not words.]

Lord Spencer is not an orator. Simple, unadorned, straightforward, he speaks just as he feels; and this lent a singular fascination to a speech which from other lips might have sounded thin and ineffectual, for the speech was nothing less than a revelation into the depths of a nature singularly rich in courage and experience. One cannot help thinking of all that lay behind those plain and unadorned words in which Lord Spencer told the story of his conversion from the policy of coercion to that of self-government. Here was the man who had looked out one summer evening on the spot where his close friend—his chief subordinate—was hacked to death; this was the man who had brought to conviction and then to the narrow square of the execution yard the members of one of the most powerful and sanguinary of conspiracies; here was the man who for years had passed through the streets of Dublin and the towns of Ireland amid the rattle of cavalcade, as necessary for his protection against popular hate as the troops that protect the person of the Czar in the streets of Poland. Here was, indeed, a man not of words but of deeds; one who spoke not mere phrases coined from the imaginings of the brain, but one who had seen and heard and throbbed; had looked unappalled into the depths and the abysses of human life, and the dreadest political experiences; one who had visited the Purgatorio and conversed with the lost or the tortured souls, and come back from the pilgrimage with words of hope, faith, and charity. Altogether it was a fine speech—worthy of the man, worthy of his career, worthy of the great and historic occasion.

[Sidenote: Funereal Devonshire.]

I wish I could say as much of the speech of the Duke of Devonshire. It may be that his miserable failure was due to the fact that he is as yet unaccustomed to the House of Lords, and that the modesty which is undoubtedly one of his disadvantages as a public speaker has not yet been overcome; but his speech was a return to the very worst manner of his earlier days in the House of Commons. I have heard the Duke of Devonshire in his early manner and in his late; and his early manner was about as detestable as a man's manner could have been. He had a habit of sinking his voice as he approached the end of a sentence, so that a sentence beginning on a high note gradually sank to a moan, and a murmur, and a gulp. The whole effect was mournful in the extreme, and gave you a sense of the weariness and the worthlessness of all human life such as the most eloquent ascetic could never succeed in imparting. In the House of Lords, the Duke of Devonshire suddenly returned to his early and bad manner, and delivered a speech which was more like a funeral oration than a call to arms.

[Sidenote: Lord Ribblesdale.]



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Of the remaining speeches I need say little. Lord Brassey, in a few manly and straightforward words, expressed his entire sympathy with the principle of the Bill; Lord Cowper gave another very melancholy and inaudible performance. And then came one of the most remarkable speeches the House of Lords has heard for some time. From the Treasury Bench there stood a tall, slight, and rather delicate figure. The face, long, large-featured, hatchet-shaped, was surmounted with a mass of curling-hair; altogether, there was a suggestion of what Disraeli looks like in that picture of him as a youth which contrasts so strangely and sadly with the figure and the face we all knew in his later days. This was Lord Ribblesdale. Lord Ribblesdale holds an office in the Royal Household in the present Administration. Up to a short time ago, he was unknown in even the teeming ranks of noble litterateurs; but an article he wrote on a conversation with the late Mr. Parnell gave indications of a bright and apt pen, a great power of observation, and a shrewd, impartial mind. On Sept. 4th, he surprised the House by showing also the possession of very rare and very valuable oratorical powers, His speech was excellent in diction, was closely and calmly reasoned, and produced an extraordinary effect, even on the Tory side, which, beginning by a stony silence, and a certain measure of curiosity—ended by giving an impression of being moved, and even awed a little by this speech. Altogether a very remarkable performance; we have not heard the last now that we have heard the first of Lord Ribblesdale in the fields of party oratory.

[Sidenote: A striking personality.]

The Duke of Argyll has changed a good deal in physical appearance during the last twenty years. There was a time when he was was robust and squat, a rather stout little man, with a slightly strutting manner, head thrown back, and very fine and spacious forehead; a head of hair as luxurious and drooping as that of Mary Magdalene. The form has considerably shrunk with advanced years, but not with any disadvantage, for the face, pinched and lined though it appears, has a finer and more intellectual look than that of earlier days. Wrong-headed—perhaps very self-conceited—at all events, entirely left behind by the advancing democratic tide, the Duke of Argyll is yet always to me a sympathetic and striking figure. If he thinks badly, at least he thinks originally. His thoughts are his own, and nobody else's; and though he is a bitter controversialist, at least he feels the weight and gravity of the vast questions on which he pronounces. Above all things, he has a touch of the divine in his oratory. He is, indeed, almost the last inspired speaker left in the House of Lords. There is another speaker, of whom more presently, with extraordinary gifts, with also true oratorical powers, capable of producing mighty effects; but with Lord Rosebery the light is very clear and very dry; there is none of



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the softness and brilliancy, and poetic and imaginative insight which are to be found in the speeches of the Duke of Argyll. On September 6th the Duke used very vehement and some very whirling language about Mr. Gladstone; his reading of history was all wrong; his policy for Ireland was—to put it plainly—brutal. But what cannot be forgiven to a man who has still such a beautiful voice—who still gesticulates so beautifully—and, above all, who is capable of rising to the height of some of the passages in the speech on this particular Wednesday? For instance, what could have been more beautiful than that passage in which he put the argument that Ireland was too near to be treated in the same way as a distant colony—the passage in which he spoke of seeing from the Scotch Highlands the sun shining on the cornfields and cottage windows of Antrim?

[Sidenote: Rosebery's great triumph.]

On September 7th a very great event happened in the House of Lords. The mental mastership of that assembly was transferred from one man to another, from the master of many legions to the captain of a few thin and almost despised battalions. I heard the whole of Lord Rosebery's speech, and I heard three quarters of the speech of the Marquis of Salisbury, and no impartial man could deny the contrast between these two speeches on this occasion, the one being no less fine and complete, the other no less monotonous than I have set forth. It was not merely that Lord Salisbury proved himself vastly inferior to Lord Rosebery in mere oratory, but the speech of the Foreign Secretary was that of a finer speaker, and of a more serious, intellectual, and sagacious politician.

[Sidenote: A disadvantage conquered.]

Lord Rosebery had the disadvantage of following upon a speaker who had reduced the House to a state of somnolent despair. Lord Selborne has an episcopal appearance, the manner of an author of hymns, and the unctuous delivery of a High Church speaker. But like most of the orators of the House of Lords, he considered two hours was the minimum which he was entitled to occupy, and though he spoke with wonderful briskness, for an octogenarian, at the beginning of his observations, his voice soon became so exhausted as to be a mere senile and inaudible whisper. Deeper and deeper it descended, and the House was in the blackest depths when the Foreign Secretary rose to speak. Everybody knows how embarrassing and distressing it is to an orator to have to begin by rousing an assembly that has been thus depressed; and the difficulty was increased in the case of Lord Rosebery by the fact that he had to address an audience in which four hundred men were against him and about forty in his favour; and there is no orator whose nerve is so steady, and whose self-confidence is so complete, as not to be depressed and weakened by such a combination of circumstances. This is partly the reason of the lighter tone of the earlier observations



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which offended some too sensitive critics. Indeed, it might have seemed for some time as if Lord Rosebery got up with the idea of treating the whole business as the merest unreality of comedy; and had resolved to signify this by refusing to treat either the House or the Bill or himself seriously. In face of the tragedies of the Irish sphinx—with all its centuries of brooding sorrow behind it, this was not a tone which commended itself to the judicious. But, then, this was a too hasty criticism. The light and almost chaffing introduction was necessary in the highest interests of art; for, as I have said, the House was depressed, and it was in no mood to listen to an orator whose creed appeared to it the merest rank treason. It was necessary to get the House into something like receptiveness of mood before coming to serious business; when that was done, it was time enough to seek to impress it.

[Sidenote: An oratorical tour de force.]

And this is just what happened. Everybody was in really good spirits by the time Lord Rosebery ten minutes on his legs; Lord Selborne's unctuous dronings had disappeared into the irrevocable and vast distances; in short, the moribund Chamber was alive, vivacious, and receptive. And when he had got them to this point Lord Rosebery took the serious part of his work seriously in hand. Not that he attempted lofty appeal. On the contrary, rarely throughout the speech did he raise his voice above that clear, penetrating, but eminently self-restrained tone which is the tone of a man of good society, discussing the loftiest and most complex problem with the easy and disillusioned composure of the experienced and slightly cynical man of the world. Nay, Lord Rosebery offended some of his critics by openly avowing the creed of the man of the world in dealing with the whole problem. He was careful to disown enthusiasm, or fanaticism, or even willingness in the service of Home Rule. It was with him simply a frigid matter of policy, a policy to which he had been driven by the resistless evidence of facts, the resistless logic of reason.

[Sidenote: A deep-laid purpose.]

This frankly was an attitude which grated slightly on the sensitive nerves of the many to whom Ireland's emancipation—with all the sobbing centuries which lie behind it—is a fanaticism, a faith, a great creed; but the point to be really considered is whether this was the tone to adopt for the purpose of carrying out the desired end. And I am inclined to think—and some of the hottest Irishmen I know agree with me—that this was the very way Lord Rosebery should have spoken. And after all it was wonderfully impressive—even to me with all I feel about the Irish question. For the image it presented—set forth by the physical aspect of the orator—was such as I can imagine to be wonderfully impressive to that dull, unimaginative, and unsentimental personage—the man of the shifting ballast, whose almost impenetrable



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brain has to finally decide this question. And the image presented to that very creature of clay was this: "Here is a man who is my Foreign Secretary; as such, he has every day of his life to deal with questions which affect my interests in the most direct way; to fight for my purse, my future, my Empire; and he has to do so with his brain matched against the brains of the astutest men in the world—the diplomatic representatives of other Powers. And all this he has to do with the sense that behind the smooth language of diplomacy, the unbroken and even voices of diplomatic representatives, there stand ironclads and mighty armies—bloodshed, wholesale, and hideous death—the tiger spirit and powers of war. And I see that the man who has all these complex problems to solve—these trained gamblers to watch—these sinister Powers to confront and think of—is a man of cold temper, of frigid understanding, of a power of calm calculation in face of all the perils and all the emotions and all the sentiment of the perplexing Irish problems; and to him Home Rule has come as a set, sober choice of possible policies for the interest of our Empire." Such an attitude—exalted by the even, though powerful, the cold, though penetrating voice—the face impassive and inscrutable—the eye, steady, unmoving, and unreadable—all this, I say, was just the kind of thing to produce an immense impression on those who are ready only to accept Home Rule as the policy that pays best.

[Sidenote: Even the Peers impressed.]

And certainly the House of Lords was wonderfully impressed by this attitude. There was no applause, except now and then from those skeleton ranks that lay behind Lord Rosebery, but then there was in the whole air that curious and almost audible silence—to use a conscious paradox—which conveys to the trained ear clearer sounds of absorption and attention than the loudest cheers. And then you began to forget the badinage of the earlier sentences—you forgave the frigidity and self-repression—you became strongly fascinated by the mobile face, inscrutable eyes, and the voice penetrated to your innermost ear; he gave you an immense sense of a clear, masterful, and resolute mind and character. And, finally, towards the end, when, to a certain extent, Lord Rosebery let himself go, there was a ring not of ordinary emotion, but of the passion of a great Minister who was fully conscious of the Imperial and supreme responsibility of a Foreign Minister, who was able to look great and even complex facts straight in the face, who had the courage to face the disagreeable solution of a troublesome and perilous problem. And, in spite of its lethargy, its hatred of his opinions, the House of Lords felt this also, and there was something of awe in the silence with which it listened to the ringing words of warning with which the speech concluded. And its attitude showed more. It was, so to speak, a soul's awakening; it was the discovery of having found at last a man who could sway, impress, and strike its imagination.



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[Sidenote: Salisbury's signal failure.]

On Friday night, September 8th, Lord Salisbury had his opportunity of undoing this great effect—of reasserting that intellectual as well as mere voting dictatorship which he holds in the House of Lords; and he signally failed to rise to the occasion. I do not like the policy of Lord Salisbury, but there is a lucidity, a point, and sometimes a vigour in his speeches which make them usually charming reading. It was, therefore, with the full expectation of being interested that I listened to him, but he drove me out of the House by the impossibility of my keeping awake under the influence of his dull, shallow, and disappointing speech. He began with a little touch of nature that certainly was prepossessing. He had brought in with him a dark-brown bottle, like the bottle one associates with seltzer water. The fluid was perfectly clear; it was evidently not like the strong wine which Prince Bismarck used to require in the days when he used to make great speeches. And Lord Salisbury, as he poured out a draught—it looked very like Johannis water—lifted up the bottle to the Ministers opposite with a pleasant smile, as though to prove to them that he was not offending against even the sternest teetotal code.

It was the first and the last bit of real human naturalness in the whole speech, for Lord Salisbury's manner and delivery are wooden, stiff, awkward and lumbering. He stands upright—except, of course, for that heavy stoop of the shoulders which is one of his characteristics—and rarely moves himself one-hundredth part of an inch. The voice—even, clear, and strong, and yet not penetrating, and still less inspiring—rarely has a change of note; it is delivered with the strange, curious air of a man who is thinking aloud, and has forgotten the presence of any listeners. The eyes—hidden almost amid the shaggy and black-grey hair which covers nearly the whole face—are never directed to any person around. They seem to gaze into vacancy; altogether there is something curious, weird, almost uncanny, in this great, big whale of a man, intoning his monologue with that curious detachment of eye and manner in the midst of a crowded, brilliant, and intensely nervous and restless assembly of men and women.

[Sidenote: The pessimism of a recluse.]

And it was not to be wondered at that a speech so delivered—a mere soliloquy—should fail to be impressive. It was too far and away unreal—had too little actuality to reach the poor humble breasts that were panting for excitement and exhortation. But once throughout it all was there a touch of that somewhat sardonic humour that sometimes delights even Lord Salisbury's political foes. Replying to the very clever speech of Lord Ribblesdale, Lord Salisbury described the speech as a confession, and all confessions, he added, were interesting, from St. Augustine to Rousseau, from Rousseau to Lord Ribblesdale. That, I say, was the solitary gleam.



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For the rest, it was an historical essay—with very bad history and worse conclusions; and the whole spirit was as bad as it could be. The Irish were still the enemy such as they appear in the bloody pages of Edmund Spenser, or in the war proclamations and despatches of Oliver Cromwell; and yet I cannot feel that Lord Salisbury's language could be resented as, say, the same language would be from Mr. Chamberlain. It all sounded so like the dreamings of a student and recluse—discussing the problem without much passion—without even malignity—but with that strange frankness of the unheard and unechoed musings of the closet.

[Sidenote: A muttered soliloquy.]

Finally, the speech also had the narrowness, shallowness, and unreality of the hermit's soliloquy. In the main, there was no insight. A logic-chopper, a dialectician—even in some respects a musing philosopher—such Lord Salisbury is; but breadth, depth, clear vision—of that there was not a trace in the whole speech. And then you went back in memory to the other speech—so clear, so broad-directed, yet uttered by a man who looked straight before him and all around him—who felt the presence in his every nerve of that assembly there which he was addressing; who lived and saw instead of dreaming—and you could come to no other conclusion than that of the two leaders of the House of Lords, the young man was the statesman and the man of action as well as the orator, and that it was worth the spending even all the weary hours of this past week in the House of Lords to learn so much of these great protagonists in our Parliamentary struggles.

[Sidenote: Anti-climax.]

Of other speakers I say but little. I came in during the dinner hour to see a very little man with what we call in Ireland a “cocked” nose, a conceited mouth, and a curious mixture of the unctuousness and benedictory manner of the pulpit and the limp twitterings of the curate at a ladies' tea-fight. This was the head of the Bishop of Ripon. I cannot stare for even a second at this tiny tomtit and artificial figure, with all those lawn sleeves and black gowns, and all the other fripperies and draperies of the parson-peer, who is to every rational man so grotesque and contemptible an intruder in a legislative chamber. In the grim and crowded gallery of the personages of an Irish Epic, such an intruder is like the thin piping note of a tiny bird mid the carnage and shouts and roars of a battle-field.

Everybody knows the result of the division: for the Bill, 41; against, 419; majority, 378. It was a conclusion that was foregone, but the Lords themselves recognized the comic futility of it. The attempted cheers ended in one loud, mocking, universal laugh. And thus the curtain fell on the historic drama of the great Home Rule Session.

T.P.

THE END.

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*** Transcriber's notes, corrections ***



p28 tyranny : was “tryanny”
p59 ofttimes : was “oft-times”
p87 Brummagem : was “Brummagen”
p95 satisfactory : was “satisfactory”
p98 must : was “most”
p108 spellbound : was “spell-bound”
p128 cheers—he : was “cheer—she”
p150 unusually : was “unusally”
p191 airily : was “arily”
p221 eyeglass : was “eye-glass”
p226 spellbound : was “spell-bound”
p250 shamefaced : was “shame-faced”

(see HTML version for pagenumbers) *** End Transcriber's notes ***