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# THE TAINT IN POLITICS

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## A STUDY IN THE EVOLUTION OF PARLIAMENTARY CORRUPTION

"The Florentine secretary's orb never quite sets."

LORD MORLEY.

LONDON
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# PREFACE

THE following pages attempt to give precision and usefulness to the vague feeling that there is something wrong with politics. Our conduct, in regard to grave national affairs, is neither wise nor consistent. There is no class of men amongst us whom we more generously flatter with public notice and high-sounding titles, yet, the moment the affairs we have entrusted to them reach a critical stage, we clamour for the business-man. There is, in normal times, no saying more common amongst us than that the party-system suits what we are pleased to call the genius of our race, yet we are very apt at the close of a long period of trial and peril to assure each other, with an appreciation of relief, that the party-system is now dead and ingloriously buried; and almost in the same hour we follow with admiration the attempts of politicians to distribute us afresh in new parties.

It were wiser, since the affairs entrusted to the politician now lie at the roots of our personal and common weal, to give a precise shape to this dark suspicion we constantly mutter and as constantly ignore. Is our political system corrupt? Are we merely foolish, or duped, when we hear of political scandals abroad and thank the gods that we are not as other men? Why do our politicians feverishly seek, as they did in a recent debate, to shift from their House the "opprobrium," as they called it, which the country casts on it? I seek to answer these questions, not by making a piquant collection of rumours which one is obliged to keep in anony-

mous form, not by strained conjectures and interpretations, but by a patient study of recorded facts.

If these facts belong in large part to former days, if the earlier chapters of this work are historical, they have not the less interest and pertinence. No part of our national life is so shaped and coloured by its past as our political system. The quaint proceedings of our Houses of Parliament are not more unintelligible apart from history than is the behaviour of our politicians. They are the heirs of a political system which a century and a half ago was revoltingly corrupt, a century ago still fiercely resisted every demand for the reform of its corruption, and half a century ago still cheated the country by mere pretences and the most grudging instalments of reform. The taint is still there, but we citizens have set up something in the nature of a system of sanitation which compels it to seek new forms. The story of this evolution or transformation occupies much of my space, since it gives the inquirer a special equipment for studying the subject. We then survey the existing political system in all its branches, from the constituencies to the cabinet, and easily define for ourselves its precise measure of lingering corruption, dishonesty, chicanery, sophistry, and incompetence. Beyond that it is not proposed to go. When we have reached a mood of genuine and serious resentment, when we no longer laugh to hear politicians call each other knaves and cozeners, knowing that to them we have entrusted what is far more precious than a man's single bank-balance, we shall soon find a remedy.

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# CHAPTER I

## THE STATE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY MACHINE

On November 21st, 1918, a remarkable appeal to the British people was issued by what were generally regarded as the two most gifted and most conscientious statesmen we then possessed. Inheriting a power which had been scandalously misused during one of the gravest crises into which the country had ever passed, Mr Lloyd George and Mr Bonar Law had nevertheless contrived to avert disaster and to restore the drooping prestige of the nation in the eyes of a wondering world. It was Carthage that fell. We, as is our wont, genially overlooked the small vanity of our politicians, and knew that only a large infusion of non-political energy had enabled our nervous administration to bring our massive resources to the point of victory. But we at least trusted that we had found statesmen sagacious enough to perceive, and disinterested enough to accept, the moral of their experience. In the fulfilment of that not less grave task which, we dimly foresaw, the era of peace would lay upon us, there was to be no dallying with "the game of politics." England had, in the stress of a mighty struggle, suddenly matured. Politics would be henceforward a scientific conception and manly discharge of the vastest enterprise in the world.

The letter which Mr Bonar Law and Mr Lloyd George issued gave that impression to the entire nation, except to the adherents of a few small

minorities whose personal interests would be endangered if that conversion were genuine and sustained. This letter evinced a quite serious and comprehensive grasp of the nation's needs, as far as they could then be discovered. Our swords were to be turned into ploughshares with the speed and economy which an ordinary commercial firm would devote to the dispatch of its comparatively trivial affairs. We pictured our five million soldiers and three million further war-workers incorporated in that depleted industrial army which had so heroically met our needs, and even sustained our comfort, during five exacting years. We imagined the great dynamo of our industrial life pouring a doubled energy into the work of restoration. We talked of a thousand million sterling of salvage from our colossal stores. We pointed eagerly to the empty markets of the world and lovingly counted our profit. A few months of brisk, cheerful "conversion of industries," and by Easter our streams of exports would restore the welcome spectacle of incoming streams of gold, or the equivalent of gold.

The lessons of our tense experience and dire need were to be applied richly to our new economy. Full employment for all and an output far exceeding that of 1913 were to be secured by "the development and control in the best interests of the State of the economic production of power and light; of the railways and means of communication; by the improvement of the consular service; and by the establishment of regular machinery for consultation with representative trade and industrial organisations." Just what the more thoughtful of us had dreamed of for ten years! The war had brought a premature tinge of gray to many a head, but we were reconciled. We were to reward out "heroes," without materially lightening our pockets, by putting them on the land. Afforestation and recla-

mation were to proceed at once. Our splendid women were to be encouraged by our sweeping away "all existing inequalities of the law as between man and woman." Our agriculture was to be awakened to a full activity by a new and better system of transport. Our artisans were to be won by an ample provision of houses, "improved material conditions, and the prevention of degrading standards of employment."

Now, these things were practicable. They were obvious statesmanship. They promised a solution of the very grave problem which alone seemed to mar our splendid prospect. The one shadow on the brightening landscape was, of course, the shadow of Labour. The criminal blunders of the first two years of the war had thoroughly perverted the standards of economy in the mind of the workers. No one, it is true, expected them to return to the conditions of 1913. It is not too much to say that in the winter of 1918 there was quite a general disposition to meet this legitimate aspiration of the workers. The series of economic reforms sketchily set forth in the Coalition-program were the obvious means of doing it. The organisation of power and transport, the improvement of the consular service, and the scientific direction of agriculture, meant larger markets, cheaper production and distribution, and a vast surplus of profit for the improvement of wages. This was, said the *Times* cordially, "an unimpeachable document."

The defect of the scheme did not escape notice. A few days later Lord Dunraven wrote in the *Times* that the Coalition leaders had indeed expounded "an admirable and an elaborate and ambitious scheme of social reform and reconstruction, but they had omitted from it any reference to the instrument by which the scheme was to be put into operation." They had, he rightly said, put forward a program

"equal in importance, and probably in bulk, to the whole achievement of social reform in the last century." But they had promised no improvement whatever in the machinery of State which had so pitilessly revealed its ineptness during the war.

Our politicians hastened to supplement their fair promises with declarations of stern purpose. Mr Lloyd George at once coined a brand-new formula of statesmanship: "To make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in." It is humorous to recall that in the same speech, delivered at Wolverhampton on November 24th, he said: "There is no time to lose." Mr Churchill, on the same day, assured the apprehensive north that "the world cannot be allowed to slip back and to settle down into the narrow pre-war rut." Mr Bonar Law, next day, solemnly avowed that the aim of his contingent of the Coalition was "to raise the condition of the mass of the people of this country"; and their condition then, in 1918, was far better than it had ever been in the history of England. Mr Asquith, watching this conversion with genuine concern, eager to prove that Codlin is the friend, not Short, promised, on November 26th, "a life worth living for every man, woman, and child in the kingdom," if we would ignore these mendacious opponents of his, and send him and his friends to Westminster. Mr Lloyd George, not to be outdone, assured us that his immediate and sacred task would be "the lifting of the mass of misery, of wretchedness, of hopelessness there has been in an old country like this, the sweeping away of slums," etc. Mr Asquith raised his bid; and on December 5th, the eve of the election, Mr Lloyd George drove his Right Honourable friend from the democratic market by a letter which ought to have been printed in gold. He was going, really, to "change the whole face of existence." He pointed to Mesopotamia, which was soon to be the

orchard, the kitchen-garden, the new exclusive market of England. He directed our eyes to the depleted markets of the world, and conjured up a vision of our magnificent war-industry, reinforced by six million demobilised soldiers, doing a portentously profitable business. And he said: "The government *have schemes* for developing the resources of our own country in a way they have never been opened up before."

This was decisive. The country gave Mr Lloyd George and Mr Bonar Law such power as statesmen have rarely enjoyed before. Labour, inexperienced, vague in its aims, conspicuously lacking in ability, and enfeebled by a dreamily unpatriotic element, was thrust aside. The ambition of the Asquithites was sternly punished. Independent members were scattered to the winds. We were familiar enough with the turning of England into a land of promises on the eve of an election, but there seemed to be something definite, serious, organic in *these* promises. In any case, *il fallait parier*, to adapt the famous motto of Pascal. The alternative was an Irish-Labour-Asquith combination, which would have been pathetically feeble. We bet on the tried statesmen and their "schemes"; and to-day we nurse our sorrows with whatever air of philosophy we can command.

They have certainly "changed the face of existence." It was as much brighter a year ago as a hill-side in Tuscany is brighter than a suburb of Manchester. The shadow of Labour has grown gigantic. The statesmen who a year ago pictured us restoring and decorating the universe, at a prodigious national profit, now set before us the spectre of national bankruptcy. We have added, airily, nearly £1,000,000,000 since the armistice to a debt which already towered high above the world's record. We forget that this debt was to be "paid

in full" by Germany, and we wrangle over rival schemes of confiscation and production, while our statesmen sit dumb and our remaining capital is converted into diamonds and cars and other luxuries with a frivolity never known before in the history of England. Our scanty production is incessantly suspended by strikes, and we wait twelve months before we place any restraint on a greed of dealers which has almost irreparably torn the fabric of our life. We have an army of 900,000 men a year after Germany was reduced to impotence. We keep a navy of 170,000 officers and men, and an Admiralty staff of 16,500, a year after the complete annihilation of the only fleet that ever threatened us. Our Ministry of Munitions has still a staff of more than 20,000. We (in November, 1919) pay weekly alms, on a princely scale, to 350,000 men and women, while we wear out our shoes in the search for servants and houses. Our British pound, once the envy of the world, lingers at an ignominious rate of exchange. Our imports (largely of things which we could make) are as opulent as our exports are beggarly. The ugly phrase "civil war" is heard every few days.

For this criminal folly and extravagance, this dance of death, this shameless failure to grasp the greatest opportunity ever offered to the nation, our statesmen are responsible. The dangers they had to encounter were foreseen. One did not need to be a statesman to know that the myriads of temporary workers would evade demobilisation by every lie and trick in the ample resources or human nature. It was plain even to the man who knew as little of economics as of teratology that unrestricted profiteering meant higher wages, and higher wages further profiteering, until the process would approach criminal lunacy. (Ten months after the armistice I pay for the paper on which I write this

a price which I know to be 200 per cent. higher than the retailer need charge.) It was obvious that delay was profoundly dangerous, yet, although Foch confidently predicted the issue from July, 1918, so little preparation was made that the statesmen of Europe and America took three months to marshal their gorgeous staffs and camp-followers for a glorified parliament, six further months to conduct it, and six months more to recover from the effort. It was obvious that our domestic enterprise ought to run concurrently with this prolonged orgie of diplomacy, yet it was suspended as completely as if there were only one Englishman who knew the elementary conditions of it. It was clear to any sagacious observer of current events that if the quarter of a million Socialists who, whatever their motives, did not want to see the country settled, had time and opportunity and pretext to leaven the mass of the workers before production reached its full development, they would succeed in doing it. Not a single thing of importance has happened in the last year which could not have been foreseen.

Lord Dunraven was right. The program of November 21st was an electioneering window-show, not a business-agenda. Before the election took place the Coalition-leaders were compelled, by electoral strategy, to postpone this sane program to certain catch-vote cries that were forced upon them. We were to hang the Kaiser (whom they knew to be securely entrenched behind a hedge of Dutch lawyers) and demand an indemnity of £30,000,000,000 or so from bankrupt Germany. Most of us genially recognised at the time that these sops to Cerberus were merely verbal. We thought the constructive program safe. And to-day, after twelve precious months, we understand, vaguely, that about 5000 houses have been built out of the promised 500,000; we learn that our national ex-

penditure is nearly £4,000,000 a day, or more than half our total national production per day; we find our transport in a state of costly anarchy, lighting and heating worse than ever, and the great power-scheme postponed to the Day of Judgment; and the only instalment of the glorious plan is that Mr Lloyd George has called the agriculturists together and told them that the country expects them to produce more, and expects the banks to finance them, and expects the labourers to be good, and will grant (or guarantee) them a further subsidy out of our overflowing exchequer! *Parturierunt montes.*

The political system is inept, dishonest, archaic, and contemptible. Never again would we have a party-system in England, our journals assured us in 1918. The situation is such that, unless the machinery be altered, we shall have to seek refuge in a party-system from the costly inefficiency of its rival. Can the machinery be altered? What is wrong with it? How is it that, at a time more momentous than any we have yet witnessed, in the hands of the strongest men to whom we could entrust it, there has been such a catastrophic failure?

It is inefficient because it is corrupt and archaic. It is corrupt and archaic because, while we re-adapt the machinery of our businesses in each advancing decade, we suffer the vastly more important machinery of State to escape re-adaptation. We suffer this because most of us are dazed and duped by the verbiage of politicians who do not want it altered. We should howl with laughter if we read that the shareholders of some important syndicate had chosen a managing director because he was a pretty speaker; but we still choose the managing directors of our national business on their oratorical qualifications, their powers of mystification.

Let us try to determine coldly, patiently, and summarily the defects of our political system. The

man who dislikes the words "taint" and "corruption" has to face the fact that we were, somehow, grossly deceived at the last election. We were deceived at every other election, but in this case the deception was as indelicate in its opportunity as it was disastrous in its consequences. Each party promised us an earthly paradise. Not one would have done differently than has been done. But it will be best in this summary analysis to take the system in its actual form, leaving to later chapters the justification and the enlargement of the indictment.

The general judgment of the country, that, if a few statesman were to be supremely entrusted with the great task of reconstruction, Mr Lloyd George and Mr Bonar Law were the best for the purpose, is as defensible to-day as it was in 1918. It is as futile to quarrel with democracy as it is to say that the present Government does not represent the British people. When the *Daily Mail* cast its influence into the scale against the Coalition, it was pressed to suggest an alternative group of statesmen or an alternative program. It refused to publish, much less to comply with, the request. An Asquith regime was, after the horrors of 1914-1916, unthinkable. A Henderson-Webb regime seemed hardly less ludicrous or dangerous at such a time. A conflicting batch of fairly evenly balanced groups would have been still worse.

But in choosing Mr Lloyd George and Mr Bonar Law we, against our hope, gave renewed life to some of the worst features of the party-system. In our eagerness and cheerfulness we thought that coalition meant coalescence; that party distinctions had gone. We were soon undeceived. Each leader had to contribute a party and a party fund to the enterprise, and the offices of second and third rank had to be distributed on the oldest traditions of the division of spoils. While private firms were pre-

paring with every modern device to meet the strain of the new era, our politicians, the directors of our vast imperial business, were consulting precedents of the time of William the Third and Anne, or clinging to the methods of Earl Danby and Sir Robert Walpole. Mr Bonar Law apparently stipulated that inherited mediocrities or enfeebled veterans of his party should occupy positions of vital importance. Mr Lloyd George had to reward men who speculated on *his* fortunes rather than on those of Mr Asquith. As to competence . . . We would muddle through.

Similarly in regard to funds. The Conservative Party being in a position to devote its whole accumulated funds to the campaign, while the Liberal funds were confiscated by an ambitious minority, it followed that the Conservatives must form two-thirds of the Coalition representatives in Parliament. We have, of course, got rid for ever of bribery at elections. A man no longer needs £20,000 to persuade 2,000 voters that he will be their loyal and attentive servant. An enlightened constituency calmly chooses its representative. But somehow it still costs from one to two thousand pounds to direct the judgment of this enlightened constituency to a sound conclusion. Take a fairly typical case at the last election. A, B, and C contested a certain "cheap" division. I happen to know that B's modest expenses were £500, and on that basis may confidently assume that C's expenses were not more than £300, and A's expenses not less than £1,000. The issue of the election faithfully reflected this expenditure. A, a Coalition-Conservative, ran away with the election. C, a Labour candidate, did not poll enough to get back his deposit. A was not a wealthy man. Now that the salary of a Member of Parliament is £400 a year, and will soon be £500 or £600, it is possibly a reasonable speculation to invest £1,000 in an

election, seeing that the duties are not onerous enough to exclude other employment. In all probability, however, A received half or more of his election expenses in return for his promise of faithful support. In other cases the candidate is wealthy enough to "nurse" the constituency for years and dispense with party aid. The majority of such candidates are Conservatives. Instances of both types will be given in a later chapter.

It will be shown later how the policy of a Government was modified, even under so stern a Puritan as Mr Gladstone, by a rich donation to the party funds. Such incidents rarely get publicity, for it is not to the interest of any party to encourage detectives. Journals like the *Herald* or the *Labour Leader*, which call to us to rend this veil of secrecy, would not dare to publish a complete budget and subscription list of their own. Incidents enough will be given later, but they are hardly necessary. Those who pay the piper call the tune, or they are in some other way rewarded for their modesty. Some of the more remarkable "honours" which have appeared in the lists since December, 1918, have an obvious implication. Mr Lloyd George had to create a fund of, one supposes, at least a quarter of a million. The Conservatives had far more than that, and they became the predominant partner of the Coalition. It was the party game in all its virginal freshness.

But the program? It is unnecessary to attempt to analyse the minds of politicians. The chief feature which had ensured success in the business of the war was organisation. It was obvious to suggest an application of this to the new tasks of power-supply, production, distribution, and commerce. This would attract the imagination of the country; and it really might prove possible to do something. The Conservatives agreed, because they had a vague

idea that the most profitable form of organisation had been that which not merely did not supersede private enterprise, but actually enriched it with guarantees and subsidies and protection.

The great plan was nothing more than a superficial synthesis of current ideas. There was no elaboration, no agreement on basic ideas as to the form of this new national organisation. Both sides probably knew that there would be no Coalition at all if the discussion were pushed too far. Possibly Mr Lloyd George, certainly some of his supporters, thought of genuine national action in the *nation's* interest. The vast profit which would accrue from this organisation of the basic factors of the national economy would pay the inevitable increase of wages that would be demanded. Here the more powerful element of the Coalition used its power. Private enterprise—that is to say, the enterprising manufacturers and dealers who create party-funds—was to have a large share of this vast new profit. The proper function of Government is to protect them, subsidise them, or guarantee them high prices. Witness the miserable form in which the Government's agricultural proposals have at length appeared. So the whole scheme was wrecked, and we look forward to a long, sullen, costly, and dangerous conflict of Labour and Capital.

The network of interests in which the procedure of our politicians involves and enmeshes them accounts also in large part for the appalling financial scandal of the last twelve months. Mr Lloyd George quite plainly told the country last November that, in the conviction of our financial experts, nothing like a full indemnity could be expected from Germany. Those of us who knew Germany agreed. But under the pressure of journals which threatened to divert a million votes from the Coalition, Mr Lloyd George was compelled—it is to his credit that

he at least tried hard to mitigate the folly—to adopt the slogan. As a financier, he must have known that we would in reality get little more than a tithe of our indemnity, and that we must set about a drastic and speedy economy, in face of a formidable reluctance of departments, and put a master-brain in control of our finances. One can imagine his feelings when he found himself compelled to accept Mr Austen Chamberlain. It was part of the price of securing power. Behind Mr Chamberlain were several hundred Liberal and Conservative members whose knowledge of economics consisted only in the magic formula "increased production." They represented wealthy or comfortable folk who were going to be wealthier or more comfortable than ever; while their income-tax would sink to a shilling, because Germany would undertake the interest on the Debt. As to Labour, it would, of course, profit by its increased production—possibly get a few shillings more than it did in 1913—and so it might reasonably be expected, or in the event of reluctance be compelled, to roll its shirt-sleeves up to the shoulder. England was going to be a merry country.

When this child-like philosophy was shattered on realities, both Treasury and Parliament were ludicrously impotent. Mr Austen Chamberlain sat in tears: Parliament in a sort of mild bovine wonder. Taking advantage of the archaic simplicity of the political scheme, departments snapped their fingers in the face of the Treasury, and hundreds of thousands of incompetents continued to find shelter in their enlarged premises from the keen winds of the open labour-market. Day by day any person who cared to take the trouble could see highly-paid officials in London doing half the work of a third-rate clerk. At Woolwich Arsenal they were still making guns in March, 1919, and clerks in White-

hall were keeping the accounts. In the provinces and abroad the scandal was even worse. In October there were firms making tanks. The army mutinied, and the trouble was met by the one remedy known in Westminster: more money. So large a proportion of our officers now got more than they had any hope of getting in an open competition for employment that they resisted demobilisation. In short, while we bled at every financial pore, the machinery of State proved itself ridiculously inadequate and the responsible authorities ludicrously powerless. Parliament would not seriously intervene because the members did not want another election. The man who had staked a thousand pounds on his parliamentary chances wanted five years' profit on his capital. The men whose expenses had been met by "the party," or by some wealthy adherent of the party who was grateful for favours to come, were very uncertain of re-election. Up to the date at which this is written, during nearly a year of the grossest extravagance and criminal maladministration, Parliament has only found courage *once* to question the high wisdom of the Cabinet; and that was over a matter of twenty-four French pilots, and the revolt was accompanied by warm assurances that the censure must be understood not to go beyond this trivial point!

Thus, without putting the least reliance on rumours, without any indulgence in the not uncommon practice of converting dark suspicions into positive facts, we find the machinery of State entirely unworthy of the age in which we live and scandalously inadequate to its tasks. We suffer the great modern work of national administration to be blended with, and perverted by, a political system which is thoroughly tainted; and the taint spreads through the army and navy and civil services which depend upon the political system.

Instead of choosing administrators on the ground of their ability, we see our democratic choosers drenched by an outpour of insincere oratory and promises, and enmeshed in a network of paid enterprise and organisation, the power of which they fail to perceive. We find this organisation centring about the persons of a few professional, and to a large extent hereditary, politicians, who fight each other much as the Blues and Greens fought in the ancient Roman Circus. Each has his large group of prospective placemen, or "careerists," the last qualification of whom is mere ability. From the youngest aspiring secretary to the would-be minister they are in a great measure mere servants of the sacred "party": men whose fathers richly endowed its funds, men who have inherited names of party-significance, men of the hereditary caste of legislators, men who by open speech or secret intrigue served the party, unpaid, for years in the certain hope of rising higher, men who have a following that it is the party's interest to conciliate. So we get Hendersons at the Board of Education, Illingworths at the Post Office, Chamberlains at the Treasury, Cecils at the Foreign Office, Herbert Gladstones as Viceroys, and so on.

Having thus secured office in a contest of promises which have the maximum of speciousness and the minimum of practicability, having secured in advance (by distribution of the party-funds) that the representatives of the people shall be a "tied house," the group of speculators who have successfully floated their company distribute its better-paid offices amongst themselves and their necessary supporters. Their depleted treasury is re-filled by a shower of honours (apart from genuine rewards of merit) nicely graduated according to contributions. Each of the honoured men has, of course, done something or other which may be dressed into a pretext

in the "List of Honours." No one supposes that the successful boot-manufacturer has crudely approached a Liberal or Conservative official with a cheque for £17,000 and said: "I want a baronetcy for this." It is therefore possible for the higher representative of the party in the House to deny indignantly that honours are sold. But the wealthy man who is desirous of such things may learn in any London club what the respective contributions to the party-funds of the latest baronet and knight were; and the man of leisure who cares to inquire what precisely were the "local services" which are appended to the name of Sir Algernon Pumpkin, Bart., in the last Honours List will be greatly edified at the extreme generosity with which such things are rewarded by our politicians. The party-chest steadily fills for the next election.

Our successful politicians then settle down to the dual task of retaining office, which comes first, and administering the country. Our unsuccessful politicians devote themselves to the single task of ejecting their rivals as speedily as possible. It would be a fascinating game to watch if, meantime, we had not entrusted them with the care of a national business worth £2,000,000,000 a year. The tricks, precedents, conventions, subtleties, and tactics of the game are so numerous that we have to pay a speaker and his staff about £10,000 a year to be umpires. One has to keep a "good House," a "good Press." One has to watch malcontents, and weigh the chances of buying them or suppressing them. One has to study daily the open tactics and secret intrigues of an opposition which is led by a man who has been playing the game, perhaps, for fifty years. One has to help the incompetents out of their difficulties and chasten the undue ambition of the competent. One has to keep a reserve of pensions, offices, and occasional jobs for literary

and other servants outside. One has to give untruthful answers to questions, and untruthful accounts of our progress, without the possibility of being found out. It is a great game—for the players. We others must be content with the prospect of a ten-shilling income-tax, a levy on capital, or bankruptcy.

This tainted system is quite unintelligible unless you know something about its history. It is the slightly modernised version of a very ancient and disreputable game. Everybody knows that a vote was once worth ten or twenty guineas, and that the taps once ran beer or wine (according to the number of voters) on election-day. But, since we have suppressed this open bribery, few realise how stubbornly a corrupt past lives still in our political system: how the taint has merely changed its forms in order to elude our modern political sanitation. A few chapters will therefore be devoted to tracing the rise and culmination of political corruption, and its evolution, under the pressure of reform-movements, into its modern shape. Then I return to the machinery of State as we know it to-day, and furnish abundant evidence for the summary indictment which I have given in this chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SOURCES OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION

THE sources of English political corruption are usually located in the reign of the Stuarts, but, although it is not expedient here to wander far from our proper subject, it is advisable to realise that political life nearly everywhere is, and always has been, more or less tainted. We are not more corrupt than the Athenian democracy was in the days of Epicurus or the Italian democracies of the Renaissance were. Our parliamentary life is not inferior to that of France, and it is far purer than that of Spain. Our politicians need not blush in the presence of the politicians of Australia and New Zealand, and they will assuredly not be recommended to take the Congress of the United States as a model. Nor is the taint in the least peculiar to democracies. It was at its worst in England under the later Stuarts and the House of Brunswick; and the foulest European exhibition of corrupt statesmanship was afforded by the ministers of an autocratic Tsar. Indeed, we must not in our indignation forget that dishonesty is as rife in law or commerce as in politics. It is the far graver cost of the taint in *national* enterprises which ought especially to inflame us against political irregularities.

The truth is that the taint set in as soon as men began to achieve by wit what in a more primitive state they had won by the sword: in other words, as soon as politics was born. The development is naively depicted in Wagner's dramas, where Loge,

the embodiment of craft and duplicity, is as valuable a servant as Siegfried and as great a power as Wotan. Wit was born in an age when the law of the stronger still ruled. The stronger wit was as ruthless as the stronger arm. Witless warriors, whose vocation was threatened, might gird and rail at the new development. Kings found that it paid, and the counsellor stood equal with the soldier. Secret diplomacy, chicanery, and deceit were born in barbarism. Even such an Empire as the Muscovite was largely based on it; for Ivan III., centuries before Russia was civilised, realised that the pen was mightier than the sword—and far cheaper and safer.

It is not unusual to trace the poisoning of European politics to Machiavelli, and that cold-blooded codification of corrupt procedure, *The Prince*, has not been without influence. In this age of apologists even Machiavelli has found at least extenuating writers. He had, it seems, a deep sympathy with the people of Italy who groaned under a score of petty tyrants, and in hailing Cesare Borgia he hailed the deliverer of men from a sordid despotism. Cesare, it is suggested, concealed from Machiavelli the selfishness of his aim and the moral obliquity of his character. The seventh chapter of *The Prince*, the longest of the book, undoes this apology. It positively chuckles over Cesare's appallingly unscrupulous actions in founding an Italian princedom, even over the piece of brutality he perpetrated at Sinigaglia. "Having thus recorded all the actions of the Duke," says Machiavelli, "I see not one to blame. It seems to me clearer than ever that we must, as I have done, set him forth as an example for all those who have, by good fortune and the arms of others, covered the distance which separated them from the throne."

Machiavelli, in other words, codes, but codes with entire approval, the unscrupulous statesmanship of

his time, or the mixture of lying, cozening, and fighting that went by the name of statesmanship. He had no influence in corrupting his own age, for he merely reflects and analyses its corruption, and one may doubt if his counsels really added anything to the native ingenuity of such monarchs as Frederick the Great or such statesmen as Mazarin and Metternich. He is but a literary monument of the politics of his time, a witness that already statesmanship was synonymous with craft amongst the young nations of Europe. When Machiavelli was in his cradle there was not one of the leading powers of Italy—Naples, the Papacy, Florence, Milan, and Venice—that was not, as we should now say, thoroughly Machiavellian. There was hardly a great family of Italy—the Sforze, Colonne, Orsini, and so on—that was not corrupt. And France, Spain, and the Empire were little inferior to them in cunning, and only less skilful in lying. *The Prince* was written in 1513, the year in which Giovanni de Medici assumed the Papal tiara and the name of Leo X. At his thoroughly corrupt court, in his chancellory (which broke all European records of duplicity), the book was received as a clever and entertaining compilation of the laws of nature.

A complete account of the evolution of political corruption would therefore fill volumes, and it will suffice here to describe how justly lay monarchs and statesmen might have pleaded that they did but mould their ways as they were exhorted, on the model of the Eternal City. Corruption in England begins so markedly with a Prince of the Church, Wolsey, and so particularly in his relations with Rome, that a glance at the evolution of Papal politics will not be regarded as superfluous.

With the casuistic aspect of this development, the question whether the towering ideal of Rome justified means of realisation which were in themselves

irregular, we have nothing to do. The plain fact is that perverse wit began to rival the sword of the Teuton in the new Europe when Churchmen based their power upon such acknowledged forgeries as the Donation of Constantine, the Donation of Charlemagne, and the False Decretals. Even the most profoundly religious of the Popes, such as Innocent III., countenanced a diplomacy which would have extorted the admiration of the Florentine secretary. One need only instance Innocent's dealings with the youthful Frederic, with Otto of Germany, with John of England, or with the revolting authors of the Albigensian crusade. The sojourn of his successors, a hundred years later, at Avignon, developed this casuistry in less reputable form, and for less unselfish purposes, and the Papal Court became a bye-word in Europe for diplomatic and administrative corruption. It will, however, be enough if we briefly examine the procedure of the Papacy in the time of Machiavelli.

Papal politics, which had always been casuistic, assumed a quite unscrupulous form in the early decades of the sixteenth century. The corruption began in one of those amiable weaknesses which the delinquent Popes would have been painfully astonished to hear described as criminal, yet which in their grave and far-reaching consequence must be so described. It began with nepotism. A learned and quite pious Spanish bishop, Alfonso Borgia, obtained the tiara in 1455, and he had little suspicion that the young nephews, for whom he made smooth the path of ecclesiastical promotion, would cause the name of his family to linger in history as the very personification of corruption. Twenty years later a pious monk of the obscure family of the Rovere mounted the Papal throne. He thought virtue quite consistent with nepotism, and a fresh brood of nephews, spoiled by sudden luxury and almost destitute of moral principle, assisted in the

degradation of Rome. Innocent VIII., again a man of piety and of regular life, brought a third strain of unscrupulous nephews. Between these and the older Roman families there set in a contest for the wealth of the Vatican in which bribery and treachery were the most familiar and the most humane weapons.

Out of this fetid struggle of ambitions Alexander VI., at a cost of about one million sterling and a few score murders, rose to the Papal throne and wrote an unforgettable page of history. I am concerned here only with the way in which he and his cardinals infected, or more deeply infected, the chancellories of Europe. His quick-change alliances represented an entirely unscrupulous application of cunning to statesmanship. He had not the feeblest sense of honour, but changed secretly from France to Naples, or Milan to Florence, the moment his interest altered; and he took a cynical delight in deceiving his friends of the previous hour. His method of ruining the cardinals of the older Italian houses, the rebellious barons of his court, provided a plain precedent for his son, and every step in Cesare's infamous career was approved and applauded by him. In ten years of this utter disregard of every dictate of honour and justice he, the central figure of Christendom, doubled the lamentable quantity of political poison in the veins of Europe.

On this one need not dwell at any length, since the whole world now acknowledges the complete immorality of Alexander VI. What is not generally recognised is that the *political* corruption of the Borgia did not merely linger for twenty years at the Vatican, but was deepened under his two famous successors, Julius II. and Leo X. Creighton is not an illiberal historian of the Popes, but he is moved to call the diplomacy of Julius II. "as revolting as the frank unscrupulousness of Alexander VI." The terms of his censure are not happily chosen, for

Julius was just as frankly unscrupulous as his predecessor and life-long rival. From the hour of his accession, which he had secured by bribery, he entered upon a campaign for the recovery of the Papal States in which every principle of honour and truthfulness was violated. Like Alexander, he regarded alliances as temporary expedients in a grand game of deception. On one occasion he carried his policy to a point which outraged even the insensitive princes of Italy. He granted a safe-conduct to the Duke of Ferrara, to come to Rome to negotiate, and then wished to ignore it and destroy his captive opponent on the ground that he had now discovered fresh crimes which were not covered by the safe-conduct.

He died in 1513, the year in which Machiavelli wrote his treatise of political casuistry. In that year Giovanni de Medici, son of the famous Lorenzo, became Pope, and it would be difficult to match his duplicity from the annals of diplomacy. The doctrine of Treitschke, and those other German political theorists who held that a contract bound a State only as long as the circumstances remained unchanged, is quite respectable in comparison with the maxims of Leo X. "When you have made a league with one man," he used to say, "there is no reason why you should cease to negotiate with his opponent." The way in which the corpulent pontiff carried out this maxim in practice causes even the Catholic historian Pastor to blush for his "unparalleled double-dealing." Before he had been a year on the throne he signed a secret treaty with France against Spain and a secret treaty with Spain against France. At a later date he signed two similar treaties within a fortnight. In all such cases the interest of himself and his relatives was secured, whoever won in the ceaseless conflicts. His whole pontificate was spent in double-dealing of this kind, and the movements of his troops, as one or other

monarch pressed for the fulfilment of his secret obligations, present a humorous spectacle to the eye of the historian. It is estimated that in eight years he entered into one hundred secret treaties; and it may be added, lest any person imagine that he was driven by an overpowering sense of the importance of his charge, that in the same period he spent about £2,500,000 and again degraded the Vatican.

One need not describe how Paul III., brother of Alexander VI.'s golden-haired mistress, pursued the same policy in meeting the Reformers, but it is piquant to recall how the chief element of the Counter-Reformation, the Jesuists, notoriously consecrated the same procedure of cunning and deception. It is enough to cite the amusing cases of Father Nicolai and Father de Nobili. The former not merely penetrated the Protestant defences of Sweden in the guise of a Lutheran pastor, but actually taught Lutheran theology in a Swedish seminary. Ths latter, an Italian of high birth, deceived the most rigorous Brahamists of India for years by so thoroughly adopting their language, rites, and costume that he passed for a Swami of the most exclusive caste and of the strictest Hindu orthodoxy! These eccentricities of virtue need not detain us, but we must remember that it was men of this diplomatic school who for years guided the decisions of the monarchs of France, Spain, Portugal, Naples, and Austria.

The influence of Machiavelli's *Prince* on the development of European politics is minute in comparison with this prolonged perversion of the very shrine of European idealism. From the fifteenth century onward every European Power had resident agents at Rome, and their extant letters to their monarchs generally reflect an amused admiration of the corruption of the Papal court. It was there that statesmen first learned that every man had his price. There was the greatest market of honours and offices

which the world had yet seen. There even crime could purchase immunity, and dishonesty could thrive more luxuriantly than honesty. Spain, France, Naples, the Empire, and the Italian princes learned to meet duplicity by duplicity, and their statesmen were encouraged in developing the taint which they would eventually share with Parliaments.

England is one of the most conspicuous examples of the transmission of this taint from the clerical to the lay statesman. The plea one sometimes hears, that this rapid spread of immoral maxims was due to the renascence of pagan letters, cannot seriously be sustained. The nepotist Popes of the fifteenth century were wholly ignorant, and rigorously isolated from the influence of the new literature. Alexander VI. knew no more of the classics than the occasional loose play of Plautus or Terence which was enacted in the Vatican; and Leo X. had little more acquaintance with them. Julius II. knew nothing of either Latin or Greek writers. The most serious contribution of the Renaissance to the literature of Europe was, in fact, not Plautus or Apuleius, but the grave idealism of Plato and Plutarch, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius.

It is therefore not the first breath of the Renaissance in the time of Henry VIII., but the fact that his chief statesman was a Churchman, to which we must look for the first notable beginning of corrupt statecraft in England. Under the Tudor Kings the last trace of Parliamentary power, in its earlier form, had been suppressed, and the only "politicians" were the King's personal friends and counsellors. Modern history is usually most severe on the earliest records of a nation, but the tradition of a large measure of democracy and comparative purity in Anglo-Saxon days is not seriously challenged by recent research. The Norman Kings endeavoured to substitute their docile bishops and

abbots and barons for the older representatives of the people, and, although they were still often forced to call Parliaments, genuine representation fell into decay. Magna Charta was rather a charter of the barons, on whose rights the despotic monarchs had encroached. It is true that Parliaments can be traced throughout the whole period, but under the Tudors, when the enfeebled barons were finally checked or replaced by a new type of court-favourites, the representation of the people counted for little. The right of the householders of the boroughs to elect representatives was still recognised in theory, and often put into practice, but the monarchs now neutralised this impediment to their autocracy by a practice of manipulating the boroughs which would continue in great freedom until the Civil War.

When the prolonged internal disorder and strain of the French War came to an end under the Tudors, the use of a Parliament was obvious, but Henry VII. had completed the despotism which foreign monarchs and their adventurers had opposed to Anglo-Saxon democracy. When, therefore, under Henry VIII., England became entangled in continental politics, the guidance of the nation was left to the King and his principal advisers, and the familiar type of corrupt statesman was evolved in this country. The removal of the great abbots and the subjection of the bishops to the State at the Reformation completed the process of royal autocracy, and favoured the rise of these new types of adventurous politicians.

Wolsey, a churchman in name, but a quite unscrupulous adventurer, may be regarded as founding the tradition. He seems to have been the son of a modest trader—whether he was a butcher or no is disputed—but he was educated at Oxford and became a royal chaplain. His astuteness soon caught the eye of Henry, and he was frequently employed on diplomatic missions. This was at a

period of the lowest depth of political corruption at Rome, and the blunt Henry was dazed at first by the gross deceitfulness and quick and secret changes of policy of the Popes and the monarchs who sought his alliance. France, Spain, the Empire, and the Vatican, sharpened by twenty years of intrigue and deception, regarded the simple-minded Englishman as an easy dupe. Wolsey entered with native zest into the battle of wits and quickly learned its laws. Every man had a secret aim and a price: every treaty might have a secret counter-treaty. He coached his royal master, and in a few years they rivalled in diplomatic perfidy the most accomplished of French courtiers and the most supple Italians of the diplomatic staff of Leo X. In their dealings with France, which had thought it easy to outwit them, they laid a secure foundation for the fame of "perfidious Albion"; and even Leo X., Wolsey's great ally and model, found the cardinal, who aspired to replace him on the Papal throne, a master of the prevailing art.

Wolsey was at length beaten, and compelled to retire, by the Papal Court; whose action in the matter of the divorce of Catherine of Aragon is now plainly recognised as a piece of diplomacy. But Wolsey's heirs in statecraft, Cranmer and More, were not disposed to desert the profitable ways of the new politics. How Cranmer bribed the universities of Europe to express a grave moral doubt about the validity of Henry's marriage is well known. Some may express surprise that Sir Thomas More is included amongst the founders of our political corruption. However enigmatic More's character may remain, it is certain that as a servant of Wolsey and the King he readily took part in their cozening; and the careful reader of the *Utopia* will know that in doing so he did no violence to his own principles. Unlike Machiavelli, More surveys the corrupt political world of his time with disapproval. It is, how-

ever, rather a genial cynicism than a strict virtue that inspires his caustic observations. He thinks, not that honesty *is*, but that honesty *would be*, the best policy, if all would practice it. Meantime, one has to deal with knaves, and there must be no quixotism. A statesman, he says, must not leave a commonwealth because his high ideals cannot be realised. "You must with a crafty wile and subtle course study and endeavour yourself, as far as in you lies, to handle the matter wittily and handsomely for the purpose; and that which you cannot turn to good, so to order that it be not very bad." More seems, however, to have returned in age to the piety of his youth and sacrificed his life for a principle. He was no democrat. His ideal commonwealth is an aristocratic republic, in which most of the work is done by slaves. He was not the man to give any aid to the feeble efforts of Tudor Parliaments (in which he had opposed the King before he received office) to recover their ancient power.

This corruption in the central part of such political machinery as the nation then possessed was increased by the rapidly growing wealth of the country and the large importation of ideas of luxury. Bribery and the sale of offices took the place of the old practice of rewarding a stout soldier, a flattering courtier, or a drunken comrade. The distribution of Church-wealth was as corrupt in procedure as it was useless from the point of view of national economy. Honestly and dishonestly, princely fortunes were made or begged, and a score of greedy adventurers flocked to the door of the Court whenever one man issued with spoil. The standard of material life rose as rapidly as the moral standard deteriorated. London was passing into its Augustan Age, from the effects of which only a strong infusion of healthy provincial blood would redeem it.

In our day we see plainly the double development

which few then realised. London and the great houses which depended on it encouraged the growth of the corrupt but gold-scattering autocracy of the Tudors. The provinces, on the other hand, were producing in increasing numbers the men who would presently be known as Puritans. Partly because they shared what small amount of religious revival there was in the English Reformation, partly from the provincial hostility to metropolitan corruption and effeminacy, the "country gentry," as they would come to be called, developed a shade of antagonism to the new Court. They were found in the Parliaments which were still summoned, and the Tudor tendency to ignore their rights more than once brought out their spirit. The new commerce was greatly enlarging the mercantile class, and the Port of London was by no means the only one to derive advantage from the inflow. Feudalism was receiving a severe blow, and before the middle of the sixteenth century a conflict between Court and Parliament came within the range of possibilities.

It was clear how such an issue would be met. The statesmen or servants of the Court were now accustomed to meet almost every problem with what they regarded as diplomatic methods, and they would inevitably seek to disarm a Parliamentary opposition by bribing its weaker or corruptible elements and coercing or ignoring the remainder. Political life was evolving toward its modern form and, from the force of circumstances, developing also the taint which lingers in it to-day. Kings and chancellors who had found foreign courtiers, prelates, and even scholars, open to golden persuasion would naturally assume that the plain Commoner would be attracted by opening the door to him of the luxurious life of the new metropolis.

The development was suspended for a time by a national peril which dwarfed domestic differences. The Catholic episode of the reign of Mary ended the

long continental intrigue by a definite alliance with Spain. In six years the policy brought its inevitable reaction: the establishment of Protestantism and a sturdy defiance of Spain. All England united to meet the vindictiveness and fanaticism of Philip of Spain, now the most powerful and the wealthiest monarch of the world, and the chief pretext of Parliament, reluctance to find money, had to be temporarily abandoned. In Elizabeth's earlier years the Commons had given more than one proof of their growing strength. At the close of the session of 1566 Speaker Onslow had boldly reminded the Queen of the limits of the royal prerogative, and in 1601, when the national peril was past, a speaker in the Commons had repeated the reminder.

On the whole, Elizabeth completed the Tudor disdain of Parliament. In one year she rejected no less than forty-eight measures which had passed both Houses, and she sent more than one insurgent member of the Commons to the Tower. Thirty-six boroughs had been added to the electorate during the reigns of her two predecessors. Elizabeth created sixty-two new members, and took care, generally, that the new constituencies were favourable to the pretensions of the Court. The decay of the constituencies, as some of the earlier mediæval towns crumbled into ruin or the franchise was corruptly restricted, fostered the designs of the Court and courtiers. The crown could artificially prolong their voting strength and entrust it to safe men. As the Puritans grew in strength, it became necessary to sink deeper into corruption in order to provide a counterpoise to their strength within the limits of the Constitution. Bribery and venality developed at equal pace. We have to see how the taint developed under the Stuarts in such strength that it lingers to-day in the political veins of England and of its parliamentary offspring beyond the seas.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUART CORRUPTION

WHAT we have seen so far is rather the preparation for, than the beginning of British political corruption. There were at that time no politicians in the modern sense of the word; no ministers, and certainly no cabinet. In the country were municipalities or corporations which, by ancient right or recent charter, were empowered to send representatives, like the counties, to Parliament. Nominally these Parliaments limited the monarch's power to do as he willed, especially in the levying of funds. But the crown had the right to veto their measures, to punish recalcitrant members, and to vary the constituencies with a view to altering the complexion of Parliament. The Tudors had used these powers to the full, and Parliamentarians were almost impotent. Not from them, but from the gay crowd at his Court, did the practically autocratic monarch choose his advisers; and the favourite maintained his position by impelling the monarch still further to ignore the archaic and enfeebled relic of Saxon days which men called Parliament. The king was the politician.

The rapid advance of the nation under Elizabeth not only brought with it the need to create some sort of political machinery, but led to an acute conflict of ideals in regard to political power. To Essex and Buckingham the doctrine of divine right commended itself as equally august and profitable. The Reformation had been so partial and imperfect

in England that there were plenty of divines ready to construct a theological basis for a doctrine of divine right, while there were, until quite recent years, none whatever to take the side of the people. This, however, had little real influence on the situation. The vital issue was money. The standard of luxury rose higher and higher, and one of the weaknesses of the humane conversion of coats of mail into silk doublets was that the Court now swarmed with greedy adventurers of a new type. From these were drawn the advisers of the arch-politician, the king, and it was their interest to keep the country in the character of a patient milch-cow. The first two Stuarts failed in this plan because they underrated the growth of Puritanism and endeavoured to carry their aim by bluff and force. The later Stuarts adopted the plan of bribery and corruption, and made it a normal feature of English political life.

It must seem to the foreign historian ironic that the Englishman, the most stoutly patriotic and self-sufficient of all national types until recent years, has had one dynasty after another of foreign kings to override or pervert his native traditions, which were amongst the best of the Teutonic family. The Normans shattered the democracy of Anglo-Saxon life and emasculated Parliament. The Scots tried to reduce England to the condition of France under Louis XIV. The Germans succeeded in neutralising the revived measure of self-government by fostering a system of parliamentary corruption which enabled them to combine nominal democracy with a very real and lucrative autocracy. The history of Parliament throughout these changes is not merely interesting. It is as necessary for the understanding of some features of our life to-day as a knowledge of mediæval ways is for the understanding of the red and white pole that hangs outside

the barber's shop or the painted blue lion outside an inn on the public road.

Under James I. the sober Puritan element in Parliament grew stronger and on more than one occasion asserted its power. James was indolent and scholarly, but accustomed from youth to bloody reminders that, whether kings had divine rights or no, their subjects had very material weapons. He left Elizabeth's ministers, and the host of needy Scots he brought with him and enriched, to gather and protect their wealth as they could. He shrewdly informed the Commons that he did not require a "subsidy" when the Court-party in the Lords showed an intention of extorting one from them; and, when he later pressed for a subsidy, the Commons used very plain language about his needs and his prerogatives. Nominal or sinecure offices were, in fact, being multiplied for Court-favourites and *their* favourites or agents, and the temper of the Commons rose. They impeached Sir Giles Mompesson, then Bacon. Under such leaders as Sir Edward Coke and Pym, in face of the king's assertion that their rights were granted by the throne and at the discretion of the throne (a monstrous mis-statement), they laid it down that "the liberties, franchises, privileges, and jurisdictions of Parliament are the ancient and undoubted birthright and inheritance of the subjects of England." James could retort only, in Tudor fashion, by dissolving Parliament and imprisoning its leaders.

James left the quarrel to his son, Charles I., and it is enough for my purpose, since the corruption of Parliament itself comes later, to recall that it ended in the Civil War and the supremacy of Parliament. The Tudor and early Stuart way of dealing with a recalcitrant Parliament had failed. There was, of course, already much taint in the parliamentary system. There were rotten boroughs and burgage-

voters. There were tied electors in the country and placemen in the House. But the consistently and sternly democratic nature of Charles's Parliaments shows that this corruption was limited. The Long Parliament which met in 1640, twenty-five years after the beginning of Charles's attempt to win autocracy, is a proof that the parliamentary system was still sufficiently sound to express the deliberate will of the literate minority of the people. The real and thorough corruption of the British political system begins, ironic as it may seem, after the triumph of Parliament in the Civil War. Yet the brief sketch we have seen of the earlier form of corruption—the corruptness of monarchs and their advisers—is by no means irrelevant. This was the fount from which the taint would now pervade the entire system.

The failure of the Commonwealth is not surprising. Cromwell succumbed to the besetting temptations of political power, and manipulated elections and Parliaments as freely as a Stuart had done: as freely as Lenin does in modern Russia and, presumably, any other democratic leader would do. The end justifies the means. In the realisation of that maxim, which no one professes, politicians are as adept as Jesuits. The spectacle of Oliver Cromwell sitting in the House, debating with the Lord and his conscience whether he shall use his three hundred soldiers to do what he had fought a Civil War against kings for doing, is a common political situation. *My* ideal, *my* party, *my* personality, is so important for the country that *I* may adopt with moral immunity those methods which I reprobate in my opponents. It is to-day the language of Liberals in opposing Conservatives: of Socialists in opposing Liberals.

The spectacle of these inconsistencies might not of itself have destroyed the new democracy of Eng-

land, but it was reinforced by an utter and general disgust of Puritan ways. Merry England had become too dreary a comedy. The autocracy and greed of kings were lost in the shining memory of the gaiety, license, prodigality and sparkle of the Stuart days. Probably many thought that they could restore the fun without restoring the autocracy. Surely the Cavaliers had realised in their exile that there was now in England a will of the People as well as a will of Kings? In a burst of pent-up joy and gaiety the Stuarts were welcomed back to England; and the next, and most sordid, phase of English political life began.

It was natural that the new Parliament should consist almost entirely of Royalists. The country was sick of the austerities, hypocrisies and biliousness of the Roundheads. It was equally natural that this Royalist body should prove subservient to the Court, and that in the intoxication of a general return to gay and free ways the Court should regard the Puritan episode as completely obliterated, and think only of emulating the opulent license of Louis XIV., with which it was most pleasurably familiar. There began a new race for wealth and luxury, madder and more unscrupulous than ever. In such periods there is little delicacy about the means of acquiring money. In army, navy, Church and State-services the taint spread rapidly, but, says Macaulay, the sober censor of all this frivolity, "those who made politics their business were perhaps the most corrupt part of this corrupt society." To put it differently, politics now came into existence as a distinct and unsavoury profession for the making of money. The recent history of England had not tended to develop an inflexible sense of principle. The famous window in Whitehall still recalled to living memories the most tremendous event in English history, the execution of a king,

yet there was the king's son as luxuriously lodged, and almost as autocratic as his father had been. Moreover, two, if not three creeds enfeebled by their mutual obloquy the standards of conduct in the minds of the less robust, while a more or less obscure Deistic movement spread a not very austere scepticism in the minds of the cultured.

At this period the necessity arose for the Court-party to apply the familiar methods of diplomacy to the domestic political system. The reaction against Puritan sourness went so far that it in turn brought about a reaction toward Puritanism. A grave suspicion that the king leaned to Popery accentuated this feeling, and the successors of the Roundheads carried repeated bye-elections and strengthened their party in the House. Soon there was a "Country Party" with which the frivolous Londoners had to count. It included, of course, sober London merchants, but its chief strength lay in the country. The Earl of Clarendon, the king's most intimate counsellor, was impeached (1667) for venality and peculation, and banished.

Power now passed to what may be regarded as the first Cabinet in English history, the "Cabal" (*C*lifford, *A*shley, *B*uckingham, *A*rlington and *L*auderdale), and the work of tainting politics proceeded merrily. Money and places were freely distributed among members of Parliament. Sir Thomas Clifford, a secret Catholic and head of the Government, was the arch-corruptor. While the country was in open and popular alliance with Protestant Holland and Sweden against France, Clifford and Arlington (another Catholic) assisted Charles to enter into a secret treaty with Louis, in which the French king engaged himself to supply Charles with sufficient funds to be independent of Parliament and sufficient men to crush a new civil war; and Charles promised to make open profession of Catholicism at

the earliest convenient moment. To prepare Parliament for the disclosure of this disgraceful piece of Machiavellism, Clifford had liberal recourse to bribery. A seat in the House began to have a peculiar monetary value. A vote in the constituency sympathetically rose in value. Even French gold poured by these secret channels into England. It is material to note that Clifford was not in person a venal or corrupt man. One understands the temptations of the higher political world better when one finds such men assuming with ease the character of corruptors.

The sober elements of Parliament were still strong. They shattered the Cabal, impeached Arlington and drove Clifford into obscurity. But the change of politicians was infelicitous, for the Earl of Danby, who succeeded Clifford, was far worse than his predecessor. Corrupt and covetous himself, he quickly seized upon the proved venality of members of Parliament and made it one of the chief means of sustaining his own power. During his long public career he did more, perhaps, than any other man to deepen the taint in English politics; though there was hardly a high politicial personage of the time who did not resort to such methods. Even the chivalrous and high-minded Republican, Algernon Sidney, was convicted of taking a thousand guineas of French gold; and the excuse that he expended it in the spread of his idealism only shows the perversity of the times. Leaders of the Country Party—the Whigs, as they would presently be called—were not less open to bribery. Sir Thomas Lee and Sir Thomas Meres accepted thousands of pounds in money, and lucrative offices, on condition that they would use their influence in their party to secure the grant of ample subsidies to the king. There are political historians who blame the Whigs, of later reigns, for the adulteration of public life.

We shall see that, in fact, the corruption reached its lowest depth under Whig ministers, but in the reign of Charles II., when the taint so rapidly and fatally developed, it was the Tories who corrupted the Whigs and educated them in the value of parliamentary corruption.

It was about this time that the distinction of Whig and Tory came into use in English literature. The Whigs were the modified successors of the Roundheads, and the new name was borrowed from an epithet which was in Scotland applied with some disdain to rural Presbyterians. They were prominently characterised by a defence of Presbyterianism against the Episcopalians and a resolution to restrict the claims of the king. Upon their opponents they retorted with the equally opprobrious name of Tories, which belonged originally to the wild marauders of Catholic Ireland. The Tories were presumed to favour the Catholic leanings of Charles (though Danby and others hated Catholicism), and they certainly supported his dream of luxurious autocracy. But we have already seen that neither creed, nor party, nor even personality withstood the taint. The Catholic Clifford and Protestant Danby were equally generous in the distribution of tainted money; the Deistic Sidney and Presbyterian Meres were equally ready in acceptance. Indeed, men now passed with such ease from one party to the other that even the microscopic eye of the modern historian has some difficulty in discovering their principles; while the age had the further distinction of producing a professedly neutral group who went by the name of "trimmers."

The Whigs now obtained an accession of strength which for a time enabled them to threaten a new civil war, but it ended in further reaction and a deeper corruption of the system. The fear of Popery remained strong both in the metropolis and the

country, and a series of plots, real or fictitious, raised the feeling against the Tories to a white heat. Shaftesbury transferred his services and his ambitions to the popular side, and a formidable movement was set afoot. The excesses of the Whigs, however, and the horror of civil war brought a reaction in favour of the Court, and the king was enabled to scatter his opponents. What interests us in this change, in 1682, is that Charles was directed by his advisers to manipulate the constituencies. Charters were withdrawn from towns which returned Whigs, and small towns which were regarded as safe Tory seats were elevated to the unexpected dignity, and not unprofitable privilege, of sending members to the Commons. The constituencies were, as we shall see, hopelessly archaic and ludicrous, but these slight alterations were entirely corrupt in intention.

The last eight years of the reign of Charles II. were, therefore, years of open and unblushing corruption. Offices were created and sold with lighthearted frivolity. Salaries of officers in the service of the Court or in the Civil Service were raised out of all proportion to their importance or the State's resources. A groom of the Stole received £5000 a year for the discharge of his onerous duties. A group of Lords of the Bedchamber received each £1000 a year. Commissions in the Army and Navy were issued without the least regard to competence, and contracts were a recognised source of income. A politician found at his disposal a machinery of persuasion which few of that age could resist, and he had no more scruple in using it than had the most adventurous of the gay ladies who flaunted a brilliant finery in, or on the fringes of, the two Courts. Parliament gradually filled with officers of the army, the navy or the excise; and the consciousness that their seats or their commissions de-

pended entirely on the will of the higher politicians preserved them from any suspicion of Whiggery. The higher politicians themselves created large fortunes by the use of their corrupt power. The dour Puritans were dead. The country was docile. The metropolis was enchanted.

Less than two years after the head of the chivalrous Sidney had fallen, the dissolute monarch quitted the kingdom he had besmirched, and his Catholic brother inherited and sustained the corrupt system; save that the fair white hands which had previously distributed pardons and offices, and received commissions, were now replaced by the anointed hands of priests. The practices continued. A special kind of brokerage was evolved in London. Parliament was gaily likened to a pump, into which you introduce a little water in order to ensure the outflow of a stream. At James's first election, in 1685, a stout, loyal majority had been returned. The reformed constituencies had been carefully canvassed. Local clergy and officers who had influence had been effectively intimidated, and had secured the proper conduct of the voters. The more courageous or more independent, who feared not intimidation, were seduced by the more amiable policy of money or place.

The narrow-minded ferocity of the king soon brought an end to this reign of reaction. Taking a pretext from the rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth, he fell upon the Whigs with a severity which chilled the gaiety of the nation. Women of gentle birth were burned alive, and the bloody Jeffreys was created Chancellor for his grisly work. A reign of terror opened for the successors of the Puritans while the enfeeblement of the kingdom by corrupt practices went so far that even the queen and her ladies dipped their hands in the muddy stream. Happily for the country, James's zeal for his Church

equalled his zeal for the royal prerogative, and the country, still thoroughly and sturdily Protestant, took alarm. The charters of enfranchised towns, even the qualifications of individual voters, were scrutinised afresh, and from the palace Father Petre directed an obvious campaign for preparing Parliament for the suppression of Protestantism. In that sacred cause no form of bribery could be irregular, and further improvements were made in the electoral and parliamentary machinery which the Whigs would presently inherit.

Remembering still the horrors of the Civil War, the nation had tolerated the conduct of James impatiently as long as he was childless, and the crown would pass to his Protestant daughter, Mary. When in 1688 it was announced that a son was at length born, and the Catholics openly rejoiced, men of all parties except that of Father Petre turned toward William of Orange. William astutely united the various parties by a protest that he came only to secure the life of the Protestant religion and the freedom of Parliament, and the whole nation rallied to him. So feeble a remnant was left to the last of the Stuarts that William at once mounted the steps of the throne.

Twice in less than a half-century England had wrought a revolution, ostensibly in the name of its Parliament. Yet that Parliament, which our children are taught in school to regard as an unique national institution, a monument of the solid sense and manly independence of our fathers, had sunk deeper than ever precisely during this century of Puritanism. Traditions had been inaugurated, and political types had been produced which would make the national machinery particularly ineffective at the time of its greatest opportunity. The agricultural and industrial revolution would soon open. The national wealth would begin to rise at a re-

markable speed. But the central administration would be so corrupt and inept, the mass of the people so ignorant and powerless, that the distribution of wealth would take a form which would provide only bitter conflicts for a later generation.

How this degeneration began we have now seen. In order to restrict the inquiry as far as possible to modern times I have included no study of the origin of Parliament, and have not attempted to trace the comparatively mild corruption of meliæval times. It seems that at least from the fifteenth century onward the system of representation lent itself to improper practices. Although the office or position of representative was not the lucrative affair it would become after the development of the two great political parties, we gather that the representatives were paid, aparently by those whom they represented in London. In any case, as we witness to-day in municipal politics, the "honour" was sought and the persuasion with which it was solicited at times took the form of silver or gold. As we find conflicts with Parliament in every century, we may assume that there were, long before the time of Clifford, men who knew the value of an accommodating attitude. Political corruption is, as we saw, as old as politics.

But these relatively mild and infrequent disorders need not be studied here. The taint which we deplore to-day is not merely this inevitable irregularity of a system in which a man may owe his place to anything except competence, and may lose it in spite of his competence. It is the last phase of a peculiar development of our national life, and this alone calls for our consideration. We have seen its earlier development. Under the Tudors, when Parliament could with impunity be ignored or coerced, the statesmen who administered the country, through the reigning monarch, contracted

the very general diplomatic dishonesty of their time. The economic development of the country increases their ambition, since it associates great wealth with power and makes it no longer necessary that the aspirant should have a long sword or a long list of ancestors. But the same development infuses a measure of self-respect into the country, and Parliament becomes conscious of its power once more. From this and the religious development we get the Civil War and its sequel, the differentiation of politicians into two antagonistic parties—roughly, the king's party and the people's party, the Tories and Whigs. In the midst of these changes, which enhance the importance of domestic politics, statesmen learn to employ at home the secret and unscrupulous arts which they have so long used in cozening the foreigner. We now reach a point where the second revolution practically ends the dream of a divine right of British kings, where Whig and Tory lose their original antagonism and become little more than rival groups of adventurous seekers of wealth and power. We enter the great age of political corruption.

tribution of guineas in the House saved the ministers from any greater inconvenience than a few indignant descriptions of the state of the nation they administered; and the anger of the reformers proved just as impotent when they went on to discuss the condition of the House itself.

This was, in 1692, the first formal debate on parliamentary corruption, and we easily gather from the speakers that already the system of representation needed drastic revision. Many boroughs had so far lost the comparative importance which had in the early Middle Ages entitled them to representatives that their continuance as constituencies was not merely an incentive to, but an inevitable occasion of, corruption. The once thriving town of Dunwich dropped slowly under the waves of the North Sea, but it still returned two members. East and West Looe, once substantial little towns (for the time) on the coast of Cornwall, were now decayed fishing-villages, with only thirty-three voters; yet they had, says Oldfield, "as many members as the cities of London and Westminster and the county of Middlesex, which contained near a million inhabitants and paid a sixth part of the revenue of the country."* Old Sarum, already almost a deserted ruin and a thing of interest only to the archæologist, returned as many members as the county of Yorkshire.

These "rotten boroughs," and the equal scandal of the burgage-votes, we will consider presently. For the moment it is enough to note that the attitude of the professional politicians was at once moulded in a form with which we are familiar to this day. There were some in both parties who found the condition of the country very regettable. They conciliated people by a virtuous shake of the head over the rotten boroughs, and they found that

* *The Representative History of Great Britain*, III., 239.

after such an exhibition of righteousness they could escape with a few murmurs about "practical difficulties." A few found the state of things so sordid that at least stronger language was demanded of them. "It is notorious," said Earl Dorset in the House of Lords, "that a great number of persons have no other livelihood than by being employed in bribing corporations." He referred to constituencies, which we will consider later, where a dozen or score municipal councillors monopolised the right of vote and put a proportionate price on their privilege. Tories boldly met the reformers with praise of our glorious Constitution and its superiority to every foreign institution. What seemed to the jaundiced reformer acts of coercion or bribery on the part of the local magnate were to the Tory "these feelings of mutual kindness which bound together our wealthy gentry and their poorer neighbours and brought them into frequent and friendly intercourse." Properly viewed, these relations were "one of the main causes of the good working of our ancient constitution and, still more, of its duration." So said a distinguished Tory writer.

The Whigs, on the other hand, had no advantage to derive from reform. Indeed, they already profited by the system themselves, and they cynically smothered the demand of the small section known as "the Country Party." Since there were now plenty of men of wealth among the Whigs, they had equal chance with the Tories of purchasing the votes of municipal corporations and burgage-holders. The large towns of modern times—such as Manchester and Birmingham—were then still pleasant villages on whom none thought of bestowing political power. Reform would take the shape of disfranchising decayed boroughs (which a Whig might purchase as easily as a Tory) and enlarging the vote of the counties (which were overwhelmingly

Tory). With familiar political casuistry they argued that any strengthening of the power of Toryism would be so grave a national danger that it were better to overlook a few little irregularities.

The "representation of the people," however, had already become so gross a tragi-comedy that something had to be done, and the interests of the rival parties were so complicated that something might be attempted. The Commons passed a measure for checking the number of placemen in the House. Although the Lords consecrated it, the Bill was still so obnoxious to the Court Party that the King, declaring it an encroachment on his royal prerogative, refused to sign it, and the Commons yielded. The reformers in the Lords then took up the work, and they passed a measure restricting the duration of Parliament to three years. The prospect of having to renew their illicit expenditure on elections every three years was naturally distasteful to the members of the Lower House, and, with an anxious eye on the grumbling country, they opposed, and, when the King also declared against it, rejected the measure. It was some years before it became law.

In 1693 the Whigs returned to power, and the twenty years during which these successors of the Puritans retained it form the most scandalous part of the record of the corruption of England's political life. The original division of the two parties had been almost lost in confusion. The genuine, enthusiastic Tory was now generally *dis*-loyal; for he looked daily to the "King over the water," and regarded William as an unhallowed human creation, a usurper. At the best, the Tory party was distracted, while the Whigs gathered strength. Sunderland, who now formed a ministry—the first group of politicians to go by that name in English history—had advised the King to lean on the Whigs, and the art

of persuasion by bribe was more assiduously cultivated than ever. Sunderland himself had few scruples while of his colleagues Lord Wharton is described by Swift as "the most universal villain I ever knew," and Lord Somers as "a man possessing every excellent qualification except virtue." The national life of the country was passing through two centuries of corrupt politicians from which it has not yet recovered. The "game" of politics was entering its golden age.

Two years later, in spite of every corrupt device for censuring the docility of the House of Commons, the abominable condition of parliamentary life was starkly exposed. It was found in the course of an inquiry that the Member for Heydon and Secretary of the Treasury, Mr H. Guy, had accepted a bribe of two hundred guineas As he was a Tory, the Whigs virtuously sent him to the Tower for such an outrage on the purity of English political life. The case, however, as is not unusual, drew out a series of fresh charges and demands of inquiry.

There was, of course, no press in those days, or even, owing to the mediæval poorness of transport, a national public opinion. London and Westminster alone could be roused by their pamphleteers to exert a collective pressure on the politicians; and it must be admitted that the writers themselves were generally as corrupt and venal as the politicians. In any case, scandal was the precious metal of their trade, and the cry for a bold and comprehensive inquiry became louder and louder. It is said by writers of the time that a shudder of ghastly apprehension passed over Westminster as if the plague had broken out afresh. No man was safe, and none knew if the neighbour he met bore the taint. It was, in particular, stubbornly repeated that the East India Company and the City of London had spent large sums in corrupting members of the

House of Commons. Lord Wharton was forced to take up the challenge and permit a general inquiry. He may have trusted to the customary art to evade disclosures, but the facts were so gross and notorious that they soon compelled recognition.

Within a few days it was proved that Sir John Trevor, the Tory Speaker of the House whom Danby had appointed for the purpose of corrupting it, had taken bribes. His salary was £4000 a year, and it was estimated that he had used his position to make a further £10,000 a year. On the specific charge that he had accepted a thousand guineas from the City of London to smooth the way through Parliament for one of its measures he was convicted and dismissed. The accounts of the East India Company were next examined, and the result confirmed every picturesque rumour that had circulated in the clubs. The Company had secured its very profitable monopoly by spending enormous sums in bribing the Court and the House. For decades sums of money, as well as jewellery, silks, and stones of the Indies, etc., had been systematically distributed in order to secure influence at Court or in Parliament, and none was so high in either world as to have refused the taint. The Commissioner of the Treasury, Sir Edward Seymour, had long been a butt of the wits for a rumoured deal in what they called "Saltpetre's Pence." It was proved that he had, through an agent, received £10,000 in connection with a fraudulent contract for saltpetre; yet he suffered no penalty.

Danby himself, who had risen from the dignity of Marquis of Carmarthen to that of Duke of Leeds, and had accumulated a large fortune, was definitely proved to have received 5,500 guineas, and was clearly shown to have received more. He escaped under a cloud of vague assurances and genial raillery. He unblushingly, merrily, told the House

of Lords that, when he was Treasurer under Charles II., there were a number of bidders for the farming of the excise. Lord Halifax had instructed him to tell *each* of them that Halifax had secured the contract for him, and had thus got an illicit commission from each bidder! The House of Lords felt that the contemporary irregularity was small in comparison with this, and the Duke of Leeds escaped. Only one man, a servant, could definitely prove his guilt, and the Court connived at the flight from the country of this man. A strict prosecution of the inquiry would have been awkward for the Court. It was said that £10,000 of East India gold could be traced to the King himself.

The Grumbletonians renewed their pressure, and Sunderland was compelled to bribe more freely than ever in order to cheat the rising hostility of Parliament. A new Parliament, largely bent on reform, had been returned at the end of 1698. It cut down the army, in spite of the King's positive orders, and passed a Bill for the forfeiture to the State of the immense property the King had bestowed on his Dutch friends and his notorious mistress. The temper of the Commons was so stern, in spite of all the known meaus of persuasion, that the King was forced to assent.

The reign of Anne (1702-1714) thus opened with some promise of a return to purer traditions, but the action of the Queen in placing almost all the high offices in the hands of Tories soon restored the party-game with all its irregularities. Power passed alternately to Tories and Whigs every few years, and the most shameless efforts were made to debauch the constituencies in favour of one or the other ambition. Governed entirely by the Marlborough's, Anne gave the supreme position to Lord Godolphin, whose son had married Marlborough's eldest daughter, and two groups of antagonistic

families, with little to choose between them either in policy or procedure, struggled for what were now literally spoils of office, while the war against France and Spain dragged out its inglorious length.

The inevitable recurrence of scandal happened in 1712. The Duke of Marlborough was publicly credited with having made half a million sterling by illicit commissions during the war, and the House of Commons definitely censured him for levying large commissions on the pay of foreign troops in the English service. His guilt is unquestionable, but, like so many other gold-laced offenders before and since, he escaped punishment. Marlborough and his wife had between them drawn salaries to the total amount of £65,000 a year, yet such was the greed and indelicacy of the age that they had added hundreds of thousands to this by corrupt means. His secretary, Cardonnel, was, however, expelled from the House of Commons, and Sir Robert Walpole, Secretary for War and leader of the House under Godolphin, was committed to the Tower for receiving a thousand guineas on a contract for forage.

It is, perhaps, the most striking commentary on the corruption of the times that within two years of his release from the Tower, Walpole was again the leader of the House of Commons, and one of the first statesmen of the country. Walpole, is, indeed, one of the most significant and interesting figures in the political life of the age. Sprung from the country gentry, educated at Cambridge, he entered Parliament by means of one of his own "pocket-boroughs," and soon proved the most expert "manager" of the House. His method of management consisted largely in the development of the existing system of bribery. Walpole was one of those who adopted the more frivolous version of the growing scepticism of the time. Blunt, shrewd,

and entirely devoid of moral prejudices, he applied himself to the task of the hour by the easiest means, whatever their ethical complexion. He sneered at Church-practices, yet amiably sanctioned them. He outran the scepticism of Locke, but shuddered at his austerity. One must not, however, imagine that his dissociation from the Church of England was the prime cause of deepening the taint in English politics, for the Church was exceedingly corrupt. It is his son, Horace Walpole, who gives us a piquant illustration of the situation. Toward the close of his life Sir Robert gave the Bishop of Chester a living worth £700 a year to marry one of his natural daughters. Sir Robert, unfortunately, died soon afterwards; and the right reverend prelate retained the living and declined to marry the ambiguous lady. In London there were bishops of the time who had their mistresses at table.

Such was the man whom one may almost call the father of English modern politics; and the majority of his rivals and contemporaries were only less skilful in playing the game. At the accession of George I. (1714) Marlborough was re-instated in office, the veteran cynic, Lord Wharton, became privy seal, General Stanhope was second Secretary of State, and Pulteney Secretary of War—a promising initiation of the Hanoverian phase of England's national life. Walpole was in congenial company, and one of their first acts was to repeal the Triennial Law and extend the life of Parliament to seven years. It is amusing to read that one of the reasons alleged for the change was the sordid bribery practised at elections. "Perhaps it will be best," Lady Mary Montagu wrote to her husband in 1714, when he wished to enter Parliament, "to deposit a certain sum in some friend's hands and buy some little Cornish borough." It now suited the leading politicians to perceive the prevalence of

bribery, and the political state of England was gracefully lamented. The boroughs and voters naturally resented this material restriction of the stream of gold to the country. A vote was then, perhaps, not worth more than a score of guineas—we shall see it rise presently—but to a small provincial trader in those days twenty guineas was a respectable sum, and hundreds of petitions against the change were sent up to Parliament. In the purest language of political ethics these petitions deplored the weakening of their control of their representatives. The politicians were familiar with the dialect. They so contrived that only ten of these petitions were presented in the House. Two hundred others, which "arrived too late," were burned at the Post Office —after the passing of the Septennial Bill!

Once more a grave scandal fell upon this complacent and corrupt world. At the bursting of the South Sea Bubble in 1720 another batch of distinguished politicians were dragged into the light. For years the public had been encouraged in the most reckless gambling, and swindlers had thriven as never before. One had only to announce a scheme to extract iron from coal or oil from sunflowers, or even a mechanism of perpetual motion, and London flocked to the tables which overflowed on to the streets of the City. The books of the South Sea Company were brought to the House of Commons, and it was found that the most lavish corruption had been employed in securing its foundation.

From the beggared tens of thousands came so frantic a demand for vengeance that Parliament was compelled to proceed honestly. The Earl of Sunderland had accepted £50,000 in shares. Aislabie, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had by bribes and speculation acquired a fortune of £794,000. Walpole succeeded Aislabie, and he adroitly saved the Earl of Sunderland from punishment. Stanhope, the Premier,

was accused, and justly accused, of having received £10,000; but in the heat of his defence in the House he fell in a fit of apoplexy, which at once proved fatal. An appalling cloud, in whose shadow the faces of politicians were livid, brooded over "the mother of Parliaments." The Postmaster-General, Craggs, a friend of Sunderland, was shown to have received £40,000 and to have been the chief intermediary of the corruption. He was ruined and driven to death. His son, a Secretary of State and the accepted lover of one of George I.'s mistresses, had shared the fatal gifts. Peeresses, Members of Parliament, courtiers, civil servants—hundreds of the beruffled and beribboned gentry of the metropolis were proved to have opened their pockets to the tainted stream of half a million sterling of gold; and death—for even Sunderland did not survive the storm—was almost the only refuge from the infuriated crowds of their victims.

So inveterate, however, was the corruption of the age that within a few years scandals again arose. In the year 1725 Walpole, who led the House at this period, persuaded the King to restore the Order of the Bath, on the genial ground that it would form for him "an artful bank of thirty-six ribands to supply a fund of favours." In the same year Walpole grossly bribed the Scottish members, who visited London, and got their consent to the increase of the tax on ale in Scotland. In the same year the Lord Chancellor, the Earl of Macclesfield, was fined £30,000, and removed from office, for peculation.

George II., at his accession in 1727, retained Walpole in office, and that astute politician contrived by a system of bribery, in the House and the constituencies, to hold power for the next fifteen years, with little interruption. He spent £5,000 a year on the employment of literary men and journa-

lists to defend his government. He managed the House of Commons by what the conscientious Hume calls "unscrupulous bribery," as well as tactical ability. He doubled the Secret Service Fund, and influenced elections by every means at his disposal. "Every man has his price" is a saying first attributed to Walpole; and there is no doubt that he expressed that sentiment in slightly different words, and proceeded on it habitually. His sons had sinecures which yielded £14,000 a year. His ability, his services to the country in many ways, are unquestioned; yet one realises how familiar corruption was to his age when one finds Burke making excuses for him, and Johnson describing him as "the best minister we ever had."

There are, however, historians who maintain that English political corruption reached its lowest depth, not under Walpole, but under his successor in power, Henry Pelham. In 1740 the Duke of Newcastle—himself "the greatest borough-monger in England"—began a fierce campaign against Walpole. In 1742 Walpole fell, over proved irregularities at elections, and the not unfamiliar inquiry set up by his enemies ended in the not unfamiliar acquittal. Pelham became Premier, and it is enough to quote the sober authority of the *Dictionary of National Biography*—an indulgent martyrology of our political saints—that, though not personally covetous, "he chiefly maintained his influence in Parliament by an elaborate system of corruption," or, as Hunt and Poole say in their *Political History of England*, by a "lavish distribution of the spoils of office."

The Duke of Newcastle, the expert borough-monger, succeeded Pelham in power in 1754, and Horace Walpole tells us that in that year the bribery at the election surpassed all records. It may have risen above the previous record, but there was now

at work a new influence which, while it perhaps tempered the evil in the House itself, or prepared the way of reform, was rapidly deepening the corruption in the constituencies. The election of 1761 was worse than the election of 1754. The election of 1768 was still worse. The greed of the voters themselves was growing at an alarming pace. When Lord Chesterfield offered £2,500 to purchase a seat for his son—possibly one with only a few score voters—the brokers laughingly replied that the price now ranged from three to five thousand pounds. Selwyn sold the two seats at Ludgershall for £9,000. The City of Oxford offered to renew the parliamentary tenure of its two sitting members if they would pay its debts, which amounted to £5,670. Outraged by the profiteering, they made a complaint to the House, and ten of the leading citizens of Oxford were summoned to London and lodged in Newgate; and in Newgate, to the delight of London, they sold the seats to two other men. The price of a single vote was in places now as much as fifty guineas.

It was the work of "the Nabobs." Any person who moved in parliamentary circles in the seventh decade of the eighteenth century heard on all sides the most violent and virtuous denunciation of the corrupting influence of these Nabobs. They were, of course, the *nouveaux riches* of the period; men, generally, who had amassed wealth in the Indies or the Indian trade. The East India Company had unlocked the sluices, and tens of millions of gold and precious things were flowing into England. A seat in the House became a popular ambition of the merchants, and the constituencies freshened like a bed of flowers under a beneficent shower in July. In places where, as we shall see, a dozen or a score of men monopolised the voting, the franchise was a property of enormous value; and the defrauded householders now began to struggle with the cor-

porations for their political rights and their legitimate emoluments. Where a few sticks or stones, or a few square yards of ground, represented some ancient place with a right to return two members, the venerable relics assumed such value as if they were authentic fragments of Noah's Ark or Nero's Golden House. A new blight had descended upon England's glorious and unparalleled parliamentary system.

It was the darkest hour. The first glimmer of reform was faintly relieving the edge of the political horizon. What the causes of the reform-movement were, we will consider in the next chapter; but we may at once put ourselves on our guard against the theory that it was due to the rise of a more honest generation of politicians. Fox, who now appeared, was an entirely willing element in the corrupt system of the time. The elder Pitt had been in Parliament since 1735. He had entered it by one of the rottenest of the rotten boroughs of England, Old Sarum, and had during thirty years never hinted at its corruption. In 1754 he began to represent one of the Duke of Newcastle's proprietary boroughs. Neither statesman, nor any other, said a word against the completely degraded political system until the hereditary cliques of politicians and their dependents were threatened by a more or less independent body of wealthy merchants who were able to outbid them. A vote at ten or twenty guineas had been an innocent detail of a providential system. A vote at fifty guineas was a sure sign of the growth of paganism; it strained the resources of the London organisers and exposed the lord of the manor to a ruinous competition in his own preserve.

There were, however, several other circumstances which favoured a struggle for reform in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and to this struggle we will devote a chapter. The language

with which Conservative politicians, both Whig and Tory, tried to avert the reform is of enduring interest. It is no less related to the language of our day than the corruption itself is related to the irregularities which still linger. The apology has, like the taint, sustained a natural evolution in the struggle for life. But we are chiefly concerned with the taint itself, and we have now seen its full development in English political life.

It had two sources. One is the inherent mischievousness of open voting. A free and independent Englishman may boast that he will cast his vote openly in the sight of men and angels, but such heroism would not be without danger now, and was quite impossible in mediaeval conditions. The courageous few were soon suppressed by lords who owned their houses and controlled their employment, and their homes and places were quickly taken by the venal or the sycophantic. The constituencies ripened to rottenness as soon as the period of semi-barbarism was replaced by one of domestic peace and larger national life. The decay of older towns into political fictions added to the corruption. Meantime, the politicians themselves were developing a separate taint, which we have traced, and, when Parliament again became an institution of real strength in the national life, they turned upon it the practised methods of foreign diplomacy. The Civil War which intensified the strength of Parliament merely added to its corruption. Frontal attacks by the Court-party became impossible. The work—the fight against the will of such of the people as remained honest—was entrusted to the political sappers and miners. Members were corrupted, and voters were corrupted to return corrupt members. We pass to the next phase, the struggle to find a way out of Serbonian bog.

## CHAPTER V

### THE FIGHT FOR REFORM

It will be convenient and instructive to insert here a sketch of the political system which we have hitherto considered only in the partial glimpses afforded by an occasional page from the record of its history. It is a truism of our time that nothing can be understood apart from its evolution. An institution may draw its sustenance for the day from the age in which it lives, but its form is determined for the most part by extinct forces. Theoretically, we moderns, with our strong sense of mastery and creativeness, make our own institutions. In practice we do not. "Great is the power of the actual" is as true to-day as when Carlyle wrote it. Modification, not creation, is our practical motto. The past still dominates us.

On the other hand, the impatient and sensitive person who urges us to leave undisturbed in the cemetery of history the past misdeeds of Church or State has a mistaken idea of charity. If the misdeeds or irregularities of to-day are entirely dissociated from their historical past, one can only compare them with the finer ideals of our time and the more bitterly resent them. One feels that the men who can do and say such things in an age when honour and truthfulness are on the lips of all are moral perverts. Their position becomes much more intelligible when one realises that the system which to-day enmeshes them with its irresistible temptations is only the modified form of a system which

owes its corruptness to a morally inferior age. Indeed, it is precisely because so many refuse to believe that distinguished or responsible men of the twentieth century can lie or cozen or bribe that they are blind to the irregularities which are daily exposed; while extreme critics, equally unmindful of the past, dress up our politicians in a melodramatic wickedness which defeats its own purpose. We avoid both extremes, and approach our business with more hope, if we know the evolution of English politics and politicians. Less than a hundred years ago our political system was corrupt, inept, false, and fraudulent to a degree that is now almost unimaginable.

The time I have reached in this preliminary historical sketch was a hundred and fifty years ago. In the fifty succeeding years—or, at least, the first half of that period—some important reforms were carried. As late as 1830, we shall see, the parliamentary system was a criminal sham. The parliamentary system of to-day as described by, let us say, Mr Belloc or Mr Smillie, has the chaste manners of a mothers' meeting in a Baptist chapel in comparison with the system of ninety years ago. Yet this was an improvement upon the political system over which the elder Pitt and Fox gracefully presided, and which evoked the applause, and would have drawn the defensive swords, of all the gentlemen of England.

It may or may not be useful to tell our children in school that our fathers set up, and for centuries held up to the admiration and envy of the world, a model political institution. Some of us are reluctant to tell lies even to children. But the adult Englishman, at least, ought to know that his parliamentary institution had become, by the end of the eighteenth century, an appalling mass of corruption. Whether Walpole, or Pelham, or Pitt really ad-

ministered the country well is another question. They did so in spite of the system; and we shall hear them claiming that it was actually the defects of the system which enabled strong and able men to hold power.

Our system of popular or parliamentary representation in the latter part of the eighteenth century consisted theoretically of—to omit Scotland—about quarter of a million free, independent, and open-eyed voters, who sent every seven years 468 representatives to Westminster to keep the King in check, control finance, and initiate legislation. There was, it is true, a house of barons and bishops next door who could veto whatever the Commons did; and the King could veto (or refuse to sign) anything on which they agreed. But we shall not be tempted to shed many tears over these improper impediments to the will of the people if we first study how the popular representatives were chosen. The qualifications for voting were so ancient and complicated that an army of lawyers grew fat on the constant quarrels. The chief qualification was the possession of a house, or the paying of taxes. Since the vote was open, this at once put the voter at the mercy of a wealthy landlord. Some towns consisted of only a few score houses, and were owned entirely by one man. They formed his "pocket-borough," transferable by will like a Russian estate with a thousand serfs, or liable at any time to be offered to the highest bidder on the market. In many cases the town was halved between two landlords, but as nearly every borough in England returned two members, the duality of ownership presented no difficulty. Here are a few advertisements from London newspapers on the eve of a parliamentary struggle:

"Whoever wishes for a seat in the House, by honourable and constitutional means, may have

the choice of many, where their success can be made certain. Address a line to M. B., No. 11, Doun Street, Piccadilly." (*The Telegraph*, September 5th, 1795.)

"The present system of electioneering is attended with great evils, among which the following are not the least—much trouble, heavy expense, and great uncertainty of success. The advertiser knows how to obtain seats in the House without difficulty. His plan is infallible and perfectly constitutional. None but principals can be treated with. Address a line to M. B., No. 11 Doun Street, Piccadilly." (*The Courier*, September 3rd, 1795.)

"Counsellor Baldwin, Secretary to the Duke of Portland, is to be elected (not nominated) for the borough of Malton, in the gift of Earl Fitzwilliam." (*The Times*, October, 18th, 1795.)*

A very large number of the smaller constituencies were thus entirely dominated by landowners or employers. They used their absolute power to help their parties, which helped them, or they sold it for the time of the election. The above advertisements, inserted by some agent of such borough-lords, are plain enough; and we have already seen how Lord Chesterfield found £2,500 too small a price for one seat. The smallest borough returned two members. Ludgershall was a village of seventy houses. We saw that the owner of these got £9,000 for them; and as mere property they were probably not worth a thousand pounds.

The householders were not always thus controlled, especially in the larger towns. In these places one found the free and independent voter; and one generally found that he put a high price on his free-

* These extracts are taken from Mrs Thelwall's *Life of John Thelwall*, vol. I., p. 364.

dom. There were certain places of sound public spirit which rejected both bribery and coercion. They were relatively few. In the course of the eighteenth century such a subtle pervasive flood of corruption poured over the constituencies that, where intimidation was impossible, bribery was general. There was so little communication that the price of a vote varied. At Boston it was five guineas; at Wallingford forty. Lord Shelburne himself speaks of working men who were offered £700 for their vote, so that the cost of a single election was known to run to £30,000.* Where there was not a definite tariff, there were free meals and free drinks, and the long and costly process which is still known as nursing a constituency, and is still practised.

In other places the stubbornness of a group of independent voters was defeated, or the expense of bribing them reduced, by clerical pressure or by a local abundance of Government-servants. In many coast-towns the excise-men could turn an election, and the party in power or the crown unblushingly controlled the votes of these civil servants everywhere. In other places, again, very numerous places, the right to vote was by ancient charter confined to the "corporation." This was, in theory, the municipal authority, but in those roadless and entirely insanitary days the corporation really did nothing except vote. The members elected each other, or passed the privilege from father to son. One can guess the value of being a member of one of these corporations in the glorious days of the Nabobs. Any man would pay £4,000 for a seat, and the members of the corporations varied from two or three to a score.

In many places a freeman had the right to vote,

* See G. S. Veitch's *Genesis of Parliamentary Reform* (1913) and Oldfield's *History of Parliaments* and *History of the House of Commons*.

but this apparently admirable arrangement easily lent itself to corruption. The corporation could confer the freedom on any it pleased, and in an uncertain election, or for a substantial consideration, or under coercion from the local lord, it would create hundreds of these voters. It is on record that when Earl Lonsdale saw the Duke of Norfolk gaining on him at a Carlisle election, he brought in 1,400 men from his estates and collieries and "induced" the corporation to make them freemen and voters on the spot. In some places one acquired a vote by marrying the daughter of a freeman, and even this adventurous method did not deter some from seeking the profitable franchise.

Most outrageous of all were the burgage-voters, the owners of sticks or stones which represented a vanished town, or even of certain pig-styes or bits of land. At Midhurst the burgage was a heap of 118 stones in the middle of a field. For this field and a moderate amount of surrounding estate (197 acres in all) the Earl of Egremont paid £42,000. On election days the Earl handed to three or four trusty men (who would immediately return the parchments after voting) title-deeds to these stones, and they returned two members, nominated by him, to the House. In this "constituency" there was not a single house or inhabitant. Much the same was Old Sarum, where the last apology for a house was destroyed in 1792. Its one inhabitant until that date sold refreshments to visitors in a dilapidated shanty. By burgage-right, belonging to Lord Camelford, it returned two members. The neighbouring city of Salisbury had one member. At Westbury the sacred totem was a wall. In other places it was a share in a disused pit or a decaying cottage. In one place it was a stone in the middle of a stream. Most of these things were owned by peers; and lawyers loved them.

The modern reader will feel that I am selecting a few eccentric antiquities from what may be a generally respectable list. How could Fox and Pitt (except for a brief period) defend such a system? How the politicians defended such a system is precisely one of the points I am going to impress upon the reader. It is an important part of the psychological equipment we will bring to the study of our modern politicians. But it is material to understand the system they defended, and I will therefore take in *alphabetical order*, not selecting "awful examples," the first forty boroughs in Oldfield's exhaustive list. I merely condense his long description of each:

*Abingdon.*—Six hundred householder-voters. "Very corrupt"—the local representative of the Treasury buys the seat—but "as independent as any borough can be under the present system"!

*Amersham.*—One hundred and twenty householder-voters. All are tenants of one man who returns his two sons to Parliament.

*St Albans.*—Five hundred and sixteen householder-voters. They are controlled by Earl Spencer (who returns his brother-in-law) and Lord Grimstone (who returns his nephew).

*Aldeburgh.*—Eighty householder-voters. The borough is the private property of P. C. Crespigny, Esquire.

*Aldborough.*—A village of fifty-seven houses. Each householder has a vote. Nearly all belong to the Duke of Newcastle, who returns two members.

*Andover.*—A town of two thousand houses, but the vote is confined to a corporation of twenty-four men, who "elect one another."

*Appleby.*—A hundred burgage-voters, the burgages owned and the votes controlled by the Earl of Thanet and the Lonsdales. "Hog-sties which give votes as burgage-holds have been purchased at a

price exceeding all belief." Sir P. Francis won the seat in 1802. There was *one* voter. Sir P. Francis facetiously thanked the electorate for its unanimity.

*Arundel.*—One hundred and ninety householder-voters. Rank bribery, and result controlled by the Duke of Norfolk.

*Ashburton.*—Two hundred householder-voters, nominally. Really two voters, the owners, Lord Clinton and Sir R. Palk.

*Aylesbury.*—Five hundred householder-voters. The Marquis of Buckingham always returns one of the two members.

*Banbury.*—Eighteen voters, strictly controlled by the Earl of Guildford.

*Barnstable.*—An open borough. No patron. Three hundred and fifty voters.

*Bath.*—A large town in the eighteenth century. Vote confined to a corporation of eighteen voters, "who elect one another," and are under the control of the Marquis of Bath and Earl Camden.

*Beaumaris.*—Twenty-four voters, controlled by Lord Bulkeley.

*Bedford.*—Fourteen hundred voters. A large number under the control of the Duke of Bedford, but much independence.

*Great Bedwin.*—Eighty householder-voters. All are tenants of the Earl of Aylesbury, who dictates the issue of elections.

*Beeralston.*—Seventy burgage-voters. Each pays threepence per year rent to the Earl of Beverley, who appoints the member.

*Berwick.*—Six hundred voters. Lord Delaval dictates the return of one of the two members.

*Beverley.*—One thousand voters. Two hundred are tenants of Lord Yarborough, who returns one member.

*Bewdley.*—A corporation of thirteen voters, who take their orders from Lord Lyttleton.

*Bishop's-Castle.*—Fifty householder-voters. All are tenants of Lord Clive, who owns the borough.

*Blechingley.*—Ninety householder-voters. All are tenants of Sir R. Clayton.

*Bodmyn.*—A corporation of thirty-six voters, controlled by Sir J. Morshead.

*Boroughbridge.*—A village with sixty-five burgage-voters, the burgages all owned by the Duke of Newcastle.

*Bassiney.*—A small village of twenty houses. Voting confined to the corporation. In 1781 and 1790 there was only one living member of the corporation, and he returned two members. In 1795 there were four voters, and they were under the control of the Earl of Mount Edgcumbe and the Hon. Wortley Stuart.

*Boston.*—Three hundred and eighty householder-voters. The Duke of Ancaster has much influence, but there is a good deal of independence. [This description shows that Oldfield is not addicted to exaggeration. The price of a vote in Boston was, notoriously, five guineas.]

*Brackley.*—A corporation of thirty-two voters under the Earl of Bridgewater.

*Bramber.*—Fourteen wretched cottages give burgage-votes. Half belong to the Duke of Rutland and half to Lord Calthorpe. Each returns one member to Parliament.

*Brecon.*—One hundred voters, completely dominated by Sir C. Morgan.

*Bridgenorth.*—Seven hundred voters, under the influence of J. Whitmore.

*Bridgewater.*—Two hundred and seventy voters. Earl Poulet dictates one member.

*Bridport.*—Two hundred and thirty voters. "One of the few independent boroughs in England."

*Bristol.*—The second city of England in the

eighteenth century. There are five thousand voters and two members—of whom the Duke of Beaufort dictates one and the Duke of Portland the other.

*Buckingham.*—Less than two hundred houses. Two members. Thirteen corporation-voters, under the absolute control of the Marquis of Buckingham.

*Bury St Edmunds.*—Six thousand inhabitants and thirty-seven voters.

*Camelford.*—Sold in 1812 by the Duke of Bedford for £32,000. It has nine voters and two members.

There is no need to prolong the list. This first section of it is as typical of the rest as the first yard of cloth is of a bale. Even worse instances occur. Castle Rising has [in 1795] only two houses, owned by Earl Cholmondely, and returns two members. Corfe Castle has fourteen resident voters and it returns two members, who own the voters. Dunwich has scarcely a whole house, but it has twelve voters (bossed by Lord Huntingfield) and two members. At Derby the tenants of the Duke of Devonshire are honorary freemen. At Dorchester the Earl of Shaftesbury has votes attached to various bits of waste land. Ludgershall has seventy houses, owned by two men, each of whom returns a member: Liverpool, with three thousand voters, has only the same number of members. Portsmouth has twenty thousand inhabitants and a hundred voters. Scarborough has seven hundred rate-payers and twenty-two voters. Rye has four members and nine voters. Rochester has six hundred and thirty voters and one member. London has two members.

This was the state of the electorate in 1795, after a series of "reforms." A few details will be added when we reach the age of the Reform Bill, and a few general statements may complete this description of the electorate that attracted the attention, and for a brief period faintly awoke the zeal, of Mr Pitt. The 421 members sent to Parliament by these re-

markable boroughs represented 84,000 electors; if a few large towns were omitted the proportion would be appalling. County-voters, in any case, numbered 130,000, yet they had a right to only 92 members. Cornwall alone—it was full of rotten boroughs—sent forty-four members to Parliament. Scotland, with a population of two millions and 2643 voters, returned only forty-five members. Of the whole 468 "representatives of the people" at Westminster it was estimated that 306 were returned by the Treasury and 162 individuals (peers and gentry); and in nearly every other place, where a member was "freely" returned, the election was an orgie of beer, bribery and brutality.

After this description there is little need to dwell on the character of the members assembled at Westminster. To speak of the England of the eighteenth century as a self-governing community is ludicrous. Of four million adults less than quarter of a million were enfranchised; and of this quarter of a million only a few thousands deliberately sent men to represent their views and principles in the House. Two-thirds of the members of Parliament represented a handful of rich people. A large proportion were dummies of the Treasury, for there were nearly 50,000 exciseman-voters.

Upon this system our bishops bestowed their blessing—not a single suggestion of reform in three centuries came from the episcopal members of the Lords—and our most distinguished politicians expended their most graceful rhetoric decade after decade. But about the middle of the second half of the eighteenth century their complacency began to be disturbed by cries of reform. Too much, perhaps, has been made of individuals—chiefly Pitt and Wilkes—in this connection, and not enough of general changes. The agricultural revolution had already proceeded far, and the industrial revolution

had begun. Communication was improved. But far more important than these things—for we really do not find much improvement in the electorate itself—was the economic development which created a new wealthy class apart from the old land-barons and landed gentry. It was the Nabobs who taught Whigs and Tories the elements of political morality, by making political immorality more costly.

The elder Pitt, for instance, had used the machinery of the rotten boroughs all his life, and his often-mentioned disposition for reform was little more than the kind of velleity we are accustomed to find in statesmen. He held strongly that the purpose of Parliament was to represent property, not persons. Cut away the influence of the Treasury, and it did that much. As to the rotten boroughs, they were certainly "diseased limbs" of the Constitution. It might, however, be dangerous to amputate, and the prudent statesmen would rather give an increase of good blood and new vigour to it (by enfranchising new boroughs) wherewith it might resist the poison. One is quite familiar with this political dialect. What he really wanted was the suppression of such corruption (excise-votes, etc.) as served his enemies. Rotten boroughs and burgage-votes were useful to him and his party and he would not touch them. But the advent of the Nabobs in his old age stirred him. "Without connections," he said in the Lords, after he had taken the title of Earl of Chatham, "without any natural interest in the soil, the importers of foreign gold have forced their way into Parliament by such a torrent of corruption as *no private hereditary fortune could resist.*" The sting is in the tail.

Chatham gave utterance to this virtuous indignation in 1770, thirty-five years after the stones of Old Sarum (which were a possession of his family) had sent him to the House of Commons. The Nabobs

were not responsible for that state of the electorate which we have examined; nor were they responsible for the presence in the House of Commons in 1770 (according to the *Annual Register*) of one hundred and ninety place-holders. But a separate movement was beginning in London which added to the slight fermentation of reform-ideas. In 1769 the famous *Letters of Junius* had appeared, and John Wilkes was returned for Middlesex. The service of "Junius" was rather indirect. Like the Whigs generally, he demanded little more parliamentary reform than Chatham did.

John Wilkes really begins the campaign for reform, but his history does not dispose the modern democrat to bow very reverently before his statue. He was the son of a London distiller, educated at Leyden University, where he met Baron D'Holbach and learned advanced ideas about God and man. Rousseau's *Social Contract* had, we must remember, appeared in 1760. The ferment was already fairly brisk in France. Wilkes was a scholar and a gentleman: also a rake and a man of no moral delicacy. He had bought his seat in Parliament. He was, however, disappointed in his ambition, and he founded *The North Briton* (1762) and lashed the Court-party. He was convicted of "libel," and, although Middlesex thrice returned him in 1769, the House declared him incapable of sitting. At a fourth election the Court-party opposed a Colonel Luttrell to him, and they were defeated by 1143 to 296 votes. Yet the House of Commons declared Luttrell elected! London raged, and the first society for the reform of Parliament was established.

Perhaps this assisted Chatham in his age to see the enormity of political corruption. We must add that already in America associations of Sons and Daughters of Liberty—with tar and feathers for those who wanted the liberty not to join—were

springing up, and under the influence of American and French ideas Englishmen were beginning to think. The Whigs began to coquet with the movement in a familiar way. We practical and experienced politicians, they said to reformers, will show you how to carry out your ideas. They would reform all that helped the Tories only, and find all other reform impracticable.

Such dates as stand out in the calendar of the time, as far as it concerns us, illustrate this development. In 1770 a sober country member brought into the House a Bill for disfranchising revenue-officers. They numbered 50,000, as we saw, and every man's vote was controlled by the Treasury and used to support the party of "king's friends" in the House. This early attempt to put an end to a grave scandal was defeated by 263 votes to 188.

In 1773 the American colonists fired the imagination of Europe by scattering the cargoes of the tea-ships over the waters of Boston Harbour. Everybody in England and France knew what the quarrel meant. There was to be no taxation without representation. The modestly liberal political ideas of John Locke were growing in the mind of the world. When the colonists proceeded to declare their independence, and the French, stimulated by this example, rapidly developed the social gospel of the Encyclopædists, the vague body of Whig sentiment in England began to crystallise in two definite forms. The more conservative or the less sincere rallied to the Tories and the King; the more liberal and sincere gathered under the new banner of Radicalism. New popular leaders—Horne Tooke, Major Cartwright, etc.—took up and developed the demands of Wilkes. The failure of the American War, the scandals which (as usual) transpired in the course of operations, weakened the Tories and courtiers, and encouraged the Whigs and Radicals. London and Westminster

were developing a formidable strength. Wilkes, in 1776, tried the temper of the House with a comprehensive reform-measure, but the time had not yet come. Lord North killed it with a few pleasant and graceful remarks in which Pitt's convenient theory of the danger of amputations had a plausible position.

But a sterner man than Wilkes, Major Cartwright, who had asimilated American ideas in the colonies themselves, had now espoused the reform. He was for adult suffrage, the ballot and the single vote. This concrete and admirable program it was which chiefly drew real reformers into a new party, and caused the more reactionary Whigs to ruin the movement by compromise. As Mr Veitch says, they aimed at passing an economic reform, which would strengthen their own position and weaken that of the King's party, and shelving the real political reform, which would affect both Tory and Whig. In 1778 one of their number proposed to exclude contractors from the House. The Bill passed, but it was prevented by the ministry from becoming law. Burke had no greater success with a partial measure in the same year.

By 1780 the reform-sentiment became a reform-movement. Centres of association were formed in the country, and they began to correspond with each other. Petitions were sent to the House. Conferences were held in London. It must be admitted that the movement was by no means purely idealistic. Many petitions came from would-be voters in constituencies where a corporation monopolised the franchise, and monopolised the guineas which a vote represented. In other cases, the chief concern was economy. The movement gathered strength from all sources, except the orthodox Whigs and the Tories, who raised their eyebrows in horror at the growth of " anarchy."

Weariness with the American War broke the

power of the Tories for a time and compelled the King to lean upon the Whigs. At once, in 1782, they grasped their opportunity, and passed the limited and (to themselves) innocuous measure of reform to which they were pledged. Revenue-officers were disfranchised, and seventy boroughs were thus delivered from the influence of the Court and the Treasury. Contractors were expelled from the House of Commons. Sinecures to the extent of £70,000 a year were abolished. In anger and sorrow the clients of the old regime looked out for the end of the world, while the Radicals made each measure of reform the base of a larger demand.

To us who look back the sequel offers no surprise. Political experience down to our own time would enable any man to forecast it. The greater part of the Whigs now quitted the camp of reform and adopted the scare-cries of their Tory opponents. To this point they had benefited by reform. The further reforms which were demanded—and the sketch in the early part of this chapter will show how large and imperative they were—would gravely disturb the basis of the power of the Whigs, and they therefore discovered that the Constitution was in danger and the wisdom of Parliament imperilled. To the Radicals, at the time, it mattered little that Horace Walpole and Fox endorsed the Tory idea of the danger of surgical operations. With them was the younger Pitt, the rising star of the House of Commons, who had entered Parliament in 1781, and pleaded for comprehensive reform. In 1782 he moved for the appointment of a committee. It was refused, and, when he repeated the demand in 1783, under the Coalition-government of Fox and Shelburne, it was again refused. The Coalition was broken, and in 1784 the country faced an election on the reform-issue. In spite of the most impudent use of the machinery of corruption, in spite of harrowing

appeals to save property and the country and the last elements of virtue from the devouring dragon of reform, the country rejected the Coalitionists, and Pitt became Premier.

The reformers prepared their clothes for the inauguration of the millenium, and in 1785 Pitt produced his great measure. It was not heroic. Thirty-six decayed boroughs were to be politely requested to *sell* their " rights " to the nation for one million sterling, and the seats which they had filled were to be transferred to London and the counties. Less than a hundred thousand men would be enfranchised, and every borough and burgage-holder who chose to consider his " rights " worth more than a share in a million pounds, and refused to sell, was to be left undisturbed. Yet the House of Commons refused to consider even this slight alleviation of an intolerable scandal. Lord North launched Tory thunder upon it. Fox and Burke poured Liberal cold water upon it. The House, by 248 votes to 174, refused leave to introduce the Bill!

And there ended the attempt of the eighteenth century to put its squalid political house in order. A few partial reforms were carried. The Radicals pressed for more, and, at the centenary anniversary of the Revolution of 1688, stirred the country to indignation. The fervour of Pitt had evaporated, and a debate on reform in the House in 1790 almost extinguished the last hope. One leader of the House after another defended the execrable system which I have described. Burke assured the House that " the people did not wish for any reform." Wyndham protested, in accents of dignity and sincerity, that " the House of Commons, constituted as it was, answered all the beneficent purposes that could possibly be desired." And Pitt? The great protagonist of only five years ago now suavely observed that, after Mr Wyndham's eloquent speech,

he need only observe that this was no time for changes! He moved the adjournment of the House and it was carried. The political gentlemen of England gave a further lease of forty years of life to the sordid system we have considered.

A new phrase had been invented: "Was it wise to repair one's house during a hurricane?" Blessed be the phrase-maker, for he shall possess the earth. A hurricane—that is to say, a most wise (up to that point) and beneficent reform—was proceeding at Paris. Sound middle-class statesmen still controlled the French Revolution, and nothing had yet been done beyond the suppression of flagrant abuses and political crimes. But the political instinct which, guided by a cynical estimate of the general intelligence, makes forces out of phrases had the good fortune to discover the word "hurricane." It appeared in every journal. It was on every lip. Old Sarum, and the disused pits of Droitwich, and the pig-styes and pigeon-cotes of Richmond, and all the drunken voters and corrupt corporations and corrupting landlords, smiled in the sun once more. Fox almost alone of the politicians of England scorned the trickery. It was useless. From George III. to the fishermen of East and West Looe spread a sentiment of relief. There was a hurricane blowing. They need not repair the national house.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE "GREAT" REFORM BILL

LOOKING back over those years, with our historical charts outspread before us, we trace two developments which were bound to enter into a fatal conflict and prolong the life of corruption. The first was the development of Radicalism, or of a brood of humanitarianism in which the Radicals took the most prominent part. Other strong and earnest men came to the assistance of Cartwright. There were the sturdy Hardy and the impassioned Thelwall. Priestly and the Birmingham Unitarians worked in the Midlands. Horne Tooke stung the metropolis. The Fox (a Liberal) section of the Whigs continued for some years to profess the new principles. Southey (in his first phase) lent his aid. Paine's *Rights of Man* obtained a circulation which threw the King into transports of rage. Reformers flattered themselves that, in spite of the secession of Pitt the moment a shadow of a pretext was offered him, they were on the eve of the millenium. There were Corresponding Societies and Societies of Friends of the People in many places, and the new "citizens of the universe" supported fiery toasts at their dinners. Despotism was doomed. France had lit the world. This corrupt Parliament would not last ten years.

But the French Revolution, to which they all looked, had not proceeded two years before the Friends of the People began to receive very rough treatment from the people. Priestley's house was

wrecked in a terrible riot. London taverns were invaded, and the "pro-French" diners were put to rout. Politicians smiled, and lashed the mob against the French and pro-French. The Revolution entered upon its second and darker phase. Mere Liberals and their poets deserted it, but the more sturdy Radicals held on. We need not study history. The Russian Revolution has followed the same course, and there is the same desperate group of apologists for criminal folly. It did more harm even than verbiage about hurricanes. Parliamentary reform came to be recognised as the cry of a small school whom the masses would hound out of English life; and whom the political leaders now found it easy and even virtuous to extinguish.

On May 2nd, 1793, several petitions for reform were sullenly received at the House of Commons. Mr Grey —as he then was—gravely urged his fellows to consider the matter. He pointed out that it was true that, as was asserted in one of the petitions, no less than ninety-seven members were directly, and a further seventy indirectly, appointed by peers or the Treasury; and that ninety-one Commoners procured the election of a further 139 members of the House. In a word, 306 members, or a majority of the House, represented only the 160 individuals who returned them. By an overwhelming majority, led by Pitt, it was decided not to accept the petitions.

The last chance had gone. War upon France had been declared in the previous month, and it was now treachery to entertain French ideas of rights of man. The cause of God was identified with rights of property. Like maddened oxen the people, the very victims of this chicanery, were driven upon the reformers. There was a hunt for "foreign agitators" and French gold. Special legislation against "evil-disposed" persons began. The societies were suppressed. Many of the stoutest reformers were

sent to Botany Bay; the less stout, and their printers, were intimidated by fines and imprisonment. Pitt, the reformer, inaugurated a "white terror" against English reformers. He very much regretted it, he explained. We are familiar with the language. There were those who recalled the spectacle, which had sent a thrill of admiration through London some years before, of Pitt standing at the open door of the House, vomiting without (from drunkenness on the previous night), and listening to an attack on him by Fox, and then returning to the benches to make a brilliant reply. Was England hopeless? But Pitt was a great man, a splendid worker in the country's need, and from Berwick to Land's End the people rallied to him. Parliamentary reform, said Horne Tooke in 1797, was "dead and buried."

It rose again ten years later. The horrors of the Revolution were growing dimmer in people's memories, and the French War imposed a terrible burden. New men appeared. Francis Place, most priceless of reformers, was secretly reorganising forces in the metropolis. Robert Owen, the greatest idealist of the age, was beginning work in the north. Cobbett was inventing a new language—plain English. Sir F. Burdett spread a new Radicalism in London. The principles of the great Tory jurist, Bentham, were sternly humanitarian. Indeed, in 1809 Bentham issued a *Plan of Parliamentary Reform*, in which he advocated annual parliaments, nearly adult suffrage, and equal electoral districts. His friend and disciple, James Mill, was detaching these sentiments from Tory politics and preparing the way for philosophic Radicalism.

These were small, if pregnant, beginnings, and the political leaders who sucked their oranges in the House gave them no support. In the midst of the war they played their party-game with a reckless-

ness which shocked many who were far from Radicalism. There was a general election in 1807.

> "The great opposite factions," says even the genteel *Annual Register* for that year, "were loud in their accusations of each other. Each maintained that the other grasped at offices . . for the purpose of getting possession of the public money. The people appeared very well disposed to believe both. Both parties, the INS and OUTS, as they were familiarly called, had so uniformly embarrassed government, when it was not in their own hands, and yet so uniformly taken the first opportunity of deserting the cause they had professed to maintain, that the people at large had absolutely lost all confidence in a majority of them."

It is instructive to learn that in that year "the King withheld the subscription of £12,000 with which he was accustomed to assist his ministers for the time being at a general election." There was still, little over a century ago, a *do ut des* contract between the King and the leading politicians. There were worse things. In 1809 a Member of Parliament, Colonel Wardle, who had inherited a discarded mistress of the Duke of York, the Commander-in-Chief, persuaded the lady to give him information which he brought before the House. Mrs Clarke herself had done a roaring trade in illicit commissions, and her princely protector had shared the loot. One scandal dragged others to light, as generally happened, and Perceval was compelled to introduce a Bill against the brokerage of contracts and commissions.

Still the cause of reform languished, and politicians prospered. In 1810 Ernest Jones was sent to jail for protesting against the exclusion from the House of "strangers." The privileged Briton, with his unique system of popular representation, had

still no right to watch the antics of his representatives or read a literal record of their proceedings. Sir Francis Burdett arose in the House and protested. He was committed to the Tower.

There is no need for us to consider the period in detail. Public attention was soon absorbed in the final stages of the titanic conflict with Napoleon, then in the Council of Vienna and the restoration of feudalism in the nineteenth century. A few Whigs, and all the Radicals, protested against this monstrous enthronement of the Holy Alliance on the smothered aspirations of the peoples of Europe, but it suited the bulk of our politicians. They had smelled the mephitic vapours of the pit of revolution, and their comfortable system was to be protected by closing the outlets abroad. London settled down to a new era of peace, prosperity and peculation. The Prince Regent set a glorious example, putting part of the heavy annual price of his luxury and debauch, with the connivance of politicians, on the Civil List. Neither the Spa Fields Riot (1816) nor the Cato Street Conspiracy (1819) disturbed the general complacency. A great meeting in Manchester (1819) was settled by the sabres of the cavalry and yeomanry, and made the pretext for stiffening the law which forbade meetings to demand reform. More leaders of the people were arrested, lodged in the abominable jails of the time, or sent to the penal colonies in Australia.

Canning, whose liberal and humane disposition was shocked by the despotism of foreign monarchs, saw little ground for reform at home. A few more sinecures were abolished. A few measures of no great importance were passed. But the growing mass of the English people, who rotted in the evil underground dwellings and the filthy mills of the industrial north, or were condemned to an ox-like ignorance and endurance over the countryside, were

to remain in that station to which, as peers and prelates assured them, "the Almighty had appointed them." Few then worked less than seventy-five hours a week, or earned more than ten shillings a week. Children down to the age of six and seven toiled twelve hours a day, six days a week, for a penny a day. The moral condition corresponded, naturally, to the material condition. Drunkenness, sexual license, coarseness, brutality and gambling were all but universal. The death-rate was appalling, and the insecurity of life and property a disgrace to what was called civilisation. Ninety per cent. of the people were totally illiterate, and even the physical sunshine was excluded from their homes by a window-tax.

These things concern me only indirectly, in so far as they reflect the character of the politicians who ought to have attended to them. What directly concerns us is that the political system itself was sodden with a corruption that forbade all hope of social legislation. I have given many illustrations of this corruption, but if we are to take the true measure of the "great" Reform Bill of 1832, and the character of the statesmen of the time, we must again glance at the system which they were compelled by public pressure to submit to some modification.*

The forty counties of England returned only 82 members to Parliament, and twenty-four cities returned only fifty members. London had only four members, although it already had a population of a million. In short, of the 489 members who "represented" England no less than 332 were returned by 166 boroughs which had, collectively, little more than the population of London. Large new towns like Manchester and Birmingham had no represen-

* The best account, at length, will be found in E. & A. Porritt's *Unreformed House of Commons* (2 vols., 1903).

tatives. Moreover, the right of voting was so arbitrarily distributed that there were few places in which the majority of the citizens had an opportunity of expressing their wish. At the Westminster election of 1803 the brewer, butler, bell-ringer, gardener, cook and organ-blower of the Abbey claimed the right of vote in virtue of their office. In a large number of places a small and close corporation monopolised the right to vote. At Malmesbury in 1722 this small group of men had extorted a bribe of a thousand guineas for their vote; and it must be confessed that one element of the demand for reform was the desire of other citizens to share this lucrative right, and a large ingredient of the parliamentary opposition was the prospect of having to bribe a thousand voters where hitherto the candidate had needed to bribe only twenty or thirty.

There were, in addition, as we have already seen, burgage-voters: men who held legal titles to certain relics of property to which a vote had once been attached. At Droitwich the right was associated with old pits which had long ago ceased to provide salt. They had returned two members to Parliament during a hundred and thirty years of sterility. At Downton there were a hundred burgages, of which one man held ninety-nine, while the hundredth was a stone in the middle of a stream. At another place the burgage was a plot of land little more than a square yard in extent. In other places pig-styes or pigeon-cotes gave the right to vote. Here and there they were owned by women, and these were not less astute than the men in deriving profit from them. Some of them were, like other property which gave control of seats, bought by the existing government in order to secure its power at the next election. In the reign of George III. ministers bought a number of seats at from two to four thousand pounds each.

Lastly there was, as we saw, a power in many places of completely nullifying an election by creating any number of freemen on the eve, or the day, of the poll. At Bristol in 1812 the election was settled by the creation of 1,720 freemen. At Malden in 1826 a thousand were created. At Gloucester in 1779 there was a manufacture of 513, and at Derby of 426. They were not necessarily residents. At Coventry, in the 1831 election, 235 out of the 426 freeman-voters were not residents. At Colchester, in the same election, there were 900 non-resident freeman-voters. Each party used this weapon without the least scruple. But in most places the existing freemen refused to have the value of their votes lowered by this process of multiplication. A *small* body of voters could expect wine, not beer, on election-day; and the money-gift was in proportion. Lord Penrhyn spent £30,000 in a futile bid for the vote of the freemen of Liverpool in 1790. At the 1830 election a candidate spent £80,000, bribing 2,060 freemen. Where there was fear of an effective petition—which happened once in a generation—the sale of the vote was indirect. Mr Hume assured the House that before the 1831 election the voters at Ilchester, which he knew well, contracted debts to the extent of £85 each. It was the agreed price.

The only statesman of the time who was moved to any sincere resentment of this state of things was Lord John Russell. In 1828 he put forward a motion for the disfranchisement of Penryn and East Retford, and the sordid nature of the system was exposed to all. Both places had indulged in flagrant corruption for decades. Penryn, a Cornish borough with 2,324 inhabitants and only 140 voters, was under the "patronage" of Lord de Dunstanville. In 1802, when a rival to his nominee had appeared, the list of voters had grown mysteriously during the night before the election. These things were prime

jokes in London clubs a hundred years ago. East Retford had a thousand inhabitants and 140 very disputed voters, under the Duke of Newcastle. For sixty years before 1802 the recognised price of a vote had been forty guineas. At the 1802 election the price was known to rise in some cases as high as 150 guineas. The Cabinet could come to no unanimous decision what was to be done in these cases.

For some years Parliament had escaped a general interest in its peculiar corruption because the public mind was absorbed in the question of Catholic Emancipation. When that question was settled, in 1829, the parliamentary reformers, led by Russell, pressed their great issue on the House and the country. The agitation had still, at the beginning of 1830, only faint and remote prospects of success. Whigs supported the Tory Government in resisting even moderate reforms. Suddenly a great change came over the situation. George IV. died and William IV. was believed (wrongly) to be more favourable to progress. A second revolution occurred at Paris, and once more the democratic flame soared until its light penetrated all the dark places of Europe. We quoted, a few pages back, the admirably indignant language of the *Annual Register* on the corruption of our statesmen. In its issue for the year 1830 it uses a new language. "The spirit of change is abroad, wild and indiscriminating," it affirms. "Nothing is easier," it disdainfully tells the Radicals, "than to persuade men that they are entitled to that which will gratify their self-pride, their vanity, and their love of fame." This ludicrous language was the new political dialect. But the struggle is now opening, and we shall become familiar with the accents of the apologists for corruption.

At the general election in the summer of 1830 the country registered a severe verdict on "the Pig

Tails," as Daniel O'Connell called the Tories. The Whigs did not reach power, but wherever the elections were comparatively free, both counties and boroughs went heavily against the Tories. This lamentable illustration of the danger of free voting merely increased their determination, and Wellington put into the King's mouth language which for months received a popular reply in riots, arson, and the wrecking of mills. "I am confident," said the King in his speech, "that they (the people) justly appreciate that happy form of government under which, through the favour of Divine Providence, this country has enjoyed for a long succession of years a greater share of internal peace, of commercial prosperity, of true liberty, of all that constitutes social happiness, than has fallen to the lot of any other country in the world." He was determined, he said, to "transmit these blessings unimpaired to posterity." It was the voice of Wellington and the "old Tories," as some modern Tories—eager to dissociate themselves—put it. It was, in fact, the only sincere element in the whole opposition to reform. When Wellington was challenged by Earl Grey in the House of Lords, he said:

> "The country possesses at the present moment a legislature which answers all the good purposes of legislation, and this to a greater degree than any legislature ever has answered in any country whatever. I will go further and say that the legislature and the system of representation possess the full and entire confidence of the country."

This, I say, was quite sincere; because Wellington and his colleagues believed that the sole aim of Parliament was to protect property, and that "the country" meant the few hundred thousand who possessed property.

More interesting to us than this expiring type of politician is the conduct of the younger and more alert statesmen, Whig and Tory, who saw that the time for this inflexibility was over. In London pamphlets calling "To Arms" circulated freely. In the provinces were seen banners with the strange device, "Blood or Bread." Wellington's idea of opposing his guards to this advancing flood was futile. Politicians had reached the familiar second stage in their code: compromise. Peel, who was invited to replace Wellington as Tory Premier, was secretly assured that prominent Whigs would support him if he cheated the popular demand by a moderate measure of reform. Even Brougham, the idol of the advanced Whigs, disavowed any intention of pressing for a "radical sweeping innovation." But Peel knew that his party would not yield any reform which would satisfy the people, and Earl Grey took the reins.

The psychological study of statesmen is usually pursued with so inveterate a prejudice that none is more genuinely astonished at the result of the analysis than the victim himself, if he be still this side the grave. The sympathetic analyst discovers virtues, the critic discloses vices, of which the statesman had no honest consciousness whatever. Mr Lloyd George probably smiles at some of the eulogious descriptions of himself which appear, while I have no doubt that he raises his eye-brows in mild, naive astonishment at some of the characterisations of him which are current in the warmer zones of the Labour world. He forgets the melodramatic characterisations of his opponents with which he entertained the same people not twenty years ago.

The statesman is a casuist. He does things which lend themselves to dark description, but the frame of mind in which he does them is one, not of villainy, but of factitious virtue. He has, as a rule, neither

time nor disposition to analyse his own sentiments. Even where he carries into public life, as he rarely does, a resolute endeavour to stand well with God and the angels, he quickly develops an art of automatically investing projects with a garment of virtue which is quite invisible to his opponents but quite real to himself. The only humour in Lord Morley's great biography of Gladstone is in the unconscious revelation of this process during the first twenty years of his public life. The wrestles with conscience of that classic athlete are entertaining. Most statesmen attain the same result more easily.

It is material to impress this on the reader when we reach the threshold of a century of Whig activity which brings tears of admiration to the eyes of some, yet draws from others only charges of gross hypocrisy and deliberate deception: which is represented, on the one hand, as a low and interested pander to the crowd and, on the other, as a systematic cheating of the people by yielding an inch where justice required a mile. The Reform Bill of 1832, framed and passed by the Whigs, is coupled by Liberal writers with Magna Charta, or even with the Sermon on the Mount. It stands in our children's school-manuals as one of the most glorious monuments of the struggle of light against darkness. Modern historians are not so indulgent. "It was," says the Honourable George Brodrick, "the crowning merit of the Reform Act, from a Whig point of view, that it *stayed* the rising tide of democracy, and raised a barrier against household suffrage and the ballot. . . . It was a charter of political rights for the manufacturing interest and the great middle class, but it did nothing for the working classes in town or country."* At the time Daniel O'Connell had caustically, and quite sincerely, re-

* In Hunt and Poole's *Political History of England*, vol. xi., p. 307.

marked that it was intended by the Whigs to give them a lease of Downing Street for many generations. A more patient and conscientious critic, Molesworth, says in his *History of England* (ii., 51):

> "The Whig Government, in passing the Reform Bill, had deliberately and intentionally maintained to a great extent the preponderance which the landed interest had always enjoyed by giving so many additional members to the counties and by consenting to allow so many insignificant boroughs in the agricultural districts to be represented in the House of Commons."

Writers and speakers whose interest it is to consider only this aspect of the reform easily conclude that Grey and Russell stand in the long line of our Machiavellian statesmen. The truth is, as I said, that the psychology of such men is more subtle than is usually imagined. It is no more simple than is the psychology of their fiery Radical opponents; just as the respective minds of the Duke of Newcastle and Mr Smillie are by no means so simple in their vice and virtue as the average miner supposes today. Grey and Russell were sensitive to the corruption of the system, and wanted reform. But they were essentially and very narrowly limited by the system, and they determined to keep reform within such bounds that it should not weaken the Whigs and assist the Radicals. They had only to glance at the ninety per cent. illiteracy of the people —which they did next to nothing to alter—to discover a most praiseworthy reason for their restriction.

Grey included seven relatives of his own in the strong ministry which he formed. Most of his ministers were peers and large landowners. Mr Brougham, the popular idol, virtuously refused to be muzzled by accepting a seat in the Cabinet; but

he was just as effectively brought into the syndicate by an offer of the Lord Chancellorship, which he accepted. It was noticed how during the next year or two Brougham kept some great scheme of reform, at which he often hinted, "locked up in his own breast." Russell and a few members of the Cabinet were set to devise a scheme. Grey was no democrat. He expressly stipulated for an aristocratic scheme, and the King had good confidence in him. Popular agitators like Cobbett and Richard Carlile, who would warn people how things were drifting, were handed over to the police. Radical ideas of ballot, adult suffrage, and triennial Parliaments were brushed aside; and the electorate was neatly trimmed so as to get rid of such real corruption as was of no advantage to the Whigs.

The scheme which Russell eventually brought into the House was, in fact, more drastic than the Radicals (on whose vote it more or less depended) had expected. Sixty boroughs, returning 119 members, were to be disfranchised. Forty-seven boroughs were to lose one member. When one recalls that 197 members were returned for places that had less than a hundred voters each, and that 154 patrons returned 307 members, the scheme seems modest enough. But the Tory gentlemen of England fell upon it in tones of quivering indignation and pathetic concern for the nation. Sir R. H. Inglis laid it down that it was the business of Members of Parliament, not to represent the views of constituents, but to "consider the affairs of the country and the good of the Church." As to the "rotten" boroughs, they were a providential part of England's magnificent system. They enabled men of intellect and distinction to fill the House with "useful men," unhindered by the mob; and some of the most eminent of British statesmen had entered the House by that avenue. Peel took up this apology for the

rotten boroughs. Were they disfranchised, the House would soon cease to be "that great arena of talent and eloquence" which commanded the admiration of the world. As to representation, it was the grand character of the existing system that it "enabled every class in the community to have a voice in the election of members of the House." Palmerston, who really cared nothing about reform, quietly reminded his aristocratic friends that the alternative, seeing the state of the country, was revolution. But the Tories were inflexible. Sir C. Wetherell said it was a proposal of "robbery and pillage": a very naive allusion to the value of the vote in small boroughs and corporations.

The Bill passed the second reading by one vote—302 to 301. Infuriated Tories and representatives of the corrupt boroughs (who swarmed about the House) found that the turning vote was that of a Tory-traitor, the Right Honourable John Calcraft, whose conscience had driven him into the Whig lobby. It is on record that he was so persecuted that he committed suicide a few months afterwards. But the Government was beaten on committee, and went to the country.

In the ensuing struggle for "reform" every instrument of corruption and intimidation was used, as never before, by both sides, and the Whigs returned with a large majority—and a weaker Bill. It had a majority of 136 votes on the second reading, and the House settled down to one of its historic struggles on committee. Lest any should be genuinely misinformed, the Government put into circulation some appalling details about the boroughs. Beeralston, Bossiny, and St Mawe's each had only one ten-pound householder; Dunwich, Bedwin, and Castle Rising had two each; Aldobrough had three, Ludgershall four, Bletchingley five, and so on. Beeralston paid in taxes £3, 9s. a year, and

Bramber £16 8s 9d. They returned two members each. Birmingham paid £26,968 a year, and Manchester £40,094. They had no members. Taxation had nothing to do with the matter, the Tories retorted; and with the help of the Irish—who here begin the practice of selling England's birthright for the promise of a mess of Irish pottage—they fought every word of the Bill and canonised every corrupt borough in Cornwall. For forty nights, in the heat of summer, they struggled eight hours a night for our "glorious constitution." In a fortnight Peel spoke forty-eight, and Wetherell fifty-eight times. The Bill passed by 345 to 236 votes.

"What will the Lords do?" It was the question of the hour, but none for a moment doubted the answer. They rejected the Bill by 199 to 158 votes. Grey had made a special appeal to the bishops to act justly. In reply the Archbishop of Canterbury, cheered by the score of bishops behind him, denounced the Bill as "mischievous in its tendency and dangerous to the Constitution." Twenty-one bishops voted against it. There were only two schools in the House—Whigs who thought it a less painful alternative to revolution, and Tories and prelates who cried that it "opened the floodgates" and threatened Church and State. And this was a Bill which touched only 86 of the rottenest of the rotten boroughs, left all the other electoral corruption undisturbed, and enfranchised only half a million respectable citizens!

What would the people do, was the next question. It was six in the morning of October 8th when the Lords gave their decision. That day London shopkeepers kept their shutters up, and there was a run on the Bank for gold. Here and there a rotten borough rejoiced. "Sudbury, famous in the annals of corruption, rang its church-bells and fired cannon." Over the country generally fell the dark

shadow of approaching revolution. Nottingham Castle, the property of the Duke of Newcastle, was burned down. Bristol witnessed days of civil war. Meetings ran to crowds of 200,000 people. The Radical press used language which even an editor in our free age would hastily and shudderingly condemn to the waste-basket. The London *Chronicle* flayed "that obscene renegade Phillpotts" (the Bishop of Exeter), called the Queen a "nasty German frow," and railed at the King's "bastards" and even "their poor, drivelling begetter." "The by-blows of a king ought not to be his body-guard," it roundly said. The next time the King appeared in London his cariage was pelted with mud. Bishops were burned in effigy, and cathedrals threatened with fouling. The workers grimly made pikes out of iron bars, and drilled on the moors. The guards sharpened their swords in the streets.

Let us not claim too much virtue for the Whigs. England was *very* near to civil war in the autumn and winter of 1831; much nearer than seems to be known to those superficial folk who assure each other that Britons, unlike Frenchmen, never think of revolution. All but the blind Tories, who would not mind drowning 'Radicalism' in blood, were terribly impressed by the omens. There must be reform. Lord John Russell brought in a third Bill, little altered, and it passed the Commons. We need not linger over the details. The plan was mooted of creating a sufficient number of new peers to turn the majority in the House of Lords. The Tories seem to have concluded that even Whigs, who after all were English gentlemen, would not stoop to so revolutionary a manœuvre, and six further weeks were spent in obstruction and other waste of time in the first quarter of 1832. Grey resigned, and the redoubtable and stiff-necked Iron Duke assumed power. He had soon to confess a humiliating failure, and

the London mob used such arguments with the King that he was terrified into submission. Grey resumed office, as the King now consented to the creation of new peers. Privately, however, the King advised the Tory peers to withdraw their opposition, in order to prevent the sullying of their high caste, and a sufficient number of them sullenly complied. The Bill passed the Lords by 106 votes to 22.

England was lit from end to end with bonfires. So thankful were our grandsires for small mercies. The ballot was refused. The disproportion of electoral districts was outrageous. Hundreds of members would still sit for constituencies which escaped destruction only because Whig had an equal interest in them with Tory. Bribery and corruption were untouched. Intimidation was as free as ever. Less than a million out of six million adults had a share in choosing their legislators. The Lords could still annul any decision of the Commons, and the King could set at naught both of them. It had taken a grave threat of civil war to win so much. But the country rejoiced. From the slopes of Pisgah Grey and Russell and Brougham announced to the people the land flowing with milk and honey which was to reward their centuries in the desert. Once more to the polls, on the new franchise, and the golden era of social legislation would open. Let us coldly and judiciously survey its achievements. It means a new chapter in the evolution of our politicians.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE "REFORMED" PARLIAMENT

THE general election which was held in 1832 made little difference in the relative strength of parties in the House of Commons. There are historians who affect some surprise at this, but we have seen that it was precisely the result expected, if not designed. The Whigs, who were already in a majority, slightly increased in number. The enlarged county-vote favoured the land-owners, Whig and Tory, and in the towns corruption was more rampant than ever. It was so gross that the House of Commons was compelled to pass sentence of disfranchisement on Liverpool, Stafford, Warwick, Hertford and Carrick Fergus. But the Lords helped their friends out of this little difficulty. They found that there had been *no* bribery, and the most glaring examples yet known escaped punishment. In sum, a solid majority of Whigs confronted an unstable minority of 150 "Conservatives" and 190 Radicals, Irish members, and free lances. The name "Conservative" had lately been introduced and found favour.

But, although the struggle over the Reform Bill had sharpened afresh the antagonism of Whig and Tory, the real note on both sides of the House was conservatism. The Whigs had discovered a new phrase. There were to be no more "organic changes." The strain upon the British Constitution of cutting out a few score boroughs and burgages which were an utter disgrace, and enfranchising a few tens of thousands of ten-pound householders—

quite substantial folk in those days—was so severe that the noble lords who ran the country could not contemplate any further interference with the system of representation. The Radicals, with painful memories of the evils of the last election, pressed for the ballot. The Government refused to hear of it, and Mr Grote, the Benthamite, brought in a Bill. Lord Althorp, the Whig leader, genially represented to the House (while a larger number than ever of petitions for coruption and intimidation awaited investigation) that the Reform Act had substantially put an end to these evils, and the remaining disorders were negligible. Peel went farther than his Right Honourable friend, urging that the House of Commons was already *too* democratic. The Bill was rejected by 211 votes to 106. Year after year, for forty years, grave-minded men would urge this elementary reform of electoral procedure on the House, and not a single eminent politician on either side would listen to them. All of them knew—Grey and Russell and Palmerston, as well as Peel and Derby and Disraeli—that the open vote meant bribery and intimidation.

The Radicals pressed for triennial, instead of septennial Parliaments. Mr Tennyson brought forward a motion, and again the Government used its influence to prevent the reform. It was now unnecessary, they said. One must "give a trial" to the great reform they had just effected. And so on. As to abolishing the property-qualification for Members of Parliament, extending the vote to all householders, reforming the House of Lords, etc., Whig and Tory scoffed at these Radical delusions. The revolutionary movement on the continent had again subsided, and there was no grave pressure. You *must* not mend your house during a hurricane: you *need* not mend it when the weather is good. The Radicals, utterly disgusted with this philosophy,

sick from the frustration of their great hopes of 1832, were in furious and helpless opposition before the end of 1833. The Birmingham Union, the great centre of reform in those days, prayed the King to dismiss his ministers, as they were either unable or unwilling to carry out the work of reform.

Seeing that the Radicals then pressed merely for reforms which seem even to the modern Conservative obvious and elementary, this language will be to many unintelligible. Is it not notorious that the Reformed Parliament at once addressed itself to a constructive program which changed the face of England? What about that long list of glorious measures which adorns the pages of political historians and flows admiringly from the lips of our teachers?

It is undoubtedly true that many measures of great importance were passed, and it would be equally ungenerous and unjust to regard such statesmen as Russell, Grey and Brougham as insensible to the grave injustices of the time until a forest of pikes appeared on the political horizon. They abolished colonial slavery, made considerable improvements in the administration of justice, regulated the labour of children, reformed municipal government, greatly reduced the infliction of capital punishment, reduced the tax on papers and did something for education. But these things must be considered relatively to the times, and one then perceives that the measures were a totally inadequate and partly a reluctant alleviation of a state of things that ought to have inspired any statesman with a "sacred madness" for reform.

Take the position of the children of England. It is well known how, at the introduction of the factory-system, every child in the manufacturing districts, down to the age of five or six, was drafted into it and driven like a slave. When these did not

suffice to build up the fortunes of cotton-spinners, the workhouses of the kingdom were emptied and tumbrils rolled northward from all parts with their loads of orphans and illegitimates. No one cared what became of them. There were no restrictions on hours of labour or forms of punishment, no sanitary regulations, no responsibility for accidents, no inspectors. The whole country knew that colonial slavery was hardly worse than the condition of the children of England. In 1831 the House appointed a Select Committee to investigate the matter, and its report was circulated in 1832. It is one of the most horrible documents, one of the most ghastly indictments, that it is possible to read. Yet the Government proposed to do nothing. The manufacturers were its friends; and *therefore* interference with the free play of economic laws on the labour-market, or with private rights of property, was a very undesirable thing. When humanitarians pressed, Lord Althorp at first refused them Government assistance. The evils were, however, too ironical in face of the zeal to abolish slavery abroad, and a measure was passed. What did it do? It reduced the hours of children between the ages of nine and thirteen to *forty-eight* hours a week, and of youths and maidens below the age of eighteen to sixty-nine hours a week!

Reformers pressed for the education of children, and this was the obvious remedy for the prevailing coarseness as well as—we now know—a means of enriching the country. Considerably more than half the *children* (not the population) of England still received no education at all, and the education of the majority of the other half was a comedy. The State paid not one penny for the work. "There is," said one of the rare liberal prelates of the time, "no record of any people on earth so highly civilised, so abounding in arts and comforts, and so

grossly and generally ignorant, as the English." There was no contemporary nation so rich and able to grant it as England. The Government, partly to oblige capitalists who wanted every hour of the children's time and partly in obedience to the jealousy of the clergy, refused to interfere. When at length they were shamed into doing something, they awarded an annual grant—three-fourths of which went to the Church—of £20,000 a year! Prussia, with a far smaller population and infinitely less wealth, was then spending £600,000 a year on its schools.

It was the same with the administration of justice. The jails were squalid and filthy beyond description. The penal law was barbaric, and the courts were often atrocious. In 1833 a well-known humanitarian witness was driven with scorn out of court (and an innocent man condemned for lack of witnesses) by a London magistrate because the hostile barrister chose to describe him as an unbeliever. All over the country squire-magistrates imposed the most savage sentences for trifling thefts, and treated the people as dogs, or less respectfully than they treated their dogs. Reformers had pointed out the barbarism and stupidity of the system for forty years. Only its most glaring faults were modified by the Reformed Parliament.

The Parliament lasted only two years, when the game of Ins and Outs was vigorously resumed. It was believed that there was a Tory reaction in the country, and the King gladly received the resignation of the Whigs. The country was, indeed, disgusted, and, in spite of the customary Whig circus-parade of "the great measures they had put on the statute-book," their strength was reduced at the 1835 election. The election itself was an eloquent commentary on their plea that no further "organic changes" were needed. Bribery passed all previous

records. The *Maidstone Gazette* (August 1st, 1837) tells us that Wyndham Lewis spent £6000 in securing 529 votes at Maidstone. At Stafford 852 out of 1049 electors were bribed. Corruption was general and notorious. No less than sixty-seven election-petitions were returned to the House. But the balance of parties was so nearly equal that neither side would lose a seat, and the customary machinery for absolving delinquents was used. Such petitions were then tried by committees chosen from the House, and the committees were chosen with care. One knew the verdict as soon as the list of names was published. Daniel O'Connell, who now worked with the Radicals, bluntly accused the absolving members of admitting "foul perjury." The Radicals tried to get the power of adjudging petitions transferred to the law-courts, but the leading statesmen found the proposal a reflection on the integrity of members of the House of Commons.

The stately procession of reform-measures continued under Melbourne, the new Premier, and the Tories made melodramatic forecasts of ruin and revolution. The education-grant was raised, after a furious struggle, to £30,000 a year. The death-sentence for sheep-stealing and coining and similar crimes was abolished. The penny-post was established. Although, when Radicals moved for a further extension of the franchise, Whigs united with Tories and crushed them with a weight of 509 votes to 20, the Tories used such language against the Government that there arose a situation almost unique in English history. It was darkly rumoured that the Tories were conspiring against the throne, and O'Connell chivalrously offered the young Queen, who had just acceded to the throne, an army of 500,000 Irishmen to defend her. How little they knew Queen Victoria! "The industrial and the social evolution," says so little Radical an historian

as Mr Sidney Low, "went on almost unnoticed by statesmen and politicians absorbed in the party-controversies." *

The condition of England was growing serious. Seven years of glorious Whig legislation, under the banner of Reform, were ending in—"the Hungry Forties." The rich, through the growth of machinery and the capitalisation of industry, became richer every decade. The poor became poorer. Consumption sank, and the disordered and clumsy finances showed a deficit of several millions every year. Uneasy at the mood of the country, the Whigs tried an "organic change"; one that would be for their own advantage at the approaching election. They would alter the franchise so as to secure a larger Irish support. They were compelled to withdraw this, and they then sought to alleviate distress, and conciliate Radicals, by a fixed duty on corn.

The election was one of the liveliest and most inebriating on record. Liberals—as they now called themselves—made a banner of the Big Loaf and the Little Loaf, and eloquently recited the long list of their measures. Conservatives—they now positively disclaimed the odious name of Tories—called upon the land-owners to wreck this new threat to agriculture, on the manufacturers to smite for all time these meddlers with their business, on the country generally to save itself from revolution. Corn-Law Abolitionists were now added to the din. Without taking a single penny out of the pockets of the wealthy it was possible to relieve the distress of the poor by abolishing protection. Chartists swarmed in the towns and flourished the famous six points (the ballot, manhood suffrage, annual parliaments, equal electoral districts, the payment of members and the abolition of the property-qualification)

* Hunt and Poole's *Political History of England*, vol. xii., p. 24.

which were to destroy corruption for ever and really inaugurate the millenium.

One gets tired of repeating, although it is historically true, that bribery and corruption were worse than ever. The authoritative record is: "The recent election had been attended by more corruption than ever. . . . New forms of bribery and corruption had been introduced." It is an historic fact that electoral corruption increased after 1832, yet legislators refused for decades to interfere with it. Roebuck pointed out in the House that many petitions had been corruptly compromised: a familiar method of "pairing." A Parliamentary Committee had to report that he was right, and named six boroughs for disfranchisement. "But," says Molesworth, "the persons interested in preventing further proceedings were so numerous" that nothing was done, except the chastisement of one very flagrant borough and a mild and innocuous measure against certain forms of corruption.

Lord Morley's biography of Gladstone is not a critical exposure of the dark ways of politicians, but here, as in many other places, it corrects those who imagine that corruption was confined to a few persons and places. It was at the election of 1832 that Gladstone descended into the political arena. He was, in mood and temperament, a High-Church curate whom an ambitious father had diverted from the narrow path of virtue into the broad road of politics. Under the patronage of the Duke of Newcastle, who only three years before had evicted forty families "for the outrage of voting against his nominee," he stood for "the rather rotten borough" of Newark. Lord Morley does his best for his friend and hero; and indeed it is the peculiar value of this illustration that it relates to the highest-minded statesman who ever governed England. We are assured that Gladstone did not know at the time

how his eloquence was supplemented by "darker agencies." Some things he knew and resented. He poured out righteous indignation when he heard that special constables were not to be had because every man in the town was drunk, and that "a certain proportion of the voters could not be got to the poll without a breakfast," including intoxication. He did not know apparently, that the bandmen, mostly Reds (Tories), were paid fifteen shillings a day (an artizan's wage for a week) for several days. He knew it all when his expenses, which he had strictly limited to a thousand pounds, were returned at more than two thousand. And the point of the matter is that "the fierce battle [against his agents] lasted over many of the thirteen years of his connection." That is to say, corruption was used in his cause at later elections. It is worse to reflect that it was more than half a century before he used his great power to pass a measure against the corruption he knew so well (1883).*

I am tempted to glance at another page of Lord Morley's work which concerns this year, 1841, which we have reached, and reflects a correspondingly low standard in the House itself (in which Gladstone already held a high position). The Government was holding on in the face of defeat for the sheer purpose of completing its meretricious appeal to the constituencies. Peel and the Tories fought just as vigorously to get them out before that appeal was completed. It came to a division of a sensational character in which, it was at first rumoured, the votes were equal. The Liberals then brought in, in a chair, a member who was "reported to be in a state of total idiocy," "and was evidently in total unconsciousness of what was proceeding" (says Mr Gladstone himself). This man, "less human even than an automaton," was borne through the crowd

* *Life of Gladstone*, i., pp. 91-97

of members and added to the Liberal vote. Gladstone's only comment is: "Upon looking back I am sorry to think how much I partook in the excitement that prevailed; but how could it be otherwise in so extraordinary a case?" There are other peculiar consciences besides the Nonconformist. A little less Thomas à Kempis, and a little more Benthamism, would have been better for England.

I am not writing a political history of England, and will confine myself to two points in the Tory rule of the next five years. The women and children of England now had a passionate and singular champion in Lord Shaftesbury, a man whose reforming fervour along one line was accompanied by extraordinary prejudices along others. He painted for Parliament so harrowing, yet indisputable, a picture of the horrors of woman and child life in the mines that even the most hardened politician shudderingly consented to reform. At least, Lord Londonderry alone, a large mine-owner, had the effrontery to mumble the customary phrases about rights of property. The philanthropic Earl was less fortunate in pressing for the education of children. His description of child-depravity, his revelation that there were still in England 1,014,193 children receiving no education whatever, moved the Cabinet to frame a measure to provide some schooling of factory-children, but it was lost in the acrimonious struggle of Church and Chapel for the "souls" of the youngsters.

He then, in 1844, pressed a Bill for reducing the work-hours of women and children in factories to ten per day (six days a week). Sir J. Graham, the Government spokesman, suavely regretted that he must insist on "ten" being changed into "twelve" (for children down to the age of thirteen and married women). He "felt much pain," but, after all,

it was "a question of degree rather than of principle." (It was really a question of the employers of factory-labour being immensely more numerous and important to the Whigs than the employers of children in mines.) Shaftesbury had been taunted with the fact that, while he laboured so zealously for industrial workers, the labourers on his father's estates in Dorsetshire were little better than serfs, and he had fallen back upon their healthier conditions. Sir J. Graham, Gladstone's colleague, "would not examine into the question of comparative salubrity as between agricultural and manufacturing industry." The hours must be twelve per day. John Bright, now a power in the House, more gravely supported the Tory sentence on the women and children of England. He reminded members of "the high wages, and general prosperity and comfort, of the manufacturing population." I have spoken with Lancashire women who were girls in the mill in those days. From cellar-homes in the dingy suburbs of Manchester they were driven at five in the morning to the distant mill. On winter mornings the cold was so piercing that they at times ate their scanty *dinner* on the way to the mill. They struggled wearily through the day without food, and toiled home too tired to do more than eat a little bread and fat and fling themselves, as they were, on what they called beds—until five in the morning. They shall have twelve hours a day of it, said the House, Whig and Tory. Cotton-spinners were formidable folk to interfere with.

The new school of politicians, the Manchester school, was, as is well known, strongly opposed to these vital reforms. I have said that the mind of the politician is peculiarly subtle and casuistic. When we find Lord Morley, in a more than sympathetic study of the most genuinely Puritan of them all, continually asking us to use a large charity

in surveying the careers of politicians, this statement will not seem excessive. Indeed, the lawyer or the man of business may justly plead that the politician is no more entitled to leniency than he, but may not implausibly be subjected to an even more rigorous judgment on account of the further-reaching consequences of his conduct. In the particular matter that concerns us here such a plea is especially forcible. Industrial England was foul beyond words right up to, if not far beyond, the middle of the nineteenth century. The hours and conditions of labour, the squalor and ignorance and burdens of the workers, the disparity of wage and rent on capital, were outrageous. We are taking a broad human and entirely just view when we insist that these early Victorian statesmen must be judged by the England over which they presided. Their omissions, nay, their active hindrance of reform, are then seen to be enormously larger than their achievements; and the moral temper which we find at the root of their omissions and obstructions reflects the enduring taint of our political world.

Bright and Cobden at least hated the party-system, which was responsible for so much of the evil. When Peel began to break with the inveterate protectionist tradition of the Conservative party, in abolishing the Corn Law, Cobden passionately urged him to wreck the party-system. "Let us have an end of this juggle of parties, this mere representation of tradition," he said. Without cynicism, we may reflect that the party-system had thwarted Cobden's aim for ten years. But in founding a "school," instead of a party (if there is any difference), Cobden and Bright rendered a similar disservice. Whether or no the Liberal tradition which they established of excessive economy in defence has not cost us in the long run a hundred millions for every million it saved, on the industrial side the policy of

*laissez-faire* prolonged the horrors of the workers for two generations, planted the seeds of a terrible conflict, and is shown by the logic of events to have been from the first an academic superstition. It has the even worse aspect that it filled the pockets of the rich and kept empty the pockets of the poor. It kept the sunshine in comparatively small areas of the national life.

This, however, was no deliberate aim, however much it may have been a subconscious or semi-conscious impulse, in Cobden and Bright. For them the abolition of the Corn Law was the first expedient in a struggle that has become familiar: how to put a little more in the pockets of the workers without taking any from the pockets of the masters. The fascination of the plan began to dawn on Peel and Gladstone. Then came the terrible potato-blight and famine, sending the scale down with a bang. "This memorable session of 1846," says Lord Morley, referring to the Tory adoption of free trade in corn, "was not a session of argument, but of lobby computations." Parliament was interested (while the country starved) in "the play of forces, the working of high motives and low, the balance of parties, the secret ambitions and antagonism of persons." Peel plunged, and wrecked the Tory party; though the unfailing providence that presides over politics had already supplied an astute and entirely unscrupulous leader, one Benjamin Disraeli, who would salvage the wreck.

Peel fell, and the Whigs came in. At once, in 1846, a new Bill for the reform of the industrial world was introduced. Cobden opposed it, and the House gladly adopted his plea to wait and see if the beneficent abolition of the Corn Law would not do all that was needed. In 1847 Mr Fielden, a humane Oldham manufacturer, brought the House back to the question of the women and children. He

poured bald statistical facts upon his colleagues. Manchester, with a population of 163,856, had nearly 6000 deaths a year, and of these one fourth were deaths of children of less than five years of age. Liverpool was as bad. Their homes were abominable. Their sufferings from disease and death were terrible. Their vices alone flourished. He asked a modest improvement: twelve hours a day, including two for meals, on five days, and eight on Saturdays, for children between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. In short, a ten hours day, or fifty-eight hours a week, of actual work for children! If our politicians were not so blinded by their party-game, they would see that our purblind Education Department, instead of cramming into children's heads long lists of Saxon princes and wars and other rubbish, taught them how different England was even seventy years ago. There would be much less "bite" in Bolshevist oratory.

The House was "appalled," we are told, by the figures, which were read from official publications, and passed the second reading. In plain English, only 87 members had the courage to vote against it, but only 195 had the courage to vote for it! The committee stage was instructive. Hume and Bright sternly opposed the Bill in the sacred name of political economy. Sir Robert Peel, for his party, opposed it in the not less august name of property. "You are," he said, in a passage of singular candour, "giving these classes intellectual improvement; and unless you can remove every law inconsistent with that intelligence, the institutions of the country will be in danger." Being a gentleman, he was, of course, anxious to improve the lot of the people; but not *this* way. He did not suggest a way. In the end, he boldly posed as a champion of the workers. He knew of hundreds of working men who had, with the aid of their children's wages,

made small fortunes. In the name of justice he demanded that this right be not taken from them. The Whig case was stated, neatly, by Sir George Grey. On the maxim, which Gladstone formulated years afterwards, that Liberal wisdom is "to blunt the edge of a grievance," he urged that "ten hours" be changed to "eleven hours." In the Lords, Brougham, the reformer, surpassed his oratorical record in denouncing the Bill. He was in such deadly earnest, the country was in such positive danger of "ruin" from the Bill, that he opened with an invocation of "divine assistance" in pulverising it. But the workers of England were now alive and alert. Chartism and Owenism grew amazingly. The Bill passed.

On the strength of this great legislation the Liberals came back from the polls with an increased majority in 1847. For a time it looked as if they were going to do great things. The change was, of course, in their environment. The flames of revolution shot up once more at Paris. The Chartists made the blood of London run cold. But the fires died down quickly and harmlessly, and the party-game proceeded comfortably. Russell settled down to doing next to nothing, and Disraeli settled down to an attitude of vigilance in case he imprudently ventured to attempt something. Radicals brought in their almost annual motions or Bills for parliamentary reform—the ballot, the abolition of the window-tax, etc., and the government suavely murdered the infants. Cobden pressed the cause of naval economy and of arbitration. Others advocated marriage with a deceased wife's sister, and others a reduction of the scandalous salaries of servants of the Crown. They were all conducted to the lethal chamber. The country was again in great distress. The golden age had churlishly refused to come at the command of the Manchester magicians.

Russell wearily handed over the reins, and there was a Coalition.

Few periods in the history of the party-system are more lamentable than that immediately before and during the Crimean War; into which, indeed, we notoriously drifted through lack of firm and wise statesmanship. Yet there was far more ability in Westminster than there is to-day, and there was never less real party-antagonism. For a time Disraeli had kept together the main body of the Conservatives, apart from the Peelites, on a protectionist platform. That failed, and it is ludicrous to read how the rival politicians strove to *create* rival programs. The situation was a miserable struggle of statesmen for office, complicated by a dread of the practical measures which the state of the country would demand. The reader must glance at the biography of any statesman of the time—Russell, Derby, Aberdeen, Palmerston, Graham, Gladstone, Landsdowne, Newcastle or Disraeli. The time is a maze of ambitions, hostilities and intrigues. Mutual charges of trimming, scheming, deceiving and even lying flew about.

There is, of course, no more harm in a statesman seeking office than in a mechanic seeking to become a foreman. The cant of a certain type of orator or writer (generally "on the make" himself, as we all are) on this point is hardly less repugnant than the effeminacy of the mediæval person who thinks ambition a sort of sin. The mischief comes in when the politician flatters himself that he seeks office, or seeks to expel others from office, for the good of the country. Your politician is, it is true, always convinced that his conduct of affairs will be beneficent, but his casuistic imagination makes this so important that the end begins to justify the means. Hence the "scramble," as Morley calls it, of 1853 (and 1855). He likens it to the antics of carp

" struggling for bread in the fish-ponds of Fontainbleau." Disraeli, excluded from the scramble by his blunders, cynically observed: " The cake is too small." Sir James Graham confided to his diary: " It is melancholy to see how little fitness for office is regarded on all sides, and how much the public employments are treated as booty to be divided among successful combatants."

Out of the struggle emerged Palmerston: a vigorous, generous, cheerful man, a healthy hater of the corrupt European despots, a man not insensitive to social maladies at home, but a born politician. " My lord," said one to him, " I shall be pleased to support you when you are right." " I don't want your support when I am right," said Palmerston, " but when I am wrong." The country liked him; but the country wanted more parliamentary reform, and neither he nor Landsdowne wanted to see it, and hardly any statesman desired it as a matter of justice. The Crimean War—with the usual crop of blunders, born of the seed of political corruption, saved him from the painful need of reforming England. When it was over he recommended the incompetent Duke of Cambridge as Commander-in-Chief of the army.

Peace came at length, and then dissolution; and Bright urged the country to turn down the " set of liars and scoundrels " who formed Her Majesty's Government. Instead, the country scattered the Manchester School and returned Palmerston to power. The election was as corrupt as ever. A recent writer tells from his own recollections how, at that time, the boatmen of Sandwich would vote for a Liberal for three pounds, but, being Liberals, would not vote for a Tory for less than five pounds. The Whigs contrived to get through a *very* moderate Divorce measure (which still left England behind nearly every other civilisation in that matter). They

were beaten in the following year, and the Tories had a turn. Their opponents—the majority—were divided into four bitterly hostile parties, but the quarrels were so largely personal that they could hardly find "planks" for election-platforms.

The one thing the country clearly did want was an extension of the franchise, and each party now saw that it must give a performance on that slack wire if it would attain power. Disraeli unblushingly volunteered. "If," says the historian of the time, "we regard politics merely in the light of a game, in which office is the prize of the most adroit or lucky player, we cannot but bestow unmixed praise on this move on the political chess-board, as being the one that was best calculated to checkmate the opponents of the Government." The Bill, naturally, embodied an astute attempt to enlarge the franchise yet strengthen the Tories; and Palmerstonians, Russellites, Cobdenites and other minorities united to slay it and the Government. The country was dazed and weary. It wanted reform, but it saw the matter "treated entirely as a question between the Ins and Outs," says Mr Herbert Paul. For a change it returned a majority of Liberals, who promised real reform, and they made short work of the tricks by which Disraeli tried to cling to power.

Palmerston was compelled to let Lord Russell introduce a reform Bill. "In 1855," Gladstone had said in the House, "my noble friend escaped all responsibility for reform on account of the war: in 1856 he escaped all responsibility for reform on account of the peace: in 1857 he escaped that inconvenient responsibility by the dissolution of Parliament: in 1858 he escaped again by the dissolution of his Government." Gladstone—who himself showed not a spark of concern for reform—did not love Palmerston, who detested all creeds and Churches. But Palmerston knew that he was not

yet cornered. The majority of the members wanted to escape reform if they decently could. Russell's Bill was received coldly, debated languidly, and withdrawn. "There can be no doubt," says Molesworth, "that many a member sent to the House of Commons because he was believed to be a strong and honest reformer was secretly doing his utmost to defeat the small modicum of reform which the Government was willing to concede, because they knew that the adoption of a Reform Bill would be followed by a dissolution." * Bright used stronger language about this cynical violation of "solemn pledges." As an historian, who is not a Radical, says: "Members who had had to pay somewhat dearly for their seats felt no desire to support a measure which might send them back to their constituencies almost before they had become familiar with their duties." It was the burning question in the country, yet on some nights of the debate the House was counted out.

Palmerston marked time, as far as social legislation is concerned, for five years. A reform Bill was brought in almost annually. It was as good a joke as Women Suffrage would be to a later generation of politicians, though there was still hardly a workman in England who had a vote. In 1865 the Government dissolved, but Disraeli and his Tories were obviously just as fraudulent as the Liberals, and Palmerston returned to power. I will give later the authentic evidence of no less ecclesiastically-minded a person than Sir John (Lord) Acton stooping to buy the votes of shopkeepers in this election, in the Liberal interest. The country resounded with the cry of reform and wallowed in corruption.

But Palmerston died in the same year, and the bells which tolled for him "sounded the knell of the ten-pound-householder, the real ruler of the nation."

* *History of England*, iii., 164.

Gladstone, now Liberal, led the Commons, and he and Lord Russell decided that it was their duty to introduce a Bill at once. Their followers cursed their conscientiousness, and it had the expected reward. Robert Lowe and a company of seceding Liberals attacked it fiercely, and Disraeli took advantage of the situation.

The Tory ministry was formed in July 1866, and it needed all the political cunning and effrontery that Disraeli could command. The country was aflame for reform, but Lowe and the Adullamites would regard it as dishonourable trickery if the Tories brought in any Bill resembling that which had occasioned their temporary alliance. One of the great chapters in the history of the political game opened when in February 1867, Disraeli produced his proposal. They would proceed, he said, by resolution, not introduce a Bill, and the House would, of course, see that a rejection of the resolutions would not involve the fall of the Government. The House laughed at the impudence of his suggestion, and he produced the Bill which he had in reserve.

Nominally, it enfranchised all ratepayers; but a series of "fancy franchises" gave additional votes to clergymen, lawyers and educated people generally, so as to reduce its democratic perils. The Liberals were baffled and annoyed. Disraeli had stolen their electoral wares. They pressed amendments, and Disraeli gracefully yielded. When the amendments were Radical, the Liberals themselves (fearing a dissolution) would not support them. Old Tories tearfully predicted the crack of doom. Adullamites gnashed their teeth at the cynical betrayal. Lowe bitterly observed that "the Right Honourable gentlemen opposite" had "given no indication of the extreme facility of changing their opinions and lending themselves to the arts of treachery." Dis-

raeli heatedly advised the Right Honourable gentleman not to be so free with the word "infamy," for he (Lowe) had done the same thing in 1859. Lord Cranbourne (Salisbury) said the Bill was "a political betrayal which has no parallel in our annals." Gladstone (who suffered plural voting until the day of his death) denounced the dual vote as "a gigantic instrument of fraud."

"When thieves fall out"—Demos gets a little of his own. The Bill became law. Parliament was again reformed. The measure stands in Conservative electioneering literature as one of the glorious monuments of the party. Lord Derby merely claimed at the time that he had "dished the Whigs." Disraeli probably trusted his peculiar eloquence to keep on the straight path the working men he had been forced to enfranchise. After all, he may have reflected, they were less critical than ten-pound householders. "Few great changes," says Mr Sydney Low, "have come about with less evidence of principle and conviction on the part of those mainly concerned in it." Disraeli, who was not haunted by such reflections, enjoyed a delicious six months' performance on the parliamentary slack-wire. Lord Derby resigned, or handed him the Premiership. If the Liberal majority turned him out, they would have to appeal to the country on the old franchise, and therefore have to appeal again as soon as the new franchise was good. It was the game at its most piquant. Disraeli danced until the autumn. Then the general election bade him disappear—ungrateful country!—and the great period of Gladstonian Liberalism opened.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AMERICA INVENTS THE CAUCUS

At this point in our consideration of the evolution of political corruption it is necessary to pass from the Old to the New World. We are going to see a new form, which will provide a more modern and subtle element of demoralisation, introduced into British political life. Birmingham, at this point, begins to use "the Caucus"; and, although the theory must not be pressed too far, there is a general agreement that the idea of the new "machine" was borrowed from the United States. It is, at all events, clear that the systematic organisation of political life in the United States, and its usefulness for party-purposes, began to react upon England. Until 1868 there was little organisation in this country. There were recognised dynasties of leaders of the great parties, generally peers, and through other peers and landowners they secured that a certain number of constituencies should be either "Whig" or "Tory." The result was obtained by a lavish use of money and of the dominant local influence. The new party, Radicalism, having little money or influence and large professions of political virtue, would now seek a counterpoise in the democratic organisation of votes; and this would in a few years be perverted by the oligarchy and subdued by the prevailing taint.

During the period immediately preceding the Revolution in the American Colony there was a division akin to that of Whigs and Tories in England.

Some of the colonists were for the peaceful inducement of England to redress their grievances: some were for violent procedure and independence. They, in fact, called each other Whigs and Tories, and no doubt the contrast of political temper was of long standing. Boston, the great centre of disaffection, was one of the most intense foci of political life, and its clubs and societies quickly reflected the fire of the time. It is recorded by American historians that thirty years before the Revolution groups of the more prominent citizens of Boston used to meet at times and "make a Caucus"; that is to say, to settle between themselves the nominees for whatever elective offices there were. The absence of a great political centre, a native Parliament, compelled the ambitious to look the more eagerly to local offices, and, as usual, a spirited few took advantage of the supineness of the majority. A secret confabulation, over a glass of spirits and a pipe, appointed the candidates, and the conspirators then worked for their appointment. One such society became known as "the Caucus Club." The origin of the word is lost, and a number of ingenious theories fill the gap in our knowledge; but, although it is not the most accepted theory, one inclines to the view that it comes from an Indian term for such conversations. Such societies, and the "Sons of Liberty" and "Daughters of Liberty" which arose on every side, soon extinguished the last traces of Tory, or pro-English, feeling, and America, luckily for the world, began its separate evolution.

Some years later the outbreak of the French Revolution, which had been in no small part inspired by the American Revolution, led to the creation of a number of "Democratic Societies," on which the wealthier and the governing elements frowned. As the French Republicans went from excess to excess, and ended in imperialism, these societies fell into

discredit, but from them is derived the name of the second of the great political parties of America, the Democrats.

It was, however, another and more immediate issue which rent the new State into two factions. In framing the Constitution statesmen had at once encountered the very delicate problem of finding a just balance of power between the central national authority and the constituent States of the Union. Some such difficulty was encountered later, in Australia, and will always be experienced. By difference of temperament men divided into those who laid the greater stress on central authority and those who were more jealous of liberty. To some extent this was accentuated by a difference of environment. The townsman favoured centralisation, the patricians of the agricultural provinces preferred decentralisation; and the French fervour, which was greatest in the towns, was all on the side of central national authority. Men like Madison and Hamilton led a Federalist (or Nationalist and Democratic) movement against the Anti-Federalist forces under Jefferson.

The Constitution was inevitably a compromise, but the struggle continued for a generation as a conflict of rival tendencies in the interpretation of the Constitution. Two very sharply opposed parties were developed, and the multiplication of political offices, in the State-legislatures and at Washington, opened out a large field for ambition, intrigue, and conflict. The choice of Washington as first President was, of course, spontaneous and national; and Adams—in spite of the opposition of Hamilton—succeeded him without a material use of party-machinery. Both these were Nationalists or Democrats (a word then little used), and the Anti-Federalists remained on the opposition until they contrived to get Jefferson elected in 1800. It was now their turn to reduce

the Democrats to powerlessness, and by 1820 the antagonism of the parties was lost, apparently, in an "Era of Good Will." We shall see how and why it revived.

But what mainly concerns us is to see how the flavour of (supposed) ancient Roman virtue of revolutionary days developed into the extraordinary corruption of American politics. The "caucus," we remember, was a meeting of a small group of forceful citizens in some domestic or convivial environment who agreed to promote the election of certain men (largely themselves) to the elective offices. In this there is no corruption, unless we choose to regard as such the exploiting for the triumph of their own ideas of the general apathy by a spirited few. There were now far more, and more important, offices to be filled, and caucusism had a proportionate development. One must recall the conditions of the time in America. As late as 1800 there were only 4,500,000 people scattered over the existing States, and in immense regions communication was difficult, and an election a vastly different matter from what we know it to-day. Once therefore the (presumably) best men, or politically best-educated men, of a State were concentrated in the capital of that State, their recommendation of candidates would naturally have great weight. The division of parties increased the disposition of electors to rely on such recommendations, as the leaders of the party were better judges of what was regarded as a vital need.

There thus sprang up a party-caucus of each type at every centre of State-legislature, and from it a "ticket" was issued recommending candidates for the Governorship or for minor offices. The caucus soon extended its operation to the nomination of Electors (the men elected to elect the President). The local caucus attended to municipal offices. The

national caucus at Washington, in fine, was soon discovered to have, not merely higher ability to direct, but the advantage of a central position, and it began to spread the net of its influence over the whole land.

Hamilton and Madison may be said to have initiated the work by their efforts to exclude Adams from the Presidency. There was nothing corrupt in the measures they took, and the motive was defensible; but such interference was against the spirit, if not the letter, of the Constitution, and it set up a precedent. The Anti-Federalists, who had expressed warm American indignation at the conduct of Hamilton, set up a secret caucus of their own at the next election and secured the return of Jefferson. In 1804 their caucus and its operations were quite open, and from that date the Congressional caucus was a recognised institution. There were protests in the various States, which could do no more than *suggest* names to the central caucus at Washington, but the Congressmen held their ground firmly. Their opponents, the Democrats, were for twenty years reduced to a negligible force. In the country the Democrats were accused of favouring the English idea of a central despotism, and were even suspected of monarchist plots.

Another step in the direction of corruption was taken by Jefferson and his friends, though assuredly Jefferson had no idea of acting unworthily. Washington and Adams had, in assigning offices, looked only to the fitness of applicants. They might strain the qualifications here and there in favour of some meritorious survivor of the War of Independence, but they did not use their power to exclude political opponents. Jefferson, with the familiar casuistry of a politician, concluded that it was important to the country that office-holders should have "sound views." He removed 124

officials from the administration, and took some care that Republicans—a name which now came into use —filled the vacant places. No one then foresaw the future scrambles for "the spoils of office," and all the insufferable abuses to which this apparently patriotic principle would lead.

In the States themselves another germ of corruption was developing. The American Constitution, which one must not call primitive, but which one may describe as the outcome of the best wisdom of a small population in the eighteenth century, laid it down that each State must appoint a small number of Electors who would then choose the President of the Republic. The State was left to settle its own method of nominating the Electors, and the political eagerness of a few, which so easily passes into corruption, found an opening here. It was usual at first to divide a State into districts, each of which should have one Elector. The practice soon set in of altering the districts so as to include a majority of voters of a particular party, and a new word was added to the vocabulary of political corruption. "Looks like a salamander," said one man, looking at a 'revised' map of a district issued by Governor Gerry. "You mean a Gerrymander," said another; and "gerrymandering" entered the dictionary of politicians.

The normal method of obtaining the electors was to issue a list of candidates for the whole State and let people vote on them. Here the caucus at the capital of the State found an opportunity, and it issued the "ticket." Local caucuses were consulted in drawing it up, but the whole business was dominated by party-interests and personal greed. With the "Revolution of 1800," or the triumph of the Jeffersonians, the struggle became more acrimonious, and the corruption deepened. Champions of the oppressed minorities began in Congress to make

eloquent complaints about the decay of the primitive purity of American politics. The caucus was fiercely denounced as tyrannical, and the orator, Randolph, admitted that the appointment of Electors had become, in forty years, "a mockery—a shadow of a shade." The Senate passed a measure for the restoration of the district-system, but the House of Representatives protected the caucus and its ticket. Differently from in the Senate, where large and small States were equally represented, the more populous States had a majority in the House of Representatives, and they had an interest in the existing system.

New York was, meantime, rising to a position of importance, and in the third decade of the nineteenth century it contributed a fatal element to the political development of the United States. So far we have seen manoeuvres which only a purist would designate as corrupt, and we can well imagine the politicians of America pouring virtuous scorn on that political condition of monarchist England which we have considered. They probably made no allowance for the extreme difficulty of uprooting abuses in a country where the traditions are centuries old and the development is continuous. We have now to see how, in spite of their scorn of England—a disdain still instilled into the young in American schools by the teachers dwelling on the state of things we abolished in 1832—in spite of the political virgin soil they had for creating reformed institutions, they engender a political corruption which is almost without parallel in the civilised world. Politics has a peculiar attraction for the ambitious, because here the successful man has an immeasurably larger share of public notice and flattery than the successful merchant or lawyer. When large material gain is added to this soothing of one's vanity the struggle for office becomes more intense

and less scrupulous, and the character of the aspirants sinks lower and lower.

Amongst the patriotic societies founded on the eve of the War of Independence there had been started at New York a " Society of St. Tammany." The name is not known in the Martyrology of the Church, but true Americans must have an American patron, and a dead Indian chief was jovially decorated with the aureole of sanctity. In 1789 this society was revived as a democratic organisation with the kind of Indian rites and ceremonies which American lodges still often adopt. Its aim was to check the wealthy and sustain the principles of the French Revolution. In time it adopted the Jeffersonian or Anti-Federalist side in national politics, and toward the close of the century it found an able organiser in Aaron Burr and became an effective and unscrupulous machine for controlling votes. This machine was used on Jefferson's behalf in the 1800 election, and the Tammany men claimed that they won the Presidentship for him. Jefferson did not allow the claim, but he richly rewarded the New Yorkers with offices, and the scent of Tammany for spoil grew keener. How it then organised completely for the control of the city, how in a few years its leaders defrauded the city of a quarter of a million dollars, will be told later. Let us first follow the development of national politics.

By the third decade of the nineteenth century New York and other corrupt cities were contributing low and greedy types of politicians to the central body, and the early tendencies were accentuated. The old division of parties was in decay, though there was still a general antagonism on such issues as the National Bank and other Federal proposals, and personal ambition was more pronounced. A group of covetous men would choose someone with a plausible qualification and trust to enrich them-

selves by his patronage if they made him President. Senator Van Buren, of New York, the successor of Aaron Burr, adopted General Jackson, a poor statesman but very popular soldier, and the Tammany machine was set to work all over the country. Adventurers of the lowest type were enlisted in the campaign, and America generally had its first great lesson in corruption. Jackson was elected (1828), and the election was followed by the first open and sordid scramble for "the spoils of office." Jackson was an upright man, but he had employed corrupt men and their clamours drowned his scruples. His predecessors had discharged, collectively, only seventy-four public officials. Jackson displaced two thousand in the first year of his Presidentship, and let his greedy followers into key-positions of the administrative system. As he was re-elected in 1832 —the new men taking good care of their own re-election, for they would certainly fall with their President—the machine had eight years in which to fasten itself on the country.

America was now definitely handed over to the mercies of professional politicians; and English politicians, even of that remote date, were virtuous in comparison. The "caucus" had been generally superseded by "Conventions," in which delegates of the voters met to decide on the adoption of candidates. The new politicians captured the Conventions by the now general method of direct or indirect bribery, and controlled the nominations from the ward up to the highest office. Where a sufficient number of voters remained unattainable by corruption, violence was ruthlessly organised and the grossest fraud was used in manipulating the returns. Every official, even police-official, belonged to, or was paid by the party. Each of the great parties, which began about 1835 to style themselves formally Republican and Democrat, had such an organisa-

tion. The weary and bewildered voter registered as he was directed, or as he had contracted, or else remained aloof from the sordid traffic of political life.

The economic crisis of 1837 and the repeated exposures of the "graft" that was now unblushingly levied more or less awakened the country. America was never without statesmen of the nobler type, and a high proportion of the citizens regarded with shame the appalling lapse from the idealism of the days of Washington and Adams. Unhappily, many of the best citizens were, as in all countries, unwilling to have anything to do with the squalid game of politics, even to the extent of casting a vote, and the remainder could not put together an effective organisation without imitating some of the irregular methods of their opponents. You need some courage to face the poll when you know that the polling-station will be guarded by the "ward-heeler" and his gang of bullies (with bribed police looking on), that your vote may have already been cast by someone who has impersonated you or neutralised by two men with no right to vote, and that the returns may be falsified to any extent. High-minded leaders like Clay would not consent to adopt any of these methods after denouncing them for years in Congress. General Harrison, a straight but dull-minded man, was chosen as candidate by the Whigs (the reformers), and, to the slogan of "Away with the Spoilers," they swept him onward to the supreme office.

It made little difference to America except that a new and piquant feature was added to political life. Probably no spectacle in America is to-day so bewildering to the Englishman as the carnival or pandemonium which accompanies the adoption of a candidate for the Presidentship at the Convention of one or other of the great parties. Much allow-

ance must be made for difference in social traditions. I say traditions, not temperament, as the popular sort of psychology in America which diagnoses the differences between the English and the American character is absurd. "The American wears his heart on his sleeve," I heard an American orator say, to resounding applause, "and the Englishman wears it—where God put it." It is, of course, supposed to be a virtue to wear it on your sleeve. Everyone who knows America knows how superficial this is. The American social tradition, still saturated with colonial qualities, is more expansive and boisterous than the English. On a summer's day, in an outer suburb of New York itself, you may meet a company of middle-aged *patresfamilias* dressed as Indians and acting the part, following a custom of their "lodge." Prick the skin of one of them, and you may find that he was a sober Englishman twenty years earlier. His heart is still in the same place; but he is in a new social world.

At the 1840 election, however, there was a definite and deliberate beginning of the wilder features of a Presidential campaign. Harrison was a mediocrity who had not even the military ability which was supposed to have qualified General Jackson for the position of supreme statesman. He would not fire the imagination of the country; so the party must fire the imagination of the country with a poetical picture of him. Mammoth-parades, torch-light processions, prodigious banquets, massive flag-waving, etc., were introduced in order to simulate (and thus eventually create) the enthusiasm which was lacking. A London crowd will enthuse over anything if you give it the chance. An American crowd will enthuse over nothing, because the enthusiasm itself is worth while.

Harrison was, as I said, carried into office to the tune of "Away with the Spoilers." As soon as he

was installed the lusty chanters crowded round him, clamouring for " the spoils of office," and he had to yield. The spoil was now richer than ever. Railways had begun, and securing a concession for these and other public works meant enormous illicit wealth. You got a monopoly against a city or a State and worked accordingly. People slept in the corridors of the White House to besiege the President in the early morning. Harrison succumbed in a few weeks, and the Vice-President, Tyler, succeeded him. He was less fit for the office than Harrison, but the sacred Constitution put the country in his power. To secure his position at the next election he discharged public officers (even Harrison's men) right and left, and created a Tyler-bureaucracy. The administration became fearfully corrupt. Even judges were appointed for a few years, and justice was bought and sold. A period of seventy years' immunity for certain types of grave crime began in many parts of the United States. Corruption in the State-legislatures and the cities throve proportionately. Politics became one of the most lucrative and least exacting professions in America.

The struggle over slavery and the Civil War infused some sincerity into this shocking world. Both parties were rent by the abolition-question, and Lincoln was at length elected on a principle. Even at this juncture, however, the old practices were employed. Without Lincoln's knowledge his supporters bargained with the delegates of Indiana and Pennsylvania, promising that two notoriously unworthy nominees of theirs should enter Lincoln's cabinet in return for their votes. Lincoln was forced to keep the compact. He (and most of the leading Republicans) wished to purify the system, and to distribute offices equally amongst the two parties. But the Democrats generally sided with the South, and there was the usual hecatomb of partisans of

the fallen power. Over and over again the party-organisers compelled Lincoln to make unworthy appointments. "Jones (the party-boss) is President," said Lincoln sadly.

The momentary triumph of the Republicans led, at the death of Lincoln, to the complete demoralisation of the party. The Democrats being discredited for office, the Republicans invaded the conquered South, enfranchised the negroes, and organised the vote. Some of them, it is true, were idealists of the Abolitionist-school, but the majority were "carpet-baggers"—the name is here added to the American political vocabulary—of the familiar type. They captured or sold the public offices, appointed their own judges, levied commissions on contracts, and ruthlessly plundered States and cities. Republican leaders directed the campaign from Washington. The dispossessed whites of the South sullenly reorganised as a Democratic party, and a struggle of great virulence and unscrupulousness ended in a "solid South" for the Democrats.

The party-organisation of one side or the other now completely overshadowed the Executive, which was rarely strong. A Congressional Campaign Committee at Washington arranged and controlled the elections of members of Congress throughout the country, directed the President in the exercise of patronage, and drew up a regular tariff for aspirants to office. One paid a specified sum to the party-funds, and one then proceeded to extort as much as possible from the position or the contract which one obtained. We shall see this in more detail presently, when we consider local politics. But the very centre of the corruption was the capital of the State or of the Republic which ought to have sternly crushed it. It was a time of great industrial expansion, and "boodle" and "graft" attained the monstrous growth of Mesozoic reptiles. "A net-

work of rings surrounds Congress," said a writer in the *North American Review* as early as 1869. An attempt was made, in the interest of the people, to check the disastrous grants of railway-monopolies, but the companies defeated the authorities by means of their bribed representatives in Congress or in the State-legislature and did what they liked in the country. Hardly an enterprise could be started without the payment of " boodle " (bribes), and the corrupt speculators could then rely on the police and the judiciary to overlook their exploitation of the public.

General Grant was promoted to the White House, and the political world was, if anything, still further corrupted. After the customary instalment of his partisans in office a system of espionage and secret denunciations was evolved, and the terror was worse than ever. The pretext was that the South was still dangerous, and it was essential for the preservation of the Republic to " strengthen the party." Everybody knew that the real loyalty taken into consideration was the loyal payment of the " voluntary " contributions to the party-funds which had been promised when office was secured, and that hundreds of sordid adventurers were at hand seeking to displace the fortunate man. The idealists who had entered the party in the fight against slavery were now elbowed out of it, and the lower type of politician, largely of Irish extraction, made of it an environment in which he alone could prosper.

Such was the evolution of the political corruption which grew up in the virgin soil of the new Republic: a corruption which is even now very far from destroyed in America. President Hayes (1876-80) tried to scotch it, but failed. Under Garfield it met little check; and the restraint which President Cleveland put on it almost died away under his successors, Harrison and M'Kinley. As the South

was plainly seen to be loyal after 1870, there was no clear principle on which the parties contrasted. On the tariff and currency questions each party was itself divided. They were bent only on preserving the corrupt system and its spoils. In 1883 a rising anger in the country led to the passing of a measure which opened public offices to competitive examinations and forbade "contributions" by members of legislative-bodies or office-holders. But within a few years the muddy stream had found underground channels. One could still buy a judgeship for $15,000, or a seat in Congress for $4,000; and the position was worth far more on account of its opportunities for boodle and graft. Politics remained, and remains, a "game" of a kind hardly intelligible to the Englishman.

In order to understand both the value of this power for which men struggled and the reason why the corruption flourished right into the twentieth century, we must glance at local politics. Tammany had, as we saw, inaugurated the corruption at New York, but Mr G. Myers, the impartial historian of Tammany, assures us that "the Whigs sought in every possible way to outdo Tammany in election-frauds . . . and in fiscal frauds they left a record well-nigh equalling that of Tammany. The Native Americans imitated both Whigs and Tammany men, and the Republicans have given instances at Albany of a wholesale venality unapproached in the history of legislative bodies."* For more than a hundred years the greatest city of the New World was exploited by rival broods of politicians to an extent that seems incredible to denizens of the "effete and despotic" Old World. One corrupt gang, the Tweed gang, cost the city of New York at least $160,000,000, on the lowest computation, during a short spell of power.

* *The History of Tammany Hall*, p. x. (1901).

Right at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Tammany Society captured the city of New York, thinly veiling its operations with a program of charity and benevolence. It organised the votes in every ward, and bribed or terrorised the voters. As early as 1806 its leaders began to be convicted of fraud, and from that date until 1900 there was hardly one of its prominent men who was not involved in theft or swindling. In a few years, in the first decade of the century, the city showed a deficit of quarter of a million dollars. In 1811 Tammany Hall was built out of these illicit gains, and the Tammany Society (which secretly controls the Hall and its work) has found it convenient at times to insist on the nominal distinction of the two. By 1816 the Tammany men controlled both the city and the State, issued tickets for all offices, and regulated every election. They were, in theory, still the democratic representatives of the people against the Pro-English plutocrats. The people met in their wards to choose delegates for the Tammany Council. But the leaders, the professional politicians, were rapidly accumulating wealth and binding to themselves, by golden chains, a sufficient body of adherents to ensure the realisation of their corrupt policy. They put creatures of theirs in the police and the courts, and they allotted to each other, or sold to outsiders, blocks of land which are now invaluable. The stream of gold, or silver, trickled down as far as the wards, and the entire system was cemented by mutual interest.

The result became apparent in 1826 and 1827, when the grossest frauds were discovered. Several leaders were convicted of embezzling millions of dollars. They escaped punishment, as a rule, but America was astounded at the disclosure of electoral corruption. Loads of men, generally vote-less aliens, were openly driven from poll to poll on election days

and permitted to vote at each. Voters of the opposing side were robbed of their votes, or the votes were registered for Tammany. Bribery was common. The system was used on behalf of General Jackson at the Presidential campaign, when thousands of fictitious votes were cast for him in New York. The bosses were proportionately rewarded, and the benefits percolated to the lower strata of the system.

Robert Dale Owen and his "Working Men's Party" boldly assailed the monster in 1829. But Tammany successfully raised the cry that the tenets of the Owenites, the most idealist party of the first half of the nineteenth century, were "subversive of morality," and continued its career of plunder and violence. Common voters were paid five dollars a vote. Members of the city Council and the State-legislature were bribed to grant franchises (monopolies), charters, etc., to the men who paid Tammany. It is estimated that the "machine" was now worth about half a million dollars a year. An Equal Rights Movement next (1834-7) organised against Tammany, and helped the Whigs to power; but between incompetence and corruption—which was tearfully exposed by Tammany when it returned to power—the Whigs lost favour and the old system returned. The police and judiciary were now completely corrupted. New York was dominated by a sympathetic league of politicians, magistrates, police, gamblers, criminals, and prostitutes.

In the forties violence was organised. Men brought "gangs" to enforce their nomination at the Council or secure their election in the wards. Nominations were put up to the highest bidder, and dummy nominees were created to raise the bids. Regiments of "repeaters" (men who voted over and over again, whether they had a vote or not) were organised and conducted about under the smiling

eyes of the Irish policemen. "Ward-heelers" (bosses of gangs which dominated wards) were paid to use violence, or refrain from violence, as the case might be. Whig wards sold their collective vote to Tammany, and Tammany wards sold their vote to the Whigs. Bloody fights kept away sober folk from the polls. Their votes were registered for Tammany, and thousands of voteless men were hired to vote. In the 1844 mayoral election 55,086 votes were cast in New York. The total number of legitimate possible voters was 45,000. An English election of the same period was a picture of innocence by comparison; and the corruption of the politicians themselves was just as far beyond that of English politicians. A series of disclosures in 1853 sobered America for a time, in spite of its excessively indulgent disposition. New York was sodden with corruption, yet in three years the saloons were as busy as ever organising sham-voters, paying bullies to intimidate respectable voters or smash doubtful ballot-boxes, providing repeaters, and handing out twenty-five dollars each to genuine voters. Apparently, the disclosures of 1853 had whetted appetites. At the 1856 election the chief of the police had given a holiday (to help in his own election) to nearly all his men, and the city is described as resembling a battlefield. Two rival gangs fought on the streets with guns and barricades, and ten were killed and eighty wounded. In 1864 the Republicans had to bring 6,000 troops to New York to preserve the peace during the election.

The service of the city (which is, over large areas, bad enough to-day) was intolerable. All officers were appointed for party-reasons or for money. A sanitary inspector, whose qualifications were tested by asking him the meaning of "hygienic," thought it meant "the odour arising from stagnant water." He knew, at least, what ought to be dealt with in

New York. Candidates for the police were, if they could pay the tariff, tested by being asked to read the large-type title of a newspaper. State-police and city-police fought on the streets, and had to be separated by soldiers. The State-legislature was, in both branches, just as bad as the city Council. Democrats and Republicans sold everything that was saleable. Five bills in 1860 cost the promoters quarter of a million dollars. One group of thirty legislators, organised for hire or purchase under a boss, were known as "The Black Horse Cavalry."

Yet New York had not yet touched its lowest level. The "boss system" replaced the clique system in the sixties, and the extortion was unparalleled. Boss Tweed spent $100,000 on the stables attached to his country-house, and his associates were only a little less rich. All the judges worked with him, and even murder was rarely punished. About 30,000 thieves, 3,000 saloons, 2,000 gambling dens, and an incalculable number of prostitutes paid weekly tribute. The newspapers were nearly all subsidised—the *Sun* proposed the erection of a statue to Tweed—but in 1871 the *Times* began to expose the gang, and, after a long and thrilling fight, Tammany was defeated at the election. Tweed went to jail, and his gang was dispersed. In three years it had corruptly accumulated at least a hundred and sixty million dollars. Yet Tammany was in power again in 1874, and Boss Kelly (1874-84) emulated the career of Tweed, and Boss Croker (1886-97) followed and discreetly emulated Kelly.

It is needless to tell the more recent record of New York. There was a "reform" in 1890, and Tammany was back in 1892. There was another reform later, and Tammany was back in 1904. There has been a prolonged and most devoted struggle for reform in the last twenty years, but the whole world knows how deep the corruption was until at least a

few years ago. In 1910 a high-minded merchant, fighting the Poultry Trust, was shot dead in broad daylight on the open market, before the eyes of scores of men, and no prosecution followed, for no witness dare speak. In 1912 a gambler, Rosenthal, "squeaked" about police-extortion, and Police-Lieutenant Becker, who had been his partner, hired four men to murder him on Broadway. The world gasped when it read the records of the trial. East-side bankers told me that the "gunmen" were clients of theirs—"quite a nice, smart young fellow," a banker described one of these professional murderers to me—and their profession was well known. New York lawyers blandly explained to me the corruption in regard to prostitutes which still prevailed in 1913. Since then Tammany has returned to power, and *perhaps* the reform of New York's politics is completed.

When one turns to Lincoln Steffens's *Shame of the Cities* one is at first amazed to find him describing New York, in 1904, as "the best example of good government that I had seen!" Chicago, which has to-day more murders to its account in a year than Great Britain has, and of which its own highest authority has recently said that, owing to police-corruption, "the crime conditions are appalling," is described by Steffens as "a triumph of reform!" And these things are said in a work which raised a howl of indignation in America at the author's injustice to local politicians! But Mr Steffens is a conscientious journalist, and the state of things he describes in the cities of Philadelphia, St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Pittsburg goes far to explain his words. I cannot even summarise his indictment here. "You can't put all the known incidents of the corruption of an American city into a book," he says. A friend of his is writing a record of the corruption employed in one specific undertaking—

the building of the Philadelphia City Hall—and he doubts if three volumes will suffice. Here a few words must suffice to send to the American work, and to Mr Myers's *History of Tammany Hall*, the reader who has so far failed to appreciate the taint of the political atmosphere.

St. Louis is, or was until recently, the special shrine of "boodle," or the making of money by the corrupt grant or securing of "franchises" (concessions or monopolies) and contracts. It is a recent development, dating mainly from about 1890. Decent men were driven out of local politics, and other men organised with all the brutality of the game. A regular tariff—so much for a wharf, a siding, a street-improvement, even for an awning or a pedlar's license—was drawn up. Public property was plundered, and the pay-rolls were loaded with false names. Foreign corporations flocked to the golden meadows, and outbid the St. Louis men for trading concessions. Then the St. Louis men rose in wrath and had a "reform": that is to say, one brave and honest Attorney General, Folk, now found people enough to support him, and he made a magnificent fight. One railway had deposited $144,000 in bribes for municipal councillors to pass a certain Bill. These councillors had tried to sell the waterworks, which was worth $40,000,000, for $15,000,000, and a million for themselves. It was so flagrant that millionaires and politicians had to be sentenced to several years of prison; but the Supreme Court of Missouri obligingly quashed the sentences. In the middle of the fight there was an election, and the people took so little interest that the boodlers secured power again. St. Louis is said to have improved in recent years.

Minneapolis began the game, on a large scale, as late as 1901. Mayor Ames—all names and details are given in this terrible book—appointed gamblers

and criminals as his chief police-officers, dismissed 107 honest policemen out of a total force of 225, and proceeded to make merry. Here the specialty was "graft," or commissions on crime and vice. Prostitutes paid a hundred dollars a month, and occasional presents. Mayor Ames benevolently reduced their debt to the city to $100 in two months; and he collected the intervening month for himself. "Blind pigs," opium joints, gambling dens, and thieves had a proportionate tariff. Thieves and gamblers were invited to come from other cities and work under the protection of their old associates. They paid $500 or $1,000 down, and $200 a week. The police dipped into the profession on their own account at times. But Minneapolis found the stench of this corruption too pronounced, and the whole system was expounded in court in 1902 and abolished.

Pittsburg cultivated boodle and graft impartially. It is the city which someone described as "Hell with the lid off." "Politically," says Steffens, "it is hell with the lid on." In the eighties it had a "boss," one Chris Magee, who went to New York and Philadelphia to study the trade. He organised the wards and controlled the Council. Vice and drink paid graft. Monopolies and contracts oozed boodle. But Chris was not as gross as a New York boss, and he gave a good deal of value to the city. The system was exposed and broken, but the memory of the genial Chris is cherished in Pittsburg, as you will find if you revile it there.

Philadelphia is an easy first, if you credit Mr Steffens; though I doubt if he knows Tammany as well as that city. It was already "corrupt and contented" in the sixties. In the seventies its famous Gas Ring certainly ran Tammany close. They turned all their employees into ward-politicians, silenced money-making citizens by maintaining pro-

tection, put respectable figure-heads into office, and took a prodigious toll of the coffers of the city. They were defeated in 1883, but the corruption continued, and two "bosses," Martin and Porter, captured the "machine." Repeaters (illegal plural voters) were so numerous that a ballot-box in a district of one hundred voters would contain 200 votes. The judges (part of the system) declared that the ballot-box was sacred and there could be no scrutiny. Some of the names attached to voting papers were the names of children: others of dead dogs. The police helped the party to find "repeaters," and genially protected the elections. Elections were held in a disorderly house belonging to a district-assessor. Teachers, reformers, churches, and charitable institutions were bought up by grants. There were several exposures, but no prosecutions, and the graft and boodle grew steadily worse. In 1901 the city lost $2,500,000 on one contract. We are not told how far Philadelphia has reformed; but I may add that during the last ten years there has been a strenuous campaign for reform in America.

Chicago is described as "reformed in spots." Boodle was abolished after a thriving career in the nineties. In 1902 a New York firm offered a bribe of a million dollars for a certain concession, and it was refused. Hence Chicago's reputation for virtue; though one ought to add that the bankers of Chicago were infuriated at this "refusal of business." I ought to add also that when I was there in 1913 there was a hold-up, with revolvers, on the crowded main street (corresponding to Oxford Street) in the middle of the afternoon; and the papers described it as the eightieth hold-up on the streets of Chicago in a few months, and ascribed it to police-corruption. I have already quoted the President of the Chicago Crime Commission saying, in November, 1919, that

" the crime conditions are appalling," and that the police and courts could reduce the crime by 50 per cent. in thirty days *if they would!*

San Francisco, Washington, Cincinatti, New Orleans—in a word, nearly all the large towns of the United States, have much the same record. These are the centres in which elections occur, the nurseries of the higher politicians; and no one who is familiar with them will question that, while the grosser features have gone, the taint of the political atmosphere remains. I was in America only a few years ago when Congress was bringing its session to a close. It was bewildering to see the geniality with which nearly every American journal bantered Congressmen on the crowd of " pork " Bills with which they, as usual, concluded the session. They were about to face their constituents, and the " pork " Bill which each produces on such occasions is the grant of a road, a bridge, a railway, or some other fat morsel, at public expense, for those whose votes he is about to solicit. There is only one thing more repugnant—the unctuous and patriotic language in which the votes are solicited.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ORGANISATION OF CORRUPTION

We return to England, and must now see how far the American system was introduced and what were the consequences. The general election of 1868 had, we saw, thrown out Disraeli, the emancipator of the working class, and given Gladstone a majority of 120. Disraeli had been right in one respect. The enfranchised workers showed not the least disposition to anarchy or revolution. Every working-man candidate was rejected, and it is estimated that the new House of Commons was "the wealthiest that had ever assembled." Even Radicals like Roebuck, and eminent friends of the people like John Stuart Mill, lost their seats. But the country had not been deceived by the Electoral Reform Act. Either party would have been forced to pass it, and neither party really liked it. The issue of the election was Gladstone or Disraeli, pacification or coercion in Ireland. Few trusted the glittering verbiage of Disraeli, and Gladstone hastened grimly to Westminster to open the Liberal millenium.

It was in this election of the year 1868 that the caucus made its first humble and innocent appearance in England. There had hitherto, we saw, been comparatively little organisation of political life. Since the eighteenth century the leaders of the great parties had had "whippers-in" (whips) to secure the attendance of the supporters whom they had corruptly placed in Parliament, and in the towns, to some extent even in the counties, there had been

political societies, independent of Westminster, for propaganda purposes. In 1831 the Tories had created a political centre in the Carlton Club. Five years later the Whigs had established the Reform Club. Since 1832, moreover, there had been a growth in the country of "Registration Societies." The Reform Bill had left the register of electors almost as open to dispute as ever, and agents of the candidates, aided by specialist lawyers, had continual and expensive conflicts over the rights of the long-suffering voters. Registration Societies, Whig and Tory, joined the fray. In 1861 central Registration Societies had been established at London.

We must not exaggerate our indebtedness to the United States, yet there was in 1868 a new development which is generally described as the introduction of the American caucus. On December 21st, 1867, the secretary of the Birmingham Liberal Association, one of the most spirited provincial centres of the time, put forward a plan for the close local organisation of political life. The constituency was to be mapped and groups of burgesses were in each district (corresponding to the American ward) to elect representatives who would meet in council and choose candidates. The procedure was strictly democratic, and it expressly excluded dictation from Westminster. The idea was taken up. The Ward Committees appointed a Central Committee, which nominated three Liberal candidates for the coming election. Birmingham was systematically canvassed. The new voters were instructed, and the waste of votes by overlapping was ingeniously prevented. One elector was to vote for A and B, a second for B and C, and a third for A and C. The Radical Central Committee would have been horrified to hear itself described as a caucus. Had not the voters elected *them*? But the gist of the matter was: "Vote as you are direc-

ted "—if you want the party and its magnificent ideals to prevail.

As the three candidates were returned, the enterprise obtained the seal of success. It was applied, with the same issue, to municipal politics. It undertook propaganda, and the plan was adopted by Liberals in other towns. It developed aspirations, and in a few years Birmingham became the centre of a National Liberal Federation, chastely isolated from the taint of Westminster. There were now two men of great and varied ability behind the machine: Joseph Chamberlain and that astutest of workers in obscurity, Schnadhorst. The caucus was an accomplished fact. The Conservatives heavily reviled its despotism and corruption, then copied it. It was Disraeli who stripped it of its air of Birmingham originality and called it the "caucus." He adopted it soon afterwards.

Years would elapse before the new machine fell under the power of the Parliamentary leaders, and we may meantime glance once more at Westminster, where Gladstone led his legion to the great Liberal campaign against injustice. His majority was not quite a pure expression of the determination of the British public. "At the general election of 1868," says Ostrogorski, "corrupt practices prevailed to a greater extent than at all the elections of the preceding half-century." There it was, however, and the country expected it to repeat the Whig record of the Reformed Parliament of 1832.

Gladstone had appealed for a mandate to pacify Ireland by disestablishing the Church and passing a Land Bill, and, as is known, he drove both measures through the House before the end of 1870. The first measure affords a good illustration of parliamentary methods. Though "both sides of the House of Commons, having threshed out the subject on the hustings, were beyond the reach of logic,"

as Mr Herbert Paul says; the debates raged and blazed for three solid months. Then the pious Lords sprang to the breach. The Queen, hostile to the Bill but assured that it was inevitable, conveyed a hint to the Archbishop of Canterbury to let it pass (after exacting as much money for the Church as possible), but the Lords sustained the struggle until October. Some were in tears. Some declared themselves ready to kneel at the block rather than see this anomaly removed from Ireland The Land Bill occupied the following year, and the Liberals then turned to consider if anything could be done for England.

It had been obvious for seventy years to the meanest social student that, whatever the American slaves or the oppressed Greeks or the Irish peasants needed, the mass of the people of Great Britain urgently needed education. Until 1868 extensions of the franchise had been devoid of the least risk. They had substituted alert members of the middle class for the drunken and corrupt voters of the earlier period. Now that political power found a still broader base, and the demand for manhood suffrage became louder, the appallingly backward state of the people was a clear menace No less than two million children were still without any sort of education, and a further million attended schools of the poorest character, which were never inspected. Nearly three-fourths of even the new generation were growing up to civic life in total ignorance, or a literacy which was not far removed from it. We pay dearly to-day for the interested refusal of politicians during half a century to educate England, and the jealousy of Church and Chapel which furnished them with a pretext.

It is characteristic of Mr Gladstone's Whig type of mind that he took far less interest in such subjects than in the grievances of Greeks, Italians

or Irish. "In the new scheme of national education established in 1870," says Lord Morley, "the head of the Government rather acquiesced than led . . . his private interest in public education did not amount to zeal, and it was at bottom the interest of a churchman. . . . What Mr Gladstone cared for was the integrity of religious instruction."* Of the Whig peers with whom he liked to fill his cabinet not one cared sincerely for the education of the people. But the country and its Radical representatives forced the subject, and Forster introduced a measure.

The struggle over education began the disruption of the Liberal party and prepared the way for later developments. The Radicals were for free, compulsory and secular education: for a unified school-system which should end the long scandal of clerical obstruction and leave religious education to religious institutions. Here Gladstone, as Whig and Churchman, opposed the popular demand, and availed himself of every pretext for compromise. He would have education neither free, nor compulsory (universal), nor liberated from religious complications; and he was stoutly supported by his colleagues. They proposed to leave the religious question to local authorities. Mr Vernon Harcourt pleasantly described the consequences. "Close upon four o'clock on the polling day," he said, "men will accept as many articles of faith as you may supply them with pints of beer, and the least sober will be the most orthodox." The struggle ended in Cowper-Templeism, and Radicals and Nonconformists began to doubt the democracy, and deplore the prejudices, of the Liberal leader.

So far England owed little to the groups of statesmen, mostly hereditary legislators, who controlled the House of Commons and administered a

* *Life of Gladstone*, vol. ii., pp. 298 and 299.

country whose material prosperity was out of all proportion to its social condition. Some good measures—abolishing University Tests and the purchase of army-commissions, legalising Trade Unions, reorganising the army, and introducing the ballot—were passed in 1871 and 1872. But compromise lingered in the cabinet, and the country began to grow weary. Ireland, instead of being pacified, was more unruly than ever. Appointments of a party character were made. Licensing Bills shrank before the bluster of "the Trade." It was at the end of 1872 that Disraeli made the famous speech in which he likened the occupants of the Front Bench on the Government side to "a range of exhausted volcanoes." "Not a flame flickers upon a single pallid crest," he said, in a masterly example of the sparkling rhetoric with which he concealed the Tory lack of constructive proposals. The year 1873 was spent, wearily, once more upon Ireland, and Gladstone was defeated. Disraeli played the game. He insisted that Gladstone should have a few more months to complete the demoralisation of his party, and then, in 1874, he summoned the Trade and the Church and the country to put an end to this "career of plundering and blundering."

The Conservatives returned to power with a majority of eighty-three. Gladstone complained that he was swept away in "a torrent of gin and beer." His less pious Radical followers called it an alliance of Beer and Bible; and Conservative writers admit that they assiduously cultivated the penetrating influence of both publican and parson. They do not admit, though it is past dispute, that bribery was as rife as ever. The elector, long educated in corruption, had now the added advantage of the ballot, and might take money or liquor from either side without prejudice to the sanctity of his vote. Still, neither political party had any

intention of striking at these corrupt practices. The Parliamentary game controlled the entire procedure. Disraeli had posed as champion of Church and Trade—the two chief nerves of the electorate—and had thrown out vague promises with liberal hand to all parties. When their representatives promptly appeared at Westminster to claim the fulfilment of the promises, he explained that his Government was not bound to honour every unofficial promise that had been made at the hustings by Tory candidates. Gladstone had tried to outbid him by a vague promise to abolish the income-tax: which Chamberlain, somewhat too strongly, described as "the meanest public document which has ever, in like circumstances, proceeded from a statesman of the first rank." The bait was disregarded, and Achilles sulked in his tent for some time, leaving the lead of his diminished forces to Hartington.

We will not linger over the inglorious record of the next few years. Parliamentary time must be occupied, and a number of unexciting measures, of secondary importance, passed into law. One of the most important was the Merchant Shipping Bill. Appalling facts were laid before the House by Plimsoll, yet Disraeli, with the connivance of the Whigs, attempted to prevent it from becoming law, until Plimsoll, losing his self-control, poured scalding invectives on this proposal of political jobbery. The Russo-Turkish War broke out, and the usual advantage was taken of that blessed pretext for doing nothing.

It is remembered by most people to-day only that we "put our money on the wrong horse," but a close examination of the period will reveal more than a diplomatic miscalculation. Sir Stafford Northcote, on behalf of the Government, made an entirely false statement to the House. Nothing had occurred, he said, as the House was adjourning, to

mar the good prospect of peace in Europe. It was reported by the London papers the next day that the Government had, while it made this announcement, ordered 7000 Indian troops to Malta. They had, Northcote flippantly said, on being challenged, "merely moved troops from one part of the Queen's dominions to another." The weakness of the Liberals in face of this misconduct was such that Disraeli taunted them with their inability to move a vote of censure. He was at the height of his popularity, the summit of the Queen's favour. It was then that he described his great Liberal opponent as "intoxicated with the exuberance of his own verbosity."

Gladstone waited with the patience of a political spider. The Russian imbroglio was followed by the Afghan War: the Afghan War by the Zulu War. The time had come. The first Midlothian campaign echoed in the wilds of Scotland and brought comfort to the drooping hearts of Liberals. A shining moral idealism was opposed to the tinselled profligacy of the Conservative administration. The country stirred, and Disraeli hastily dissolved; and with a loud cry of the triumph of principle over "gin and beer" the Liberals returned to the House with a majority of one hundred and six over their opponents.

In point of sober historic fact, the election of 1880 was one of the most corrupt since 1832. "By this token know ye the power of the Caucus," Mr Chamberlain cried to the Conservatives; and it was the first election in which the Birmingham system was generally applied. But the caucus had blended easily with, not only the Midlothian idealism, but the oldest traditions of persuading voters. A shower of petitions followed the election, and the inquiries revealed a disgusting amount of corruption. The official returns put the cost of the election at

£1,737,000; though it was believed to be nearer £3,000,000. Liberal candidates had spent, on the average, £1604 each in persuading the voters of the wickedness of their Tory rivals. Conservative candidates had spent £1974 each in proving that they were the genuine guardians of probity and property. There were fiery mutual charges of open or masked corruption all over England, and any person who cares to run over the Blue Books of 1881 (vols. xxvi, xxvii., xxix. and xxxi.) will exonerate the honourable members from malice in making the charges. Direct bribes were still given, but the new system had generally camouflaged its operations by the creation of regiments of canvassers, messengers, printers, entertainers, etc.

Gladstone was triumphant, but his air of triumph faded somewhat when he surveyed his new world. The echoes of the Midlothian campaign rolled ominously over the world. "The Irish Brass Band" was just begining its irrepressible music under Parnell; and Gladstone had thought much more about Bulgarians than the Irish. The Boers were reminding him that he had described the Conservative interference with them as "the invasion of a free people"; and he had now to admit to himself that this was election-rhetoric, not statesmanship. "Young England" was meeting in a corner of the Carlton Club, under Randolph Churchill, and plotting to steal the thunder of his democratic oratory, or pronouncing such oratory "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals to the Whigs, for they have always existed by corrupting and deceiving the people." Radicalism was compelling him to recognise, by forcing him to take the utterly unwelcome Chamberlain into his cabinet, that England had grievances to redress as well as Greece and Bulgaria. While he hesitated, bewildered, the Boers rebelled, and his Budget was loaded with a war-bill; and the

Irish rebelled, and his fair program had to include a Coercion Bill; and Egypt flamed up on the southern horizon. He had only one consolation. Disraeli died.

For our purpose we need consider only such measures as were designed for the improvement of the political atmosphere in Great Britain. The corruption at the 1880 election had been so flagrant that the sober elements of the country sternly demanded a measure of reform. The reader will have noticed, from the figures I have just given, that the advantage of corruption had been on the side of the Conservatives. Four hundred and eighty Conservative candidates had spent—to speak only of the declared expenses—£951,000. Four hundred and eighty-eight Liberal candidates had spent only £771,540. It was plainly safe for a Liberal statesman to give effect to his righteous indignation, and a Corrupt Practices Bill was introduced in 1881.

The House of Commons is always amusing on such occasions. It is healthily united in reprobating the evils which have inspired the measure: it is more than willing to pass a measure for its own purification: but on reflection it discovers that this particular measure is ill-advised. "The reception of the Bill," says the *Annual Register*, "was favourable, but by degrees the enthusiasm which its appearance had kindled began to slacken even amongst ardent reformers." The penalties were too severe. The evil would merely be driven underground. And so on. In brief, the Bill was withdrawn. Meantime, the results of election-inquiries were published, and public opinion demanded action. The Bill was reintroduced in 1882, and got as far as second reading, which it passed without division. Three months later Mr Gladstone abandoned it. "The opposition," says our authority, "was of that veiled and insidious nature which is more frequently

fatal to a proposed reform than open hostility." The Government then proposed a Bill for the disfranchisement of the towns which had been convicted of gross corruption. This also was withdrawn.

"It is difficult for any one," Mr Gladstone wrote about this time, "except those who pass their lives within the walls of Parliament, to understand how vital and urgent a truth it is, that there is no more urgent demand, there is no aim or purpose more absolutely essential to the future victories and the future efficiency of the House of Commons, than that it should effect, with the support of the nation—for it can be effected in no other way—some great reform in the matter of its procedure."

The young enthusiasts to whom—on the apostolic principle of being all things to all men—the veteran statesman wrote this may have wondered why he had regarded this vital need so complacently during thirty years of power. Parliamentary life was not more in need of reform than it had been for half a century, yet Mr Gladstone, the moralist in politics, had not hitherto shown any tendency to iconoclasm. The need was not more urgent in 1883 except in the sense that the wicked features of Parliament now prevented Mr Gladstone from passing measures, instead of preventing Mr Disraeli. However that might be, he was now bent on reform, not so much with the support of the country, as because the country, shocked by the electoral disclosures, forced him to do something; and the Corrupt Practices Bill was re-introduced. It forbade the creation of fictitious employment for voters (with which Mr Gladstone had been familiar since the payment of bandmen at his own first election) and reduced the limit of expenditure by candidates. In future the candidate must not spend more than £350 to £920 (according to the number of electors) in boroughs, or more than £650 to £1790 in counties.

The uproar began at once. Tories denounced the proposals as "grossly unjust and enormously severe." Radicals like Cowen and Tory Democrats like Churchill easily and scornfully showed that the Bill was little more than a mockery. A candidate could not be punished for myriads of things done by means of agents or bogus clubs, as the measure was not explicit and severe enough, The Birmingham caucus and its progeny were eloquently denounced in this connection. But the Birmingham prophet was in the ministry, and the independent critics represented only small fractions and might be ignored. There was a friendly meeting in the wings of Parliament of the great protagonists of either side who would soon cross swords on the stage, a friendly understanding that some of the harshness of the measure might be mitigated in committee, and the Bill passed the second reading without a division. It then fell under the customary long and cruel mutilation. Night after night was spent in discussing what *was* bribery, undue influence, or treating, until the press broke in with an angry reminder that there was no serious doubt in the mind of the country. Radicals pressed for amendments to strengthen the measure. Mr Labouchere asked that it be made illegal to obtain a title by helping the election of another person. No such thing was ever done, ministers retorted. Lord Randolph Churchill promptly quoted the cases of Sir R. Green-Price and Sir H. Johnstone, who had been thus decorated for resigning seats to ministers. Gladstone indignantly denied that there had been any "transaction": a very satisfying word.

In brief, the Corrupt Practices Act was added to the list of Liberal triumphs. We shall see what it did. The flagrant purchase of votes, which was already in decay, was abolished, but other forms of corruption arose. Judges soon found, they said,

that the law contemplated only the period immediately before an election, and a candidate might do a good deal with impunity before he was officially and explicitly recognised as candidate. Moreover, it still cost about £5000 to run an election-petition; and, as long as both sides lived in glass houses, it was indiscreet to throw stones.

One thing Mr Gladstone did do in the reform of Parliamentary procedure, but it is usually omitted from the high chronicle of Gladstonian achievements. He introduced the closure. The debates on the Irish Bills in 1881 threatened to pass all records, and Speaker Brand astonished the House (or a large part of it) by arbitrarily cutting off the stream of heated and frivolous rhetoric. Liberal historians are eager to make it clear that Brand did this entirely of his own initiative. We could hardly be charged with undue suspicion if we assumed that the occupants of the Front Bench were rather less surprised by this *coup d'Etat* (as the Conservatives called it) than others were, but the time would come when the closure would be turned against the Liberals, and their torrent of indignation would have flowed less easily if it could be shown that they themselves constructed the "guillotine." It was, in fact, one of the most material of their achievements. The waste of time in speeches which never influence a single vote in the House is scandalous enough to-day. In the nineteenth century it was appalling. It may be put to the credit of Mr Gladstone and his colleagues that they at least did not rebuke the friendly Speaker for his disinterested innovation.

Another point of legislative reform arose in 1884. Gladstone passed a third extension of the franchise, and the Lords rejected his Bill. They would not claim, one of the leading speakers in the Lords said, that the state of representation (by which only three million adults had the vote) was "absolutely per-

fect," but they would say that "under the present franchise-system labour was amply and fairly represented." The country quite understood the situation. All the resonant verbiage about the Constitution and political wisdom was intended to conceal a party-struggle. Such rhetoric never does deceive anybody, but Parliamentary tradition demands it. Mr Gladstone was to complete the extension of the franchise by a Redistribution Bill, and the Conservatives wished to compel him to introduce the two Bills together so that they might know the worst. He was just as eager to get his party-advantages in two instalments.

To the growing Radical element in the country the situation was welcome. The power of the Lords was, as all now recognise, a mediæval anomaly in our Constitution, a machine for the enforcing of the Conservative sentiment; and the cry gladly spread from city to city: "End them or Mend them." To the end of his political life Mr Gladstone shrank from that cry. The Whig flesh quivered beneath his Liberal skin whenever Radical supporters pointed out this "vital need." There was no need for the Queen to impress on him, as she did, that he must come to terms with his opponents rather than listen to counsels of that "organic change." He was never a thorough democrat. Once more he met Lord Salisbury in the wings of the Parliamentary theatre and arranged the forthcoming combat. He produced his redistribution-plans, and the astute Conservative statesman made his terms. A Bill was framed which would "satisfy all parties," as the *Times* said: in other words, the disfranchisement of boroughs was nicely arranged so that the Conservatives should not lose more than the Liberals. The Bills passed, and the House of Lords kept its flag flying over the citadel of popular representation.

These "reforms" were followed by one of the

most singular and most tortuous developments of parliamentary life since the eighteenth century. The one weakness of the admirable party-machine which had now been evolved on both sides was the need of a "platform" composed of so many impressive "planks." The proverbial visitor from Mars might imagine that a statesman's task was simple. He had merely to scan the face of the country for grievances and abuses, and set to work to remove them. Better-informed people know that this ideal simplicity is the simplicity of children. Each party has vested interests or vested prejudices, represented on its pay-roll, and to select a grievance for remedy without considering these would be the height of political unwisdom. Indeed, it was becoming increasingly difficult for both parties to make a constructive program for England. Not that dragons were now scarce after all the glorious political St Georges of the last hundred years. The next forty years of legislation would prove how much there was still to be done. Social legislation had, in fact, barely commenced. But the popular demand was rapidly assuming a form and an accent which must intimidate any statesman who chooses half his colleagues from the peerage and his most necessary supporters from among the wealthy. Fortunately, the evergreen problem of Ireland furnished a legitimate and laudable distraction.

German trouble in Africa, Russian trouble in Asia, Mahdi trouble in the Sudan, and at last the death of Gordon, brought the ministry of righteousness to a close, and statesmen began to deck their windows for an election. Salisbury carried on for a time with "a Government of Caretakers," but an election in December (1885) was certain. For this the Radicals prepared a formidable program at which Mr Gladstone shuddered. He began rather to educate himself in Irish politics. There followed

one of those obscure passages in English politics which no independent historian can illumine, and the expert has no desire to illumine.' A few years later Gladstone, angry at the way in which Lord Salisbury had defeated his hopeful plan of returning to power on an Irish cry, sternly denounced the Conservatives for making a secret promise of Home Rule to Parnell on the eve of the election, and thus obtaining power under false pretences.

The facts will illustrate the ingenious transformations of parliamentary corruption under pressure of an improved environment. Parnell himself stated, and it is not disputed, that on the eve of the election in 1885 the Conservative Lord-Lieutenant, Lord Carnarvon, consulted him on the Irish question and gave him the impression that something like Home Rule might be expected of the Conservatives. He regarded this as an electoral bargain with the Conservatives, and the Irish vote in England went against the Liberals. Lord Salisbury himself publicly used language which was fairly construed as a promise to grant a legislative body in Ireland. Gladstone, on the other hand, was silent. Lord Hartington and Mr Chamberlain had at once violently denounced the project, and the unity of the party was threatened if Gladstone made a bid for the Irish vote. In plain English, both the leaders were playing with the Irish question for election purposes. If either could get a secure majority independently of the Irish, he would do nothing.

The Irish had helped the Conservatives to unseat Gladstone. They caused him to lose a score of seats at the election. At the close of the election it was found that the Liberals (335) were just equal to the Conservatives (249) and Nationalists (86), and deep was the disgust of all parties. Parnell angrily recalled the bargain with Lord Carnarvon, and Gladstone denounced it with fervid oratory. Lord Salis-

bury repudiated the charge with equal fervour. Lord Carnarvon had had no instructions whatever. He had acted merely as an individual. Lord Carnarvon confirmed this, but he added that he had afterwards told Lord Salisbury of the "conversations," and this and the ambiguity of Lord Salisbury's own language will suffice for most people. They may or may not agree with Mr Chamberlain that "a strategic movement of that kind, executed in opposition to the notorious convictions of the men who effected it, carried out for party purposes and party purposes alone, is the most flagrant instance of political dishonesty this country has ever known." They may think Lord Hartington equally ignorant of precedent when he protested that the Tories had deeply impaired "political morality." But there will be little difference of opinion if it is proposed to apply to the whole situation the motto given on the title-page of this book.

Whatever allowance we may be disposed to make for Mr Gladstone's difficulties, he was heavily punished. On December 17th he sat down to write to Lord Hartington one of those vague and politic statements of his position which were designed to satisfy an anti-Home-Ruler, yet leave the way open for considering Home Rule. He had just forwarded this disavowal of any "intentions" in the matter when the *Standard* reached him from London with a plain statement of the plans he was so anxious to conceal. By an extraordinary indiscretion, which must have strained the veteran statesman's Christian endurance to its limit, Herbert Gladstone had given away his father's secret. It was an awful hour for so august a moralist. His diplomatic resources were quite unequal to the task of disavowing the plan without disavowing it, and the crisis came quickly. He boldly shattered the Liberal party, replaced the lost wings by an alliance with

the Irish, and assumed power as a resolute and convinced Home-Ruler. I need merely recall how his first Irish Government Bill was rejected on the second reading, how Gladstone dissolved and made a leonine fight, and how the Conservatives triumphed over the dispirited and divided Liberals. Chamberlain and Hartington had at least the decency to wait a few years before joining the party which they had so recently accused of a flagrant violation of the elements of political morality.

It is unnecessary to follow the intrigues, schemes and combinations of the next six years of Conservative power. With a majority of one hundred and eighteen over the combined Home-Rulers, the Unionists had a secure term of office, and they could afford to laugh when Gladstone indignantly disputed their right to use the closure. Another political development had meantime appeared which is more material to our subject.

The Birmingham Caucus, which had "gingered" the Liberal party for ten years, found itself in a peculiar situation when its high priest repudiated the leadership of Gladstone. For years the chief engineer in charge of the machine, Mr Schnadhorst, had laid it down that members of Parliament must "sacrifice their personal convictions" whenever loyalty to the party demanded this. They had driven the independent Cowen out of political life at Newcastle. They had forced a terrible struggle on Forster at Bradford. They had showered admonitory telegrams on any constituency whose representative swerved a hair's breadth from party-loyalty. This, we must remember, was not the dictation of the party-officials at Westminster, but the spontaneous action of free provincial Liberals.

The men of Birmingham were now hoist with their own petard. Schnadhorst almost alone passed to the Gladstonians, and the caucus he left behind

him was excommunicated by its daughters throughout the kingdom. There were still many who wanted a provincial centre of Liberalism apart from Westminster, and a northern city was suggested, but the heads of the party now got it transferred to London. Schnadhorst became secretary both of the National Liberal Federation and the Central Liberal Association. Candidates would now be selected, programs arranged, inconvenient matters adjusted under the eye of the oligarchs. There were, it is true, spurts of rebellion. Labouchere and a few strong friends spoke with scorn of the "Caucusians." The *Reynolds Newspaper* Radicals pelted "the Schnadhorst machine." The workers began to choose candidates of their own. Gladstone surveyed his kingdom with some disgust, and he had little or no share in the "Newcastle Program" which was designed to cement the cracking structure. To the last he was a Whig, and Whig methods of ensuring loyalty were—as a study of the honour-lists of the next Government will show—preferable to Radical concessions. I will tell later how Cecil Rhodes was permitted, even under Gladstone, to weight the Liberal scales. For the moment it suffices to point out that the new machine, erected at Birmingham, now passed under the full power of whips and leaders, and the quite modern phase of political life began.

The pendulum swung back in 1892, and Home Rule returned with a meagre majority of fifty-five. It meant that Gladstone must press into service representatives of every minority, and he confronted his last task with a fair show of courage. Radicals who scorned "Liberal fossils" were yoked with Imperialists like Rosebery. Through the interminable, stormy debates of 1893 the old man drove his unsteady team. For the first time in his life he saw blows exchanged in the House of Commons. For

the tenth time he saw the Lords calmly reject what the representatives of the people had devised after seven months of unparalleled struggle. For a moment the thunder rumbled in the bowels of the slowing volcano. Would he crown his Liberal career by attacking the greatest anomaly of English political life? The Lords, defiantly, mutilated and forced him to abandon his Employers Liability Bill; mutilated his Local Government Bill. They should see, he muttered. But Gladstone was eighty-four years old. Wearily he took off the helmet and cuirass, and laid the lance by the wall; and, after the shabbiest dismissal from the Queen that a great statesman ever experienced, he passed from the great stage.

While it is not my purpose to write a political chronicle, I have felt it material to follow in some detail the course of events since the day when Gladstone took the lead of one of the great political parties. His career is a curiously sensitive mirror of the modern political world. He had entered it with, not merely the ideals, but the sentiments of a zealous clergyman; and at the outset he found his way smoothed by electoral corruption, yet for forty years mooted no plan of attacking that corruption. Throughout his long life he acknowledged the corruption of British politics and politicians. In expressing his estimate of Disraeli he affected no reserve at all, but even in making general statements about his fellow-actors he used language which in his mouth must be regarded as very damnatory. Lord Morley, in his discreet biography, allows his sentiment to appear repeatedly. "'Man,' he often used to say, 'is the least comprehensible of creatures, and of men the most incomprehensible are the politicians.'" He repeats this to Lord Acton, apropos of Chamberlain, in 1887: "It is one of my common sayings that to me characters of the

political class are the most mysterious of all I meet." *

In such phrases one recognises a desperate attempt to cultivate Christian charity. Politicians are not "incomprehensible." They are amongst the most easily read characters. What Mr Gladstone obviously means is that they are either corrupt or incomprehensible, and both his creed and his profession and *esprit de corps* dissuade him from saying the former. In his last years he was more candid. In his summaries of conversations with the retired statesman, Lord Morley says: "He has not been in public life all these years without rubbing shoulders with plenty of baseness on every scale, and plenty of pettiness of every hue, but he has always kept his eyes well above it." Certainly no one will accuse him of baseness, but we have seen him over and over again wrestling with his stubborn conscience and doing things which, had he remained out of politics, he would never have done. Perhaps much of this was in his mind when he said, in 1891: "I have never advised any individual, as to whom I have been consulted, to enter the House of Commons." It was not by his advice that Herbert Gladstone entered politics. Quite clearly it was, in Gladstone's view, a tainted world. There is no more convincing illustration of this than the casuistry which the stalwart Puritan himself develops, time after time, in face of a moral issue. Lord Morley's work is a noble study of a noble man. It is also, coming from a politician, a terrible indictment of politics.

* *Life of Gladstone*, iii., p. 88 and p. 355.

## CHAPTER X

### OUR POLITICIANS AND THE NATIONAL CRISIS

We have now reached our own generation and our existing political system, and it would be superfluous to follow the chronicle year by year. We have seen the slow transformations of a political scheme which was designed to meet conditions of an entirely different character, yet has in every decade of the last hundred and fifty years resisted adaptation to a new world and a higher public sentiment. We have seen every reform trimmed by the politicians themselves to the smallest dimensions which public opinion would suffer, and usually followed by the transformation of the old abuse into a new type of corruption. We have, I trust, gathered the essential differences between the national business and a private concern, between the political and any other profession. The national business may deteriorate while the national managers prosper. The national business may be entrusted to men for their oratorical qualifications or their dexterity in intrigue, while private business scorns such gifts. The national business is beset by the peculiar difficulty that two rival firms have a monopoly of its prestige and emoluments; that the primary attention of each is devoted to outwitting its opponent; and that each commands a vast organisation for dazing and duping and befooling the ultimate controllers of the nation's destiny.

We have now to study the system as we find it in action in our own generation, and inquire how far

the widespread scorn of political life is justified. I propose to test this first by the behaviour of our politicians during the strain of the great war. Until only a few years ago it was customary to pronounce the party-system superior to any that could be devised for the conduct of our national life. We were then surprised to find that, the moment an unusual effort was required of our statesmanship, men on both sides suavely assured us that the party-system must be entirely suspended. We are not clear about the situation to-day. Large numbers of our journalists and political writers declare, or express a hope, that this party-system has gone for ever. A minority of our politicians would have it restored at once. The majority seem, as far as one can understand, to intimate that they think it may be restored with safety when the strain on our national machinery is somewhat relaxed; which to the simple-minded citizen looks uncommonly like a confession that party-government is an inferior device. Since, however, most of us regard a national business with a turnover of £2,000,000,000 a year, with the most delicate and far-reaching of problems, as, even in time of peace, a thing to be entrusted only to the highest ability we can command, we will patiently examine the lessons of the last few years.

As we read history to-day, the outstanding issue for our national economy in the few years before 1914 was that of defence. The outstanding fact is that nothing received less attention, and the education of the public was left almost entirely to peace-enthusiasts who were so resolute that, if Germany had cared to say that her new ships were merely for export to Patagonia, they would have believed it. It is true that in Mr Asquith's cabinet the situation was more seriously discussed. Sir Edward Grey and Mr Churchill contended earnestly for an adequate

defence against German possibilities. Other, and more numerous, members of the cabinet repeated the shallow stuff that was being talked all over England. The Kaiser (who had already baulked the two Hague Conferences) was the Prince of Peace: poor Germany was merely intimidated by English Jingoists: and so on. Mr Asquith, most accomplished of politicians, knew that his first duty was to "hold the party together." He held it together, by doing nothing.

In 1912 the situation became very grave. In February of that year Lord Haldane made his famous visit to Berlin. Let us take Mr Asquith at his word. He told us in October, 1914, that, when Haldane reported that the Germans would agree to some relaxation of the naval race on condition that we agreed to be neutral in case of war, he at once saw the depravity of Germany. His impression must have been put beyond reasonable doubt during the next few months. In the spring the French ambassador at Berlin, M. Cambon, sent home to Paris a minute and documented and most grave report on the state of Germany. He proved that the overwhelming majority of the Germans wanted war. One may assume that this document was forwarded to Sir E. Grey and Mr Asquith. A few months later, again, Mr Roosevelt, who was by no means anti-German at that time, visited Berlin. On his return to London he had lunch with Mr Asquith, Sir E. Grey, and Lord Haldane. He very earnestly impressed on them his conviction that Germany was preparing for war with France and England.

Still the Liberal supporters of the Government flooded England with assurances of German fraternity, and Mr Asquith sat dumb. In October Sir John Brunner, the President of the National Liberal Federation, sent a circular letter to the chairmen of all the local Liberal Associations in England and

Scotland and Wales. He reminded them that the sacred Liberal principle was "peace, *retrenchment*, and reform," and insisted that this was the time to enforce it (on the Government). He opined that the "false and shameful panic of 1909" (when the nation had been partially awakened to the truth) had unhinged the brains of many, and the calm sanity of the retrenchment-Liberals must speak. He argued that our "entanglement" with France endangered our precious good relations with Germany. He did not expressly urge us to tear up our *entente* with France, though this was obviously suggested, but he did press the Liberal Party to demand that the Government should meet Germany by relinquishing the right of capture at sea during war!

In the following month there was a public conference on Anglo-German relations at the Caxton Hall, when these things were repeated. What did the Government do? It reported to Parliament that there was an improvement in our relations with Germany. It lulled nearly the whole country at a time when Mr Asquith says that even he had at length perceived the wicked designs of Germany. It encouraged the disdainful and insulting reception of Lord Roberts and his warnings. It complacently regarded the saturation of its own party with a silly and disarming optimism by manufacturers who were grossly ignorant of the facts and fanatics who were supremely indifferent to facts. Why? It would be interesting to ascertain the amounts given to the funds of the Liberal party by the wealthy manufacturers and enthusiasts who from 1909 to 1914 kept the bandage on the eyes of England. In any case, Mr Asquith's business was to hold the party together.

It would be a mistake to blame the Liberals only. They have the more blame because they were in power, and had information which could have been

used without any overt provocation to Germany. The statesman who asks us to believe that the only alternative to the wicked policy of 1909-1914 was to shout from the housetops that Germany was preparing for war, has a queer idea of statesmanship. We might have done infinitely less than the Germans, who almost shouted their preparations from the housetops, did, yet have made such preparation that the war would never have taken place. What inflamed our pacifists was our naval preparation, which was done quite openly. Even our naval arrangement with France was plainly announced to the world by the transfer of the Mediterranean fleet. Had we been equally prudent—it is not a question of boldness—in educating the country, purifying the diplomatic service, and seeing that our military status corresponded, not to Lord Haldane's theories, but to the known weakness of France and Russia, there would have been no war. Neither party sought these things. It was left to a few men outside both, or all, parties to warn their fellows; and politicians spoiled their work by repeating month after month that our relations with Germany were good, and *they* were the people who knew.

There was a scene in the House in November, 1912, which recalls St. Augustine's famous picture of the factions contending in the Circus at Carthage while the Vandals hammered at the gate of the city. A group of Conservatives achieved that thrilling triumph of the system, a defeat of the Government by a snap-vote. Sir F. Banbury rose and moved an amendment of which he had given no notice. The subject was, of course, Irish, not English. The situation was plotted. The debate was rapidly wound up, before the Government Whips could fill up the thin House, and the Conservatives won by 228 votes to 206. The adjournment was moved, and, as ministers left the House, Conservative

members jumped on the seats, waved their arms like schoolboys on the last day of the term, and shouted: "Good-bye, take your pensions." Mr Asquith, whose majority rose next day to 119, properly refused to resign. Mr Bonar Law denounced his right honourable friend's procedure as "tyrannical and revolutionary." To his own followers he commended the advice which Redmond had given the Irish in 1905, which was to "make the continued life of the Government in this Parliament impossible."

They did their best. These Liberals were, on the best traditions of the game, cheating them of the emoluments of office. The most sober reporters assure us that many of the Conservative members became "hysterical." Sir W. Bull was expelled from the House for calling Mr Asquith a traitor (*not* for his behaviour in regard to national defence). Government speakers were refused a hearing. Even curses were heard amid the din and the roar of "Adjourn." The adjournment was forced. As Mr Churchill left the House, some of the Tory gentlemen shouted at him, "Rats." He made the mild retort of waving his handkerchief, and Mr Ronald M'Neill threw a heavy book at him, hitting him in the face. The floor was strewn with papers which the representatives of the British people threw at each other across the House. From the House the mad passion spread to the country, and our people, who ought to have been gravely considering the impending disaster to Europe, were vehemently urged by one set of orators to see that Mr Asquith had trampled on the sacred traditions of Parliament, and by another set to appreciate that he was merely keeping a group of greedy adventurers out of office.

That scene—and it was nearly repeated in 1918—will live when the last chapter of British history is written. Possibly Mr Bonar Law is not to-day

proud of the prominent part he took in it. There is no excuse for any of them except the precious exigencies of the party-system. If Mr Bonar Law had not expended so much fiery rhetoric, the cry of the clubs and Press would have been changed from "B.M.G." to "B.L.M.G." As for national interests . . . We would muddle through.

In the early part of 1913 the German Government was forced to make its preparations so openly that military authorities actually predicted a crisis in the summer of 1914. It added 200,000 men to its peace-army, raised the war-chest from six to eighteen millions sterling, and voted an immediate expenditure on the army of £50,000,000. The widening and deepening of the Kiel Canal approached its completion. War-literature in Germany rose to several hundred volumes per year. The Navy League and Pan-German League enlisted millions of members and drenched every village with bellicose oratory. It was known that the Kaiser, threatened with displacement by his son, solemnly rebuked by the Reichstag for professing friendship with England, was in open alliance with the war-party. Even the Socialists voted the extraordinary military grants.

What were our politicians doing? They were busy with Ireland. They were attending to the Welsh Church. They were facetiously discussing women-suffrage. They were, above all, playing the party-game. A new Franchise Bill was in the House, and, as usual, it tended (or was supposed) to increase the Liberal, and diminish the Conservative, strength in the country. There was war to the knife—at all events, almost to the fist. When the closure was used to check a stream of oratory on women-suffrage (which the House was determined not to grant) Mr F. E. Smith denounced the Government for its "brutal exercise of superior strength." Mr Bonar Law declared that the Government was

"in the gutter," and could not degrade Parliament any further. But whenever the question of our national defence or the prospect in Europe arose, there was a beautifully harmonious optimism.

So, amid belated echoes of Marconi scandals and Indian silver scandals and violent mutual accusations of greed and dishonour, we lumbered into the war-zone. The fatal year opened with an attempt by Mr Lloyd George to secure naval reductions. Germany was quite friendly, and not in the least likely to challenge us, he said. The speech resounded throughout the country, and great meetings clamoured for our grasping the outstretched hand of the Kaiser. In the previous year the French Government had stolen (though its agents) a confidential military memorandum at Berlin, in which it was said: "We must accustom our people to think that an offensive war on our part is a necessity. . . We must so manage affairs that an outbreak will be considered a relief, because after it would come decades of peace and prosperity, as after 1870." One may confidently assume that this was communicated to the British Cabinet. One may suppose that the leaders of the Opposition were not left in total ignorance. But Mr Bonar Law, outside Parliament, scouted the danger of war almost as disdainfully as Mr Lloyd George did.

In February there were futile debates on the purity of political life and the sale of honours, to which I will return later. The system was declared spotless, and reform was refused. Then the House settled down, for the thousandth time, to a lengthy and glorious debate on Ireland. The members interrupted their labours at the end of June to notice the murders at Serajevo, and send the most amazing messages to "the aged Emperor of Austria." That hardened old sinner (and his accomplice at Berlin) must have smiled to hear himself complimented by

England on his efforts to "preserve the peace of Europe." The House continued until July 31st to discuss Ireland. Outside, men were now talking about the vital interests of England. Socialists and professors and bishops, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily News*, were clinging frantically to the old creed. We must be neutral, if war did occur. No sane and sagacious lead was given to the country by any politician. Germany had been talking of "the event of war" for ten years, but we must not even mention possibilities. Our politicians were still discussing Ireland when Germany began her first secret mobilisation. A few days later the thunder roared from the firmament; and ministers actually went about boasting (since it proved our innocence) that we were "the least prepared nation in Europe!"

Viscount Haldane has stated in his vindication (Mr H. Begbie's *Vindication of Great Britain*) that we (or our statesmen) were quite alive to the impending disaster and thoroughly prepared to meet it. The state of the ministry on August 1st, 1914, the state of the army, the state of the country, and the state of the diplomatic service sufficiently answer the second part of this apology. As to the first part, it is probably true in relation to Viscount Haldane, Sir E. Grey, Mr Churchill, and Mr Asquith. Churchill and his associates were alive. Sir E. Grey is known to have long insisted on better defence; but one may gravely retort that he would have done his duty more faithfully if he had sternly cleansed our embassies, especially in the near East, of the idlers and incompetents who filled them and let Germany do almost as she willed. Viscount Haldane appreciated the danger at times, but we may leave his elusive psychology to some posthumous biographer. That he was watching developments in the summer of 1914 may be proved by a

fact which it was unwise, or impossible, to disclose earlier: at the end of June, 1914, secret instructions were sent out to our reservists to be ready at a moment's notice, on receipt of a code-telegram.

Mr Asquith may or may not have appreciated the danger. It seems impossible that any Premier who was in supreme control of our Foreign Office, War Office, and Admiralty during the few years before the war should be insensible of the danger. But he made the disastrous and unpardonable blunder of consulting party-interests before national interests. His cabinet was divided. With Mr Burns, who very unduly flattered himself that he knew Germany, he would willingly have parted. He had already tried to dispense with him, when he found that adopting him into the cabinet did *not* induce the Labour Party to incorporate itself in the Liberal Party, but Mr Burns had declined to see that that was the sole reason why he was raised to cabinet rank. Lord Morley and Mr Lloyd George were a graver matter. To shed them, on an armament question, meant to disrupt the party. The opinion on the matter of Mr M'Kenna, Mr Birrell, Mr Runciman, and others, would not have much weight. A powerful minority, with decisive documents, would have won them. But both in the cabinet and out of it were resolute adherents of the older Liberal creed, the short-sighted policy of purchasing retrenchment by optimism; and beyond them were masses of wealthy contributors to the party-funds and workers in the movement who would have represented all preparation as provocation. The Liberal Party was saved; and a debt of £6,000,000,000 was laid on England. I take it that Mr Asquith *knew* that France, whose politicians were as culpable as ours, had not the equipment for a million men, and that Russia's great armament was mostly paper. It was his business to know it.

Thus we met the great onset, with an army designed only to co-operate with continental forces which were miserably below the theoretical plan, with no schemes ready for the rapid mobilisation of our further resources, with a Premier keenly intent on party-interests, with a cabinet largely consisting of men unfit to meet a crisis that had threatened for years, with a Battenberg as First Sea Lord, with a crowd of under-secretaries chosen for their services to the party, with our more critical embassies manned by young men who could play tennis and had been to Oxford. There is no sign of the bracing of our system to meet the shock which Mr Asquith and Viscount Haldane say they foresaw from February, 1912. Our Government remained a nondescript collection of professional politicians, undistinguished peers, wealthy men, sons of wealthy men, good talkers, toadies to politicians, lawyers, and careerists. With this equipment we took the field against a national system in which every element was despotically ruled by a man who despised party and had only one idea—to win.

We need not survey in detail the terrible years that followed. The slovenliness with which the nation's work was conducted has made an almost ineffaceable mark on our economy. Almost from the start individuals were encouraged to use the war as a grand means of enriching themselves, and the national economy entered upon the disastrous perversion from which we suffer to-day, and will suffer for decades. Our politicians were dismally incompetent to manage the various branches of State entrusted to them. As early as February, 1915, the price of flour and bread was rising from fifty to one hundred per cent. above the pre-war level, and any economist could foresee a general rise, with a general disturbance of Labour. The issue was raised in the House. The profiteering of shipowners was exposed

daily in the Press. But Mr Asquith unctuously explained the laws of supply and demand to the ignorant Labour members who raised the question, and thought the situation, in the circumstances, quite satisfactory. Mr Bonar Law agreed with his right honourable friend. Mr Runciman thickly implored them to think twice before they "departed from principles which had been tested over and over again." Mr Austen Chamberlain agreed that it was an "unsuitable time" for making Socialistic experiments in the control of private enterprise. . . . At the end of that year one Liverpool shipping firm, a private firm, divided a million in profits.

In every branch of the national life the same "laws of supply and demand" and "principles that had been tested over and over again" were given a free run. The funds of each party depended on the success of private enterprise. The heads of the various departments at that time were incapable of any other kind of enterprise. Timber was wanted, and private enterprise was told to go ahead. The enterprising Mr Meyer, it was soon announced in the House, was making profit at the rate of £60,000 a year! As usual, the Government resolutely defended their nominee until public clamour compelled them to dock his imperial profits. Horses were wanted. We sent abroad for them men whom we had prosecuted after the South African War, and they levied commissions in the old style.

As to guns and munitions, the story is too sordid and stupid for words. The Munitions Committee, which was set up in April, continued to send out contracts with no price on them. A concrete example, which is within my personal knowledge, will serve better than a hundred stories. A certain new type of gun was invented, and orders for shells were sent out to the chairmen of the various districts. No price was named, though the Committee could

have ascertained easily what the price ought to be. The manufacturers generally agreed upon a price, and obtained it. This price was nearly double the price at which they were eventually willing to produce the shell. One honest engineer, who had the good sense to be a citizen as well as a manufacturer, sent his contract back to London for a price, and obtained one. He set his own draughtsmen to work, and found that the price named from London was thirty per cent. above a fair and reasonable price. He sent the contract back again, and offered to deliver the goods at the lower price, if it were made uniform for all engineering firms. The Committee consented; but I afterwards found that the shell was being made in the north, and presumably everywhere else, at the higher price. Perhaps an apologist would plead the need of haste. Certainly there was need to hurry, for these "goods" were of great importance for the winter of 1915-1916. But in one instance, at least, the supply was held up for *four months* by a trifling dispute between the London Committee and a Local Committee which one vigorous man could have settled (and eventually did settle) in six hours.

That is how we fought Germany, and prepared the ruin of our national economy, in 1915. Every one who was able to follow the German press at the time knew that the collapse of the initial plan left the Germans dispirited and enfeebled in the spring of 1915. Had our statesmen shown a proper appreciation of the facts from 1910 to 1913 the war would have never have occurred. Had they either resigned or sought the ample assistance of businessmen when the war broke out, it would have been finished in 1915. What happened was that for months Germany produced 250,000 shells a day, while we produced only 2,500 high-explosive and 18,000 shrapnel shells. So much was allowed to be

published long afterwards; but it was not added that a year after the outbreak of war, when we had had ample time to organise our resources, Germany still produced five times as many shells per day as England. At that time there were large engineering firms in the north who had not been asked to make a shell.

Mr Asquith now lays the blame on Lord Kitchener, who is dead. On April 20th, 1915, it will be remembered, Mr Asquith went to Newcastle, where a great "Deliver the Goods" meeting had been convened. This was the early period of the German underground works and barbed wire entanglements. High-explosive shells were vital, and any word of the Premier's would go through the workshops of England. He is usually reported as saying that our operations were not at all crippled, as some maintained, by a scarcity of shells. What he really did say was so confusing that the effect was much the same. After defending himself and his party by rebutting this libel that the army was short of shells, he went on to explain that "the urgency was due to the unprecedented scale of the use of munitions and the enlistment of so many skilled workers." There was a shortage and "urgency," and there was not a shortage. The party-interest again spoiled the national interest.

As to Lord Kitchener, it seems to be forgotten that he spoke on the subject in the House of Lords on May 18th. He then stated that there had been a "considerable delay" in the production of high-explosive shells; that the demand was enormous, but the supply was inadequate on account of the lack of experience of manufacturers in producing them. Viscount Haldane embroidered this text at the National Liberal Club on July 5th. An ample supply had been ordered in October, he said, but the production was delayed by differences between

capital and labour. A third theory was discussed in the House. It was said that incompetent officials at the War Office had misled Lord Kitchener, and their heads were demanded; and refused by the Government. All three theories were true. A large supply had been ordered, but not nearly large enough for the new conditions of the war, and certain military authorities ought to have been promptly discharged. There had been "differences between capital and labour." Here is an experience of 1915, told me by a workman involved in it. An employer let his workers know that he would cut down their rates, as the wages they were making were very high. They sent a deputation to tell him, genially, that if he did this, they would send a report on *his* profits to London; and employer and employees continued to add to our National Debt. In the third place, the recognised manufacturers, the prominent Liberals and Conservatives, were for a long time allowed to monopolise the manufacture and the profits.

It was a sordid scramble for wealth on the one hand and higher wages on the other, impotently surveyed by the nerveless folk who presided over the national machine. The only sign of life given by the patriotic Opposition was a criticism of the Budget. The revenue for the coming year was estimated at £270,000,000; the expenditure was estimated at £1,332,000,000. But the leaders of the Opposition fell upon the estimates with little less than the usual virulence, and the Irish Party went into convulsions at the prospect of a higher tax on beer and whiskey.

Before the end of May the complacency with which the country had been beguiled was rudely shocked. The Russian "steam-roller" rolled backward at headlong speed. It was whispered under breath that the Russian infantry were fighting with sticks.

New dissensions broke out in the Government. The Conservatives, Mr Bonar Law afterwards said, could have brought out facts far more serious than those which had led to the famous "Cordite vote" years before, and swept the Government out of power. He was honest enough to add that the Conservatives could not very easily have held power after them. In the Conservative rank and file there was a sullen resentment that he had not done so, and for a year or two they regarded the compromise as cheating them out of a large share of the sweets of office. Luckily, they had wiser leaders, and we got the Coalition.

But even this change, effected at a moment when the Germans had recovered their nerve and were displaying appalling vigour, was marred and enfeebled by our abominable party-considerations. Theoretically a coalition unites the best men of both parties, the best men of the nation, for harmonious and energetic national action. It is so sound a theory, and is so frequently invoked in a national emergency, that the layman is puzzled by the familiar praise of our party-system. Indeed, the very emphasis with which our politicians tell of the personal sacrifices they make on entering into a coalition make one wonder if the normal duality of our political world is not due to those personal interests which they patriotically disregard at a time of crisis. If the party-system merits all the praise it receives from those who are prominent in it, how does it so constantly fail in a period of special stress? And why is the abolition of party-distinctions so very effective when our effort must be most tense, and so hazardous or ineffective when Government has to bear only the comparatively light burden of ordinary administration?

These are secrets of the sacred enclosure. What concerns us for the moment is that, at a time when

party-interests were supposed to be sacrificed on the national altar, they very plainly enfeebled the new combination. When Mr Pease, the only one of the retiring ministerialists to make a word of complaint, contended in the House that the interest of the nation and its soldiers ought alone to be consulted—one gathers that he meant that at such a time party-interests ought *not* to be consulted—Mr Asquith eloquently protested that no other thought had influenced them. He said:

> "What is the personality of this man or that? A supreme cause is at stake. We have each and all of us—I do not care who we are or what we are—to respond with whatever we have, with whatever we can give, with whatever we can sacrifice, to the dominating and inexorable call."

Again a most admirable sentiment; which Mr Asquith no doubt recalled when he quitted office in 1916, and which he doubtless holds constantly before his eyes since the country passed its verdict on him in 1918. But when one examines the *personnel* of the great exchange in 1915, one wonders if the sentiment was judiciously realised. The vigour of Mr Balfour replaced Mr Churchill's debility at the Admiralty. Mr McKenna was transferred from the comparatively otiose dignity of the Home Office and took command of our weird and wonderful war-finance. Mr Henderson startled the world by undertaking to run our Education Department. Mr Walter Long energetically attacked the thorny problems of our Local Government Board. Mr Birrell continued his Platonic rule in Ireland. Mr Runciman still watched our shipping and the other massive problems of our Board of Trade. And, in order to make quite complete the infusion of new blood into our languishing departments, half a dozen Liberal under-secretaries were removed, and half a

dozen adherents of Mr Bonar Law and Mr Balfour took their places. Mr J. M. Robertson, an able economist and one of the most vigorous of the under-secretaries, was discharged, with all his experience, and replaced by Mr Pretyman. And so on.

It was a party-deal. In point after point the national interest was postponed to party-interest or personal interest. Some complained that it deprived the Government of an effective opposition. They would do better to read the record of the Conservative Opposition until July 1915. There was far more fruitful opposition after the establishment of the Coalition. The most deadly charge is the record of the new Government.

There were advances. Mr Lloyd George, faced with a gigantic problem in his Munitions Department, inaugurated the change which was to save the nation. He invited men who were not professional politicians to lend a hand in the national business. Labour, now at least partly aware of the facts, bent its back to the work. But the Government and the House had so little to do with these things that at the end of the month they dispersed for a six weeks' holiday! A few live men, like Sir H. Dalziel and Sir A. Markham, protested. Mr Asquith thought that, on the whole, the situation was satisfactory, and the House joyously agreed. At that point our Russian hopes were shattered. Our campaign in the Dardanelles was a failure. It was clear that Bulgaria was preparing to join Germany. Ireland, India and Egypt were being roused against us. America was seething with anti-British sentiment. Labour was giving trouble every week.

The new session bore no evidence of new vigour. A revised Budget put the revised estimate of deficit at £1,285,000; and the members made it the occasion of a spirited debate on Free Trade and Protec-

tion. Mr J. H. Thomas issued (in the House) the first of his prophecies of "revolution"—which he would greatly deplore, of course—if compulsory service were adopted. There was in this talk about compulsion, he said, a plot to displace Mr Asquith; and he intimated that the workers of England would rise *en masse* in his defence. Dark rumours began to circulate about Gallipoli. There were, in fact, more than rumours. Lord Northcliffe had, in manuscript, an authentic account which even he dare not publish. It was unnecessary for ministers to approach him privately, as they did, and implore him to say less. That manuscript has not yet seen the light.

At length some of our statesmen, sobered out of all party considerations by the darkening prospect, took patriotic action. Sir E. Carson left the Cabinet and publicly laid the amazing charge that the Government had no "clearly-defined, well thought-out, and decisive policy" in the East. Bulgaria had entered the war. The veil of secrecy over Gallipoli was unendurable: especially to those of us who knew the facts. We were told by Sir E. Carson that the military staff which advised the Cabinet was "a scratch lot." We were told by Lord St Davids that the Headquarters Staff and Divisional Staffs in France were full of incompetents who owed their places to rank, money or social influence. The need for a more gigantic effort than ever was apparent, but Mr Runciman, Mr McKenna and Sir J. Simon blocked the way to compulsory service. Mr Asquith held on. His health was quite good, he said, and he would *not* resign. The *Globe* was suppressed. The one set of papers which was independent of both parties, and therefore doing splendid critical work, was luridly denounced in the House.

The story of those terrible early years of the war must be shortened. We settled down to a "war of

attrition," and columns of figures of "man-resources" took the place of the old diagrams of steam-rollers. Mr Belloc, giving plain hints that his figures came from the French and British War Offices, "proved to demonstration" that the German resources would shrink after the beginning of 1917. Mr Masterman, whom the country had decisively rejected but the Government retained, lent them a more authoritative air. We at last extorted a measure of compulsory service—"a monument of political ineptitude," Mr Duke called Mr Asquith's first Bill, which the House indignantly rejected. The House wrangled to protect Ireland, which continued its plotting under the fatherly eye of Mr Birrell, and conscientious objectors. The battle of the tank was fought, in official circles, and the edge of this most valuable weapon blunted before it was used. We still had no Air Ministry. Rumania came in just when the Russian offensive had spent itself, and was smashed within a month. The debt rose to £2,500,000,000. The Irish rebelled. Unsavoury rumours about Mesopotamia spread, and, when Mr Asquith's mellow assurance that all was now "quite satisfactory" had been brushed aside and an inquiry obtained, another ghastly scandal sickened the weary land. Rumania disappeared. Food ran short. Teetotallers were allowed to play their tricks on the sullen workers.

The terrible year ended with the splendid revolt of Mr Lloyd George. Was he ambitious? Does it matter two pins whether he was or not? He had the two qualities we needed: energy and an appreciation of the value of men of business and science. He gave the food to Rhondda, the shipping to Pirrie, the schools to Fisher, and so on. The system, unhappily, still counted. He had to keep certain weaklings. He had to send Mr Henderson, who could not tell a Russian P from an English N, to

deal with the Russian revolution. But we no longer muddled through. We marched on, heads erect and eyes on the goal. The party-system was reduced to a minimum. We held up our heads amongst the nations. We got there; but as a legacy of the first three years of sluggishness and incompetence we have a debt of £6,000,000,000, a nation unhinged by the complete perversion of its economic standards, an industrial order so demoralised that we almost despair of its return to sanity.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE PARTY SYSTEM

At this point the reader is asked to turn back and glance again at the first chapter. In 1918 we reached our goal, and, knowing that a colossal task still lay before us, we not unwisely entrusted it to the men who had found the men to achieve victory. I have described what followed. Never was there a more bitter disillusion; and it is more bitter because we are conscious that if we had to choose again to-day we should make the same choice. The old paralysis of 1914-1916 seemed to return to the political organism. It is not the least use for us to remind ourselves that mighty things were done in what I am calling a period of paralysis. We know them well: a synthesis of military, naval, industrial, distributive, and financial efforts such as no other nation has ever equalled. The point is that mightier things could have been done with our resources, and ought to have been done. We have seen that the reasons why they were not done are political.

So it is with the situation since 1918. Considering, on the one hand, the magnitude of the necessary reconstruction and, on the other, the perverted views and temper of our people, the task was truly gigantic. The effort put into it is very far from commensurate to the task. The outcome so far is astonishingly poor. And the reasons are political. The appalling orgie of diplomacy and intrigue at Paris was the first cardinal blunder. It was such work as politicians love. The initial dilatoriness

was fatal, and the proceedings and staffs were ridiculously over-elaborate. The whole world suffers and languishes because the qualities of ordinary business methods were not studied. Observation sometimes tempts one to say that, if one woman can do a thing in five minutes, two will take ten minutes, and three fifteen minutes to do it. So of politicians. If one Government will take a month to do a thing (which a commercial board will do in a fortnight), six governments will take six months.

For it is hardly necessary to say that there is nothing distinctive about our British politicians. The qualities of politicians differ in degree only in different lands. The political development in France during the war was just as paralysing and pernicious as here until Clemenceau infused his vigour into the machine. There were the same gold-laced incompetents, the same mediocrities installed for party-reasons, the same disastrous favouritism, the same "patriotic" suppression of inconvenient facts to protect individuals, the same illusion that good talkers are good doers, the same floods of oratory in accord with parliamentary traditions, the same postponement of national interests to those of cliques. It was the same in Italy. It was the same in Greece and Bulgaria, only more squalid. It was the same in America, as far as autocracy permitted. It is just the same beyond the war-theatre. From Spain, where politics mean jobbery almost of the worst American type, to Argentina the national business is conducted on lines that would wreck a private business in six months.

It is therefore not surprising that twenty groups of politicians took six months to settle what everybody thought had been settled when each power entered the war, and to create a League of Nations which is hardly worth the parchment its articles are written on—which leaves us just where the

Hague Conferences did. But for us in England the graver circumstance was that our work of domestic reconstruction was almost suspended until the Paris Conference was over. For this we are paying dearly. We lost at least £500,000,000 in production and wasted at least £500,000,000 in avoidable expenditure through the delay in England. That is a very moderate estimate. The work waiting to be done was such that production ought to have been doubled or trebled.

The patient social physician, the wise shareholder in the national business, will try to select the real causes from the excuses and mutual charges that flew about. War-weariness is pleaded. It is rubbish. Our politicians were jaded, perhaps, but the country was not. Wherever there was wise guidance, the energy was as great as in the best war-days. There were three real causes. First was the obvious need that the same central power which had converted our industries into war-industries should re-convert them as rapidly as possible into peace-industries; but, although this central power had four million men under its control, it eagerly listened to the selfish plea of "private enterprise," that manufacturers be allowed to do the work themselves (and reap unlimited profit). The second cause was that owing to the utter perversion of the popular economic standard it was necessary to restrict currency and restore its original value as speedily as possible; and this vital work, which only the central power could effect, was scandalously neglected, and England fell into hysterical dissipation with its wads of paper-money. The third cause was that, as our authorities ought to have known well, there was a deadly difference of opinion between labour (or the minority that directs labour) and capital as to the distribution of the profit of re-equipping the world, and so there was

a demand for a perfectly clear and reasonable scheme; but our central authority dare offend neither side by proposing something different from the extreme demands of each.

It would take a volume to make these things entirely plain and give the necessary illustrations. I can only ask the reader to take any single strand of disorder in our time and see if it does not lead to the discovery of remissness or cowardice in the political authorities. The remedy, one will say, is "increased production," and the Government has shouted it until it is hoarse. Yes, but there will be no increased production if the manufacturing and distributing middle-class is to take the extraordinary profits out of it which those men have been making for the last five years. The present system of advancing wages and advancing commodities is mere preliminary fencing. The workers demand "real" advances. In 1915 and 1916 Socialist economists privately—it was never printed—assured the workers of South Wales and the Clyde and East London that the war would make an end of the middle-class banking and capitalist system. They are disappointed; but they are not going to return to the old system. It is a problem beyond the capacity, and too delicate for the party-interests, of Mr Bonar Law and Mr Austen Chamberlain.

Another says that the remedy is the restriction of the currency. One would like to see the Government attempt it. Another says that the great need is to restrict importations. The Government finds that a tax on motor-cars and motor-cycles does not make the smallest difference to the invading flood of American goods, and it dare do no more. Another says that the national organisation of power and transport and agriculture will pay the higher bill for wages. The Government have shown that they dare not do it. Another says that, since the Govern-

ment do not believe that our National Debt will be paid by Germany, they ought to tell the country the stark economic facts in the boldest language. They dare not do it. They are muttering commonplaces, temporising, putting off the day of reckoning —or of dissolution—as long as they can.

Our national business, in a word, is in a very bad way indeed, and the brains which control it are distraught and vacillating. Its vital elements are conflicting and chaotic, and it is loaded with a debt of £6,000,000,000. If we do not find a national income of more than £800,000,000 a year, or four times what we found in 1913, we shoulder the debt for ever, or until the Bolshevist Revolution. England needs, as never before, a straight, clear, bold, incisive lead. Such a lead could only come from statesmen, and our statesmen are politicians. They do not like straight, clear, bold pronouncements, if these make anybody wince except their political opponents.

There's the rub. The party-system injures us to-day, as it has injured England during the whole of the long period I have surveyed. The Coalition has not abolished the party-system. It means that whereas a Liberal statesman ten years ago needed to study the interests of the Liberal party, he now has to study the interests of the Conservative party also. It does not mean that the best brains of both parties are now available for the nation's business, for half of the Liberal party stands out in sullen opposition, and at the moment it looks as if a large part of the Conservative party were about to secede. The Labour party cries plague on all their houses. The ideal plan of the moment is to form a new Whig party, with four other parties playing the ancient game of combinations and defeats.

After all our talk about the modern purification

of politics, history is repeating itself very crudely. In an earlier chapter I showed how the mind of the country was reflected in the impartial *Anual Register* during the Napoleonic War. People complained that, in spite of coalition, each of the parties "maintained that the other grasped at offices for the purpose of getting possession of the public money." They spoke contemptuously of "Ins and Outs." They noticed how each embarrassed the other when out of office, and fell lamentably short of its promises when it was entrusted with office. In short, "the people at large had absolutely lost all confidence in a majority of them."

Then in 1832 political life was "reformed." The strain of another great war, the Crimean War, was laid on England in 1855. How did the new machinery, the Coalition of that time, work? The Blue Books of the Sevastopol Committee, like our Blue Books of the Mesopotamia Commission, were terrible reading. Men had to complain of a War-Cabinet and House of Commons that took a two months' holiday in the gravest period of the struggle. Sir A. H. Layard, Samuel Morley, Charles Dickens and other non-politicians held scorching meetings in the city. The administration was, they agreed, filled with incompetent men. Sir Austen Layard moved in the House a resolution which is worth reproducing:

> "That this House views with deep and increasing concern the state of the nation, and is of opinion that the manner in which merit and efficiency have been sacrificed in the public appointments to party and family influence and to a blind adherence to routine, has given rise to grave misfortunes, and threatens to bring discredit upon the national character, and to involve the country in great disaster."

If the Conservatives had cared to unite with these independent Liberals, they could have thrown out the Government. But there are times appointed in the party-manual when it is unpatriotic to do so: times, that is to say, when clearing up the mess would entail more loss than prestige. So the Government got Sir E. Bulwer Lytton to move an amendment which also is worth reproducing:

> "That the House recommends to the earliest attention of Her Majesty's Ministers the necessity of a careful revision of our various official establishments, with a view to simplifying and facilitating the transaction of public business, and, by instituting judicious tests of merit, as well as by removing obstructions to fair promotion and legitimate rewards, to secure to the service of the State the largest available proportion of intelligence for which the people of this country are distinguished."

This was stately, elegant, soothing to conscience without any harsh effectiveness. The House passed the amendment by a large majority. Palmerston remained in power, and laughed at the "Drury Lane theatricals" of the reformers. He made the Duke of Cambridge Commander-in-Chief. And in the following year nearly the whole of the critics were swept out of Parliament.

We were just as wise when it came to the Boer War, and we got just as little wisdom out of it. We reached the Great European War with a system as in 1804, in which "merit and efficiency had been sacrificed in the public appointments to party and family influence." At the close of the war the defects of the system are little altered. In view of present tendencies there is some danger that the temporary modifications we adopted will be aban-

doned, and the old system will return with all its archaic and mischievous features.

Now there is little or no reality to-day in what were once deep and earnest principles dividing thoughtful men into two camps. We no longer take different sides on the royal prerogative, for there is no royal prerogative. We no longer divide into furiously hostile parties over the Church, for the Church of England includes considerably less than half the nation, and it is to-day not without its Liberals. There is no longer a sharp antagonism over foreign affairs, for the Conservative leader who would venture to revive the attitude of his party fifty years ago would not have the least chance of power. We are not even cleanly divided over Tariff Reform, and how we stand in regard to Ireland we hardly know ourselves. At the most there is a Conservative spirit which tends to protect from change the Throne, the Constitution, property and the Church, though large numbers of Liberals would heatedly affirm that there is no Tory monopoly of this spirit; and there is a Liberal spirit which anticipates "reasonable and gradual" change, though most modern Conservatives dare not admit that this is distinctively Liberal. The present proposals of new parties and new combinations show how hollow and politic the whole division is. Men are discussing the re-arrangement of groups, not on any principles which may spontaneously draw them together, but on the ground of possible success at the polls.

Such plans have often been mooted before, and the third and fourth parties have perished with the ambitions of the men who led them. The plain truth is that England is controlled by two organisations, not two sets of principles. They were once bodies of men cemented togther by the force of strong convictions. Leaders naturally arose, and loyalty to leaders followed as a matter of course.

As the fire of conviction dimmed, the heirs of the power and glamour of these leaders sought other means of cohesion. Money was obviously the first: intimidation the second. You followed the leader, or his representative, because you were rewarded for doing it, and punished for not doing it. Both agencies were easily used until the middle of the nineteenth century. Intimidation had then to be abandoned. Money remained the great political agglutinant.

Here the party-leaders and zealous adherents violently dissent. Do you, they ask, quarrel with a body of men because they choose to make modest annual contributions for the triumph of principles which they regard as precious to the nation's welfare? Do you regard Mr Birrell as one of these unscrupulous party-hacks, or as a man of sincere and informed convictions, if of unpractical character? Well, Mr Birrell emphatically said that the greatest of questions was whether England in the twentieth century was to be Liberal or Conservative. Gladstone would undoubtedly have supported him. You must, the resentful Liberal may say, be cherishing the illusion of the sale of honours and the adaptation of policy to contributions, which has been raised and refuted in every decade.

Let us see. It is quite true that the charge has been raised and refuted in every decade. It was familiar a century ago, and the then leaders of the House resented it as indignantly as Mr Bonar Law does to-day. We have, however, seen so many things resented in the House, which were notoriously true, that we investigate further. In the House, even a hundred years ago, it was quite customary to deny that there was corruption at elections. Let us take a concrete case. In 1815 Sir Thomas Lawrence was knighted. What could be more innocent or natural? If we cannot confer the dignity

on artists of his rank, what is the meaning of knighthood? In point of fact, the *Dictionary of National Biography*, our most scrupulous informant, tells us that the Prince Regent, in knighting him, assured him that he was "proud to confer the honour on one who had raised British art in the esteem of all Europe." If we question the sincerity of this honouring, we shall certainly look askance at some of the grounds alleged for conferring titles in our modern lists. Yet any person who cares to consult *Sir Thomas Lawrence's Letter-Bag* (p. 97) will find this letter which was written to him at the time by Mr Mash:

> "If you will have honours conferred upon you, you must pay for them. . . . Send me a Draft before eleven o'clock to-morrow morning for £108, 2s. 8d., upon the receipt of which directions will be given for your knighthood to be announced in the *Gazette* to-morrow evening."

One can imagine the irony with which a politician of the day would have demolished the idea that the honour was *sold* to Sir Thomas Lawrence, the great artist. Two generations, later, however, this letter sees the light. Will anyone question that it is a surviving fragment of a system, a regular business? The tone and terms of the letter are clear enough.

I have already given a later illustration of the improper bestowal of honours. It was not for money, but it fitly illustrates the value of the denials of politicians. In 1883 Mr Labouchere, who knew most things that were to be known about the seamy side of politics, asked for a rider to the Corrupt Practices Bill, making it illegal to obtain a title by promoting any person's election. The insinuation was heatedly challenged. At once Lord Randolph Churchill suplied two notorious instances. Sir R. Green-Price was made a baronet in 1869 by

the Liberals for vacating the Radnorshire Boroughs to provide a safe seat for Lord Hartington. Sir H. Johnstone got a peerage in 1880 for resigning Scarborough in favour of Mr Dodson. Mr Gladstone warmly assured the House that there had been no "transaction" in either case. Any person who cares to run over the records will find a remarkable number of these instances of *post hoc, sed non propter hoc*.

It was about this time that Mr J. Passmore Edwards entered Parliament. Few men deserved honours more than Edwards, but he died a plain man. He was a strong Liberal, and probably contributed generously to the funds. On two occasions he refused knighthood. I am aware that the second offer came from Mr Balfour, but Edwards had already refused to be knighted. He had seen too much during his parliamentary career. Those who never heard his caustic observations may read what he says in his *Few Footprints* (p. 42):

> "The House of Commons is a rich hunting-ground for title-hunters. If the curtain could be lifted so that light might be thrown on the motives and the means used by many to get titles, both the wearers and the things worn would command only insignificant respect."

Unhappily, the man who would let light into this particular gloom has a peculiar difficulty. To select any name from the Honours List, and say that the recipient had done nothing to deserve the honour, might indeed win the assent of ninety-nine men out of a hundred, but lawyers and judges are not made like other men. Mr Passmore Edwards gives a quaint illustration in the book I have just mentioned. After his first election he was sued for corrupt practices. There was not a ghost of substance in the charge, but the case dragged slowly through

the Court. Even when Mr Justice Hawkins pointedly remarked that "this case is costing more than a guinea a minute," counsel blandly pursued his futile argument. It cost Mr Passmore Edwards £500 to meet an utterly baseless charge. On the other hand, one might as well seek to prove the identity of Junius or the Man in the Iron Mask as *prove* any man's contribution to party-funds. The subscription-book is the most sacred document of the cult.

Now and again some candid biographer fails to burn a letter, and the contributions of Cecil Rhodes to the Irish and Liberal funds will be found very significant evidence. Rhodes made his contributions, not for a trumpery title, but to influence policy. Now, that policy is ever modified or even in the faintest degree influenced by donations to the party is even more eagerly denied than the sale of honours. But the facts here are incontrovertible, and they suggest strange lights on strange acts.

Readers of Viscount Morley's *Life of Gladstone* will remember how both Mr Gladstone and Parnell long vacillated on the question whether, after the grant of Home Rule, the Irish members were to remain at Westminster. Neither of them wished it, but there were reasons for retention. In Gladstone's biography the mind of the great statesman is judiciously guided to its ultimate attitude, the decision to retain the Irish, and there is no mention of Cecil Rhodes or the Liberal Secretary. But Howard Hensman had published in his biography of Rhodes a few years earlier a lengthy and detailed and convincing account of the matter that might have been considered.*

Rhodes had in 1888 given Mr Parnell £10,000 and £1000 from another South African, for the funds of the Irish party, on condition that thirty-four Irish

* *Cecil Rhodes* (1901), pp. 346-357.

members remained at Westminster after a Parliament had been set up at Dublin. Parnell had at first refused to consent to this proposal. He cared nothing about Rhodes's scheme of Imperial Federation, or about anything except Home Rule. The offer of £11,000, however, assisted him to see that it was desirable that Ireland should be represented at Westminster. He arranged that Rhodes should write a letter explaining his wishes. As Rhodes indiscreetly, or bluntly, mentioned the money in the letter, Parnell had this passage deleted—which throws some light on the value of political documents—accepted the money, and won his colleagues to the plan. It remained to overcome the reluctant mind of Gladstone, for Chamberlain had particularly resented this proposal. Two years later Parnell wrote to Cecil Rhodes—the letter is reproduced—to say that he had just visited Hawarden, and had seen that the retention of the Irish members was in the draft of the Bill.

Mr Schnadhorst, the Liberal whip, then approached Rhodes. An election approached, and the treasury was not full enough. Rhodes promised £5000 to the Liberal funds if the Irish members remained at Westminster and if (especially) Mr Gladstone would firmly refuse to withdraw from Egypt. Schnadhorst certainly gave Rhodes the impression that he had consulted Mr Gladstone, and got the necessary assurances, for on February 23rd, 1891, Rhodes wrote to him:

> "I enclose you a cheque for £5000, and I hope you will, with the extreme caution that is necessary, help in guiding your party to consider politics other than England."

It was the time, it will be remembered, when Gladstone was warily steering between the Scylla of Radicalism (which demanded the evacuation of

Egypt) and the Charybdis of a new Liberal Imperialism. Indeed, Rhodes added an angry postscript in which he tells that he has just seen Morley's language about Egypt, and he says to Schnadhorst: "If you think your party hopeless, keep the money, but give it to some charity you approve of." The whole transaction was to be kept secret.

A few months later Gladstone attacked the Conservative Government over Egypt, and demanded evacuation. Rhodes now told Mr Schnadhorst that, if Gladstone persisted in this attitude, the money must be given to a charity. The writhing and wriggling of the Whip under this painful demand make amusing reading. The money was already virtually spent; he had not regarded Egypt as an essential condition; and, in short, Mr Rhodes might rest assured that Mr Gladstone had only registered a 'pious opinion' which would not be carried out. It was not carried out, as the world knows. The demand for the evacuation of Egypt disappeared from the Liberal program, after adorning it for twenty years.

The reader may make what he likes of the official denials. Mr Gladstone denied that he knew of the "transaction." The fact remains that Rhodes paid £15,000 to party funds (for which he otherwise did not care a rap), secretly, for the explicit purpose of altering the prevailing Liberal policy in his own Imperialistic sense. The money was retained. The aims of Mr Rhodes were realised. One wonders how many other contributions to British party-funds came from South Africa.

In fine, I may put on record, though they will still be remembered, certain statements made in a recent debate on honours and party-funds. Mr Belloc, when he was in Parliament, brought in a motion for the auditing of the party-funds. It will be recollected how the parliamentary strategists easily de-

feated the proposal by an amendment which dissipated attention in futile wrangles. Later, there was a debate in the Lords, with the usual strong statements and bland denials. On May 28th, 1919, Brigadier-General Croft obtained a day in the House of Commons, moved a resolution which called upon the Government "to make the publication of the particulars of such funds compulsory" and to ensure that "recommendations for the bestowal of honours in recognition of subscriptions to such funds should be discontinued."

The name politician had, he reminded the House, become "one of opprobrium," and the leader of the House had himself attributed its decay to the extinction of the individual member by the party-system. He urged the House to "strike at the root of corruption": to have party-funds audited by a chartered accountant, a list of the chief subscriptions published, and a body formed for examining any names recommended for honours. Of the hundred and fifty-five who had received hereditary honours in the last two years a large proportion were members of Parliament or journalistic supporters of the Prime Minister. Perhaps Brigadier-General Croft strains our credulity a little when he says that Mr Lloyd George had recently said, in answer to one who censured his honours lists: "I am no worse than Walpole." It would be strange if the twentieth century produced a statesman equal to Walpole in the corrupt management of the House.

But later speakers were more explicit. Mr Bottomley gave direct personal experience. "A once famous leader of society" had offered him an honour, "on certain formalities on his part," for services he was "supposed to have rendered." Lieutenant-Commander Astbury, Unionist Member for Salford, told how another member had been

approached by "an emissary of the Government," who asked how much he would give to the party-funds for a baronetcy. (Some sapient supporter of the leaders interrupted this statement with the remark that there was "no record" of it!) Sir D. Maclean, Sir R. Cooper, and other men of sober judgment supported. Lord Hugh Cecil, who assuredly ought to know, admitted the grave disrepute of Parliament, though he did not believe there was "anything they could properly call corruption." But he significantly supported the motion. The granting of honours must be reserved for an independent committee of the Privy Council. The intense secrecy of the party-funds was "open to much criticism." In short, almost forgetting that he had refused to admit "anything they could properly call corruption," he urged the House to declare that "the present system had come to an end."

In the political world truth is not what "each man troweth," but what his temperament permits or compels him to say. The truth was known to everybody in the House. The precise donations of certain knights and baronets on the last list passed from mouth to mouth. The reasons alleged in many cases were the laughter of the smoking-room. But Lord Hugh Cecil was a Cecil as well as a Puritan, and the truth breaks laboriously through his halting words. Mr Bonar Law looked round the House. Three-fourths of its members were away. The Whips had detained only enough faithful souls to crush the stalwart few. So Mr Bonar Law dispensed the customary opiates. The Whips assured him that no money was ever asked for honours, and no man was ever honoured for subscriptions! "Accept the resolution, then," someone cried. He would, he said, if it were put in the (entirely barren) form that honours must not be given for donations to party-funds. Not that party-funds were an evil.

Quite the reverse, he said; if they did not exist, constituencies would be more likely to run after rich men who could pay their own expenses. As to auditing, it would be useless, as there would be evasion. As to entrusting the lists to the Privy Council, he was sure no self-respecting Prime Minister would thus surrender his responsibility. And, after retailing this traditional syrup for half an hour, Mr Bonar Law concluded that they "could not cure *an evil of this kind* by attempts like this; they could only cure it by public opinion"!

So it was in the days of Palmerston, or even in the days of Pitt. The charge of evil was a wicked slander; but the Government would take wise measures to deal with the evil which the *House* and country so strongly resented. The party-funds must be protected. So sensitive are the party-leaders to the suggestion of impropriety, that they will continue decade after decade to hear the whole world about them say cynical things rather than seem to yield to slander by publishing their subscription-lists. We do not need their lists. The honours' lists suffice. Half of them are unmerited. The effort to dress up trifling services as titles to the nation's gratitude are often ludicrous. There is no longer a frank sale of honours as there was in the days of Sir Thomas Lawrence. That enables political leaders to say, with some sort of conscience, that they never sell honours or bend their policy at the dictation of the rich. But the whole world knows what *does* happen. Give a fat cheque, in four or five figures, to the funds of your party, and the Whip will see that your merits are studied with a microscope, or your son shall get a foot on the golden stairs.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE POWER OF THE OLIGARCHS

It is more than two thousand years since political theorists began to dispute about the ideal type of governmental machine, yet the philosophers of the nineteenth century have left the problem where the Athenians had left it long ago. The issue lies between democracy and aristocracy. No reputable and impartial thinker praises either autocracy or oligarchy. It is ever a question of weighing the cultural demerits of Demos against the moral demerits of Ploutos: the imperfectly-grasped and erratic ideas of self-interest of the Many, and the very clear ideas of self-interest of the Few. An historical indictment of both forms of polity is quite easy. No democracy has had the long average life of monarchies; but no aristocracy ever used its gifts exclusively on behalf of the entire body or avoided corruption. The modern world, it is true, pays little attention to the political theorist; yet it is not without interest to note that none have a good word for oligarchy.

We in England, however, are ruled, not by an aristocracy or plutocracy, but an oligarchy. We soothe our vanity with the phrase that we are a self-governing nation; as if that were not a flagrant contradiction in terms, since government in its essence implies coercive power over us. In hours of ceremony we gracefully grant that we are a monarchy; though it would be interesting to see what would happen to-day if our King refused his signa-

ture to one of our measures, or attempted to enforce in Parliament a measure which the majority of us disliked. When we are in a serious mood, we imagine that we are no longer "governed"; that the country is administered, and new laws are framed, by men elected for those purposes by us and revocable at our will.

There is no need to run again over the political calendar in order to disprove this. There are, or have been, certain great issues which the country forced on its statesmen. Such were Catholic Emancipation, the Reform Bill of 1832, and the abolition of the Corn Laws. Lord Morley would add the Reform Bill of 1867, and he is disposed to picture a reluctant Government driven into action periodically by us, the people. There are undoubtedly times when this occurs, though one would rather say that the Reform Bill of 1867, which neither Palmerston nor Disraeli really wanted, was due to an equal mixture of political chicanery and popular pressure. The country forced upon the House the creation of a more or less national and rational scheme of education, and it forced the conflict with the Lords. Even here, however, it is instructive to study the behaviour of the King's (not our) Ministers.

In 1901, under the Conservatives, an auditor disallowed the expenditure of the London County Council for advanced instruction in science and art in secondary and continuation schools. It would be interesting to have a quite full and detailed account of this procedure, but probably we shall never have it. At all events, it cut a most important element out of our school system, and, though there were no doubt many in high places who would like to cut out permanently this stimulating diet of the children of the workers, the Government dare not leave matters where the Cockerton judgment put them.

Sir John Gorst introduced a measure. County or Borough Councils were to control secular education in secondary schools through committees; and the Councillors might co-opt anybody whom they pleased to regard as an "expert" to these committees. The drift of the measure was at once plain. The representatives of squire and parson rubbed their hands. The Liberals objected, but with dignity. The Radicals and the representatives of the teachers roundly denounced the Bill, and so plainly depicted its sectarian motives that Mr Balfour was obliged to withdraw it because of the prospect of "a long and bitter resistance." The oligarchs were defeated, but only partially They introduced a modified measure, which was almost equally repugnant to the mass of the people, and used their technical power to put it through. It was quite out of accord with their election-promises, but they knew their House. Honourable members were so little interested in this Bill, in spite of its serious possibilities, that only 342 figured in the last division. Mr Joseph Chamberlain, who had once written (to G. J. Holyoake) that he wished "to wrest education out of the hands of priests of all shades," voted for it. The oligarchy, in other words, had a good deal of its way, in spite of the very plain mood of the country.

The conflict with the Lords is an even worse instance of the thwarting of the will of the people by the oligarchy of leading politicians of both sides as long as they could. It would, perhaps, not be inaccurate to say that the country has been eager ever since 1830 to break the medieval power of the Lords. The legislative record of the Lords in the nineteenth century is one long procedure of slaying or mutilating Bills which the representatives of the people passed; and the more fiercely the people demanded these measures, or the more progressive they were,

the more surely the Lords destroyed or eviscerated them. Yet it took the leaders of the Commons seventy years to nerve themselves for the obviously popular task of making us, in truth, a "self-governing" people.

We left Mr Gladstone in his later years muttering that something would have to be done with the Lords, but no one had any illusion about the prospect of his doing anything, and his letters and diaries make it plain that, even if he had been younger, the people would have found it impossible to impose upon him their will in connection with the Lords. Chamberlain's letters in the later seventies express the deep annoyance of the Radicals at Gladstone's personal suppression or restriction of progressive legislation. It is unnecessary to add that when Chamberlain himself entered into full power as an oligarch, he had no more mind than Gladstone or Salisbury to carry out the will of the people in this respect.

In 1909 a more dangerous Radical than Chamberlain forced his way into the charmed circle, and it was fortunate that his own will coincided entirely with the will of the people. Mr Lloyd George's "Socialistic" Budget of 1909—which Socialists regarded as a *bourgeois* trick—provoked one of the historic fights of the House of Commons. There was no ambiguity whatever about the mind of the nation, but the Opposition frankly represented the minority of property-holders, and they fought with every weapon in the parliamentary arsenal. New phrases were added to the political vocabulary, and Mr Balfour's ingenious "frigid and calculated inexactitude" brought less elegant rejoinders. It was November before the spring Finance Bill passed the Commons, where an overwhelming majority of the members supported it from the start. The Lords then rejected it by 850 votes to 75. This Bill, they

said, in the hope of forcing a modification of some of the new burdens on property, must be specially submitted to the people before they could find it in their consciences to let it pass.

There is no doubt that, as Mr Asquith said at the time in the Commons, this was a piece of "the hollowest political cant." But within a few months there were many who wondered if Mr Asquith's own words were entirely free from that taint. At the moment he struck an heroic attitude. He welcomed the challenge, and would ask the country to decide whether the Lords or the Liberal Government were in power. The House, he said, in that grand language which once made his reputation as a statesman, "would be unworthy of its past and of those traditions of which it is the custodian and trustee" if it did not at once hurl back this "usurpation" of its rights. Radicals, weakened in their allegiance by the Government's conduct in Egypt, rallied to the cry and closed the ranks. Mr Lloyd George declared that he "would not remain a member of a Liberal cabinet for an hour unless full powers were accorded it enabling it to pass into law a measure securing that the Commons could carry Bills in a single Parliament either with or without the sanction of the House of Lords." Even Sir Edward Grey, far from Radical, a conscientious Whig, called upon the nation to assert for ever the rights of the Commons to be uncontrolled as to finance. In fine, on the eve of the election, Mr Asquith vowed at a monster-meeting in the Albert Hall that "Liberal ministers would not again assume or hold office unless they could secure the safeguards shown to be necessary for the legislative utility and honour of the party of progress." On that understanding, which seemed clear, Liberals and Radicals scattered over the country for the great fight.

As usual, the issue was complicated, the mind of

the people dazed and inebriated, in every possible way. Conservatives generally made it an appeal on Tariff Reform. Every refined trick left possible by the Corrupt Practices Act was practised. Money was poured out abundantly—in defence of money. Peers whom no intimate friend had suspected of the energy of making speeches stumped the country. The Church—only four bishops had voted for the Bill—was enlisted in the crusade. The women, angry at Mr Asquith's personal thwarting of their suffrage-measure, withdrew every vote they could from the Government. In spite of it all, Mr Asquith was returned with a working majority of one hundred and ten over the Unionists.

The Liberals were 274: the Unionists 272. They looked at each other in embarrassment and annoyance. The forty-one Labour members and seventy-one Nationalists wanted an immediate attack on the Lords' Veto. It held up Home Rule, and it blocked the way to progressive legislation. But Mr Asquith was discovered to be unhappy. There was talk of a Coalition, a meeting in a wayside inn, anything but a straight fight. No compromise was possible, however, and Mr Asquith kissed hands. He asked no guarantees or assurances whatever, and he and his colleagues placidly faced the House as if the Albert Hall meeting had never taken place. Not only Radicals, but Mr Balfour himself, banteringly asked if Mr Asquith had got his "safeguards." In a tone of naive surprise the Premier protested that he must have been misunderstood. How could an experienced statesman be supposed to ask "guarantees for a *contingent* exercise of the Royal prerogative." The less experienced statesmen at the back of him muttered angrily that this was trickery and verbiage. Liberals like Sir H. Dalziel and Sir H. Spicer bluntly said that they had been "misled." Nationalists and Labour members put it less politely. It is known

that the Unionists privately made an offer to help the Government to carry on, in defiance of the Irish and the Labour men. What precisely took place, or would have taken place, we do not know, but presumably Mr Asquith learned that the Lords would now pass the Budget. Instead of at once attacking the Veto, as the country had expected, he put the Budget through once more, and the Lords meekly submitted to "the will of the people." The providential death of King Edward saved him for a time from further measures, and it was not until 1911 that he proceeded against the Lords.

It is needless to dwell on Chinese Labour and other matters on which the will of the country was plainly expressed. It would be superfluous to dwell on the election-promises of 1918 and the dismal failure, or positive refusal, to fulfil them. We are in the hands of an oligarchy that trims our ends, rough hew them how we will. It is rare for the will of the people to prevail, and the victory is never complete.

Many would suggest that the first condition of the survival of this oligarchy, which the Civil War of the seventeenth century substituted for a despotic monarchy, is the lingering of the medieval practice of the King choosing the First Minister. Fortunately, this apparently autocratic act is limited by the political possibilities. The King must choose a man who can rally a majority of the House, and therefore presumably represents the will of the majority of the people. Buckingham Palace therefore finds itself painfully compelled at times to summon men whose personalities or sentiments are not congenial. Queen Victoria's feeling toward Gladstone, the first great Commoner, is well known, in spite of his religious zeal, his Puritanism, and his real Conservatism. At his retirement she pointedly ignored his suggestion of a successor, and chose a peer who was even less Liberal than he. But the

practical situation is inexorable, as she discovered. This remnant of the royal prerogative is almost useless, as the chosen Premier has to be approved by the support of the House.

The real mischief is in the next step. If some industrious historian will one day write, as far as it is possible to do so, the chronicle of the formation of ministries, it will prove as amusing as Petruccelli della Gattina's history of the Papal Conclaves. Forty-eight hours of weird intrigue and calculation follow the choice of the First Minister. The last consideration is the competency of the particular candidate to control a great department of State. Westminster gasped with astonishment when Mr Lloyd George had the audacity to look beyond the crowd of office-seekers, who lingered within telephone-call, and choose "non-politicians" of a cabinet rank. It was war-time, certainly, but even the vital need of the nation must have some respect for political traditions. The law is plain. There are some twenty or thirty men on each side who have a right to be included in the ministry, and the task of the First Minister is to do as little harm as possible within the Party by his necessary omissions—for the cake is never large enough, in Disraeli's phrase—and find, in that narrow sphere, the nearest approach he can to square men for square holes.

At one time it was necessary, whatever the standard of ability of the peerage at the time, to select first a large number of peers as the substantial part of the cabinet. The Whig had to dissipate the slightest suspicion of revolutionary intentions. The mood has outlived Whiggery. There were four peers in the cabinet which set out to fight Germany in 1914, and it is safe to say that not one person in 100,000 could recall the names of three of them to-day.

Next to these come hereditary legislators, or scions

of political families. Since Mr Herbert Gladstone decided, in spite of his father's consciousness of the wickedness of the political world, to choose that career, the cabinet was open to him. Qualification was a secondary matter. Any member of the Cecil family, one supposes, can march straight from the cradle to the cabinet. The Marquis of Crewe had a right by birth and marriage. Mr Harcourt and Mr Churchill had only to produce their pedigrees. The Montagus, Mr Austin Chamberlain, Mr Hobhouse, Sir John Pease, Mr Masterman, Mr Tennant, and others fall in the same class. They were born to the purple, or they married it. It would be hazardous to quarrel with their families or connections. They are normal and legitimate aspirants to membership of the oligarchy.

The other groups are fairly well defined. There are the sons of rich members of one or other party. For a few years they can afford to work as unpaid secretaries, or apprentices, and learn the trade. Presently they appear in the ministry, or on the fringe of it, and the Press has laboriously to discover who they are. "A slight ballast of mediocrity steadies the ship and makes for unity," says a distinguished politician. One would not care to suggest that they are useful for outvoting members of the ministry with pronounced personality. It is probably the kind of sophistication with which men like Mr Gladstone reconcile themselves to entrusting national tasks of great importance to mediocrities, for reasons which need not be looked in the face. What becomes of the Post Office or the Home Office or the Board of Trade under their scrupulous attention is another matter. The journalistic view, as Mr Stead genially put it in his examination of the 1906 cabinet of Mr Campbell-Bannerman, is that "a Premier is entitled to perpetrate one job" in making his cabinet. Mr Campbell-Bannerman had made his

private secretary, who had married Lord Aberdeen's daughter, Secretary for Scotland. Happy the nation that gets only *one* job perpetrated in the choice of its administrators. "In all cabinets," says a parliamentary writer, "there are members of whom it may be said, 'one wonders how the devil they got there.'"

The private secretaryship is a widely recognised approach for talent which has no political pedigree and no aristocratic marriage-connections. Young lawyers, to whose aspirations the hours of the House are nicely and deliberately adjusted, are familiar with the route. In the 1906 cabinet eight out of nineteen ministers were lawyers. In the 1914 cabinet nine were lawyers, and the extra-cabinet workers were largely lawyers. The ideal politician is, it seems, a man who has been through Oxford and the courts. He is accomplished in the art of preventing anything from being done, the confusion of issues, and the prolongation of debate. None but a lawyer could think out Mr Asquith's magnificent phrases and subtleties of speech. But this approach is not reserved for lawyers. Any young man who will for some years zealously and loyally serve the Party, in and out of the House, for a number of years may cherish hope to-day. Let him write a book on the glorious deeds of Gladstonian Liberalism (or Disraelian Conservatism, as the case may be), devote his leisure to the cause, show himself expert at blocking motions or nettling questions (if on the Opposition), and he may presently find himself Under-Secretary for some branch of the national economy about which he knows as much as he does about the finances of Liberia.

Lastly, there is the unpleasant need of sharing the spoils with representatives of minorities whose support is essential, or whose opposition must be disarmed. It grows more painful every decade.

Gladstone, needing the Radicals, was forced to make an offer to Sir C. Dilke—a gentleman, it is true, but a pronounced Republican and suspected of infidelity. Dilke compelled Gladstone to accept also Chamberlain, then a strong anti-clerical and Republican. Downing Street was changing. Lord Salisbury was compelled to include Lord Randolph Churchill, whom he regarded as a traitor, and ultimately Mr Chamberlain. A deeper depth was opened when a Labour Party appeared. Mr Burns had to be taken into the cabinet. Extreme Labour men at once disowned Mr Burns, and Mr Asquith tried to induce Mr Hyndman to join! A few years later Mr Henderson was put in control of the third largest educational system in the world, and was—he says—sent to Petrograd (where people translated to him what they thought fit) with discretionary power to turn out a titled ambassador and take his place.

These, however, are the minority of the cabinet, and can be outvoted at any time. The oligarchs—the representatives of the great political families and the men of exceptional ability who have forced their way in and will found new families—settle down to the consolidation of their power. The machinery they find at hand, elaborated by a long line of oligarchs, is almost perfect. The Opposition is the Opposition, and has its recognised laws, the first of which is not to remain in opposition one day longer than it can help. It must be vigilant for snap-votes and intrigues with disaffected minorities. It must use no language in less than the superlative degree whenever the Government does something that the country may presumably resent, or fails to do something which the country empowered and instructed it to do. All things are lawful to it, and most things are expedient. It can throw out a Government over a Franchise Bill, and then pass an even more demo-

cratic measure itself. It can cast down a ministry for the horrors of Chinese labour, and then contemplate them with philosophic resignation. It can ask whether the Government has the guarantees it promised to exact, and then give it a gentlemanly assurance that they will not be necessary. This is all in the game.

But the rival group, the oligarchs of the quinquennium, are quite familiar with these manoeuvres, and, if they start their reign with a majority of at least sixty or seventy, are not disturbed. Their main task is to hold their majority. The greater part of their supporters are safe. The indignation which was vented when Mr Lloyd George and Mr Bonar Law issued "coupons" before the last election was part of the theatrical unreality that seems inseparable from politics. In effect they are always issued, as we shall see in the next chapter. A parliamentary candidate faces the electorate almost invariably as a "supporter" of one or other group of oligarchs. They control the machine and the party-funds, and it is of little use for any man to seek election in defiance of the machine. Probably he is to some extent financially dependent on it. At least he must rely on its organisation, for the so-called Independent is almost invariably crushed between the stones of the Liberal-Conservative mill. Even most of the few members who are financially independent soon find the limits of their power. In the hands of the leaders is the dread weapon of dissolution, with the prospect of finding another thousand or two thousand pounds for an election. During the course of the year 1919 we have realised the force of this. We find its influence every few years in the political chronicle of the nineteenth century. We have a flagrant example in the earlier part of the war, when many members clung to Mr Asquith, because their salaries were secure against reduction

as long as he remained Premier, but were plainly threatened in the event of a change.

The leaders have then to deal with "followers" who show a tendency to mutiny. They are quite aware that this is in some cases a recognised form of ambition, and the remedy is prescribed by long experience. "Tell ——— we'll do nothing for him until he drops that grievance of his," a cabinet minister said to a friend of the member whose name I suppress. No doubt for entirely different reasons he dropped it; and he appeared in an enviable position soon afterwards. The record of the last twenty years has many such coincidences. The sugar-plums at the disposal of the cabinet are numerous, quite apart from ministerial positions. There are political pensions for the deserving and the docile. Some one once asked Mr Gladstone for a political pension for either a Conservative or a Radical; Lord Morley does not say which, but I suspect a certain well-known Radical. "You are probably aware," the great Puritan replied, refusing, "that during the fifty years which have passed since the system of political civil pensions was essentially remodelled, no political pension has been granted by any minister except to one of those with whom he stood on terms of general confidence and co-operation." Lord Morley adds that in his later years Mr Gladstone wanted to abolish these "remodelled" aids to oligarchy, but was dissuaded by his younger colleagues on the genial ground that, in view of the approaching term of his political career, such an act would be an act of dictation to the consciences of others. They still ooze from the Exchequer, and the list of recipients is interesting.

There are lectureships in connection with the party-organisations that are ever willing to listen to the recommendation of a minister. Journalistic openings are possible in a certain section of the press.

There are knighthoods and privy councillorships and other decorations which at once put a man in a position to double his fees for lectures or articles. There are commissions and committees and other prizes. Mr Passmore Edwards told me that half the Irish members, when the Liberal Party was sustained by them, lived on the work of the House long before members began to receive salaries.

For the thoroughly refractory, who are generally men of means as well as political morals, with safe seats, the oligarchy has other measures. Their record in the House, especially since the caucus was adopted, is not encouraging to any. The awful example of Cowen still haunts the smoking-room. Mr Gibson Bowles later attempted the free lance, and his experience did not make the career more attractive. In 1901 he accused the Government of putting pressure on an independent committee in connection with reconstruction-work at Gibraltar. It issued its report, he said, and then, under pressure from the oligarchs, withdrew it and issued a different report. His experience may be gathered from the letter which he wrote to the *Times* (October 18th):

> "The right of free speech, or of any speech at all, on any subject at all, is so fenced about by rules, mostly new and made by the clerks at the table to shut up loopholes, that it can only be exercised at the will of the Minister. Each session witnesses new additions to the closely-woven net wherein the feet of the private member are entangled should he dare to raise any matter whatever in any form whatever."

The country has since shown some tendency to return a few men of independent character, if party-connection, and the net has been draw closer over the House. Up to 1904 it was said that only three really independent members had sat in the House

of Commons, but there were symptoms of a decay of docility. Nothing would be so fatal to the party-system, and the Conservative Government became stringent. "No man," said an expert on the House, speaking of Mr Balfour, "has done so much to destroy the power of the House over the Government of the day. He has practically converted Parliament into a registering body to ratify the decrees of the executive after such amount of grumbling as the Prime Minister sees fit to permit." About the same date a private member wrote to the *Times* (April 24th, 1904):

> "In a few years' time the non-professional politician, the man of independent thought and speech, will cease to exist in the House of Commons, and his place will be taken by the voting machine who will be a joy to the Whips, but who will contribute nothing to the thought or to the judgment of the assembly."

As is known, the private member has already almost lost the power of speaking in debate, except on the "private members' days," when some measure is being academically discussed which no one regards as serious. The speakers are arranged in advance. In 1911 Mr Ginnell made a violent protest against the choice of Mr Lowther as Speaker. He denied that Mr Lowther was impartial in calling upon members to address the House, and, of the many Radical members who agreed with Mr Ginnell, one, Mr Wedgwood, wrote him to say so. We remember still the severe rebuke which the oligarchs inflicted. Mr Wedgwood bowed to the ground. Even Mr Ginnell greatly modified his charge, though he was suspended for a week, by 311 votes to 84. But, incidentally, the public learned to its surprise that, whenever there was a serious or "full dress" debate, the Whips supplied the Speaker with a list

of the names of the men who were to be permitted to speak!

Apart from these serious debates, when the ordinary member has now merely to listen (if he cares) and vote, there is the possibility of bringing forward motions or asking questions. The motion is easily defeated. You get a loyal supporter to anticipate with a motion, and the hostile motion cannot be put until this is disposed of; and the member who has blocked the way is not compelled to proceed with his motion at all. The critic may, in his indignation, move the adjournment of the House, but he will be fortunate if he knows of forty independent men to support him. Most members know that it is a waste of time. They rely on questions for the purpose of criticism, and during the war and the last twelve months some very effective work was done in this way by judicious critics. Unhappily, useful questions were apt to be lost in the flood of meticulous questions—such as whether German prisoners were really provided with felt socks in their boots—which the Pacifists outpoured day by day. It was, in any case, exasperating to have a pert Under-Secretary making a reply which combined the minimum of information with the maximum of impudence. The man who asks searching questions is treated as a pariah. Compare Lady Astor's language during the election and after a month in Parliament.

So the oligarchs keep their " team " together until at least the milestone which means a pension is passed. As they get stale, a vernal freshness lights up the opposite benches. The crucial month approaches. The parliamentary situation takes on some resemblance to billiards. If you lose your shot, you trust to leave a bad table for your opponent. The penumbra of dissolution steals on, and the work outside Parliament is more heroic than

inside. The war-chest must be counted, and further contributions be discreetly elicited. The new circular of the firm, the list of election-promises, must be composed. Catch-phrases must be invented, lurid posters devised (they still linger in rural constituencies), words put to jingles of the hour. Orators, organisers, journalists, pamphleteers—grateful for favours to come—must be flung upon the public. It is a quaint way of conducting the business of a mighty nation, but the leaders have one good reply: the public seems to like it.

It remains only to consider an aspect of the question which provokes extraordinarily opposite opinions. Whether the maintenance of the system I have described is corruption or no I leave to the reader. There are certainly worse political systems. We have seen the American. The French and Italian political worlds have during the last forty years produced scandal after scandal. All the heroism of 1816 to 1870, all the blood of martyrs to the Holy Alliance and its successors, ended in the French and Italian oligarchies of the last forty years. The Spanish is even worse. A Catholic Spanish writer says, in a work which he addresses to the king, that the Spanish political system is characterised by "profound immorality and congenital debility." Señor Maura himself, the ex-Premier, said in the Cortes in 1901 that all the struggles and sacrifices of the nineteenth century had only established "an immense imposture" in Spain. It is the closest European counterpart of Tammany. Portugal, in our own days, has evicted a corrupt king to instal a set of very questionable politicians.

The taint of our own system is more subtle, and it is in that sense that we have to examine our "scandals." I happened to be in one of our colonies just after the "Marconi scandal." When I, speaking to a group of distinguished colonial

politicians in their House of Assembly, deplored these things, they looked at each other and smiled. "You call those things scandals in England, do you?" said one of them. Yet at the time they were, whatever they are to-day, under the impression that some of our statesmen had used Government influence or information to enrich themselves.

What is clear about what is called the "Marconi scandal" is that ministers have a large power of preventing the disclosure of undesirable facts in Parliament. The libel-court ruled, we remember, that no English politician had dealt in English Marconi shares, which went up nearly four-fold in eight months on account of a Government contract. One may admit that in more than one continental country deals of this kind by politicians would be a matter of course. We are assured that no such deal occured here. Yet the facts, which are now acknowledged, were kept from the House and the public as long as possible. They were dragged from reluctant witnesses. The Attorney-General was a brother of Marconi's managing director, and it is not unnatural that Godfrey Isaacs should recommend American Marconis as a good investment. It turned out that the Government contract did not help the American Company. Did the Master of Elibank, when he purchased 3000 American shares for the Liberal party, think that there might be an indirect influence on the Americans? We are reduced to conjecture; but it is notorious that great pressure was required to elicit these innocent facts.

To the delight—I mean the secret delight, but public indignation—of the Conservatives, the "Marconi scandal" was followed speedily by what was called "the Indian silver scandal." Inarticulate members dropped on the luxurious couches at the Carlton, and in Conservative houses. This was what the House of Commons was coming to in our Radical

age! Mr Lloyd George threw at them some rude insinuations about *their* misdeeds when they were in power, and hastened, in view of the approaching election, to set the Liberal house in order. The Government, he said, had defeated a ring in entrusting the purchase of silver to Messrs S. Montagu & Co. But the firm had made £7513 brokerage; and the head of the firm was Lord Swathling, his brother was Under Secretary for India, a member of the firm was Liberal M.P. for Whitechapel, and a relative of Lord Swathling was Postmaster-General.

In such circumstances as these the representatives of the people need the fullest power of inquiry. But, as we saw week after week during the war, their power of inquiry is very limited. The instinct of the official is to deny and conceal. There is a ludicrous supposition that even under-secretaries and their underlings never err. It is the system which prompts this ridiculous attitude. The Opposition would pounce upon any admission of error and make a national catastrophe of it. The Government plays the game by suppressing or glossing facts. As most of the press is divided like the members between the two parties, it is a safe game. One set of papers will harmlessly fume: their rivals will accept any explanation. The advantage of a Coalition is that three-fourths of the press is "good." The oligarchs virtually control three-fourths of the manufacturers of public opinion. They have laboratories of peptonised food in Downing Street. And there are knightly spurs, if not something better, on the horizon for sensible editors.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE REPRESENTED AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES

THE obvious reply to the theme of the last chapter is that we freely choose our parliamentary representatives, and that I have admitted that these have the power to break an inacceptable ministry at any time. How, then, can one speak of oligarchy? I selected, let us say, at the last election, a candidate who was pledged to support Mr Lloyd George and Mr Bonar Law. He believed, as I believed, that they were the fittest men to administer the country in a period of difficulty, and that the program of action they put before us was sound. To put it in general terms, nine out of fifteen million electors deliberately entrusted power once more to a Government with which they were familiar, and instructed their representatives to support that Government. Is this oligarchy or democracy? Is it good logic or bad temper?

One might retort at once that if this ingenuous plea were admitted one could not easily understand the unpleasant odour that attaches to the name "politician." One wonders by what strange hallucination Mr Gladstone was brought to disparage politics and politicians, why Lord Hugh Cecil so haltingly says that his world contains "nothing that can *properly* be called corruption," why Mr J. R. Macdonald thinks that it is very difficult to be honest in Westminster. One is astonished that lawyers thrive so well in this simple, democratic atmosphere, and that the House resists down to our

own day the country's praiseworthy curiosity to read the lists of subscribers to the party-funds. But we may take the alternative course of examining this liberty of ours to choose our representatives and this supposed power of theirs to control ministers.

Let me revert to the London constituency in which, at the last election, three men "solicited the honour" of representing the people in Parliament. The second and third were turned down so ruthlessly that each forfeited his £150 deposit, and probably twice that sum in expenses. They will, of course, not appear again, and their fate will not encourage others. That is the first limitation of our liberty. The oligarchs have laid it down that any candidate for Parliament must deposit £150. Their own candidates have not the least risk of losing it, but outside candidates have a very serious risk. They have further laid it down that a candidate may spend from one to two thousand pounds in announcing to the electors that he will support Mr Bonar Law or Mr Lloyd George, or both. *Their* candidates will get the money. There are rich party-chests, recruited by effective means at the disposal of the oligarchs, for the financing of poor, but loyal, men and the assisting of others. The outside candidate must find at least £500 out of his own pocket, and even with this he has little chance against a man with £1500. Further, an election, in an advanced civilisation like ours, has a very extensive business-side which demands great skill and experience; and they command the skilled and experienced men.

We do not seem to be as free as we imagined. Suppose, however, that we had a few hundred well-to-do and virtuous and leisured men and women, quite indifferent to titles, offices and other political rewards, ready to contest every constituency in

Britain. There is, of course, as long as the present system lasts, not the remotest hope of returning a majority, or even a very large minority, of such men. Suppose we wished to respond to their benevolent aspirations. What would be the result if we returned one of these, after listening to an address from him—his expenses could easily be kept within a hundred pounds but for the rival circus-display—and questioning him? What would be the result? We should indeed have a representative in Parliament, and he or she might be virtuous and cultivated, but he would have the disadvantage of being dumb. Fifty such members—a hundred such members—would have no organisation, no common links, and would count for little. The King would send for a recognised party-leader, and the customary oligarchy would be installed. If the Independents were numerous enough to form a dangerous minority, there would be a Coalition and a strategic arrangement of legislation. Under the present system, in other words, we have to choose between futility and one of the two Parties. The oligarchs have seen to that. At the last election the plain issue was Coalition or something far worse.

This, moreover, is on the theory that an election is a pure democratic institution in which the free and independent citizen, no longer terrorised by employer or landlord at an open poll, registers his simple-souled conviction on national issues. For the great majority it is, of course, nothing of the kind. The amplest advantage is taken of ignorance, greed, and frivolity. The party-machinery encourages, not the new tendencies to honest political life, but every lingering tendency to sacrifice one's democratic duty to other considerations.

A veteran political worker published a volume of reminiscences some years ago.* He recalls, almost

* *Reminiscences of a Country Politician*, by J. A. Bridges, 1906.

with affection, the elections of fifty years ago, and there is one page that may be reproduced since it quaintly illustrates how men of strict honour in the other relations of life are guilty of strange aberrations when they enter politics. It refers to an election at Bridgnorth in (I calculate) 1865. It had been a Tory pocket-borough, the small number of freeman-voters being regularly bribed and intoxicated by the sitting member. In 1865 Sir John Acton (later Baron Acton), the well-known Catholic scholar and intimate friend of Gladstone, chose to contest this corrupt seat in the Liberal interest. Everyone is acquainted with Acton's ideals and professions, but it seems that he met the conditions much more easily than Gladstone had done. Bridges interviewed a tile-maker and farmer who had hitherto voted Tory, because the Tory member was his landlord and the Tory agent rented his shooting. He was now independent and doubtful. He calmly opened his business-books and looked which of the three candidiates had dealt most heavily with him. Even Sir J. Acton had bought tiles to "a considerable amount," but the Tory candidate had bid higher and got the vote.

Worse follows. At this election in which an idealist entered the running, "votes reached a value that the oldest freeman had never dared to hope for and that they were never to reach again," and Sir J. Acton personally engaged in the traffic. On the day of the election three small traders were still "neutral." Sir John was seen to enter the shop of one and the Tory agent hurried after him, to see what he was purchasing. He found the shop empty, and waited in vain. Sir J. Acton had departed by the back door. The Liberal candidate entered the shop of the second trader, and the Tory agent learned and went after him. Again the business was done in an inner room, and Sir J. Acton went out by the

back door. The third trader was induced in the same way to part with his neutrality. Both sides had imported gangs of roughs, and there were bloody fights. Acton's men seized a half-drunken butcher whom the Tory agent was piloting to the poll, and carried him off to vote Liberal. They did the same with two men who were waiting for the bribe promised them by the Tories. Sir J. Acton won the seat by one vote.

These things happened sixty years ago. The point of interest is in connection with the assurance, still blandly forced on us, that "gentlemen" do not do things which the law forbids; for bribery was strictly forbidden even in 1865. Sir J. Acton was merely our "Nabob" over again. He made the corruption worse. In fact, candidates generally left these things to their agents. Bridges asked his chairman of committee, a clergyman, what price he might rise to in the case of a particularly exacting voter. "For goodness sake don't tell *me* anything about it," said the clergyman. "Do what you think best."

In the course of the long period surveyed by this reminiscent country politician we see a considerable change come over local politics. The fighting—rather to his regret—disappears. The crude bribery is replaced by subtler forms. The Tories, he says, still deliberately cultivate the parson and the publican; though he would like his Party to desert the clergy as "it would perforce make men of the cringing toadies whose cry, like that of the daughters of the horse-leech, is 'give, give.'" The publican is too precious an ally. The more purchasable, or less serious, voters meet in his rooms. Smoking-concerts with free drinks are arranged with him. Temporary clubs are housed in his premises. There is generally a "room upstairs" which is very useful.

If any person doubts whether there is still in

England any large amount of this new form of corruption at elections I would urge him to study *Electioneering Up to Date*, by Mr C. R. Buxton. It deals with the elections so recent as 1895, 1900 and 1906, and there has been no material change since then. It chiefly puts together the reports of 260 candidates at the 1906 election and details revealed at election-inquiries. No doubt they were largely disappointed candidates, and one must set aside as "non-proven" much that they say. But there remains a mass of proved corruption, in every part of Britain, which goes far to explain how those of us who would like to take political life seriously are thwarted.

He gives first concrete instances of "ground-baiting," or the distribution of coals, food, drink, etc., in view of an approaching election. The *Birmingham Daily Post* (7th January 1895) recommended Colonel Long for the Evesham division on the ground (amongst others) that he sent meat several times a week to a rheumatic patient, and eventually sent him to Droitwich baths. Must not a man be philanthropic because he is going to put up for Parliament? Somehow it recalls the old pictures of Lord Wharton, of the eighteenth century: the London dandy who knew every worker's child in his constituency and swore he must "have a glass of ale with Tom" when he called at a cottage. In the Haggerston petition it was proved that the Unionist candidate made food-tickets (sixpence each) of his private cards and distributed fifty a day to "deserving applicants." At Hull a speaker, mentioning that Lord George Hamilton had secured £900,000 worth of business while member for Hull, was reported as saying: "Am I not right when I say I am a strong advocate for a very good dose of bread and butter politics" The *Manchester Guardian* quoted this item from the election-poster

of a candidate at Camborne: "Eighthly, he subscribed large sums to deserving local institutions and charities, and, ninthly, he contributed £100 a year to the Miners' Accident Fund." In a bye-election in the Cricklade division (1898) some of Lord Emlyn's tenants issued a letter recommending his candidature on the ground (amongst other philanthropies) that "if anyone goes to the Golden Grove [his house] on errands or business, they have a pint of good ale, bread and cheese, and a shilling."

In the Yarmouth petition-case it was proved that the candidate had held many meetings, at which free drinks were given, in public-houses. At Droitwich a publican who was charged with permitting drunkenness on his premises pleaded that it was at a private "political smoking-concert," and it was elicited that the local agent of the Conservative Association paid for the room and seven bottles of whisky, cigars, and beer for ninety people. In the Worcester petition-case, which was abandoned, there was evidence for production that a National Conservative League had eleven lodges in Worcester and held smoking-concerts weekly in public-houses, at which the chairman stood drinks. The same thing was done in practically all the villages of Shropshire and Worcestershire. In the Rochester case evidence was given of tickets which entitled a man to a meal of sandwiches, ale and claret, being sold at threepence. In the Bodmin petition the Cornwall Liberal Social Council was found to have invited all electors to an "At Home" at Lord Clifden's seat, with free supper. In another west-country town a candidate paid an agent £300 a year to extol his generosity in the local press. In the *Times* of February 11th, 1895, it was said that the Liberal candidate for Colchester had given "a magnificent donation for a free library" and had got large business for the

town; and next day the agent of the Conservative candidate hotly retorted that *his* man had spent enormous sums in Colchester and paid for "a wholesale distribution of coals." The *Oswestry Advertiser* published a letter from a "Tory Squiress," in which she rejoiced that the happy result of the Oswestry election would save her a hundred pounds a year in entertainments, contributions, etc., since she could now leave these to the new member.

This is a selection of Mr Buxton's concrete cases of "ground-baiting." These are not rumours, or confined to backward localities. They reach from Haggerston to Bodmin, and illustrate a national system. Probably few are ignorant that this system thrives to-day. Our judges have ruled that a parliamentary candidate has a right to spend money in order to secure "popularity," but not to secure votes. Of course, all they aim at is popularity. To the votes which follow they are indifferent. As that classic politician, Lord Wharton, said, when the labourer's wife assured him that her husband's vote was safe: "I don't care about that—I want to have a glass of ale with Tom." Within the last year or two I had occasion to stay a few days with a well-known family in a county town. They described in detail how the sitting member was drenching the poorer districts with small benefactions week by week, and these districts would vote almost solid for him. But "nursing" constituencies is no secret. Yet it is a thoroughly tainted and most important part of our present system.

This sort of thing is legal. Our statesmen have seen to it that the Corrupt Practices Act leaves ample room for the peculiar advantages of the party-organisation against the honest Independent. Corruption at, or just before, elections is not now legal, but it is rife all over England. Again I will venture to borrow a few instances, mostly of the 1906 elec-

tion, from Mr Buxton's book and from an article by Mr J. Fisher in the *Independent Review*, April 1906.

Philanthropy, of course, takes on a Christmas glow when an election is believed to approach. Drinking-clubs rise like mushrooms, and like mushrooms will wither away when the election is over, and free drinks no longer add to their attractiveness. Small parcels of coals and groceries fall in showers. Kindly ladies visit the homes of poor mothers and see that mother and babe have good milk in abundance. Dainty dames press sweets on dirty urchins at street corners. Suppers and smoking-concerts multiply, and grow cheaper as they multiply. Strangers arrive in the town with full pockets, and believe so strongly in their impartial opinion of Mr——, the Liberal or Conservative candidate, that they are willing to stand drinks all round to any who will listen. Local politicians or municipal officers—whose names will surely be reported to the headquarters of the caucus—ooze whiskey and drop cigars.

There is a mass of evidence of these things in 1906, and anybody who cares to take the trouble could collect the evidence for 1918. At one place the mayor of the city accompanied the candidate round the public-houses and scattered whiskies and sodas and cigars. At another place several unknown men, who disappeared again after the election, backed a certain candidate's merits with the same liberality. In many towns sums were deposited with publicans before polling day, and free drinks were supplied to men introduced by the agents; or beer fell amazingly in price, and the publican recovered his loss somewhere afterwards. In one town a titled lady canvasser told a poor woman, whose house she visited, to send her dairy-bill to the Hall. In another a district-visitor, who was canvassing,

distributed sugar and syrup, with a graceful reference to the Conservative candidate, a few days before the election, and declined to distribute it where the sentiment was known to be Radical. In other places beef was generously distributed. In a Shropshire village ten hundredweight of coal was delivered to each worker with the message (by the carter): "This is from a Tory: what have the Liberals done for you?" Elsewhere, in many places, local charitable bequests were made to serve political objects. In a London constituency 1070 Christmas parcels, worth three shillings and sixpence each, were given away three weeks before the election.

Treating is quite general in England at election-time. The Act of 1854 had only forbidden the candidate to treat. The Corrupt Practices Act of 1883 made what seemed elaborate regulations to prevent any person from treating for him, and punished the receiver as well. But Mr Fisher gives plenty of positive evidence that treating is common, though it would be difficult to prove it legally. In the course of his inquiries a single publican told him that he controlled ninety votes. In very many places the price of beer was lowered, or abolished, and drinking clubs were temporarily formed. Mr Buxton shows that in the week ending July 15th, 1895, the revenue from beer was £337,000 more than in the corresponding week for 1894. One million barrels of beer above the ordinary flow were consumed in Britain that week. The general election had taken place on the 13th.

Another trick is for wealthy people to hold up their subscriptions to local causes, if there is a Liberal candidate in the field, until the result of the election is known. Shopkeepers and workers who openly state their sentiments, or do not emphatically declare for a particular side, lose their customers after the election. Mr Buxton quotes a

passage from the *Parish Magazine* of the Rev. A. P. Upcher, vicar of Halesworth and Chediston: "We must see that we support and patronise in trade only those who are loyal to the Church" (p. 37). He reproduces letters written to Liberal tradesmen on the eve of an election, saying that they may send in their Bills if they support the Liberal candidate. The Primrose League of Leamington (Hants) issued a list marking the local traders who were to be dealt with or avoided. A Liberal grocer, after a bye-election, lost £80 of his turnover in six months. Specific cases are quoted of threats of loss of employment, or promises of employment, according as a man voted.

Employers of one or other party make use of their power in the interest of their candidate. Most people will remember a notorious case not many years ago, in which a Liverpool ship-repairer kept a body of hostile workers in the middle of the Mersey until the poll was closed. Mr Buxton adds many instances. One candidate is taken over the works, and given every advantage, while his rival is excluded. Workers who are known to be on the same side as the employer get special facilities for voting and workmen who are known to be on the other side—and the opinions of the great majority are well known in every shop—get the reverse. Employers canvass the works for their candidate. No doubt many men will sign, and vote otherwise, but in one works in 1906, situated in a constituency of only 6000 voters, a thousand written promises to vote for a particular candidate were secured. Amongst the agricultural workers the belief is fostered that the ballot is not really secret. It was reported in the *Sussex Daily News* (7th November 1904) that a candidate was asked at a meeting if the ballot was secret. It is said that he refused to answer, but that his chairman, Sir H. Harben,

observed that he "did not believe it was." There are places in which the villagers are told that there are mirrors in the voting stand by which votes can be read. Farmers and house-owners in rural districts are especially bad. We talk of the incubus of the reactionary agricultural voter, but few realise how widely the system of intimidation and temptation still prevails.

We now see the value of the pretty theory that fifteen million free and indepndent electors, the overwhelming majority of the adults of the country, deliberately choose to return men who will, as they well know, accept the leaders whom I have called oligarchs. A vast proportion of the voters are bribed, intimidated, seduced, or mentally fuddled. Leaving out those who are intimidated—and we may admit that their number decreases at every election—it may be pleaded that one cannot blame politicians if men choose to let their convictions be influenced by the paltry bribe of a few free drinks. The evidence I have quoted shows that this is a quite inadequate and sophistical way of putting the matter. To millions of our people it is a material thing to have in their district an "open-handed gentleman" of great wealth. For millions of others what our judges call "popularity" turns the human scale. I was in South Wales on the eve of the last election, and listened to two fairly educated women discussing the prospect. The elder would vote for Dr——, a sincere, grave, rather Radical worker. The other was to vote for his opponent because he was "a *nice* man." What do such people know about the possible issue to their country of choosing between A and B? I will go so far as to admit that at several general elections I, a trained student of politics, refused to vote for either the Liberal or the Conservative candidate because it was impossible to say which was the less harmful. In millions of less

educated minds a glow of popularity, or "a good dose of bread-and-butter politics," easily weights the dice.

It is a pernicious system, a corrupt system. Every single trick which I have described ought to be rigorously forbidden and punished. In every single case the object was, transparently, to influence votes by corrupt means. Every means is corrupt which is not a purely immaterial appeal to the intelligence of the elector. Treating, in particular, is one of the most repulsive ways of influencing electors that could be imagined. The people who give and take such bribes ought to be punished by the total prohibition of treating from the time the election is announced until it is over. Free drinks and cheap beer are easily detected and punished. But both our great political parties know that these things are done for them, and they will not move. They know that for every petition one of them brings, the other side will bring a petition; so they "pair." They know that the Independent who wants to bring a petition—in the nation's interest—must have a few thousand pounds to sacrifice; and they have no mind to alter that.

In fact, the difficulty of proving corruption in the legal sense, though you may bring evidence enough in the human sense, is almost prohibitive. Of forty-two petitions brought between 1886 and 1906, after the passing of an elaborate Corrupt Practices Act, twenty-six were rejected by the judges. I have already quoted Mr Justice Grantham's ruling that a candidate may spend, some time before the election, to secure popularity. Baron Fitzgerald would not rule that it was corrupt for landowners to gather at the door of the polling-station, though he said: "I entertain grave doubts whether it is either prudent or proper." Mr Justice Bruce, who presided over the Haggerston inquiry in 1895, exonerated

the candidate who, four or five months before the election, distributed five hundred of his visiting cards entitling the recipient to food. This is the official interpretation of the Act of 1883. It evidences the popular political interpretation of it for the last sixteen years. But our statesmen say that the law is adequate.

This by no means exhausts the grossness of our electoral system. Ostrogorski quotes a well-known Conservative organiser, Mr J. H. Bottomley, saying in 1889:

> "The franchise has been made a mockery, and we must clear away the endless scandals of the Revision Courts. The law on the subject is a sealed book except to a few, and those who are neither Tories nor Radicals—the neutrals—political outcasts—suffer most. . . . The register, when complete, is a trophy of party trickery and manipulation."

That is still true. The law, framed by politicians, reads as if it were written expressly for the purposes of the local party-organisers. One would like to know what proportion of voters could say, if they have not been instructed by a party-agent, and have not lived many years in a house, what are the precise conditions of their right to vote: or how many lodgers know whether they are true citizens or no. The local organisers and their lawyers settle the whole business, and the fight is marked by chivalry of a peculiar kind. I once, being rather disgusted at the conduct of a Nonconformist of particularly unctuous piety, told the Tory organisers that, to my absolute knowledge, his son, who exercised a lodger-vote, was not a lodger. Nothing came of it. They "paired." Such cases are numerous. The admirer of bluff British common sense and honesty ought to attend the Revision Courts in September

and October. This whole department of electoral life is in scandalous need of reform.

In all these and other ways the tendency, if not the aim, of the machine is to discourage the amateur (the Independent) from meddling with a skilled and costly game. The conditions are kept such that only a powerful and wealthy organisation can attend adequately to this important section of the game. The oligarchs lay it down that a sum five or ten times what is really needed to put one's views before the electorate may be spent by each candiate. His friends more or less crudely spend more for him, and provide vehicles to give him an advantage over a poorer candidate. The return of his expenses is not subjected to any very elaborate check. There is, perhaps, fifty or a hundred pounds for an astute election-agent. Most people who belong to that world know that this is often only an instalment. Especially if the candidate succeeds, the agent may expect a handsome "present" some time afterwards. Other workers are "honorary." Some of them will appear presently on the Borough or District Council, helped by the machinery to which they lent their aid in the general election. Some are tradesmen, contractors, employers, etc.; and one good turn deserves another. An encyclopædic work on our electoral machinery would surprise many people who think that political life is very simple.

The orgie of promises and counter-promises, in fine, must be borne in mind, though we have already considered this. The pyrotechnic display in an election-month does certainly grow more sober. One can remember occasions within the last twenty years when the hoarding of London or Manchester bore ghastly loads of crude colouring. The prime joke was for each party to represent the other as a compound of Bill Sikes and the Artful Dodger

picking the pockets of a particularly stupid-looking citizen. Myriads of broadsides, of the humour (without the art) of the eighteenth century, were plastered over the country. One voted for the broadest joke. These things linger in the rural constituencies. Politics never attempt to lift up.

In the cities we now rely on strong print. Phrases are priceless, especially if they are alliterative. Qualifications of the weirdest description appear. Personal records are polished until they shine; and in a few days after you have read them, a canvasser of the opposite side comes to whisper insinuations about them at your door. Men who were playing billiards when you were reading Sidgwick or Dunning or Ostrogorski insist on pushing into your dining-room and giving you elementary lessons. If the candidate has a pretty wife, he sends her as a sample of his political convictions.

So we muddle through an election in England in the second decade of the twentieth century. As far as one can gather, we are not far advanced beyond the Athens of 2300 years ago. The mischief is that our politicians are not eager to see us advance. Every extension of the franchise and refinement of the system has been forced on them. The system suits them. We are controlled by a country-wide machine, and it is controlled by a few oligarchs or oligarchable persons. The machine leaves us—I will consider the Labour Party later—only two alternatives. We shall vote either Liberal or Conservative; or throw away our vote. Twenty men sit in one chamber in Westminster and construct a program. Twenty rivals meet in another chamber and construct a different program. Neither set of program-makers has consulted us, beyond a certain prudential regard for "the feeling of the country." What they chiefly want is election, or re-election. It matters very little what the local candidiate says in his program.

He will agree to almost anything we want, and afterwards justly plead that we also accepted him as a supporter of the Conservative or the Liberal party, and he was bound by its decisions. We, the self-governing people, are almost helpless. Every few years some of our journals announce that the party-system is "breaking up." It is not. It is as strong as ever. And we are as much enslaved by it as ever.

## CHAPTER XIV

### IN THE PARLIAMENTARY LABYRINTH

THE very recent case of Lady Astor will have spluttered angrily on the lips of many as they read the last chapter. Just as I write of closed systems and oligarchs, it will be said, an independent lady routs her official opponent and makes her way to the House. On what precise grounds Lady Astor won her election, or what was the psychology of the constituency in returning her, would entail a lengthier analysis than we can make here. Broadly, she was going to introduce common sense, economy and the superior wisdom of woman's intuition into Parliament. But within three weeks the London Press reported her as using language which seemed to intimate a profound and speedy disillusion. Lady Astor has not the *savoir faire* of Labouchere, or the resolute practical sense of Sir A. Markham or Sir H. Dalziel. It may be that the very qualities which carried her through the election will detract from her usefulness in that best of all clubs, and most backward of all assemblies, the House of Commons.

Probably a new member thinks he will snatch an hour or two sometime in the fortnight of congratulations for the purpose of studying the procedure of the grave body to which he is promoted. He may be recommended to go at once to the most accurate and painstaking and sympathetic of all guides to the House, Sir T. Erskine May's *Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usages of Parliament.* It runs to 906 large pages of condensed matter. One would

require three years' assiduous study to master it; and then there would remain the extraordinary mass of unwritten law (in the empirical sense of the word) and procedure which to the aspiring politician is even more important. The new member generally prefers to rely on Providence and a few other friends of some experience, and walk warily and silently for the first few months. The path is strewn with pitfalls and obstacles.

A glance at the staff of the House would warn any cautious man at once that this is no simple world of expressing opinions into which he has wandered. The central figure is the Speaker, originally a robust gentleman chosen from the body of the members to "speak" for them to the king whenever a painful occasion arose for them to do so. He is now the Chairman of the House, though old hands would probably be in danger of apoplexy if some blunt innovator proposed that he should be called by that name. But he is a Chairman of a peculiar kind. His extraordinary knowledge and onerous duties are recognised by the House granting him £5000 a year (the salary of five distinguished professors), a mansion of a very expensive type, a legal assistant with £1800 a year, and a secretary with £500 a year. This is a measure of the complexity of the rules and procedure he has to see carried out.

But this does not exhaust the impressiveness of the staff. At times the House must call itself a committee, and for these occasions another learned gentleman, the Chairman of Committees, has to be detained at a salary of £2500 a year, and behind him is a Deputy-Chairman with £1000 a year. Then there is a Clerk with £2000 a year and a Chaplain with £400 a year. At times, again, the House is under the necessity of communicating with the House of "Barons, Earls, Archbishops and

Bishops," and this is a costly and elaborate business. A Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod has to have £1000 a year to wear a picturesque costume and carry a glorified stick, and say a few stage-words ("My Lord, the carriage waits"), on these occasions. Being a real gentleman and a thoroughly mediæval creation, he has to have a "Yeoman Usher of the Black Rod" associated with him, at a salary of £400 a year, or as much as the harassed master of a large secondary school gets. And the Lords, who now discharge no function, since we have been compelled to take away from them their one function of seeing that the country is not improved too rapidly, have to have a separate palace, and a separate Speaker and Deputy-Speaker, at a cost of £6500 a year. I omit the inevitable swarm of lesser officials.

These people have to earn their living, and the new member, who has just sworn to a few thousand innocent folk that he is off to London to make their voice heard in the cause of efficiency, economy and common sense, is reduced to silence at once by their stately and elaborate ways. It is the opening of Parliament, let us say, and the Lords and Commons have assembled, when the day is half over (the lawyers might not be able to get there earlier), in their respective chambers. Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod makes an impressive entry, save for a few smiles on the Labour benches, and summons the Commoners to the higher sphere. There they are told—the tone is that of Dombey talking to Mrs Richards—to elect a Speaker and bring him on the morrow for approval. There being as yet no Speaker, the Clerk (who must on no account speak) acts the part of a dumb chairman, to let them get through the business. Then the day's work is over, and they disperse to dinner.

Not being expected to arise early after so labori-

ous a day, they assemble at two on the following day, and the fancy-dress ball is continued. Black Rod respectfully intimates to the Lords that "His Majesty's Faithful Commons" (several score of whom are Republicans) have done as they were told, and their Speaker "submits himself with all humility to His Majesty's gracious approbation"; which he gets. Then they spend a few days in taking oaths and examining papers and so forth. Then there is another humble procession to the Lords to hear the King's Speech, or the oligarch's immediate program, and two of the worst speakers in the House are chosen (on peculiar principles) to talk platitudes about it, and the Commons read a dummy Bill, which is supposed to be a defiant commemoration of some spirit of independence which they had in ancient times.

"Without the historic sense," says Sir T. Erskine May, all this is "a bewildering jungle"; and very few of the seven hundred members to-day have sufficient historic sense to write two hundred words on the strange evolution of Parliament after the Civil War. Very few of them complain, however. The atmosphere is that of a highly ritualistic church, providing its own narcotic. Even robust Radicals succumb in time. Probably Mr Lloyd George would resent a suggestion of change as much as Mr Chamberlain would have done in his later years. The business of the House is not going to be conducted on twentieth-century lines, and the neophyte might as well realise it at once. What does it matter? The "organs of public opinion" describe the show annually in terms of respect, if not of exaltation, so we need not bother.

The House then proceeds to business, in its own way. There are not seats for everybody—a defect which any Borough Council would remedy in three months—so there is a scramble for seats, and, at

the risk of being counted a Vandal, you have to learn an ingenious set of rules in the use of hats, cards, etc., and the geographical distribution of the House into party-areas and important and unimportant benches. As you are now only a voting automaton, it matters little. You leave to heroic or ambitious or abnormal souls the privilege of occupying the benches and linger within call. Five hours listening to ordinary debates in the peculiar atmosphere of the House of Commons (in spite of its famous physical machinery for comfort) is poorly paid at £400 a year, you conclude. You cannot catch the Speaker's eye in connection with any subject of importance. I have known one of the ablest private members, and an authority on the subject, fail to do so in a three nights' debate. You are food for divisions, cannon-fodder in the great party-struggle. For this a long experience of municipal councils, in which you could say what you thought, is supposed to have prepared you.

The hours of work of the House of Commons symbolise and sustain its determination to be unlike any other place of business in the world. In this respect the House is not guided by that reverence for the antique and archaic which accounts for a good deal of its extraordinary proceedings. The lateness of the hour of opening is a comparatively modern development. Before the Civil War, when men were sent to Westminster only to do certain national business, as far as the king would permit them, the House met at six in the morning. Under Cromwell it was wisely decided that prayers should be fixed at eight in the morning, and any member who did not appear at eight, or soon afterwards, was fined. On the other hand, it was prescribed that the deliberations should generally cease at noon. Night sittings were forbidden on the excellent maxim that "a grave and sober council ought not to do

things in the dark." This Puritan feeling was so strong that the sight of candles in the House, when some serious debate was prolonged, aroused great hostility. Several resolutions of the House were annulled because they had been passed by candlelight. Dinner was early in those days, and substantial. It was not deemed advisable to give after-dinner hours to the nation's business when no prudent merchant would think them fit for his private business.

After the Restoration of the Stuarts there was a good deal of laxity. Fines for not appearing at eight were discontinued, and the hour crept slowly backward over the day. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the House rarely met before noon, and it discharged most of its business by candlelight. There were many reasons for this besides laziness. One, undoubtedly, was the spread of drunkenness in all classes. There were few members of the House who did not get drunk at night, as every gentleman of liberal habits was supposed to do, and they were little disposed for business on the following morning. The proportion of business-men in the House was small. They were mostly landed gentry, the parasites of the rich, and, later, retired merchants. The evening, when the drinker enjoys his most lucid hours, was chosen; and the debates often ran until cock-crow in the morning. Another reason was that the proceedings changed somewhat in character. The party-fight was in full blast, and Parliament was a " career " for young men of wealth and leisure who had left Oxford or Cambridge and done the grand tour of Europe. The House became, as Pitt boasted, the most famous arena of eloquence and wit in Europe. The evening was the natural time for this. Parliament had ceased to be a place of business, and need not observe business-hours. It was a " talking-shop." Every orator knows that

the best time for orating is after six in the evening.

In the reform-period, 1832, a rule was passed that the House should close at midnight. The spectacle of legislators strolling home to bed, often in a state of exaltation which might be misconstrued, when plain men were going to work, was not edifying. It is also true that much wine was consumed during all-night sittings. The House itself was startled one night by an honourable member calling thickly upon the Speaker to oblige with a song.

But already a new development had set in, which checked any tendency to revert to daylight-hours. Business-men and lawyers were entering the House in increasing numbers, and they wanted the morning for their private affairs. The lawyer-member generally aspires to become a professional politician, or at least to have the way smoothed to a judgeship or other legal dignity, but in the earlier years he must keep himself by legal practice. Our national habits might have been created for his convenience. We close judicial business at the early hour of four, and we commence national business, substantially, about the same time. We give five hours work in the law-courts, so that a healthy and ambitious man may still be able to do four hours' political work in the evening. The London business-man is similarly consulted. In effect he has until four o'clock to see to his private affairs. That the overwhelming majority of the members belong to the provinces, and must leave their businesses behind them, does not seem to matter.

For all, however, there is the crowning privilege of longer holidays than any man engaged in private business would dare to take or grant. On the average our politicians, who have the most colossal business in the world on their shoulders, work five or six hours a day for 170 days out of the 365. There is no other class of workers in the community that

has such holidays, and none but teachers (whose hours are determined by the needs of the children) who work only five days a week. The theory is still, apparently, that the member of Parliament is a gentleman, or a person who is not supposed to work at all, but generously gives a portion of his legitimate play-hours that the country may benefit by his wisdom. The consequence is that, as in the law-courts, business is nearly always in arrears. As I write, in the winter of 1919, our politicians are taking the usual prolonged holiday, yet leaving behind them a mass of untouched or unfinished work which was supposed to have been done in the last session. Of the work which was displayed as a program before the eyes of the country a year ago very little has been done.

One must recognise, of course, that a few of the leading statesmen have very heavy work. Few men in private business have anything like their hours of employment or the intensity of the task while it lasts. It is unfortunate that in their case the burden of the nation's work should be complicated by the thousand and one tasks and anxieties which they have simutaneously to face as party-leaders, but in any event no man who knows anything of the daily round of a conscientious Prime Minister or leading cabinet-minister will grudge them their holidays or their salaries. One is almost tempted to suggest that it would be wiser to abolish the sinecures and decorative offices which still burden the Civil List, and make the leading positions in the national administration attractive to the finest talent that the nation produces. To do so at present, when a score of other considerations than competency account for the rise of stars on the political horizon, would be useless; but meantime we may recognise that those who occupy the highest positions in the House of Commons lead strenuous and unenviable lives.

This applies to few. Quite apart from special committees, which need not be taken into consideration, the life of a member of Parliament is one of such abundant leisure that he is able to add materially to his income. The House has not the slightest intention of re-adjusting its ways to the important new departure of voting itself salaries. But in this respect English custom generally is so crude and primitive that there is little hope of reform. The idea is still general that public work is best performed when it is least paid. One may be quite conscious of the danger which the contrary tendency involves, yet decline to assent to this curious maxim.

To return, however, to our main point. The northern worker, let us say, who has, in a frenzy of enthusiasm, been sent by his fellow-workers to help to reform the ways of Westminster, soon finds that he is quite powerless. He learns a lot of minute rules about when to sit and when to stand, when to wear a hat and when not to wear a hat, and so on, but as a rule he finds no occasion even for these. His duty is to appear for a division and enter the lobby which his party-allegiance prescribes. If his conscience impels him at any time to dissent from the decisions of his leaders, he has to face a grave anxiety about his seat. The caucus gets to work. Telegrams pass from the party-headquarters in Westminster to the local party-representatives in his constituency, and back to him, in slightly modified form, at the House. Is he a Liberal (or Conservative) or is he not? The general triumph of the party is so much more important to the country than some erratic opinion of his on a particular point. If he succeeds in finding quite a large group of his colleagues who agree, he still has little power. A very large group of Conservatives wished at one time to put Mr Balfour on the shelf for his philosophic doubts about Protection. They did not suc-

ceed. A large group of Liberals tried in 1919 to influence Mr Lloyd George. They failed. A dissolution would be a graver matter to them than to their leaders.

Still more pathetic is the situation of the man who decides that he will risk rejection, or not put up again, at the next election. In one respect the machinery of the House is here as lax as it is stringent in most other matters. A man may continue to sit in Parliament, and harass the Government and its business in a hundred ways, when he no longer represents more than a few hundred voters in his constituency. By an ancient rule he cannot resign. The House, as if it were bent on doing nothing as ordinary mortals do, insists that he must go through the form of applying for the Chiltern Hundreds. This, however, he scarcely ever desires to do. The whole atmosphere is so insincere that he takes advantage of his technical position. He has been elected for five years. He conveniently overlooks the fact that he was really elected to represent ten thousand voters for five years. The time may come when he will have abundant evidence that he no longer represents more than a tenth of these, but is uttering sentiments daily which the other nine-tenths regard as gravely detrimental to the country's interests. The House cares nothing for constituencies between elections. It will provide no machinery by which a constituency may afford proof that a man no longer represents it, and may cancel his mandate. So the fortunate rebel may continue for years to harass public departments for fantastic figures, and waste the time of the House, on the strength of his personal, and perhaps eccentric, convictions.

But even the man who has the sympathy of his constituents in his rebellion can do little. A few men of long experience of the House, considerable

wealth, public repute and journalistic support, may carry on a very effective pin-pricking campaign. The answers to their questions may seem to the public satisfactory, but the expert knows that the shot has told and a change will quietly be effected. Such men are the salt of the House. As a rule, the man who goes to the House for the purpose of ruffling its complacency, or presently feels impelled to ruffle its complacency and abandon the hope of re-election, runs an obstacle-race which soon wears out his patience. He may disappear, like Victor Grayson or George Lansbury, in a storm that does little more than disturb his neighbours for an evening. He may remain a futile centre of irritability, like Mr Belloc or Mr Ginnell, for a few years. He may develop a curious sense of humour and expend his zeal in facetious interruptions and things which he regards as *bons mots;* which is silly. He makes no substantial impression on the traditions of the House or the deliberately traced program of its leaders. He feels at times that it would be more economical for the country once in five years, or less, to invite the rival groups of oligarchs to lay their respective programs of legislation before it and simply endorse one or the other. It would save a good million a year. An extensive biography of any leading British statesman will show how *very* rarely the Cabinet policy was deflected by pressure from amongst its own supporters.

The average member wearily succumbs to this regime and becomes a good subject of the oligarchs. He no longer indulges at table in insurgent remarks which will be reported to the Whip. He finds himself provided with a club refined and luxurious beyond the dreams of Muddleton or Dudbridge, in which his life had hitherto been cast. He has, at relatively small cost, a second luxurious club and genial society at the National Liberal Club or its

rivals. If he have a mind for study—it is not unknown—a superb library is open to him. The party provides other pleasant functions for the faithful; and he may even, on occasion, walk the lawn at Buckingham Palace and hobnob, or very nearly, with all the talent and splendour of England. If he needs more money, there are new ways of making it. The magic letters after his name will secure five guineas for an article in a journal which would otherwise not trouble to read his copy, and from three to ten guineas for a lecture or, if he is willing to profess at least a rudimentary religion, an address. The Labour member who to-day complains bitterly that £400 a year is not a living wage—for 170 days' work a year—need not expect serious sympathy outside those Labour circles in which the accent of grievances is more considered than the substance. Any observant person will conclude that the income of several of them, apart from office-holders, is nearer £1000 a year.

By the time when dissolution is at length actually decreed, the average member is a wiser but not a sadder man. He very strongly desires re-election. The early days, in which he declared that it was almost impossible to be honest at Westminster, or in which he disrespectfully translated the word Parliament, "talking-shop," are forgotten. He has developed "the historic sense," though he may have learned little history. He will tolerate the next opening of Parliament with equanimity. The tediousness of its debates he now knows how to beguile or avoid. He may, in fact, claim that the modern substitution of four or five humdrum speeches of three-quarters of an hour each, by the leading representatives of four or five parties or sections, is an advance upon the two finished orations, sparkling with fine lines from the classics, which once filled up an evening of the House's time. He enjoys the puns, person-

alities and puerilities which a new generation substitutes for the sonorous verse of Homer or the pregnant sentiments of Æschylus.

He will serve for another five years. As far as his means permit, he plays for "popularity," with a Stoic indifference to votes, in his constituency. He rescues dying football-clubs, addresses the P.S.A. or Brotherhood or whatever a layman may address with fine impartiality, and shows a laudable concern for every comfortable citizen's duty of benevolence. He takes care to stand well with the local section of the national machine, and produces a record of fidelity and industry in the division-lobby. Westminster approves of him, and the ambitious individual who thought of supplanting him may retire into his obscurity. He reflects what a mighty difference it makes to a man to stand well, or stand ill, with the party-machine. Individualism, he comfortably concludes, is an heroic policy, but after all it is futile. England is going to be ruled by *a* party. Only a party can *do* things in England. Practical wisdom is to see that it be the right party —*his* party. So he reports his financial needs, and returns to Westminster under the most peculiarly sacred of all obligations to the party.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE OUTLOOK

FEW thoughtful persons will dissent from the suggestion that the outlook for Britain is discouraging if the system I have described is to continue. A high proportion of our voters are influenced by more or less mercenary considerations which candidates for Parliament are still allowed to dangle before them. A still higher proportion are quite incapable of a judicious decision unless the issues are put before them in the simplest and clearest terms; and we still permit our day of decision, once in five years, to be preceded by a national orgie of sentimentality, mendacity, vulgarity and personalities which must leave any but the strongest and best-educated minds in a state bordering on inebriation. A further proportion would choose men and women, after grave and quiet examination of their opinions, whom they regard as useful persons to deliberate on our great national issues; but they find that, in effect, they must choose one of the two individuals imposed on them by the rival parties, or the candidates of the three rival parties, who will not be permitted to exercise any individuality at all.

It means, in short, that the country must choose between one of two rival groups of oligarchs. Now these generally include one or two men of conspicuous ability, and the great mass of the electors see a simple way out of the maze in recognising this fact and voting for a particular man who is sure to assume power if his followers are in the majority. This

is, in fact, the best that can be said for our present system. Our Premier is not very far removed from an autocrat. If colleagues in the Cabinet dissent, in spite of the utmost prudence in selecting them, he can generally overrule or, in an extremity, dispense with them. I say "not very far removed from an autocrat," because our political history records many instances to the contrary. There have been extreme cases in which the Premier could not without absurdity be described as an autocrat. Take Lord Rosebery or, at one time, Mr Balfour. Or consider the humour of describing a good-natured mediocrity like Mr Campbell-Bannerman as an autocrat. Yet, as a rule, a Premier chooses men who will co-operate in his plans and contrives to make them see that his plans are just. In quite recent years we have seen cabinet-ministers, who were well known in informed political circles to oppose a certain measure violently, remain in the Cabinet when it was passed. So we simplify the complexity forced on us by choosing something in the nature of an autocrat to administer the country for five years. We are a democracy because *we* choose him. We genially overlook the machinery he used, we flatter ourselves that we, the British people, calmly selected him to direct our administration.

But here the limits of his autocracy, and of our choice, begin. If there are any persons who imagine that our autocrat calmly surveys the talent of the country, when the king has recognised our will and called him to Buckingham Palace, and selects the most skilful and experienced men to take charge of the public departments, it is only one more proof of the scandalously low state of political culture in the country. In point of fact, there are millions of voters who either think this or never think about the matter at all, though it is a point of vital interest to all of us. We have seen what really hap-

pens. Instead of surveying the national talent, he confines his scrutiny to a small group of thirty or forty professional politicians of his own party; and even here he has to look to a good many things besides ability. There are families so distinguished or so benevolent that even if the son who has entered politics has no more than the intelligence of the manager of a suburban bank, "something must be done for him." He may even become Chancellor of the Exchequer, at a time when it needs a financial genius to keep it solvent. There are old men, who ought to have retired years before, but who have either not the means to retire on or not the lucidity to see that their period of use is over. The mysteries of cabinet-making are notorious: mysteries, that is to say, in the literary or journalistic sense—things that you could elucidate, but would rather not.

The secondary offices are filled in turn on very complex grounds of selection. If ministers must have unpaid secretaries, and unpaid secretaries must be men distinguished rather by the ability (or fortune) of their fathers than their own, there has to be a day of reward. Politicians rarely trouble their heads about science, but the Eugenic theory of our time charmed them. Genius runs in families, so it is in accord with the highest scientific culture to visit the virtues of the fathers on their children. In point of fact, a careful perusal of any good biographical dictionary will show that genius does not run in families. Any person who cares to write a list of the thirty ablest men of the last generation—or thirty names of very high talent may be written down from memory—and then write the names of their sons in a corresponding column, will not need to read the speculations about heredity of a certain school of scientific men. Genius runs in families only in the political world; that is to say, in all

other spheres of life the son finds his natural level, but in the political world he finds it comparatively easy to attain the positions which his father attained, whether he has the same ability or only one-fourth of it. In one respect, indeed, the politician outdoes Sir Francis Galton. He thinks political genius is communicated by marriage into one of the great political families.

We thus find that we have chosen, not an autocrat who will use his judgment loyally to secure the finest talent and the highest energy, but a set of political adventurers who will put their hands eagerly to jobs which are fit only for supermen. The directive council of our national and imperial business costs us more than a million a year; if we include the royal family, more than two million a year. But an American syndicate would not tolerate it for three months.

The situation looks worse when we consider how the taint spreads downwards through the departments of national life which are controlled by the Government. It is so notorious that the loudest charge against "State-socialism" for fifty years has been the incompetence of the State, with its two-million-a-year directive council, to do anything as well as a company would with a Board of Directors costing from £5000 to £10,000 a year. For the last two hundred years politicians have weakened the army by jobbery, and it is well known that the jobbery went on even during the last, and most terrible, war. The War Office became the paymaster of politicians whom the country no longer wished to see in the limelight of the House, and of stuffy veterans and mediocre officers who could exert social pressure on politicians. The abuse became worse after the Coalition, because there were now two sets of politicians, and political families, and political supporters, to be consulted. It enfeebled

the army in the field as well as the army in London. Every fresh extension meant an extension of favouritism.

This pernicious abuse, which is plainly an extension of the political system, enfeebled every department. I asked an outside expert why a certain scientific body set up on Government funds worked so slowly and unsuccessfully. He answered that the last qualification sought in the scientific workers appointed was, apparently, scientific distinction. Committee after committee was appointed including one or two names which caused informed persons to raise their eyebrows. Men skipped from one department to another as lightly as if no task were too intricate to be mastered in a month. Local publicans, of military age, became, under local political influence, inspectors of guns and shells. I have seen them at work. It was the same right through our gigantic national machine. Even in normal times the same thing goes on. Our Civil Servants are the most pampered and most leisurely and extravagant of all employees. Parliament, next door, believes in short hours and long holidays. So do they. They are not "in business," thank you.

There can be no doubt that this situation grows more serious every decade. For a hundred years England had almost a commercial monopoly, and we could afford to let politicians direct and tamper with the great departments of State. Our workers and manufacturers saw to it that the State prospered, in spite of all parasitism. America was then a remote and comparatively small agricultural polity. Japan lingered in the Middle Ages. Germany did not seriously develop industrialism before 1871. In the period between 1871 and 1914 we still prospered, because the world-markets were enormously enlarged and there was trade for all.

That enlargement will not continue, and the commercial rivalry will be intense when the world returns to its normal life. The peoples to whom we catered—take India or South America—begin to manufacture for themselves. The caterers grow more numerous. Japan is a new force. The United States is quietly closing America against the rest of the world. India will gradually, as it is industrialised, take a larger interest in Africa and the near East.

Politics has had to expand in harmony with world-development. In the days when Fox and Pitt regarded Parliament as a stage for the display of wit and oratory and culture, there was practically only one task of government—the defence of the country. Foreign politics and finance were subsidiary to this. Parliament was not burdened with work except during a war. The House was the club and debating society of the parties, which had once represented opposed principles and now represented rival syndicates. The members were nearly all men who despised "trade," and thought the qualifications of a business-man odious. How could one quote Catullus or Aristophanes to such people? What use could be made of a brilliant career at Oxford in an assembly of tradesmen?

In the course of the nineteenth century the whole art and ideal of government has changed. There is hardly an aspect of the life of the citizens which it must not regard. It must handle and judiciously distribute £200,000,000 a year, or manage an estate worth £4,000,000,000. Nay, since it has to nurse the prosperity of the entire kingdom, beyond the tenth which it appropriates in taxes, it must take thought for a national business worth £10,000,000,000; six years ago one would have said twice that sum, but debt and sterile expenditure and inflated currency have reduced us so low. It

has, moreover, to expend this national revenue in ways that lay beyond the dreams of Pitt and Althorp. It has to superintend the education of all the children of the country: supervise all the factories and workshops in the country: pension all the aged workers in the country: manage the entire postal, telegraphic and telephonic service of the country: deal with all the crime, poverty and lunacy and some other forms of disease in the country. It has, above all, to see that the wheels of the industrial machine run smoothly, and that our commerce is fully instructed and scientifically directed. It has to do this in face of rival national firms which go even beyond this paternal method: nations of which the government condescends to subsidise particular industries and gathers information all over the world for commerce.

The task is now stupendous, intricate and most momentous in its consequences. We make it vaster and more costly every year. With a light hand we throw out ten or twenty millions for house-builders, or railway-workers, or farmers, or purveyors of food; and we scarcely notice that ten mouths will soon gape at the surface of the pond for every one we satiate, or else that we are extending our political economy in new directions. Politics is now a business, not in the old political sense, but in the gravest economic sense. It will be a source of still graver anxiety presently. Commercial competition abroad and industrial exactions at home will lower our financial vitality, and, in proportion as it is lowered, there will be louder and louder calls upon the public Exchequer.

Yet in the face of all this new development our politicians cling to archaic methods and stoutly support our wasteful party-game. They must meet at an hour when most of us are beginning to look at the clock. They must pay a man £400 a year

to read, less than two hundred times a year, a prayer to which no one but Lord Hugh Cecil attaches the slightest importance. They must maintain a procedure so complex and mysterious and irrational that they must pay men £20,000 a year to see that it is carried out properly. They must suffer a similar House next door, which they declare to be useless, to be put on the estimates, and pay a series of ornamental gentlemen to do the work of an occasional messenger-girl between them. They must find excuses for a party-system which they themselves declare to be so detrimental to public business that it would be unsafe to lean on it in a critical period. They must retain a method of discharging their functions, by formal debates which make plain what everybody knew, and suppress the men who might contribute something new, which no other executive council in the land would imitate. They must keep up the fiction that the House is a place of oratory, though the art of oratory is dead, and the occasion of oratory is gone for ever. And they do this because it is in the interest of the party-game, since every speech is really addressed to the prospective voters and never influences the hard-cased audience in the House.

This sort of thing will not sustain Britain in the coming contest. There are those who shudder, and make wry faces, when you talk of coming contests. Have we not had enough of them? It does not matter whether we have or not. We are entering upon two new contests as grave as any we ever engaged in before: the industrial contest at home and the commercial contest abroad, the struggle for production at home and the struggle for distribution abroad, the fight, not merely for life, but for a greater life. There is no mistaking the signs of the times. The millions who were once content to wait for their luxuries in the next world are determined,

for greater security, to have them in this. Our economy is going to be either transformed or ruined. Statesmanship can transform it. Politicians are merely putting back the hour of reckoning by clipping the coinage. What is likely to happen?

The Labour Party is the hope of many. We will not at once be prejudiced because it calls itself a "party," and it is the party-system which threatens England with ruin. Like every other party, of course, it seeks its own interests. There is, however, this difference: its interests mean the interests of nine-tenths of the community. Pitt and Wellington said candidly that Parliament existed to protect property; which at that time meant far less than a tenth of the community. Six years ago property-holders—down to the lowest section of the middle class—were about a ninth of the community. To-day, if we regard the latest figures of income-tax, they number about an eighth. It is difficult to calculate, for many a worker to-day earns as much as an author or a university professor, and whole classes of workers get as much as schoolmasters. But let us say that Labour, in the narrower sense, represents seven-eighths of the nation, and would theoretically promote the interests of the seven-eighths.

What we want to know, however, is whether a Labour Party is likely to purify the administration of its hampering defects or to maintain the worse features of the party-system. We need not theorise about political development. It is taking place all over the earth, and, as it has in some countries outrun the stage in which we linger, we have only to turn to them for enlightenment. Try Australia and New Zealand. There one sees the next phase. Liberals and Conservatives have fallen upon each others' necks and formed "national" parties of opposition. Labour is in power. Socialism slowly

advances, and, as every one who knows Australia has found, it pronounces Labour a misbirth from the womb of time, a sham and a snare for the workers. The party-system thrives as luxuriantly and mischievously as here. Australian Socialists leave it to English Socialists (except when they are expressly called to help) to bless the so-called "Socialistic" triumphs of the Labour Governments of Australia. They talk of "the official Labour Party" much as our Socialists speak of the *bourgeoisie* (which must be kept in French, or else it loses its blood-curdling quality and sounds quite harmless).

Now, are we tending to the same consummation? Certainly. Labour was routed at the last election because the country decidedly preferred Mr Lloyd George to Mr Henderson and Mr Macdonald. But no other election will be fought in the same circumstances, and the Labour-tide will steadily rise. It rises at every bye-election. If the general election could be deferred for another two years, one would not be surprised to see a hundred and fifty or more Labour members; and the rise of the tide will continue. Does it promise a solution?

Let us examine the political organisation of Labour. Its inevitable aristocracy, or group of leaders, differs materially from the higher groups of the other parties. There are (as yet) no hereditary leaders. There are no men included because their fathers contributed brain or money to the party. Already, however, we begin to ask questions. Are one or two individuals, who are plainly not horny-handed sons of toil, so prominent in Labour counsels because they are really credited with superior political wisdom, or are there, even here, secret subscription-lists? For the last twenty years some needy sections of the Labour-world have been not unfamiliar with secret funds. Here are two pas-

sages from the work of a political veteran, Howard Evans, whose word commands respect:

"At a certain general election two obscure Socialist candidates made their appearance and went to the poll. I had information that their election-expenses were paid by Tory money, and published the fact. One of these candidates called on me, declaring that he had no knowledge of the matter till afterwards, but he admitted that my statement was true. . . .

"There was another man who had been closely connected with Karl Marx and the International. He started a Labour paper, which was filled from end to end with the most scurrilous abuse of tried and trusted leaders of Trade Unions. How the thing lived was a mystery I could not fathom, but I had little doubt when its editor was appointed to an important post in the Tory electoral organisation." *

The first of these instances, and several like it, are now well known. The second is a very exceptional case, except in so far as it speaks of journals whose survival is "a mystery I could not fathom." The Labour Party, especially in its left wing, is very eloquent about secret funds and secret diplomacy. It is not conspicuous for the virtues which are opposed to these unhappy vices.

It is, however, much more important to study the main organisation of the political Labour Party. It has its caucus, its central committee, its local committees, its war-chest, its discipline in the House and organization in the country, its rewards of loyalty and service, its punishments of dissent. It is, in other words, built, with certain differences, on the model of the older parties. It imitates their machine. This, it says, is inevitable and harmless; and certain

* *Radical Fights of Forty Years* (1913), p. 100.

important differences must be conceded. Its slender war-chest has certainly no connection with the honours' lists. It has no moneyed and leisured young men who can 'devil' to the elders for a few years and look for a reward. Its clubs and centres of cohesion are quite genuine drinking clubs for people of like politics, not bogus-affairs financed by political patrons. Five million men have, surely, the right to create an organisation for the more effective representation of their policy in Parliament.

In some respects, however, the Labour Party shares the defects of its predecessors. It was heavily chastised at the last election for, amongst other things, the unfitness of a large proportion of its candidates to inspire confidence. Had the Labour Party issued a plain and detailed program, and said to the nation: "These men are merely required at Westminster to vote this program in the division-lobbies," it would have diverted attention from the candidates and their (often foolish) local syllabuses; though it would have left one annoying side of parliamentary life where it is. The Labour Party was not in a position to do that. One suspected that it had either not the statesmanship to frame a program or sufficient domestic harmony to avow it. The electors therefore patiently listened to, or read, the candidates who appeared, and their confidence was not secured. A man who had, perhaps, spent several hours of his leisure every week for some years in attending, without pay, to the small affairs of the local branch of his Trade Union, was rewarded with a candidature by the Labour headquarters. One may admire the sentiment of gratitude, but gravely doubt whether experience of the somewhat different and very much smaller affairs of a branch of a Trade Union fits a man to decide national and imperial issues. Another candidate, one found, was judged worthy to take his

place in our legislature because he had proved himself remarkably energetic in exciting or conducting strikes. Another was a born legislator because his language about the enemies of Labour could be heard quarter of a mile away. Another had to be adopted because his particular section of the Labour Party—say, the Independent Labour Party—was entitled to so many seats, and chose its own candidates.

Into these categories most of the candidates fell. Middle-class men of Labour sympathies were tried here and there, and they were generally so mangled that their proportion is not likely to increase. Most members of the party do not like them—the cake is not large enough; so they are carpet-baggers, or intruders of doubtful loyalty. The choice must be confined as far as possible to genuine wage-workers. This clearly means a lowering, instead of an uplifting, of parliamentary ability. It is, of course, quite a mistake to suppose that in each generation that is born the middle-class represents talent and the workers lack of it. There has been far too much nonsense talked about heredity. The middle-class is the class which inherits, not talent, but opportunity. The successful father is able to give a finer edge to the moderate talent of his son. There is a vast amount of stupidity born in the middle-class every decade, and a vast amount of ability born in the working-class every year. But the tremendous conceit of their class which many workers have is ridiculous. Most of the cleverer sons of workers, especially in our age of scholarships and greater opportunities, leave their fathers' class before they are thirty; and the Labour candidates chosen from the branches are rarely under thirty. This means that they are chosen as men well equipped to conduct the gigantic business of the nation when their very position implies that they have not business-ability.

In a word, like the older Parties the Labour Party

has to consult its own interests as an organisation. It has to choose men for administrative purposes who have merely shown a certain talent for talking or for the totally different business of organising strikes. It is just where the Athenian democracy was in the fourth century B.C. It is rushing toward the pitfalls which political theorists have always predicted for it. Its leaders, as a body, to-day do not inspire confidence. There are a few men amongst them who have proved their ability and have fine character. There are more whom one cannot without a shudder of apprehension imagine in control of the national machinery. Mediocre as our actual ministry is, though combining the talent of one and a half parties, who would care to see it replaced by thirty of the most prominent men of our actual Labour-world? Which would be Chancellor of the Exchequer, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister of Education, or Minister of Agriculture?

One has the same anxiety about their ideas. Any man who closely and sympathetically studies the most prominent men of our Labour movement, in the belief that it may yet come to power, will be apt to get a curious impression that they look and talk as if they were haunted. Some one is after them. Some one, that is to say, is after their place in the esteem of Demos; and, unhappily, the economic culture of Demos is so low that he has a prodigious belief in possibilities. Promise him four or five hours' work a day—"in a properly ordered state of society," of course—and he believes we could all live like retired colonels on that. Promise him a fortnight's holiday with pay every year, and he will not dream of doing the very simple sum in arithmetic which is required to show that this would cost £150,000,000 a year. Tell him that all education ought to be free, all workers liberally pensioned at sixty, all houses provided at moderate rent for

workers by a heavy subsidy, all medical treatment for the workers unpaid, and so on. He never works out the cost. He has a vague idea that abolishing the idle rich, making productive-workers of luxury-workers, and cutting down the army and navy, will provide funds about a hundred times greater than such changes actually involve. Hardly a single Labour leader or orator dare tell the simple economic facts. They have to bid, rhetorically, higher and higher. There is another man ready to outbid them, in rhetoric. The most monstrous exaggerations circulate. Even the middle-class supporters of Labour shrink from correcting its grave errors.

This sort of thing is no more promising at present than the actual system. And even less promising is the feminist panacea for our political maladies. Any discerning person could have foreseen ten years or more ago that the long and foolish resistance of politicians to the demand for the suffrage would have grave consequences. Women orators soon exhausted the plain reasons why they should have the suffrage. These became platitudes, and, as meetings were mainly filled and paid for by women who had heard these things ever since they had put their hair up, something stronger had to be said. Feminist orators had to vie with each other, if they were to remain popular, much as Labour-orators do, or Mr Asquith and Mr Lloyd George do. It was suggested that woman's peculiar gifts would be a distinct and complementary addition to man's political efforts. It was found that these gifts were, if you studied them properly, far superior to man's. Great scorn was poured on " the smoke-dried male brain " (just when women were beginning in large numbers to smoke), and the despotism of the male, and the male pretension to legislate for women and children, and the coarser nature of the male which led to wars and dare not check drink and prostitution and

syphilis, and so on. Figures of venereal taint were put in circulation which showed, when you worked them out, that fifty per cent. of our legislators must be diseased.

Apart from these exaggerations, these natural reactions on the obstinacy of the male, there was, and is, a very widespread idea that woman's distinctive gifts would tend enormously to purify politics when she reached the House of Commons. Science and philosophy were enlisted by young ladies from Girton. Bergson had shown that sympathy or intuition—woman's great quality, of course—was the real source of all superior knowledge. Science had discovered that during the golden age there was a matriarchate. Anyhow, the advent of woman into politics was, and is, very widely regarded as the beginning of the end of political corruption.

It is hardly worth while discussing this at any length. The question of woman's supposed power of intuition (which only exists in fiction) is more fitted for a debate at Newnham. The only gift she brings is a certain charm and freshness due to her long abstention from politics. It has faded a little in the last ten years. Most of us will readily admit that she could—that a large number of women could—discharge the not very oppressive functions of our actual member of Parliament as well as the bulk of the males who do so, and that she has as much right as man to aspire to it. But there it ends. She must enter Parliament as a citizen, not as a woman. There is very rarely a question before the House in which her special experience counts for anything, and, when such a question arises, women-experts are quite easily consulted. Much has been made of the famous "orange-boxes" which male legislators are supposed to have ordered for babies. Probably a House of women would have

ordered something that poor women could not afford, and then put it airily on the estimates. Let us not carry the sex-war into politics. It is going to be bad enough in the home.

With all respect for the distinguished and earnest men who recommend it, I do not see that proportional representation would help. We should have strenuous minority-campaigns and some very curious combinations; like the combination of Irish and Radicals which seemed so revolting to John Bright, or the combination of Socialists and Catholics which at present runs Germany. We should have an election, even in a grave and complex period like this, turning on a single and fantastic issue like the prevention of other people from consuming drinks which you yourself do not like. Five million American dollars would supply a batch of candidates and a Columbian electoral machinery which would secure a sufficiently large group of members of Parliament to make a deal with some party in the House. Such fanatics of one idea, real monomaniacs, will sell the remaining and greater interests of the country at any time to purchase the triumph of their idea. The Irish Brass Band has been bad enough. Twenty brass bands would enliven the House under proportional representation. The more advanced women would return a score of fanatics of their school, who would adopt a tactical moderation in the election. The two million Roman Catholics would return twenty or thirty members who would make any deal to secure an exchange of diplomatic representatives with the Vatican. There would be an Anti-Vivisectionist group, an Anti-Gambling group, and so on. The substantial interests of the country—what these people disdainfully call its "material" interests—would be lost in a battle of sentimentalities. The liberty of the individual citizen would be restricted by a crowd

of semi-monastic rules, with an army of women-police to enforce them.

Some reformer once suggested that we ought to set up a cultural standard for members of Parliament and make every candidate pass an examination in history and economics. It is certainly desirable to have a higher cultural standard. This does not mean a restriction of Labour-members, many of whom know far more about history—the social history that really matters—and economics than most of their Liberal or Conservative colleagues do. But the idea has little chance of acceptance, and it would not carry us far enough. The party-organisation would quite easily provide a number of "crammers" who would speedily put its candidates through the necessary preparation. It would not affect the party-system.

"Measures, not men," is another reform condensed into a phrase. Probably most of our electors would retort that it is precisely the policy they adopt. It is the measures suggested on the candidate's prospectus that interest them. His personality is, as a rule, unknown It is the measures which divide Liberal from Tory, in the popular view. The phrase is too vague. One might put some vitality into it by suggesting that the measures placed before the House ought to be severely detached from personalities or parties. One could not prevent the author of a measure from enjoying his small vanity, or a party which proposed a measure from parading its merit before the electors; but if it could be secured that measures be discussed without involving the fall of the ministry, a great deal of the more sinister element of the life of Parliament would be cut at the root. It would half ruin the party-game. Shorter Parliaments would counteract the tendency to make party-capital out of such an arrangement, and there would always remain the

power of the House to pass a direct vote of censure on a ministry.

This, and the re-arrangement of the debates and re-adjustment of hours, would make an immense difference without any heroic or revolutionary measures. When Parliament works at least seven hours of the day (not day and night) and three on Saturdays, for at least two hundred and fifty days a year; when ministers can be induced to be content with short speeches—they could almost always convey in half the time what they have to say—and any member who has positive information or suggestions on the subject is perfectly free to rise and briefly make his point; when facetious and platitudinous and sectarian speeches are deemed to be a waste of the country's time; when half the silly rules and archaic customs are recognised as mediæval ash clogging the fire of parliamentary life; we shall have made a long step toward improvement. As things are, we have not only the danger of insufficient attention to our most pressing national needs, but we have a minority taking excuse from the obstinacy of Parliament for what it calls "direct political action" This minority was bitterly disappointed at the last election. It was deliberately turned down by the nation. It fears it will have little better fortune at the next election. So, taking a pretext from the taint of the actual Parliament, it would use its industrial position to coerce the majority. The weapon is as crude as the policy for which it is generally used, and the country is in danger of seeing its economy ruined for decades unless it insists on the purification of political life.

I am not so much concerned with the method of purification as the establishment of the disease. Unhappily, a very high proportion of our people do not in the least realise how morbid and stupid and mischievous the political system is. The edu-

cation we give them is almost as crude and perverse as the political life itself. Teachers begin history at the time of the Romans in Britain, drag the poor children through the appalling morasses of Welsh wars and Danish wars and Norman wars, and so on, and are just on the threshold of the section of history which would enable them to give children some sense of citizenship when the call to the workshop interrupts their "training." Social feeling they communicate to the children by the medium of childish and untrue legends about the uncivilised Hebrews of 2500 years ago, or the parables in which Christ conveyed instruction to people living in social conditions as remote from ours as can be imagined. Then, under a vague and undiscriminating idea of "preparing children for industrial and commercial life," they spend long hours over the geography of Arabia and Kurdistan, or the varying navigability of the rivers of Spain. These things occupy two-thirds of the school-hours, and the boy or girl is turned loose at fifteen or sixteen, to sow his or her intellectual wild oats, with as much civic sentiment as a young Hindu. Patriotism and religion, our politicians rule, must be the guiding ideals. It is the principle imposed upon the educationists of Germany by the ex-Emperor in 1890.

The fundamental need is education. Our people must cease to smile at the eccentricities of the House the blatancies of elections, and the unblushing effrontery of election-promises. They must learn to attach more importance to deeds than words. They must learn to demand a little, simple, ideally lucid economic annual, which at the beginning of each year will tell them what wealth we really have, what wealth we could have, how our production compares with that of other nations, what leaks there are in our distribution, and so on. Every citizen ought to know these things about the corporate life on which

the individual life vitally depends. As it is, one finds oneself regarded as quite a learned person for being able to tell these things from memory. From a knowledge of these elementary economic facts people will turn critically upon the House of Commons. Is it finding the remedy of our present grievous economic maladies? Is it flinging out vague promises which the economic situation does not justify? Is it leading us away from the financial precipice it announced to us so gravely six months ago? Are the cheery optimists talking on the strength of a serious study of the facts, or are they, under the traditional political impression that the public is an ass, playing the old game of dangling carrots before us? Are they merely seeking a transfer of power and prestige and salaries to themselves? If we prefer to jazz, and play bridge and golf and football, *all* the hours, instead of occasionally asking ourselves these things, we shall merely get a reshuffle of the political cards and a continuance of the game. The system is far too deeply rooted in our life to be shaken by flinging a few pamphlets at it.

We have all heard of Nietzsche and his scorn of democracy. Perhaps when we look at ourselves in this mirror we wonder if he was really as mad as we are told. He summoned us to be individuals, not herds: human personalities, not sheep. There are worse forms of insanity. When you come to think of it, it was mainly politicians who told us what to feel about him. He made many mistakes. He was a poet and rhapsodist and pyrotechnist, not a political teacher or social thinker. But this part of his teaching it will pay us to reflect upon. We have too long been driven like sheep to the Liberal or the Conservative poll. We are sick of election-promises and parliamentary performances. The beginning of wisdom is the recognition of folly.

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