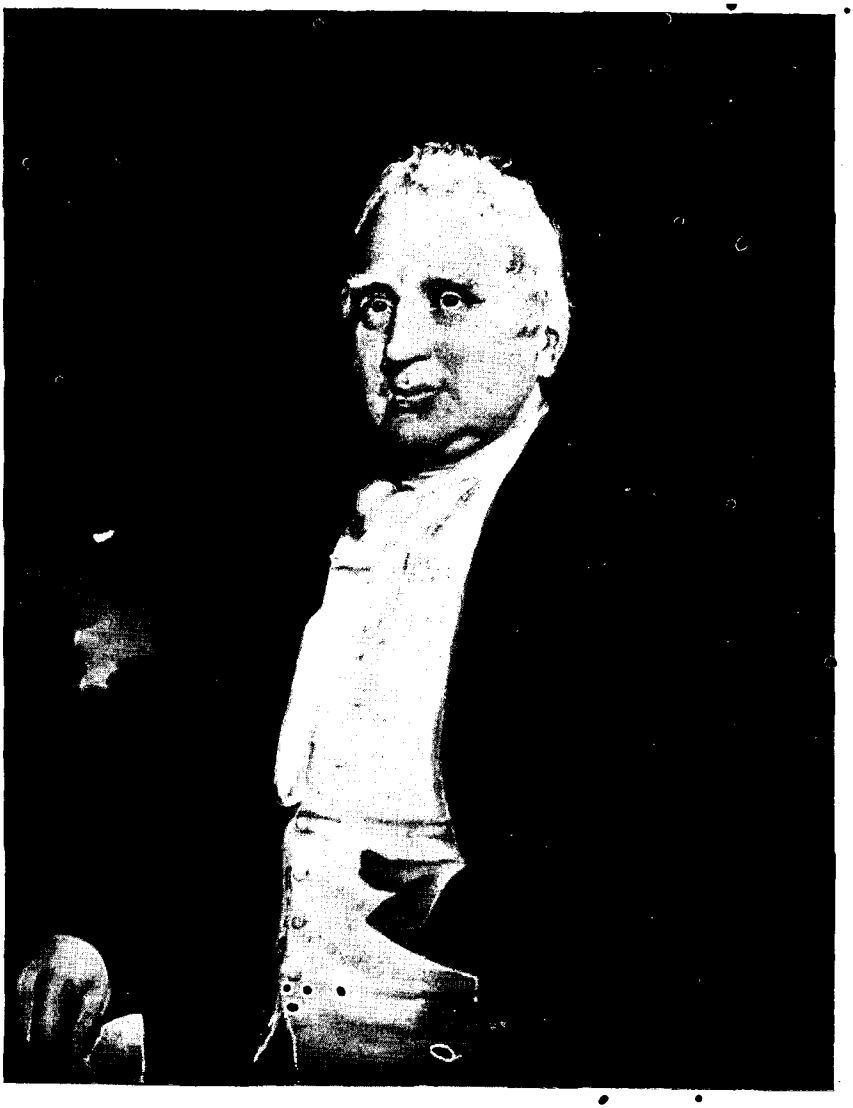

WILLIAM COBBETT

From a Painting in the National Portrait Gallery.

Sripavari Chakravarty
18th March, 1939

THE PUBLIC LIFE

THE PUBLIC LIFE

By

J. A. SPENDER

Volume I

With Four Half-tone Plates

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PREFACE

HERE and there in this book I have made use of sentences and short passages from long-buried writings of my own, and in the closing chapters I have developed certain ideas briefly indicated in "The Comments of Bagshot," a volume of Essays published eighteen years ago. I have not troubled the reader with references for these, but I ought to acknowledge the kind permission given me by Sir Hedley Le Bas to draw on a chapter which I contributed to "The Book of Public Speaking," published by the Caxton Publishing Company.

J. A. S.

CHANTRY PLACE,
MARDEN, KENT,
January 1st, 1925.

CONTENTS

BOOK I

THE BACKGROUND

BOOK II

TYPES OF PUBLIC MEN

BOOK III

POLITICIANS AND PARLIAMENT

CONTENTS

BOOK IV

AMERICAN AND FOREIGN EXAMPLES

LIST OF PLATES

INTRODUCTION

I

THE term "public life" is used in this book in the popular sense which limits it to politicians. There are many others who lead a public life. The actor, the clergyman, the judge, the barrister, the musician, the lecturer, all are in their several ways public performers, and may be broadly distinguished from their fellow-men who work behind screens—in offices, consulting-rooms, studios, libraries,—and have no spectators of their activities. The differences in character and capacity which mark us out for the one kind of life or the other constitute one of the main dividing lines in human nature and nothing is more important, when we are choosing our professions, than to be sure on which side of it nature intended us to be. But to deal in one book with all the kinds of public performers and their performances would be beyond the capacity of any writer, and for present purposes I have taken "the public life" to be the life of men and women devoted to the affairs that are commonly called politics.

My first idea was to examine the technique of this public life in the hope of saying something that might be of interest to the working politician. But this, it soon appeared, could not be dealt with as a thing fixed and settled and belonging only to the present time. It was so traditional and yet so incessantly changing that it required a backing of history and some estimate, however provisional, of the new tendencies at work, if it was at all to be understood. But even this was not the end. Comparison with other methods, American and European, was evidently necessary to bring out the salient characteristics of the British public life, and this had in some measure to be supplied. And

then at every stage the question arose, how could the methods of politicians be detached from their policies and ideas, their general outlook upon life and the state of opinion they were dealing with? In such a study fact, history and speculation become inextricably mixed and lead at times into very deep waters.

The subject is inexhaustible, and one writer can hope to do no more than approach it from the angle of his own experience. The defect of most writings on the methods of politics is that they are undertaken either by students who have little experience of practice, or by politicians who have little regard for theory. The writer who perfectly combines both points of view has yet to be found, but in the meantime there may be room for a study which relies mainly on actual examples of the public life as led in our time and recent times, and yet endeavours to set them against some background of history and theory. The comparative newness of democratic methods and their rapid development under stress of great events—to say nothing of the admission of women to the franchise—make all generalization exceptionally hazardous in these times, yet it is impossible not to believe that there are some qualities inherent in political human nature which will remain constant in both sexes and through all changes. That at all events is an assumption which the political writer is bound to make. If the next generation were likely to behave either as apes or as angels, or if the causes which have operated in our time were suddenly to be suspended or to give place to others of which we have no experience, political studies would have no value except as museum records. That human nature is neither unchangeable nor so changeable as to make the study of it unprofitable is a necessary hypothesis of practical politics, and the foundation of anything that can be called political science.

The general scheme of this book is to trace the streams of politics which from the eighteenth century onwards have converged upon the House of Commons and made it the centre of the British public life; to take certain individuals who seem to have been typically children of their

time and examine their methods in and out of Parliament ; to contrast with these the methods of certain public men in other countries and especially the United States ; and then to choose certain aspects and problems of the present day public life and consider these separately. Among these problems I have included that of the Press. One bumps up against the Press at every turn in considering the public life; to avoid it was impossible, to deal with it merely by the way seemed an evasion. I cannot hope to carry the assent of all my Press colleagues in what I have said on this subject. A journalist writing about the Press is like a painter turned critic in that he has always the bias of his own school, and I cannot complain if what I have said is discounted to that extent.

Finally I have added with many misgivings a very imperfect attempt to estimate certain of the leading ideas which are in politics or behind them, and which must enter into the philosophy and, one may even say, the religion of the public man.

2

Without anticipating what follows, I will ask the reader to bear in mind certain general propositions which enter deeply into all parts of it.

First and foremost the public man in this country is above all things a Parliament man. To obtain a seat in Parliament is his earliest ambition, to become a leader in Parliament his constant effort. All political activities are focused on Parliament. To increase the number of those who vote for Parliament, to bring pressure to bear on Parliament, to obtain redress through Parliament have for a hundred and fifty years or more been the aims of all agitators and reformers in Great Britain. If the profession of politics has been held in greater esteem in this country than in most others, that is mainly due to the place of honour which Parliament holds in the Constitution. It is a sovereign Assembly controlling Government and holding it to account ; and its members are not merely legislators

but the masters and critics of the Executive with power to depose it, and by so doing to alter the whole course of national policy. Where these conditions do not obtain, where the Executive functions independently of the Legislature and can persist in spite of its displeasure, politicians cannot obtain the power and influence that they enjoy in countries where Parliaments are sovereign. Membership of the Legislature becomes a comparatively minor object of ambition, and the most ambitious either attach themselves to the Executive as bureaucrats or become bosses and manipulators of the party machines.

The study of the British public life is, therefore, first of all that of the great parliamentary figures and their methods in Parliament ; and to this I have devoted a considerable part of this book. These great parliamentary figures have been men of extraordinarily different characters, but they have certain marked characteristics in common. Almost all of them have professed an extreme deference to the House of Commons and developed a peculiar skill and subtlety in their relations with it. The practice and tradition which they have built up have enabled Parliament to retain and exercise its sovereignty without depriving the Executive of its initiative or diluting its proper authority. We are so accustomed to take this result for granted that we scarcely realize the delicate interplay of forces that it involves or the subconscious wisdom and experience that have produced it. In all Constitutions there is an incessant veiled struggle for the possession of power between one part and another, and it has so far, I think, been the special merit of the British system and the public men who worked it that they have kept the balance even between its various parts.

But this is an achievement of the two-party system, and it has been accomplished mainly in Parliaments elected by a more limited suffrage than we now enjoy. One of the questions before us in these days is whether it can be maintained under a three-party system and an electorate which sends men to Parliament who, however great their

qualifications may be in other respects, are without the peculiar kind of experience which has made the British Parliament what it is. I hope this question may be answered affirmatively, but it was never more important to study the laws of parliamentary action and to understand the fundamental kind of forbearance needed for the smooth working of a sovereign Parliament with a Government responsible to it. All Parliaments are groping along the edge of the unmapped boundary which divides the things that are amenable to argument and reason from the things that will encounter forcible resistance. Extremists pass it in one country, reactionaries in another, but of whatever complexion the trespassers may be, they break Parliaments and institute tyrannies resting on force and intimidation. The Marxian who preaches and the Bolshevist who practises class war; the black shirts, the gallopers, and all others who appeal to force against argument necessarily find Parliaments an obstacle in their path, and are driven by their own logic to challenge their authority and even to suppress them, when they get the opportunity.

I have dwelt in what follows upon some of the dangers which beset parliamentary government, because they seem to me to be of vital importance to the conduct of the public life. The public man whom I have had in my mind's eye is one who believes above all things in the efficacy of debate and whose business it is to make willing converts and not to overawe or coerce the unconverted. The first article in this man's creed is the sovereignty of Parliament, and if that is undermined by encroaching Executives or sacrificed in impatient efforts to make Parliament do what it is incapable of doing, he is lost. Then the way is cleared for adventurers and revolutionaries who will make short work of traditions and conventions and institute the methods of the soldier or the terrorist. We are, I hope, safe from this catastrophe in our own country, but public men need, I think, to realize that Parliament is not an institution which can live on its past. A constant effort is needed from all its members to sustain its dignity and keep the idea of

its sovereignty clear and firm in the public mind. The tendency to belittle it, deride it, treat it as only one of many competing political activities, must be actively resisted, and the kind of "direct action" which questions its authority be placed outside the bounds by all political parties.

Not less important is it to make the conditions such as will attract the ablest and steadiest men to the public life. That cannot be the case if general elections are to be annual or biennial events, and the winning or keeping of seats a hazard of the distribution of votes in three-cornered contests. Rich men who do not take politics too seriously and subsidized men with Trade Union or other organization behind them, may be able to survive these conditions, but they will be fatal to men of moderate means and independent dispositions. A certain security of tenure is necessary to any profession, and if even political leaders of unquestioned capacity and long service cannot be guaranteed seats in the House of Commons, the parliamentary career will be thought impossibly hazardous by other people.

These, it seems to me, are serious matters which call urgently for the attention of all parties. If, in pressing their advantages against each other, they neglect their common interest in an efficient and smoothly-running House of Commons offering an attractive career to men of the best type, the public life will be profoundly altered and for the worse. And the same result will follow by a different road if members of the House of Commons permit the functions of a sovereign Parliament to fall into abeyance and are content to act as spectators of the Executive. These things are subtle, and the modifications of custom and usage are generally so gradual that they are not easily perceived at any given moment; but let us keep grip of the fact that the position of public men in this country depends in the main on the prestige of Parliament, and that without the power of acting through Parliament they would be little more than talkers at large, or members of a debating society.

But the best institutions in the world will not work unless behind them are men of reasonable competence in the subjects which they profess to handle, and of sufficient probity to prevent them from playing on the ignorance of other people. Whether they can obtain the necessary supply of such men is a cardinal question not merely for democracy but for all systems of government, and though optimism is, I hope, on the whole justified, there are certain signs which it would be folly to ignore. For example, it would be difficult to exaggerate the misery which the dogged pursuit of economic chimeras by uninstructed politicians has inflicted on Europe in the last five years. We have seen statesmen of the highest eminence passionately demanding things which all competent judges knew to be impossible, taking measures to enforce these demands which could do nothing but make confusion, and, apparently in sheer ignorance of the results, throwing grit into the delicate machinery of international commerce, while all the time protesting that justice and right compelled them to act in this way. I speak, of course, of the effort to recover reparations from Germany, which, at the time of writing, has reached the stage of the Dawes Report. This effort is commonly regarded as an incident in international politics, but it has been in effect a continuous research into the nature of wealth, which is of profound importance to all politicians and ought to be registered for their benefit in domestic as well as international affairs. Let me briefly consider some of the stages in this affair.

The first stage was at Paris, in 1919, when the British Delegation—of which Lord Cunliffe, the Governor of the Bank of England, was chairman—estimated the German capacity to pay at £24,000,000,000, the figure current during the British general election of December, 1919. In the private negotiations which followed between the Allies, this was reduced to £8,000,000,000, at which it still topped the French estimate by about £1,000,000,000; but for the time being differences of opinion prevented any

total being fixed and the question of the final amount was relegated to the Reparations Commission, the public being left under the impression that £10,000,000,000 and upwards was a fair demand.[1]

The next stage was that of the so-called Paris schedules in 1921, when the total demand was brought down to £6,000,000,000, the Germans still protesting that this was beyond their capacity to pay.

The third stage was that of the French expedition into the Ruhr in 1923 for the purpose of enforcing payment of the Paris schedules.

The fourth stage was that of the Dawes Report in which the total was still unfixed, but under which the general idea seems to be that Germany shall pay about £2,300,000,000 by means of annuities rising to £125,000,000 a year.

It may be said generally that this reduction has been due not to any desire to spare Germany, but to the belated discovery of the fact that the transfer of the vast sums originally contemplated was mechanically impossible, and even that of the relatively small ones now proposed extremely difficult without injuring the creditor nations. This process of enlightenment about elementary economic fact has been painful and gradual, and it has been resisted to the last by a large number of the statesmen concerned, who have protested incessantly that the wealth was there and that it could and ought to be got. These statesmen, it became evident as the argument proceeded, thought of wealth as "money" indubitably existing, probably concealed, and in either case capable of being seized and brought away, if proper measures were taken. In the first years after the war it was even a familiar argument of the newspapers that, if a valuation of German resources were taken, it would be found that the £20,000,000,000 and upwards of the original demand was quite a small proportion of the wealth of Germany, and could quite soon—some said too soon—be made good. In January, 1923, when the occu-

[1] "What Really Happened at Paris," edited by Col. E. M. House and Charles Seymour, p. 275.

pation of the Ruhr was being debated in the French Chamber, French speakers said that they were going to "fetch the wealth from where it really was" (*chercher l'or où il réellement est*), and the public appetite was whetted by glowing estimates of the wealth of the Ruhr.

These beliefs were exactly parallel to the Communist ideas in which experiments were simultaneously being made in Russia. What apparently the Allied statesmen thought they could do to Germany was exactly what the Bolshevists thought they could do to the Russian bourgeois—seize their "money" and divide it up among themselves—and, like the Bolshevists, they have had to discover, by a series of disastrous experiments, that vastly the greater part of this "money" had to be earned day by day by men and women whose co-operation had to be secured by some kind of incentive, and could not be secured by any sort of coercion without an incentive. M. Poincaré discovered, as Lenin discovered, that it was one thing to seize and imprison capitalists, and quite another to appropriate their emoluments, and that the plant of a ruined industry had no value if brains and hands were not available to work it. Thus in the last stage we have come to the Dawes scheme which, in its essence, is an attempt to provide the Germans with a motive to work just as the Bolshevists came to their "new economic policy," which is an attempt to provide the Russian bourgeois with a motive to work.

The Allied problem is complicated, as the Russian is not, by the necessity of transferring the wealth when created in the form of goods (as most of it must be), but this does not affect the parallel between the two problems, so far as they are concerned with the nature of wealth. One of the main questions before us now is whether in domestic politics we can dispense with the costly verification which has been necessary in international affairs, and proceed on certain agreed assumptions which will rule out things which are mechanically impossible and enable political effort to be concentrated on realizable aims. It is certain that if domestic politics are to be governed by the ideas of Lenin and foreign politics by the ideas of the statesmen

who have handled the reparations problem, internal and external chaos must be the result.

For good or evil the public life is so much occupied with controversy about material things that knowledge about the nature of wealth must be a large part of the equipment of the politician. If, for example, it could be understood that by far the greater part of what is counted wealth in a modern community is earning power which may be destroyed but cannot be divided, and the value of which at any given moment is simply an estimate of future profits, many delusions and much bitterness might be avoided. The idea of plunder would be ruled out, and the problem of wealth and poverty seen in its true light as one of the relations of human beings and their co-operation in the making of wealth. It would then be realized that what is important to a community is not the sanctity of property treated as a dead thing, but its utilization through the mutual services of living people which must be willing. Most of the disputes between Labour and Capital, Socialism and Individualism seem to assume either that this problem has been solved once and for all by something which is called Capitalism or that it will be miraculously solved by something else which is called Socialism. In actual fact the Socialist workman has so little confidence in the miracle that when he demands the nationalization of mines and railways he stipulates that he shall stand outside the process and retain all his rights of bargaining and striking unimpaired; and the Capitalist is so little satisfied with his achievement that he is incessantly changing its form, and more and more declining the part that individualist theory assigns to him. Until the human brain loses its inventiveness and science is exhausted, this process must go on, and it will be in the future as heretofore, an unceasing adjustment and readjustment to changing circumstances.

The last thing that could be desired is that pedants and professors should lord it over Parliament or limits be set to legitimate differences of opinion. But if politicians are to be in a state of ignorance, or, what is worse, to play on other people's ignorance of things which are

not in dispute among those who are competent to judge them, good government and social peace must be more and more difficult. If there is one thing certain about democracy, it is that it will not stand demagogues, and the surest sign of the demagogue is that he plays on the ignorance of others. How to discourage his trade and arm honest and competent people against him is one of the most vital questions of these times. There is of course no royal road, but in the last section of this book I have suggested ways in which undisputed knowledge might be rescued from demagogues and gathered up for the benefit of public men who desire to serve the State honestly.

4

The greater part of this book must be left to tell its own story, and I cannot pretend that it is a plain tale. The Great War has swept away much of the conventional optimism of the previous years, and reminded us all of the fearful responsibilities of the public life. I cannot imagine anyone reflecting seriously upon public affairs in these times without being brought to the conclusion that government is the most difficult and dangerous of the human arts, and that it is still in all probability in its infancy. There are times when one is tempted to fall into Mr. Wells's chronic despair at the untidiness of the human nursery, and other times when one feels that all the heart would be taken out of the children, if it were tidied as he desires. We should perhaps be capable of more patient and more cheerful thoughts on this subject if, instead of thinking of the world as very old and very evil, we could think of it as very young and very inexperienced, as it almost certainly is, if we may measure the ten thousand years of its civilized life against the millions which astronomers tell us is the probable period of its habitable existence. But the quarrel between the Utopian and the practical politician will, I hope, continue and flourish. It is good for us all that acute and ingenious brains should be constantly at work spinning schemes in a free and imaginative

atmosphere, and the more they express their impatience with the journeymen of politics, whose work is a plodding and pedestrian business, the better it will be.

But if one of the journeymen might venture a criticism of the current Utopias, it is that so few of them seem to go to the root of the matter. They treat life as if it were solely a question of material conveniences, and as if the human heart would be changed if men and women were lodged in particular kinds of model dwellings and the State substituted for private individuals as their master and employer. When we are able to test it, this result does not seem to follow. The employees of State railways, the postmen, the municipal dustmen appear to be no happier, no wiser and certainly not more amenable to their employers than other people ; and there is no sign yet that the tenants of State houses will be different from their neighbours or more contented with their rents, unless these happen to be lower. So far as one can see, a large number of these Utopias might be completely achieved without in any important respect affecting the lives, problems, happiness or unhappiness of the mass of men and women. The venue of their struggles about wages and the conditions under which they work would be changed, but these struggles would go on as before, and perhaps with a sharper intensity when the new master had been substituted for the old.

Plato in his " Republic " said that kings should be philosophers and philosophers kings. This might be hard measure for the public men of modern times, but neither they nor the writers who try to reconstruct society on paper can get away from the necessity which he so deeply perceived of basing politics on psychology. To the literal-minded the Republic of Plato may seem full of fantastic dreams, but its ruling idea of a harmony in the body politic corresponding to the harmony of the body and soul in the perfected individual can never lose its virtue. Still less his perpetual insistence on the need of knowledge in those who govern and on the evils which result when opinion and knowledge are confused, and that which belongs to knowledge is taken into opinion. We may reject his idea of a select number

of specially instructed persons being set up to rule their fellows or regard his communism as the literary myth it was probably intended to be, and yet feel that he is profoundly wise in posing the problem as that of the right relations of human beings, and the just valuation of their services to each other and the State. The public men of our time may not be philosophers, but they must see their problem in this way or be doomed to perpetual disappointment. We should be in evil plight if we were driven to choose between dogmatists who believe that they can impose final solutions upon the endlessly unfolding process of creative evolution and light-hearted illiterates who despise knowledge and science and think only of giving the public what it wants. The men we need are those who will constantly think of human society as a living thing of infinite variety, which is not to be chained to their footstools or tied to their systems, but helped to resist the bad and realize the good that is in it.

BOOK I

THE BACKGROUND

THE PUBLIC LIFE

CHAPTER I

THE OLD REGIME

The Old House of Commons—Its Moral Standards—Politics and its Rewards—Private Morals and Public Duty—The Vinous Atmosphere—The Constituencies—The Average M.P.—His Political Aims—Establishing Contact with the Public—The Ancestor of Advertisers—Growing Power of Opinion—Reporting the House of Commons—Extra-Parliamentary Heroes—The Mob and its Manipulation—Results of the French Revolution—The Fashionable Politician—George Selwyn—Influence of Burke.

1

MANY generations have said in their haste that the House of Commons is no longer a fit place for gentlemen to sit in or politics a becoming occupation for them to pursue. Visions of a golden age in which sensitive honour and chivalrous conduct made a paradise of the public life have appealed to all ages, but they seem to have been specially cherished by our grand-parents, and obtained some plausibility from the success with which the old order had conducted the struggle with Napoleon. Historians then and since have been left repeating that it was the greatest of all the oligarchies of modern times. It had indeed great qualities which save that judgment from being ridiculous, but if the word gentlemanly implies a sensitive conscience or fine standard of manners, it is the last that we can apply to it. It gloried in its defiance of all Puritan standards of conduct ; it plundered the public treasury without shame or mercy. It bought political power and sold it again to the highest

bidder ; it caballed and intrigued and left the public interest at the mercy of a half-insane king and his corrupt friends. "The first lesson taught to a political apprentice, both by precept and example," says Trevelyan in his "Early History of Charles James Fox," "was to mock at principle and fight for his own hand." Lord Shelburne as a youth was unwise enough to confide to Henry Fox the high-flown opinion that "gentlemen of independent fortune should be trustees between the King and the people, and make it their vocation to be of service to both without becoming the slaves of either." "Come up to London and ask for a place" was the breezy reply of the famous Paymaster. "This will lead directly to what I suppose you aim at, you'll never get it from that trusteeship that you speak of ; nor, to say truth, should you get it till you have got rid of such puerile notions." [1]

To the gentlemen politicians of this period the public purse was bottomless and their claims on it an hereditary right, veiled for appearance' sake under the forms of pensions and sinecures. The Minister not only feathered his own nest but the nests of all his poor relations and dependents, drawing freely for that purpose upon ecclesiastical as well as lay patronage, and upon Irish as well as British offices. The Patronage Secretary to the Treasury, forerunner of the modern Chief Whip, was expected to provide the Government with a majority as cheaply as possible ; and during a large part of the eighteenth century he worked directly on Members of Parliament and bought them individually. Tradition says that he had a private window opening into the Lobby of the old House of Commons through which he passed his gratuities.[2] "The arguments," says Trevelyan, "by which Grenville and Grafton persuaded their supporters were bank-bills for two hundred pounds and upwards, so generously dealt about at a Premier's levée that sometimes they were slipped into a hand which was ashamed to close upon them ;

[1] Trevelyan, "Early History of Charles James Fox," Silver Library edition, p. 105.

[2] Ostrogorski, "Democracy and Political Parties," i, 139.

tickets for state lotteries sold to Members of Parliament in parcels of 500, and resold by them at a profit of two pounds a ticket; Government loans subscribed for by the friends of Government at par, and then thrown on the City at a premium of seven and even eleven per cent. Lord Bute and his adherents by one such transaction robbed the country of nearly four hundred thousand pounds."[1] Then there were "favourable contracts for honourable members connected with commerce, or who were willing to be connected with commerce, when they had a chance of supplying the Fleet with sailcloth and salt pork at exorbitant rates and of a quality which was left pretty much to their own sense of obligation. And a gentleman who liked to get his own price without sacrificing his ease might have his choice of pensions secret and acknowledged; and of highly endowed posts in every climate of the globe, whose functions could be performed while seated at the whist table of Brooks's by anyone who had proved his fitness for public employment by buying a borough, bribing a corporation or swamping a county with fictitious votes."

Private morals were in keeping with these ideas of public duty. Gambling and the ruin that followed in its wake were universal. The governing class drank deep and died early, and gout was its universal affliction—an emblem of high breeding and sporting tastes, which, for all its inconvenience, was accepted with a certain pride as well as fortitude. Mr. Gladstone was once asked how it was possible for Mr. Pitt to deliver a great oration after drinking three bottles of port. "You must remember," he replied, "that he was addressing an assembly very few members of which had consumed less." The answer admirably conveys the vinous atmosphere of the old politics, but it is fair to say that public men were not in this respect different from their fellows. They drank as all self-respecting members of their order drank, neither more nor less, and it is an accident of their position that their habits have been specially recorded. But we may conjecture that the chronic semi-intoxication of an eighteenth-century

[1] Trevelyan, pp. 101–102.

Parliament contributed not a little to the highly spiced rhetoric and lofty sentiments of the period. These were necessary both to awaken the House and to chime in with its mood, when awake. Tacitus relates that the rulers of a German tribe always conducted their debates in a state of intoxication, because it was found that they could thus most freely express their opinions.

In this old regime the average politician counted for little except when the spoils were distributed. The great majority attached themselves to their patrons, the Bedfords, the Butes and the Rockinghams, and were content to vote dutifully, and take their pay, or when not voting dutifully to exact their price. The last thing their patrons expected or desired of them was that they should meddle in politics outside the course laid down for them in Parliament.[1] Three-fourths of the House of Commons represented either close boroughs, which were the acknowledged property of territorial magnates, or rotten boroughs, which were for sale or purchase, and when knocked down to the highest bidder, were absolutely in his gift. The so-called representative system was three centuries out of date, and, even if it had not been vitiated by the efforts of the Tudor sovereigns to establish a Court party by a profuse creation of boroughs, most of which fell into the hands of neighbouring landowners, would have been reduced to absurdity by the natural shifts and changes of population. Oldfield reports that as late as 1815, the House of Commons contained 471 members who owed their seats to the goodwill and pleasure of 144 peers and 123 commoners, 16 Government nominees, and only 171 members elected by popular suffrages.[2] The latter came mainly from county constituencies and great towns which were strong enough or public-spirited enough to resist the sale of their privileges, but the cost of contesting

[1] Palmerston, in an autobiographical fragment (Ashley's "Life," Vol. I, 16), says: "Soon after this [1807] I came into Parliament for Newtown, in the Isle of Wight, a borough of Sir Leonard Holmes's. One condition required was that I would never, even for the election, set foot in the place." "Newtown" should, of course, be Newport.

[2] H. B. Oldfield, "The Representative History of Great Britain and Ireland," London, 1816, vol. vi, Appendix.

these was so great that their representation fell almost inevitably into the hands of the great and wealthy. Out of a population of eight millions of the English people only 165,000 possessed a vote.

2

For the great majority of Members of Parliament the public life was, in such circumstances, a mere incident in the life of pleasure and fashion—important for the making of their fortunes, but not otherwise requiring industry or exertion. It had its anxious moments, without doubt. With the King daily scrutinizing the division lists and distributing rewards and punishments according as his faithful Commons performed his will or not; with patrons constantly shifting from one faction to another, and incessant changes of Government transferring rewards and penalties from one group to its rivals, it needed a certain nimbleness to keep a place in the sun. But there were well-established rules of the game which mitigated these risks. The rival factions honourably acknowledged their respective rights to provide for their own. Whatever else they might dispute about, there were no recriminations on this subject, and the wheel turned often enough to give everybody a chance. In spite of its factions, there was a camaraderie about the old House of Commons which earned for it the title of the best club in Europe, and made it a pleasant place for aristocratic good fellows. There was a proportion of Squire Westerns, but these were kept in their place by the dandies and the men of fashion. The only deadly sin was to be a bore or a preacher. But inside the chamber the solemn plausibilities were well maintained, and it was thought becoming that public business should be conducted in due order and with a decorous rotundity of speech. Pitt fought his duel with Tierney because Tierney accused him of obstructing the business of the House.

For the greater part of the eighteenth century the governing circle consisted of a few thousand people for

whom the world outside scarcely existed. The people, said a bishop of the Established Church, "had no concern with the laws except to obey them," [1] and at the very end of the century a judge could say from the bench that "the landed interest alone had the right to be represented" and speak contemptuously of "the rabble who have nothing but personal property." [2] Good form and class-interest conspired to keep the great game within a closed circle from which this "rabble," let alone the millions of humble folk, were railed off.

Yet soon after the middle of the eighteenth century the great figures Pitt, Carteret, Pulteney, and Fox were breaking out of it and somehow establishing contact with the outside public. To do this required exceptional gifts in days when Parliament debated in secret, when the scanty newspapers reached only a small minority and public meetings were unheard of. But certain things helped them. For one thing, war was a great kindler of popular emotions; success in it was paraded, and failure could not be concealed. The politician in war-time became a popular or an execrated figure *malgré lui*. Still more, the corruption of the House of Commons had passed the bounds of discretion and become notorious; and as the tool of the King, the House took shape in the popular mind as an engine of the tyranny against which in better days it had been the people's champion. The few men who were thought to stand for the public became in the modern sense popular heroes, and they were not slow to seize the opportunity. Many of them held views which by modern standards must be called reactionary, but in fighting King and Parliament, their one resource was to appeal to the populace, and in their speeches and writings there is a democratic ring which is scarcely heard again for a century. The people, says Burke, are "the Master" and "the employers of Parliament and its natural lords." "Let us identify, let us incorporate ourselves with the people."

[1] Bishop Horsley, quoted by Buckle, "History of Civilization," i, 500.

[2] Lord Justice Clerk, summing up in the trial of Margarot and Gerrald, 1793.

3

The elder Pitt was first of the long line of popular politicians. Garrick said of him that he would have held the stage of Old Drury better than any of the actors of his time, and he knew well how to set a stage for himself. After his dismissal as a Field-Cornet for a speech which gave offence to George II, he drove about the country in a one-horse chaise without a servant, appealing for popular sympathy and applause.[1] "His light," says Lord Rosebery, speaking of him at a later date, "was never hid under any sort of bushel, and he did not intend that it should be. He already saw that his power lay with the people and that it was based not merely on his genius and eloquence, but on a faith in his public spirit and scrupulous integrity. His virtues were his credentials, and it was necessary that they should be conspicuous. . . . He was perhaps the first of those statesmen who sedulously imbue the public with a knowledge of their merit. He can scarcely be called an advertiser, but he was the ancestor of advertisers." "Chatham," said Dr. Johnson, "was not, like Walpole, a Minister given by the King to the people, but a Minister given to the King by the people." He was "carried," said Gibbon, "on the people's shoulders." Shelburne has left a bitter fragment, which perhaps shows a little of the other side of the shield, declaring him to be "always acting, always made up and never natural, incapable of friendship or of any act which tended to it."[2] But Lord Rosebery is not far wrong when he speaks of him as "the man who almost discovered popular feeling in England,"[3] and in that respect he may fairly be called the first of the moderns among English public men.

The last half of the eighteenth century showed the rapid growth of opinion as a factor in public affairs. In their battles with the King and the corrupt gang which did his bidding, the politicians were more and more thrown back on appeals to the unenfranchised multitude. Nothing

[1] "Chatham," Lord Rosebery, p. 161.
[2] Fitzmaurice's Life of Shelburne, I, 57–60.
[3] "Pitt," Lord Rosebery, p. 54.

but the fear of it prevailed with George III and the Butes and the Bedfords. The landmarks in the process which made public life an affair of the public are the battles with Wilkes and the arrest of Crosby and Oliver in the struggle to obtain the liberty of reporting the debates of the House of Commons. How private and furtive was the process of government may be gauged from the fact that Wilkes was thought to have done a novel and dangerous thing in printing the names of Ministers in the *North Briton*. The caricaturists and satirists of the early part of the century were reduced to veiling the objects of their attack in classical or biblical garb. Even Churchill was driven to amazing shifts of ingenuity to ensure the identification of his characters without naming them. The arguments which in a later generation were adduced for the ballot were thought valid in the eighteenth century to screen Parliament from the public. Even Gladstone in his youth was opposed to the publication of division lists, on the ground that it should be left to the discretion of each member to tell his constituents how he voted, if indeed he chose to do so at all.

Long before the end of the century, it was evident to the keener minds that Parliament must either make terms with the new force or eventually be swamped by it. The popular movement was developing with the alarming logic which is inherent in English institutions, when they are once set in motion. The right of petition carried with it the right of petitioners to assemble to organize their petitions, and thus slipped insensibly into the right of public meeting. The tolerance of any sort of Press led to a combination of news-sheets to assert what they deemed to be the ancient privilege of reporting the House of Commons. The House itself failed to develop any corporate loyalty on the side of secrecy, and certain of its members were keenly alive to the virtues of publicity. The reporter Woodfall, known to his contemporaries as "Memory Woodfall," is supposed to have been paid £400 a year for reporting in the *Morning Chronicle* the speeches of Fox and Sheridan better than those of Pitt and Dundas; and

for years before that, the hired scribe had been the faithful attendant of the ambitious politician. The notorious resolution of 1728, which Col. Onslow endeavoured to perpetuate in 1771, might declare the reporting of debates to be "an indignity to, and a breach of privilege of, the House," but very few of its prominent figures felt injured by appearing in Dr. Johnson's report of the "Senate of Lilliput," in the *Gentleman's Magazine* or even in the less reputable columns of the *Whisperer* and the *Parliamentary Spy*. The trouble was that in the conditions laid down, these reports were bound to be fragmentary and discontinuous if not actually erroneous and grossly partisan. Dr. Johnson, as he has told us, did not let the Whig dogs get the best of it, and certainly the Whig dogs were not more scrupulous.[1]

4

In the meantime, the extra-parliamentary forces were becoming more vocal and obtaining powerful leaders outside Parliament. Under the impulse of the Wilkes agitation, political associations multiplied and Corresponding Committees were set up in all parts of the country. The establishment of mail coaches made news from London a regular feature of country life, and inarticulate people who felt the pressure of taxes in remote counties awoke to the fact that the doings of King and Parliament had some interest for them. Eminent friends of the people outside the House of Commons and anathema to the governing circles now began to assert themselves. John Cartwright, Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, John Jebb, Horne Tooke and others rapidly gained an influence which, judged by modern standards, placed them abreast of the historic parliamentary figures. Their weapon was the pen rather than the tongue, and an immense output of pamphlets carried their doctrine to all parts of the country. Behind them were the Radical philosophers: Jeremy Bentham, greatest of all but always the power behind the throne;

[1] *See* "The English Radicals," by Roylance Kent, p. 60.

William Godwin, who could kindle a hard white flame in others but was true to his boast that he was "a philosopher who did not mix in the business of the world"; Tom Paine, pugnacious iconoclast, driving recklessly at all established beliefs, but honestly believing in a political millennium based on the abstract and natural rights of man. The doctrines of most of them were French in parentage but British in application, and the enormous belief that they had in reason as the guide of human affairs kept them aloof from the mob and perhaps saved British politics from running the same course as French. Their pamphlets were Hebrew to the illiterate masses which in most parts of the country were much less concerned with the theories of government that interested these middle-class gentlemen than with their own daily struggle for bread, which most of the theorists thought to be outside the sphere of government.

The mobs of the great towns played a large part in later eighteenth-century politics. In London the famous Middlesex elections brought them on to the scene as a new power, and the City magnates knew well how to manipulate them in their subsequent struggles with King and Parliament. They alone seemed to make any serious impression on George III and his satellites. The London mob was both Jingo and Radical. Chatham was its hero as well as Wilkes. If it smashed the windows which were not illuminated for the return of Wilkes, it also burnt down the house of the Constable of Westminster because, in his absence from town, it was not lit up for the second-rate victory of Cartagena. Its resources were varied and picturesque. It burnt a petticoat in effigy on a hint that the Queen Dowager was exerting an undue influence on the new King, and a big boot to point its displeasure at Bute. Unpopular politicians went in fear of their lives not from assassination, but from mob fury. When Crosby and Oliver were ordered to Westminster, an enormous crowd blocked the approaches to Parliament, and Lord North's carriage was wrecked, and even the brothers Charles and Stephen Fox were pelted and roughly handled. When Wilberforce borrowed Pitt's carriage in 1795, he was warned

that, if it were recognized, its occupant would run a good chance of being murdered.[1] But in spite of the scares which drove Pitt into increasing measures of coercion, there is little evidence of any organizing revolutionary brain behind these ebullitions of the London mob ; and its violence was generally tempered by a certain rough humour.

There were darker stories of the provinces. The dagger which Burke threw on the floor of the House of Commons was one of three thousand said to have been discovered at Birmingham, and riots in that city were a by-word for ferocity. After the French Revolution had broken out, the fear of mob-violence carried all before it in Government circles, and all the best people were as firmly convinced as their posterity in our own time that law and order were being undermined by a sedulous and insidious revolutionary propaganda engineered from abroad. From this time onwards the mob came up against Treasonable Practices and Seditious Meetings legislation, and the democratic movement was thrown back for a generation or more.

5

The letters of George Selwyn give us typical pictures of the life of a fashionable politician of the eighteenth century. Being in the smartest set, Selwyn regarded a seat in Parliament both as a means of increasing his income and as part of the apparatus of social life. About the seat there was no difficulty. He owned the double-barrelled pocket borough of Ludgershall—consisting of a group of cottages in Wiltshire—and his family had a predominant influence in Gloucester. From 1745 to 1754 he sat (with a nominee of his own) for Ludgershall and then transferred himself to Gloucester. He appears to have discovered that it was more profitable to sell Ludgershall than to sit for it, and in 1768, when the Nabobs broke into the preserves of the aristocracy and began bidding for their boroughs, he disposed of it for £9,000. This did not prevent him from inveighing against the "Nabobs" in

[1] "Pitt," Lord Rosebery, p. 178.

the full-blooded style of a modern aristocrat denouncing profiteers, and in one of his letters to Lord Carlisle he declares himself heartily in favour of Alderman Beckford's proposed Bill for "the more effectual prevention of bribery and keeping out Nabobs, commissioners and agents of the House of Commons, or at least from their encroachments upon the claims of persons established in towns and boroughs by descent, family interest and long enjoyed property."[1] Having disposed of Ludgershall, he sat for Gloucester till 1780, when he was unexpectedly thrown out by an opponent who outbid him. There was, he complains, a party of "True Blues" in the place which cost him twice two thousand pounds by opposing him and wanted the same amount for supporting him. As between Ludgershall and Gloucester, he was probably a good deal in pocket, for it is unlikely that the £9,000 paid by the Nabobs was all he got for the former constituency, but his complaints were loud and deep when he was required to disburse, and being a fine gentleman he loathed electioneering. "What I shall suffer from folly and impertinence and from everything that is disagreeable," he writes from Gloucester in 1780, "cannot be described." Being beaten at Gloucester, he retired again to Ludgershall.

However, as the account stood, the game was well worth the candle. Being in Parliament with a vote of his own and two to dispose of, he was not a man to be forgotten, and he was remembered to so much purpose that he was, as Sir George Trevelyan says, "at one and the same time Surveyor-General of Crown Lands, which he never surveyed; Registrar in Chancery at Barbadoes, which he never visited; and Surveyor of the Maltings and Clerk of the Irons in the Mint, where he showed himself once a week in order to eat a dinner which he ordered, but for which the nation paid"; also, and perhaps chiefly, "Paymaster of the Board of Works," an office extinguished under Burke's scheme of economical reform, which Lord Rockingham,

[1] "George Selwyn, his Letters and his Life," edited by E. S. Roscoe and Helen Clergue (Fisher Unwin, 1899), p. 51. For further information about the incursion of the Nabobs, *see* the "Early History of Charles James Fox," p. 134 *et seq.*

greatly to Selwyn's disgust, had the ill-taste to proceed with on coming into office after the fall of Lord North in 1782. This deprived him of £3,000 a year, and he regards it as an unmerited blow "coming after debts created by imprudence, which might otherwise have been soon liquidated." Two years later Pitt consoled him with the equally lucrative and unexacting position of Surveyor-General of Crown Lands, and he was now safe to the end.

Selwyn's politics had the practical purpose of keeping his places in the whirligig of parties and factions. While professing to be a Tory, he was extremely agreeable to Whigs; and though he preferred White's Club he was quite at home at Brooks's. He adored Charles Fox, but in the circle of the King's friends was careful to explain that he gravely disapproved of most of his opinions. He draws a lively picture of Charles constantly interrupted in the serious business of "punting and dealing" at Brooks's by tiresome people who would pester him about public affairs. Men interested him enormously; measures not at all. He had a genius for gossip which would have made his fortune as a popular journalist a hundred years later, and was an insatiable fribbler and diner-out. Great ladies adored him, and young ones still danced with him when he was fifty and upwards. He was counted a wit, but discretion prevented his shafts from being too keenly barbed, and time has deprived most of them of what point they had. He depicts to perfection the atmosphere in which his kind lived and moved, but one may read hundreds of his letters without lighting on a single observation on public affairs which could be called sagacious or even interesting. He prided himself on being temperate in his vices, but his manner of life is frankly characterized in a pungent letter from his friend Lord Carlisle, who compares his own pursuits at Castle Howard with Selwyn's in London. "I rise at six, am on horseback till breakfast; play at cricket till dinner; and dance in the evening till I can scarce crawl to bed at eleven. You get up at nine; sit till twelve in your night-gown; creep down to White's and spend five hours at table; sleep till you can escape your supper reckoning,

and then make two wretches carry you in a chair, with three pints of claret in you, three miles for a shilling." He nevertheless considered himself a very useful public man, and when his vote was needed was punctual in the Division Lobby.

Selwyn is, perhaps an extreme instance, but the average M.P. of the eighteenth century was of this type. He feathered his nest, obliged his patrons, obeyed the whips and not infrequently sold his vote for hard cash. George III himself said that "this trade of politics is a rascally business—a trade for a scoundrel and not for a gentleman," and he, who had so many gentlemen in his pocket, ought to have known. But there were exceptions like Burke, whom one of his relatives describes as "full of real business, intent upon doing solid good to his country, as much as if he were to receive twenty per cent. from the commerce which he labours to improve and extend." In his many years in Parliament Burke must have learnt, in his own phrase, "how much of an evil it is necessary to tolerate," and he was not perhaps in his own practice entirely removed from the standard of his time. But he was the ideal Member of Parliament, and his lofty sense of the public interest, and respect for his constituents, combined with his writings to lay the foundation of a new conception of public life. If the House of Commons extricated itself from the slough into which it had fallen in the last half of the eighteenth century and became in the subsequent generations an example to the world of an incorrupt and honourable assembly, it is not a little to Burke that we owe it.

CHAPTER II

THE TRANSITION

Politics the Secret of the Few—The Intrusion of the Public—Coercion and Reaction—Organizers and Agitators—Francis Place and William Cobbett—Cobbett's Characteristics—His Life and Struggles—Radicalism Turned Inwards—The Origin of Individualism—Government the Enemy—The Old Liberal Creed—What it Achieved—Effects of the Anti-Corn Law Agitation—Exaltation of the Middle Class—Limitations of the Public Life—Victorian Politicians—Bagehot's Opinions—Liberals not Democrats—The Solemnity of Victorian Politics.

I

IN the conditions described in the last chapter the art of government was necessarily the secret of the few. *Paucis vivit humanum genus* remained the motto of the old regime ; and though orators paid tribute to something that they called " the people," and a few exceptional men like Chatham, Burke and Charles Fox had an imaginative feeling for public duty and human rights, the great majority of the governing class were convinced that the first of all their duties was to preserve their own rights. In such circumstances the public life, as the modern understands it, was an impossibility. A modern popular politician would have found himself in a prison with all exits guarded by vigilant gaolers. Without platforms to air themselves upon, with no newspapers to report their speeches, with scarcely any constituencies to which they could appeal, and a House of Commons which regarded its own proceedings and the votes of its members as a secret to be jealously guarded, clever men were thrown back upon cabal and intrigue, and the petty arts which might win them the favour of the King or of the great families which had the temerity to oppose the King. The average politician was a hireling, and he knew it ; and he earned a good character, if it could

be said of him that he served faithfully for his pay and was as little heard of as possible outside that expected duty. A few great stars succeeded in establishing contact with the public and at critical moments kept both the King and the House of Commons reminded that the mob could be set in motion, when they went too far, but most of these remained faithful to their order in essentials and had no wish to see the multitude break into the charmed circle of government. The public life, as we understand it, was led within this circle and depended on the wisdom or the whims, the influence or the ability, of about a score of individuals.

But from the time of the Wilkes' affair a contrary stream had been running in the country, and powerful men were appearing outside Parliament, to defend the right of the public against tyranny in high places. Associations, committees, public meetings and all the rest of the paraphernalia of modern public life were now making their appearance, and would probably have established themselves as part of the recognized machinery of politics but for the French Revolution and the War. The Revolution scared the middle-classes and drove powerful champions of popular rights like Burke into the Conservative camp. The Napoleonic struggle clinched this tendency, and like all great wars, extinguished the democratic movement while it lasted, and threw the autocratic forces on their defence when it was over. Stringent coercion was now the weapon of the oligarchs, and the Radicals pursued their agitation under the threat of pillory, imprisonment, transportation and the gallows. Radicalism was never a more dangerous trade than in these years, as men like Priestley, Horne Tooke, Holcroft, Thelwall, John Frost, Tom Paine and Cobbett were soon to discover. Even the Whig party was shattered, and someone said in the last year of the century that they could all have driven home together in a single hackney coach. "That," replied George Byng, "is a calumny ; we should have filled two."

But this reaction was bound to run its course, and the story of the fifteen years after the war is that of the bank-

ruptcy of the old regime. It had great moments, none greater than when the Duke of Wellington and Lord Castlereagh, appearing in spite of themselves as the embodiment of the best Whig tradition in foreign affairs, put their veto upon all vindictive efforts to dismember France after the defeat of Napoleon. But it had neither men nor ideas fit to cope with the times in domestic politics, and its leaders were mostly weak men with violent minds who fought a disastrous losing battle against popular causes, and retreated without dignity when they were beaten. The Reform Bill settled much more than the enlargement of the franchise. With the close boroughs went innumerable things dear to the heart of the old regime, and most of all the monopoly of the landed class in the public life. The Act of 1832 was by modern standards and even according to the standards of the old Radicals a very pitiful instalment of democracy, but it was an immense concession to the new industrial order, and, after it was passed, no one dared speak of the "landless rabble."

2

The last ten years of the fight against the old regime were the foundation years of the new politics. The organization of opinion outside Parliament dimly foreshadowed in the Associations and Committees of the previous century now took definite shape. Individuals like Francis Place, the zealous and indefatigable tailor, whose story has been told by Mr. Graham Wallas,[1] now for the first time did the work of propaganda with a skill and thoroughness which would do credit to any modern master of the craft. The library at the back of the shop at No. 16 Charing Cross became laboratory, Publication Department, and General Headquarters for the Radical movement. From this centre Place worked the movement for the repeal of the Combination Laws, doubling the parts of organizing secretary and parliamentary agent, supplying the newspapers with a stream of facts, lobbying Members of Parliament, collecting evi-

[1] "Life of Francis Place," by Graham Wallas; Longmans, 1897.

dence for the Parliamentary Committee ; planning alternative campaigns on moderate and extreme lines, keeping the agitators within bounds, so long as quieter means seemed likely to prevail, but prepared to let them loose if sterner measures were needed. The same astute hand is seen at work in the Reform agitation, which also was a masterpiece in its alternate use of the moderate and the extremist. Place was never harmless as a dove, but he certainly was wise as a serpent, and he measured to a nicety the limits within which " direct action " was serviceable, and the point at which it might turn friends into opponents. The reactionaries were kept reminded that the mob was formidable, but Whig reformers given no excuse for backsliding. I see him like Mr. Sidney Webb with a dash of Keir Hardie and a good deal of Schnadhorst in his composition. But one side of him was a bookish man, and as the friend and disciple of Bentham, he had schooled himself to believe that, if reason were given a chance, it must prevail.

A very different man of the same transition period, but also a pioneer of the modern politics, was William Cobbett. Carlyle calls him a " most brave phenomenon," " the pattern John Bull of his century, strong as the rhinoceros, and with singular humanities and genialities shining through his thick skin." There was no philosophical process in Cobbett's mind, and least of all a belief in sweet reasonableness as a factor in human affairs. Tory, Jingo, and Radical in succession, he was swept by his moods, which found vent in tornadoes of invective. Normally a man of immense courage, he was liable to sudden fits of discretion which sent him flying across the Atlantic for fear of being gaoled, and then back again, when his unquenchable talent for opposition had made the New World too hot to hold him. He seemed always to be in a passion, but often it is a splendid rage in which we seem for the first time for many centuries to hear the genuine cry of the poor. The other Radicals were town-bred men who had learnt from books and saw human-kind in a mist of generous theory ; Cobbett was racy of the soil, son of farmer and inn-

keeper; and his mind was stored with pictures of the labouring man at his daily toil on the brown earth, with back bending under the load placed on it by wealthy "tax-eaters," and grasping landowners who had driven him from the common field. From first to last he was this man's friend, and stoutly and gamely he stood by him whether he was being victimized by aristocratic landowners who ought to have known better, or made the subject of new-fangled experiments by urban and philosophic Radicals.

Never was such a profusion of talent poured into the business of political agitation. This roystering campaigner rides through the country seeking grace and beauty, and above both "the green blade of corn." "Oh! the thousands of linnets all singing together on one tree in the sand-hills of Surrey! Oh! the carolling in the coppices and the dingles of Hampshire, Sussex and Kent!" "My choice has always been very much divided between the woods of Sussex and the downs of Wiltshire. I should not like to be compelled to decide, but if I were compelled, I do believe I should fix on some vale in Wiltshire, water meadows at the bottom, corn-land going up towards the hills, those hills being *downland*, and a farmhouse in a clump of trees, in some little cross vale between the hills, sheltered on every side but the south." The man who writes like this speaks of his opponents as "barking like hell-hounds till they are suffocating in their own foam," calls Liverpool "pink-nose" and derides Quakers as "unbaptized buttonless blackguards." At one moment he is swinging this tomahawk, at another delighting you with the freshness and simplicity, the beautiful delicacy and refinement of his vision of rural England. An enormous output of pamphleteering and journalism, crammed with fact and seasoned with expletives, pours from this poet who lingers spell-bound over "the little cross vales between the hills." Never, I suppose, had a single writer more influence over the popular mind than Cobbett in his *Register*, and with all its coarseness and violence and damnable iteration, it is splendid and manly stuff compared with a great deal that passes for effective popular writing in the newspapers of

to-day. Cobbett never hits a fellow when he is down, though he seldom misses an opportunity of smiting anyone who is up. He loves unpopular causes and goes bull-headed for the great and formidable. The Government ruins him by a stamp-duty on periodicals ; but he passes through the Bankruptcy Court, and returns to the charge and finally emerges triumphant from a prosecution which wins freedom not only for himself but for the whole tribe of writers. After the last of Cobbett's prosecutions (1831), seditious libel ceased to be a serviceable weapon of Government against Radical reformers.

But Cobbett's life illustrates the difficulties which men of advanced opinions had to face in the forty years before the Reform Bill. They were practically excluded from Parliament, since the cost of contesting even the few free boroughs was prohibitive to all but men with the longest purses. Their weapon was their pen, and they plied this against all the coercive powers that we have since seen employed in our days in Ireland, and penalties generally much more severe than were inflicted on Irish nationalists. If on some occasions the mob was on their side, on others it was freely at the disposal of their opponents. The blameless Priestley had his house burnt about his head at Birmingham by a " Church and King " mob which ruthlessly destroyed his library and his scientific instruments. " As the mischief did occur," commented the King, " it was impossible not to feel pleased at its having fallen on Priestley rather than another, that he might feel the wickedness of the doctrines that he was propagating." During the thirty years from 1792 onwards long terms of transportation were by no means an improbable consequence of spirited challenges to the existing order. John Frost was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and to stand for an hour in the pillory at Charing Cross because he had been overheard to say in a coffee-house that he was for " equality and no King." The Scottish judges surpassed themselves and threw their English confrères far into the shade in their zeal to defend the British Constitution against agitators, as may be seen in the trials of Muir, Margarot and Gerrald,

and of Watt and Downie, who were actually sentenced at Edinburgh to be hanged, drawn and quartered. Cobbett himself was thought extremely lucky in being permitted to spend the two years' imprisonment, to which he was sentenced in 1810, in comparative luxury, and there were loud grumbles in aristocratic circles when it was known that he was being fed from his own farm and permitted to edit his *Register* from prison. But for him, as for Tom Paine and Priestley before him, it was always a question whether he should face the storm or run to shelter from it in America.

3

The savage persecution of these years turned the Radical movement inwards and led the quieter spirits to find refuge in the study. While a few powerful agitators fought the Government in the open, Bentham and James Mill, Adam Smith and Ricardo were working at the combined system of economic and political philosophy which for fifty years and more was to dominate English Liberalism. The history of philosophical Liberalism is outside the scheme of this book, but since it profoundly influenced the public life of the next two generations, a few of its salient characteristics must be noted. The individualism of this school was not the pure theory it is sometimes supposed to be. Serious-minded and disinterested men who had watched the proceedings of Governments in the last years of the eighteenth and early years of the nineteenth century concluded almost of necessity that government was an evil. They had seen a half-mad King and a corrupt Parliament plundering the taxpayer and exalting particular interests at the expense of the public. They had seen perpetual encroachments upon liberty in the name of Governments which cloaked the pretensions of cliques and powerful families with the forms of authorized power. The experience seemed to prove it impossible that human beings could be entrusted with power over their fellow-creatures and not abuse it. To keep government,

therefore, within the narrow limits in which its operations could be checked by a vigilant public opinion and the processes of law seemed the natural remedy. With few exceptions this note is struck by all the Radicals, practical and philosophical. Cobbett is against the "thing," the "system" which when analysed turns out to be the ruling caste entrenched in Government. Bentham's busy and benevolent brain spins many schemes for human betterment, but they are all schemes in which the people are encouraged to help themselves without the intervention of Government. Socialist Utopias in which a benevolent Government orders the life of a model community are either passed unnoticed by these thinkers or dismissed as amiable dreams. "Owen," says Bentham, "begins in vapour and ends in smoke." "All legislative interference," says Place, "must be pernicious. Men must be left to themselves to make their own bargains; the law must compel the observance of compacts, the fulfilment of contracts. There it should end. . . . No restrictive laws should exist. Everyone should be at liberty to make his own bargains in the best way he can."

John Stuart Mill saw in later days the limitations of this doctrine and the unforeseen consequences to which it was tending. But for the next two generations it was supreme in British politics, and led to the concentration of political effort upon emancipation from Government, Government being conceived as either an evil in itself or as an engine too powerful for human frailty. Never were Governments so dominated by theory as the Administrations which immediately succeeded the Reform Act of 1832. Bentham with his theory, Adam Smith with his theory, James Mill with his theories and, above all, Malthus with his theory, were haunting presences, whether living or dead. The Whig statesmen of the time prided themselves on their strict impartiality between rich and poor, but Malthus in fact gave their doctrine a sharp edge against the poor, as Cobbett was quick to perceive. It was not quite the same thing to deprive the rich of their privileges as the labourer of his out-relief. But it seemed rational to say that, if Government was not to enrich the

great and powerful, it must not stand between the poor and the consequences of a thriftless multiplication beyond the limits of subsistence. The old muddled but half charitable system which had kept the labourers in a servitude outside the workhouse must give way to a new rule which would throw them on their own resources except for the workhouse. In this way freedom would be established and economic theory be justified. In the same way, perfect freedom was to reign between Nonconformist and Churchman, Jew and Christian, master and workman. The masses flocking into the towns from the country under the combined influence of the new Poor Law and the Enclosure Acts, were to be perfectly free to make their own bargains with those special votaries of the new freedom who were developing the industries of the towns. Not even the little child was to be denied the liberty of selling his labour for ten hours a day at seven years of age. The enormous mass of suffering which accumulated in these years undoubtedly found vent in the Chartist movement; but the Charter, too, is strictly in line with the old Radicalism. Its principal demand is not for social reform but for the franchise and more franchise, conceived as the way of freeing the people from a still dominant Whig and Tory aristocracy.

But the anti-Corn Law movement, though still in line with emancipating Radicalism, broke new ground and raised serious doubts as to the sufficiency of the prevailing theories. A powerful agitation now for the first time brought home to thousands of comfortable middle-class people the conditions in which millions of their fellow citizens were living, and the emotions kindled carried them far beyond the limited purpose of repealing the Corn Laws. John Bright might be opposed to Factory Acts, but he could not melt great audiences to tears about the pinch of poverty in humble homes without compelling them to think about other things that inflicted suffering besides the taxation of bread. There were supporters of the Corn Laws who were only too ready to retaliate upon free-trade manufacturers by vigorous counter-attacks upon *laissez-faire* cap-

italism. Some of them were genuine humanitarians who found a leader in Lord Shaftesbury ; others had far-fetched ideas of stemming the tide of rationalist Radicalism by creating a new kind of Merrie England under the leadership of the aristocracy. For the next thirty years individualist Radicalism was sapped and mined in all directions. The mockery of Disraeli, the scorn of Carlyle, the eloquence of Ruskin, the banter of Matthew Arnold, all descended upon the political philosophers and their complacent middle-class disciples who supposed that politics had been reduced to their final simplicity and thanked God daily for the beneficent tokens of progress and prosperity under a system which left well alone.

4

What exactly the old Radicals conceived the sphere of politics to be is not easy to determine. Their leading thinkers were not democrats in the modern sense of the word. James Mill would have been content with a Reform Bill giving the franchise to every man with £100 a year, and he argued that working men electors—very few of whom in his day enjoyed that qualification—would be guided by " the intelligence of that virtuous rank who come the most immediately in contact with them . . . to whom they fly for advice and assistance in all their numerous difficulties . . . to whom their children look up as models for imitation, whose opinions they hear daily repeated, and account it their honour to adopt."[1] To install the middle-class in the place of the King as the real sovereign power in the country, and thereafter to make government the expression of middle-class sobriety and honesty seems for most of them to have been a sufficient working ideal. They appear to have assumed that this middle part of the commonwealth would hold the balance even between classes and be free both from the selfishness of the aristocrats and the gusty passions of the mob. This sanguine idea was by no means without serious justification, and in

[1] " Essay on Government," p. 32.

the middle years of the nineteenth century Parliaments under middle class influence performed miracles of cleansing and purification. They swept away the whole noisome business of Georgian corruption, reformed the entire legal system, established the highly expert service of public officials detached from politics, which is still our salvation from the spoils system, and firmly embedded in the mind of Parliament and the nation that indefinable idea of the public interest which is the sheet-anchor of honest statesmanship.

These are achievements in which we see the upright and dutiful spirit of the English middle-class coming into action, and it is doubtful whether they would have been possible under a wider franchise. What a modern demagogue might have made of the opportunity of converting the Georgian system to popular uses and carrying it forward for the benefit of political bosses will scarcely bear thinking of. But the middle-class reforming spirit inevitably reached its limits when these reforms were accomplished, and its vision of the future was that of a state of equilibrium, in which honest and efficient administrators stood on guard against reaction, kept the taxes down, avoided foreign adventures, and removed whatever obstacles remained to the free exercise of their abilities by independent citizens.

While these ideas ruled, the public life could scarcely be romantic. The men whom the middle-class liked to represent them were men of character and solid worth, safe, sober-judging men trained in Quarter Sessions, men who knew all about money and credit, who were sufficiently well endowed to be removed from temptation, and had enough other employments to render them free from all suspicion of being "professional politicians." During these years there was no worse term of opprobrium than one which suggested that a politician was wholly devoted to politics, and no greater degradation could be conceived for the House of Commons than that its members should be paid. After this, it was only less important that a politician should not be too clever or be suspected of literary

or other fantastic accomplishments. Disraeli fought all his life against the widespread disapproval of his romantic character, and in no respect did he show greater talent than in living it down. But to the end he has the appearance of a parrot in a Parliament of rooks—a vivid and exotic figure against the drab background of British worth and respectability. All the writing of this time dwells upon the necessity of *suitable ability* for the public life. It was felt that the scheme of things was least disturbed when public men had, as Bagehot used to say, first-rate capacities and second-rate ideas. First-rate ideas were indeed required by writers and theorists, but in practical affairs they sent men plunging outside the proper sphere of government and encouraged illusory hopes among the masses of the people.

5

There was, indeed, little room for movement within the boundaries which the old Radicals laid down for domestic politics. As we look back on it, the mid-Victorian period seems to be peopled with large and slow-moving public men purged of all the vices and most of the wit of their eighteenth-century predecessors. These men lived in an atmosphere of high-toned moderation. They advocated reforms, but not too much of them ; they believed in progress, if it was not too rapid. Like Mr. Brooke of Tipton, they were in favour of almost everything " up to a certain point, you know." Their characteristic attitude was that of respecting and being respected. They respected themselves and were respected by their constituents, they respected the Crown, the House of Commons, the House of Lords, the Church, the Constitution and the laws of political economy. Their speeches approached all these objects of veneration with a rhetorical low bow and were full of congratulations on the progress and prosperity ensured to the country under its happy institutions. They were good party men, and the struggles on the Corn Laws and the questions which divided Church

and Nonconformity kept the party lines sufficiently clear for practical purposes. But the material they dealt with was churned over and over again without being renewed ; and since they honestly held that most of the subjects which interest the mass of humankind were outside the sphere of legislation, they were under no necessity to exhaust their brains with original thinking.

If we look to the writings of Bagehot we shall see a very clever and accomplished literary man expounding the ideas of this class. To keep the equilibrium established by the Reform Bill is his main anxiety. He hears rumblings below the surface, sounds in the distance of an excluded multitude asking for admission, murmurs which indicate that the " lower orders " and other imperfectly educated people do not appreciate the advantages of the system under which they live. He is aware that the course of events has a little upset the balance of 1832 and is prepared for cautious measures to readjust it. The object of the 1832 Bill he tells us in 1852 was " to transfer the predominant influence in the State from certain special classes to the general aggregate of fairly instructed men " ; [1] and the object of the next must be " to enlarge the influence of the growing parts of the nation as compared with the stationary ; to augment the influence of the capitalist classes, but to withstand the pernicious theories which some of them for the moment advocate " (*e.g.* John Bright) ; " to organize an expression for the desires of the lower orders, but to withstand even the commencement of a democratic revolution." He admits that the House of Commons has two defects, one " an undue bias towards the sentiments and interests of the landed interest," the other that " too little weight is given to the growing parts of the country ; too much to the stationary." That is to say, the new and populous districts which had grown up since 1832 were under-represented. But subject to these two defects, " the House of Commons coincided nearly—or sufficiently nearly—in habitual judgment with the fairly intelligent and reasonably educated part of the community,"

[1] " Parliamentary Reform," Bagehot, 1859.

and " almost all persons, except the avowed holders of the democratic theory, would think that this is enough." He concedes, however, that it is a defect in Parliament, " as a representative though not as a ruling institution," that it " does not provide any mode of expression for the sentiments of what are vaguely but intelligibly called the working classes." To obtain this expression without disturbing the equilibrium is an anxious and delicate problem. The working classes are self-taught, and self-taught men are " commonly characterized by a one-sided energy and something of a self-sufficient disposition." They suffer from " fervid ideas of unseasonable originality," and are " particularly liable to singular opinions." Yet the very fact that their opinions are " singular " requires some expression of them in a representative assembly. The problem, therefore, is how to get a seasoning of these singular opinions without swamping " the habitual judgment of the fairly intelligent and reasonably educated part of the community." There are difficulties on either hand. The true principle is that every person has a right to " *so much political power as he can exercise without impeding any other person who would more fitly exercise such power*," (the italics are Bagehot's own) and " any such measure for enfranchising the lower orders as would overpower and consequently disfranchise the higher should be resisted on the ground of abstract right." Justice, therefore, is on the side of " a graduated rule, in which all persons should have an influence proportioned to their political capacity," the working classes having " some influence but not a predominant influence, the higher orders of society retaining the authority in matters of political opinion which is theirs by virtue of the leisure, the education, the more instructive pursuits and the more instructive society which they enjoy." Finally, after much casting about, Bagehot plumps for a plan which shall give the working classes the run of a few selected constituencies, while reserving all the rest to " the fairly intelligent and reasonably educated part of the community."

Bagehot remonstrates with the Liberals of his day for

their loose thinking on this dangerous subject. "They had a vague kind of abstract idea," he tells us, "that the franchise must be extended some time or other. They would have been shocked to hear themselves called democrats, but when they talked about reform, their language, so far as it had a meaning at all, had a democratic meaning." John Stuart Mill would not, I think, have been shocked to hear himself called a democrat, but he, too, feared a working class preponderance over instructed opinion, and relied on proportional representation and fancy franchises to keep the balance. Among all the wise men of this time the predominant thought was of checks and balances to keep democracy within bounds. Their ideal politician was a man who combined property with intelligence and was proof against "ideas of unseasonable originality"; their ideal voter a "sufficiently instructed person" who would place himself in the hands of property combined with intelligence, and know how to deal with unseasonably original ideas.

6

England in the nineteenth century probably produced more of such people than any other country in any period of the world, and their success for nearly forty years in keeping British politics within their own boundaries is a very remarkable achievement. They were a little shaken in 1848, but success in standing upright amid the tottering of continental institutions reassured them far more than Chartism had alarmed them. Their belief in British institutions, as tested by experience and proved superior to anything the world had yet seen, as the happily discovered mean between continental despotism and continental anarchy, was almost a religious faith; and there was a solemnity about their public proceedings which had not been known since the days of Cromwell. White's and Brooks's became reformed institutions; the country would have been horrified to hear that its members of Parliament were "punting and dealing" in St. James's Street, when

they were supposed to be at Westminster. The present generation can never quite realize the awe which surrounded the old politics in the last days before democracy, the respect with which the member was received when he visited his constituents, his affable condescension, the air of mystery with which he spoke of his parliamentary duties, his admired incompetence in public-speaking, his long words and rotund phrases and the deep pauses while he consulted his notes. In these years the jargon which is called the parliamentary style was built up into a kind of professional language. The member and the Minister used it, and the leader-writer revelled in it. No one ever talked in this way on any subject under the sun except politics, but in politics the use of the common tongue would have been thought a kind of levity which stamped a speaker as a man of vulgar origin.

CHAPTER III

THE NEW ORDER

The Aristocratic Hold on Politics—Stars and Minor Luminaries—Rest and Be Thankful—Spirited Foreign Policy—Statesmanship and Foreign Affairs—Disraeli and Gladstone—The Appeal to the Multitude—The Public Man in the Open—The Newspaper his Servant—Results on the Press—The Revolt of the Newspapers—Publicity and the Public Life.

I

EXCEPT for a sprinkling of business men and a rather larger number of lawyers, the character of Parliament was at first little changed by the Reform Bill of 1832. Many of the old influences persisted. The landed classes held their own in the House of Commons and practically monopolized the county seats. The cost of electioneering was still so heavy and the suspicion of poor men so general that the Member of Parliament still needed a deep purse. The House of Commons met late and sat into the small hours to suit the convenience of lawyers and men of the world, and so adjusted its great debates and critical divisions that they should interfere as little as possible with the social engagements of its members. One may say roughly that the Georgian style was prolonged until Parliament met in the new Palace of Westminster after the great fire which destroyed the old House. There is still a flavour of the eighteenth century in the debates on the Corn Laws when the young bucks of the landed aristocracy rallied to Disraeli in his fierce denunciation of their betrayal. Disraeli's speeches in 1845 and 1846 seem as remote from modern times as the speeches of Erskine or Rigby or Charles James Fox. Victorian solemnity set in after the repeal of the Corn Laws and lasted till it was broken by the rise of the Irish party. The prevailing influence was now that of serious Liberalism gradually shaping itself, under

Gladstone's influence, out of the fragments of the old parties.

Government during this period remained in the hands of the aristocracy. The Cabinets consist predominantly of peers and the commoners are mainly drawn from noble families. The business men, the men of middle-class origin, are so few that it would be difficult to cite a dozen of them in all the Cabinets from 1830 to 1868. Few of the Ministers of this time are more than a name or even a name to the subsequent generations ; and to look over the lists of them is to be reminded how brief is the glory of the public life. An immense gulf separates the few stars who have projected themselves into history from the minor luminaries who were their equals and colleagues in the Ministries of the day. Melbourne, Peel, Palmerston, Russell, Gladstone and Disraeli stand out as historical figures in the forty years between 1834 and 1874, but who else ? Special grounds may be pleaded for others —Sir James Graham, Lord Aberdeen, Sir William Molesworth, Sir George Cornewall Lewis, Sidney Herbert, Cardwell, Robert Lowe, Goschen, the Duke of Argyll, but no impartial historian could put them in the first class. A few great members of Parliament there were, Bright, Cobden and Daniel O'Connell towering above all others, and some distinguished men who were in Parliament but scarcely of it, such as Macaulay and John Stuart Mill. The rest have passed into oblivion, leaving their deeds to be commemorated by the peerages in their families, or the caskets and presentation épergnes which adorn the dinner-tables of their grandchildren.

Another generation may so judge of the public men of our own time, but to the backward vision this period seems one of dutiful mediocrity in which the few men of great talents had a unique opportunity. To give individualist Liberalism a fair chance there had better have been no men of conspicuous talents. What the system needed was men of integrity and competence who would carefully administer the public purse, be quietly on guard against reaction or corruption, nip in the bud any tendency

to encroach upon the sphere of private enterprise and otherwise be as little heard of as possible for good or evil. The Whig leaders whom the Liberal party inherited were quite willing to do most of these things or leave competent officials to do them, and, so far as domestic politics went, to rest and be thankful. But they inherited a tradition which required English Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries to be stars in the European firmament, and here they found their opportunity of winning applause and renown. This was an unceasing vexation to the Manchester School, which desired its principle of *laissez-faire* to cover the whole field of politics and by no means least to apply to foreign affairs. For twenty years and more Bright and Cobden fought a losing battle with Palmerston, who well understood the combative spirit of his countrymen and the value in politics of giving it firm and resounding expression. It helped Palmerston enormously in dealing with his opponents that he was able at most critical moments to stand as the champion of Liberalism in Europe, the defender of Italian freedom against Austrian oppression, of Danish independence against Prussian encroachment, of the right of asylum against foreign tyrants seeking to encroach upon British liberty. Tories applauded his "civis Romanus sum," and his spring to attention when anyone said "British interests"; Radicals, while deploring his aggressive and provocative manner, were bound to admit that the causes in which he testified had large claims on their sympathy. He was fairly caught out over Louis Napoleon, but even on that, as the sequel showed, the majority held to him, and the success with which he maintained himself in power as the indispensable British statesman remains one of the most remarkable feats in the politics of the nineteenth century.

Palmerston was nothing but a Foreign Minister, and to his school and to most Conservatives statesmanship was nothing but foreign policy. This is what made Ministers great and powerful, enveloped them with glamour and mystery, loaded them with responsibility. They knew secrets which would not bear whispering; they could set armies

in motion, make powerful sovereigns tremble at their nod. We get the atmosphere of it best in Disraeli's novels. His world is peopled with resplendent ambassadors, talking secrets of State to high-born Ministers, with half-confidences permitted to great ladies and Princes of the Church. Days spent in Chancelleries are wound up in gilded salons where the great game goes on to an accompaniment of enchanting music in a dazzling throng of superbly dressed women. This, one divines, is what in Disraeli's thought made the public life worth living, gave it romance and dignity and atoned for the vexation and vulgarity which had to be endured in the business of vote-collecting.

2

In sharpest contrast is Gladstone, first of the real moderns, to whom all this was flummery and folly. Gladstone was singularly unskilful in the mechanics of foreign policy, but he saw it as a great and simple thing which concerned peoples rather than sovereigns or diplomats, raising issues of right and wrong of which the mass meeting on Blackheath or the crowds in Midlothian were as good judges as the Chancelleries and the Cabinets. This appeal to the multitude with its passionate simplification of the supposed complexities and intricacies of the affairs of nations was thought highly unbecoming by the established authorities of the period. The Queen was alarmed and indignant; Disraeli, who had never in his life made a speech outside Parliament except at the Guildhall or at a farmers' meeting in his constituency, shared and fomented her fears. Not a few of his countrymen were seriously of opinion that Mr. Gladstone had gone mad. The Midlothian campaign was indeed a portent in the public life of the country. Tribunes of the people, like Bright, had stumped the country; it was the manner of their kind and they might be presumed to know no better. But that a man who had held the highest position under the Crown, should demean himself by stump oratory on the most delicate and dangerous of subjects was altogether intolerable.

In Mr. Gladstone's mind there were no boundaries between one subject and another. All questions alike, whether domestic or foreign, could be referred to certain simple principles of which the people were competent to judge. Whether he was disestablishing the Irish Church or denouncing Turkish atrocities, his appeal was to the conscience of his countrymen. More than any man except Bright he destroyed the tradition that the art of government was the secret of a governing class and broke the monopoly of the politician-administrator who had ruled the country since the Reform Bill.

3

From 1868 onwards the public man was in the open, and a faithful Press followed him to the platform whence he now made appeals which were at least equal in importance to those which he had made from his place in Parliament. The whole modern business of organization and propaganda was soon on foot. With the localities stirred up to a political life of their own, it became more and more difficult for wealthy and well-born individuals to obtain safe seats in the House of Commons by arrangement with the whips and the political clubs. Political programmes became a necessity for both parties, and both endeavoured to broaden their appeals so as to make them acceptable to the largest numbers. The extension of the franchise in town and country went on concurrently with this extension of the appeal and the promise. Discrimination between people, all of whom were now assumed to be educated, no longer seemed logical or just. If the old idea of leaving most things to settle themselves was abandoned, the masses whose interests were bound up in the new legislation had a right to be consulted. The Liberal was no longer, in Bagehot's phrase, "shocked to hear himself called a democrat": he would have been shocked to hear himself called anything else; and most Tories were at pains to prove that they were in reality just as democratic as their opponents.

So we pass to a new kind of public life in which political

campaigning is as important a part of a leader's activities as administering or criticizing from his place in Parliament. The star performer no longer keeps to his own constituency or reserves himself to election times, but is all over the country at all times obeying the call of whips and party managers. The constituencies clamour for his services, and are with difficulty appeased when he is not available. Clubs and associations are formed to provide speakers ready to go anywhere at any time and to speak on any subject in the service of their party and well drilled in the literature which is issued by " Publication " Departments. When campaigning is on foot, there is an enormous high pressure of bustle and excitement extending outwards from London to the farthest Hebrides. The master of this period is Joseph Chamberlain.

4

The same years witnessed another movement undreamt of by the older politicans—that of the Press endeavouring to assert itself as a power independent of Parliament and political parties. Up to 1890 or thereabouts the newspapers lay under the old tradition. The greater newspapers had moments of independence, but on the whole they followed the politicians and accepted their assumptions about the ordering of the public life. They spoke with awe of Parliament and recorded its proceedings in whole pages of solid type. How many people read these pages, or what instruction or entertainment they found in them was never brought into question. They were the records of Parliament, and for a great paper to appear without them was unthinkable. That the great, wise and eminent figures of the front benches were as great, wise and eminent as they claimed to be, that the country hung on their words, and that it was the business of the journalist to convey them faithfully to a listening world were tacit assumptions in every great newspaper office. A certain margin for judicious criticism was permitted, but the writer thoroughly understood that his was the subordinate rôle, and horror and consternation followed on the rare occasions when he

broke loose from the party lead. On their side the politicians accepted these services as their natural right, and few of them realized to what extent their positions, careers and relations with the public depended on their regular performance in the submissive spirit of the old journalism.

When the politicians came into the open, the Press followed them from Parliament to the platform with the same respectful tender of its services. It was assumed that the great, wise and eminent had the same right to be reported on the platform as in Parliament. It was supposed that the heavens would fall if at least a dozen of them were not reported verbatim and in the first person whenever they appeared at a public meeting. So to the solid pages of Parliament were now added other solid pages of platform oratory. If one looks at the files of the *Times*, *Standard*, *Morning Post*, or *Daily News*, from, say, the years 1878 to 1895, the effect of the modern eye is portentous. Day after day we see the unbroken columns of forbidding small type recording the voluminous efforts of about a dozen individuals—some of them plainly of no oratorical capacity—to explain, expound and recriminate with one another. And side by side with these are further columns of "three-decker" leading articles in which the writers plod wearily in the wake of these heroes, gathering up their loose ends, making sense of what they leave incoherent, dutifully supporting their own side and applauding the blows which it administers to the other. My early memories are of unceasing struggles with the disjointed flimsies in which the utterances of the great poured in floods on the editor's table from midnight till two in the morning—struggles calling for ingenuity in conjecture and emendation which would have made the fortune of a classical scholar, and for a nimbleness in producing the appropriate comment upon what the oracle was supposed to have meant, which, if the meaning had been at all profound, must have defeated the human brain. Fortunately what most of them meant could be evolved without reading more than a dozen lines of what they said.

The old journalism, presenting day after day this por-

tentous dish, was bound to become detached from the common life. The enormous absorption of editors, leader-writers, sub-editors and reporters in the turning out of the peculiarly forbidding and specialized product which was supposed to be politics, and the assumption that it was the main business of a newspaper, left little brains or space for other and more genial activities of the human family.

5

By the year 1890 or thereabouts, it only required someone to come along and ask seriously whether this stuff was read, whether it was "copy," whether there was any human being, not a professional politician, who could say honestly that he liked it or wanted it or did anything with it except turn from it with a sigh to the report of a murder or a fire—it only needed this to bring the whole thing toppling to the ground. The appearance of Alfred Harmsworth putting this very question was an absolutely fated event. It was a child's question, the question of an *enfant terrible* blurting out a secret which was whispered by its elders, but which custom and decorum had led them to stifle unanswered. The answer to it provided in due course by the new associated newspapers drove venerable organs of opinion on to the rocks and wrought a revolution in the public life. Politics lost their pre-eminence in the Press and were required to establish their claim as "copy" in competition with a hundred other subjects. Parliament, unless it provided a "scene," was reduced to half a column of small type, and the claim of the great, wise and eminent to occupy space urgently required for crime and football was openly derided. W. T. Stead had raised a smile by suggesting that the editor of a London newspaper was on a par with a Cabinet Minister; Harmsworth boldly claimed to be the master and superior of most of them and brought some reputed to be powerful to his feet by threatening to suppress their names and speeches or to turn his newspapers on to them. He openly professed himself to be entirely without preferences or prejudices, whether for

one party or another, one set of men or another, or one set of principles or another. He had ideas of "success" for the country and for his newspapers which he pursued with single-hearted conviction, but, except so far as they contributed to these, politics and politicians were raw material for his newspapers to be used or discarded according as it could be turned into "copy."

That this new attitude was a kind of emancipation for vast numbers of newspaper readers is not to be questioned in view of its immediate and immense success. They had accepted the old newspapers with their long reports and serious leading articles, their obeisances to Parliament and public men, their evident belief that politics was the chief business in life, because there were no others. When others appeared which flouted all these conventions and frankly produced a variety entertainment, in which politics were but one turn among many, a million men and women heaved a sigh of relief and deserted the old show for the new. Where one group of newspapers led, others followed, and all in different degrees felt the influence. Within ten years the entire relations of Press and public men were changed. The old supposition that the Press could be relied upon to broadcast the proceedings of Parliament and the speeches of Cabinet Ministers was no longer valid. The most widely circulated newspapers made it clear that they acknowledged no right or duty in this respect and would be guided solely by their own judgment of the "news value" of individuals or occasions. Political events or Bills in Parliament which high-brows and long faces thought of momentous importance might not be worth a paragraph in their columns. A Minister might be worth a column one day and not a "stick" the next, and on ninety-nine days out of a hundred the speeches of all of them were sheer boredom to the mass of fatigued or light-hearted men and women who made circulations.

I shall return to this subject in future chapters, and for the moment am only concerned with the general tendency. Much has been written on the question whether this new kind of journalism has influenced opinion, but that aspect

of it is comparatively unimportant. Its influence in actually converting readers from one set of opinions to another has probably been quite slight, and to do it justice, it makes no great pretensions in that respect. What it has done has been to throw the old machinery of politics out of gear and profoundly to change the atmosphere of the public life. The assumption that reason and argument will prevail, which was the foundation of philosophic Liberalism, must be far less certain when neither is presented in any consecutive form and most arguments are thought too dull to be set out in the columns of a " live " newspaper. The paragraph supersedes the column, and the headline in the end becomes more important than the paragraph. The mere abbreviation is enough. Within the small space available the appeal must be to emotion and prejudice, and the effect be produced by perpetual iteration of catch phrases. Naturally in such circumstances the successful politician tends to be one who lends himself to this process, who provides the best copy and gets in return the best advertisement. So to his other duties and responsibilities the public man has now to add that of being a public entertainer and, if he wishes to remain in the public eye, to give the same serious attention to the business of publicity as an actor or an operatic star.

It is impossible to believe that any of these phases are final, and with the rise of Labour we may get a new phase. In a space of a hundred years we have seen politics as the great game of aristocrats, the solemn pursuit of philosophers and serious persons, and the raw material of the popular modern Press. We have lately been reminded that, whatever the outward forms, the issues are tremendous and the consequences of error tragic. It is, therefore, of the highest importance to us all to understand the conditions of the public life and the means, if any, whereby the most dangerous of all the human trades may be rendered relatively safe for both the practitioners and their clients.

BOOK II

TYPES OF PUBLIC MEN

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT AGITATORS

Organized Agitation—Anti-Corn Law League—Cobden and Bright —Their Team-work—Their Zeal and Sacrifices—Against Taking Office—Sir James Graham's Opinion—Their Independence of Party—Bright as Minister—His Influence as Private Member—His Eloquence and Style.

1

HAVING in a general way surveyed the ground, let me now go back and consider the methods of certain prominent individuals in greater detail.

I have referred in the previous chapter to the Anti-Corn Law League as having broken down the theoretic and negative spirit of early nineteenth century politics. It may be said also to have definitely modernized the methods of political warfare. "The League," to adopt Mr. Trevelyan's description of it, "was a new portent in English life, introducing into politics not only new aims but new methods and a new spirit which, if successful against the old established politicians and their methods, must needs imply a redistribution of social power. It was democracy, no longer as a vague resource for the future, but as an invading reality. In an age when political meetings were rare events, and serious politicians seldom spoke outside 'the House'—except officially from the hustings—Cobden and his lieutenants addressed immense meetings night after night over a series of years. Once a month or oftener, from March, 1843, until the Corn Law fell in 1846, a London opera house was packed from floor to ceiling, from the back of the pit to the back of the stage, with an audience that was never once bored and never once lukewarm; and in the twelve weeks between December, 1842, and the end of the following February, one hundred and thirty-six smaller meetings were

held in London alone ; in the provinces each big city had a mass meeting nearly every month, and each market town at least once a year. In an age when political literature was limited in quantity, and perfunctory and personal in such arguments as it advanced, the League, in 1843 alone, distributed nine million carefully signed tracts, by means of a staff of eight hundred persons." [1] This agitation created the habit of public meeting and made speakers and public debaters of thousands of men who had never till then dreamt of leaving their firesides.

Cobden and Bright, who led the movement, were the first thoroughly competent public men that the country had seen at work outside the walls of Parliament, and together with William Fox, who has perhaps received less credit than is his due, they present an example of team-work which has never been surpassed in public life. The great platform performer of later days has often sought to be " fair as a star when only one is shining in the sky," and he generally resents the too near proximity of other stars. But Bright and Cobden, being full of zeal for their cause, and entirely without vanity or jealousy, were wise enough to see that their combination, as Lord Morley has said, " far more than doubled the power that either of them could have exerted without the other." Cobden was consummate in plain speech and lucid argument ; Bright abounded in passion and poetry ; and the one opening and the other following made an impression which neither could have made alone. Each supplied what was lacking in the other, and the public not only linked their names together but thought of them as inseparable, as in fact they were.

Both were religious men and both brought to politics the zeal of missionaries. They sacrificed their businesses, their comfort, their health, even their families, to what they were persuaded was the call of duty. They saw a vision of thousands of humble people being plundered and starved by an iniquitous law which filled the pockets of rich landowners ; and, leaving their calico printing and cotton spinning, they travelled by day and harangued by night till

[1] " Life of John Bright," by G. M. Trevelyan, p. 90.

the whole country was filled with the sound of their voices. Their businesses languished, they suffered crushing domestic bereavements, they were worn out with fatigue, but still they persisted. When the cause seemed hopeless and the League was in despair, they made an extra spurt. Cobden had twice to be rescued from bankruptcy by public subscriptions ; Bright suffered so much in pocket that he was at least once in grave perplexity whether he could or ought to go on. Members of the community in which he was brought up gravely doubted whether so much striving and publicity could be harmonized with the meditative and charitable kind of life which they professed to lead. There was indeed something odd in the appearance of this staunch and resolute man in Quaker dress hitting from the shoulder on the public platform. Bright was persuaded that he was performing a Christian as well as a public duty, but the pleasure with which he confesses that he has " done a little prize-fighting," shows that the old Adam was alive within him.

The great twin-brethren sat loose to the party politics of their time. Not to take office was Cobden's settled principle, and not to take it until he saw his way to give effect to his own ideas in a Government of like-minded men was Bright's. To be in Parliament, but not on the front bench, to make their speeches and votes in Parliament ancillary to their agitation in the country, but never to subordinate their ideas to party strategy in the House of Commons was their general aim. This cut across the prevailing constitutional idea that men of great power and influence must at all hazards be brought within the responsible governing circle. Bright records that in December, 1852, when Lord Aberdeen was forming his Government, after the defeat of Lord Derby, he met Sir James Graham one morning passing through St. James's Palace. " I told him he knew our course—a good Government, acting honestly and doing well, would have our support ; we should not depart from our independent line of action. He said 'I don't approve of that. I think your position in the House and the country, your popularity, the large party

you influence, and your great public services, which I would be the first to recognize, all entitle you to a share in the Government, and I shall think no Government properly constituted in which you have not a part. I think it is a most unsound principle that men who do greatly influence opinion should not bear a portion of the responsibilities of the Executive Government ; now that is my opinion.' " [1]

The general principle is unimpeachable, but Bright and Cobden had lately enjoyed the greatest triumph which private members operating outside a Government had ever obtained (or have ever since obtained) and they were convinced that they could do better work as critics than as Ministers. They had the more reason for thinking it, since the public for which they stood was the great unenfranchised multitude, whereas the public for which the Minister stood and to which he was responsible was the select company of upper-class and middle-class voters and its representatives in the House of Commons. From the repeal of the Corn Laws to the outbreak of the Crimean War they were in fact a terror alike to Whig and Tory, and their known power in the country made it extremely imprudent to carry the war into their camp. No consideration of political expediency prevailed with them. Most reluctantly they joined with the Tories in the division against the Irish Coercion Bill which threw Peel from office, deeming that their consciences required them to persist in their opposition to Irish coercion, though they knew that this particular opposition was a cabal against the man who had earned their undying gratitude by abolishing the Corn Laws. Then they took up a running fight against Palmerston and the policy of " meddling everywhere, advising, controlling, encouraging, menacing, in every country not of first-class power in Europe." Once more they joined Tories and Protectionists in the critical Don Pacifico division to the great annoyance of good party men. Bright writes in his diary a day or two after that event :—

June 29th (1850). In the evening dined with Mr. Willcox, M.P., in Dorset Square. Mr. Cockburn, M.P., there, and some

[1] Trevelyan, p. 208.

what insolent to Cobden, telling him he was no reformer, and that he ought to be turned out of the Reform Club, because he would not vote to keep in a Liberal Government! What a strange notion of the duty of a member of Parliament those place-holders and place-seekers have! This Mr. Cockburn having been in a fright all the week for fear if the Government went out he should miss his appointment as Solicitor-General which he is expecting on the first vacancy![1]

A little later Bright was again at the heels of another Liberal Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, on the ridiculous "No Popery" fiasco of his Ecclesiastical Titles Bill. Here at all events, said the party man, was an issue on which the Nonconformist, the Protestant, the Quaker might be expected to hold his tongue, if he could do nothing better. To jump in on the side of the Catholics, to foment the Irish side of the quarrel in the interests of the Pope, to raise the issue of religious tolerance in a manner so inconvenient to a Liberal Government—all this, surely, was the superfluity of naughtiness.

Bright and Cobden seemed, indeed, to their generation, to have uncontrollable consciences. We find Bright in "a desperate puzzle what to do" on the Hungarian question in 1850. He and Cobden had taken a leading part in the reception of Kossuth in England, but, while honouring the patriot and exile, they had been extremely uneasy at the dispatch of the British fleet to the Dardanelles to support Turkey when she refused to surrender the Hungarian rebels against Austrian rule at the dictation of Russia. An honourable instinct said that Kossuth deserved a hero's welcome. The principle of non-intervention required that he should not be encouraged to believe that he would be assisted by British arms. So after joining in the reception of Kossuth, Bright took the first opportunity to point out that "by perfecting our own institutions, by promoting the intelligence, morality and health of our own country, and by treating all other nations in a just and generous and courteous manner, we shall do more for humanity than by

[1] Trevelyan, 190.

commissioning Lord Palmerston to regenerate Hungary by fleets in the Black Sea and the Baltic." Cold comfort this for Kossuth, who may well have replied that the perfecting of British institutions and the promotion of the intelligence, morality and health of the British people were exceedingly indirect ways of assisting Hungarian patriots.

Bright was undoubtedly wise in deciding that the principles which he held disqualified him from being a member of a Government in the conditions which ruled in those years. It was possible for the private member but not possible for the Minister to declare his sympathy with oppressed foreigners, and yet to draw a firm line between sympathizing and helping. It was possible for the private member but not possible for the Minister to be the powerful advocate of the labourer against the landlord but to pull up sharply when the town workman asked for Factory Acts to protect him against the manufacturer. Non-intervention as a governing principle evidently would not work in either the domestic or the foreign sphere. The fervent appeal to moral forces always at some stage brought the Executive Government to the necessity of doing something or retiring baffled and discredited. Bright's ministerial career, when late in life he reluctantly agreed to join Mr. Gladstone's Government, added nothing to his glory, which remained to the end that of "Tribune of the people." In that sphere he was incomparable, and his opposition to the Crimean War is perhaps the finest and most courageous passage in the life of any public man of the Victorian Age. While the war lasted, Bright was perhaps the most unpopular man in the country. The influence which he had built up by fifteen years of devoted service to popular causes seemed in these years to be shattered beyond repair. He was said to have shown himself in his true colours and to be for ever discredited. He nevertheless lived to prove the maxim that no man can gain the highest influence with the British people who has not at some time or other fought them to the death or risked his life in swimming against the popular stream.

2

Cobden and Bright are unique examples of public men who have won commanding positions outside the official hierarchy. They had no predecessors and have had no successors. The god of all the distinguished men of our time has been high or the highest office. Not one of them has said (or if he has said it has been believed) that he was content to serve the public as a critic of Government. Lord Rosebery's attempt to plough a lonely furrow ended in his retirement from the scene. But Cobden and Bright not only said it, but were believed, and in saying it, they were thought to be not above the battle but in the heart of it. It was no mock humility which led these powerful men to decide that they could best serve their generation by standing aloof from the game of tactics played between Whig and Tory front benches between 1843 and 1868. Undoubtedly they were right in thinking that the causes to which they were dedicated could best be served by bringing the pressure of unenfranchised opinion to bear upon official personages who certainly would not move without it. Thus they won free trade from Peel and reform from Disraeli. But the rôle required a rare concentration of purpose on objects conceived as great causes, and a complete disinterestedness which could not be tempted by what are called the prizes of public life. Modern Labour leaders have struck the same attitude, but their avowed object has been not to promote a particular cause, but to enable their own party to return to power without being compromised or diluted by any other party. Bright and Cobden had no such idea ; they could only hope to make their views prevail by imposing them on one or other of the ruling factions ; and to be free of both and to be ready to take favours from either was from that point of view essential to the service of the people.

Cobden died in this faith and Bright suffered mental agonies in departing from it, as he did at Mr. Gladstone's urgent entreaties in 1868 and 1880. What should he do at Court? How should that uncontrollable Quaker

conscience be subdued to wearing a gold coat and a sword? The whole world tittered while the solution was gravely sought and happily found in the permission of Her Majesty to let him appear "in a plain court suit of black velvet, cut very like the coat and breeches of old-fashioned Friends." [1] Other things were not quite so easily settled. He was, frankly, useless as an administrator, and an illness which enabled him to escape from the Board of Trade was a blessing in disguise. He came back chivalrously when Gladstone was *in extremis*, but by then it was a settled conclusion that, if ever he was a Minister again, it must be in a position in which he had no administrative duties. Thus he came to shed lustre on the Chancellorship of the Duchy. In the Cabinet he was always sitting on the edge of a volcano, for his principles debarred him from taking responsibility for military operations, and in this uneasy world the most pacific of Governments were perpetually running into something which brought soldiers on to the scene. Then the painful searchings of heart set in again and the question was merely how much of it he could endure.

These were but late and unimportant incidents in his career. When he finally quitted office in 1882, the public said he had done well not because they agreed with him about Gladstone's Egyptian policy, but because he was John Bright and a man of peace. He resumed his place at once as the greatest figure in English public life, Gladstone alone excepted, if indeed with that exception. A later generation cannot easily realize the awe and reverence which this elder statesman inspired in millions of the English people, or the weight which attached to his lightest word. To multitudes he seemed to be the living symbol of all that was just and upright and God-fearing in public affairs, and immense was the consternation when he broke away from Gladstone on the Irish question in 1886. Not what Lord Hartington, and still less what Mr. Chamberlain thought, but what John Bright thought was what the wavering multitude of Liberal electors were waiting to learn.

[1] Trevelyan, 402.

and it was his condemnation which more than any other factor sealed the fate of the first Home Rule Bill.

Such a career deserves the careful study it has received in Mr. Trevelyan's biography. It is the supreme type of one kind of public life, a kind perhaps impossible under modern conditions, when all classes are represented in Parliament, and their representatives are rightly expected to undertake executive responsibility for their advice. Bright could lead the public life on his own terms and at his own discretion. Except at the one moment when Manchester rejected him after the Crimean War, he had constituencies at his back which left him free to say what he liked and do what he chose. Being free from the cares of office or any responsibility for an official opposition, and after middle life not over-burdened by business, he had abundance of time for thought and preparation. When a great cause required it, as in the days of the League, he could go from platform to platform trusting to the moment for inspiration and words. This fluency gained by practice was no doubt an invaluable reserve, but he never banked on it when the necessity was over, and for most of his life he spent time and thought without stint upon his public speeches. Though entirely free from the meaner arts of self-advertisement, he had an instinct for publicity which was positive genius. His speeches were comparatively few, but they seemed to come at exactly the right moment, and the pauses between them to be beautifully timed. His letters to the Press had the same quality of opportuneness. They appeared just at the moment when a multitude were asking what John Bright was thinking, and they answered the question and then left it alone. The method was that of an immensely effective simplicity and the effect produced such as can only be achieved by the masters of speech.

3

Bright had what by modern standards must be called a thoroughly bad education which ended when he was fifteen years old. The best that he could say of his masters in

later days was they were incompetent but kind. He had to the end of his days a contempt for classical studies, and probably shared Cobden's opinion that one copy of the *Times* was worth all the books of Thucydides. Yet his own style was more classical and more fastidious in its use and choice of words than that of any of his contemporaries who were brought up at Eton on Horace and Homer. He seemed at a stroke to have abolished all the jargon which then and still defaces the Parliamentary style. His best speeches bristle with fact and quiet argument beautifully arranged and conveyed as a rule in the simplest of Anglo-Saxon words. The purple passages are few, but they are led up to with extraordinary skill, and they seem exactly as much as the subject will bear. The cadences, the pauses, the climaxes all belong to the highest art. This tribune of the people is, one perceives, an artist to his finger-tips, with a natural sense of style which the very limitation of his reading has left him free to develop on natural and simple lines. He was, at all events, steeped in the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth.

With all his preparation his genius was for speech and not for writing. His speeches never smelt of the lamp, and had no resemblance to those elaborate compositions which so many able men in later times have been accustomed to read from typewritten folios. However the result was arrived at, it seemed to be born of the occasion, and the movement of it was pure oratory carrying the audience in a gathering flood. I heard him make four considerable speeches, three in the House of Commons and one before a vast audience in the Bingley Hall, Birmingham. He was then an old man, and the effort of addressing 20,000 people was plainly exhausting to him, but the beauty of his voice, his noble figure, his perfect command of his material and his audience, made an ineffaceable impression. He was one of the few men who had an equal mastery in the House of Commons and on the platform, but he never confused the two or gave to the House what was intended for the platform. On all the occasions I heard him he came armed with elaborate notes, and it was said that his perorations

had been written out in full; but one saw him discarding sheet after sheet, throwing his notes aside, following new lines of thought, catching his inspiration as he went along, stopping always before it was exhausted, and through all keeping his head clear and cool, and his finger on the pulse of his hearers.

His great purple passages are well known, but a large number of his speeches will bear reading from the first word to the last, and I can imagine no better study for the public speaker of to-day if he only desires to see how facts may be marshalled and arguments grouped to yield their greatest results. Bright is in a special degree master of the approach to a hostile audience. He stands his ground, never abating one jot of conviction or shrinking even from fierce denunciation, but the objector is hushed by the spell of his words, the note of persuasion, and even of prayer, which is heard in his voice. Listen to the closing passage of a speech in the House of Commons in 1863, pleading the cause of the North against Roebuck's motion for recognition of the Southern Confederacy:—

> We know the cause of this revolt, its purposes and its aims. Those who made it have not left us in darkness respecting their intentions, but what they are to accomplish is still hidden from our sight; and I will abstain now, as I have always abstained, from predicting what is to come. I know what I hope for and what I shall rejoice in—but I know nothing of future facts that will enable me to express a confident opinion. Whether it will give freedom to the race which white men have trampled in the dust, and whether the issue will purify a nation steeped in crimes committed against that race, is known only to the Supreme. In His hands are alike the breath of man and the life of States. I am willing to commit to Him the issue of this dreaded contest; but I implore of Him, and I beseech this House, that my country may lift nor hand nor voice in aid of the most stupendous act of guilt that history has recorded in the annals of mankind.

Only a man of the deepest religious sincerity could have ventured to address a secular assembly in these terms, and only a man of consummate skill in the use of words could have achieved this combined appeal to the Almighty and the House of Commons without total disaster.

CHAPTER V

PALMERSTON AND PALMERSTONISM

Palmerston—The Judicious Bottle-holder—Showing his Fists—"Tit for Tat"—Calling his Bluff—The Schleswig-Holstein Affair—Jumping his Colleagues—The Recklessness of Age—The Old Foreign Politics and the New—Palmerston and the Newspaper—Relations with the *Morning Post*—Affability to Reporters—A Question about Editors and Statesmen—War and the Press.

I

SOMETHING has already been said about the methods of Lord Palmerston, but the most famous of nineteenth-century Foreign Secretaries requires a rather more careful consideration. The Palmerstonian period was regarded by our parents as the high-water mark of British influence in the world, and from the passing of Metternich to the rise of Bismarck, Palmerston may be said to have held the casting vote in Europe.

He once described himself as the "judicious bottle-holder," but the principals were always aware that he was ready to enter the ring himself on the slightest provocation. His instincts were on the whole generous, and as a rule—though not always—he was tempted to cut in on the weaker side. Though a man of the world, he was in his own way a genuine humanitarian. He was on fire against the slave-trade when abolition was still an unfashionable cause; his biographer describes how he was won over to factory legislation by a demonstration in his own dining-room of the labour of little children in cotton mills.[1] He had a sound instinct against monopoly, which brought him early in life on to the side of Free Trade. With these Liberal promptings he combined all the pugnacity of the bulldog breed. He was in the habit of telling people that he would

[1] "Life," i, 460–1.

knock them down if they did not get out of his way. He liked to show his fists even when he did not use them. When the King of Naples was slow in withdrawing a certain sulphur monopoly which Palmerston thought prejudicial to British traders, he promptly ordered the British fleet to demonstrate, and thought it a good thing that it should persist in demonstrating even if the King gave in. "I very much approve," he writes to the British Minister at Naples (April 20, 1840), "of your having insinuated in one of your despatches that, even if the Neapolitan Government gave the assurances you required, Sir R. Stopford (the Admiral) would still come to Naples." On general principles it was salutary for Naples to see the British mailed fist. A few months later when one McLeod, a British subject, was arrested in New York and put on his trial for murder because he had set on fire and driven over the Falls of Niagara an American steamer engaged in carrying arms to Canadian rebels—on the face of it a pretty high-handed proceeding—he at once, and without waiting for the result of the trial, threatened the United States with war. "Mr. Van Buren (the President) should understand this," he writes to the British Minister at Washington, "that the British nation will never permit a British subject to be dealt with as the people of New York propose to deal with McLeod, without taking a signal vengeance upon the offenders. McLeod's execution would produce war, war immediate and frightful in its character, because it would be a war of retaliation and vengeance."[1] The Don Pacifico case needs scarcely to be recalled. For the collection of the debts of this shady Maltese Jew, Palmerston risked war with both France and Russia, and won his most conspicuous parliamentary triumph in the famous five-hour long *Civis Romanus Sum* speech in which he dazzled the House, confounded his critics, and drew all the gentlemen of England to his support.

All these operations evoked rounds of applause from the men in the street. Palmerston thoroughly understood the pugnacious character of his countrymen, and was a

[1] *Ibid.*, i, 403.

master of the art of kindling their enthusiasm and their wrath. Compared with his direct and racy appeals to the old Adam, Disraeli's imperialism seems literary and exotic. " C'est Palmerston qu'il nous faut " was in all emergencies the cry both of the London mob and of the London clubs. With this backing he rode a high horse over Crown and Cabinet. The Queen, the Prince Consort, and his supposed chief, the Prime Minister, complained incessantly and fruitlessly of his lack of respect for Throne, Constitution and Cabinet discipline. Again and again they heard for the first time of strokes of policy and vitally important dispatches, committing the Government and the country, when they were past recall. His excuse was that the process of consulting other people was tedious and dilatory, and extremely prejudicial to a spirited foreign policy. If the Constitution required it, so much the worse for the Constitution ! Anyhow, he didn't care. They could do anything they chose, but he and the great public behind him would know what to do with *them*. When finally his enemies did trip him up, he took it smiling, and was ready in a moment with his " tit for tat." The House of Commons might think the recognition of Louis Napoléon on the morrow of his *coup d'état* just a little too much ; but club and mob were unshaken, and by the end of the year he was again the indispensable man. Lord Aberdeen was bound to have him, and when the luckless Aberdeen Cabinet drifted or muddled into the Crimean War, who but he could save the country ? From the beginning of 1855 onward he was officially as well as actually his own master, and so on (with one short break) till November 1863.

Then the great bluff was called by a new man whose appearance on the scene he had failed to notice. The name of Bismarck does not appear in his biography, and there seems to have been no one in England who knew what was happening in Prussia. England till that moment had spoken in the firm tones of a mistress of legions, and had generally had her way. It was understood that her chief Minister would stand no nonsense, and no one was disposed to try. But in sober fact the army that he had behind him

could not have stood for a fortnight against the organized power of Prussia, and the fleet, though supposed to be supreme, had been dangerously neglected. The characteristic idea of the later period of armed diplomacy, that policy should be related to armaments, seems never seriously to have occurred to Palmerston or Russell. There was in those days no Committee of Imperial Defence and, except for occasional panics, Cabinets left military and naval questions to the departments with a sublime confidence that all would be right if honour or policy necessitated a war. So in June 1864 the two old men (Palmerston being then in his 81st year, and Russell only seven years younger) all but succeeded in pitting the little British army against a Prussian force ten times as strong and twenty times as well equipped, and would have done so but for the stubborn opposition of the junior and less spirited members of the Cabinet.

It would be tedious to enter into the details of the Schleswig-Holstein affair which brought this final reverse upon Palmerstonian diplomacy, but Palmerston's methods on this occasion are worth examining, if only because they were the last throw in the long gamble. To the end he was incorrigibly his old self, jumping his colleagues, committing them first and consulting them afterwards. In August 1863 he had told the House of Commons greatly to its alarm :—

> We are convinced—I am convinced, at least—that if any violent attempt were made to overthrow the rights and to interfere with the independence of Denmark, those who made the attempt would find in the result that it would not be Denmark alone with which they would have to contend.[1]

Gladstone has left it on record that in saying this Palmerston "spoke entirely of his own motion and without the authority or knowledge of the Cabinet in which nothing had happened to render likely any declaration of any kind on the subject."[2] Inevitably it was construed by the

[1] *See* "Life of the Second Earl of Granville," by Lord Fitzmaurice, i, 452.
[2] Gladstone's Life, ii, 116.

Danes as a promise of English support, if they resisted the Prussians. Resist they did, and, to do Palmerston justice, he fought his hardest to act up to his words.

In the following year, and once more without consulting any of his colleagues except Russell, he informed the Austrian Ambassador that if an Austrian squadron on its way to the Baltic were to pass along the English coast in order to face the Austrian and Prussian squadrons which the Danes had defeated off Heligoland he would regard it as an affront and an insult to England, and that "he would not stand such a thing, and rather than stand it he would resign office." Again the Cabinet declined to have its hands forced, and, failing English support, the Danes concluded an armistice. But the negotiations that followed quickly came to a deadlock, and once more Palmerston and Russell were for backing them in resisting the terms that the Prussians insisted upon. The two old men fought a desperate rear-guard action against Queen and Court and the majority of the Cabinet, and again there was a violent disagreement as to whether Russell had not given a highly important pledge to the Danish Plenipotentiary without the consent of the Cabinet.[1] The end came on June 25th, when Palmerston and Russell, Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, were almost alone for war. The Prime Minister, Lord Morley tells us, "held his head down while the talk proceeded, and then at last said in a neutral voice, 'I think the Cabinet is against war.'"[2] It is improbable that his feelings were neutral, for this decision was the end of Palmerstonism.

Lord Robert Cecil said with a sneer in the debate which followed that if Mr. Cobden had been Foreign Secretary instead of Lord Russell, he "fully believed this country would have occupied a position proud and noble compared to that which she occupied at this moment. She would at least have been entitled to the credit of holding out in the name of England no hopes which she did not intend to fulfil, of entering into no engagements from which she was

[1] "Life of the Second Earl of Granville," i, 470–1.
[2] Gladstone's Life, ii, 118.

ready to recede." The sarcasm was justified, but what strikes us when we look back on these transactions is the complete recklessness of the principal performers. They were the oldest and most experienced of British statesmen, but it seems never to have occurred to them to relate the thing they wished to do with the means they had of doing it. It cannot even be said that they were ignorant, for if we look to their correspondence we find Palmerston writing to Russell in February of this year, a moment when he was less inclined to action : "The truth is that to enter into a military conflict with all Germany on Continental ground would be a serious undertaking. If Sweden and Denmark were actively co-operating with us, our 20,000 men might do a good deal ; but Austria and Prussia could bring 200,000 or 300,000 into the field and would be joined by the smaller German States." Yet with this knowledge of the opposing forces, and without any effort to increase the British force in the interval, he and Russell drove furiously towards war, and at the end condoled with each other over the disadvantages of having in a Cabinet able men who "will have opinions and hold to them," and whose opinions are "generally on the timid side"—so different from Pitt, who had only "Westmoreland" and his like to consider, or Peel, who had only "Goulburne and Hardinge." And yet in the very letter in which he offers this consolation Palmerston blandly remarks that if we had gone to war "Prussia would have rallied all the smaller German Powers around her and we should equally have failed in saving Denmark."[1] Lord Malmesbury, who moved (and carried) the vote of censure on this occasion in the House of Lords, adds as a footnote to his "Memoirs" :—

> It is perhaps well that we did not enter into this contest, as our army was not armed at that time, like the Prussians, with the breech-loader, and we should probably have suffered in consequence the same disaster as the Austrians did two years later.[2]

Such was the end of the sporting diplomacy which had

[1] "Life of Palmerston," ii, 438.
[2] "Memoirs of an Ex-Minister," ii, 315.

delighted the London public for the best part of a generation, and a year later its principal exponent had passed from the scene. With the rise of the Prussian military power the country was faced with the alternative of following the Bismarck lead into Continental militarism or abandoning the notion of dictating to the European potentates. For the next thirty years it chose on the whole the second alternative, though it gave itself an outing under Disraeli on the comparatively safe ground of the Eastern question. The ruling assumption during these years was that Great Britain herself was inviolable, and that if she were compelled to go to war she could make it sufficiently disagreeable for any of her neighbours who had either sea-borne commerce or possessions across the sea to compel them to respect her. This in its turn assumed that none of the military Powers would challenge her at sea, and when that assumption failed she found herself driven back into European entanglements.

We are tempted to read back the suppositions of the later period into the earlier, but to do so would be a serious mistake. The scientific technique of later times—the Intelligence Departments, the General Staffs, the Committees of Imperial Defence, the elaborate comparisons of relative armaments, the incessant testing of the ground before committing anybody to anything—are altogether later developments. Compared with the grim masters of modern war and policy, Palmerston bears all the marks of the amateur. His talk was racy, of the race-course and the prize-ring. He was a lord and a country gentleman, a magnate of the turf, and in all capacities a sportsman. He said so himself repeatedly, and the country agreed that there was nothing better a statesman could be. Between the fall of one great military system and the rise of the next there was an interval of breezy pugilism in which the British people thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and did some considerable services to the world under this master of the noble art. But there was a limit to these performances, and it was reached in 1864.

PALMERSTON AND PALMERSTONISM

2

There has been much shaking of heads in recent years over the decay of Cabinet discipline, and it is commonly assumed that complete loyalty between colleagues and rigid observance of the principle of collective responsibility were shining virtues among nineteenth-century statesmen. The preceding narrative, to say nothing of the records of diarists and biographers, may reasonably suggest doubts on that subject. Perfect service in a Cabinet demands a combination of qualities which is seldom found in one individual, and would be almost miraculous in a collection of fifteen or twenty individuals. Mr. Gladstone's first Government probably came nearer the ideal than any in modern times, and the Conservative Government which followed kept up the tradition in circumstances of increasing difficulty. Palmerston, as we have just seen, thought it within the rules of the game to jump his claims when his colleagues were in doubt, and was throughout his life extremely impatient of the trammels of collective action. In yet another respect he was ultra-modern. He communicated freely with the newspapers, preferably with the *Times* when Delane had become an intimate,[1] but with any other paper that would serve his purpose when he was on the warpath. Mr. Kingsley Martin, the author of a recent monograph[2] on one phase of his career, has been at much pains to elucidate his singular alliance with the *Morning Post* for the embarrassment of the Aberdeen Cabinet (of which he was a member) in 1853. That alliance, says this writer, "was no secret, though the degree of its intimacy was a matter of guesswork. The *Post*, therefore, had an importance far greater than its circulation would at first suggest; for it early betrayed the disunity of the Cabinet. From the time when the divergence between the *Post* and the *Times* (which supported Lord Aberdeen) first became obvious, the cause of the *Post* was taken up with enthusiasm by all who loved Palmerston or hated Aberdeen." Palmerston, to put it bluntly,

[1] "Delane of *The Times*," by E. T. Cook, pp. 99–138.
[2] "The Triumph of Lord Palmerston," by R. Kingsley Martin.

was using the *Post* to force his reluctant chief into the Crimean War, and using it to get himself into the public eye as the hero of the hour and the necessary man if war should follow. In this he completely succeeded, as the sequel shows; but Mr. Kingsley Martin adds that the *Post's* attack on Aberdeen "had no connexion with the merits of any particular issue. It so happened that the Eastern question provided the material for the struggle, but any other question on which Palmerston and Aberdeen were known to differ would have served the same purpose." Aberdeen, it must in fairness be added, used the *Chronicle* to support his own views, until it became too bellicose for his tastes, and then, to the great annoyance of Abraham Hayward, its most notable contributor, suddenly deprived it of official information which he was sending to the *Times*.

It would be absurd in the face of this evidence to suggest that Victorian statesmen were innocent of dealings with the Press. Their communications with the leading journalists were in some respects more regular and more continuous than those of their successors in our own time. Palmerston, says the writer just quoted, "was probably the first English statesman who deliberately ingratiated himself with papers of all shades of opinion," and all the records show that he took enormous pains with this part of the technique of the public life. Whatever might be the calls on him, he was always accessible to the reporters, always willing to adjust his arrangements to their convenience or that of their newspapers. When a meeting had been fixed at an inconvenient hour for the newspapers, he was willing to make private orations in his room in his hotel, so that a late speech should not go unreported in the next morning's papers. He was well rewarded for these pains. After his death the editor of a prominent paper wrote that "there never was a man who was so great a favourite personally, not with the reporters only but with all the gentlemen filling the higher positions on the Press, as the late Lord Palmerston. The reporters of all the papers, without reference to the point as to whether the paper they represented were favour-

LORD PALMERSTON

From a Plaster-cast of a Bust by G. G. Adams in the National Portrait Gallery.

able or opposed to his Government, vied with each other in their anxiety to pay attention to whatever he said."[1]

Herein Palmerston (as a journalist may be permitted to say) was an example rather than a warning to other public men. Courtesy and consideration for those whose work is intimately bound up with his own, and whose ministrations are essential to his existence as a public man, need not expose even the greatest of performers to the suspicion of currying favour. Where the line is to be drawn in the relation between the two parties will be discussed in another chapter, but a *caveat* may be entered against the common assumption that when an editor is found to be in intimate relations with a Minister, the editor is necessarily the mouthpiece of the Minister. That certainly was not so in the case of Delane, whose intimacies were widely ramified between both political camps, and we need not suspect it between Palmerston and the *Morning Post.* Borthwick in spurring the Aberdeen Government on to a spirited anti-Russian policy was doing what was entirely congenial to him, and if Palmerston chose to ply him with munitions the convenience was mutual. Borthwick may have suspected that the splashing ex-Foreign Secretary was restive in the domestic sphere to which, as Home Secretary, he had been relegated in the Aberdeen Administration, but it was manifestly no part of his duties to divine the motives of his informant, so long as the information supplied was helpful to what he honestly considered to be his duty to the public.

So with the other newspapers whose activities are analysed in Mr. Kingsley Martin's monograph. The Aberdeen Cabinet was, no doubt, extremely leaky, and most of the newspapers seem to have been in touch with one or other of its members. But with a very few exceptions it was the Ministers and not the editors who were waiting for a sign, and the former were far more likely to seek than to give enlightenment. When that something not ourselves which makes for war is in the air, it needs no ministerial prompting to make the newspaper world highly sensitive

[1] "The Triumph of Lord Palmerston," p. 55.

to its influence. Early intimations of what a drifting Ministry wants to know about the public mind may generally be expected to reach Fleet Street before they reach Downing Street. In the light of subsequent knowledge the current of opinion, which in 1853 swept Liberal and Radical as well as Tory papers off their feet and carried the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Chronicle* and the *Daily News* on the same warlike tide as the *Morning Post*, seems strange and irrational. That the Crimean War might have been avoided with a little cool sagacity and clear steering on either side is now all but unanimously admitted. But journalists and statesmen are here shown to us—the first for the most part driving, and the second for the most part drifting—in the grip of circumstances compelling both to an unwanted and unnecessary war.

In such circumstances the attempt to apportion their respective responsibilities or to decide which took their inspiration from the other is of little use. The moral is that if statesmen let affairs reach the point at which the man in the street begins to say that war is inevitable, they will look in vain to the Press to pull them back. A few valiant men may stand firm and risk the penalties which opposition to the popular view brings on these occasions, but the majority will go zealously and honestly with the tide. The Press as a whole can never at these moments be an agency for peace. Its whole nature and inherent qualities—its sensitive contact with the public, its claims to represent and reflect opinion, its interests, its habits—disqualify it for that rôle ; and the statesman who supposes that he can control it at his will, use it one day to kindle war-like emotions, and the next to assuage the tumult, will always find that he has been living in a fool's paradise. The Minister who gives the Press the "tip for war" speeds it down an inclined plane from which he will try in vain to pull it back. A right understanding of this psychology of the Press is of enormous importance in the current discussions about "secret" and "open diplomacy," but I must reserve the consideration of that to a later occasion.

CHAPTER VI

SOME GREAT VICTORIANS

Peel and His Method—The Quintessence of Parliamentarism—From Peel to Disraeli—A Perilous Model—The Lure of Dizzy—From Palmerston to Gladstone—The Uses of Hostility—Thriving on Opposition—His Method with Opponents—Collective Loyalty—His Adroitness as Party Leader—As Orator and Debater—Gladstone-Baiting—An Immense Publicity—Salisbury-Intellectual and Recluse—His Massive Influence—Blazing Indiscretions—As Foreign Secretary—The Line of Least Resistance—The Last of the Peer-Premiers—The Coming of the New Diplomacy.

I

IN 1849 while Peel was yet watching the parliamentary scene, Disraeli was chosen to lead the Conservative party in the House of Commons. We can only guess what the feelings of the retired leader must have been at seeing the man who had assailed him with merciless invective at the most difficult moment of his career, chosen to sit in his place and lead the party which he had broken. The Victorian Age is rich in contrasted personalities, but Disraeli has in a peculiar degree the quality of throwing himself into relief against his contemporaries. Beside any of them, but especially beside Peel, he must always seem the adventurer. Peel, though dating from an earlier period, had become the quintessence of the steady British parliamentarism which came in with the Reform Bill. His solid virtues were crowned with great but normal ability ; he spoke supremely well the language which ordinary people understand ; he was the bridge between the middle classes and the aristocracy, and brought into the Conservative camp large numbers of the new business men who would otherwise have followed the Radicals. Twice in his career he suddenly and absolutely inverted what were supposed to be the settled convictions of a lifetime—first on

Catholic Emancipation and then on the Corn Laws—and yet was totally unsuspected of any but the highest and purest motives. Englishmen felt safe with Peel ; and if they could not be in office themselves, his opponents were always glad that he should be there. He may, as the Duke of Wellington said, " have had no manners," but his manner *vis à vis* the public and the House of Commons was perfect. Even when his circumstances were equivocal, he bore himself in such a way that he seemed always to be doing the right thing.

If everybody wanted Peel, nobody wanted Disraeli. He forced his way all the time, insisting that the House of Commons should hear him and that his party should take him and put him into the highest place. Take him they had to, and his conquest was finally complete. But there was struggle and mortification all the way. Six years after he had been appointed leader in the Commons, Derby deliberately refused to take office, when the Aberdeen Government had resigned during the Crimean War, on the ground, as he told the Queen, that he had no one " capable of 'governing' the House of Commons." This may have been partly Derby's prejudice, but the surprising thing is not that the House of Commons should have been reluctant, but that it should ever have consented to be " governed " by this manifestly exotic being, with his debts, his novels, his orientalism, his perennial pose of being a man of mystery and destiny. Nothing seemingly could have been more un-English, more challenging to everything that the House of Commons likes and admires or thinks safe and wise.

The career of Disraeli is so untypical that it will always be a perilous model for those who dream of imitating it. It was in him the manifestation of a personality which made honest and characteristic what would be mere play-acting if practised by the normal Englishman. Reading his Life, one gets the conviction that his all but incredible character was real and genuine, and that he was never more himself than when he seems most unlike anything that ever was. So far as he is an example, it is of an amazing industry,

perseverance and courage, overcoming all obstacles. Of the thirty-nine years of his public life, thirty-two were spent in Opposition. Again and again the prize was dashed from him just when it seemed to be within his grasp. The Whigs in their wisdom decided that the Tory party should have little spells of office which were just long enough to keep its appetite whetted, and to prevent its organization from going to pieces, but not long enough to enable it to take root or to enable any of its members to prove their quality as Ministers. Disraeli was undaunted through it all. His conviction that his hour would come ; his determination to be even with the men who had blocked his path, carried him through all discouragements and mortifications, and gave him a capacity for suffering fools gladly in which he is almost unique among very clever men.

Above all he stuck to the House of Commons—that alpha and omega of the old parliamentary practice. I retain a vivid image of him from a visit to the Strangers' Gallery of the House of Commons in 1873, when I was about eleven years old. I have forgotten the subject of debate ; it seemed interminable and unintelligible, and no one of any importance took part in it. The Treasury bench was all but empty ; Gladstone came in once, and I got an excited glimpse of him for a few minutes before he disappeared again behind the Speaker's chair, but there all the time sat Disraeli, his head down, his arms folded, one leg crossed over the other, absolutely immobile hour after hour. The strange face, so exactly reproduced in Millais's last portrait of him, the solitariness of the attitude, the lure which he had for all eyes caught my childish imagination, and for the next five years " Dizzy " was my hero. This peculiar fascination, which was something different in kind from that exercised by any other politician in our time, must be realized by those who would understand his career. His oratorical gifts—sparkling epigram, audacious invective, Corinthian ornament—were those of a young man, and, when he came finally to power, little of them remained. I have even heard parliamentary journalists say that in their experience he was a dull and rather

inaudible speaker. But this fascination remained and increased to the end, and has made him since his death the object of a cult which none of his contemporaries has enjoyed.

2

The transition of the Tory party from Peel to Disraeli was not more abrupt than that of the Liberal party from Palmerston to Gladstone. It is difficult to find any connecting link between the sporting statesmanship of Palmerston and the serious Liberalism of Gladstone. In 1865 the leader of the Liberal party was still—in his 81st year—a plunger, a man of the world, the spokesman of all that was spirited and pugnacious in his countrymen, a man whom the caricaturists habitually represented with a straw in his mouth and his hands in his pockets. In 1868 the leader was a devout and ecclesiastically minded Christian, who appealed fervently to the conscience of the nation, whose politics were an integral part of his religion, who vibrated with a sense of his duty at home and abroad. To men of my generation, Gladstone will always be the old man eloquent. For us he stood out as the embodiment of venerable authority going on to the end and beyond it with unquenchable courage and tenacity. But he too had a long and difficult apprenticeship, and his life up to the age of fifty does not fill the first of the three volumes of his biography. There were many moments in his earlier career when all parties gave him up as impossible, and when those who cast horoscopes declared positively that such a combination of great gifts and queer scruples as his character presented was totally unsuited to the public life. Men said that he had lost his way and was obviously designed by nature to be an Archbishop and not a Prime Minister.

A study of Gladstone's career brings out the conditions in which hostility is useful, and in which it may be fatal or highly damaging to a public man. Greatly as serious Liberals disliked and distrusted Disraeli, their sentiments were as nothing to the animosity which Gladstone excited in English Conservatives between the years 1868 and his

retirement in 1894. Differences about his character devastated society, divided families, even destroyed nerves and health. His defeats seemed like personal calamities to his followers, as did his triumphs to his opponents. His secret was that the enthusiasm for him always rose a little higher than the antagonism. He was never one of those whose supporters admit (in private) that what their opponents say of them is unfortunately true. The true Gladstonian admitted no flaw in the object of his veneration. There were at least twenty years during which any Liberal speaker who found himself in difficulties had only to mention his name to keep an audience occupied in clapping their hands and stamping their feet until he had recovered his thread. If for one half his countrymen Gladstone was Satan made manifest, to the other half he was saint and apostle.

He thus throve on opposition, but his management of his opponents was consummate. He could blaze with indignation about causes, but he seldom or never lost his temper with an individual. He would brush aside in a sentence, generally of studious courtesy, the most violent and vitriolic attack, and launch immediately upon his theme. He had an air of natural large-mindedness which made critics of even considerable stature look small. This absence of rancour and complete absorption in the thing he was doing raised him in an extraordinary way above the common level of recriminating politicians. He showed the same qualities in the inner circle of colleagues and friends. It is not always that Prime Ministers are loyal to their own Governments, but no one ever charged Mr. Gladstone with the slightest deviation from his own scrupulous regard for collective responsibility. To the end of his life he bore uncomplainingly the burden of obloquy which fell on him for the disaster to Gordon, though he was by no means the principal culprit. His talk in private was singularly free and indiscreet, but he could never be drawn into any serious criticism of colleagues. Invited to admit that a certain legal luminary was not a man of sparkling temperament, he said with a twinkle in his eye, " no colleague of mine was ever dull ! "

To these great and simple qualities he added a remarkable adroitness—some called it cunning—in the management of a party. Eminent men in later days have guarded themselves by elaborate preparation, and even by the use of the written manuscript against the dangers of incautious speech, but Gladstone had no need of these precautions. He had fortified himself with an elaborate protective apparatus of qualifications which made it extremely difficult to catch him tripping. This caused much amusement to his contemporaries, but its value as parliamentary armour was undeniable. When an opponent quoted an old speech, he almost invariably interjected "Read on," not, as his colleagues surmised, because he remembered what he had said, but because he was quite sure on general principles that he had not said, without qualification, what his opponent imputed to him. And so it generally turned out. He was also extremely resourceful in explaining away what on the face of it seemed a positive statement. When twitted with postponing a certain measure which he had promised should be "in the forefront of the Liberal programme," he replied with the utmost gravity that the "forefront" was "a line and not a point." Impetuous as he could be on certain subjects which, like the Irish question, possessed him body and soul, he was yet of opinion that on many others the Prime Minister or leader of the party should be the last to be converted. Again and again he required the most positive evidence that a question was "ripe for action" before he would commit himself on it. Always he drew a sharp line between permissible opinions which he or others might hold as private individuals and opinions which he could pronounce *ex cathedrâ* as Prime Minister or leader of the party. His remarkable success in keeping extremists and moderates within the one fold of the Liberal party was due largely to this theory of party leadership. The former believed that, if only they were patient, Mr. Gladstone would be converted; the latter hoped that, if they held on, they would prevent his conversion. Never in later times did the conversion of one man seem of such importance or speculations about his state of mind assume

so lively an interest. Stead used to say that the leader of the Liberal party was like a tug with a string of barges in tow which could not make any sudden turn without causing inextricable confusion in the fairway. No one as a rule was better aware of this than Gladstone, and his one impetuous turn in 1885 was the exception to a life-long habit of caution.

In my boyhood I had many talks with an aged man of letters who had begun life about the year 1820 as a reporter in Parliament. He made living images for me of men who would otherwise have been purely historical figures, and I still seem to see Liverpool, Castlereagh, Brougham, the "Duke" and Peel through his eyes, and at that period. But one figure towered above all these in his memory, and I can still hear the thrill in his voice as he spoke of the "divine Canning" and described the dazzling oratory and imposing personality of that supreme Parliament man. Many of us in after days came to think of Gladstone in just this way. He too towered over his contemporaries, and his mere presence on the scene seemed to extinguish other people. Forty years ago the first thought of every spectator in the galleries of the House of Commons was whether he would see Mr. Gladstone and have the good luck to hear him make even a short speech. His beautiful presence, his great authority, his long service, the range and variety of his gifts, his power of appealing to heart and conscience gave him a pre-eminence which none could challenge. Other men might stand up to him, and even floor him, on particular subjects or occasions, but no one came near him as an all-round debater and leader. He was as powerful on the platform as in the House ; he was good on the great occasions, and often at his best when he cut suddenly into debate. Joseph Chamberlain was heard to say after a twenty minutes' impromptu by Gladstone, entirely at his expense, "that is the speech I would rather have made than any I ever heard in the House." Having witnessed the last of his great battles from its beginning to its close, and for years together heard nearly every important speech that he made in the House of Commons, I can think of no

effort by any individual which for fierce zeal and sustained energy at all compares with this effort of Gladstone's or which in the same degree displays a powerful mind concentrated on a single purpose. His critics said that he had limitless powers of self-deception, but to his followers he seemed an inspired prophet calling them to judgment.

Except for a few purple patches that are enshrined among gems of parliamentary oratory, Mr. Gladstone's speeches are little read in these days, but that is no reflection on them for their own particular purpose. The good parliamentarian does not deliver literary compositions for the benefit of posterity ; he is the child of the moment using words as tools to further his political business in the world of action. Gladstone was supreme at that, and he never anticipated his hour by any preparation that would commit him to a particular groove or prevent him from catching the mood of his hearers and giving it back to them in fervent improvisation. I have seen many of his notes for speeches, and they consisted almost entirely of headings to keep the argument clear, with facts, figures and handy quotations grouped under them, a few words and phrases thrown in, and now and again, though this more rarely, a sentence written out. All the rest was the creation of the moment, aided by an extraordinary sensitiveness to the currents of opinion on all the benches, and liable to digressions on the spur of the moment which led the speaker into a maze of side-issues, only to emerge triumphant on his main road. Reported the next day in the newspapers it often seemed highly involved, but it seldom sounded so, and one of the fascinations of listening to it was to follow the speaker as he threaded his way through sentences of impossible intricacy, and found safety and grammar in a trenchant conclusion.

Skilful interruptions could drive him right and left of his argument or send him impetuously down blind alleys, from which return seemed impossible. But he always did somehow get back or give a sudden turn to the irrelevant which lent it a plausible appearance of being not only

germane, but absolutely essential to his argument. His habit of following where his interlocutors led was the despair of whips and even sometimes of his colleagues. Gladstone-baiting became a fine art among his opponents. The Fourth Party, and especially Balfour and Randolph Churchill, made their reputation on it. To "draw the old man," to stoke him up, encourage him to enlarge in his spacious way on the innumerable things that interested him, was in the 'eighties a recognized branch of party tactics and one of the surest ways of consuming time. The Gladstone-baiter came armed with sheaves of quotations from his old speeches, which he used with a cool impertinence. I remember vividly one night when Randolph Churchill produced a big bundle from his pocket and began reading, while Gladstone jumped across the table at him with a menacing forefinger outstretched. Presently he read one sentence to the middle and then stopped. "No, that's too good," he said, "I must keep that till next time," and calmly put the bundle back into his pocket.

Like all eminent men of the old school, Gladstone was a most patient watcher of debate. His advice to young men, like Disraeli's, was to "stick to the House," and his own practice conformed to his precept. He sat hour after hour through debates which no modern Cabinet Minister and scarcely even an Under-secretary would grace with his presence in these times. He was a frequent diner-out, and took a liberal dinner-hour, but he reappeared punctually about a quarter to ten generally in evening-dress with a disorderly white tie straying towards the back of his neck. The departmental duties of Prime Ministers and Secretaries of State are no doubt more exacting in these times than forty years ago, but the old school left an impression of endurance and hardy physique which the later men have scarcely lived up to. Gladstone and his contemporaries sat in the House till the small hours of the morning, and were early at their desks the next day. Gladstone felled trees in the recess, but he played no golf and took no week-ends while he was in London. On Sundays he was what he called a "twicer," i.e. he went always twice to church,

but the London Sunday counted as one of the most important days in politics and, strict Churchman as he was, he could scarcely guard himself from the private talks and conferences behind the scenes for which it was appointed in the minds of secular politicians.

The Victorians loved to think of their statesmen as learned and cultured men with the all-round accomplishment of the Admirable Crichton. Here, too, Gladstone gave them abundant satisfaction. He seemed to be equal to every subject. He was a scholar with Homer and Horace at his finger-tips ; a theologian who could do battle with the giants of a " godless science " ; a linguist who could on the spur of the moment make a speech in Italian or French, who knew his Dante by heart, who surprised by sudden and copious references to obscure foreign authors. It mattered not that experts pronounced his scholarships out-of-date or his theology mediæval ; he seemed to move in a large and spacious way through all the departments of human and divine wisdom. If he praised a novel, the fortune of its author was made ; if he could be lured into controversy, the widest audience was secured for his opponent as well as himself. He had, as no other man of these times, the faculty of kindling interest at his touch. In that respect he was not only the leading politician but the supreme public man of his generation. His publicity was immense, but the newspapers went after him, not he after the newspapers. Thousands of humble people had his portrait on their walls or a little plaster bust of him on their mantelshelves ; every detail about his life, his family, his religious practices, his hats, his collars, the number of times he masticated his food, were judged to be " copy." Pilgrims went in thousands to Hawarden and reverently bore away chips from the trees he felled. Queen Victoria was at one time reported to look askance at this infringement by a subject of what was supposed to be a royal monopoly, but neither he, nor she, nor anyone could help it. The inexhaustible interest which Gladstone had for the multitude was a thing which made itself—a dissociable something attaching to his personality.

3

Gladstone and Disraeli, though sharply contrasted in other respects, were alike in this lure which they exercised on the public mind. "Dizzy" had an equal attraction for those whom Gladstone left cold or repelled, and together they divided and led the country as no two men have ever done before or since. Salisbury represents a type entirely remote from both of them. He seemed to be a purely intellectual man, and in his later days almost a recluse. He obtained a massive kind of influence and authority with almost none of the gifts that are commonly thought essential to the public man. No one seemed to know him, or to have more than a dim idea of what he really was like. Again and again I have asked men who were presumably brought into intimate association with him how he struck them, how he worked in the inner circle, and was never able to get any clear impression in my own mind. They said that he was courteous but absent-minded, reserved but incisive in his talk, that he wrote an immense number of letters, and would answer the humblest correspondent in his own hand, that he was sincerely religious, but had a scientific instinct which made him modern and open-minded in many of his views. But the total impression which he made on them as upon the public appears to have been singularly impersonal. They greatly respected him; they saw him as a force and an influence, testifying silently to the old order, hating fuss, noise and réclame of all kinds, immersed in foreign affairs, and believing that most things at home or abroad were better left alone.

It was not always so. For the rank in which he was born he had had a quite adventurous early life, having contracted a marriage that his father disliked, and been put to the necessity of earning his bread with his pen. With pen or tongue he was a dashing young man, and when he got into the House of Commons, he was not long in earning the reputation of a "master of flouts and gibes and sneers." To the end of his days he retained the habit of flinging out sudden little gibes—his opponents called them "blazing

indiscretions "—which gave the one flavour of personality to his speeches. But as he advanced in years he seemed more and more to be thrown in upon himself, and apart from these flashes, his discourses were mostly about credit and stability, the importance of preserving institutions, the mischievousness of Jack Cade politics and all the other things that strike chords in the conservative mind. Adventures for him were over when he became Prime Minister in 1886. There was no one to challenge his authority in his own party, there were no perplexing choices of policy such as confront a Radical leader. The country was extremely prosperous and Labour not yet in sight. His party wanted nothing except that he should resist Home Rule and Newcastle Programmes, and buy Liberal Unionist support as cheaply as possible. In European affairs he followed the line of least resistance, keeping in with Germany and the then dominant Triple Alliance, and buying its support against French hostility in Egypt with the necessary concessions, which included the cession of Heligoland. The Russian seizure of Port Arthur launched him against his will upon the deep waters of the Far East, and there for a time he floundered until he found his bearings in the Japanese alliance—the last act of policy for which he was responsible. After his death a friend sent me an extract from a diary in which he had noted the fact that he had travelled up to London in the same compartment with Lord Salisbury, and had observed that he read the leading article in the *Westminster Gazette*, then put it aside, then after a few minutes picked it up again and read the same article through again, and after that seemed lost in thought. The article, I found on looking it up, was about the Anglo-Japanese alliance, and in it I had drawn a bow at a venture and said that it left a dangerous possibility of war between Russia and Japan.

His adventures with Lord Beaconsfield in the 'seventies seemed to have cured him of all splashing politics, and in after years he comprehensively described the performances of those years as a " backing of the wrong horse." John Morley regarded him as his ideal Foreign Secretary, and

the country in general had implicit confidence that he would keep the peace and do nothing rash. He seemed rather a contemplative man than a man of action, and his speeches had always an air of thinking aloud. He agreed with Bagehot in disliking ideas of "unseasonable originality," but he had an original way of dealing with the commonplace, and his style was pointed and pungent. For a man who disliked rhetoric and eschewed all gestures, he was a remarkably effective speaker to a great audience. I heard him several times in the Albert Hall—that hardest of all tests for the not quite perfect speaker—and each time he made himself heard from end to end without any apparent effort or raising of his voice above its normal pitch.

It seems to be agreed that such a career would be impossible in these times. The Tory party, as well as the Liberal and Labour parties, are now of opinion that a peer must not be a Prime Minister, and that a Prime Minister must not be a recluse living behind park walls. Even in Salisbury's time the position of Peer-Premier was beginning to have serious drawbacks. The last five years of his third Administration are more properly described as the Chamberlain period than the Salisbury period. Striking across all his preconceived ideas of both the methods and the objects of politics came this formidable man from Birmingham with his Radical ideas, his restless ways, his aggressive imperialism. One may surmise that the circumstances which required Salisbury to take Chamberlain into his Cabinet were a hard necessity. No two men could have been more divided in temperament and general outlook on life. It was whispered in 1899 that Salisbury had a deep sympathy with Kruger against the hard driving of his Colonial Secretary, and that he went very reluctantly into the struggle between Rand magnates and "Dutch rural simplicity." The South African War was in effect the end of nearly everything that Salisbury stood for, and the opening of a new chapter in which modern politicians were launched upon uncharted seas.

CHAPTER VII

THE NEW POLITICS AND ITS EXPONENTS

Chamberlain and the New Politics—Americanizing our Institutions—A First Appearance—His Provincial Backing—Coercing Gladstone—Operations from Within—The Unauthorized Programme—A Masterly Campaign—Using Opponents — Personal Characteristics — Gladstone's Mistake — Principles of Strategy—Methods in Debate—A "Second-best" Career—*The Last Campaign—Contrast with Rosebery*—The Intervener in Public Affairs—Between Parties—A Use for the Intervener—Parnell—His Eccentricities—The National Tribute and its Reception—His Catastrophe—A Grand Miscalculation—The Sin of Being Found Out—Public Men and Scandal—A Question of Leadership.

I

JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN is so deeply the originator of the modern kind of politics that we must sharply distinguish him from his eminent contemporaries, all or nearly all of whom were in the apostolic descent from the old statesmen. He seemed to his generation to have come suddenly from nowhere, breaking the hallowed ritual which had been respected even by Bright and Cobden, provincializing and Americanizing the authentic metropolitan tradition enshrined for centuries at Westminster. In the 'seventies Chamberlain was for millions of Englishmen the symbol of what is now known as the "red peril." He had toyed with Republican opinions and was even supposed to have remained seated when the Queen's health was being drunk; he advocated a "universal Godless education," and held views on other subjects which alarmed even the left-wing of the Liberal party. Above all, he was, in collaboration with that other man of wrath, Schnadhorst, the inventor and manipulator of the Birmingham "caucus," which threw a dangerous challenge to the established

methods of selecting candidates for Parliament and threatened to make free men the slaves of a political machine.

In sober fact, Chamberlain's preparation for politics was highly honourable and creditable. In youth he had devoted himself to the affairs of his own city and had laboured wisely and well in its service. He held that an infusion of national politics was essential to give life to municipal controversies, and had deliberately organized the Birmingham local elections on party political lines. This was his bridge into national politics, and his zeal and ruthlessness in local affairs had made him a reputation far beyond Birmingham when he first became a candidate for Parliament. By this time he knew from practical experience a great many things about housing, sanitation, education and the life of the poor in towns which were a vague hearsay to most politicians even on the Liberal side. And when he got into Parliament, he proved at once to be quite unlike the image of him which the newspapers had presented to the public. Instead of a demagogue flooding the House of Commons with windy rhetoric, there appeared a highly accomplished and self-possessed debater, making short and incisive speeches, using words with a cutting edge, possessed of all the parliamentary arts, with a soft but penetrating and expressive voice. The performance was, if anything, too perfect. "It is all very nice, very nice, Mr. Chamberlain," said an old member whose advice he sought, "but the House would take it as such a great compliment, if now and again you could manage to break down."

Perfect as his manner was, he abated none of his opinions to please a conservative Parliament. He pressed for disestablishment, secular education, the abolition of flogging in the army, temperance reform, and everything else that moderate men thought extreme and unseasonable. More than once he found himself in collision with his titular leader, Lord Hartington, and then his tongue was merciless. "It was rather inconvenient," he said in a debate from which the leader had pointedly absented himself, "that they should have so little of the presence of the noble lord, lately the leader of the Opposition, but now the

leader of a section only." Those who recall the internal situation in the Liberal party about the year 1879 will appreciate the meaning. By a dozen little touches of this kind combined with an adroit stage-management which always timed his speeches for the right moment and never multiplied them unduly, he had made a very decided mark when the election of 1880 returned Mr. Gladstone to power. What was more, he had behind him a large regional following in Birmingham and the Midlands. This was his own speciality. Other men had a public distributed over the country; Chamberlain had a solid localized band of followers prepared to back him through thick and thin, to go wherever he led, and even to transfer its allegiance from one party to another, if he so decreed. This was an enormous advantage to him throughout his life. It saved him from the vicissitudes of electioneering which afflicted other public men and especially those of the Liberal party ; it gave him a base of operations for any new departure, and made him both independent of and a source of alarmed anxiety to the London politicians.

After the election of 1880 came his first stroke in the great game. Returning from the elections Gladstone learnt with a shock of surprise that Chamberlain expected to be in the Cabinet. In fact Gladstone was presented with an ultimatum by Dilke and Chamberlain. He sent for Dilke, but " to his extreme amazement," as his biographer tells us, " Dilke refused to serve unless either himself or Chamberlain were in the Cabinet. The Prime Minister might make his choice between them; then the other would accept a subordinate post." Otherwise both would remain out. Gladstone, we are told, " discoursed severely on this enormity," and the case was adjourned while he recovered from the shock. A very severe shock it was. Here was a new man without any experience of office, without even the usual credentials of public school and university education, claiming to leap all the stages by which young men pass gradually to high office, and to enter the Cabinet at one bound ! Such a thing had never occurred to Gladstone as possible, and the manner in which the coercion was

applied heaped offence upon offence. With great difficulty Gladstone was prevailed upon to believe that "the man from Birmingham" really was an important person, or at least that other people thought him so, for his own conviction on that point wavered for the next six years, and was only settled when events had passed beyond his control. In 1880 he so far yielded as to permit him to enter the Cabinet in what was then thought to be the rather junior position of President of the Board of Trade.

From 1880 onwards we see Chamberlain developing the technique of the modern popular leader from within the Cabinet. He had to prove to his stalwarts in Birmingham and elsewhere that he had not sold the pass by taking office in a Cabinet in which so many Whigs sat in the seats of the mighty. This put some strain on Gladstonian ideas of Cabinet solidarity. Gladstone himself had seen many games played between Minister and Minister, and even between Ministers and editors in the best Victorian times, but they were all, so to speak, within the circle, or at least confined to an area of which St. James's Street was the western and Printing-House Square the eastern boundary. But this new man was in touch with new and strange people beyond the metropolitan area, and he seemed constantly to be signalling to them from the innermost sanctuary. Newspapers supposed to be in touch with him were extraordinarily well-informed about intimate affairs; schemes were attributed to him of which his colleagues knew nothing; he seemed to be bidding for an independent leadership. He said things about the Church, about Irish landlords, about affairs in the Transvaal which had no authority from his colleagues, and sent some of them plucking at Gladstone's sleeve and imploring him to exercise discipline. He even ostentatiously abstained from a division in which, by all Cabinet rules, a Minister was bound to record his vote. Remonstrance proved useless. There was a careful deliberation in all that Chamberlain did; no incontrollable impulse carried him into indiscretions which he was prepared to retract. When rebuked, he was, as he used to say, "unrepentant and unashamed," the same cool un-

ruffled figure with the mask-like face and exasperating smile.

Early in the day Gladstone seems to have decided that there was nothing to be done about it and, since he was not prepared for a break, wisely refrained from trying. Colleagues like W. E. Forster protested that they were the victims of a campaign which their junior colleague was directing against them from inside the Cabinet, but there was no remedy. Queen Victoria herself had to be put off with explanations and promises of amendment made vicariously by the Prime Minister which the sinner himself completely ignored. After four years no one could say that he had yielded an inch to any of the influences which are supposed to quench the ardours of the Radical in office ; on the contrary he had dragged reluctant Whigs along with him in campaigns of popular oratory and made them, under cover of their own principle of collective responsibility, connivers with him in stinging denunciations of the House of Lords and other institutions which in their hearts they revered.

The situation was embarrassing, for none of them could protest to any purpose without resigning, and resignation was not in their scheme. Worse than all, the new man was looking ahead while they were merely drifting, and apparently to a certain disaster which awaited an unpopular Government, if nothing could be done to retrieve the position. In Chamberlain's view there was something to be done, and done very quickly. The thing needed was a programme which would rally the town workmen and bring the newly enfranchised labourer into the Radical fold. The Whigs of the Government had consented to his enfranchisement, but they had not thought of the consequences and seemed to suppose that nothing would be changed by it. Programmes at that period were novel and audacious expedients savouring of Americanism and Convention politics. Till then the party leaders had been content with manifestoes on the eve of the poll and had generally prided themselves on entering office unpledged. Gladstone, it is true, had set the fashion of campaigning, but

he had concentrated on one issue, and generally confined himself to attacking his opponents. Chamberlain conceived a campaign and a programme covering the whole field of domestic policy, and making definite promises to the electors. Authority frowned on it, and it had, therefore, to be "unauthorized"—a dangerous mistake on the part of the Whigs, who soon discovered that in declining responsibility they had lost control. The programme went out, and Chamberlain became its hero, and the more its hero because obstructive and reactionary persons were supposed to be at work against him behind the scenes.

The fall of the Government in June, 1885, prevented any sharp issue between him and the right wing of the Cabinet, and from this moment he was "unmuzzled." Former colleagues might complain, as they did with much vigour, as his alarming ideas were developed on the platform between September and November, but there was nothing they could do, and by this time Gladstone seemed to be almost benevolent. Looking back on it from some experience in after days, I am still of opinion that this campaign was the best organized and most effective of any in our time. Chamberlain despised all tub-thumping oratory. His ideas, if extreme, according to the standards of the time, were clear and practical; and his programme seemed to be drawn with the neatness and precision of a contractor's specifications. There was something in it for everybody, and the whole was expounded in a series of speeches which were an orderly progression from start to finish. His style had a hard cold glitter which made every point luminously clear, and forbade all blurring or softening of the outlines. No one could possibly fail to understand what he meant or what he would do, if he had the opportunity.

Outside his own city he had no Press that he could rely upon for what is now called propaganda, and the fact that the venture was labelled "unauthorized" caused the official organs to walk delicately. But then, as later, Chamberlain made his opponents do the chief part of his Press business. He drew their fire and kept them in a state of exasperated clamour which exactly suited his purpose and placed him

in the centre of the picture during the critical weeks of the election. They rose in excited protest against the "detestable doctrine of ransom"—ransom due to the strong poor who would "make short work of private ownership if they were left alone"; they declared it to be both outrageous and irreverent that the "idle rich" should be compared to the lilies of the field which "toil not neither do they spin"; they roared at "three acres and a cow," and told the "cockney" to hold his tongue about things he didn't understand. All this was exactly what Chamberlain expected and intended; and week after week he kept the bonfire bright by throwing in just the requisite quantity of inflammable mixture, when it seemed to be waning. It was part of his art to be severely economical about this. Three parts of all his speeches were plain and practical exposition devoid of rhetoric, but he knew exactly the kind of sarcasm which would most infuriate the opponents, and he supplied it in exactly the right quantity. Above all, he let no one attack him without returning the blow and was as unsparing of former friends as present enemies. The whole country laughed when he characterized Hartington and Goschen as Rip van Winkle and the "skeleton at the feast."

When I was still an undergraduate I spent three days in his company while he was collecting material for the rural part of his programme in Wiltshire, and I had a hand in one or two of his meetings in the subsequent weeks. He left on me the impression, which was never obliterated afterwards, of being totally unlike anyone else, or anything which till then I had imagined a statesman to be. The orchid, the eyeglass, the inexhaustible cigars, the smart and even dapper appearance were so exactly the make-up that one would not expect in a tribune of the people that they suggested some clash in his personality. He was both alert and aloof, keenly watching, but keeping his thoughts to himself; kindly and courteous, but breaking into sudden and scornful characterizations of individuals, a man of obvious mystery with rather frightening qualities held in leash, but not in the least self-assertive or overbearing.

His voice was fascinating, but it had a dangerous quality in it, and a sentence begun in a low tone would come to a trenchant conclusion with something like a hiss. He was certainly not at all insensible of the "publicity value" of his idiosyncrasies, but they were so original in their design, and so neatly carried out that they were, as critics say, entirely convincing—which is more than can be said for the cultivated oddities of some public men.

It is easy to see how and why he jarred on Gladstone, who with all his developing Radicalism was still to the core Eton and Christ Church; but never was such a shock given to the loyalty of a left-wing as when Gladstone, on forming his Government in 1886, thought him suitably rated as President of the Local Government Board after his ringing exploits in the previous summer and autumn. A certain impetuous speech upbraiding old colleagues in the middle of the election seems to have weighed heavily at Hawarden, and Gladstone was said to have repeated three times over, "he doesn't know the rules of the game." It would be truer to say that he deliberately flouted them—and was prepared to take the consequences, though perhaps without fully calculating what these would be both to himself and to Gladstone.

The rights and wrongs of Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule and Chamberlain's reaction on the Irish question lie outside this chapter, which is concerned only with the methods of the two men. Argumentatively, Chamberlain was by no means bound to follow Gladstone because in the previous Parliament he had seemed to be in advance of him on the Irish question. Home Rule meant many different things, and he was entitled to place his own solution against Gladstone's. But what amazed and stupefied conventional politicians was that he crossed right over to the anti-Home Rulers, and within a few months was turning the whole of his batteries upon his old friends. It was expected that he would argue about details, obtain his terms and come back to a feast of fatted calf, or failing that, that he would have walked delicately and declared himself a sorrowful dissentient. No one imagined that he would

blow "the Round Table Conference" out of the water and place himself in the van of the Unionist campaign. Many foolish things were said about it. He had succumbed to the charms of dukes and duchesses, been tamed by the flattery which was certainly poured out without stint upon him by his former enemies. All this was nonsense. He was simply acting up to a theory of politics which forbade all half-way houses between party and party, and any sentimentality about old friends. If, as he decided, Gladstone's Home Rule was to be opposed, it had to be opposed tooth and nail, and every sacrifice made to come into line with the party opposing it. Away then with Radical programmes and disestablishment of churches until the Empire was safe, and in the meantime war and merciless war against the disintegrators. To Chamberlain political strategy was an exact science of which the principal rule was that there must be no fraternizing in the trenches and no wandering in no-man's land. You must be on one side or the other; on whichever side you were, you must hammer the other incessantly, and if circumstances required you to change sides, you must go on hammering and listen to no nonsense about your new opponents being old friends.

The old friends gasped. It seemed unthinkable and incredible. Weapons made in their arsenal, talents so evidently designed for the destruction of *their* opponents, experience of organization and propaganda learnt in their school, a disposition so obviously Radical, a habit of speech so clearly intended for the chastening of dukes and Tories—that all this should be taken bodily and placed at the disposal of the Tory party was unheard of, impossible. I doubt if any body of politicians ever suffered so much mental irritation and annoyance as Radicals under Chamberlain's attacks between 1886 and 1892. From association with them he knew all their weak and tender places, and seemed to take a positive pleasure in making them writhe. In vain they raked up his past, and printed in deadly parallel what he said to-day and what he said two years ago. He never defended himself, he never even admitted that he had changed, he always attacked. It was said at

the time that he had three golden rules for debate, "never apologize, never explain, never retract," and if a fourth were necessary it would have been "leave your opponent's strong points alone and go for his weak ones." A large part of his strength in debate was that he hardly ever attempted to answer what he could not answer effectively. Often and often I have watched him in debate, and wondered what answer he was going to make to this or that seemingly unanswerable point made by an opponent. In nine cases out of ten, he made no answer, but by the time he sat down he had changed the entire issue, and now the question was what answer the next man was going to make to him.

In all these ways he was by far the most efficient politician of his time. He seemed to care for nothing but politics; he had a deadly concentration on what he was doing, and a contempt for all amateurs. He got himself the reputation of the man who did things, who "put things through." He dabbled in nothing outside politics, made none of the discursive speeches about art, letters and religion which other politicians love, had no hobbies but the growing of orchids, and prided himself on taking no exercise. Everything to his vision was black or white, with clear-cut outlines and no half-tones. I have heard him say that from 1886 onwards his own career was a second-best, since the only thing worth having in public life was the Prime Ministership, which he knew to be beyond his grasp. But he was absolutely determined to make the very best of the second-best, and claimed, not without justification, that he had compelled the Tory party to take a large part of the unauthorized programme of his Radical days. With all his superficial inconsistencies, no man was from beginning to end more consistently himself in character and method To take nothing lying down, to go ruthlessly to a conclusion when once decided upon, to use all available means (including at times some extremely dangerous and equivocal ones) to a given end, and never to admit defeat, were his guiding maxims. His "new diplomacy" was merely his habitual platform method applied to Mr. Kruger, and his

special kind of commercial Imperialism was entirely in keeping with his previous thought and training. In the 1880 Cabinet Gladstone thought him a good deal of a jingo, and other of his colleagues had grave doubts about his orthodoxy on Free Trade. But still more like him was his method of launching his new programme on the Tory party in 1903. It was 1885 over again, with Mr. Balfour and Lord Salisbury playing the parts of Lord Hartington and Mr. Gladstone. As in 1885, so in 1903, he saw his party rapidly declining in favour and threatened with destruction unless something was done and done quickly. Others might drift or potter, but he at all events would show them how to change the issue, recover the offensive and bring confusion to their opponents. This time he miscalculated the forces against him, but he fought a losing battle with astonishing verve and courage, and showed himself to the end what he was at the beginning.

2

Sharply contrasted with him among the men of this time was Lord Rosebery, who had every gift that Chamberlain lacked, and lacked every quality that made Chamberlain powerful. Chamberlain in his time was the supreme type of the concentrated professional politician, Rosebery of the brilliant, discursive intervener in public affairs. To the one, politics were the openly proclaimed first and last thing in life ; to the other they were always half a dream and sometimes a nightmare. By the irony of fate Rosebery won early in life the prize for which Chamberlain strove all his life in vain ; and having won it and found it far from glittering, he could never be induced to pay the price of winning it again. To Chamberlain there were no politics but party politics, and an uncompromising choice of sides was the first duty of a politician. To Rosebery a party was at best an unpleasant necessity and at worst an odious kind of tyranny. Nothing pleased him more than to wander alone in no-man's land and draw the fire of both belligerents. He seemed to have all the gifts of a great

public man combined with an artist's distaste for the public life, and especially for that part of it which requires the taste and judgment of the individual to be deferred to the rough necessities of organized team-work.

Nec sine te nec tecum vivere possum was for several years the cry of the Liberal party to Lord Rosebery. Such eloquence, such wit, so glittering a position in the world of wealth and sport, were desirable assets even for a Liberal party, but the price demanded for them seemed constantly to rise until the bidders gave up in despair. To the official leaders he was an unceasing perplexity ; they demanded that he should come in or stay out, and he would do neither. He spoke when he chose and as he chose, and at the last to the confusion of the group which had been willing to accept him as their leader. In the end the party system extinguished him, and both parties concluded that there was no room for the man without party. The Liberal party added that peers had shown their natural disqualification for being Prime Ministers—a judgment which was confirmed seventeen years later by the Conservative party. But Rosebery was so unlike any other peer that ever was that the conclusion can hardly be said to have followed from the premise, however well justified it may be on other grounds.

Rosebery's career would probably have been different if he had spent even a few years in the House of Commons, or if the prize of the highest office had not fallen to him so early in life. The co-operative sense, the habit, as Mr. Gladstone used to say, of putting your mind into the common stock, which is the most serviceable quality of the public man, is probably better learnt in the House of Commons than anywhere else in the world. No man can sit long in that assembly without discovering the unprofitableness of the lonely furrow. But the question remains whether there is not or ought not to be a place in the public life for a man who, like Lord Rosebery, has caught the ear of the public and yet cannot be fitted into any of the prevailing moulds of opinion. Lord Rosebery himself undoubtedly did a signal service by pointing the way to peace in the South African

War in his famous Chesterfield speech, which could not have been delivered with the same effect by any man who was definitely labelled a party leader. His experience ought not, I think, to be taken as a discouragement to other distinguished men in like position to express themselves freely on a sufficient occasion. But in these days their difficulty is to find a platform outside the correspondence columns of newspapers. In an ideal commonwealth they would have special days set aside for them and be asked to occupy the pulpits of St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey.

3

The strangest figure of these times is the Irish leader, Parnell. One looks in vain for any other example of the same combination of the volcanic and the glacial as seemed to be in his character, or for such loyalty and such antipathy as he evoked. Parnell was the last man whom the Irish might have been expected to choose for their leader. He was a Protestant ; he was deeply reserved, frugal in speech, freezing in manners. He repelled intimacy, ruled with an iron hand, was never for a moment the good fellow or the pleasant companion. How far this was deliberate acting, and how far the expression of his real self was never decided. If he was acting, he was never found out ; he even ended as the tragic hero of a rather sordid romance. There was undoubtedly in his character something morbid and thwarted. His biographer displays him as grossly superstitious and strangely ignorant; he fell into a panic if he was in a room with three candles in it ; he kept an audience waiting for an hour and a quarter while he read up the elements of Irish history for a lecture he had undertaken to deliver, and confessed without shame that the subject was new to him.

The strong silent men who sway multitudes with their glance are commoner in fiction than in life. Most of the strong men in modern times have been voluminous and sometimes clumsy talkers. Parnell came nearer the type than any man of his generation. In 1883 his countrymen

raised a sum of £40,000 as a national tribute to him. This is how he received it :

> The Lord Mayor, a man of culture and an eloquent speaker, was deputed, with some other leading citizens, to wait on Parnell at Morrison's Hotel and to hand him the cheque. His lordship naturally prepared a few suitable observations for the occasion. At the appointed hour the deputation arrived, and were ushered into a private sitting-room, where stood the Chief. The Lord Mayor, having been announced, bowed and began : 'Mr. Parnell——' 'I believe,' said Parnell, 'you have got a cheque for me.' The Lord Mayor, somewhat surprised at this interruption, said 'Yes,' and was about to recommence his speech, when Parnell broke in : 'Is it made payable to order and crossed ?' The Lord Mayor again answered in the affirmative, and was resuming the thread of his discourse when Parnell took the cheque, folded it neatly, and put it in his waistcoat pocket. This ended the interview.

A few days later a banquet followed. Parnell spoke on the political situation, but said not a word about the cheque.[1]

No murmur came from the multitude of poor and humble people who had given their shillings and pennies to swell the cheque. With overflowing hearts they gave, and in silence he received. It was the way of "the Chief"; he was beyond good and evil and the simple emotions of the ordinary man. He seems all his life to have taken it for granted that he owed no account to anyone but himself. He disappeared for weeks, and reappeared without a word of explanation to colleagues and followers who had been gravely embarrassed by his absence. When the *Times* published the notorious Pigott forgery, he did not trouble to look at it till the evening, and then his only comment was, "I did not make an S like that since 1878." If he was a popular hero, he seemed to have all the aristocratic disdain for the mob ; and no slight contempt for many of the politicians of his own party, albeit that they served him with a dog-like devotion. His colleagues called him "Sir," and he resented the slightest approach to familiarity.

[1] "Life of Parnell," by Barry O'Brien, vol. ii, p. 27.

So it continued for twelve years, and then came his catastrophe. A hundred times he had trusted his own judgment and found it right ; again and again his people had rallied round him when his enemies were trying to ruin him. It was unthinkable that they should intrude upon his private affairs or let him be ruined by Captain O'Shea. He had only to hold his head high and go straight on. One of his few intimate colleagues told me the story just before the crash came. He described to me how a fortnight earlier he had gone to " the Chief " to discuss ordinary party business and how, when he had got up to go, Parnell turned in his chair and said, " By the way, T., I am not going to defend that action." " My God, Sir," was the answer, and " Pooh ! " the cool retort. " It will be a nine days' wonder," said Parnell. " Nine centuries, Sir," said the colleague.

All the reserve broke, all the demons in him seemed to be let loose, when he realized the truth. For the Non-conformist conscience he cared nothing, and if only the English had reviled him, he might have been so much the more a hero to the Irish. What broke him, was the revolt of Catholic Ireland. Here was his grand miscalculation—the fatal mistake of the Protestant. Had he been a Catholic, he would have known the penalty that awaited the co-respondent, and the impossibility of making amends by marrying a divorced woman. More than once he had done battle with Pope and ecclesiastics and rallied the faithful to his side. Now he had struck something hard and immovable which was beyond his comprehension. This time his enemies had him in their power, and his friends, or the great majority of them, dared not even ask for mercy.

I have seen many dramatic moments in politics, but none is quite so vivid in my memory as that of the fall of Parnell. At last he showed himself, and day by day one could see him striding backwards and forwards through the lobby, his hair streaming, his eyes blazing, a ghastly pallor on his face. Old friends who wished to say a kindly word dared not approach him ; the word went out that " the Chief " would hear nothing except from the few who

were prepared to back him to the end. He was proud, and his enemies spared him nothing. There was the fire-escape incident and other horrid little details so damaging to dignity, but so inexorably required by the Court. Thus in a few months he passed from the triumph of the Parnell Commission to the depths of the O'Shea divorce. Politically the verdict was final and the rest was a pitiful struggle against desperate odds and failing health. Some said charitably that this strange and frozen man had for once in his life proved to be a human being, and all the world turned and pelted him.

The story is a handy theme for moralists, and they have embroidered it thickly. To many foreigners it is the culminating instance of British hypocrisy. Parnell's intrigue with Mrs. O'Shea, they point out, had been well known for years, and his intimate colleagues could scarcely have been unaware of it. His sin, therefore, was to be found out. That is in a sense true, and it is idle to deny it. The public man may argue that his private life is between him and his Maker, but he must be careful to keep it so. He is asking too much of his fellow-beings when he expects them to condone conduct which has become openly scandalous. The distinction between the private allowance which the charitable may make and the public condonation which is implied in maintaining the found-out in eminent positions cannot be obliterated in the normal Anglo-Saxon society. The public man must to this extent bring his private conduct into uniformity with his public professions. Whether there is a way back for the found-out has often been debated, but none so far has been discovered. The public man generally loses his head when he is faced with scandal, and either protests an unbelievable innocence or attempts an impossible defiance. What lawyers call "confession and avoidance," has yet to be tried, and there is nothing else that is worth trying. "Retire, marry, return," was the advice which Andrew Carnegie cabled to Parnell, but he, too, forgot that Parnell was the leader of Catholic Irishmen in whose eyes the way of atonement was far less simple.

Parnell's career and his methods raise a question about leadership which is worth a moment's consideration. Is it possible that a man may obtain a great power over a democracy by deliberately eschewing all the arts which are supposed to make for success in popular politics, by disdaining flattery, withdrawing himself from the multitude, neither courting nor suffering himself to be courted by the most willing adherents, despising words, relying solely on the power of an impressive character? Parnell scarcely answers the question. He was a revolutionary leader deeply concentrated on one purpose. The Irish trusted him because they thought he knew and they did not how to deal with the English. A certain mystery and taciturnity may be an effective part of the make-up of the revolutionary. Yet there are everywhere signs of a reaction against the glib and fluent tribunes of the people, and it is possible that something of Parnell's disdain and his frugal but cutting effectiveness of speech may catch the ear and inspire the confidence of the multitude when it has grown suspicious of those who are courting its favour. But to impress in this way is a gift of nature, and the assumption of the part by those who are not born to it is one of those impostures which are certain to be detected.

CHAPTER VIII

SOME EMINENT MODERNS

Campbell-Bannerman—The Ordeal by War—The Reward of Endurance—A Political Philosophy—Contrast with Balfour—The Philosophic Doubter—Intellectual Distinction—A Remarkable Achievement and One Mistake—Belief in Party—Qualities and Defects—John Morley—Comparison with Balfour—Literature and Politics—A Smothered Rebellion—Living up to his Character.

I

THAT a man should bear adversity bravely and persist in his ideas through the most untoward circumstances will always in this country be one of the tests of his fitness for the highest position. Among the public men of recent times, Campbell-Bannerman pre-eminently stands this test. He had no arts or graces which make him interesting to the student of technique. It was a mere accident that his career did not end in his becoming Speaker of the House of Commons; until the last years of his life he had no ambitions which had not been abundantly gratified by a distinguished but by no means outstanding Ministerial career. He was thought to be a man of the world, clever and canny in a rather original way, rather cynical and easy-going, devoted to his wife and his fireside. His acceptance of the exceedingly troubled position of Liberal leader in the House of Commons was a genuine surprise to his friends, and most people thought of him as a stop-gap put in to fill the place until other more eminent people came to their senses or recovered their tempers. Then came the South African War, which seemed to be his ruin. Patient as his efforts were to smooth the differences in his party, this was an issue beyond smoothing. Nothing would induce him to say that he thought the war just and inevitable or to retract one word

that he had said in criticism of the diplomacy which preceded it. In the full tide of patriotic enthusiasm he went out of his way to denounce as "methods of barbarism" the policy of gathering the Boer women and children into concentration camps which the Government declared to be essential to the conduct of the war. The newspapers declared it to be an outrage, and most of his colleagues shook their heads and thought it a grave indiscretion. Implored to retract or explain, he repeated the offending phrase again and again. No public man in the same position ever faced and weathered such a storm as raged about his head during the next two years. Gladstone had braved the wrath of the rich and well-to-do in campaigning against Lord Beaconsfield, but he had had the multitude with him. Campbell-Bannerman denouncing concentration camps spoke only for a small minority; all the rest, including large numbers of his own party, thought him either gravely mistaken or grossly unpatriotic, and declared him to be for ever disqualified from succeeding to the position of Prime Minister, if his party should return to power—which now seemed a very remote and unlikely event.

It was nevertheless this very ordeal which raised him from a mediocre to a great position and enabled him eventually to win the greatest electoral triumph that has fallen to any political leader in our time. He waited patiently for the inevitable reaction after war, and, when it came, the public judged that there must be very uncommon qualities in a man who had so dauntlessly kept his flag flying in the tumult of popular wrath. He gained not only power and position, but the peculiar affection which rewards the brave man, and for the short time that remained to him he exercised an authority over his party which few even of its greatest leaders have enjoyed. Coming back after the triumph of 1906 he seemed to be a new man, acquiring suddenly a readiness and effectiveness of speech and a sure touch in judgment, of which he had shown few signs in his previous career. He had the good fortune to carry through the one policy for which he had steadfastly testified from the first days of the South African War, but

he passed from the scene before the reaction came, which is the testing time of Prime Ministers who have won great victories.

Campbell-Bannerman held in its simplest form the philosophy of the old party system. There were times when the country wanted Liberalism, and times when it wanted Conservatism, but it never wanted something between the two. Conscience apart, the politician who trimmed his sails to the prevailing wind made a profound mistake, for he would not get in when his party was out, and when his party came in, he would probably be left out. Dishing the Whigs was, therefore, fatal to Tories and bowing the knee to the jingo Rimmon disastrous to Liberals. To hold on grimly in bad times was thus the condition of making yourself powerful and acceptable in good times. Possibly too simple a creed to cover the doubts and hesitations of subtler minds, but none the less a brave and simple test of virtue under the old politics, and by unflinching adherence to it Campbell-Bannerman came victorious out of a long conflict with the most brilliant and formidable men of both parties.

2

A very different type is Arthur Balfour, who played a chief part in this conflict. If two men were ever made to misunderstand each other, they were Balfour and Campbell-Bannerman. To Balfour, Campbell-Bannerman seemed the embodiment of all that was dreary, obstinate and unenlightened in the Liberal creed, a figure to be guyed in debate, and when it threatened to become dangerous, reduced to its native absurdity. To Campbell-Bannerman, Balfour was the shallow dialectician, perpetually making the worse cause seem the better, the dancer on the tight-rope, the crafty deviser of traps, snares and puzzles which, at the last, in a famous outburst, he bluntly called "foolery." Both men deserve a more respectful consideration than either—or the adherents of their respective schools—would have given to the other. When in the year 1903 Balfour found safety from the sharp declaration

on fiscal policy which would have destroyed his Government, by pleading that his convictions were "unsettled," it was said at the time that no one but he could have made such an avowal without reducing himself to absurdity. But his reputation as a "philosophic doubter," founded partly on a vague impression of his writings, but still more on the habitual scepticism of his political attitude, made it seem actually probable that this was the state of his mind. In this respect he stands alone among politicians. I can think of no other man who has reached the highest or even a very high position with his mental equipment. It is not in itself a very uncommon equipment. Scores of other men less gifted have questioned the postulates of democracy and the permanence of political creeds. Scores of others have shared his distaste for Cobdenism, and all else that the Victorian Liberals called principle. But none of them have entered public life with this creed, and still less made it serve for years together as the defensive armoury of a political party, both in power and in opposition.

For many years Balfour's mission in life seemed to be to *embêter les libéraux*. As the exponent of coercion in Ireland in the 'eighties and 'nineties he exasperated them as no other Conservative leader ever did. Other coercionist Ministers had pulled long faces and talked of grim and distasteful necessities; he seemed to take a particular pleasure in driving hard at the Liberal principle that force was no remedy, and the "stupid party" were delighted to have a champion who both did what they wanted done and lent such an air of intellectual distinction to the performance. This all along the line was his special contribution. He gave the Church precisely the footing it wanted in the elementary schools, but with a high air of making it seem the modern and philosophical solution as opposed to the drab and outworn dogmatism of the Liberal and Undenominationalist. He gave the brewers what they wanted—a transaction which might have tried the nerve of the most hardened politician—but again with a fine air of reducing Liberal and Temperance fanaticism to its proper absurdity.

For sheer political skill and adroitness, no achievement

in our time can be set beside Balfour's in maintaining his Government for the two years after Chamberlain had divided the Unionist party on the fiscal question. For all this time he kept two parties at bay, and reserved a judgment which, if delivered, must have destroyed his Government by throwing one or other of them into opposition. The Unionist Free Traders supported him in the plausible belief that he was a Free Trader at heart ; the Chamberlainites held their hand in the equally plausible belief that if he were given time, he would declare himself a Protectionist. To keep both in hand was a miraculous and seemingly impossible feat, and it was watched with breathless excitement from week to week. From the tactical point of view he made but one serious mistake, and that was in walking out of the House and taking his party with him in order to avoid perilous divisions in the spring of 1905. The sporting public drew a distinction between evading pursuers or keeping them at bay and running away from them. The latter they judged to be "not cricket," which is perhaps the most disastrous judgment that a politician can invite. It was said that the Prime Minister had claimed the right of retiring to the pavilion when the bowling got too hot.

Whether a Prime Minister in difficulties should prolong the life of his Government or go quickly to the country is one of those questions which are interminably debated among the higher tacticians. Generally the answer is that bad becomes worse by waiting. It was an accepted formula of pre-war days that a Government which has once fallen sick never recovers. So Balfour himself discovered, but his justification was, I imagine, that any precipitate action on his part might cause a split in the Unionist party which would destroy it for a generation; and that, as a trustee of the party, he was required to make almost any sacrifice, and to accept almost any embarrassment for the avoidance of this greater catastrophe. It was an oddity of his otherwise sceptical temperament that he was a strong and fervent upholder of party politics and the two-party system, and that he seemed to regard the

preservation of a party as an end in itself. Hence the peculiar blend, which most irritated his opponents, of what seemed like extreme partisanship with the aloofness of the impartial and detached observer. He seemed always to be finding high philosophical justification for what other people bluntly called "moves in the game."

Balfour is the supreme example in our day of the intellectual on the Conservative side, but any later politician who attempted to form himself on this model without his temperament or the advantage of circumstance which gave him a start in public life, would surely come to disaster. He had with it all a remarkably courageous and persistent temper and a very cool executive sort of brain which made his counsel of high value in the wide range of imperial and strategic problems into which party politics do not enter. His weakness was that, from lack of contact with ordinary minds, he greatly miscalculated the public mood both as Minister and leader of Opposition. It was a serious mistake for a Conservative leader to use the House of Lords to thwart a popular demand for Radical legislation as he used it from 1906 onwards. That was to hold up the natural reaction after the Liberal triumph, and to set the lists for a struggle in which the peers were bound to fight at serious disadvantage. Conservatives used to laugh at the favourite Liberal simile of "filling the cup," but Balfour himself justified it in the early years of the 1906 Parliament. It is a common infirmity of the intellectual temperament, whether Conservative, Radical or Socialist, not to perceive the limits of theoretical power; and under Balfour's guidance the House of Lords appeared to have lost the serviceable instinct which till then had prevented it from accepting battle except on ground favourable to itself. The Duke of Wellington would scarcely have made the same mistake.

3

Though they were not usually compared, Balfour and John Morley had more in common in their mental make-up than any other two men in public life during these years.

Had Balfour been required to earn his living as a young man, he too would surely have started as a writer, for nature has endowed him with a fine and fastidious literary instinct which never fails him when he takes pen in hand. Throughout his life he has spoken as the writer speaks, delicately picking his words, amending and erasing as he goes along, never hesitating to keep his audience waiting while visibly in their presence he searches for the perfect mode of expression. Morley had actually more of the rhetorical in his composition than Balfour, and on the full-dress occasions of which he had received adequate notice he could deliver stately and highly polished orations which are beyond Balfour's compass. For twelve years from 1886 onwards he was one of the most powerful platform orators in the country. But he was always oppressed by the difficulty of satisfying his literary conscience in impromptu speech, and having entered the House of Commons comparatively late in life, he never acquired the unembarrassed ease and familiarity with its ways which made Balfour a great House of Commons man. The comparison must not be pressed too far, but the light-hearted scepticism about Liberal and democratic principles which gave spice to Balfour's thought and speech found its counterpart in Morley's growing despondency about the behaviour of Liberal and democratic peoples, and the disappointing results in the human heart of the high maxims which had warmed his youth. Behind their politics, the two men seemed to take no very different view of the world and human affairs.

There was nothing Morley disliked more than the suggestion that he was the literary man who had strayed into politics. He had high political ambitions, and protested that his writing was part of his politics. The claim was well founded, but the pen and the tongue have essentially different techniques and a studious apprenticeship as a publicist is as likely as not to be a disqualification for the public man. With all his accomplishment in the set oration, Morley never quite effected the transition from pen to tongue, or the still more difficult transition from work

done in the study to work done in the council chamber. This is the final stumbling-block of the literary man in politics. To be no longer the final arbiter of what shall be said and how it shall be said, to have to yield to the criticism and correction of other and perhaps inferior men, to see his work flattened to the average of common opinion—all this hard discipline to the solitary worker, and with the best and most loyal intention he is often in a state of smothered rebellion.

So I think it was with Morley. The literary habit which makes autocrats of writers was strong within him, and often made him wayward and inexplicable to colleagues with a simpler turn of mind. He charmed and vexed them alternately, and much as they desired to please him, what he really meant and wished was often beyond their guessing. He would heartily subscribe to a policy, and at the last moment suddenly rebel against the means which were plainly necessary to carry it into execution. He would consent to a course of action which plainly could have only one consequence, and then be greatly astonished when it followed, as when he retired from the shadow Cabinet of the Liberal party in 1898 and found to his surprise that he was not summoned to its next meeting. He constantly asserted his desire to be relieved of the burdens of the India Office, but I think I am a competent witness to the fact that he was painfully astonished when one of his many resignations was finally accepted. Apart from the highest office, his dearest ambition was to be Foreign Secretary, and in that he was twice baulked. To other people it seemed strange that a man who prided himself on his little-England-ism should especially designate himself for offices in which he was bound to be involved in great and imperial affairs, but it was scarcely less strange that he should wish to end his career in the House of Lords.

To take his career as the test of the literary man in politics would be a serious mistake. He was Morley—a fascinating, gifted, exceptional man, as unlike other literary men as he was unlike most politicians. He was in fact less a literary man than a moralist with the pen, or to use

an old-fashioned word in the strict sense, a publicist with a fine taste for rhetoric. All parties like to have such men ; they appeal to a circle which the ordinary politician does not reach and impart an air of distinction which is thought to come from a higher and purer region. *En revanche* a character is imposed on them which they have, however reluctantly, to live up to. Morley had many light and graceful gifts. He was a brilliant talker; a collection of his letters would show him as one of the neatest and daintiest turners of a phrase among his contemporaries. But as a public man he was expected always to walk the high processional road, to appear in the grand manner on great occasions, to be on all occasions the unbending moralist and philosopher. Insensibly he took on the character and, I think, felt the strain of it. His political life would have been easier if he could have unbent in public as he did in private and have been judged by a more human standard than was commonly applied to him.

CHAPTER IX

THE MEN OF THE GREAT WAR

Asquith—His Oxford Backing and Parliamentary Capacity—Unsought Promotion—Clear-cut Views—The Liberal Schism and its Healing—Power and its Problems—The Strategy of the Prime Minister—A Serious Mistake—The Shadow of War—A Perplexing Problem—The Solution—Limits of Preparation for War—The German Challenge and its Results—Grey—His Single-mindedness and Simplicity—The Open Secrets of his Diplomacy—Democracy and Foreign Politics—The Limits of Publicity—Lloyd George—His Beginnings—Advantages and Disadvantages of being Welsh—Contrasted with Chamberlain—An Exhausting Personality—Virtuosity in Politics—Relations with the Press.

1

THE Great War runs like an immense watershed across the territory I am attempting to survey. While it lasted, and for the period immediately following, all that lay on the other side of it seemed distant and insignificant. Compared with the great upheaval and the vastness of the new issues, the battles of the old politicians looked like trivial scrimmages which we were almost ashamed to recall. This is a natural but emotional idea which history will probably reject. To the historian all these events will be continuous and related, and he may even single out the period before the war as requiring the closest study for the right understanding of what followed, both in world politics and in domestic affairs. Yet it is impossible to consider the men who were specially associated with the war, and more particularly Asquith, Grey and Lloyd George, without feeling that they are in a certain sense marked off from their fellows. They had to make decisions which shook the world, which touched the very existence of their country, which brought death and desolation, salvation and victory, to their own fellow-countrymen and to multitudes

in other lands. They had to bear responsibilities beside which those that fell on their predecessors, however illustrious their names, seem like feathers in the scale.

My mind goes back to the 1886 Parliament, in which Asquith first made his mark. A little group of new members used to assemble once a week to consider subjects which the then Liberal Opposition might bring before Parliament. They had several gifted parliamentarians among their number, but they were all agreed that, when they had anything specially good, it should be entrusted to Asquith to lay before the House. His perfect lucidity in presenting a case, his skill in debate, the admirable form and finish of his way of expressing himself, had even then marked him out as a predestined favourite of the House of Commons. He came to it with the reputation of a coming man, and had behind him the very serviceable backing which Oxford and Balliol can give to those whom they mark out for great careers. He had "firsts" and University scholarships to his credit, he had been President of the Union; all the young Oxford men were agreed that he was the man of their time, and Jowett had endorsed their verdict. Then for ten years he had struggled at the bar and made a brilliant beginning. These are qualifications which the House of Commons both likes and mistrusts. It has seen a great many academic young men and been sadly disappointed in some of them. It watches them keenly to be sure that they are neither prigs nor fools, and that they bring no airs and graces from the homes of learning. It watched Asquith and discovered him to be cool and modest, brief and pointed, a young man with a remarkable gift for the kind of speech it most likes.

For years he led the life of the busy barrister and the active Member of Parliament, but always with his eye on Parliament. He was not a frequent speaker, but he timed his strokes with perfect skill and accuracy. He could cut in at a moment's notice and do exactly and perfectly what the occasion required. He never seemed to seek an opening, but when it came he seized it, and the most difficult occasion seemed always to find him at his best. The one

criticism of him was that with these remarkable gifts he suffered from a certain lethargy of temperament. Instead of being on the pounce, like other ambitious young men, he had to be pushed and primed. He went ahead because he could not help it, because his extraordinary abilities carried him along in spite of himself, and in the teeth, as it sometimes seemed, of a positive dislike of any kind of public display. Never at any moment in his career can it be said that he fought for any prize or took any step to promote himself. Whatever came to him was the free offering of friends and colleagues who were convinced that on his merits he most deserved it.

This is not to say that all was plain sailing in his career. He was never of an accommodating temperament to either opponents or friends. He had a natural style which made it impossible for him to deal in the ambiguities and evasions which other politicians have found so serviceable in a tight corner. He might reflect long upon what he was going to say, but when he said it there could be no mistake about his meaning. If as Home Secretary he was called upon to sanction the use of troops in quelling a strike riot, he would do it and say so without any of the deprecating airs which are thought becoming in a Liberal Minister on such an occasion. If he had to make the choice between approving and condemning the South African War, he would make it and not stand shivering between two opinions. Here he came into sharp collision with Campbell-Bannerman, and for a time gravely risked his own career. Campbell-Bannerman undoubtedly had with him the great majority of the rank and file of the Liberal party in his general line on the South African War. They held strongly that the war should have been avoided, and listened with impatience to any argument which appeared to justify the Milner-Chamberlain diplomacy. To them as to C.-B. the Liberal League seemed to threaten the foundations of the Liberal faith. For Asquith the Kruger ultimatum disposed of all that went before, and when the die was cast for war, there was no room for doubt or criticism.

A schism which might not only have blighted Asquith's career, but have changed the whole course of British history, was only just averted in 1901; but averted it was, and not a little through Asquith's own efforts. The same clear-cut habit of mind which had made him choose definitely between war and peace now made him choose between Toryism and Liberalism, and so stop the drift which might have carried a dissentient Liberal party into the Tory camp as ten years earlier it had carried the Liberal Unionists. The next three years were entirely favourable to him. No subject could better have suited his scientific and economic turn of mind and his genius for lucid exposition than the fiscal controversy on which Chamberlain had challenged the Liberal and divided the Unionist party; and it was agreed on all hands that his speeches were incomparable. Nothing served him better during these years than his happy capacity for turning the page and beginning a new chapter without rankling memories of the old. Different as were the temperaments of the two men, Campbell-Bannerman had complete confidence in him. He knew him to be entirely without rancour, and utterly incapable of the jealousy or envy which might have been suspected in a meaner man in like circumstances.

So when Campbell-Bannerman passed from the scene in 1908, the succession fell to Asquith, like all other promotion in his career, as a matter of course. Rivals and competitors there were none, but doubters were many. Would he with his colder temperament and more intellectual method be able to control the immense unwieldy majority in the House of Commons as C.-B. had done—or a Cabinet in which there were two or three stubborn and ambitious colleagues who were certainly not patient men, as he was? The tide of 1906 had begun to ebb; one or two adverse by-elections had cheered an Opposition which had already struck hard, and on the slightest encouragement was prepared to strike harder with its weapon the House of Lords. The old problem of "filling the cup" or "ploughing the sands" seemed to be all that remained to a Liberal Government. Could any man, be he a Gladstone or a

Pitt, see any safe way out of such a situation, either for his party or for himself?

2

The six years that followed threw a burden on British statesmanship for which there is no parallel in any previous years. As we look back on them across the watershed, they seem terrible years. There was the immense preoccupation of home affairs, the Irish question threatening civil war, whichever way it was settled; the House of Lords question raising all the problems of democracy; the Budget question which now seems so trivial, but which then loomed like the red peril over the landscape of ancestral England. And in addition to all this the gnawing anxiety of a European situation which now and again, as in 1908 and 1911, flared up into a dangerous crisis, and then relapsed into a smouldering fire. It would be presumptuous at this time to attempt to pass judgment on these tremendous events, but certain things may be said from the special point of view of the art and craft of statesmanship and the public life.

Considering the varieties of opinion within the Liberal party and the abundant opportunities of conscientious differences, it was a great achievement to keep a Cabinet together during these years. There were moments when schism seemed inevitable, but it was just at these moments that Asquith developed a rare ability in striking an average of opinion which enabled the opposing parties to be reconciled without compromising their consciences. His great advantage was that he had no party in his own Cabinet; he was loyal to all his colleagues, which is a very rare virtue in Prime Ministers; and his habit of assuming that they would be loyal to him was of more virtue than any attempt to assert authority. Then the strategy of his Government was in all its domestic controversies as near perfect from its own point of view as any that I can recall. The exact measurement of what the election of January 1910 was worth, and the bold return to the country in December of that year for a fresh authorization before proceeding with Home Rule, are as near as possible the perfect model

of a wise handling of democratic forces. Asquith's expositions of the issue between the Lords and the Commons remain to this day among the classics of Liberal constitutionalism, and show the lawyer and the politician in a perfect balance. He conducted the whole of this case without any lapse into the mob oratory which had so often accompanied controversy between the two Houses.[1]

One serious mistake he made in these domestic affairs. When Carson started arming and drilling a force which was plainly intended to be used against the executive Government, the law should have been put in motion against him. A question arose here which was more important than the Irish question, the question whether the Government could sustain its authority or had any power to make the will of Parliament prevail. It should, I think, have been tested at the moment of challenge, for the granting of impunity to a prolonged threat of armed resistance and open preparation for it is deeply demoralizing. The tolerance of Carson governed the whole subsequent development of the Irish question and provided other exponents of "direct action" with a precedent which is not yet exhausted. It also seriously weakened the Government in the estimation of foreign countries at a moment when it most needed to be strong, and possibly led in Germany to the disastrous belief that Britain was too much occupied with her internal affairs to play any decisive part in foreign policy.

I am aware that the arguments for leaving Carson alone were superficially strong ones. The Irish Nationalists were greatly opposed to the use of British coercion against their opponents in Ireland ; they were of opinion that the Ulster movement if left to itself would die out, and that it was impolitic to make martyrs of Ulster fanatics. They foresaw such divisions in Parliament, if any drastic step were taken, as might destroy the Government and wreck Home Rule. But on the other side was the simple fact that the credit and authority of both Government and Parliament were at stake, and that unless they could be asserted

[1] While these pages are going to press Mr. Asquith's acceptance of a peerage is announced.

at the beginning by process of law, they could in all probability only be asserted later by civil war. We have here, I think, a crucial case in the British system of Parliamentary Government which cannot be too carefully examined. If the period of two years for which under the Parliament Act legislation can be held up by the House of Lords may be used with impunity for organizing armed resistance, we shall be in a position of grave peril whenever drastic legislation is proposed ; and I think the presumption ought to be that the Government which is not strong enough to stop these preparations, and is not ready to stake its existence on stopping them, is without the power to make its legislation effective. Long habit has accustomed us to think of the power of Parliament as unlimited, but much that is happening in the world to-day may suggest to us that one of the first duties of a democratic leader is to discover the limits of parliamentary power and to keep within them. On this one occasion, Asquith failed to bring his usual clear-cut judgment to bear at the critical moment.

3

The coming of war cut suddenly across this question and swamped it with another and far graver. It has been customary to say that the war took the Government unawares, and if by that is meant that the exact month or week in which it was to break out was hidden from them, it is no doubt true. But the records will, I think, show that from the day in December, 1905, when they took office to the day in August, 1914, when the die was cast, the possibility of war was an unceasing anxiety to all members of the Government and especially to Asquith and Grey. They had not been a month in office before they were plunged into the crisis of the Algeciras Conference ; through the autumn and winter of 1908 and the first six months of 1909 the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary threatened at any moment to lead to war ; in 1911 the Agadir incident made it for two months a matter of the gravest doubt whether the peace

could be saved. Then incessantly through all this time there was the menace of German shipbuilding, imposing an increasing strain on the Exchequer and raising naval problems of the utmost perplexity. It was impossible that any group of men who had lived through these experiences, and who had the inner knowledge provided by diplomacy at their disposal, could be unaware of the danger; but awareness was the least part of the problem, and the question of what wisely could be done was one of the most perplexing that ever confronted statesmen.

Certain questions will probably be debated to the end of time, but I am concerned here only with the mechanics of the problem as it presented itself to men from whom the future was hidden. If it had been known that war was coming on August 4, 1914, and no sooner and no later—which is the common assumption of critics after the event—the case would have been simple and there would have been nothing to consider but how much preparation could have been made in the time available. Great armies would have been raised, munitions would have been piled up, all politics would have been suspended in a universal call to arms. But the actual situation before the event was that there was a risk, but not a certainty of war, and that to treat it as a certainty was to make it certain. Great and sensational changes, such as the adoption of compulsory military service, could only have been proposed with any chance of carrying them through if the Government had declared war to be inevitable, and must have placed the country in grave risk of having a preventive war sprung upon it while the army was in transition. Nothing then remained but to make the sea defences of the Empire as far as possible impregnable, to put the army on a footing on which it could be rapidly mobilized and transported over sea, to provide a well-organized auxiliary force which could be quickly expanded, and in the meantime to work strenuously for peace so that, if war came, a united people would recognize it as just and inevitable. This was the solution of Asquith's Government, and in his opinion there could be no other.

If ever a similar problem is presented to British statesmen, its solution will, I think, be on the same lines and for reasons which, if we are dreaming of other wars, it is important to understand. There can be no perfect preparation for war except by those who are planning war or are prepared to say publicly that they despair of peace, and no British Government is ever likely to take that responsibility. All the belligerents in the Great War complained that they were unprepared when the moment came ; in all their countries statesmen were subject to bitter attack for failure to provide something which events proved to be indispensable, but which no foresight could have provided before the event. As science develops, it will be less and less probable that preparation will avail against surprises or that they will correspond to the emergencies which war will reveal. It is to Asquith's credit that he bore uncomplainingly much unmerited reproach on this subject, but that is relatively unimportant. What is important is that the public should not be led to believe that future Governments will do substantially more to be ready for war. It is specially improbable that any British Government will find itself in a position to make a greater effort in a given period than Campbell-Bannerman's and Asquith's Governments made between the years 1906 and 1914, or that any effort will provide against the incalculable hazards of a great war. Those who contemplate war will be wise to count it as a certainty that they will to this degree be unprepared.

The political part of the problem was limited in a different way but quite as stringently. Asquith and Grey, the two men most responsible for it, were men of simple, straight and logical minds who chose the road they took because they could see no other. The governing fact in their minds was the German challenge to British sea-power, which made friendship with France and Russia not merely a pleasant duty, but an imperative necessity. Under the armament system of pre-war Europe, to be faced at one and the same time with an unfriendly France (as in the days before the *Entente*) and a hostile Germany must have been

a position of acute peril which would have left this country at the mercy of any European conqueror or any combination of unfriendly Powers. The Germans had it in their power to end this situation at any moment by coming to terms with us about the race in naval armaments, but so long as they were obdurate on that subject, co-operation with France, and therefore with the Dual Alliance, was an imperative condition of British safety.

History may blame the system and apportion the responsibilities for it more evenly between the parties or trace it to remoter causes which partly exonerate them all, but to British statesmen inheriting the system and involved in the last throes of it, the alternatives were narrowed down to a choice that was imperative. When the last forlorn effort to transform the system had been made under Campbell-Bannerman's inspiration at the Hague Conference of 1907, and been thwarted by a flat German refusal, there remained for this country nothing but to hold to the *Entente* and endeavour if possible to keep the peace between the two groups.

4

It was, I think, great good fortune to have in control at this period two men who understood each other so perfectly as Asquith and Grey, and who saw the problem thus simply and clearly.

Grey had none of the crafts and wiles of Foreign Secretaries of the old school, but his evident single-mindedness and a certain simplicity and dignity of character won him a position of authority which few even of his greatest predecessors had enjoyed for the same period of time. Having no taste for intrigue or aptitude for the clever shifts and turns which win momentary victories by the evasion of real issues, he steered from beginning to end the same steady and simple course, holding hard to the *Entente*, but exhausting every effort to abate the armed competition which in his view was the root cause of the European trouble and the menace to peace. As he saw it, the test of Germany's good will was whether she would forgo her

challenge to British sea-power, and so long as she declined to do that she compelled this country to find security in co-operation with France and Russia. Never during these years did he appeal to popular passion or prejudice or embroider his speeches with rhetoric or fancy. When he spoke he seemed to be telling a plain tale because it was so ; the facts seemed to be mirrored in his mind, and were conveyed to his hearers with a cool, disinterested impartiality which had more power than eloquence.

Critics and opponents appeared in later days who treated him as the special exponent of the " secret diplomacy " which they held accountable for the war. Nothing could have been more alien to his disposition. He was, if anything, of too simple a character to be easily understood by the highly sophisticated professional politicians who controlled the European alliances during these years, and if any of them were deceived it was because they supposed him to mean something else than he said. In the almost insanely suspicious and intriguing world revealed by the secret documents published since the war, he stands out as the one man who will do neither more nor less than he says, who can be trusted to walk quite straight where he sees his way clearly, who has nothing to hide. To him the secrets of the old Europe were quite open ones ; certain forces were evidently tending in certain directions, the cards were on the table, and on all the broader issues Parliament and the public were as well equipped as the Foreign Secretary to form a judgment. Perhaps he presumed too much on the ability of ordinary people to put two and two together, but to his own mind the case was luminously clear and he kept nothing back.

The history of the ten years before the war illustrates all the inherent difficulties of a free democracy in its dealings with foreign affairs, all the difficulties which have since been debated in connexion with the famous Article X of the League of Nations Covenant. The democratic Parliaments claim their right to decide the issue of peace and war on the circumstances as and when they arise ; the normal course of diplomacy requires that their Governments enter

into relations with foreign Powers which, however carefully guarded, impose moral if not legal obligations on their Parliaments. It may be explained at each step that such and such engagements are subject to the ratification of Parliament when the question becomes acute ; but under a competitive system of armaments a conditional promise of assistance will almost of necessity be interpreted as a guarantee, and be so woven into the fabric of hypothetical strategy in the event of war that its repudiation becomes all but impossible. The British Parliament, for example, was nominally free to decide what it chose in August, 1914, but if it had vetoed intervention, the entire French plan of campaign based on the assumption that Britain would provide a certain force must have been thrown out of gear. Still more, if after the division of naval forces by which Britain undertook the defence of the North Sea and Channel, and France that of the Mediterranean, Britain had stood out of the war, France would have had the right to say that her reliance on British aid had exposed her to the full fury of the German attack by sea. Germany offered to meet this point at the last moment before the war by her astonishing proposal to waive attack by sea if we would otherwise give her a free hand against France and Belgium, but our acceptance of this was in the circumstances unthinkable.

There is no question that Grey rightly interpreted the opinion of the vast majority of Englishmen in these years, or that the tendency and liabilities of his policy were well understood by those who took an interest in foreign affairs. They were the subject of unceasing discussion in newspapers and reviews ; they were openly confessed and revealed in more than one of the crises that preceded the final explosion. More than this was impossible under the pre-war diplomatic system, and will be impossible again if that system is re-established. Nations which have to contemplate the possibility of war in common must at least hypothetically make plans for joint action which they cannot afford to disclose to their potential enemies. So long as and so far as diplomacy is involved in strategy, some part of it will of necessity be secret, and full disclosures

will only be possible if war ceases to be a possibility and alliances and *ententes* become unnecessary. Grey, like all Foreign Secretaries who had preceded him, accepted the postulates of the system which he inherited and made loyalty to his friends in Europe his ruling principle. The alternative of reversing the policy of his predecessors and leaving this country single-handed to face the enmity of France and the naval menace of Germany never occurred to him as possible. His great merit was that having chosen his course he held to it unflinchingly, and avoided the wavering between conflicting policies which would probably have been the greatest disaster. The old complaint of instability could certainly not be levelled against British policy while he was at the Foreign Office.

5

Lloyd George, the third of the trio who counted most in these affairs, was greatly different in temperament from the other two. Asquith, though the architect of his own fortunes, came on the scene with the academic backing which in the 'eighties was still a most serviceable asset to a young man. He was certified from the beginning as the choicest product of Oxford and Balliol. Grey belonged to the order of Melchisidek and started with a universal expectation that he would carry on its tradition. The only question about him was whether he could be induced to overcome a natural preference for more agreeable pursuits than politics. Lloyd George, on the contrary, had to fight every inch of his way up from obscure and humble circumstances. His schools were the village green, the chapel, the homes and haunts of militant Welsh Nonconformists. His one advantage was to be a Welshman. This gave him the chance of securing the kind of local reputation and following which the House of Commons always respects and which Englishmen seldom secure. What Birmingham was to Chamberlain, Wales was to Lloyd George, and for the early years of his career, he was above all things the man from Wales, the young man who

spoke for its ardent youth, and who better than any other expressed both its religious and its political aspirations. His detractors said that Wales could produce a score of others like him, and as good, but he alone was where he was, a parliamentary figure while still in his thirties, claiming to speak for his countrymen, who apparently endorsed his claim.

Yet there are disadvantages in being a Welshman. The English stumble at certain Welsh characteristics, and the Welsh find the English heavy in the hand. To the Englishman all bilingual peoples seem to lead a double life. They are perpetually escaping out of a world in which they can be tracked and verified into a world where thought and speech go underground. It was rumoured that Lloyd George said awful things at the hour of sunset on Welsh mountains, in a language deliberately intended to be unintelligible to reporters. More serious for practical purposes, he had a way of looking at things which was a constant puzzle to his English friends. As one of them said in later years, when you are talking to him in English, he always seemed to be thinking to himself in Welsh. His mind seemed dangerously fluid to orthodox English Liberals. It was open on so many subjects on which theirs was closed. It seemed to regard the whole field of politics and the preserves of both parties as legitimate battle-ground ; it seemed to disregard the secure bases which orthodox Liberals called " principles." On the other hand, it was vivid and fascinating, and lit up with ideas and enthusiasms which captivated everybody for a time, and some for a long time.

That such a man would lead the fighting life, that he would sow his wild oats as pro-Boer and militant Nonconformist ; that he would be aggressive and ambitious, break most of the rules of the game as understood by the sober English, and for considerable periods of his life drift between parties was pre-ordained from the beginning. Up to a point his career resembles Chamberlain's, and had he been pure English it would have probably followed the same course to the end. He had Chamberlain's sense of political strategy, his eye for timely diversions, his contempt

for old fogies who sat and waited for the pendulum to swing against them. His 1909 Budget was to the Liberal party of that day exactly what Chamberlain's unauthorized programme had been to a previous generation of Liberals—a brilliant diversion to save a lost battle. But he had none of the persistence which led Chamberlain for a period of sixteen years to write off his ambitions and settle down to a steady co-operation with his former opponents. The deliberate choice of the second best which governs so much of the life of most politicians was outside his scheme of life. "Anything for a quiet life," said the normal Minister after two years of office; "anything but a quiet life" said Lloyd George after fourteen.

So he exhausted both parties and left them for the time being nervous wrecks. His qualities had their uses in war, and history may judge that the sacrifices he required of his fellow beings were justified in the total result. But normal Englishmen simply could not keep pace with him or follow the turns of a mind which darted from pole to pole of the political compass; which was willing to make all incompatible experiments on the chance that one would succeed; which seemed to treat all men, all circumstances and all events as raw material for his shaping hand. But never while it lasted was there such virtuosity in British statesmanship. He dazzled by his inventiveness, his quickness, his seeming recklessness of consequences, his lavish distribution of favours, his ruthlessness in discarding unsuitable tools, his insatiable zest in the playing of political games, and his hypnotic influence over his pawns. His enemies said that he never read or studied, but his mind was unceasingly at work, and it grasped in ten minutes what other men took ten hours to ferret out from books and papers.

In yet another respect he was the child of the hour: he intuitively understood the modern Press which was so painful a stumbling-block to his more solemn colleagues. He was, in the jargon of the day, the supreme propagandist. His mind leapt with that of Fleet Street; he seemed to deal with public affairs as if he were editing a popular newspaper

with its " splash " for every day, its headlines, its pictures. He knew that lights must not be hid under bushels in a democratic age. A complete account of his relations with newspapers would be one of the most instructive manuals in the mechanics of modern politics, and not least that part of it which dealt with the final stage in which he lost his Press. For years Lord Northcliffe seemed to think him incomparable in the arts by which human nature is managed and subdued, and then suddenly, and for no apparent reason, he appeared to lose faith in him. The root difficulty of relations between public men and newspaper magnates is that there is nearly always a misunderstanding as to which is servant and which is master, and this in the end makes trouble.

It takes all sorts to make a world, especially the kind of world which had to be carried through the storm and stress of the Great War. The virtues of the old school—delicacy, dignity, patience, reticence—were not alone sufficient to find salvation in these days. Men who rode roughshod over political precedents and scruples, and conducted politics as the soldiers waged war, played, it may be, an indispensable part. For good or evil Lloyd George appealed to the martial spirit of his countrymen as few other civilians during twenty of the most critical months of the war.

BOOK III

POLITICIANS AND PARLIAMENT

CHAPTER X

THE ART AND CRAFT OF THE M.P.

The Distinguishing Quality of the House of Commons—Words a Mode of Action—The Maiden Speech—Difficult Conditions——Parliamentary Jargon—The Business Manner—Eloquence Old and New—The Decorative Side of Affairs—Before and After Dinner—Conditions of Good Debate—Tolerated Incapacity—Parliamentary Reporting—The Irish in the House—An Opportunity for Labour—A Regret for Old Times.

I

THE central fact about the House of Commons which every member of it has always to bear in mind is that it is not merely a legislative assembly, but also the authority which controls government. What distinguishes it from the American Congress and other Parliaments of the same type is that it is a Sovereign Parliament with the power of life and death over the Executive. This has been the mainspring of its action and its oratory.

Everyone who has watched the House of Commons is aware of a peculiar quality permeating its atmosphere and governing the conduct of its members in debate. It is the quality, if I may attempt to define it, of *speech directed to the practical end of governing the country*, a quality which excludes idle rhetoric, imposes strict verification of fact, and requires words to be subordinate to action. The great parliamentary orators have differed widely in their verbal accomplishments, but they have all worked in this medium and regarded speech as a mode of action. The war held the power of Parliament in suspense, and we saw the result at once in the decline of its prestige and simultaneously of its debating capacity.

The member who comes new to the House flushed with triumphs on the platform or in the debating society needs to grasp this special characteristic at once, if he is to find

salvation. Talking-shop the House of Commons may be, but here more than in any assembly in the world words are means to an end, and that end is government. A young man may let off fireworks in a maiden speech and be indulgently applauded for the performance, but after that he must earn the reputation of contributing something solid, if he wishes to get on. Let him remember that debate is team-work, and that he is more likely to prosper if he is ready to do his best when called upon than if he nurses his reputation and seeks a solitary triumph. His opportunities will be few at the start, and if he is wise he will look for these in Grand Committee or Select Committee even more than on the floor of the House. The great thing for him to aim at is the seasonable speech at the timely moment. Parliamentary reputations have mostly been won not by prepared speeches on set occasions, but by timely intervention at a critical moment with the kind of speech which helps a Government or heartens an Opposition in distress. Men thought of no account have suddenly caught the ear of the House in one inspired quarter of an hour after years of inconspicuous effort ; and others of tried ability have failed to reach the highest place because they were incapable of these impromptus. It is impossible to predict what exactly will take the House of Commons, but timeliness and relevance are the two great virtues. Again and again I have listened from the gallery to what seemed to me admirable speeches, and wondered that they fell entirely flat. And I have listened to others which, as oratorical performances, were entirely without merit, but which nevertheless were great and obvious successes. As a rule the first were judged to have been in the air and the second to have gone to the mark.

2

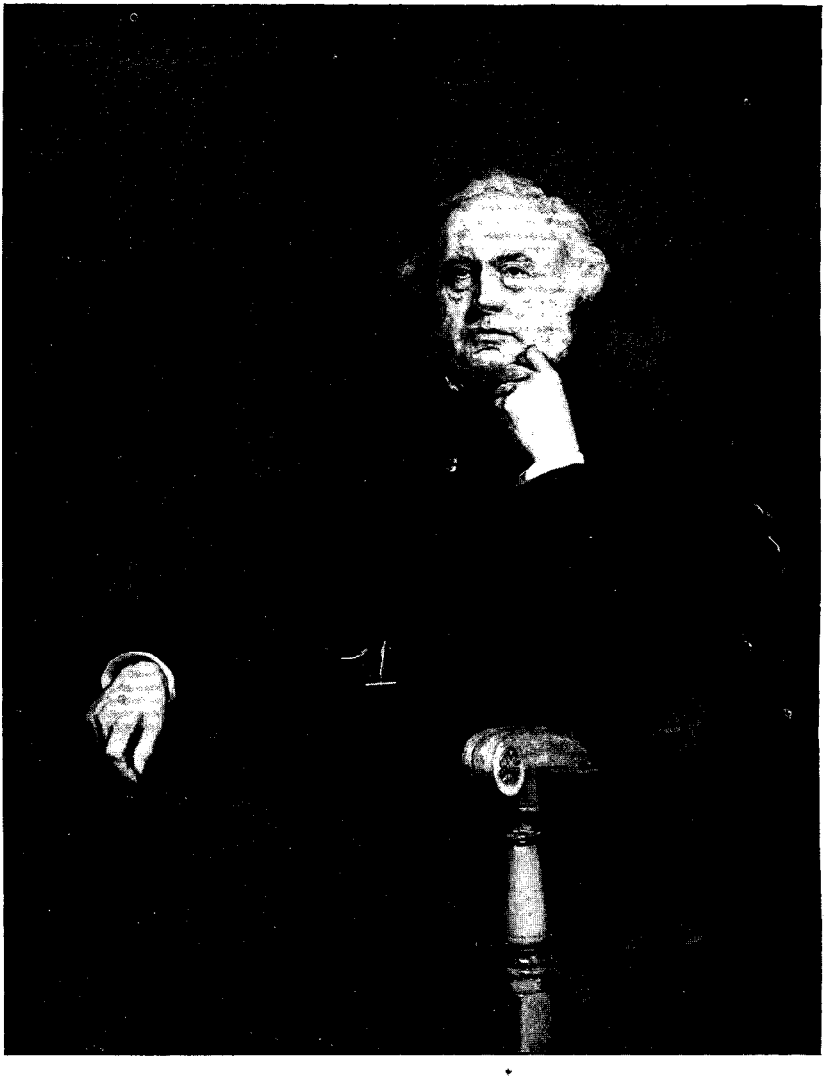
There could scarcely be more difficult conditions for public speaking than those which the House of Commons imposes on five-sixths of its members. The back-bencher comes to the House with an elaborately prepared speech.

He has no idea when he may be called, or whether he will be called at all. He may rise a dozen times without catching the Speaker's eye, and each time, as he sits down again, his speech will fade a little in his memory, or the occasion for it will have passed, or someone else will have anticipated all his best points, or the mere anxiety and suspense of bobbing up and down may have driven it out of his head when at last, and perhaps to his terror, he hears his name called from the Chair. Then as likely as not he will find himself speaking to empty benches, or, worse still, have to go brazenly ahead, while members stream into the lobby on seeing him rise. He has no desk in front of him to hold his notes ; his platform is a narrow gangway, he must stand perfectly upright and still, and limit his gestures to his arms. Only a very cool hand will do himself justice or command a perfect literary style in such circumstances.

A good House of Commons style is much applauded, and at its best it is a high accomplishment. But it abounds in jargon evolved by generations of speakers to help them over these obstacles, consecrated phrases and sentences which mean nothing but occupy the time while the House is emptying or filling, or while the speaker pulls himself together and dredges his memory for the good things he has prepared. " Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable member who has just sat down has charged my Right Honourable friend, the President of the Board of Trade, with having misrepresented the speech which the honourable and learned gentleman, the member for Calne, made earlier in the debate. Sir, as I shall presently prove, the honourable member himself is guilty of misrepresenting the speech of my Right Honourable friend, the President of the Board of Trade. For what did my Right Honourable friend say ? etc. etc." That is quite a typical opening, and if the words are duly articulated, it is generally much admired. By the time he has got through two or three sentences on this model and rung the changes on " honourable " and " Right Honourable " and " learned " and " gallant," the speaker has got his wind, and if the House has settled down to listen to him he can begin cautiously to unload his good things.

As a rule the House of Commons speaker makes his points well, but to the impatient journalist who by long habit has learnt to know what is coming, the performance often seems intolerably slow. The practised debater seldom exceeds 120 words a minute, and while he delivers one sentence he is obviously preparing the next. All through he abounds in what the literary call *clichés*. A dozen times in a short speech he will " venture to say," and when he isn't " venturing " he is " confessing." " Sir, I confess that it never occurred to me." " I confess that when I came down to this House " (they always " come down ") " I had not the slightest idea," etc. Or else he " submits with all respect," and is " astonished beyond measure " at things which leave his hearers entirely unmoved.

The conditions being what they are, it is perhaps surprising that the average of debating is as high as it is. After thirty years of listening to debates I think I detect some invasion of the business manner. The speech in Committee is often a recital of facts and figures such as an expert man of business would reel off to a shorthand writer in his office. It is as a rule lucid and well arranged, but severely unadorned. Even the second-reading speech tends more and more to conform to this model. It would be an excellent discipline for the critics who rail at the House of Commons as if it were the last refuge of word-spinners and wind-bags, to be compelled to spend three hours a day listening to the average debate on the average Bill. Nowhere else in the world can there be such painstaking and laborious effort on the part of well-informed persons to put their fellow-beings in possession of the facts as they suppose them to be, or on the whole so little concession to the art and craft of speechifying. The modern dispraise of the House of Commons comes largely from the smart journalist who is sent to write it up for popular newspapers, and day by day turns his back on it in despair because the serious part of its business provides such meagre fare for the amusement of his clients. The House *vis-à-vis* these newspapers is in a perpetual dilemma. If it does its work in the serious and thoughtful way that the interests



JOHN BRIGHT

From the Painting by W. Oules, R.A., in the National Portrait Gallery.

of the country are supposed to require, they leave it severely alone ; if now and again it breaks into a scene or an eccentric member does something unseemly, they report it in full and comment heavily on the decay of its manners. It adds to the irony of the position that the journalist who finds the House of Commons too dull for his purpose is generally the first to declare that it has fallen from its high estate.

3

The fashions of oratory change insensibly from generation to generation, and it is impossible to make any just comparison between Parliament as we know it to-day and the Parliaments which our fathers and grandfathers knew. Eloquence appeals specially to youth, and most old men are persuaded that the speeches which they heard when they were young far surpass the greatest efforts of later times. Thus each generation is apt to find its oratorical hero in the last, and in my boyhood I have heard old men say that Gladstone and Bright were not to be compared with Canning and Fox, and no doubt in their youth other old men spoke in the same way of the "incomparable Chatham." Who can say what tradition there may be in future times about Asquith and Lloyd George or the simple and powerful appeals which Edward Grey made to the House of Commons in August 1914? It has been my fate to read through a great many ancient debates, as recorded in Hansard, and the comparison they suggest is by no means all to the advantage of past times. A few great masters emerge, and one is inclined to say that Bright and Gladstone at their best are unsurpassed, and perhaps unequalled, by any of their successors. But the amazing redundancy of the old parliamentarians, the violence of their language and their lack of courtesy in debate are astonishing to a modern who has had it dinned into him that parliamentary manners have decayed in our time. To the modern reader Disraeli's attacks on Peel in the Corn Law debates often seem more like the impertinences of a clever undergraduate than the criticism of a responsible

parliamentarian, and I can hardly imagine them being tolerated in the House of Commons to-day. Disraeli's invective did not lack polish, but, what was more important, it lacked heart and conviction, and there was little in it of the noble rage for a just cause.

In most of these debates, the great speeches or the memorable passages were oases in dreary deserts of dull or pompous rhetoric. All the important people, or those who thought themselves important, spoke at enormous length and with immense waste of words. Palmerston took " from the dusk of a summer night to the dawn of a summer morning " to deliver his famous Don Pacifico oration, and though there are stirring passages in that speech which will still bear reading, everything that is material in it could easily have been compressed into half the space, and greatly, one would have supposed, to the relief of both speaker and audience. The average of debate is certainly much better adapted to the needs of a working assembly now than in the former days. The hours are tolerable, the speeches are briefer and more business-like, the procedure is simplified.

But it is not, I think, wholly an illusion of advancing years which makes one doubt whether the great moments of the modern House are on the same level as the great moments of the former times, and that point is, I think, of rather more than academic interest. A parliamentary assembly will not hold the imagination of the public or impress it with a sense of greatness and dignity, unless it is capable of rising, on due occasion, to a high level of sustained oratory. We may despise rhetoric and think lightly of the glib speaker, but this decorative side of public affairs has a high intrinsic value. The danger of the modern House of Commons is that the business man with his business speeches and the politician with his political jargon may be fatal to the great occasions when the public expects a long-lasting controversy to be brought to a fitting climax or a national mood expressed in words which touch the heart and the imagination. The great British parliamentary figures seldom failed in this sense of the great occasion,

and most of them seem to have had a subtle instinct for the dramatic setting which is of the essence of good debate. Herein they were helped by the sense of unlimited time which pervaded the old House of Commons. Vexatious and demoralizing as this might be on ordinary occasions, it was an undoubted advantage on the great occasions. The orator cannot do himself justice when he is all the time fighting with the clock or obsessed with the knowledge that the newspapers are going to press, and that if he does not finish quickly he will be unreported the next day. The great moments in the old House of Commons were nearly always after dinner and generally after midnight, but in these days the newspapers which impose their time-table upon Parliament are more and more aggrieved if anything important is said after the dinner-hour. The modern House of Commons, unlike some of its predecessors, is a strictly sober and highly respectable assembly, yet undoubtedly the human temperature does tend to rise after dinner, and men as a rule become more susceptible to oratory and more capable of it in the late hours of the evening than in the light of common day. I do not think any of the old hands would doubt that there is a real difference in the atmosphere of debate between the hours of four and eight and the hours of nine and one.

But the change of hour is accompanied by a shortening of the hours and a demand for compression, which, however good in itself, may on the great occasion be fatal to effective speech. When every speaker is warned that he must not encroach upon a time-table arranged by the whips for the benefit of the newspapers, there is no room for impromptu or for any expansion which the moment may suggest. Ministers who cannot trust themselves to compress, or are afraid that their tongues may run away with them, produce and read type-written manuscripts which ruin the atmosphere of debate. When someone exceeds or pent-up feelings overflow the boundaries, the results are unexpected and disconcerting. On the night when his great South African settlement was presented to the House of Commons

Opposition speakers left Campbell-Bannerman but one minute for the contribution which he of all men was most entitled to make to an historic debate. That was resented at the time as a studied act of discourtesy, but having been present on this occasion, I should say rather that the pent-up feelings of hostility to his proposals wrecked the time-table without any intentional discourtesy on the part of his opponents.

It is impossible, and not desirable, to return to the old ways, but a more conscious effort to make the best of the greater occasions is, I think, greatly to be desired, if the House of Commons is to retain its hold on the public. A great debate is an artistic product which requires a combination of three parties ; the speakers, the whips and the Speaker. The speakers must be ready, the whips must match them nicely against each other, and the Speaker must consent to and connive at the arrangement. If other parties intervene with unrehearsed parts, or if the speakers fail to draw each other, the occasion is a failure. Some Speakers have seemed to take a perverse pleasure in spoiling what promised to be a great debate by calling inferior performers who speedily empty the House. The moment can never be recaptured ; members may return when presently the star performer is announced, but their mood has changed and a fresh start must be made. Other Speakers seem unconsciously to select the worst advocates of a given cause and leave them at the mercy of the most skilful on the other side. Labouchere used to complain that the " great, wise and eminent " occupants of the front benches took all " the prime cuts off the joint " and left only scrap and bone for the back benches. It is a delicate matter for a Speaker to curb the appetites of the front-benchers, but on the great occasion debate can only be kept at a high level by the ruthless exclusion of the unaccomplished, and the real complaint of the House was not that the official performers had the lion's share, but that so many of them had such a deadly capacity for killing the occasions in which they had an official claim to take part.

4

Here we touch one of the singularities of the British public life. A considerable number of men rise to the highest places who not only have no capacity for public speaking, but never think it worth while to learn even the elements of elocution. Men to whom one would suppose it would be torture to appear in public, multiply their public appearances and seem to take pleasure in displaying their unpreparedness or their ignorance of the right way of addressing an audience and holding its attention. In fact the fear of the professional politician in England has gone perilously near establishing the presumption that a public man need have no professional qualifications. In no other calling could such incapacity in the professional arts as one sees habitually displayed in the public life be other than ruinous to those who suffered from it, but in this sphere it seems even to have a certain virtue. To be clever or glib is one of the most dangerous reputations a public man can earn, and he who is either of these things may consider himself fortunate if he is not deemed also to be dishonest. The presumption is that keen wits are not with solid worth allied, and Parliament is for ever on guard against the too accomplished speaker.

It is said that the late Duke of Devonshire, who, when roused, had a fine and massive quality of speech, once gravely consulted a colleague about a dilemma which frequently afflicted him. If in making a speech you had forgotten the nominative of your sentence, was it better to go back to the beginning and start again or go on to the end and take another—verb? A large number of speeches made by quite eminent men suggest that they are perpetually in hesitation between these alternatives, but in England—though not always in Scotland or Wales—an audience seems seldom to require that a spoken sentence should be either grammatical or complete, and the speaker himself has a well-justified confidence that the reporters will recover what he intended to say from the disordered litter of his words. The parliamentary reporter is one of the most

skilful and modest of men, and, having watched him at work for many years, I wonder not only at his ingenuity, but at his forbearance and patience. The indulgence which the House of Commons accords to imperfect elocution and ungrammatical speech adds beyond all reason to his labours, and the strain that is imposed on him. Comparatively few Members of Parliament trouble to make themselves audible in the Press Gallery and Ministers least of all. They read answers to questions, every word of which may be important, in a rapid monotone with their backs to the reporters and their eyes on the type-script. They drop their voices at the end of their sentences and exchange question and answer with the bench opposite in a conversational tone which is inaudible beyond ten yards. Question time in the House of Commons is a prolonged exasperation to the reporters, but repeated remonstrances have failed to produce the very modest technical accomplishment that would relieve the strain.

It is right that Parliament and Governments should be well-seasoned with administrative men, even if they have no capacity for public speaking, and the last thing to be desired is that a deliberative assembly should be in a perpetual state of rhetorical ferment. Many subjects and many occasions are better left to experts who use the language of their kind. But grammar and audibility are within the compass of ordinary mortals and a very little pains will convert a bad speaker into a tolerable one. There is really no reason why a public man should not be required to learn the technique of what is after all his chosen occupation, or why incompetence in this respect should be condoned as virtuous. A higher level of accomplishment in the arts of debate or at least of clear and concise speech would add to the amenities of Parliament and to the respect in which it is held.

5

It was often said in former days that Irish obstruction had ruined parliamentary manners and made the old kind of oratory impossible, and I dare say the same thing will

be said in the future about the Labour party. It certainly was not true of the Irish, and will in all probability not be true of the Labour party. I can remember no better nights in the House than when Gladstone, Parnell, Chamberlain, Healy, Balfour, Randolph Churchill, Redmond, Sexton and T. P. O'Connor were in full cry on the Irish question. In battling with Irish obstruction and learning from the Irish to obstruct on their own account, the Fourth Party and other young bloods of the Tory party learnt the arts which afterwards brought them fame and power. The Irish were remarkable for the variety of their gifts. Parnell with his withering defiance and icy effectiveness, as un-Celtic according to popular notions as a man could be ; Healy with his biting epigrams uttering words like scorching lava ; Redmond the noble Roman with his classical eloquence ; Sexton of the clear-cut phrase and flowing peroration ; " T.P." with his unfailing vivacity, good humour and inexhaustible store of things that interest and arrest—these and half a dozen more would have been eminent in any Parliament in the world, and they brought to the House of Commons just those elements of life and fire that the English temperament lacks, and that it needs to break down its somnolence and complacency. The notion that this peculiarly gifted and original group of speakers was guilty of defiling the pure stream of British eloquence must always seem an absurdity to those who knew the House of Commons in the 'eighties and 'nineties. They did the very reverse; they stirred the pools and freshened the streams and taught the English a great many things that the English were the better for knowing.

The removal of the Irish is, in fact, a great loss to the House of Commons, and if the Labour party can fill the gap, so much the better. The House needs a constant corrective to the legal, academic and business types, which, left to themselves, would remove it more and more from the common life ; and men who have fought their way up from the mine or the forge are more likely to provide it than any others. Style for style, it is no more an

offence to address the House of Commons in the style of Parliament Hill than in that of the shareholders' meeting, and the first even has some merits over the second. Neither is to be desired, but if the Labour man will take a little pains, he may easily discover that he has natural gifts which may be turned to the best account precisely because they have not been sophisticated by academic training. During the election of 1923 I heard on a country platform a speech by an agricultural labourer which seemed to me one of the very best examples of the simple and virile use of words that I had ever listened to, and there could scarcely be an assembly in which the level of debate would not have been raised by it. The speaker evidently had read his Bible, and he seemed to have a nearly perfect sense of rhythm and almost faultless taste. If they respect themselves, give their natural gifts free play and avoid imitating the tricks of hardened middle-class rhetoricians, scores of young workers will find themselves capable of this accomplishment, and they will hold their own in any audience. The things that they commonly consider disqualifications—the twang and the burr and the misplaced aspirate—are really, if they will believe it, of much less importance than violence and overstatement and vulgarity of speech, all of which are within their control, if they give themselves a little mental discipline. The neglect of the art of speech by all the schools, for whatever class they cater, is a standing reproach ; and if the Labour party is serious about education and desires equality of opportunity for the children of the poor, it will see that this art is taken in hand in the elementary schools. Englishmen make a serious mistake in laughing at systematic attempts to teach what in other countries is called " rhetoric," and now that the door into the public life lies wide open to all comers, one may hope that it will in time be a regular part of the curriculum of education. Rhetoric, it may be added, includes not only the use of words, but the qualities of mind that make for self-possession and effectiveness in a speaker and enable him to develop an argument in an orderly and lucid way. A man who has had " rhetoric " instilled into him in youth

will be in little danger of becoming either a wind-bag or a demagogue in later years.

A modern House of Commons based on universal suffrage and drawing its members from all classes must find the form of speech appropriate to its conditions. What it may lose in classic oratory it may gain in a vigorous and natural kind of speech, but now and again we may look back with regret to the days when its great figures hushed the assembly with a stately eloquence and aired their learning in apt quotation. To quote Greek in the modern House of Commons would be an unforgivable pedantry, and only the hardiest will venture a Latin tag. Yet there was something jolly in the romps which Gladstone and Robert Lowe had with the Trojan horse in the Reform Bill debates of 1867. And I own I never can recall without a thrill certain of Gladstone's Virgilian quotations—the "exoriare aliquis" of his 1866 peroration or the beautiful tribute to Archbishop Trench, the poet Archbishop of Dublin, in one of his speeches on the Irish Church Bill:

Nec te tua plurima, Panthu,
Labentem pietas nec Apollinis infula texit.

which is surely one of the most consummate examples of apt and touching quotation. Now and again even in these days one may trace the suppressed Latin in Mr. Asquith's speeches and think how admirably he would have played his part in these jousts of old times; but a reputation, always a little in peril of the reproach of culture, will not stand these experiments. For better or worse the atmosphere in which they are appropriate has gone for ever, and we must be content if our popular assembly develops a robust vernacular.

CHAPTER XI

PARLIAMENT AS A PROFESSION

The Advantage of Beginning Young—A Desultory Life—The Two Classes of Politicians—The Hazards of Politics—Rivalry and Friendship—The Good Colleague—The Importance of Being Trusted—Political and Personal Dislikes—The Freemasonry of the Front Benches—Private Life and Public Reputation —Unintentional Propaganda.

I

UNDOUBTEDLY it is a great advantage to enter the House of Commons young, and a young man whose ambitions reach out to a great career had better make any sacrifice to get there early. But let him in that case make up his mind that all other objects must be subordinate to service of the House of Commons. It requires a very unusual disposition to follow a bread-winning profession with any success while making a career in Parliament, and a notion that a seat in the House of Commons is an aid to barristers or a means of advancement in other professions is generally a delusion. The House does indeed accord a peculiar indulgence to barristers, and their professional engagements are generally counted a good excuse in the Whips' room, but to combine a practice in the Law Courts with regular attendance at Westminster after the Courts rise requires an iron constitution and complete freedom from domestic ties. The young man who tries it had better remain a bachelor or, if he takes a wife, be careful to warn her that on five days in the week he will not be seen at home from nine in the morning until past midnight, and that on the other two he may have to be nursing his constituency or making speeches in the country.

Journalism would on the face of it seem the easiest

profession to combine with membership of Parliament, but here too the difficulties are very great. Newspapers exact whole-time service from members of their staffs, and though a free-lance has a certain initial advantage in being able to put M.P. after his name, this quickly wears out, and a man who has no other means of livelihood will live an evil life if he relies on planting occasional articles in newspapers and magazines. And so with any other calling which exacts concentration and efficiency from those who follow it.

For the life of Parliament is the most desultory that a man can pursue, and the condition of success in it is that he shall yield himself cheerfully and systematically to its unsystematic ways. Forty years ago the old parliamentary hands constantly repeated to their juniors that the way to get on was to "stick to the House." Gladstone and Disraeli, as I have already recorded, had little else to say to the young men of their parties, and what they preached they practised themselves with an assiduity which is unknown to modern parliamentarians. By sticking to the House, they meant not wandering between the lobby, the smoking-room and the library, but actually sitting on the green benches through the long hours of debate. It is still, I believe, good advice, but it requires remarkable patience for active-minded men to persist in the purely passive rôle of listeners, whether for the purpose of improving their minds or on the off-chance that they may be able to contribute at some timely moment. The average M.P. certainly does not stick to the House. He strolls in, sits for a few minutes, is visibly bored, strolls out again, gossips in the lobby, passes to the tea-room or the smoking-room, writes a letter, picks up a paper, hangs about till the telegraph board announces that a lively speaker is up or the division bell rings.

In such conditions the unendowed must either resign themselves to living on their £400 a year or develop a very exceptional faculty of economizing the odds and ends of time, so that they may add up to a respectable sum total of work. A few men, like T. P. O'Connor, have a positive

genius in this respect, and seem actually to gain a certain stimulus from the surrounding hubbub, but the normal human being requires a reasonable degree of silence and concentration to do almost any sort of efficient work, and there is no denying that the House of Commons atmosphere is subtly demoralizing to all but the most industrious apprentices.

There are industrious parliamentarians who apply their own method to this life—so many hours in Grand Committee or Select Committee, so much time to the reading of blue books and parliamentary papers, so much to their own contributions to this literature, so much to seeing constituents or corresponding with them, all this combined with punctual attendance at divisions and as much attendance in the House itself as these occupations permit. These are the salt of the earth, and many of them pursue the administrative life with the same passion and secret ardour as other men bring to religion and the arts. They are indispensable to the working of Parliament, and it is vastly to their credit that they are generally content to do their work, and when rewards are distributed, to plod humbly in the wake of the smart and pushful. Democracy will be very much the poorer if these men are squeezed out, but it becomes more and more difficult for a smart politician of the modern type to promote what is called his career, and yet find time for these administrative labours. The nineteenth-century giants had a remarkable faculty for combining the two things. With all his rhetorical gifts, Gladstone had an insatiable appetite for laborious administrative work ; so had Peel, Russell, Harcourt, and Salisbury. But the enormous extension of the sphere of government and the ever-increasing claims of the business of publicity make it difficult for the great performers to spend themselves on details, and frequently the complaint is heard that it is impossible to obtain their attention for important matters which have no immediate public value. Of more than one eminent man I have heard it said by their private secretaries that he "never reads anything."

2

In fact politicians tend more and more to be divided into two classes with the corresponding careers. There is the meritorious and laborious career of the capable and industrious man who hopes to rise gradually from M.P. to Under-secretary and from Under-secretary to Cabinet Minister. The great majority are of this class, and the average Government has been three-fourths filled with them. But there is also the meteoric career of the men with a genius for publicity, who leap or pass rapidly over the intervening stages and storm the Cabinet after a few years in Parliament —the Chamberlains, the Asquiths, the Lloyd Georges, the Churchills. These men defy all rule ; parties must have them and will pay almost any price to get them at the beginning (and sometimes to get rid of them at the end)—and their careers offer no guidance to the humbler performers. These must follow the ordinary road and be content if virtue turns out to be its own reward. Compared with other careers the political is liable to an immense number of unforeseen chances and mishaps. A man may lose his seat just at the most critical moment in his career, and be thrown out of Parliament for a long period in which he may be almost forgotten. For reasons almost impossible to discover, he may be judged unsuitable or difficult, too good for a humble place, and not good enough for a high one, when a Government is formed. He may push himself too much or be so modest as to be easily passed over among claimants who will be formidable if disappointed. Unless he is one of the few who have a public behind him, he will seem extraordinarily at the mercy of the individual fancies or preferences of the great men whose favour is indispensable. I have endeavoured to describe the emotions and anxieties of Government-forming in a passage in another book which I will venture to reproduce here :

Small wonder if many were "on the door-step" of 29 Belgrave Square during these days. It is customary to laugh at politicians in the throes of office-seeking, but men of other professions may ask themselves what they would feel and how they would conduct them-

selves if, at a given moment, their entire career were at stake on the will or whim, as it might seem, of an inscrutable power which can neither be approached nor pleaded with, and whose decision when given is blasting and irretrievable. To be obliged to keep a perfect dignity and reticence when others may be intriguing, to spend miserable hours waiting for a summons which may never come, to be fearful of going out lest it may come in your absence or of returning home to find it not there, to see the days passing and offices filled and yourself forgotten, to be conscious that a large audience is watching your discomfiture—this is the fate of even distinguished men, let alone the scores of others who at this moment are feeling for their footing on the first rung of the ladder. Who shall cast stones if a Prime Minister's letter-bag at such times reveals some of the secrets of human nature? One man is taking an untimely holiday at Cairo, and sends a forlorn telegram to say that a cabled word will bring him home by the next boat. Alas for him, he is not indispensable, and there are a dozen candidates on the spot for the place that he desires. Another rashly attaches conditions to his acceptance of the offer made to him, and to his dismay the Prime Minister answers blandly regretting that he should have "declined." Others accept but frankly express their disappointment at being so modestly or unsuitably rated. One receives his appointment on the last day, but too late to recall a letter to his constituents publicly expressing his feelings at having been overlooked, and this quaintly appears in the newspapers together with the announcement of his appointment. Yet another passes the week in intimate association with the Prime Minister without being told what place he is to have, and learns for the first time from a friend of his appointment to a considerable office. The wives, meantime, are not negligible. Some of them boldly break through the rules which are binding on husbands and sons, and even rush the inner sanctum where the Prime Minister sits guarded by his secretaries. All the time the Press must be at the door seeking intelligent anticipations of facts officially withheld.[1]

Not a small part of the qualifications of the public life is the power to bear misfortune with dignity. The defeated Prime Minister must keep his head up when he is being overwhelmed at the polls; the defeated candidate must be first in congratulations to his successful rival; the excluded office-seeker must go about with the air of having expected nothing, and, if he is wise, be exceptionally careful in sup-

[1] "Life of Campbell-Bannerman," ii. 201.

porting his party at least for a time. Many an excellent man has ruined himself by displaying his wounds or endeavouring to retaliate by ineffective pin-pricks. A Palmerston may have his tit for tat, but Mr. Robinson or Mr. Jones must smile and look pleased.

3

Another of the difficulties of the public life is that a man's real competitors are not his opponents but his friends. He may look across the House and overflow with benevolence and charity at the rise of a promising youth on the other side, but it needs some exercise of virtue to see a friend in the same bench gradually passing him in the race for the same prize. A wit once said that party feeling was the feeling which members of the same party have for one another, but I think it is due to the politicians of the older parties to say that they have on the whole shown excellent discipline and forbearance in their rivalries with each other. The exceptions have been few and notorious, and biography bears witness to innumerable close friendships and partnerships maintained in conditions that in almost any other walk of life might have caused fatal strains. I have seen a good many Governments from within and the cynic's belief that politics are a hotbed of intrigue was certainly untrue of most of them. Harcourt's temper, "Black Michael's" moods, Rosebery's sensitiveness, were indeed causes of friction in several Governments at the end of the last century, but the warfare in which these and other eminent men engaged with their colleagues was open and above-board, the result, it might be, of temper or temperament, but not of cunning or treachery.

The older politicians had traditions on these matters which their successors will be wise to follow. Cabinet-government resting on party allegiance exacts a code of behaviour from all who take part in it which is not learnt in a day, and the art of being a good colleague is indispensable to it. There can be no confidence in a Cabinet if an ag-

grieved or ambitious Minister takes the rank and file into his confidence or supplies newspapers with material to glorify himself at the expense of his leaders or colleagues. The modern relations of public men and newspapers open up a wide field of temptation, and Cabinets are easily wrecked by those who yield to it. It is impossible to say that an unscrupulous and adventurous man may not temporarily win great success by these arts, but the majority of those who practise them are marked down as untrustworthy quite early in their careers. The few who succeed are generally men of great talents who would have gone farther and fared better if they had had the wit to be honest. The House of Commons has an extraordinarily keen eye for self-seekers. It knows them better than they know themselves, and its judgment is seldom at fault. It may accept them reluctantly as necessary men ; it may applaud their splashing speeches and nimble ways, but it does not weep at their downfall or pick them up when they are in adversity. It is equally merciless on certain more innocent faults—vanity, unseasonableness, arrogance—which it judges to be unseemly in public men. Time after time one has seen clever men blandly unconscious of their own infirmities come up against a blank wall of House of Commons disapproval which as effectively blocks their careers as the most heinous wrong-doing. And now and again one sees a man of commanding ability stunned by the discovery that his colleagues are unanimous in denying him the highest position and placing themselves and their fortunes in the hands of some comparative new-comer who has not the half of his qualifications or claims.

4

All this is but to say that character counts in public life, but that often repeated maxim is not quite so simple as it seems. No one who has seen the House of Commons spell-bound by Bottomley can pretend to think that its judgment is infallible. A particular House of Commons elected in times of excitement may fall into the public mood

which is favourable to impostors and demagogues, and nearly every House of Commons is indulgent to those who amuse and entertain it. But a man who has lived through three Parliaments and is certified by his fellow-members as a man to be trusted, generally deserves his reputation. To be trusted by the House of Commons is something more than to be trusted by your own party. One hears Liberals and Radicals saying that it is no compliment to be trusted by Tories, and Tories flattering themselves on the wrath which they excite among Radicals. But there is a subtle difference between the kinds of wrath which party men inspire in their opponents, and nothing commonly is more fatal to an ambitious man than that political antipathies should extend to his personal character. It is no harm, but even an advantage, that a man should be politically hated if he is personally liked, but most Prime Ministers are shy of including in their Cabinets men who are personally as well as politically unacceptable.

The older parties have encouraged a camaraderie between the front benches which is sometimes supposed to reflect upon the sincerity of their political encounters. We lift the curtain to find John Bright in intimate and friendly talk with Disraeli behind the scenes, to see Ministers and ex-Ministers who have been fighting for their lives in the House of Commons dining amicably together at Grillon's afterwards, to hear them calling each other by their Christian names, appraising and admiring each other's technical accomplishments with a complete detachment from their political differences. It was not always so. There were many years in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when Whigs refused to dine in Tory houses and Tories in Whig houses, and there were not a few moments even in later times when these amenities were suspended. The hostess who wanted a Tory duke to meet Mr. Gladstone at dinner in the 'nineties courted disaster, and miscellaneous hospitality was always dangerous when the Irish question was burning. But with these occasional exceptions the freemasonry of the front benches has been a special feature of British politics, and since it is liable to great

misunderstanding it is perhaps worth a little consideration.

Mr. Belloc, as I am aware, would amend this phrase and say "the front bench conspiracy," and in the same strain one may hear modern Labour men speaking of the old politics as a "put-up job" between class politicians, one section of whom was deputed to keep the workers quiet by a pretence of Radical measures, while both in reality stood fundamentally for their "privileges." It is very difficult for those who have lived through the political struggles of recent years and remember their strains and anxieties and the mountains of opposition it was necessary to wear down before even moderate reforms could be accomplished, to take this theory seriously. It requires us, for example, to suppose that the Conservative party staked the existence of the House of Lords and brought the country to the verge of civil war on issues to which in reality it attached no importance. The seriousness and sincerity of these political struggles cannot be called in question, but it was undoubtedly a singularity of the British governing class that it was able to engage in them and yet maintain amicable personal relations. To the Latin mind it is incomprehensible, and to the Prussian it was a deep mystification, which contributed not a little to its miscalculation of British intentions before the war. Being without the clue to this part of British practice, the German deemed it incredible that men who were fighting among themselves as British politicians were about the Irish question in 1914 could unite to oppose a foreign enemy. One set of observers said that the British struggle was a sham fight, the other that it was an unappeasable feud, and both were wrong.

It is in fact a real advantage in any parliamentary system that there should be certain acknowledged common ground between parties which enables them to tap each other's experience and keep their normal warfare within bounds. The task of government is enormously aggravated when any party regards another as outside the pale and denies it the courtesies which make administrative

work smooth and agreeable. To interpret this part of the public life as a deliberate attempt to hoodwink the public is a complete misunderstanding. Real intimacies between men of opposite opinions are as rare in the political as in other walks of life, but when politicians boycott each other it is a sign of temper rather than of conviction. Every gesture of courtesy or friendliness which implies the existence of a common cause acknowledged by all parties must be a gain in public life. But this is not to say that a politician does well to seek the favours of the other side. It will not be readily believed that he can do it for long without paying a price or without being influenced by the colour of his surroundings. Campbell-Bannerman, the most courteous and sociable of men, never disguised his opinion that London society was bad for Radical politicians. You couldn't, he used to say, be perpetually in the company of people who thought your opinions disreputable without wishing to tone them down to prove yourself respectable. The Radical also suffered in the esteem of the quiet and religiously-minded people who formed the backbone of his party, if he was supposed to be given over to the frivolities of the smart world. Nothing served Gladstone better with the mass of his supporters than the well-founded belief that he lived seriously in private as in public; nothing stood Campbell-Bannerman in better stead than his reputation of being a quiet Scot who preferred the society of his own kind.

5

Politicians scarcely realize the part which this side of their lives plays in the public judgment of them. They can no longer rail off one half of their existence and call it their "private life" with which the public has no concern. A vigilant Press armed with the camera takes special pleasure in exposing their frolics and their innocent sports, and is never so happy as when it catches them off their guard at Newmarket or Ascot, or on the Terrace at Monte Carlo in company with ladies whose costumes are a perpetual surprise to the unsophisticated worker. Too frequent

appearances on these scenes raise doubts in the minds of constituents, for whether it is the photographic process or some inherent quality in pleasure-seeking, the human countenance is nearly always presented with a peculiarly unflattering expression on these occasions. The popular judgment of these things varies according to the standing and professions of the individual. A smart young Conservative may even gain merit from frequent advertisement of his activities in the highest circles. This is what is expected of him, and what may be fairly counted a mark of success in what he has set out to do. But the Radical undoubtedly is compromised by any suggestion that he is not in reality what he claims to be ; and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, I imagine, would be quite ruined if he were caught on Newmarket Heath in company with a duchess or a bookmaker and presented in that guise to the readers of the *Daily Herald* the next morning.

This is a more serious matter than the light-hearted children of the world appear to realize. Of all the " propaganda " that makes for unrest and discontent none in recent years has been quite so effective as that which the pleasure-seekers themselves provide through the illustrated pages of the daily and weekly Press. It is useless to pretend that there are no idle rich, and difficult to maintain that they are an insignificant fraction, in face of this unceasing advertisement of men and women fantastically arrayed and hungrily pursuing the most expensive sports and pleasures. Economists may prove that what they squander is but a negligible quantity of the resources of the nation, but the contrast between this life and the life of the average toiling man or woman—to say nothing of the destitute and submerged—strikes the imagination and adds envy and bitterness to the inevitable clash between wealth and poverty. Those who charge agitators with stirring up strife may well take heed lest they themselves become the authors of this mischief. The public man who says that his private life is his own affair has no longer the power of making it so. The picture of him which is formed in the public eye is built up of a thousand little details which may

have nothing to do with his political action. He chooses voluntarily the life of publicity and he cannot escape its liabilities. One of these, in a democratic age, is a certain discipline which will make his life appear consistent and continuous, and in some sense an example of his public professions. The attitude of the public in this matter is not Puritanism so much as a sense of congruity and seemliness. It will be indulgent to one man who is expected to do these things and ruthless to another who is not expected to do them.

The wives of politicians find the distinction hard to understand and extremely unfair, but it is there, and they as well as their husbands have to reckon with it. Whoever embarks on the public life must make up his mind that it is a highly artificial mode of existence requiring sacrifices of privacy and convenience which no other profession demands, subject to rules and traditions which may seem quite irrational, and exposed to catastrophes which may be wholly unmerited. The political star-performer leads the actor's life and is liable to the discipline of the clergy. Conformity may be disagreeable but rebellion is generally disastrous.

CHAPTER XII

THE COMING OF LABOUR

The Old Public Life—A Narrow Circle—Liberals and Democrats—The Coming of Labour—The Liberal-Labour Pact—Results of the War—The New Party—Its Infallibility—The Labour Ladder—Difficulties of the Career—Trade Representation and its Drawbacks—Results of Education—Homage to Intellectuals—The First Labour Government—The Delegate Theory and its Consequences—A Dangerous Tendency—The "Liaison Committee"—A Vital Decision.

I

IT is impossible to read the diaries and memoirs of the nineteenth century without being struck by the narrowness of the circle in which important people moved. The "great world" depended on its own capacity to keep itself small; any big drawing-room in London could contain all of its members who really counted. Three-fourths of the governing class consisted of noblemen and gentlemen who entertained each other in their town houses during the parliamentary session, and in their country houses in the autumn and winter. A certain number of rich men were brought in; the more eminent lawyers were always welcome, and celebrities in art and letters received invitations to dinners and evening parties. A few journalists had the *entrée*, but they were generally regarded as suspicious characters. Within the circle were two groups, Whig and Tory, which kept themselves to themselves on intimate occasions, but mingled pretty freely on others, except when feelings were unusually heated. Much of the business of parties was done in the clubs: the Carlton, the Reform, Brooks's; and the more eminent politicians buried their differences and dined together *sans rancune* at Grillon's or "the Club." The personnel of this world might be made up from the Greville Memoirs, the Malmesbury Memoirs, the list of the company which Delane (as recorded in

Dasent's Life) used to meet at dinner ; and it could probably all be printed comfortably on three or four pages of the size of this book.

On the fringe of this society were the Radicals like Cobden and Bright, whose milieu was the provincial business world, who were in close touch with the leaders of Nonconformity and other serious persons, and whose politics were still in the agitating stage. The Tories thought of them as dangerous men, and the Whigs, though professing a certain benevolence towards the causes they advocated, greatly objected to their methods and held these to be an unnecessary intrusion on the old and orderly ways of governing the country.

But neither Radicals, Whigs nor Tories had seriously thought of Labour as a factor to be reckoned with in the governing class. Even as late as the 'seventies the idea of returning working men to Parliament was supposed to be a fad of John Stuart Mill's, who advocated it (in strict moderation) as the means of giving extreme opinion just that amount of representation which he held to be necessary, if moderate opinion was not to be too moderate. The Radicals were for an enlarged (though by no means universal) franchise, but the majority of both Whigs and Tories were only with great reluctance induced to accept the moderate instalment of reform conceded in the Household Franchise Act of 1867. We shall not understand the history of that and the preceding year unless we grasp the fact that many of the Liberals of this period, let alone the Whigs, formally disowned the imputation of being democrats. Bagehot, in a passage which I have already quoted, speaks of Liberals who " though they would be shocked to hear themselves called democrats," yet used language which was dangerously liable to be interpreted in a democratic sense. And notwithstanding that they and the Tories accepted from Disraeli (after the mob had pulled down the railings in Hyde Park) what they had rejected from Gladstone, a substantial majority in this Parliament undoubtedly agreed with Robert Lowe that their citadel had been invaded by the wooden horse, which would presently belch

out a horde of grimy workers to destroy it from within. *Scandit fatalis machina muros.*

I suppose that if they could have foreseen the sequel as we see it to-day, these objectors would have been more than ever convinced that they were right. Moderate as was the instalment of new voters, it immediately changed the face of the familiar scene. Since the beginning of the century there had been two great domestic controversies—the Reform Bill of 1832 and the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846—and between them long intervals of repose in which the governing class had been almost completely absorbed in foreign affairs. Now came Gladstone with the new voters behind him opening the sluice-gates and bringing " reform in a flood." Yet that impulse also exhausted itself, and for a considerable period the pendulum swung again in the old way. It even swung more in the Tory way than the Liberal way, in spite of the enfranchisement of the labourer which followed in 1885. Gladstone's impetuosity about Ireland and the struggle in South Africa checked and held up the Liberal movement, so that in the twenty-five years between 1880 and 1905, the Tories were in office nearly seventeen years, and the Liberals little more than eight. Then the pent-up Liberal movement was released in another flood at the end of 1905, and the results began to follow which the anti-democrats had predicted in 1866 and 1867.

But the Liberal party, great as its triumph seemed to be in 1906, was no longer the sole exponent of the progressive cause. Its long exclusion from office and its many internal dissensions had led not a few of its working-class supporters to question both its zeal and its capacity. All through these years Socialists had been at work sapping the foundations of Liberalism and preaching the need of a workers' party. In the early days the more important of the Socialist groups were content to " permeate and penetrate " the Liberal party. Fabians provided material for Liberal programmes and limited direct action to the London County Council. But this was only a first move, and the Independent Labour party was soon at work with the

avowed object of forming a separate party which should challenge both the existing parties and eventually throw off the shackles which bound Labour to the Liberal chariot. The Liberals from the beginning were in a dilemma. For twenty years and more they had openly proclaimed themselves the democratic party, and declared it to be one of their objects to increase working-class representation in Parliament. Gladstone had even brought one of them, Broadhurst, into his Ministry, and the whips had declared themselves in favour of working-men candidates wherever they had a chance of keeping or winning seats. But for Liberals to encourage these candidates if they could not rely on their votes afterwards, or if they were to be the nucleus of a party which would presently declare open war on the Liberal party was plainly suicidal. It was evident by the beginning of the century that the problem was becoming acute. The Independent Labour party was putting candidates into the field without consulting the Liberal whips, and not a few of them threatened what were deemed to be safe Liberal seats at a time when Liberalism seemed to need every vote, if it was to maintain its existence.

The sudden challenge to Free Trade in 1903 saved the situation for the time being. The Liberal party had the good fortune to be led by a man, Campbell-Bannerman, for whom large numbers of the workers had a genuine affection, and its electioneering affairs were in the hands of a very skilful and conciliatory chief-whip, who established a friendly footing with Labour. The result was an informal pact by which Liberal and Labour agreed, as far as possible, not to trip each other up by three-cornered fights ; and in the 1905 election 53 Labour members were returned, of whom 24 were allied to the Liberal party and the remaining 29 were nominees of the Labour Representation Committee, and pledged to sit and vote as an independent party.[1]

Their independence was of little consequence in the Parliament that followed. That Parliament was occupied for the whole of its existence with controversial subjects on which Liberal and Labour were obliged to act together.

[1] "Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman," ii, 224.

No Parliament could have been more zealous in social reform, and it is improbable that any in our time will equal its legislative output or the courage with which it faced one formidable controversy after another. But the war cleaned the slate of all this and gave a new party just the opportunity it needed to get established. Disappointment, exhaustion and reaction—inevitable sequels of even victorious war—predispose to any new experiment. Thousands said in their haste that the old parties had been tried and found wanting, and that a new one could at least do nothing worse than they had done. It was forgotten that the great mass of Labour itself had gone with the war tide, and that many of its leaders had been eminent members of successive war Ministries. The old politicians were held responsible for all that had gone amiss; it was said that a new chapter must be opened in which the workers themselves would look after the workers' interests and save them from being made the sport of profiteers and war-mongers.

But for the war it is possible that Liberal and Labour would have been welded into a Progressive party which would have carried on for another generation. But organized Liberalism was divided and shattered by Coalition politics, and the war had kindled a certain fanaticism which favoured the clean cut between classes. There were revolutions all over Europe, and even here there was a fermentation of the Marxian doctrine of the class-war, taking the milder and characteristically British form of cutting the political acquaintance of the bourgeois while the Bolshevists were cutting their throats. The older parties cultivated a certain tolerance towards each other ; in their easier moments they admitted each other's merits and even conceived it possible that they themselves might be mistaken. Labour would have none of this weakness. It was like the Catholic Church, dogmatic, exclusive, Papal, demanding the entire allegiance of its members, absolutely forbidding communion with inferior sects, contemplating always its own infallibility. It might have a difficulty in deciding what its doctrine was, but it was at least agreed that there could be no other.

Since many of the Labour leaders are clever men and experienced politicians, we may, I think, assume that this is not juvenile conceit but a well-considered plan to secure the discipline of their party. For this party is not, like the other two, a gradual development from historical conditions with old loyalties and roots in the past, but the deliberate creation of a few individuals, who have brought it into existence and made it powerful and ministerial in rather less than ten years. Nothing but a very confident claim for the complete separation of its doctrine and the superiority of that doctrine over all others could have achieved this object in so short time ; and it has necessarily from this point of view been more important for Labour to brand the other parties as reactionary than to define its own creed. What that creed is, we shall only discover by experience. The group of men included in Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's 1924 Government comprised more varieties of opinion than were ever brought together under " the Gladstone umbrella," or even under the extensive canopies of war-time coalitions. Fabian and Marxist, Liberal and Conservative, Pacifist and Imperialist, Protectionist and Free Trader, peer and proletariat, all found shelter in the same tabernacle and consented to be called " Labour." In the meantime recruits of all shades of opinion were flocking in, and the barriers which kept poor men out of Parliament everywhere being thrown down.

2

The Labour party has undoubtedly opened a new world and created a new career for the workers. The ambitious young workman need no longer think of himself as chained to his workshop, or cut off by evil circumstances from the glittering prizes of the big world without. If he proves himself competent and useful to his fellows, he may mount by regular steps from his workshop to the highest places in the land. It is as open to him to make himself famous or notorious as to any of the prize lads from the public schools and universities. The stages in this ascent are well marked.

He may become trade-union organizer, get elected to local bodies, make his mark at the Trade Union Congress, and thence become a candidate for Parliament. His pay is modest but sufficient ; his expenses are paid for him, and when he gets into Parliament his M.P.'s salary will keep him afloat. If we read the biographies of Labour members of Parliament, we can see these stages repeated again and again : miner, checkweigher, miners' agent, member of Urban Council, County Council, M.P. ; lighterman and waterman, official of Union, General Secretary, London County Councillor, M.P. ; President of Trade Union, cabinetmaker, Joiners' Society official, Co-operative Society director, M.P. ; shop-boy, docker, Transport Union secretary, M.P. ; textile worker, journalist, M.P. ; carman, General Secretary of Union, Borough Councillor, County Councillor, M.P. ; telegraph boy, telegraphist, editor of Union Journal, J.P., M.P. ; elementary teacher, County Councillor, M.P. ; engineer, convener of shop-stewards, Organizing Secretary of Union, M.P.; printer, Secretary of Union, M.P., etc. etc. The party has an imposing façade of middle-class and professional men on its front bench, but the great majority of its members started life as workmen and have reached their present position through their services to trade unions. Many of them are quite young and find themselves in their thirties and forties with all the possibilities of the public career open to them.

But to say that this career is open is by no means to say that it is easy. We shall be nearer the truth if we say that it is difficult and toilsome to a degree which must leave its mark on those who engage in it. The early work in the mine or factory ; the life of contention and striving which alone shows the way out of mine or factory ; the service of the trade union and the difficulty of giving satisfaction to its members ; the incessant propaganda, the strikes, the elections—all this means unceasing struggle and anxiety, if the young Labour man is to keep his head above water. When committed to the career, he must go on with it, for after a very few years a return to manual labour is all but an impossibility. He will have lost his skill ; he will

have become accustomed to an entirely different manner of life. The careers of many of these men have been highly honourable. Strenuous efforts at self-education, good works, philanthropic and religious, genuine zeal for the good life, righteous indignation at oppression and poverty have made their lives exemplary to men of other classes. Wives as well as husbands have sacrificed to the cause ; years of patient saving have enabled the bread-winner to go for six months to Ruskin College. Men who have travelled this road are the salt of public life, and for the older parties it is a calamity to have lost them.

But there is of course another side to the shield. Some trade unions are hard taskmasters and perpetual concentration on the interests of one trade or group of workmen does not enlarge the mental outlook. Experts in the intricate code of trade union rules easily become sea-lawyers and develop an abnormal quantity of the litigious and combative spirit. To know the rules of certain trades and the leading cases which have decided the disputed points is almost a life's study. The middle-class public has a vague idea of Labour leaders as perpetually engaged in the spread of large and dangerous Utopian ideas, but the actual life of many of them is an incessant grinding at petty and vexatious details for a modest and hard-earned salary, with critics and rivals perpetually on the watch to trip them up. The Socialism that these men profess is as much the vision of a blessed state in which these toils will be superfluous as a panacea for the evils of society.

Let it be conceded that for the present there is no other way, but the entrance to politics by the trade union door has certain very special drawbacks. It is as if the middle-class members of Parliament came to Westminster as the nominees of the General Medical Council, the Incorporated Society of Lawyers, the Institute of Journalists, the Authors' Society, the various federations and associations of employers with which the country abounds. If we had the industrial Parliament of which some innovators dream, this no doubt would be the accepted method, but in Parliament, as it is, Blackstone's definition still stands : "The Commons

consist of the representatives of the nation at large, exclusive of the peerage. Every member, though chosen by a particular district, once he is elected and returned, serves for the whole realm; the end of his coming thither, being not particular but general ; not merely to advantage his constituents, but the commonwealth as a whole."

What is true of "particular districts" must *a fortiori* be true of trade or trade union interests. I know it will be said by trade unionists that large numbers of middle-class members do in fact represent vested interests such as land, cotton, steel, beer, railways. Yet there is a distinction between men who have interests in special trades or kinds of property, and men who are the officials and possibly the paid spokesmen of these trades and kinds of property. Parliament is not barred to either, but it has always been suspicious of men supposed to be formally attached to any of these interests, and whether they come from one camp or the other, it must be more difficult for them to get on to the plane in which the " commonwealth as a whole " is conceived to be the object of the member's activities.

3

When the Victorians said " Come, let us educate our masters " they assumed with characteristic complacency that their masters, when educated, would think as they themselves thought. This has by no means turned out to be the case. Whether it is the fault of the schools, or the perversity of human nature, education everywhere seems to have results which are extremely disconcerting to those who are called educationists. The Labour party is generally reckoned as one of the results of British education and it places " education and more education " on its own banner with the same confidence as the Whig pioneers that it will be justified of its instructed children. Herein, I think, the elders may presume too much. The trouble at all times and in all classes is that the really instructed children are so few. A vast number stubbornly refuse to be educated in the sense that their seniors understand

that word, and from whatever type of public school they come, their intellectual pursuits are very much the same. One kind may speak a slightly more "cultured" dialect than another, but they all read the same newspapers, abstain from reading the same books, go to the same theatres, cinemas, music-halls, and bet on the same horses. If they differ from each other in opinion, it is not from any difference in mental or moral outfit, but because circumstances and upbringing have put them in the way of hearing different kinds of doctrine and entertaining different kinds of feelings about their fellow-beings. The young worker takes his doctrine with the same implicit confidence from Mr. Ramsay MacDonald or Mr. Wheatley as the young Etonian from Mr. Baldwin or the Duke of Northumberland.

It is, nevertheless, a remarkable fact that Labour pays homage to "intellectuals" in a way that the other parties do not. It prides itself on having a peculiar quality and brand of educated men who are to be found nowhere else. It is boundlessly hospitable to these, and opens its doors wide to any middle-class man who has the appearance of having read books and calls himself a Socialist. Conservatives positively dislike "high-brows" and Liberals are not very easy with them, but Labour adores them. And through the gate of Labour a great many pass whose intellectual capacities the other parties have either rated too low, or thought too good or too fastidious for their mundane purposes. With these have come not a few others who fell out with their fellow-countrymen in the Great War, and whom the constituencies for some queer reason will take back when they come as Labour but will not look at if they reappear as Liberals or Conservatives. The influence of these men is very great, and it has resulted in the peculiar blend of trade unionism and "Socialism of the Chair" which is the speciality of the British Labour party.

4

This history must be borne in mind, if we are to understand the present position. Superficially the Labour move-

ment seems to be involved in a struggle between its extremists and its moderates, its Communists and its Socialists ; but there is another conflict cutting across this which is constitutionally of greater importance. The party has in fact to decide whether its centre of gravity is to be inside Parliament or outside it ; and whether a Labour Cabinet, if one is formed again, will be its own master and answerable to Parliament, as other Cabinets have been, or whether it will be liable to control by other powers which are not in Parliament or only partly represented there.

The history and constitution of the party—to say nothing of the declared opinions of some of its members—makes inquiry into this matter necessary and not invidious. The party in its present form is the joint creation of Socialists and trade unionists with the trade union element still predominating. If the trade unionists absorb the doctrine of the Socialists, it is at least possible that they will expect the Socialists to accept their discipline, which has always tended to turn their representatives into delegates acting strictly on the instructions of those behind them. This tendency was undoubtedly seen at work in the conduct of affairs under the Labour Government of 1924.

It is unquestionably the opinion of a large number of influential Labour men that this is the right and necessary principle for their party ; and the agenda paper at the last annual Conference of the Labour party before the 1924 election contained various resolutions pressing it to its logical conclusion. One district proposed that the Parliamentary Labour party and the members of the Labour Government should be directly responsible to the Conference itself, and that between Conferences its executive committee should have the fullest control. Another desired that instructions should be given to the Parliamentary party that no leader should be appointed in future unless he would give an undertaking that he would not, if called upon to form a Government, appoint to Cabinet rank or to any position in the Government any individual who was not a member of the party ; and that he would submit all appointments to the Cabinet or Under-secretary-

ships to the Parliamentary party for ratification. The Cardiff Trades Council and Labour party even went the length of proposing that " in the event of future Labour Governments the power of appointing Ministers of the Crown be taken away from the Prime Minister and be placed in the hands of the Parliamentary Labour party."[1] The election prevented the discussion of these proposals but they are none the less interesting as indications of what is in the mind of influential sections of the party.

The doctrine embodied in them is stated in its nakedest form in an article by Mr. G. D. H. Cole, contributed to the first number of a new Socialist weekly journal, entitled *The Left Wing* :—[2]

> Most important of all is the question raised on the agenda at this year's Labour Party Conference, but not discussed, of the relations between the Government and the Party as a whole. It is the business of a Labour Government, not to frame a policy for itself, but to take its orders from the whole body of the Party. Labour Ministers can claim authority only as delegates of the working-class movement, and it is for that movement to tell them how to behave.
>
> The trade unions must be behind them, if they are to succeed in carrying real changes into effect ; and the trade unions have accordingly the right to call the tune. Middle-class persons like myself have a perfect right to join the Party and to offer advice ; but the control of the Party must remain with the organized workers. That is the one safeguard for its existence as the party of the working-class. Torn from its trade union moorings it might well develop, in the evil atmosphere of Parliament, into a mere reincarnation of Gladstonian Liberalism.

In another part of the same article Mr. Cole explains what would have happened if this principle had been in operation in the 1924 Parliament. The trade unions would have forced strikes and " instead of clamping them down," the Government would have used " the power of the State on the side of the strikers with no nonsense about impartiality or the fostering of ' industrial peace.' " It would have taken over Covent Garden market and run it on the strikers' terms, meanwhile submitting their case to a Court of

[1] *The Times*, Oct. 27, 1924.
[2] *Ibid*, Oct. 25, 1924.

Arbitration composed entirely of trade unionists drawn from other trades. It would have pursued the object of " turning out Capitalists neck and crop," " taking away the property of the rich," " abolishing exploitation and substituting economic democracy for class domination "—an object which, as Mr. Cole justly says, is not to be achieved " with the gloves on or by any merely political victory."

This, it need not be said, is subversive and anti-parliamentary doctrine, and I quote it only to show where the idea of seizing the Government and making it the instrument of one class logically leads. It leads to the Soviet and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, an affair of blood and iron, which extinguishes argument as effectively for the proletarian as for the capitalist, and fixes a junta of revolutionaries on the necks of both of them. If the Labour party were led or driven in this direction, it would be useless to talk of Parliament or the public life, and manuals on the strategy of street-fighting would take the place of constitutional text-books. It is, I hope, unnecessary to say that responsible Labour leaders do not think in this way and would be justly indignant if such thoughts were attributed to them. But it is not, I think, unjust to say that they have not sufficiently thought out the difference between the idea of a workers' party controlled by workers and a Parliamentary party acting in the House of Commons and responsible to its constituents. Their present organization suggests a wavering mind between two principles which really admit of no compromise, and it seems to me probable that they will be required to make a very definite choice between them if Parliament is to remain their battle-ground.

5

When Mr. MacDonald took office, he consented to the appointment of a committee of twelve in addition to three members of the Government to act as " a liaison body " between the Cabinet and the rest of the party. On this committee were two or three of the most powerful members of the party who for various reasons had decided not to

take office, and it is agreed that they did their work with great thoroughness and more than once asserted their authority over the Cabinet.[1] The actual facts are impossible to ascertain since the proceedings of the committee were confidential, but the general impression created in Parliament and in the country was that the Labour Government was in a peculiar sense not its own master, and that Cabinet decisions were liable to be corrected, revised and suddenly reversed by a power behind the scenes acting in secret and outside the control of Parliament. This appeared most flagrantly in the withdrawal of the prosecution in the Campbell case and the reversal of the decision to abandon the Russian negotiations, and it led to confused and mystifying explanations in which Ministers struggled to maintain the theory of their own independence and responsibility in face of facts which seemed to prove that they had acted under strong compulsion. And what, I think, struck the old parliamentary hands most in these proceedings was that Labour Ministers apparently accepted without a murmur, and even with an appearance of satisfaction, reversals of policy affecting their departments which must have caused the instant resignation of any Minister of the old school.

In the 1924 Parliament the majority had its remedy, which it took with a damning-of-the-consequences on the part of some of its members that proved the old parliamentary tradition to be very much alive. But in another Parliament this remedy may not be available, and it is well that we should understand exactly what is at stake here.

There is first at stake the common-sense principle, which need not be clothed in any solemn language, that no ship, and least of all the ship of State, can stand two captains. A ship, with two captains, will certainly not steer a straight course and will almost certainly run on the rocks. The old parties have often been very angry with their Governments, but it has never occurred to them to appoint Vigilance Committees to watch their proceedings. They have had the sense to see that undivided authority checked

[1] *See* an article entitled "Governing the Government," *The Times*, Oct. 27, 1924.

by Parliament alone is the necessary condition of competent government.

Next, the power behind the throne is both secret and irresponsible, and its proceedings have no relation to the processes of Parliament. Its motives and reasons are not known to the public or exposed to criticism ; it may be the instrument of a small minority or even of a personal cabal. To be obliged to justify himself to this authority as well as to prevail in his Cabinet must add greatly to the burdens of a Prime Minister and give him all the time the sense of serving two masters, one of whom may easily quarrel with the other. This must tend to destroy the nerve and shake the character of even the strongest man, and is very likely to reduce his Cabinet to a cipher. The kind of Government that Mr. Cole describes would not be a Government at all; it would be a collection of delegates with diverse views and no common mind ; it would rapidly become the plaything of the mob, and with the utmost submissiveness would certainly fail to carry out the impossible instructions of its masters. If government by trade unions in the sole interest of trade unionists is desirable, it would be far more sensible to go straight to the point, abolish Parliament and Government and set up the dictatorship of the proletariat. A parliamentary Government in the hands of a Revolutionary Committee is a contradiction in terms, as all revolutionaries have discovered.

It is legitimate to test the matter by taking the extreme case, but it is sufficient to say at present that the idea of placing government under the supervision of a Workers' Committee is borrowed from revolutionary practice and must be in conflict with constitutionalism as it has developed in the British Parliament. Broadly the question at issue is whether Government is to serve all classes and the whole country or whether it is to be the instrument of one party and class; and correspondingly whether the Member of Parliament is, in Blackstone phrase, to "advantage the Commonwealth as a whole" or merely his own class or craft. That the Labour party has definitely decided for the second of these principles against the first need not for a moment

be alleged, but a series of separate steps, each of which may look innocent, may lead to this conclusion before those who have taken them are aware of it ; and if the trade union method of controlling delegates is applied to Governments, it will undoubtedly be reached, however much it may be disowned. There is from this point of view a certain danger in the appellation " Labour," since it raises the expectation that a Government bearing this title will be at the disposal of the manual workers and seek to do their bidding and serve their interests exclusively.

It would, of course, be foolish to pretend that the older parties have acted up to the high maxim of " advantaging the Commonwealth," without regard to the pressure of their partisans. The perfect realization of this ideal is beyond human nature and unconscious bias thwarts even the best intentions. Nothing more can be expected of the Labour party than that it shall, like the other parties, acknowledge the ideal as the test by which it is to be judged and endeavour honestly to act up to it. If it is to do this, any Government that it forms must be a free agent amenable only to the judgment of Parliament, and it must be trusted to interpret the will of the majority behind it in conformity with a general public interest which transcends it. That is the foundation of parliamentary government and the condition of good government. No Government can do itself justice or even do its party justice, unless it is in a position to act freely on its own judgment. The all but universal opinion in the last Parliament was that the Prime Minister did well in those matters, like the negotiations with the French, in which he was permitted a free hand, and did very much the reverse in those in which he permitted himself to be overruled by the powers behind him. At the end the most damaging doubt about him was whether he was his own master and whether, in consequence, he was in a position in which he could deal frankly with the public. The same difficulties will inevitably recur if the constitution of the Labour party is such as to make it impossible for it to trust the Government to govern.

CHAPTER XIII

SOME SPECIAL CASES AND A SUMMARY

The Revolt of the Elder Sons—Disadvantages of being a Peer—A One-Party Assembly—Its Foregone Conclusions—An Equivocal Position—The Peer Prime Minister—Great Moments—Wanted a Preparatory Chamber—Women in Public Affairs—Many Qualifications and some Drawbacks—Qualities in Public Life—A General Summary—No Single Type—The Picture on the Screen—Convincing and Unconvincing Characters—Simple Virtues—The Sporting Qualities—The Public Judgment.

I

SOME thirty years ago the public was amused by a movement which was known as "the revolt of the elder sons." The heirs to peerages in the midst of a prosperous career in the House of Commons foresaw the deaths of their parents not merely as a personal bereavement, but as the blighting of legitimate ambitions through their transfer to "another place." They saw themselves taken compulsorily from the fighting arena of the "lower House" and consigned to the living tomb of the "Gilded Chamber"; and with one accord they protested that so quenching and unmerited a disaster should not befall them. I forget exactly what remedy they proposed, but it was, in substance, that while they succeeded to their peerages they should have at least the option of continuing to sit in the lower House.

The general reply to this demand was a very emphatic no tempered by some laughter and a little sympathy. Both Lords and Commons took umbrage at it, the Lords regarding it as *lèse majesté* that any of their members should reject the writ of summons to their chamber; and the Commons seeing no reason why an ambitious politician should have all the advantages and none of the drawbacks of being

a peer. These drawbacks have certainly not become less in the subsequent years, and with the advance of the franchise a Second Chamber composed of hereditary peers has come to look more and more like a backwater from the main stream of affairs.

But since we have perhaps not quite done with the question of a Second Chamber it may be useful to look back on the characteristics of the House of Lords, as we have seen them in our lifetime. Its principal drawback was that it had no existence when the Conservative party was in power, and only a very dangerous existence when a Liberal party was in power. Its life, as Liberals used to say, was one of coma alternating with fits; it accepted everything when the Conservative party was in power and fought beyond the limits of prudence and policy when the Liberal party was in power. In its later days five-sixths of its members belonged to one party and the great majority of them apparently took no interest in its proceedings except when they supposed the vital interest of their class or party to be affected. Then they came up in sufficient numbers to vote down the small handful of peers who represented or supported a Liberal Government. Out of 550 peers the normal attendance was from forty to seventy, and most of the remainder attended so seldom that the doorkeepers were always in difficulty about identifying them on the special occasions when they presented themselves. The sudden appearance of "Backwoodsmen" who were so evidently not politicians, and the use of them by the party whips to vote down measures passed by great majorities in the popular House probably in the end did more than anything else to undermine the credit of the House of Lords.

Whatever other merits it may have, the British peerage cannot be said to have justified the belief, on which a hereditary Second Chamber must be based, that it is possible to create a political caste. The peerage produced about the same proportion of politicians as other classes and their bias was necessarily Conservative. The small proportion of active politicians among them found themselves perpetually enacting a foregone conclusion in an atmosphere which

had none of the reality of combat and contention. Scenes or violent protests of any kind being by immemorial custom ruled out and in any case useless, Liberal peers were reduced to polite remonstrance which a clever man might clothe with a certain irony, but which he could on no account make menacing or declamatory. An assembly so acting could not be a good training ground for men of active minds. The minority were swamped ; most of the majority were superfluous, and the action taken was usually decided outside the House in consultation with the leaders " in another place." If the House discussed the conduct of the Government, its comments were of no more value than that of a well-reported debating society ; and if it amended legislation it did so with the sense that one step too much might bring the electorate in wrath about its head. In the last years of its unlimited power it was like a bee, with one sting, the use of which would probably be fatal to itself.

To be a peer was therefore, even in the old days, a very equivocal position for an ambitious politician. He was a member of an assembly to which the Executive was not responsible ; he was cut off from contact with the electors ; he had small opportunity of rendering any effective service to his party. If he was a Conservative, his eloquence was not wanted, and if he was a Liberal, it was useless. Men of his order seldom rose to the highest places, unless they had had previous experience in the House of Commons, and parties came more and more to feel that without this they were not to be trusted. Colleagues found them to be lacking in the sense of give and take and the faculty of measuring men and opinion which are learnt in the House of Commons. Lord Rosebery has often told us that the greatest of his disabilities was to be a peer, and on one occasion, if I remember rightly, he compared himself to the child outside the village fair, who, being without a penny to gain himself admission, steals a furtive joy by peeping under the tent. Before the end of the last century the Liberal party had practically decided that a Liberal Prime Minister could not be in the House of Lords, and in the

year 1923 when it chose Mr. Baldwin in preference to Lord Curzon, the Conservative party recorded its intention of applying that rule to itself. Both decisions were undoubtedly serious blows to the political prestige of the peerage, but they are in accordance with common sense. Decisions of vital importance to a Government have to be taken, often on the spur of the moment, in the House of Commons, and a Prime Minister who is excluded from that assembly will more and more find himself left out and possibly committed to courses of which he does not approve.

In spite of its limitations the House of Lords has even in our time had its great moments, and it has fought the battle of lost causes with a certain elevation and dignity. As displays of oratory its debates were often admirable though conducted in an atmosphere which has been compared to that of a ducal mansion with the duke lying dead upstairs. I have heard a famous and voluble American orator say that the best debate he ever heard in his life was in the House of Lords and the best speech a certain massive utterance by the late Duke of Devonshire on Free Trade delivered to that assembly. But for a young man seeking a political career compulsory membership of it is a disability which is scarcely set off by the advantages, that still survive even in a democratic world, of being the head of a noble family.

The use of a Second Chamber has been a large part of the technique of Conservative statesmen and so long as they timed its strokes accurately and made no serious miscalculation of the state of public opinion it remained a formidable weapon in their hands. But since statesmen are fallible, mistiming and miscalculation were sooner or later inevitable, and then the inherent weaknesses of the House of Lords as a corrective to democracy were bound to be exposed. What is called the Second Chamber question is beyond the scope of this book, but one or two reflections may perhaps be permitted.

It seems to me that far too little attention has been paid to the constitutional aspects of the Irish struggle between

1912 and 1914. If the period of the suspensory veto is to be used for organizing forcible resistance to the decisions of the House of Commons, the last state of the case will be worse than the first, and the House of Lords may find itself the centre of extra-constitutional movements which, if not checked, would be fatal to parliamentary government. The question is in a dangerous state of unsettlement, and if two Chambers are still thought necessary, experience points to the necessity of quick decisions in the issues which arise between them.

It is improbable that a great electorate conscious of its power will ever again give either the hereditary peers or any body of men elected by fancy franchises the power of veto over its own decisions, but a Chamber which would frankly accept a consultative rôle and trust to its power of influencing opinion might still play a most important part in affairs. Under our present system, we are wasting a great deal of administrative ability and scientific knowledge which can at present find no outlet in the field of politics. Men of high capacity and long experience find themselves excluded from Parliament for long periods by the hazards of electioneering ; other men of not less ability have neither the means nor the disposition to fight battles in the constituencies. We have got it into our minds that the duty of a Second Chamber must necessarily be to revise or veto the legislation of an elective House. Is it not possible to reverse conventional thought on this subject and think in future of a preparatory rather than a revising Chamber —a First rather than a Second Chamber—a Chamber which shall prepare the ground for legislation on burning questions; provide Government and the public with all the available knowledge on these subjects; show what the alternative solutions are and which, if any, of the solutions are barred by economic facts or unforeseen consequences ; a Chamber in fact which would provide all that essential knowledge which is so apt to be obscured in the battles of parties and their electioneering cries ?

Recent experience in all countries suggests that what modern democracy most needs is some such authoritative

organ of knowledge, to see that political issues are shaped in intelligible terms and that electors are not driven to a choice between mischievous or impracticable alternatives. It becomes less and less probable that popularly elected bodies will be able to fill this gap through Select Committees corresponding with the balance of their parties, and politics as now conducted leave the best and most industrious of their members too little leisure for this purpose. But if we could abandon the idea of setting hereditary or indirectly elected persons to keep elected persons in order and seek instead to provide them and ourselves with new apparatus of knowledge and fact, we might have a means of steadying opinion which would not conflict with any democratic principle and yet be powerful and influential. Incidentally we might also provide a new way into public life for men whose contribution might be of the highest value, and a way back for others whom the present course of politics is driving into the wilderness.

2

Having considered the M.P. and the Peer and the Labour leader, it would, I suppose be a serious omission to say nothing of women in the public life. The coming of women is a great fact in the constituencies ; and they may presently come in sufficient numbers to Westminster to make a definite impression upon the House of Commons. But so far as our short experience takes us there is little to distinguish women's politics from men's politics. In 1923 men and women together returned the same answer to the same question as men alone returned in 1906. In 1918 and 1924 women seemed to be swept by the same impulses as swept the male voters. Whether this is because large numbers of women still hold the view that politics is the affair of men and take their cue from their male relatives, or whether it is simply because political human nature is the same in men and women is a question on which no one can speak with certainty. I am told that special appeals to women voters are very likely to

defeat their own object and will quite certainly do so if those who draft them seem to imply that women are the inferior or even the simpler sex. Possibly some day a great woman statesman may arise and we may see women flocking after her as women.

Argument on this subject is tiresome and inconclusive, but I think it is clear that if the woman M.P. is to succeed she must go the man's road and beat him, if she can, at the man's game. All that can be said about the male politician applies, therefore, to the female and requires no correction for sex. There was a time when the opponents of woman suffrage supposed that they had reduced it to absurdity by saying that if women were admitted to the franchise they would force their way into Parliament. And such was the prejudice on this subject that women for the most part admitted this conclusion to be undesirable and argued earnestly that it would not follow. This prejudice still exists, and, to judge from the scant opportunities offered them, women as yet have considerable difficulty in persuading the constituencies (or the men-ruled associations that control them) that they are likely to make good candidates. Whether women will ever become " sex-conscious " in the manner in which the worker is adjured to become class-conscious, and form a Woman's Party which will insist on a larger representation in the House of Commons has yet to be seen. It is to be hoped that they will obtain satisfaction without adding this complication to our politics. For the present it can only be said that they have all the external qualifications for the public life. They are ready speakers ; as actresses and musicians they have long held a pre-eminent position in the public eye, and they have a peculiar gift for what is called " publicity." The notion that it was legitimate for them to employ these talents as artists and entertainers but unwomanly or indecorous for them to enter into the serious business of politics and administration, was always an absurdity. The question for them is not whether the public life is " unwomanly " but whether they will be equal to the peculiar demands which it makes on the health and

character of those who pursue it. It is probable that the proportion of women who are equal to this effort is far smaller than the corresponding proportion of men, but few or many, the women who enter Parliament will have to conform to the laws and customs of the parliamentary life. In this, as their male predecessors have proved, there is ample scope for the display of all feminine qualities.

3

After a survey of the ground it is tempting to look back and ask what are in general the qualities which make for success in the public life. The high kind of success which makes a man a commanding figure in his lifetime and projects him afterwards into history is very rare. Many are called and few are chosen. Many have prosperous and distinguished careers and are loaded with honours by a grateful country or party, but make no impression on the public mind, and, when they pass from the scene, leave scarcely a memory behind them. There is in no profession a greater gulf between stars of the first magnitude and minor luminaries. Very ordinary capacity combined with industry, good character and a moderate degree of backing or luck will carry a man to nearly the highest office, but to get beyond this, to the position of a commanding public man, is the final and greatest effort; and it requires not merely capacity and industry but natural gifts of an extraordinary kind.

Why one actor "gets across," as the phrase is, and another with greater accomplishments remains always behind the footlights is a standing puzzle to dramatic critics, and politicians present the same problem. If we take the group of men considered in the previous chapters—Peel, Bright, Cobden, Palmerston, Disraeli, Gladstone, Salisbury, Chamberlain, Balfour, Campbell-Bannerman, Asquith, Lloyd George, all of them men distinguished from their fellows, in that they did "get across"—they seem to have almost nothing in common. Almost any corresponding group of French or American politicians

would present characteristics which we might generalize into an American type or a French one, but from these we can construct no British type. The British seem to have no idea of a public man to which they expect their politicians to conform. They take all types, the academic and the self-educated, the philosophic doubter and the confident dogmatist, the impassioned orator and the man who has almost no capacity for public speaking, the cautious Scotsman and the fervid Welshman. All of these fit into the political scheme and correspond to one mood or other of the British people. There seem to be no essential qualifications or fatal disabilities.

During the first half of his life, all the wise men of politics were agreed that, in spite of his many distinguished qualities, Gladstone would never be a popular leader. His academic ways, his ecclesiastical cast of mind and incontrollable conscience were supposed to be fatal handicaps. When Campbell-Bannerman said "methods of barbarism," the newspapers exclaimed with one accord that he had made himself for ever impossible, whereas in fact his persistence in using that phrase, and his refusal to retract it or apologize for it, contributed greatly to his subsequent popularity. Again and again one hears it said that a politician has for ever done for himself, and again and again it turns out that the supposed unforgivable thing was the foundation of his fortunes. In France ridicule has an inordinate power of killing public figures. A distinguished general tumbles off his horse at a review ; all Paris laughs, and he is said at once to be *un homme fini.* The British people seem even to like slightly ridiculous qualities in their heroes. It is rather to their credit to be caught foozling at golf, and an eminent lawyer whom the House of Commons had judged too forensic for its taste at once won its affections when an ancient briar pipe fell out of his pocket as he was making his bow to the Speaker.

The essential thing seems to be some capacity of projecting a picture of themselves on the screen of the public mind. It may be a homely picture or it may be a heroic picture, but it must be a picture, and its outline must not

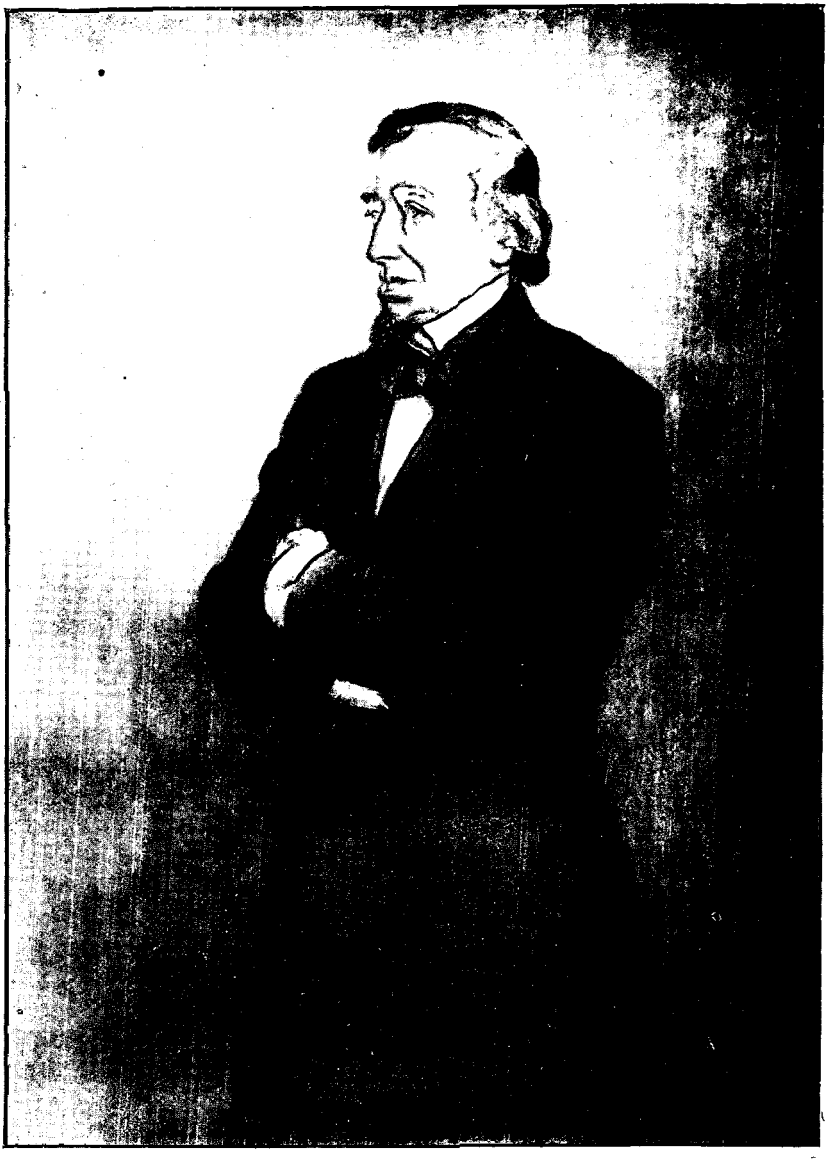
be blurred or vague. No conscious effort will do this. We see very able and accomplished men trying and leaving the screen blank. We see newspapers trying to do it for them with the same result. All the advertisement in the world will not get their picture on to the screen, if they are without the latent qualities which make the public sensitive to them. It would be idle to pretend that these qualities are confined to the able and upright. Bottomley had them as well as Gladstone. There are moments when the public seems positively to prefer Barabbas. But this usually is a brief madness, and the characters which can be kept in position, so to speak, must be capable of sustaining a prolonged scrutiny and surviving considerable periods in which they will be hissed as villains before they are applauded as heroes. It is almost an axiom of British public life that no one rises to the highest position unless at one time or another he has stood firm against the prevalent opinion and staked his reputation on what appeared to be a failing cause.

The much-worn slang of criticism that a character must be convincing has a very real meaning in public affairs. The characters which some public men present to the public are by no means convincing. They seem feebly drawn, insincere, falsely dramatic, something acted or put on which does not belong to the real man. Disraeli was from beginning to end a dramatic character ; but he did not ape this character, it belonged to him and was part of him, and the public in the end came to see that it was sincere. There was no other Disraeli. Similarly Lloyd George. His character may be liked or disliked, liked at one time or disliked at another, but it is always Lloyd George. I have heard it said that King Edward, who had almost more than any man of his time an instinctive gift for creating the appropriate image of himself in the public mind, used frequently to discard clever speeches written for him to use on public occasions, because, as he said, " everyone knows that I don't talk like that." It is for this reason that (contrary to the general opinion) clever secretaries and ghosts can do so little for public men. The too clever or too literary

speech, coming out of the mouth of a manifestly plain man, produces an incongruous impression which is fatal to reality. No one on this stage can be dressed to a part for which nature has not suited him or can recite words put into his mouth by other people without destroying his own character. The occasions on which he must reveal his unaided self are too many, and the contrast between the assisted and the unassisted occasions is too flagrant for the imposture to be long undetected.

But if this native gift is essential, it needs, in this country, at all events, to be fortified by the simple virtues of ordinary folk. Many a career has been wrecked by an inside judgment of which the public is almost unaware, but which pronounces a man unfit, for lack of certain qualities within range of the humblest. The most important of these is the co-operative sense, the power, as Mr. Gladstone used to say, of putting your mind into the common stock. If a man is by nature a solitary worker, if he belongs to the artistic or literary tribe whose work must be their own or nothing ; if he cannot bear a word altered in a dispatch of his own writing or the slightest change in the perfect Bill of his own drafting, he is not fit for the public life, which is a collective thing and a perpetual accommodation to other people's views and objections. For this reason, though literary accomplishments are much admired among publicists, literary men are generally voted difficult colleagues. They have mysterious feelings which are always being hurt ; they require to be approached with delicate euphemisms for which there is really not time in the rough and tumble of affairs. Their minds are their own, and will not go into the common stock.

It is an ingrained habit of the British people to regard their politicians as " sportsmen " and to apply the sporting code to a large part of their activities. This encourages good humour and fair play, but it also leads to an inordinate quantity of bluff in party warfare. The successful leader must always give the impression that he is riding to victory. It may be near or it may be remote, but he must speak of it as certain and never let it be supposed that he is discouraged



BENJAMIN DISRAELI, EARL OF BEACONSFIELD, K.G.

From the Painting by Lockhart Bogle, after Sir J. E. Millais, P.R.A., in the National Portrait Gallery.

by any reverse. Fortunately for themselves politicians are the most sanguine of men, but the public watches very narrowly to see how they behave in defeat, and judges them to be "good sportsmen" when they stifle resentment or disappointment and announce themselves confident of winning next time. If Disraeli in the end won the confidence of the British people it was largely from his serene confidence in persisting in what for years together looked like a desperate cause. The most certain loser in politics is the man with a grievance—a grievance against the electors, a grievance against his colleagues, a grievance against a chief who has passed him over or given him an unsuitable office. His complaints may be perfectly legitimate, but the fatal thing is to be a complainant. In no profession is it more important to conceal a wound or more dangerous to endeavour to retaliate on those who have offended you.

There are men who break all the rules and obtain a following in the country which enables them to force themselves on reluctant colleagues, men who know how to ride a storm in which their rivals and opponents founder. And there are other men who are strangely thrown up into positions which seem to be as great a surprise to them as to other people. Public life abounds in these hazards and it is rash to say that any man who has reached a certain position can go no farther, or that any is finished until his career is ended by death or physical disability. The emergencies are many and qualities which would be disastrous in one phase may be essential to the nation in another. But the public is uncommonly shrewd in its judgments, and has something of a child's penetration in deciding whom it likes and dislikes. It likes brilliant qualities to be fortified by solid virtues and is never comfortable unless it can think of its hero as honest and straight. It gives everyone a chance and will listen politely to impostors and demagogues and be as politely indifferent to preachers who bore it. It will revise its judgments when it thinks it has done an injustice and methodically mark down those whom it thinks it has rated too highly. On the whole its estimates of men have

been remarkably just, and in no country have larger or more generous allowances been made for difficulties and failures judged to have been unavoidable. It likes its favourites to say something it can remember, whether pungent epigram or blazing indiscretion ; it likes them to be not too virtuous or always too wise ; it likes them to draw the fire and return the fire. The virtues and the talents will always be assured a respectful salute from it, but its affection and loyalty are only to be won by some flavour and quality beyond talent and virtue.

BOOK IV

AMERICAN AND FOREIGN EXAMPLES

CHAPTER XIV

THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION AND ITS RESULTS

The American and the British Constitution—Contrast between Congress and Parliament—The Importance of being Senator—Parallel Streams of Politics—The American Machine—Federal and State Politics—Feeling after Public Opinion—The Nominating Conventions—Presidential Elections—Methods of Candidates—Bryan and McKinley—The Timidity of Parties—The Silver Election of 1896—A Pessimistic Opinion.

I

THE salient characteristics of the public life of any one country are best brought out by comparison with the practice of other countries. Let me in this chapter endeavour briefly to compare British and American methods.

Though in certain essential respects it followed the British model, the American Constitution reacted from it in ways that have made the practice of the two peoples widely different. Correcting what, from their experience of George III, they believed to be dangerous defects in the British model, the American Fathers detached the Executive from the Legislature, dethroned the Cabinet from its place of power and made Congress and President alike subject to a written Constitution. In this way they supposed that the Legislature would be made secure against any President who might be tempted, like the British King, to use his Cabinet for the corrupting or cajoling of Parliament. President and Congress, the one exercising the executive power and the other the legislative, have thus worked in separate spheres, both responsible to the people and limited by the Constitution, but shut off from each other by boundaries which each jealously guards against the encroachments of the other.

Whatever may be the advantages of this system, it necessarily deprives public life in America of what in England is its most arresting and picturesque characteristic, the conflict namely, of Government and Opposition in Parliament—that unceasing duel in which not only legislation but every act of the Executive is day by day exposed to comment, criticism and censure. There is in the British sense of the word, no Cabinet in the American Constitution. The President's "Cabinet" is not, as we understand the expression, "responsible" either to him or to Congress. It consists of heads of departments, appointed by the President and "confirmed" by the Senate, who are summoned periodically to confer with him, but without obligation on his part to take their advice or on theirs to resign if he refuses to take it. These heads of departments are expressly forbidden to hold seats in Congress, and though they may be summoned to give evidence before its committees they are not permitted to address either the Senate or the House or to join in debate. They may be, but are by no means always, the best known or most influential members of the party in power. The President may choose whom he will, and not infrequently he prefers experts to politicians and comparatively unknown men to known and powerful men. On the other hand, powerful Senators and politicians often decline places in the Administration rather than forfeit their seats or their liberty of action in the party. The Administration in such circumstances cannot have either the importance or the prestige of the British Cabinet. Its members seldom make public speeches and, when they do, confine themselves as a rule to their departments. They cannot win fame in debate, and in all their other activities are overshadowed by the President.

Correspondingly, Congress loses interest if not importance, from the absence of Ministers. It is, to an English eye leaderless and rudderless, the least spectacular of all Parliaments. It divides itself into a multitude of committees, most of which do their work and consider the Bills committed to them behind closed doors. The predominant

party gets its pull in these committees through the ballot in the Senate and (since the revolt against Speaker Cannon in 1910) through the action of its caucus in the House of Representatives. But the grand scrimmages between parties which we call full-dress debates are rare, and ordinary debates are ill-reported and make no impression on the public. The Senate is the more distinguished body of the two, and through its highly important Foreign Relations Committee catches the ear of the country and the attention of foreign countries. To become a Senator is the highest ambition of the ordinary politician, but there are only two Senators for each State, and only inhabitants of a State are eligible to represent it. When the prize is gained, its tenure is precarious, for nominating conventions are apt to take the view that as many men as possible should have their turn. Still it is a great thing for a man to be chosen by the Legislature of his State to be its "Ambassador in Washington," and even if he only enjoys the position for two years, he gets a certain rank and distinction for the rest of his days, at any rate in his own district.

In the House also it is the law, or at all events the unchallenged custom, that a representative shall be resident in the district which he represents. This localization of politicians has enormously affected the profession of politics. It makes what we call a parliamentary career not only difficult but actually impossible to immense numbers of eligible men. It is true that there is no centre which dominates the United States as London does England, yet cities like New York, Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia contain a very high proportion of the kind of men who make good politicians, and for all but a very few of these the way into Congress is barred. A few exceptional men find their way to the highest places through the gate of State Governorships and may become Presidents of the United States or Secretaries of State without ever having sat in Congress. An Englishman is always in a puzzle to distinguish these parallel streams of American politics. There is the Congressional stream with its biennial ebb and flow ; the high

Presidential stream flowing independently of Congress; the immense restless ocean of local, caucus, and ward politics; and outside all of these, certain individuals whose position and history it is difficult to ascertain but who seem to have enormous influence, though they never make speeches and seldom appear in public. There is no country in the world in which so much energy, money, ingenuity, and industry are devoted to public affairs, and none in which there seem to be so many obstacles to the steady pursuit of politics as a career by men of distinction.

All America hums with politics; the machinery devised for it is a vast and intricate system extending over the whole continent and including State and Municipal as well as Federal politics. Between them the two great parties cover all the activities of Federal, State and city life, and impose on them standardized types of organization which almost everywhere reproduce the same features of rings, bosses and workers organizing elections and distributing spoils by party nominations. The motive power is patronage. Having an immense number of salaried places at their disposal, the parties are able to reward zealous adherents and to replenish their funds by assessing their salaries. Others reward themselves in ways that certain public inquiries have made too flagrantly notorious; but in their most innocent form politics thus organized have necessarily the aspect of a vast business, and the rival machines seem to pursue the winning of victories and the reaping of the resultant profits, rather than the advancement of causes, as their primary object.

2

Once in every four years the whole of this machinery is concentrated on the Presidential election, and the more important local politicians get their chance of emerging into national politics either at the party conventions or at the conferences and conclaves which precede them. But this is a very small part of the activities of the machines.

The number, frequency and complication of American elections would be altogether baffling to the average citizen, if the party were not at hand to guide him through the labyrinth. Called upon to select twenty individuals for various offices out of sixty candidates, most of whom may be entirely unknown to him, he finds safety in voting the party ticket as arranged by the caucus. The machine in such circumstances is not something wilfully imposed on the elector to restrain his free choice, but the natural evolution of a system which would be confusion without it. Americans therefore accept it with resignation as a necessary evil, but the machine exacts conditions from those whom it selects which colour the whole of American politics and make the public life extremely distasteful to large numbers of American citizens.

Indeed, the chances that an American politician will become in our sense of the word a public man, i.e. a man known to and appealing to the entire public are extremely remote. Henry James says that when he visited Washington he was unable to discover the names of more than ten Congressmen. All the rest were local men doing local work behind the closed doors of the committees, either not speaking in general debates or speaking for the sole purpose of keeping in favour with their constituents, and being wholly unreported except in their local newspapers. The mere fact that there are no metropolitan newspapers covering the whole country and regularly reporting the debates at Washington makes it impossible for a member of Congress to win fame or attract to himself a national following as a parliamentarian. It is enough for the majority if they can so serve their locality and retain the favour of their local machine as to obtain a second term at Washington, or still better to be chosen by their State Legislature for the Senate. A few powerful Senators eventually project themselves into the larger field, become possible candidates for the Presidency and men of high influence in the party, whose support is essential to a President or to anyone who aspires to the Presidency. They make their voices heard especially in the Foreign

Relations Committee and compel the newspapers and the public to take note of their views. But at this point they come into competition with men who have had no parliamentary career, but who are none the less eligible for the highest prizes. Cleveland made his reputation as Mayor of Buffalo and Governor of New York State and gained the nomination to the Presidency without ever having been in Congress. Roosevelt had only a brief juvenile experience as member of his State Legislature. Wilson, the College President, got to the White House after two years' experience of public life as Governor of New Jersey. In this higher flight, parties find a use for distinguished men whom they think dangerous or stubborn material for their ordinary purposes. They are aware of the suspicion which attaches in the public mind to the average professional politician and wisely defer to it on great occasions. The high-brow and the independent may thus get a sudden elevation which would not be open to him in any other country in the world ; and a system which produces an inferior type of average politician corrects itself by providing a special short cut to the highest places for men of great ability and distinction.

3

Much that would be general politics in this country is State or local politics in America. The questions which interest the whole country are comparatively few, and these are debated rather by the newspapers than the politicians. The familiar spectacle of politicians answering one another from platforms in the country and the newspapers dutifully reporting their speeches is almost unknown in America. Conflicts between the Administration and Congress are not transferred to the country, as they would be here ; members of the Administration do not, as the members of a Cabinet would in England, offer a concerted defence of the President or themselves against the attacks of opponents. An Englishman watching politics in America gets the peculiar sense that controversy is bottled up.

He hears of it going on acutely behind the scenes in the two parties or in the committee-rooms at Washington, or he listens to elaborate calculations as to the forces behind the President or Congress if they come into collision, but except in the last weeks before a Presidential election, he sees little evidence that either party is attempting to convince the public by argument. The effort seems almost invariably to be to adjust the party to opinion, not to bring opinion round to the party. An incessant stream of information is always pouring into party headquarters as to whether this or that policy or this or that plank in the party platform is approved by voters in the different States, but in both camps there is a kind of fatalism which assumes that parties must bow to this opinion instead of attempting to convert it or subdue it to their own policy. If a President or party leader wishes to strike out a new line, he has somehow to convince the machine that the country will follow, and if he rushes ahead without taking this precaution he will almost certainly come to disaster.

Such are the general conditions for three years out of the four; then in the fourth comes the concentrated effort of the Presidential election. The national nominating conventions of the two parties now absorb all attention, and for six months the whole country is drowned in politics. Americans may care little who represents them in Congress, but they do care a great deal who goes to the White House and what kind of Administration he may form. The party conventions have often been described, and I will not dwell on them here. But there can be in all the world nothing quite like the scenes of emotion and uproar in which the skilful party-managers do the business of their candidates and work for the "stampede" which is their final triumph. The whole public catches the infection, and watches with a sporting interest the beating of a favourite or the emergence of a "dark horse," the skilful turns and twists by which the votes of the defeated are transferred to the runners-up as the ballots proceed. The management of a convention is the supreme political art;

and though the externals are somewhat different, the method is substantially the same as that by which the College of Cardinals elects a Pope, and often leads to the same unexpected results.

The candidates having been chosen, the work that falls on them between the nomination and the election is in the highest degree exhausting and exacting. A Prime Minister or leader of Opposition approaching a general election in England has a team working with him which shares in the education of the public. Between them they map out the country and deliver speeches of approximately equal authority, most of which are reported in the newspapers. Neither an outgoing President, if he has secured the nomination for a second term, nor the nominee of the opposing party can rely on any such co-operative effort. The members of the President's Cabinet are not responsible for the policy of the party and cannot speak to the country as colleagues of equal rank with their chief, as Ministers do in this country. The leaders of the opposing party are not bound together, like British Opposition leaders who have served together in a previous Government and are now making a bid to serve together in a new Government. The Presidential candidates are solitary figures, and they alone can speak with any certainty of being heard by the country as a whole. Eminent men may be brought out to make speeches on special subjects, and these may be reprinted and circulated by the million ; the respective parties may pour out a flood of campaign literature, and the newspapers may debate with one another, but the word of authority comes from the candidate and no one else, and he must be unceasingly at work from nomination day to election day. There are various methods open to him. He may tour the country in a special train, carrying his reporters with him, make speeches from the platform of his train, or take part in triumphal processions and public meetings which his supporters will arrange for him at the various stopping-places ; or he may just sit at home, receive deputations, and make speeches to them which the reporters will take down. In 1896 Bryan made a " whirlwind tour "

while McKinley sat in the front porch of his own house at Canton and delivered himself all day to deputations. John Hay in his memorial address on McKinley delivered at Washington on Feb. 27, 1902, thus described the scene :

> From the front porch of his modest house in Canton he daily addressed the delegations which came from every part of the country to greet him, in a series of speeches so strong, so varied, so pertinent, so full of facts briefly set forth, of theories embodied in a single phrase, that they formed the hourly text for the other speakers of his party and give probably the most convincing proof we have of his surprising fertility of resource and flexibility of mind. All this was done without anxiety or strain. I remember a day spent with him during that busy summer. He had made nineteen speeches the day before ; that day he had made many. But in the intervals of these addresses he sat in his study and talked, with nerves as quiet and free from care as if we had been spending a holiday at the seaside or among the hills.

Roosevelt in 1904, having no opponent more formidable than Chief Justice Parker, boldly took the line that his dignity as President required him to stand aloof from campaigning and only chopped in at the last moment, and President Coolidge in 1924 decided that his reputation for silence was one of his principal assets. But Wilson in 1920 had intended to tour the country on behalf of his European policy, and his party no doubt suffered severely from his inability to do his own propaganda. Harding brought his career to a premature close by an exhausting tour in the middle of his term. Looking at the portraits of American Presidents and stump orators—Cleveland, McKinley, Bryan, Roosevelt, Taft, Harding and others—one gets the impression of a specially developed type of physically powerful men, with big heads, square jaws, large lungs and iron frames. Without these physical endowments they would certainly never have got to the top, and even with them not a few have died young or retired broken men.

4

The enormous size of American parties and the vast extent of territory over which they operate make them far more timid than parties in older and smaller countries. They have no convictions which require them to take risks ; their frankly avowed object is to gain or keep power by defeating their opponents, and in their view it is folly to take unfavourable ground and to persist in holding it when by so doing one plays into the hands of the enemy. To discover betimes what is unfavourable ground, and if one has blundered on to it to get out of it while there is yet time, is a large part of the art of politics in America. It is a very difficult art, for the country is so big that one part can do little more than guess what another may be thinking. Eastern politicians talk habitually of the West and Middle-West as a depressing enigma which compels them to mark time for long periods together lest they come unexpectedly on something hard and hostile. When adventurous leaders like Wilson suddenly break loose from tradition and carry their parties after them without asking their leave, even those who agree with them shake their heads and predict catastrophe. For it is un-American to leap ahead of the sovereign people, and if these things have to be done it should only be after careful preparation and with the consent of party-leaders and bosses. Even when all precautions have been taken, the attempt to discover what the public wants is attended with vexatious mistakes, especially at times when it seems to want nothing in particular ; and parties have not seldom got themselves into their worst difficulties when they have been most persuaded that they have got hold of a good thing.

The plunge of the Democratic party into free silver in 1896 is a case in point. If either party had seemed likely to adopt the silver platform in that year, it was the Republican rather than the Democratic party. McKinley and Senator Hanna, the two protagonists of the Republican party, had for many years been bimetallists and had linked free silver with high tariff, whereas the Democratic party

under Cleveland's influence had been generally for gold and low tariff. The Republicans, however, decided that high tariff would be the better plank for the 1896 election, since it enabled them to ascribe the prevailing depression in trade to the Democratic attitude on the tariff and to promise relief through higher duties. Bimetallism had therefore to be thrust out of practical politics in favour of Protection, and at the Republican Convention which took place at St. Louis on June 16 salvation was found in an ingenious resolution which read: "We are opposed to the free coinage of silver except by international agreement with the leading commercial nations of the world, which we pledge ourselves to promote, and until such agreement can be obtained the existing gold standard must be preserved." We are told by one of the historians of these proceedings that "many from the Middle-West desired a plank which could be interpreted as favouring gold in the East and yet not condemning silver in the West" —to such lengths will politicians go to conciliate votes— but in the end it was agreed that the resolution went far enough to save the faces of McKinley and Hanna, and to enable the Republican party to take up the defence of gold while keeping some hope alive in the West that silver also might have its turn.

The Democratic Convention met at Chicago on July 7, and was apparently at once overcome by the temptation to pick up the good thing which its opponents had dropped. The "Cleveland men," who were by far the wisest and ablest members of the party, fought valiantly against this conclusion, and it might have been supposed that the warning of a schism in their party would have deterred the silverites. But they were persuaded that the silver plank would sweep the West and Middle-West and more than compensate for the division in their own ranks by dividing their opponents and embarrassing the Republican candidate, who was a notorious bimetallist. Bryan, who was an honest enthusiast, therefore, carried all before him at the convention, and won the nomination by the famous speech in which he protested against "pressing down upon the

brow of labour this crown of thorns and crucifying mankind upon a cross of gold." The silver question has always sent such fumes to the brain that we need not question the sincerity of this high-flown talk, but the party managers who supposed that they had dished their opponents and picked up the winning card which they had dropped found within four months that they had destroyed their party for twelve years. So difficult is it even in the best organized democracies to be quite sure whether a given proposal is going to catch on or not.

The 1896 campaign about silver was one of the most singular incidents in modern democracy. In the whole gamut of possible controversies it would seem impossible to choose one less suitable for electioneering than that concerning the proper ratio between gold and silver and the effect of the free coinage of the latter metal. Never, one would have supposed, could a popular leader have had less suitable material to handle before great audiences. Yet Mr. Bryan swept multitudes off their feet by glowing oratory on this theme, and the appearance at his meetings of sixteen young ladies dressed in white and one in yellow impressed the sacred ratio of the two metals on the simplest minds. On the other side was McKinley diluting a half-hearted defence of gold with a passionate advocacy of high tariff in his " porch speeches," while economists and bankers with Grover Cleveland to lead them took up the serious argument for the gold standard. I have quoted Mr. Hay's tribute to the porch speeches so I may without seeming invidious add the opinion of the late Mr. E. L. Godkin that McKinley was " a far poorer sort of candidate than any the Republican party had ever had, nay worse than any party had ever had since the foundation of the government." He nevertheless won a resounding victory, for the country judged that he was somewhat less dangerous than his opponent.

Mr. Godkin, the authority just quoted, took a gloomy view of the public life in America. He saw all the politicians in chains to the party bosses who nominate the delegates to the nominating convention, that peculiarly

American system which, in the hope of guarding democracy, has effectively thwarted it. The man who designates the delegates to the nominating convention is really, he says, "the most powerful man in the community. Everyone who wishes to enter public life bows before him. No one, who, being in public life wishes to rise higher, no Representative who wishes to be Senator, no Governor who wishes to be President will gainsay him or quarrel with him. Everybody but the President in a second term is at his beck. For similar reasons he holds the legislators in his power. If they do not legislate as he pleases, he will not allow them to come back to the Legislature. He has to be consulted, in fact, about every office."[1] The all-pervading power of the bosses and their brazen ways of using it and of filling their own pockets by its use would be incredible if they were not described by Americans themselves and attested by the evidence given at public enquiries. Why these things are tolerated, why public opinion does not rise up and sweep them away, what pleasure or satisfaction honest and decent, let alone eminent and distinguished men, can get out of the public life, if it is the servitude that American writers describe it as being, is a mystery which can only be explained by the force of habit and long custom. Deeming the boss to be a necessity of the complicated election system and subordination to him to be a necessary consequence of the existence of the necessary boss, Mr. Godkin went to the length of predicting that the American people would find salvation in "confining their legislatures within very narrow limits and making them meet at rare intervals." The referendum, he suggests, might then be used for the production of really important legislation.

This speculation shows the enormous difference between the British and American systems. It could not enter the head of Englishmen to suspend Parliament because certain of its members were subject to the corrupt tyranny of outside caucuses. To them Parliament is the seat of government as well as the source of legislation, and to

[1] "Problems of Modern Democracy," p. 271.

suspend it would be either to hand them over to tyranny or to plunge them into anarchy. As the American sees it, democratic government, functioning through a head of the Executive who is an elected person, would still survive and the country be put to no great inconvenience if Congress were extinguished or suspended. The difference is vital to the public life. With us the parliamentary career is the public life and a man cannot hope to rise to eminence unless he is a good parliamentarian. In America membership of Congress leads nowhere in itself, and may even be a disqualification, unless a man has power and capacity which makes him formidable outside Congress.

CHAPTER XV

CLEVELAND AND ROOSEVELT

Some Recent Presidents—Grover Cleveland—The "Veto Mayor"—Governor of New York—Election to the Presidency—Conflicts with the Senate—His Veto Record—The Reaction—His Second Term—Rebuking the Place-hunters—A "Yachting Trip"—Many Conflicts—Asserting his Authority—President versus Congress—Theodore Roosevelt—Politician and Roughrider—"Big Stick" and "Square Deal"—The Alaska Boundary—A Short Way with the Germans—"The President's Duty"—Republican Opposition.

1

WHAT has been said so far relates to the general conditions of public action in the United States. In order to get a little nearer the actual facts, let me now glance at the careers of certain recent Presidents, and see how they have risen to power and what use they have made of the most commanding position offered under any Constitution to any public man.

Grover Cleveland is a typical instance of the ascent from the lawyer's office to the White House. His father, a Presbyterian minister, died young, leaving a widow and family of nine children almost without support; and Grover, the fifth of the family, was thought fortunate when at the age of eighteen he obtained through an uncle's influence a place in a lawyer's office in Buffalo. Being extremely industrious, he made himself in a few years not only a good lawyer but a skilful advocate. He was early in favour with the Democratic party, and in 1870 at the age of thirty-three was elected Sheriff of Erie County for three years. He acquitted himself well and ten years later was elected Mayor of Buffalo, receiving the support of not a few Republicans who thought him the likeliest man to cleanse and mortify that notoriously corrupt municipality. In this he seems to have succeeded admirably and made so

free a use of the veto, which is the chief weapon of the mayor under the American system, that he became known throughout the Eastern States as "the Veto Mayor." Again and again he returned "without his approval" proposals by the Council for fleecing the public or feathering the nests of their friends, accompanying his decisions with caustic observations which show the manner of man he was. Let me quote one of these communications :

BUFFALO, *June* 26, 1882.

I return without my approval the resolution of your honourable body, passed at its last meeting, awarding the contracts for cleaning the paved streets and alleys of the city for the ensuing five years to George Talbot at his bid of four hundred and twenty-two thousand and five hundred dollars.

The bid thus accepted by your honourable body is more than one hundred thousand dollars higher than that of another perfectly responsible party for the same work ; and a worse or more suspicious feature in this transaction is that the bid now accepted is fifty thousand dollars more than that made by Mr. Talbot himself within a very few weeks, openly and publicly to your honourable body, for performing precisely the same services. This latter circumstance is to my mind the manifestation, on the part of the contractor, of a reliance upon the forbearance and generosity of your honourable body which would be more creditable if it were less expensive to the Taxpayers.

I am not aware that any excuse is offered for the acceptance of this proposal, thus increased, except the very flimsy one that the lower bidders cannot afford to do the work for the sum they name.

This extreme tenderness and consideration for those who desire to contract with the city, and this touching and paternal solicitude lest they should be improvidently led into a bad bargain is, I am sure, an exception to general business rules, and seems to have no place in this selfish, sordid world, except as found in the administration of municipal affairs.

The charter of your city requires that the objections of the Mayor, when he disapproves any resolution of your honourable body such as that now under consideration, shall be plainly stated. I withhold my assent from the same, because I regard it as the culmination of a most barefaced, impudent, and shameless scheme to betray the interests of the people, and to worse than squander the public money.

I will not be misunderstood in this matter. There are those whose votes were given for this resolution whom I cannot and will not suspect of a wilful neglect of the interests they are sworn to protect; but it has been fully demonstrated that there are influences, both in and about your honourable body, which it behoves every honest man to watch and avoid with the greatest care.

When cool judgment rules the hour, the people will, I hope and believe, have no reason to complain of the action of your honourable body. But clumsy appeals to prejudice or passion, insinuations, with a kind of low, cheap cunning, as to the motives and purposes of others, and the mock heroism of brazen effrontery which openly declares that a wholesome public sentiment is to be set at nought, sometimes deceives and leads honest men to aid in the consummation of schemes which, if exposed, they would look upon with abhorrence.

If the scandal in connexion with this street-cleaning contract, which has so roused our citizens, shall cause them to select and watch with more care those to whom they intrust their interests, and if it serves to make all of us who are charged with official duties more careful in their performance, it will not be an unmitigated evil.

We are fast gaining positions in the grades of public ownership. There is no middle ground. Those who are not for the people, either in or out of your honourable body, are against them, and should be treated accordingly.

GROVER CLEVELAND,
Mayor.[1]

From the mayoralty of Buffalo Cleveland passed to the Governorship of New York State—a position which gave him even richer opportunities of chastening corrupt authorities by the use of his veto. The governor and the mayor, standing outside and above the State Legislatures and the municipalities, with power to reject their proposals and admonish them for their shortcomings, are among the most characteristic of American institutions.

Not infrequently, after choosing undesirables for the Legislatures and municipalities, the American elector seems to find salvation by appointing a "Reform" governor or mayor to keep them in order. There could certainly be no better method of testing a man's character and executive abilities than to place him in a position of this

[1] "The Life and Public Services of Grover Cleveland," by Pendleton King. G. P. Putnam, 1884.

kind ; and within two years Cleveland had acquitted himself so well that he obtained the Democratic nomination for the Presidency by 683 votes to 137 at the Chicago Convention of 1884. He was thus held qualified for the highest political office in the gift of the American people by the tenure for three years of two purely executive offices in the sphere of local government. In one sense of the word he had had no political training or experience of any kind. He had not contested a seat, sat in Congress, engaged in debate with a political opponent, or seen the inside of what we should call a Government department. He had no contact with foreign affairs beyond that of the ordinary citizen. But in the eyes of Americans he had had just the kind of experience which qualifies a man for the highest Executive office. The President stands in exactly the same relation to Congress as the governor to the State Legislature or the mayor to the municipality. The " Veto Mayor," the mayor who has learnt to say " no " to a municipality, may reasonably be considered a likely man, when occasion requires, to say " no " as President to Congress. The man who is familiar with the machinery of government in a great State may reasonably be considered qualified to handle the still greater machine of Federal Government. The lawyer who is expert in litigation will seem specially fit to be entrusted with international affairs. We get here a completely different conception of the highest political office and the road to it from any that we are familiar with in this country. The President is, so to speak, on the other side of the table from Congress, and a parliamentary career is no part of the qualification for his office.

2

If the American people expected the " Veto Mayor " to show his qualities as President, they were well justified by the result. Though a Democratic majority had brought him to the White House, the Senate in 1884 and for the whole of his four years' term remained in the control of the Republicans, and from December 1885 onwards he was

perpetually in conflict with it. The subjects of contention were many and various, but patronage and pensions loomed large among them. The President offended his own supporters by an honest attempt to pursue Civil Service Reform by non-partisan appointments, but he had to concede enough to the machine to give his opponents in the Senate the chance of branding him as an adherent of the spoils system. He used very high language in these encounters. "The pledges I have made," he declared in his first message to Congress, "were made to the people, and to them I am responsible for the manner in which they have been redeemed. I am not responsible to the Senate, and I am unwilling to submit my actions and official conduct to them for judgment."[1] The Senate kept up a running fire on the President's appointments, and the President retaliated by vetoing the legislation sent up to him. Above all he vetoed Pensions Bills, thus raising a storm in the country, which twenty years after the Civil War still held the claims of old soldiers and their relations and dependents to be inexhaustible. At the end of the four years, his veto record was unique During the ninety-six years from the foundation of the Government down to the beginning of his Administration, the entire number of veto messages was 132. In four years he sent in 301 veto messages, and in addition he practically vetoed 189 Bills by inaction, i.e. by withholding his assent. The fathers of the Constitution had laid down in the "Federalist" that "the people ought to indulge all their jealousy and exhaust all their precautions" against the too "enterprising ambition" of the legislative department of government, and Cleveland evidently regarded himself as the vindicator of the popular will against the encroachments of the Senate. We may suspect that he would have paid no more deference to the House of Representatives, if it had happened to be controlled by his political opponents, but Presidents seem to take pleasure in conflicts with the Senate, and Cleveland seized his opportunities with avidity.

[1] "The Cleveland Era," by Henry Jones Ford, Yale University Press, p. 123.

It was a row royal and Cleveland did not mince words:

> The requests and demands which by the score have for nearly three months been presented to the different departments of the Government, whatever may be their form, have but one complexion. They assume the right of the Senate to sit in judgment upon the exercise of my exclusive discretion and executive function for which I am solely responsible to the people from whom I have so lately received the sacred trust of office. My oath to support and defend the Constitution, my duty to the people who have chosen me to execute the powers of their great office and not relinquish them, and my duty to the chief magistracy which I must preserve unimpaired in all its dignity and vigour, compel me to refuse compliance with these demands (Presidential Message, March 1, 1886.)

Senator Edmunds of Vermont retorted that the Presidential message brought vividly to his mind "the communication of King Charles I to the Parliament, telling them what, in conducting their affairs, they ought to do and ought not to do." The President's friends rejoined that another English hero was never so popular as when he had turned Parliament out of doors, and it was perhaps not a coincidence that the struggle was accompanied by what the book trade called "the Cromwell boom." On the whole, opinion was on the side of the President, for as Mr. H. J. Ford, the author of a monograph on these times, remarks, the American people "instinctively expect the President to guard their interests against congressional machinations."[1]

But before the four years were up this Presidential knight-errantry had exhausted itself, and accumulating discontents in the business and financial world, accompanied by strikes and Anarchist movements in the great industrial centres, destroyed the credit of the Administration. Cleveland, fighting to the last, was defeated at the 1888 election and with Harrison for their nominee the Republicans came back with a majority which gave

[1] "The Cleveland Era," p. 72.

them complete control of Congress. The Presidential veto having been removed, pensions were now poured out upon the claimants—men who after twenty years swore that they had received "battle-shock," widows, minors, and dependent parents—who presented themselves in incredible numbers to an indulgent Pensions Bureau.

After pensions came tariffs, and next the surprising discovery that the consumer was not getting the benefits that he had been confidently promised, which compelled the Republican party to try their hands at anti-trust legislation. All the time the silver question was boiling up, and between the fear of antagonizing either the silver States or the farmers who believed in free silver, and the obvious dangers of dethroning gold, both parties took refuge in a "straddle" which blessed silver and maintained gold, while leaving the country without any remedy for a currency system which was plainly inadequate to its expanding needs. The Republican party would have liked a demonstration for free silver in Congress, provided they could have relied on the President to veto any too dangerous experiment; but Harrison, in his reaction from his predecessor, had fallen into the habit of not vetoing anything, and it was impossible to ascertain what he thought, let alone what he would do. Probably he thought nothing—which is perhaps the safest attitude for a politician faced with the currency question—but if so, he strove honestly to make atonement by the grandeur and vagueness of his language in his Presidential messages. He said that while the producers of silver were entitled to just consideration, there should be no bigotry between the precious metals, and that "the true friends of silver would be careful not to overrun the goal." In any case whatever happened about silver or gold, all good Americans had the utmost cause for thankfulness and satisfaction. "The vista that now opens to us is wider and more glorious than before. Gratification and amazement struggle for supremacy as we contemplate the population, wealth and moral strength of our country."

3

Nevertheless the last months of Harrison's term of office were embittered by signs of unrest and dissatisfaction all over the Union: violent strikes at Pittsburgh and elsewhere which needed to be suppressed with Federal troops; incessant agitation on the everlasting currency question, in which no one seemed to be on firm ground. So when the election came in 1892 the American people swung back to "the Veto President" and brought him again to the White House with a sweeping majority which this time gave him the control of both House and Senate. Being now a second term President with less motive than ever for conciliating his party, he was in a position to assert himself in certain matters in which he had obeyed the machine in his previous term. As usual he was mobbed by place-hunters. They came singly or in groups under the escort of Congressmen, some of whom performed these services for different candidates several times a day. Cleveland stood it for a few weeks and then broke out with an Executive order setting forth that "a due regard for public duty, which must be neglected if present conditions continue, and an observance of the limitations placed upon human endurance, oblige me to decline, from and after this date, all personal interviews with those seeking office."

The wonder is not that Cleveland rebelled but that any President could ever have stood it. His revolt nevertheless raised a tremendous hubbub. He was denounced all over the country for shutting his doors upon the people who had elected him and for making an arbitrary use of power which compelled free American citizens to choose "exile or punishment." In vain did his secretary explain that the whole twenty-four hours did not afford sufficient time for him to see the office-seekers and do the minimum of public work required of the President. The storm of censure beat upon him from all parts of the country, and his own partisans were deeply offended. In the meantime a financial panic was sweeping over the country, bringing bankruptcy and failures of State banks and private

banks, especially in the South and West. Rumours that the Secretary to the Treasury meant to redeem Treasury notes in silver had undoubtedly contributed to this trouble, and the President came out firmly with an announcement that redemption in gold would be maintained. This stayed the panic but involved him in great trouble with his party who were playing with the silver question and already more than half-tempted to follow Bryan, who was now starting his agitation in Congress. In the middle of all this the newspapers oddly announced that the President had left for New York on a yachting trip. It was true in a sense, but while the yacht was steaming slowly up the East River, he was in the hands of surgeons who removed his entire left upper jaw, and a few days later operated a second time for the removal of any tissues which might possibly have been infected. The surgeons were so successful that they were able to fit him with an artificial jaw of vulcanized rubber which enabled him to speak without any impairment of the strength and clearness of his voice, and till many years later no one knew what had happened.[1]

Cleveland returned at once from his "yachting trip" to a battle with the silver party which now controlled the Senate. The details of this controversy are tedious and intricate, and I have shown in the previous chapter how it was popularized. The general verdict was that Cleveland saved the gold basis without solving the currency question. Before the end he was in mortal conflict with Bryan over silver, and with the Senate over the "Tariff Reform" scheme by which he sought to abate the protectionist duties imposed by his predecessor. In the meantime violent strikes had again broken out, and Cleveland once more showed his quality as a disciplinarian by overriding the State Governor and sending Federal troops into Chicago to quell riots in the suburbs of that city. The country in general applauded, but his party was hopelessly broken, and before the end the great majority were streaming

[1] See "The Cleveland Era," p. 178. Mr. Ford takes these details from the *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1917.

after Bryan, leaving Cleveland to be more and more the leader of a dissentient minority. Nevertheless, he fought gamely on, bringing all the Presidential guns to bear on turbulent people who contested his authority or challenged his policy, and never wavering in his conviction that in his fights with Congress he was espousing the popular cause.

Such a career would have been impossible in any other country and runs counter to almost everything that we think of as democratic in our own practice. This man is not only not a parliamentarian but the avowed enemy of the elective Legislatures. As mayor he fights his municipality; as governor his State Legislature; as President he vetoes the Bills and proposals of Congress. I have quoted the author of a monograph on "The Cleveland Era" as saying that "the American people instinctively expect the President to guard their interests against congressional machinations"—a comment which to an English ear turns the assumptions of democracy upside down in a single sentence. That the assemblies which in our view are the core of democracy should be under chronic suspicion of those who elect them and that the same electors who have brought these assemblies into being should next elect a President to keep them in order is a more puzzling procedure to the British mind than any that mystifies the foreigner in the British Constitution.

Still more puzzling is it that the opinion which is strong enough to compel parties to choose men for President who are capable of applying this discipline is not strong enough to compel them to provide Legislatures which shall be above suspicion. Whatever the cause, the result is an incessant dualism which is a serious obstacle to the foreign understanding of American politics. Not only are parties in conflict as in other countries, but there is a perennial struggle, cutting across party divisions, between the political undermen who compose the Legislatures and the political superman who sits in the White House. The vast majority of politicians never in any real sense become figures of national importance and are always liable to have placed over them a figure brought from another world

who for four years or even eight may behave more autocratically than any Prime Minister or monarch in the old world.

4

Theodore Roosevelt had an easier road in life than Cleveland. The son of well-to-do parents and a graduate of Harvard, he was free as a young man to choose his own career and astonished his friends by taking up with politicians and getting elected to the New York State Legislature. Having no high-brow squeamishness and a natural aptitude for getting on with all sorts of queer characters, he appears in the next three years to have learnt a good deal that was serviceable to him in after life about the ways of practical politicians in city and State politics, and to have frustrated not a few knavish tricks. Also he equipped himself as a ready debater in the breezy American style with a punch in it. Then he went West to the little Missouri, and after some years in "Cowboy Land" came back a colonel and was appointed a Civil Service Commissioner, in which capacity he laboured for six years to extend the examination system at the expense of the spoils system and obtained a further insight into the ways of political bosses. After this he served for two years as President of the Police Commission in New York, and once more put up a sturdy fight against corruption and blackmail. From this he got his first place in the Administration as Assistant Secretary to the Navy and then leapt into fame as Colonel of the Roughriders in the Cuban War. He returned to be elected Governor of New York State and frightened the Republican machine men out of their wits both by his progressive tendencies and his frank hostility to bosses and jobbery. For this he was relegated to what was supposed to be the safe seclusion of the Vice-Presidency at the 1900 election—much to his own annoyance—and then the assassination of McKinley brought him suddenly to the White House, this time to the still greater annoyance of powerful people who had determined that he should never go there.

In conferring on him the degree of Doctor of Laws at Harvard, President Eliot spoke of Roosevelt as "a true type of the sturdy gentleman and the high-minded public servant of a democracy." He was perhaps a little inclined to exaggerate his own virility. He liked to keep the public reminded that he was cowboy and roughrider, a child of nature sharing the primitive emotions of pioneers, a man of the people, a politician among politicians. Earnestly and often he deprecates the idea that he is either fastidious, high-brow or "silk-stocking" reformer shaking an ineffectual head over political scandals. He discovers amiable qualities in "bosses," works in a breezy way with the machine, and is willing to blot out any number of past transgressions, so long as the transgressors will walk with him on the right road. His speeches abound in energetic commonplaces, he is exuberantly patriotic and fervently moral, Jingo and Radical as the occasion demands, with swift transitions from the "big stick" to the "square deal." Some of his speeches might be the joint composition of Mr. Kipling and Dr. Clifford. He takes the field against the big trusts, and having kindled their wrath, turns round and talks severely to Labour when it looks dictatorial.

In foreign affairs he struck a stand-no-nonsense attitude which foreign diplomatists found extremely disconcerting. Anglophil as he was on the whole, he was prepared to go all lengths on the Alaska boundary question. "I wish it distinctly understood," he wrote in a letter written to be shown to Mr. Chamberlain (July 25, 1903), "that, if there is a disagreement on the Commission, not only that there will be no arbitration on the matter, but that in my message to Congress I shall take a position which will prevent any possibility of arbitration hereafter; a position, I am inclined to believe, which will render it necessary for Congress to give me the authority to run the line as we claim it by our own people without any further regard to the attitude of England and Canada." By "disagreement in the Commission" he meant anything less than acceptance of the American contention. In 1903 he did to the Republic of Colombia very much what Mr.

Chamberlain was charged with attempting to do to the Transvaal Republic at the time of the Jameson Raid, i.e. enabled the desired revolution which detached Panama to be successfully accomplished by sending an American ship to prevent the landing of troops dispatched to put it down. Colombia had kicked against ratifying the Hay-Herran Treaty for the construction of the Panama Canal and Roosevelt was not disposed to wait. "I simply lifted my foot," he explained to his Cabinet. "Oh, Mr. President," said Attorney General Knox, "do not let so great an achievement suffer from any taint of legality." Senator F. Hoar refused to be consoled. "I hope," he said, "I may never live to see the day when the interests of my country are placed above its honour" and, so saying, walked out of the White House.

There was the same Rooseveltian touch in his dealings with Germany, enormously to the surprise of Berlin. In October 1903 he proposed arbitration on the Venezuelan debt question and not getting a reply sent for the German Ambassador and told him bluntly that if he did not get a favourable answer in ten days he should order Dewey and his fleet to the spot to prevent any German landing on Venezuelan territory. A few days later the Ambassador came again to see the President, but said nothing about Venezuela. When he rose to go, he was asked if he had heard anything from his Government on that subject. The answer was "no," whereupon the President said he would advance the time he had proposed and order Dewey to sail twenty-four hours before the expiration of the ten days.[1] The Emperor appears to have been both astonished and alarmed, and immediately agreed to arbitration. This portentous American was naturally regarded as a dangerous novelty in all the Foreign Offices of Europe, but the theory was wisely set up that, as he evidently did not understand the niceties and courtesies of European diplomacy, it was not necessary to take the same offence as would have been imperative if a European had so acted to a European.

[1] See on this subject "The McKinley and Roosevelt Administrations," by James Ford Rhodes, p. 201-278.

Until the outbreak of the Great War the German Emperor was supposed to entertain a warm feeling for Roosevelt, and to regard him as a kindred spirit in the game of the big stick.[1]

The unexpected apparition of this man in the highest place could not be agreeable to the party managers and Senators who had deliberately planned to confine him to the Vice-Presidency. But he wisely put himself on his good behaviour and announced at once that he intended to continue the policy of his predecessor and to retain in office the men whom that predecessor had chosen for his Cabinet. This was almost too good to be true, and considering what manner of man he was and what manner of men these others were, it could not long remain true. From the beginning he held strongly that the President had responsibilities which he could share with no one. "The President's duty is to act so that he himself and his subordinates shall be able to do efficient work for the people, and this efficient work he and they cannot do if Congress is permitted to undertake the task of making up his mind for him as to how he shall perform what is clearly his sole duty." It was soon whispered that Grover Cleveland had come again, and, as usual, there were differences as to what was "efficient work for the people." But let Roosevelt describe the situation and the sequel in his own language[2]:—

> The course of events had regrettably but perhaps inevitably tended to throw the party into the hands not merely of the Conservatives but of the reactionaries; of men who, sometimes for personal and improper reasons, but more often with entire sincerity and uprightness of purpose, distrusted anything that was progressive and dreaded radicalism. These men still from force of habit applauded what Lincoln had done in the way of radical dealing with the abuses of his day; but they did not apply the spirit in which Lincoln worked to the abuses of their own day. Both Houses of Congress were controlled by these men Their leaders in the Senate were Messrs. Aldrich and Hale. The Speaker of the House when I became President was Mr. Henderson, but in a little over

[1] "The McKinley and Roosevelt Administrations," p. 251.
[2] "Autobiography," pp. 398-9.

a year he was succeeded by Mr. Cannon, who, although widely differing from Senator Aldrich in matters of detail, represented the same type of public sentiment. There were many points on which I agreed with Mr. Cannon and Mr. Aldrich, and some points on which I agreed with Mr. Hale. I made a resolute effort to get on with all three and with their followers, and I have no question that they made an equally resolute effort to get on with me. We succeeded in working together, although with increasing friction, for some years, I pushing forward and they hanging back. Gradually, however, I was forced to abandon the effort to persuade them to come my way, and then I achieved results only by appealing over the heads of the Senate and House leaders to the people, who were masters of both of us. I continued in this way to get results until almost the close of my term ; and the Republican party became once more the progressive and indeed the fairly radical progressive party of the Nation. When my successor was chosen, however, the leaders of the House and Senate, or most of them, felt that it was safe to come to a break with me, and the last or short session of Congress, held between the election of my successor and his inauguration four months later, saw a series of contests between the majorities in the two Houses of Congress and the President—myself—quite as bitter as if they and I had belonged to opposite political parties. However, I held my own. I was not able to push through the legislation I desired during these four months, but I was able to prevent them doing anything I did not desire, or undoing anything that I had already succeeded in getting done.

So the thing runs the same course under Roosevelt as under Cleveland, and once more we see the elected man in unceasing conflict with the elected Houses and exciting the vehement hostility of his own party in his struggle. That party sought tranquillity by choosing Taft to succeed him, but without reckoning with the insatiable ex-President who within three years had started the formidable adventure of a new party and by so doing split the Republicans so effectively as to hand the Presidency back to the Democratic party.

CHAPTER XVI

WOODROW WILSON

The "Influential Outsider" as Presidential Candidate—Woodrow Wilson—Shaping towards Washington—From Princeton to New Jersey—"No Dummy Governor"—The Convention of 1912—"Uplift"—A Blast in the Press—The Federal Reserve Act—The Coming of War—Neutrality in Thought—Walter Page's Experience—The President's Taboo—His Qualities and Defects—At the Peace Conference—A Double Conflict—Defects in the System.

I

AMERICAN parties are generally in a state of necessity when they choose their Presidential candidates. In spite of abundant warnings that the influential outsider may bring confusion to their politics, they generally must have him if they wish to win. The Democratic party had burnt its fingers over Cleveland, and the Republican party over Roosevelt; but ten years' exclusion from power appears to have convinced the former that the experiment of the influential outsider must be tried again if the way back was to be discovered. Undoubtedly they took considerable risks in choosing Woodrow Wilson. Both as President of Princeton University and as Governor of New Jersey he was known to be a man of stubborn will and somewhat intractable temperament. But he was by no means, as Europeans have supposed, a mere high-brow detached from politics. He had written widely-accepted text-books on political and constitutional questions, and had specially devoted himself to practical issues such as the defects of congressional government and the right use of the presidential power. By careful practice and preparation he had made himself a most accomplished lecturer and public speaker, and long before he left Princeton his reputation as a public man was so well established that calls for advice

on political problems and appeals for addresses on public policy reached him from all parts of the country. Already he was known to be a Democrat, and as much of a Free Trader as circumstances permitted ; and Grover Cleveland was supposed to be his hero among recent public men. His friends whispered that he had high political ambitions, and was deliberately shaping his course towards Washington. In the position in which he was, he had no need to go to the politicians : he could wait till they came to him, as they did in July, 1910, with the offer of the Democratic nomination for the Governorship of New Jersey. Then he put Princeton behind him without a moment's hesitation, and plunged at once into the campaign.

The machine men appeared to have assumed that, being unfamiliar with practical politics, he would, as soon as elected, place himself in their hands ; but they quickly discovered their mistake. He started by fighting them about the election of a Senator ; he went on to hold conferences on reform measures to which his opponents were invited; and, though by his position he was excluded from the Legislature, he so organized his forces outside as to become the leader of the reform party inside. Much of this was thought to be highly improper by members of his own party, who roundly accused him of ingratitude in having accepted office at their hands and then turned round and thwarted some of their most cherished projects. His answer was that he never had had any intention of being a dummy Governor. By a rather subtle argument he maintained that the Governor's power of suggesting measures carried with it the power of advocating the form in which they should be passed, and so on to shaping the Bills to be presented to the Legislature in private conclaves either of his own party or of men of both parties, at which he could be present himself. " You can turn aside from the measure if you choose," he said at a conference on an Election Reform Bill,[1] " you can decline to follow me, you can deprive me of office and turn away from me; but you cannot deprive me of power so long as I steadfastly stand for what I believe

[1] March 13, 1911.

to be the interests and the legitimate demands of the people themselves." Taking this high line, he got things done, and was judged after two years to have been a highly successful Governor.

But a man with this record was not likely to be the willing choice of Conventional politicians for a still higher office, and it was not till the 46th ballot that he received the nomination from the Democratic Convention in 1912. He had made his début as candidate characteristically by taking a firm stand against the existing party control, and by so doing had to all appearances put himself out of the running. But the Convention drifted to deadlock between the other candidates, and in the meantime the popular manifestations on his behalf which now came from all parts of the country acted powerfully on the delegates. When November came he was elected, like Lincoln, by a minority vote, the sensation of the election being the enormous vote given for Roosevelt, who came before the country with a new party and an improvised organization.

Like Governor, like President. He entered office with a firm determination not to accept the minimizing theory of the President's office. The President, like the Governor, should be in contact with the Legislature, actively exert his influence and, if possible, bridge the gap so often deplored by constitutional theorists and so frequently observed in his own writings, between the Executive and Congress. He began by reviving Washington's practice of an oral address in place of a written message to Congress. A very eloquent address it was :—

> The feelings with which we face this new age of right and opportunity sweep across our heartstrings like some air out of God's own presence, where justice and mercy are reconciled and the judge and the brother are one. We know our task to be no mere task of politics, but a task which shall search us through and through, whether we be able to understand our time and the need of our people, whether we be indeed their spokesmen and interpreters, whether we have the pure heart to comprehend and the rectified will to choose our high course of action. This is not a day of

triumph : it is a day of dedication. Here muster not the forces of party, but the forces of humanity. Men's hearts wait upon us ; men's lives hang in the balance ; men's hopes call upon us to say what we will do. Who shall live up to the great trust ? Who dares fail to try ? I summon all honest men, all patriotic, all forward-looking men, to my side. God helping me, I will not fail them, if they will but counsel and sustain me.

The speech was cabled all over the world, and there was general agreement that a new note had been struck. " Uplift " was the word of the hour, and the most hardened politicians felt the thrill.

For eighteen months Congress was absorbed in tariff legislation, trust control and currency reform, and the President drove steadily ahead, with now and again an audacious stroke of his own when the Legislature seemed to be lagging. When the Underwood Tariff—a substantial advance towards freer trade—seemed likely to be choked in the Washington lobbies he came out with a blast in the newspapers :—

It is of serious interest to the country that the people at large should have no lobby, and be voiceless in these matters, while great bodies of astute men seek to create an artificial opinion and to overcome the interests of the public for their private profit. It is thoroughly worth the while of the people of this country to take knowledge of this matter. Only public opinion can check and destroy it.

The Government in all its branches ought to be relieved of this intolerable burden and this constant interruption to the calm progress of debate. I know that in this I am speaking for the members of the two Houses, who would rejoice as much as I would to be released from this unbearable situation.

Whether Congress actually did rejoice at a public appeal by the President against its established ways is perhaps not quite certain, but in any case the lobbyists were scattered and the tariff went through. That done, he plunged into currency reform, and with the same remorseless insistence induced Congress to pass the Federal Reserve Act—largely his own scheme—in the teeth of a formidable

opposition from the bankers. In the meantime the Administration pursued a liberal policy in the Philippines and a hands-off policy in Mexico, the President in both cases taking what, for short, may be called an anti-imperialist line. So far everything had prospered.

2

Then came the shattering blow of the war. This cut across all schemes of domestic reform, threatened a distracting schism between the different races of the American people, and left the President in a position of terrible responsibility. It is at such a moment that the weakness of the American system reveals itself. If ever a man needed to share his responsibility with Cabinet and Parliament it was at this hour, but the Constitution left Wilson in splendid isolation, the most powerful individual in the world, with the fate not only of his own country but of the whole world in his hands. All other great nations were committed on one side or the other, and their kings or statesmen reduced to waiting on an issue which they could do little to influence. America alone remained free with the undoubted power of ensuring victory to whichever side she lent her support; and her President was arbiter of her decision. True it was that in theory Congress decided the issue of peace or war, but it was unthinkable that it should decline the lead of the President, and impossible that it should act without it. With this burden on him, Wilson seemed like a man suddenly frozen. Not to lead opinion, but to wait for it, to be the patient sleepless eremite, watching the national mood with a mind so emptied of preference or partisanship as to catch and interpret the faintest signs without distortion or prejudice, seemed now to be his deliberate intention.

So he threw out his famous doctrine of "neutrality in thought as well as in action."

The effect of the war upon the United States will depend upon what American citizens say or do. Every man who really loves America will act and speak in the true spirit of neutrality, which is

the spirit of impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned. The spirit of the nation, in this critical matter, will be determined largely by what individuals and society and those gathered in public meetings do and say, upon what newspapers and magazines contain, upon what our ministers utter in their pulpits and proclaim as their opinion on the streets.

The people of the United States are drawn from many nations, and chiefly from the nations at war. It is natural and inevitable that there should be the utmost variety of sympathy and desire among them with regard to the issues and circumstances of the conflict. Some will wish one nation, others another, to succeed in the momentous struggle. It will be easy to excite passion, difficult to allay it. Those responsible for exciting it will assume a heavy responsibility—responsibility for no less a thing than that the people of the United States, whose love of their country and whose loyalty to its Government should unite them as Americans all, bound in honour and affection to think first of her and her interests, may be divided into camps of hostile opinions hot against each other, involved in the war itself in impulse and opinion, if not in action. Such divisions among us would be fatal to our peace of mind, and might seriously stand in the way of proper performance of our duty as the one great nation at peace, the one people holding itself ready to play a part of impartial mediation and speak the counsels of peace and accommodation, not as a partisan but as a friend.

I venture, therefore, my fellow-countrymen, to speak a solemn word of warning to you against that deepest, most subtle, most essential breach of neutrality which may spring out of partisanship, out of passionately taking sides. The United States must be neutral in fact as well as in name during these days that are to try men's souls. We must be impartial in thought as well as in action, must put a curb upon our sentiments as well as upon every transaction that might be construed as a preference of one party to the struggle before another. (August 18, 1914.)

The language was exasperating to the belligerents and the counsel impossible to Americans of normal feelings. How could rational men be expected not merely to control their tongues but to hold thought and feeling suspended in this greatest of all human conflicts? How, if men's souls were being tried, could they pass with eyes averted on the other side? How should men of English or of German blood quench the deep-seated native instinct which made

them passionate partisans of the one country or the other? The doctrine fell with a soothing sound upon an indifferent multitude, who were only too happy to feel that they had no responsibility, except to refrain from making up their minds; but among thinking Americans Wilson was almost alone in acting up to it.

But this he did—rigidly, scrupulously, conscientiously—up to the last hour of the two-and-a-half years that elapsed before America entered the war. In a vivid narrative Walter Page has recorded the failure of his attempt in August, 1916, to penetrate the stainless neutrality of the President's mind.[1] He went to Washington, having come all the way from England "with a most important and confidential message from the British Government which they preferred should be orally delivered." He was invited to lunch at the White House, at which the conversation was "general, and in the main jocular." "Not a word about England, not a word about a foreign policy or foreign relations." The President explained that the threatened railway strike engaged his whole mind. The Ambassador asked to have a talk when his mind was free, and was told to wait. A fortnight passed, then another invitation to lunch, and again "not one word about foreign affairs," though by this time Sharp, the Ambassador to France, had arrived, and was also of the party. After lunch the President went to the Capitol, taking the whole party with him, but came back alone, and left word with the doorman that he wanted to see no one. Finally, after five weeks, Page wrung an interview out of him by boldly demanding it. He showed some irritation at minor incidents arising out of the blockade, but when the Ambassador, with characteristic fervour, poured out his heart about the tremendous struggle of which he had been a witness in Europe, he found him "utterly cold, utterly unresponsive, interested only in ending the war." The Ambassador seemed not to be aware that he was invading the innermost shrine of Presidential neutrality.

Page adds sundry touches which vividly convey the

[1] "Life and Letters of Walter Page," II, 171-188.

atmosphere of Washington at this time. "Neutrality in thought as well as in action" was the solemn watchword. A barrage of small talk was set up to prevent the terrible subject breaking in. "Sharp (the American Ambassador to France) and I," says Page, "might have come from Bungtown and Jonesville and not from France and England." At a gathering attended by half the Cabinet not a question was asked of either of them about the war or about foreign relations. "The war isn't mentioned." At a Gridiron dinner the Vice-President confessed to a neighbour that "he had read none of the White Papers or Orange Papers of the belligerent Governments—confessed this with pride—lest he should form an opinion and cease to be neutral." "Miss X., a member of the President's household, said to Mr. T. the day we lunched there that she had made a remark privately to Sharp showing her admiration of the French. 'Was that a violation of neutrality?' she asked in all seriousness."

It astounded Page, and even now it seems incredible to the European reader of Page's narrative. We cannot think of any European society in which the fiat of one man, whether King, President, or Prime Minister, or even Pope or Archbishop, could have prevented the free play of talk and opinion about the most stupendous event in the world, and reduced intelligent men to this impartial ineptitude, not merely in the company of strangers but in intimate conversation among themselves. One feels instinctively something eccentric in the character of the President who could have attempted to enforce this discipline, and wonders at the mental subordination of men—responsible for great departments of State—who could have accepted it. We get in this queer way more of the essential difference between the attitude of an American President to the men who compose his Cabinet and that of a British Prime Minister to his Cabinet colleagues than in a dozen text-books. In August, 1916, America was within six months of her own plunge into the Great War, and the President, as Page records, was "doing his own thinking, untouched by other men's ideas." The other men, to all appearance, were

content that the President should do their thinking and to accept his fiat that the overwhelming subject should be taboo. Our own system may be better or worse, but it is assuredly extraordinarily different. If we could imagine the corresponding circumstances in London—say Europe convulsed in war and Britain temporarily neutral but dependent on any slight turn of the wheel which might compel her to come in—we need hardly ask ourselves what the scene would have been. We see it all in our mind's eye—the one absorbing topic dominating all talk and all thought, the Cabinet meeting every other day to consider its course, Ministers on the rack about their individual responsibility, newspapers calling out for preparation, the Committee of Imperial Defence in constant session, everywhere the assumption that for any decision the Government and the whole Government would be responsible. In Washington the President puts his fingers to his lips and the official world ceases even to think.

3

Wilson secured his re-election in 1916 by a majority so narrow that at one moment his supporters "conceded" the election to his opponent, Mr. Hughes. But the result justified him, in so far as it proved that the country was on the whole more inclined to stand out of the European quarrel than to come into it. Neither party had declared for intervention; there was certainly no such decided opinion as would have justified the spokesman and interpreter of the popular will in supposing that he would have had a unanimous country behind him in declaring war. What exactly were Wilson's mental processes during the next three months can only be conjectured. We may suppose that the peace-feelers at the end of 1916 shattered his dream of a "peace without victory," in which the President of the United States would play the part of friend to all and partisan of none. If the German military power was near exhaustion, the German belief that the unlimited submarine would prove an infallible weapon governed the

situation and forbade any terms which the friend of all could venture to commend to the Allies. It also placed upon him the immediate necessity of deciding whether he should submit to what was evidently a direct challenge to his own doctrine of the rights of neutrals.

Again he was right in interpreting the feelings of his countrymen, but he found himself, against his will, their leader in war. Nature had not designed him for that vocation, and his eyes were still on the peace, the peace which, as he saw it, should inaugurate a new order for the world. His voice was far-reaching, his power of impressive, clear-cut utterance of incomparable value to the Allies. But he was still a solitary figure. The two-and-a-half years of isolation and scrupulous neutrality had cut him off from the fellowship of the belligerents and left him without measure of the passions which had swept over Europe. He was, moreover, a President in his second term—the position of all others in the world which may induce a man to think himself the undisputed master of policy and circumstance.

The sequel brought out the strength and the weakness not only of his own character but of the whole American conception of government. As an individual proclaiming a new doctrine to the world he was in a position of unequalled authority, and nobly he used his opportunity. As a practical statesman, called upon to lay his mind alongside the minds of other men, he was in a new and unexplored world. He had never, in the European sense, worked with a Cabinet: he was without experience of parliamentary life with its necessary give and take. His contact with European diplomacy had been remote and indirect; deliberately to shut his mind to influences and opinions which might conflict with his own mental attitude had for some years been his endeavour. He nevertheless chose to be his own representative at the Peace Conference, and by so doing not only matched himself against the most experienced diplomatists and parliamentary debaters in Europe but destroyed the second line of defence which would have enabled any other American representative to refer to his

Government at critical moments. The service which he rendered in launching a great idea may be held hereafter to have outweighed the errors of judgment and character which thwarted its accomplishment. But in Europe he seemed to be a man out of his element, compelled suddenly to argue where he had been accustomed to command, and without the suppleness which would have enabled him either to prevail in argument or to gain his major points by timely concessions of the unimportant.

4

The record shows him as a man of deep reserves and almost pathetic isolation, working himself literally to death by his incapacity to delegate his functions, keeping his best friends at arm's length or in a state of agitated surmise as to his next impulse. He wrestled and agonized in solitude, but was outmatched in council by skilful politicians who played on his passion for his ideal to obtain concessions which were largely fatal to it. Strangest of all, in his dealings with his own countrymen, he who had been above party seemed suddenly—and at this most inopportune moment—to have become the stubbornest of partisans. In other countries coalitions were the order of the day, and statesmen had been at pains to disarm their political opponents or to rope them into the business of the great Conference. Wilson declared boldly that a party victory at the 1918 Congressional elections was essential to the accomplishment of his task and greatly weakened his own hand by failing to get it. He could not have been unaware that all his plans would eventually be at the mercy of the Senate, which would probably be controlled by his political opponents; but he made no effort to conciliate them, and turned a deaf ear to those who prudently advised that the more important of them should be taken into counsel and invited to accompany him to Europe. Only very reluctantly, if Mr. Lansing is to be believed, could he be brought to see the necessity of the preliminary team-work and preparation of plans upon which all the other Governments were busily

engaged in the weeks between the Armistice and the assembling of the Conference.

So he landed himself in a double conflict with the beasts at Ephesus and with his political opponents at home. When he finally returned, bringing the Treaty and the Covenant with him, his capacity for conciliation seemed to have been exhausted. Clemenceau, Orlando, Lloyd George and the rest had worn him down, and he had yielded to them what was necessary to save his dream of a world at peace. But there he would stand, digging his heels in against the domestic enemies who had been incessantly attacking him, questioning his judgment, impeaching his motives. To them he owed nothing, and he would appeal over their heads to the public in the fine old way which had served him so well when trusts and tariffs and currency reform were in the balance. It must always be a moot point whether, if his health had stood the strain and he had carried through the whirlwind campaign which apparently he intended when he returned to America, he might not still have had his way. But by this time he was a broken man, fighting a lone hand, with a stubbornness that grew with the malady which made it impossible for him to fight down opponents.

In view of the conclusion, posterity must say that he would have done better to be less conciliatory in Paris and more conciliatory at Washington; but this is not the way of an American President at the end of his second term, and still less of a sick man in a state of obstinate despair. A European reading the story is divided between sympathy for Wilson and astonishment at the system which left so enormous a power of making and marring in the hands of a sick and exhausted man at the most critical moment in modern history. In any other democratic country the friends of such a man would not have been reduced to vain efforts to induce him to make the concessions which would have enabled the Treaty and the Covenant of the League of Nations to pass the Senate ; they would have been colleagues on equal terms with him in a Cabinet which would have declined to take the responsibility of refusing these concessions.

The European critic exceeds his function if he attempts to pronounce judgment on the policy of the United States. But on the assumption that Wilson's intention was a good and wise one, and that comparatively small concessions would have made it acceptable to the American people, the course of events was calamitous, both for his own fame and in the general interests of world peace. It would have been far better for Wilson if some collective responsibility could have been invoked to correct his judgment at a moment when, for quite pardonable and human reasons, it was very likely to go astray. Autocracy, whether it is a permanent institution under monarchical forms or a temporary one under democratic forms, assumes not only that the autocrat will be generally wise and benevolent but that he will never at any important moment be liable to the sickness or infirmity, the malady of nerve or will, which afflicts all human beings at some periods of their lives. Could Wilson himself have commented on his own case with the same detachment as when he expounded the Constitution in his academic days, he would surely have found in it one reason the more for that approximation to the Cabinet system which he then commended to his countrymen.

CHAPTER XVII

REICHSTAG AND FRENCH CHAMBER

Germany Before the War—The Reichstag and the Executive—Methods of Business—Bismarck and Parliamentary Government—Public Life and Official Life—The French System—The Fixed-term Parliament—The Influence of Patronage—The Advantages of being a Deputy—The Multi-party Technique—Parties and What they Stand For—Finance and Social Legislation—The Precarious Life of Governments—Nationalist Issues—Journalists and Statesmen.

1

LET me now return to Europe and glance at certain types of the public life which are neither American nor British but have borrowed from both.

Germany before the war represented an effort to graft a certain amount of parliamentarism on to a system which was essentially absolutist. Bismarck and his successors, down to Prince Bülow, were convinced believers in the political incapacity of the German people. Bismarck recognized that the great experiment of a Federal Empire required the semblance of parliamentary government, and was even willing to concede a certain amount of reality, provided the essentials were well guarded. The method adopted was that of a Reichstag elected by universal suffrage but subject to a Federal Council and without power over the Executive, which was responsible to no one but the Emperor. Thus constituted, the Reichstag influenced affairs mainly by its control of finance and its power of blocking legislation which the Government wanted, but it seldom or never succeeded in carrying legislation or asserting its authority against Chancellor and Emperor. The Government obtained from it such legislation as it considered necessary, tolerated what it considered harmless, and employed the Federal Council to stifle the rest. The

Chancellor and Ministers had the right of speaking in the Reichstag, where they sat on a daïs in specially upholstered arm-chairs which seemed to symbolize their superiority and irresponsibility. They were compelled to submit to interpellations, but they were not members of the Assembly or amenable to its votes, but the nominees of the Emperor, who alone had the power of appointing and removing them. Now and again the Socialist members showed a freedom in criticizing the Emperor which struck sharply across the normal attitude of deference to the "All-Highest," but hints of displeasure in this quarter had, as a rule, a most potent effect upon the majority.

The Abbé Wetterlé, that vigorous and combative champion of Alsace-Lorraine, has given us a lively, if slightly malicious, picture of life in the old Reichstag of which he was a member.[1] When he was first elected in 1898 he found that the average attendance was barely sixty out of a membership of 398. The remainder came only when summoned by telegraph for important divisions, and returned home as soon as these were over. The reason for this slackness was, he suggests, that membership of the Reichstag carried with it no salary and that, in order to obtain candidates, political parties were obliged to have recourse to men who were already receiving salaries as members of State Parliaments, which, however, withdrew their daily allowance when they were absent in Berlin. In 1906 Prince Bülow rectified this by providing a separate salary for the Reichstag, as well as a free pass on all the railways of the Empire for the duration of the session. The salary, quite an insignificant one according to our notions, was ingeniously graded in an ascending scale—200 marks for the month of November, 300 for December, 400 for January, 500 for February, 600 for March, and 1,000 for the whole period after Easter. The object of this was to expedite business. Thus the Government arranged to bring on all important Bills after Easter, when it knew that the object of the members would be to

[1] "Behind the Scenes in the Reichstag," translated by G. E. Lees. Hodder & Stoughton, 1918.

return home as quickly as possible after earning the largest part of their salary with the shortest possible period of service. As a further inducement to good behaviour, the Government was in the habit of adjourning the Reichstag instead of closing the session, which meant that during the holidays the members could continue to travel at the public expense. Prince Bülow's aim was, as far as possible, to eliminate the members of State Parliaments, since he suspected their particularist tendencies, but to the end it was a complaint of the governing class that it was very difficult or impossible to obtain a sufficient number of men who were qualified to be members of an Imperial Parliament or who would sacrifice time and income to continuous service in it.

If the Abbé may be believed, there was very little reason why intelligent men should make this sacrifice. "The Reichstag," said one of its members, "is composed of three dozen skilful and clever men, and 350 idiots who are indifferent to the progress of business." The three dozen arranged everything with each other and the Chancellor behind the scenes, and their battles in the Chamber were merely sham fights. "The three readings of an important Bill," says the Abbé, "always gave us the same chromatic scale. First reading: furious declarations and solemn announcements of an opposition that nothing would shatter. Second reading: a scattered retreat on a barely modified text, but with a few noisy counter-attacks. Third reading: a perfect understanding, general embracings, reciprocal congratulations and unanimous applause." When it came to the test the Chancellor and other resplendent beings, who sat on the daïs, had everything their own way after a little bargaining. The respect for superior authority, which is (or was) a leading characteristic of the good German, chilled the tender plant of parliamentary independence.

The knowledge that everything was prearranged took the heart out of debate. The average member spoke to a deafening accompaniment of small talk, and personally he was of little account. Parties were organized on military principles, and absolute obedience was exacted from the

rank and file. The Socialists indulged in demonstrations, such as refusing to join in the cheers for the Emperor at the end of the session, but they effected nothing except when the Chancellor chose to throw them a sop, and a good many of them could by a little flattery be converted into respectable and loyal *bourgeois*. Occasional hints came from high places that some day the Reichstag might be given more power and something approaching responsible government be tolerated, but these were not taken seriously or even welcomed by most of the members. In the circumstances political parties could not be effective. They stood outside the governing class, without power to displace a Ministry or opportunity of gaining experience by taking part in government, with their legislation at the mercy of the Federal Council, and their nominal power of controlling finance easily held in check by the Chancellor or the Emperor, who could dissolve them at his pleasure.

2

In the United States the detachment of the Executive from Congress has a similar result in diminishing the prestige of Congress; but political parties recover their power in the election of the President. In countries where there is neither responsible parliamentary government nor a democratic choice of the Chief of the State they can be little more than propagandist organizations, developing power and influence in times of excitement, as the German parties undoubtedly did in the days of the *Kulturkampf*, but in normal times exercising little influence over Government and offering their members no assured career in public affairs. From Bismarck onwards we see German Chancellors alternately complaining of the incapacity of the Reichstag and devising methods to prevent it from displaying any kind of capacity which might conflict with the policy or convenience of the governing caste. To Bismarck evidently, as we may judge from his Reminiscences, the test of good politics was agreement with himself, whether on the part of the Sovereign, of Ministers, or members of

the Reichstag ; and so long as he had the support of his "old Master" and could keep "the petticoats" in their place, he regarded other forms of opposition as petty annoyances, to be bought off or beaten down as occasion required. His one nightmare was that his enemies were plotting to impose on him a "Cabinet à la Gladstone," and he was never weary of demonstrating the impossibility and unthinkability of that form of government in a country in which political parties had no conceivable common policy except that of occasionally combining against the Imperial Chancellor.

In such conditions the public life, as that expression is understood in democratic countries, becomes altogether subordinate to the official life. The Minister is an official, not a politician: he is accountable to official superiors, and they in their turn to the All-Highest, who retains all the powers of direct action of which constitutional sovereigns have divested themselves or been divested. The man who aspires to play a part in governing his country must not go into politics but enter the Diplomatic service, become a Civil Servant and earn a good character by obedient and industrious service, unless he happens to belong to the minor circle of illustrious families whom the Emperor must conciliate. The Reichstag supplied a false façade of democracy to a system which was essentially autocratic and bureaucratic, and service in it offered no inducement to men of real political talent, whose natural ambition it might be to win their way to responsible positions in the government of their country.

Republican Germany has followed the British model by making its Government responsible to Parliament and dependent on a parliamentary majority. It is too soon to say how that will work, but there are plainly special difficulties in a Federal Assembly representing a multiplicity of States and the numerous parties which local, religious and particularist tendencies have developed. The Germans have adopted proportional representation with the result, for the time being, that the perfect balance which it produces between the parties makes it difficult for any

Government to obtain a secure majority. The disadvantages of that are obvious, but it is at least possible that the haphazard electioneering and violent swings from right to left and vice versa which accompany ordinary voting with a multiplicity of parties would, in the circumstances of the last four years, have been the greater danger. Of all the immediate problems presented to democracy none is more important or more perplexing than that of discovering a method which shall make parliaments representative without paralysing the dominant will on which Government depends. An unrepresentative Parliament defeats the democratic principle and inflicts minority rule on majorities ; a Parliament in which all opinions are so delicately balanced that no dominant will can assert itself must be fatal to strong government. Possibly the solution will be found in a sufficient infusion of the proportional principle to prevent flagrant misrepresentation and yet not so much as to paralyse the dominant will.

3

If we turn now to France we find a political system approximating to our own with a Ministry responsible to Parliament and a President playing, for his seven years of office, the part of a constitutional sovereign, and escaping from it at his peril, as we have lately seen in the case of M. Millerand. Suspicion of the Presidency and a determination to keep it in bounds play in France the part which jealousy of the encroachments of Congress plays in America. Historical reasons in both cases determine these sentiments.

There are, however, sundry differences between the French system and all others which greatly affect the public life. First, the centralized and bureaucratic administrative system of the Napoleonic régime has remained nearly intact in spite of other democratic changes, and with the immense body of Civil Servants which it controls is a serious rival to the elective institutions. Next, the Chamber of Deputies has only once been dissolved before the end

of its natural term, and is, therefore, to all intents and purposes, a fixed period assembly. The French people, so to speak, lock their representatives in for four years and instruct them to govern the country as best they can for that period. It is still very much in doubt whether, in the multiplication of parties, none of which can rely on a stable majority, parliamentary government is possible on any other terms. We ourselves have lost the right of reproaching the French with the instability of their Governments, and have recently experienced all the variabilities of the group system without the compensating advantage of being protected from incessant appeals to the electors. The French take the quarrels of their groups with philosophy and console themselves with the thought that they will at least carry on somehow until the next election is due.

But though to this extent simplified, the life of the French Deputy is anxious and laborious. He is generally, though not necessarily, a local man who has earned his position by acquiring influence among his neighbours and must keep it by looking after their interests. Thanks to the centralization of the bureaucracy and the enormous patronage exercised by the Executive from Paris, he is nearly as much involved in the spoils system as an American Congressman. "Every kind of service is expected of him," says Lord Bryce.[1] "He must obtain decorations for his leading supporters and find a start in life for their sons and sons-in-law. Minor posts under Government and licences to sell tobacco have to be secured for the rank and file. All sorts of commissions to be performed in Paris are expected from him down to the choice of a wet nurse or the purchase of an umbrella. Several hours of his day are consumed in replying to the letters which pour in upon him, besides the time which must be given to the fulfilment of the behests he receives." The large towns require somewhat different, but not less exacting services in defence of their commercial interests. In either case the Deputy who wishes to keep his seat must be the Paris

[1] "Modern Democracies," I, 281.

agent of those whom he represents, and, whatever his politics may be, this is the first of his duties.

There is, nevertheless, no lack of candidates for this exacting position. Aristocrats may hold aloof and profess to look down on politicians; superior people may shrug their shoulders, literary men may laugh at the petty strivings of politicians, but politics come naturally to the French people and nothing can deprive the Deputy of the respect and authority which, if he keeps his contract with them, he enjoys among his own people. To become a Deputy is an object of ambition to the lawyer, the doctor, the journalist, the business man ; and to pass in due course from the Chamber to the Senate, and perhaps on the way to be caught up into the high Ministerial world is his legitimate hope. The Minister's portfolio is always at the end of the vista and, considering the multiplicity of Governments and the shortness of their careers, by no means beyond the reach of men of respectable capacity.

The French have a natural gift for self-expression which gives an artistic finish to their public performances. No Englishman could have visited the French front during the war without being struck with the lucidity and skill with which anyone in command of anything, from the most illustrious general to the sergeant in the trench, could expound his job or enlarge on the strategical position to the stranger. Nowhere could one discover that inarticulate soldierly embarrassment which to the English mind is supposed to distinguish the man of action from the man of words, and to render the former incapable of coherent talk. In a country where children are educated to regard accomplished talk as a part of their equipment in life, audiences are not tolerant of the blundering and floundering which are regarded as venial in men of weight in this country. The average of debating capacity is undoubtedly higher in the French Chamber than in the British House of Commons and on great occasions the former expects an impassioned kind of oratory which is seldom tolerated in the latter.

The multi-party system requires a special kind of technique in French politicians which, so far, has been little

cultivated in England. Skill in making combinations, adroitness in seizing the right moment to weigh in and to make the smallest number of votes go the longest way ; instinct for the proper time to apply pressure and to relax it, are among the necessary accomplishments of the French politician. Much that would be called "intrigue" in other parliaments is all in the day's work in the French Chamber. The average duration of French Governments before the war was about nine months, and Ministerial life for that period was as a rule a succession of hair-breadth escapes achieved only by unceasing vigilance and skill. Administration was not, as a fact, the unstable and discontinuous thing that might be supposed from this record, for the successive combinations drew upon a standing reserve of well-seasoned Ministeriable persons ; and the bureaucracy remained solid and unshakable through all their combinations, and the more solid and unshakable as they chopped and changed. Hence, as we see in foreign affairs, the great power exercised by the Quai d'Orsay.

The main difficulty of an Englishman in his endeavour to follow French politics is to understand for what French parties stand. "Left" and "Right," "Monarchist" and "Republican," "Clerical" and "Anti-Clerical" are intelligible terms, but what is to be made of the distinctions between "Progressists," "Republicans of the Left," "Republican Democratic Left," "Radical Socialists," "Republican Socialists," "United Socialists"? Some of these parties represent purely local varieties of opinion, some are relics of forgotten quarrels, others embody shadows of shades of differences about doctrines that are purely theoretical. Very few of these parties have national organizations or attempt any aggressive action outside the local areas in which they have somehow got established. Outside these areas it is difficult to find a Frenchman who will profess allegiance to any of them or can give you any intelligible account of their differences beyond the quite general statement that they belong to the Right or the Left. Yet attachment to one or other of them is for the poli-

tician the way into Parliament. They provide the only organization that he can rely upon, the little body of zealous people who will form his committee and work for him on the indifferent mass who, except in times of national excitement, care little about his politics, but will want to be satisfied that he is a good man to do their business for them in Paris. The opinions to which he subscribes are as a rule so remote from the business of the Chambers that, when he gets to Paris, he and his group will be free to join the dance in any way they choose without being called to task by their supporters in the country. As the dance proceeds, the groups may dissolve and unite with other groups, dissolve again and reunite, or get so lost in the throng that they disappear and scatter their members through the other groups.

This explains the discrepancy—to an English eye—between the formidable titles which French parties assume and the infinitesimal effect of their professed opinions upon the affairs of the nation. Looking down the list of party successes after a general election, and seeing a large number of seemingly advanced politicians, "Democratic Left," "Radical Socialists," "Republican Socialists" and so forth, who have been returned, one might suppose the country to be on the eve of a great upheaval. Yet France is, and remains from generation to generation, one of the most conservative countries in Europe, and is to a very large extent governed by her rural population which desires no change or the least possible change. Radical politicians may sincerely desire advanced legislation, but short-lived Governments holding their lives on a thread cannot work out great schemes of social reform, and, if they tried to, would almost certainly be wrecked. A French Government is as a rule master neither of its legislation nor of its finance. Commissions of the Senate and the Chamber may turn its legislation inside out and return its Budget to it in a form which it may not recognize ; and being without an independent parliamentary majority it will be unable to assert itself against its critics. Finance is ultimately the rock upon which all social legislation is likely to be wrecked,

for so long as the great bulk of Frenchmen have an invincible objection to direct taxation and hold strong individualist views against State expenditure, schemes which cost money are generally ruled out.

With social legislation thus limited, with all the fundamental issues that have engaged Liberals in other countries wound up and conceded in the constitution of the Republic, with clericalism disposed of, education standardized, and monarchism scarcely even a remote danger, the struggles of parties lack reality in domestic politics. Nevertheless and perhaps the more for that reason, the conflict between the leading public figures and their followers takes on a peculiar intensity. They are striving for highly valued prizes which a turn of the wheel may bring to any of them ; within the term of a Parliament and without reference to any movement of opinion they may win power and lose it and win it again. They may have a large majority to-day and find to-morrow that it has melted overnight. Great financial interests behind the scenes are supposed to have a powerful influence on their fate. The one possibility of stirring the country which is open to all of them is on nationalist issues and especially the always burning problem of the German peril. Here they are under constant temptation of trumping each other's best cards, of accusing each other of weakness, incompetence, or undue lenience in dealing with the national enemy. M. Poincaré secured his long reign by promising to " go one better " than M. Briand and M. Clemenceau; and though his failure to obtain the desired results from his Ruhr policy caused his temporary overthrow, he returned with sufficient power to be a standing menace to his successors.

To be in power when the Chamber is dissolved is always the ambition of a French leader. With no steady lines of controversy dividing parties he can shape the issue very much as he chooses, set the bureaucracy in motion to work quietly for Government candidates and command the services of préfets and sous-préfets on their behalf. This is thought to be within the rules of the game, but when the

result is in doubt, officials find themselves in the embarrassing position of risking offence to the Government, if they refuse their services, and to its successor, if they give them and it is beaten. But when politics are normal, a sitting member who has looked after his constituents has an excellent chance of retaining his seat, and good relations with his own people carry him through most of the changes and chances of Parisian politics.

Alfred de Musset, describing the mood of the French people soon after the fall of Napoleon and the end of the long war, wrote :

Le people voulait le roi, Non.
La liberté. Non
La raison. Non.
L'Absolutisme. Non.
La Constitution Anglaise. Non.
Rien de tout cela, mais le répos.

It would be true at any time of the great majority of the French electors that they desired nothing but repose and a fair share of the favours dispensed from Paris. This great majority are hard-working simple people who work late and early, practise an incredible thrift, and have few thoughts beyond the crops and the weather, and the affairs of their parish Commune. Frenchmen are entirely right when they claim that these people are neither aggressive nor imperialist. But they are extremely sensitive to the cry that the country is in danger and scarcely less—as the recent Reparations controversy has shown—to the suggestion that they will have to pay, if their enemy is permitted to shirk. These two motives are easily played upon by Nationalist statesmen, and in recent years none of the parties, except the extreme Socialist, have ventured to challenge them. When the German issue dominates French politics, there is practically no Opposition in the Chamber or the newspapers. One Nationalist may trip another up on the incidentals of policy, but all are agreed that there must be no weakening against the hereditary enemy.

4

In France there is no dividing line between journalist and statesman. A large number of politicians make their living with their pen, and for these the acceptance of office is but an intermission of their more regular pursuit and source of income. Pichon, Hanotaux, Clemenceau, Tardieu, are all journalists ; Poincaré, when he laid down the Presidency, took up his pen, and rode back to power on a torrent of journalism. In a subtle analysis of the character of that remarkable man Mr. Sisley Huddleston attributes a considerable part of his difficulties when in power to the necessity of living up to his " irresponsible " writings and concludes it to be " an unfortunate thing that French statesmen are nearly all journalists, and that nearly all the best French journalists are or will be Ministers."[1]

There is no obvious reason why writing should be more " irresponsible " than speech ; one might even suppose that the writer would be rather more careful than the speaker to weigh and correct his words. But Mr. Huddleston is, I think, right in substance, as French experience proves. The entanglement of journalism with politics deprives the French public of the unofficial criticism of affairs which is the special contribution of the British Press. The politician cannot be an independent critic of operations in which he is taking part ; he cannot be expected to write freely and impartially about men who may be his competitors and rivals or to whom he may be beholden for favour and promotion. He is too much behind the scenes to measure the effect of the play on the audience. When a Frenchman reads his paper, he considers less what the paper says or thinks than what particular writers are driving at in the game of groups and combinations which make and unmake Ministries. This gives a spice to French journalism which is lacking in English, but it detracts from the power of the Press as a Press, the power which it might exercise as an independent impersonal critic.

[1] " Poincaré, a Biographical Portrait," by Sisley Huddleston (T. Fisher Unwin).

The extent to which the parts of journalist and Minister are doubled in France is a constant surprise to an Englishman who is accustomed to think of Ministers as shining in a firmament of their own. I remember an occasion at Paris during the war when a high British official was invited to meet a company of French journalists at dinner. As he came up the stairs, he was heard to say, with his accustomed bluntness, that this was the first time in a long official life that he had ever dined in the company of journalists, and his astonishment was unbounded when he presently found himself face to face with an ex-Prime Minister, two ex-Foreign Secretaries, and half-a-dozen more who were famous men lately in high office—all of them professional journalists and habitual writers for the Press. Whether his opinion of journalists rose or fell, I was unable to ascertain, but being one of the despised tribe, I confess to having felt a slight inward satisfaction at his sudden enlightenment about the status of a journalist.

Whether it is a good or a bad thing that the parts of journalist and Minister should be interchanged, the results of this interchangeability are highly important in French politics. The Chamber is provided with a considerable number of men who have the close and detailed knowledge of affairs which is accumulated by daily writing as well as the highly developed critical faculty which goes with that pursuit. These men do not take the comparative repose which the Minister or member usually enjoys in England when his party is out of power or the House not in session, but merely vary the form of a warfare which is practically unceasing. The result is to give French politics a peculiarly literary flavour and to surround them with a flash and dazzle of wit and epigram which are confusing to simple people and extremely difficult for foreigners to penetrate. There never was quite such a contrast as between the simplicity of the French masses and the glittering and sophisticated accomplishment of the leaders who speak for them to the world.