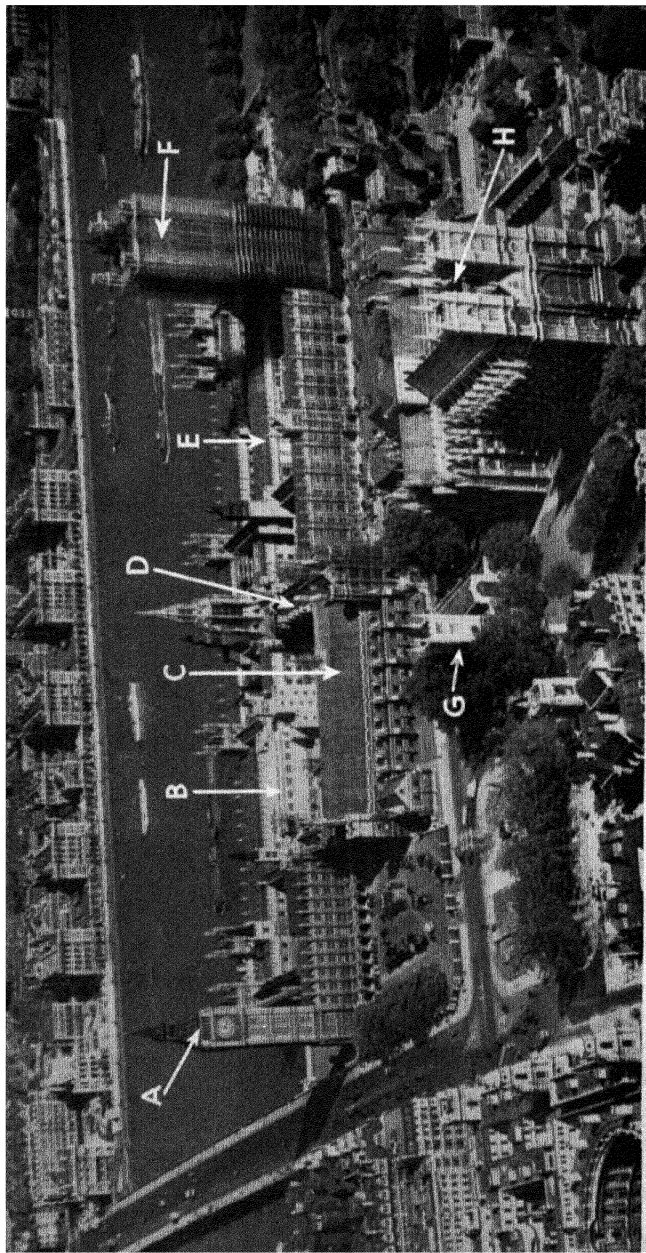


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PARLIAMENT AND FREEDOM



The Houses of Parliament and surrounding site. Westminster Bridge is at the left of the picture, and the letters indicate: A. Big Ben. B. The House of Commons. C. Westminster Abbey. D. St. Stephen's Hall. E. The House of Lords. F. The Victoria Tower. G. St. Margaret's. H. Westminster Abbey.

Letro Pictorial Ltd.

PARLIAMENT AND FREEDOM

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DEDICATED
TO
MY FATHER

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INTRODUCTION

BRITAIN has built up slowly during the centuries a rare and precious form of government of the people by the people.

This book sets out simply the story of Parliament and of some of the most significant incidents in the immortal struggle for Parliamentary freedom.

It is designed primarily for young people in secondary schools and youth associations. But the author believes that older readers who find technical writings on Parliament somewhat forbidding may find here, among much that they already know, some interesting and useful new information on the home, the traditions, the customs and the workings of the Mother of Parliaments.

FOREWORD

AT the beginning of each Parliament the Speaker, on his return from the House of Lords, says to the Commons :

“ I have to report to the House that in the House of Peers . . . I have, in your name, and on your behalf, laid claim, by humble petition to His Majesty, to all your ancient and undoubted rights and privileges, particularly FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN DEBATE, FREEDOM FROM ARREST, freedom of access to His Majesty whenever occasion may require, and that the most favourable construction may be placed upon all your proceedings.

“ All these His Majesty . . . has been pleased to allow and confirm, in as ample a manner as they have ever been granted or confirmed by himself or any of his Royal predecessors.”

Such a claim has been made by the Speaker at the beginning of every Parliament since the reign of Henry VIII.

CHAPTER I

WESTMINSTER PALACE

WHEN William the Conqueror came to London there already existed the mighty church, *Westminster Abbey*.

Between it and the Thames was a small royal palace, called *Westminster Palace*. Here the Saxon kings had lived, and from it Edward the Confessor had watched the building of the Abbey.

The Norman kings decided to make London the centre of their kingdom, and began to extend the Palace. William himself planned, and his son William Rufus began, the building of a magnificent hall, *Westminster Hall*. This was completed in the reign of Richard II, and is one of the grandest of ancient buildings in the land. It is an enormous hall, with a wonderful roof of carved oak.¹

In Westminster Hall during the past seven hundred years many important incidents in British history have taken place.

Here kings used to celebrate their coronation day, after being crowned across the way in Westminster Abbey, by giving royal banquets of great splendour. During the feast the King's Champion rode on horse-back into the vast Hall and, throwing down his gauntlet, challenged anybody to question the right of the new king to the throne.

For hundreds of years two important law courts were held at one end of the Hall.

¹ Length, 290 feet : breadth, 68 feet : height, 92 feet. It is one of the largest halls in Europe whose roof is unsupported by pillars.

Westminster Palace

Here, too, eminent statesmen were tried, when the cause which they had supported was the losing one. In 1305, when the Hall was almost new, William Wallace was tried as a traitor because he had boldly fought for the freedom of Scotland. He was found guilty and, after a cruel execution, his body was cut into four pieces, which were sent to be shown in Scotland in order to frighten any other Scotsmen who dared to think of rebelling against the English king.

Warren Hastings, a great Englishman who did much to bring law and order to the vast continent of India after it had been seized by the British, was tried in Westminster Hall by his political enemies. He was finally acquitted—but others were less fortunate. Among the victims who received sentence in this Hall were Sir Thomas More, the Earl of Essex, Strafford, Jacobite lords and less-exalted figures such as Guy Fawkes and his fellow-conspirators.

It was in Westminster Hall that Richard II was made to suffer the bitter humiliation of handing his crown to his successor, Henry IV.

Charles I was tried in Westminster Hall and sentenced to death. The House of Lords Library contains his death warrant, signed ¹ by the regicides ²—among them being Oliver Cromwell.

The bodies of kings and of famous statesmen have lain in state in the Hall. Here, too, kings have come to receive the thanks and congratulations of their people. H.M. King George V received in Westminster Hall the good wishes of Parliament on his twenty-fifth year as King. His son, King George VI, was present at its most recent historic event, when Lords and Commons, together with the Speakers or leading representatives of all the Parliaments of all the British

¹ In the Painted Chamber.

² King-killers.

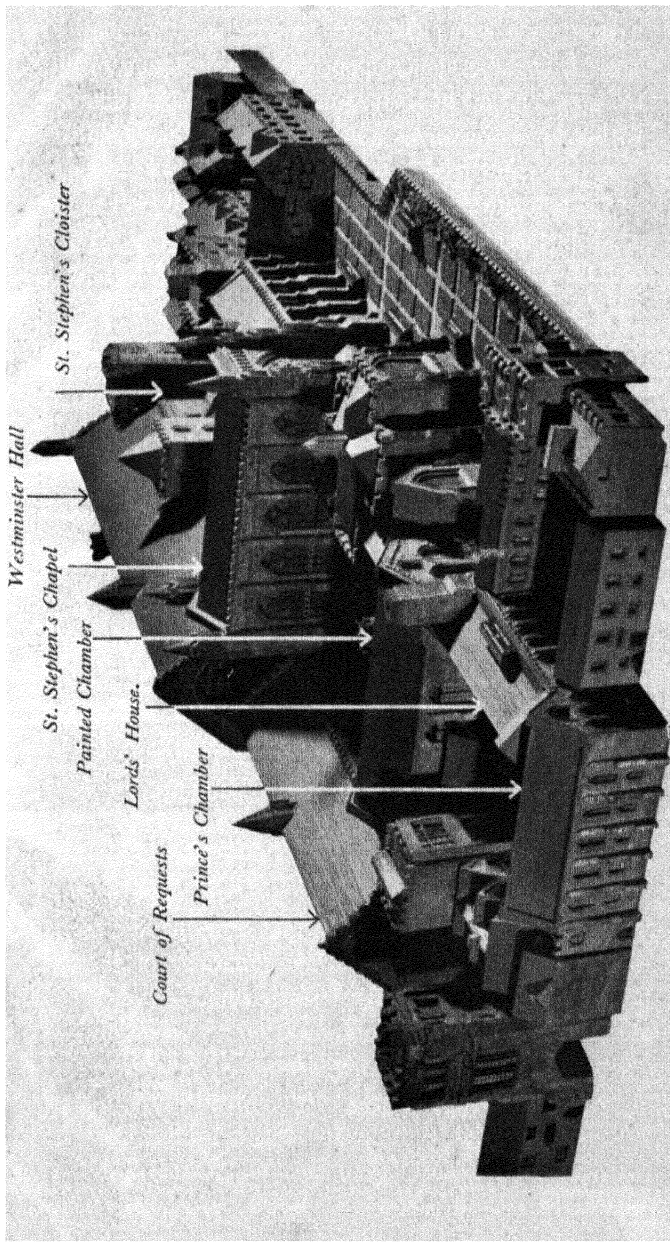
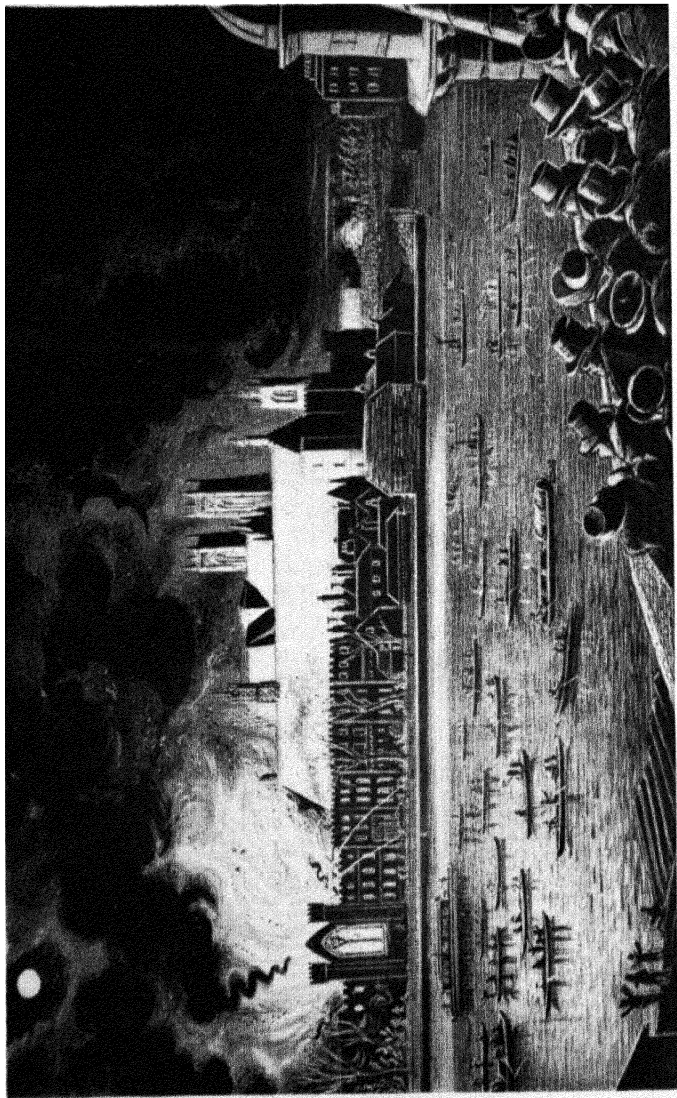


Plate I. The Medieval Palace of Westminster.

(From "Parliament House" by Maurice Hastings; The Architectural Press, (By permission of the Lord Great Chamberlain))



[From "Parliament House" by Maurice Hastings; The Architectural Press.
(By permission of the Lord Great Chamberlain)]

Plate II. The Fire of 1834.

Commonwealth, rejoiced in the completion of the rebuilding of the House of Commons.

* * *

Around Westminster Hall grew a variety of royal buildings. There was, for example, *St. Stephen's Chapel*, where kings worshipped. There was the *Painted Chamber*—a beautiful hall, much smaller than Westminster Hall, which received its name from the exquisite beauty of its walls embellished with paintings in rich colours of knights and ladies, saints and princes.

Between the Palace and the river Thames were spacious gardens.

Westminster Palace is one of the oldest royal palaces in Europe, and was dwelt in by kings long before the most famous palaces of France, Germany and Spain.

Unfortunately, most of this ancient building was destroyed in a terrible fire in 1834.

We are told that on a cold winter's night the palace attendants packed into the furnaces which heated the building bundles of old "tally-sticks".¹ The chimneys became overheated and a raging fire swept out of existence almost the whole of the Palace buildings.

One structure survived the fire. This was Westminster Hall itself. The only other fragment to survive was the shell of St. Stephen's Chapel²—the bare walls of which, with the sturdy Westminster Hall, stood grimly among a mass of rubble and ashes on the day after the fire had done its worst.

* * *

In 1837 the Government decided to hold a com-

¹ These were notched sticks which had served as a method of counting money in mediæval times.

² And the Crypt Chapel underneath.

Westminster Palace

petition to choose the best architect and the best design for a new Palace of Westminster. Ninety-seven architects submitted their drawings, and Mr. (afterwards Sir) Charles Barry's plans were accepted.

Barry began a long and difficult task. The building of a river wall was in itself a tremendous engineering achievement, as the soil of the river-bed was in places almost a quicksand. Throughout the erection of the new building Barry was constantly criticized and interfered with by the Parliament and by the public.

Step by step the noble pile of buildings took shape. In 1847 the first part was occupied. In 1852 Queen Victoria made her first official visit. But the various towers were not completed until the year 1860—by which time the great architect had gone to his resting-place in Westminster Abbey.

The new Palace was estimated to cost about three-quarters of a million pounds, but by the time it was finished it had cost two million, with at least another half-million on furnishings.

The original design was never completed. If it had been, the Palace Yard itself would have been enclosed by a magnificent terraced structure facing Parliament Square.

The new Palace was, despite its defects, one of the most important British buildings of the nineteenth century. Its architect had to blend into his new building the bits of the old Palace which had survived—Westminster Hall and St. Stephen's Chapel. This he did most successfully.

Two mighty towers dominate some six acres of building in imitation of the Gothic style—the highly ornamented way of building used by our ancestors in the Middle Ages.

Every stone is carved. Critics find the building

over-ornamented and tawdry. As the damp climate of London wreaks havoc day by day on the delicate stonework, there is never a time when some part of the vast structure is not surrounded by scaffolding on which workmen are busy repairing or replacing bits of ruined masonry.

But the two great towers—the Victoria Tower with its walls twelve feet thick, and the tower of Big Ben—and, between them, a palace of over five hundred ornate rooms, with delicate roofing and almost fantastically elaborate walls—all this, on the edge of the river Thames—makes a picture which is always vivid in the mind of every Briton. He loves Westminster Palace partly for its splendour, but at least as much for all the history that has happened—in the new palace as in the old one.

* * *

During the Second World War Hitler made attempts to destroy Westminster Palace.

On May 10th, 1941, high-explosive bombs destroyed the House of Commons, bombs fell on the House of Lords, and incendiary bombs set fire to the roof of Westminster Hall. Fire-watchers and civil defence units (who were on duty each night on the roof of the Palace, with rope-ladders down which to escape when bombs began to drop) had to decide whether to try to save the House of Commons or to concentrate on saving Westminster Hall.

Strangely enough, this was a repetition of history, for when the great fire of 1834 had occurred, the crowds of anxious watchers had cried, “ Oh, save the Hall ! Save Westminster Hall ! ”

Again men decided to save the ancient Hall, even though this meant the complete destruction of the

Westminster Palace

House of Commons and, although damage was done to the precious oaken roof, Westminster Hall escaped the war, just as it had escaped the fire a hundred years before.

Soon after the War a new House of Commons was built. It is almost exactly like the old one. The bomb-splintered doorway of the old Chamber was all that had survived, and this was preserved and was made the doorway to the new Chamber. It bears for all time the name of the *Churchill Arch*, in honour of the great war-leader.

CHAPTER II

WESTMINSTER PALACE AND PARLIAMENT

THE old Anglo-Saxon kings used to call together their wise men from time to time when they needed advice, or help—or money. This meeting was called the *Witenagemot*, or *Meeting of the Wise Men*, and it was, to some extent, the beginning of Parliament.

The Norman kings, too, used to summon together chief men from all over the country to discuss serious matters of state. At first the men so called were the great barons and bishops—men who held lands and who were in their own domains little kings themselves. Such a meeting was called *Magnum Concilium*, or the *Great Council*. At its head was the King. With him would be his *Chancellor* (who looked after his money), his *Chamberlain* (who looked after his palaces), his *Justiciar* (who looked after his law courts) and his *Constable* (who looked after his soldiers).

But meetings like this were difficult to arrange, and the King usually took counsel with a small body consisting of the officers just mentioned. This was called the *Curia Regis*, the *King's Council*.

* * *

It was during the reign of evil kings that Parliament itself began to appear.

The barons and bishops and ordinary people of the country found that bad kings surrounded themselves with a few favourites, and used their power to oppress the nation.

All have read of King John, and of how the barons

Westminster Palace and Parliament

of England, in desperation, took him prisoner and made him sign at Runnymede, on June 15th, 1215, *Magna Carta* or the *Great Charter*.

This precious document is the foundation of our liberties as a free people, although most of its benefits were devised at first for the barons alone. It declared, for example, that the King could not imprison, outlaw or kill any man unless the man had been found guilty by law, and had been tried by his "peers" or equals. This at first protected only the barons, who themselves continued to deal with their own subjects almost as they liked, but the principle was gradually extended until the Great Charter became the sheet-anchor of British liberty and the protector of every man in the land.

The Great Charter also laid down *that the King could not impose taxes on his chief men unless those taxes had been agreed to by a meeting of these men*, i.e. by what we have seen was called a "Great Council".

For the next eighty years of history the struggle that took place was one between the kings who were anxious to get money, and the other great men of the land who claimed the right to meet to consider whether the King's demands were reasonable or not.

Later this struggle was extended, until it was the people of the country who insisted that only meetings of representatives of all the people could vote the King money.

* * *

Kings after John called "Parliaments", to which they summoned barons, bishops, abbots and rich land-owners from each county. Sometimes they kept to the Charter—often they ignored it.

During the reign of Henry III the struggle between

barons and the King became bitter. Leader of the barons was *Simon de Montfort*, and in 1265 this important man in the history of freedom summoned to a Parliament not only "great men" but also citizens from some of the larger towns.

The Parliament of 1265, crude though it was, was really the first Parliament in anything like the modern meaning of the word.

In 1295 Edward I, who needed money for his wars, called together what has been named the *Model Parliament*. It consisted of earls and other important barons, archbishops, bishops and abbots, *two knights from every county and two citizens from every town*. This Parliament voted the King the money that he needed, and was the first *representative* Parliament. Previous parliaments had been meetings of the powerful men of the country. But now, in addition to the Lords and the Church, the ordinary people from countryside and town were represented.

We must add at once, however, that although this marked a great advance, it was not anything like a modern Parliament. The ordinary members were chosen by the Sheriffs or Mayors, and were either country gentlemen or rich town merchants. The peasants and workers had no members of Parliament yet.

* * *

These Parliaments of the Middle Ages had other great differences from our own.

Parliament was called when the King wanted it. There were no fixed times of meeting. The people could not demand a parliament.

When it met, Parliament could not make any laws. That was the work of the King and his ministers. All

Westminster Palace and Parliament

it had to do was to grant the King the money he asked for, and discuss the best way of raising the money by taxes.

Nobody particularly wished to be a member of Parliament, even though he was paid his expenses. Often a merchant would pay a fine rather than go up to London to represent his town. Parliament flourished, or almost withered away, according to the whims of the king on the throne.

But two significant things began to happen.

When the King called a Parliament together, the members brought with them their local *grievances*. They brought *petitions*—papers on which were set down the wrongs and injustices done in their part of the country, or requests for new powers and privileges for their towns.

These matters were talked about in Parliament, and if other members supported them in their requests, they sent a petition from Parliament to the King. If the King was sympathetic, he would promise to grant what they asked, and would send back the petition with the words *Le roi le veult* (The King wills it) written on it. If not, he would send it back with the words *Le roi s'avisera* (The King will think about it)—which was a polite way of saying that he would do nothing about it.

Even more important was the second development. As the years went on, there began a custom which finally became a mighty law—that *the King could not tax his people unless Parliament voted him the money and devised ways of raising it*.

These two developments were in time linked together. Parliament found that when the King was desperately in need of money it could say to the King, "We will not vote you the money you ask for unless you agree to

Westminster Palace and Parliament

put right the grievances which we have mentioned in our petitions." They could, in other words, bargain with the King. And every time that the King gave way, and did something that Parliament wanted him to do when he and his ministers did not wish to do it, the power of Parliament increased and that of the King grew less.

This struggle, this bargaining, was to go on for centuries, until Parliament became supreme.

* * *

Parliaments of the Middle Ages met as one body—barons, bishops and "commons", or ordinary folk.

They met wherever the King told them to meet—at Bristol, at Oxford, at Windsor or in London.

But London was the centre of the kingdom. And at Westminster was the ideal place for a great meeting—the ever-growing *Westminster Palace*, so that soon the custom grew up of holding Parliaments in Westminster Hall or in one of the other large chambers in the Palace. It was convenient for the King—and all roads led to London.

Mighty barons and bishops did not much like mixing with commoners in a united Parliament.

The Church was powerful, and wished to hold on to its own power. Barons did not like to pay taxes, and were not too happy when commoners suggested that *all* should pay whatever taxes were being levied.

Very often the petitions brought by the commons to Parliament concerned the wrongdoings of barons and bishops. It was dangerous for a Commons man to stand up in a united Parliament and say what he thought of a baron who kept a private army!

Moreover, Parliament grew very large, and although Westminster Hall could hold barons, bishops and

Westminster Palace and Parliament

commons, discussion must have been almost impossible at such a mass meeting.

For these and other reasons, Parliament broke into two bodies—indeed, for a time, into three. The clergy had their own Church Parliament (called Convocation). The barons formed a *House of Lords* (to which the clergy sent some members). And the commons became a separate body, the *House of Commons*.

The Commons met for some two hundred years in a room at Westminster Abbey—the *Chapter House*. One can still visit this historic room, where the Commons talked and worked and planned from the reign of Edward I to that of Henry VIII. One takes off one's shoes before entering, because of the precious mosaic floor. But the place is indeed holy.

Legend tells us that finally the Commons were expelled from the Chapter House by an Abbot of Westminster who thought that their noisy behaviour was a profanation of the Holy Church. Probably the reason for their expulsion was much more simple. The Abbey needed its own premises, and there could be no love lost between the proud prelates and the common folk who often used their Parliaments—and in a church, too—to attack the very Churchmen who provided them with a home.

Across the way in Westminster Palace was a large chapel which had belonged to the monks but from which Henry VIII had expelled them. This was placed at the disposal of the Commons, and for the next three hundred years the House of Commons met in—*St. Stephen's Chapel*.

It is for this reason that Parliament is often called "St. Stephen's", and later we shall see some quaint survivals in modern custom of the days when the Commons met in a church.

Westminster Palace and Parliament

As the Commons became more and more important, St. Stephen's Chapel took the name of *Parliament House*.

The Lords met in another room in Westminster Palace.¹ Whenever the King wanted both Houses to meet together—as, for example, always happened at the opening and the closing of a Parliament—they met in the Painted Chamber, or in the Lords' Chamber.

On great occasions, such as the famous trials already mentioned, Lords and Commons met together in Westminster Hall.

* * *

Through the centuries, the work of Parliament grew, and as Parliaments began to meet more regularly, Westminster Palace became less and less a palace and more and more the seat of government.

As we have seen, Westminster Hall itself was used for two important law courts. Other rooms were taken by the King's Ministers of State and all their attendants. The King himself was slowly but surely pushed out of his own palace.

As he had other palaces by now, the process seems to have been gradual and painless, and today Her Majesty is left with only a *Robing Room*, where she dons her royal robes for ceremonial visits to Parliament, and a *Royal Gallery*, through which she makes her way to her Throne in the House of Lords at the opening of Parliament.

The vast building is now called the Houses of Parliament, or simply Parliament. But it is still officially known as the Palace of Westminster, still has the privileges of a royal palace, and its upkeep and preservation are still looked after by one of the Royal Ministers.

¹ The White Chamber. Sometimes called the *Parliament Chamber*.

CHAPTER III

LORDS AND COMMONS

THE HOUSE OF LORDS consisted of barons and of bishops—of great landowners and of the chief men in the State Church.

These men were called *peers*, or *equals*, for they were almost equal to the King in their own part of the country, and in ancient days the King was often called “the first among equals”. In other words, he was the chief nobleman of the land, but whilst he was chief, others were practically his equal.

Laws were, and are still, made by the King, the Lords and the Commons. But at different periods of history the three partners in lawmaking have had different shares of the actual power to make laws.

For hundreds of years there was a struggle between the King and his Barons. Sometimes a king used the Church to help him fight against the Barons. Sometimes he used the Barons to help him to attack the Church. More rarely, he used the Commons to help him to attack both.

The story of this struggle is one of the most important parts of British history, and significant incidents in that great struggle have their echoes in the customs of modern Parliament.

Whilst King, Barons and Church were all fighting for power, the Commons also began to make demands. At first they had little to do but say “Yes” when the King and Lords told them to.

But first the Commons won the right to be the only body to vote the King money and to raise the taxes

which the King and his Ministers wanted. Later they made use of this right to gain more power, by refusing to vote taxes until the King had listened to their complaints and put things right that they thought were wrong.

Later still, the Commons claimed the right to choose the King's Ministers, and just before the Civil War they (and the Lords) put to death King Charles I's chief Minister (Strafford) and, in 1645, his chief bishop (Archbishop Laud).

In the days when the Lords, the great landowners, had the power to get their own men elected to the Commons, the two Houses got on well together. But since the beginning of the last century there has been a struggle between the Lords and the Commons.

The Lords were largely either landowners or friends of the King who had been made Lords by him. A lord's son inherited his father's title. We therefore say that most peerages are *hereditary*, i.e. handed down from father to son.

But when the Commons began to choose the King's Ministers, they also began to have the right to make commoners into noblemen by suggesting their names to the King. Gradually there has been added to the House of Lords a number of men chosen, not because of their ancestry or friendship with a king, but because of their ability and their services to the country.

The Lords were, for example, opposed to the Reform Bills, because these Bills, by adding to the number of people allowed to vote, weakened the power of the mighty landowners. But at one stage a Prime Minister threatened to ask the King to make enough new Lords in favour of the Reform Bill if the then House of Lords refused to pass it. This power to make new Lords helped to make the Commons supreme.

Lords and Commons

If the House of Commons passed a Bill and the Lords were opposed to it, they could "throw out" the Commons Bill. Or they could make alterations in it which the Commons did not approve of.

Right up to our own time the Commons have been fighting to cut down the power of the House of Lords.

First, they won the right to pass any Bills which raised money—what are called "Money Bills"—with or without the consent of the Lords.

But they wanted more power. In 1911 the Commons decided that if they wanted a Bill to pass, and the Lords were opposed to it, the Commons could make it law by passing it three times in separate sessions of Parliament. So that if the Lords opposed a Commons Bill, all that their refusal meant was that the Bill took nearly two years longer to become law.

This, however, was still a very useful delaying power for the Lords to possess. For whilst a Bill was being passed in this long, roundabout way, Parliament might come to an end, and the next Parliament might be one which agreed with the Lords and which did not want the Bill to become law.

In 1949 the Commons decided that although the power of the Lords to delay a Bill was worth preserving, the time of the delaying action could be cut down a little further.

By the Parliament Act of 1949, the Commons have the power to pass an Act against the will of the Lords, provided that certain conditions are kept and that there is an interval of twelve months between the first stages of a Bill and the last.

This means that if the Lords and the Commons disagree, the Commons always win, but only after a delay of twelve months.

When the 1911 struggle was going on, there was

great excitement in the country. The Lords naturally refused to pass a Bill which cut down their own power, but the Prime Minister of that time again used the threat that he would make enough Lords to carry it if the Lords did not agree, and they surrendered.

For the 1949 Act the Commons used the powers which they had won in the 1911 Act to cut down the power of the Lords even further, for they passed the 1949 Act although the Lords were against it.

* * *

It must not be thought, however, that Lords and Commons are always fighting about Bills.

In the Lords there are not only hereditary lords but also eminent men from all walks of life, and especially from the legal profession.

When the Commons send up a Bill to the Lords, they go carefully through it and often make useful improvements in it. Sometimes the Lords themselves produce a good Bill and send it to the Commons. Sometimes the Prime Minister gets his friends in the Lords to carry a Bill there first in order to save time in the House of Commons' heavy time-table.

Arguments about the House of Lords are by no means ended. Some people want to improve the "Second Chamber", as it is called. Some people want to abolish it altogether. Some think that it would be better if all members of the Lords were chosen because of their ability, and none simply because they are their fathers' sons. Others think that the number of hereditary peers might be cut down, but that to have some men there from famous old families is a good thing for the country.

Some think that it is good that the Lords should have power to delay Bills put forward by the Com-

Lords and Commons

mons, as it gives people a chance to think longer, and more carefully. Others believe that as the Commons are elected by the people, and the Lords are not elected, any interference by the Lords is an interference with the freedom of the people to decide by a free vote what they wish to do.

In the meantime, through the centuries, the power of the King has declined. Early kings told their parliaments what they had to do. Brave men like Sir John Eliot, in the time of the Stuart kings, and Peter Wentworth, in Queen Elizabeth's reign, died in the Tower of London for daring to oppose the King in the Commons. The Civil War was fought largely over this question of King versus Parliament.

When George I from Germany became king of this country, the fact that he spoke little English made him more and more dependent on his Prime Ministers and on Parliament. Gradually, even before the power of the Lords was reduced, that of the monarch had almost passed away.

Britain developed from an "absolute monarchy"—where the King did what he liked—to a "constitutional monarchy"—where the King is king by law and must uphold the laws made by his people.

Nowhere in the world is the relationship between the "ruler" and the Government more delicately balanced than in this country. The President of the United States of America, for example, is elected for only a few years, but has during that short time much more power than has our Queen, although he too must obey the two American Houses of Parliament if they agree against him. In some countries, a single man is, or has been, *dictator* with power of life or death over his subjects, and with a "parliament" which does just what he tells it to. Hitler was a ruler of this kind.

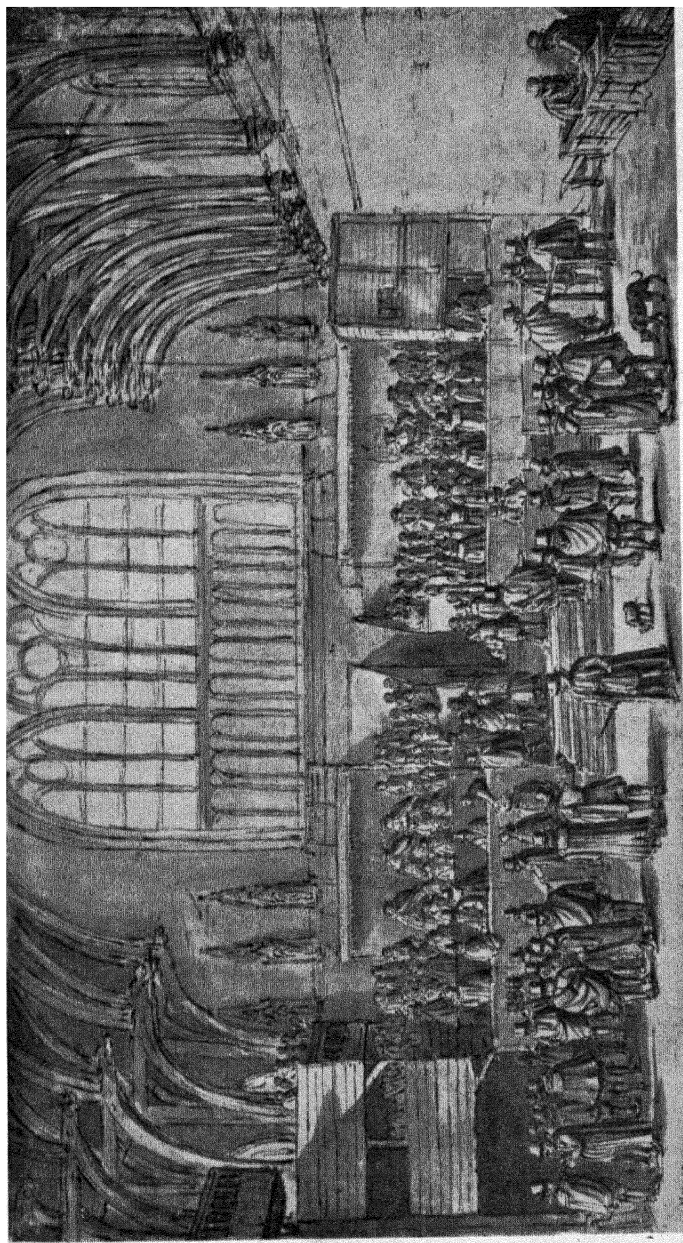
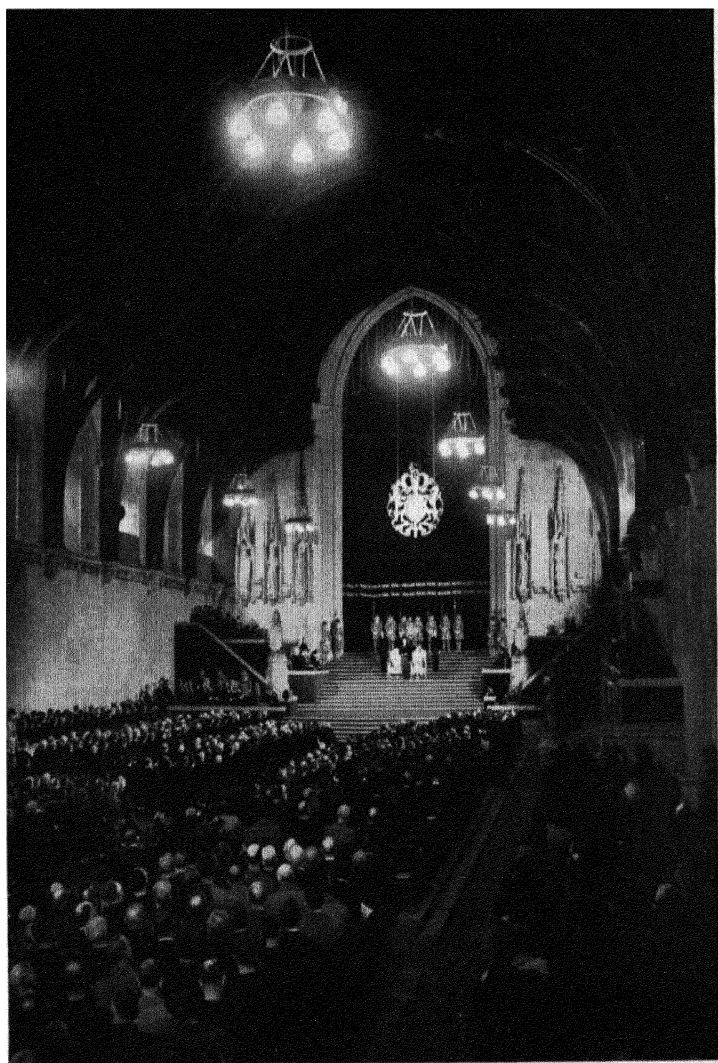


Plate III. Westminster Hall in the seventeenth century, with Courts of Chancery and King's Bench in session. [From a drawing in the British Museum.]



[Topical Press.

Plate IV. The scene in Westminster Hall when, in 1950, the late King George VI received the thanks of Parliament on the occasion of the opening of the new Commons chamber.

Our Queen rules for life, and her son or next heir succeeds her. Whilst her powers are limited by law, she plays a very active and influential part in the life of the nation.

Above all, our monarch is the link which binds together in a wonderful way the free nations who are called the *British Commonwealth*, and the Royal Family by their example and their teaching are a great moral force in the life of our country.

* * *

But most of the nation's power lies in the hands of some six hundred men and women chosen by the people at General Elections to form the House of Commons.

CHAPTER IV

THE ELECTION OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

FOR hundreds of years the House of Commons did not really represent *all* the "commons", i.e. all the ordinary people of the country.

In the Middle Ages, the M.P.s who came from the countryside were called "knights of the shire". They actually were knights—country gentry, selected by the County Sheriff and not voted for by the people. As time went on, certain people in country areas were allowed to vote for M.P.s. But such voters had to own land worth forty shillings a year, and this was quite a lot of land in those days.

In towns, voters had to own houses worth a certain amount. Different towns had different ways of deciding which citizens had the right to vote. But in most towns, whatever the method chosen, the privilege of voting was confined to a few people, and often the Sheriff or the Mayor simply picked out one of the wealthier citizens to go up to Parliament.

But it was worse than that. Rich lords and landowners very often had gradually bought up the land or property which gave people the right to vote. In this way, for hundreds of years, a man who owned a lot of land often owned the right to send someone to Parliament. Some rich lords owned in this way half a dozen seats in the House of Commons, and could put into them M.P.s who would obey them in all things. A rich man who wished to go to Parliament or to send

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some friend there would buy the land and houses which gave him the power to elect an M.P.

Moreover, although Britain had changed a great deal with the passing of the centuries, the places with the right to send members to Parliament remained the same. Little old towns grew no bigger—some of them became even smaller. Great new towns sprang up, especially after the discovery of coal and iron, and the Industrial Revolution. But the little old towns would still send two or even three members to Parliament, whilst great new towns sent nobody.

Voting was open, not secret. Everybody knew which way a voter cast his vote, and lists were printed showing how people had voted. This often meant that a voter would be afraid to cast his vote against a rich and powerful man in his district.

When only a few people had the right to vote, a rich man could afford to pay them money to vote for him. Right up to a hundred years ago voters would sell their votes to the highest bidder, and men would spend thousands of pounds in buying enough votes to win an election.¹

In all these ways, then, the old parliaments failed to represent the common people, and it is surprising that old parliaments did as much good as they did. Rich landowners and rich merchants between them owned most of the M.P.s, and the M.P.s themselves sold their

¹ Here are a few examples : In 1807, £10,000 was offered for two seats at Westbury, " the property of the late Lord Abingdon ". In 1794 the borough of Gatton was publicly advertised for sale by auction. Lord Dundonald lost an election at Honiton because he refused to outbid his opponent, who paid £5 for each vote. As late as 1880 an inquiry held at an election at Macclesfield revealed that 5,000 out of 6,000 electors had been bribed. In the Liverpool election of 1830, single votes fetched from £15 to £100 apiece.

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votes in Parliament in the early eighteenth century. Prime Minister Walpole, two hundred years ago, said "Every man has his price," because he knew that gifts of money, or promises of promotion, could buy the votes of most of the members of his Parliament.

All this has been changed during the last hundred years or so by Parliament itself in a series of reforms.

In 1832 was passed the great First Reform Act. This abolished a number of the little boroughs which had M.P.s elected by very few voters. In some of these (known as "pocket boroughs" or "rotten boroughs") two or three voters had sent a member to Parliament, and sometimes all the handful of voters had been the paid servants of one man.

The Reform Act of 1832 also gave the new towns the right to send members to Parliament.

It gave the vote in towns to every man who had a house worth £10 a year. £10 was still a lot of money in 1832, but the new limit gave the vote to all what we would call "middle-class" people, and even to some better-off workmen. It also gave the vote to more people in the countryside—to the little farmers and to owners and tenants of small pieces of land.

This was a great step forward. But still millions of workers had no vote. In 1832 out of 24 million population only a million had the right to vote. In the town of Rochdale there were 1,358 voters, and only 68 of these belonged to the working class.

In 1867 was passed the Second great Reform Act. This gave the vote to all householders in towns, and even to lodgers if they paid £10 or more a year in rent. Anyone who had lived in one place more than a year had a vote there—unless he was a bankrupt, or a criminal, or a lunatic, or a pauper.

So that in towns all except the very poor had now

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obtained the vote. In the countryside, however, most workers and peasants had not yet secured this right.

The Third Reform Act, in 1884, swept aside these injustices and gave the vote to country workers and to poor people.

But there was still one enormous group of people who had not the right to vote. This was—all the women of Britain.

In the early days of this century women worked hard in all sorts of ways to win the right to vote. These women were called *suffragettes* (*suffrage* means the right to vote) and, as many of their protests were violent, they were often sent to prison. Soon after the First War women over the age of 30 were given the vote, and later this was extended to women over the age of 21—which is the age at which men obtain their vote.

Meanwhile, Acts of Parliament were passed to prevent rich men from buying votes. In 1883, what we call “bribery and corruption” was made a criminal offence, with very heavy punishments, by the Corrupt Practices Act.

A simple example of the combined effects of some of these reforms is to be seen in the following :

In 1880 there were 3,000,000 voters, and the cost of the election was £3,000,000. Five years later, i.e. after the Third Reform Act and the Corrupt Practices Act had become law, there were 5,500,000 voters, but the cost of the election was only £750,000

In 1872 the Ballot Act was passed. This made voting secret, and so made it possible for a man to vote as he liked, without any fear of suffering at the hands of powerful men who wanted him to vote another way.

* * *

Having considered the improvements in methods of

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election made during the long history of Parliament, let us see just what happens today when a new Parliament is chosen, and how we make elections as free and as just as we possibly can.

Almost any man or woman can put up for Parliament—except a criminal or a lunatic or a bankrupt, or a member of the House of Lords, or an Anglican clergyman. But a person cannot choose himself as candidate. He must find ten people to sign a paper declaring that they wish him to be a candidate.

Moreover, to avoid wasting time and money over what are called “freak” candidates—queer people, or tiny groups of people who have no chance of being elected—any candidate must deposit a sum of £150, which he loses if he does not get *one-eighth* of all the votes cast. This fining of candidates who do not get many votes has some disadvantages, for the man who gets little support at one time may be right in the long run.

Everybody over the age of 21 (again except criminals, lunatics and bankrupts) has a vote. The names of all voters are printed each year in a register, and it is the sensible citizen's duty to make sure that his name appears on the voters' list. Each year men go round checking the names and addresses of all people living in each constituency.

When a new Parliament has to be chosen, there is a *General Election*. When a member of Parliament gives up his seat, there is a *by-election* in the place which he has represented.

In the days before voting takes place all the candidates try—by speeches, by sending printed letters to each voter, by calling on voters personally or by getting friends to call—to persuade people to vote for them.

Although voting is secret, we are such a free nation

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today that most people have no fear of saying which way they are going to vote. In fact, many people try to persuade others to vote their way, and at election times there are thousands and thousands of arguments about the "right" way to vote.

Candidates like their supporters to put bills in their windows saying "Vote for Brown", or to give money towards election expenses, or to promise to vote for them. Those who have thus promised to vote will be called on on Election Day and reminded to vote early.

Election time is very exciting. The chiefs of the various political parties broadcast speeches, thousands of meetings are held, both indoors and at factory gates, and millions and millions of printed papers are distributed. Each candidate has one free postal delivery, and his supporters act as unpaid postmen, delivering more messages from him to every house.

Then comes Election Day itself. All over the country, schools and other halls are used for voting, so that voters have not to go far to record their votes.

"Poll" used to mean in Old English "head". Voting used to take place by counting "heads", as one head meant one person. So today we still call voting-day "polling day" and the place where it takes place a "polling-booth".

In the polling-booth there are little tables, each with walls almost all round them. Here a person can vote without anyone seeing which way he has voted.

The voter gives his name or his polling-number to the clerk in charge. The clerk checks it on his register of voters (to see that he has not voted before) and gives him a voting-paper. As he does so he cancels the name in the register. The voting-paper is torn from a book, leaving behind a counterfoil. Before it is handed to the voter it is stamped.

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On the paper are the names of all the candidates, in alphabetical order. Opposite the one he wishes to vote for the voter puts a cross. Nothing more, nothing less, will do. He then folds the paper and puts it in a sealed box, through a slit in the top.

He has voted. Nobody is allowed to vote for him. Nobody can talk to him whilst he is voting. Nobody can find out how he has voted unless he cares to reveal it himself. Nobody can put any forged voting papers in the box, for not only is there a policeman keeping constant watch, but also forged papers would be recognized by their not having the official stamp.

At the end of the day all the sealed boxes are taken by policemen to a great hall. Here they are unsealed in the presence of the chief man of the town (called the "Returning Officer"), his staff of "tellers", or counters, the candidates, and a number of people chosen by each side to see that the counting is carried out fairly.

First of all the papers are counted and the totals from each polling-booth are checked with the counter-foils. This proves that nobody has stolen any of the votes, or put any extra votes into the boxes. It would indeed be impossible to do so, so many precautions and security measures are taken to make the voting fair and honest.¹

Counting of each candidate's votes follows, and the candidate with the most votes is declared elected.

The Returning Officer (usually the Town Clerk or Sheriff) writes the new M.P.'s name on an official paper, which is at once sent to London, so that a list of all M.P.s can be prepared for the first meeting of the new Parliament.

¹ There are very severe penalties for any offence against fair elections.

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The amount of money which a candidate can spend during his election is fixed by law at £450, plus three-halfpence per elector in a town, or twopence in a country, constituency. If he gives money, or promises money or favours to a voter, the candidate is disqualified and heavily punished. He is not even allowed to buy a voter a cup of tea, so anxious is the nation to prevent any bribing of voters.¹

* * *

Contrast all this with the elections in Eastern Germany of October, 1950.

There, there was one candidate only. The voting paper had one name on it. When a man went in to vote, he put the vote into one box if he wished to vote for the candidate, and into another box if he did not wish to vote for him.

All round him were supporters of the candidate, who could see which way he voted. All the police were supporters of the candidate. For weeks before he had been threatened that harm would come to him if he did not vote the right way. He knew that if he did not vote for the single candidate he might lose his job, or be imprisoned, or even lose his life. Even if he stayed away and did not vote, that might be equally dangerous.

It is not to be wondered at that 99 out of every 100 people voted for the one candidate. The remaining few were either sick—or tremendously brave.

¹ Even as late as 1887 each candidate spent on the average 4s. 1d. per vote received. At Sandwich one voter confessed in 1880 that he had received £3 from each side and had then tossed up which candidate he would support. No wonder one elector said to Lord Dundonald, "You need not ask me, my Lord, who I votes for; I always votes for Mr. Most."

At Chester in 1880, on Election Day, "beer was flowing like water, and men and women were drinking it all day".

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The sad fact is that millions who voted in this way for the Communist Government of Eastern Germany had also voted, under the same fear of punishment, for Hitler and the Nazis when they were in power.

For Fascists and Communists used the same method of voting.

CHAPTER V

HOW PARLIAMENT WORKS

THERE are 625 members of Parliament. Each of these represents a different part of the country. He may be chosen by a fair-sized town or part of a great city, or by the grouped villages and tiny towns of a country area. Roughly speaking, each M.P. represents in Parliament about the same number of people, for the country is divided into 625 parts equal not in size but in the number of people living there.

In actual fact, however, it can never work out quite that way. Some districts grow bigger every year; some grow smaller. So that every few years the constituencies have to be divided again to make them more equal. In 1945, for instance, before the latest re-arrangement was made, some M.P.s represented about 30,000 voters and others represented over 100,000 voters.

It would be difficult, however, to make constituencies the very same size. If we did so, cities, towns and villages would have to be chopped up, with people in one street—even in one house—voting in different constituencies. Every attempt is made, therefore, to make the divisions follow sensible boundaries. For example, if a town is divided into two, each ward of the town is placed entire into one of the two divisions. Or if a village is on the edge of a constituency, it is either entirely in it or entirely out of it.

Moreover, country constituencies, which are much wider in area than closely packed houses in towns, are

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made smaller in number of voters to compensate for this.

But with the building of new housing estates, the reaching-out of towns into the country, no sooner is the country divided up than new differences appear.

Here, for example, are a few extreme constituencies in the 1951 Election.

Reading North	39,681
Newbury	42,728
South Shields	74,657
Twickenham	77,444

This may be a little unfair, but it is nothing like the days before the Reform Bills, when Old Sarum, just outside Salisbury, had sent *two* members to Parliament, elected by *one* man, or when the borough of Gatton, consisting of twenty-five houses, was advertised for sale by auction, and had the privilege of sending *two* members to Parliament as one of the attractions of the sale.

* * *

It is the duty of an M.P. to bring to the notice of Parliament the various problems of his constituency. Let us look at a few examples.

He may represent a district where many people work at shipbuilding and engineering. It is his duty to try to see that Parliament does nothing which will hurt these two great industries—that the country does not, for instance, buy new ships from other countries when they might be built in Britain.

Or he may represent a farming district, where water supplies are bad. He will try to get the Government to hasten on the provision of water for the villages and farms in his district.

If it is a seaside town which has sent him to Parlia-

ment, he will bring to the notice of Parliament various matters which affect the thousands of hotel and boarding-house keepers at the seaside.

Day by day in Parliament dozens of such local problems are raised by M.P.s on behalf of their constituencies, and this is one of the most important duties of an M.P.

If a citizen is in serious trouble, he often writes to his member of Parliament, or asks to see him about it. The M.P. can get in touch with the Government department and the Minister who can look into the problem. The following is an example which actually happened.

A man was in the Reserve of the Army. This meant that he could be called up at any moment for military service as an ex-soldier.

But suddenly his wife became seriously ill, so ill that he had to get friends to look after her whilst he was at work, and himself hurry back from work each day to care for her for the rest of the day. The thought that he might have to go back to the Army and leave her made him terribly anxious, and made his sick wife even more ill.

He wrote to his M.P., who saw the Minister of Defence, and the man was freed from the possibility of having to leave his wife in her serious condition.

The member of Parliament has a busy time. Day by day he receives letters from people in trouble or wanting advice or information. At the week-ends, when he comes back to his constituency from Parliament, people whose problems are too complicated or too serious to write down come to see him.

On very urgent matters, people will come up to Parliament and meet him there. Deputations from the shopkeepers, or the trade unions, or people living in one part of the town which suffers some special

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handicap, will lay their problem before him so that he may raise it in Parliament.

For example, in one part of one town the people suffered because a power-station chimney made vast quantities of gritty smoke, and the grit was constantly getting into people's eyes. The people asked their M.P. to make the Government fit the power-station with apparatus to get rid of the grit.

All the work that we have so far described is what an M.P. does as a *private member*. But there is another part of his work which is at least as important, and this we must now consider.

When an M.P. is chosen by the people, some vote for him because they think that he is the best *man*—in character and ability—among the candidates. But most people vote for him because of the *party* to which he belongs.

For over three hundred years we have been governed in Parliament by what we call the “party system” of government.

People all agree that Parliament should deal with the various problems of the nation. But they disagree about the ways in which these problems should be solved. And, roughly speaking, there will always be at least two ways of tackling any big national problem.

Fifty years ago, for example, the two great parties in Parliament represented the landowners and factory-owners on the one hand, and the merchants on the other. The merchants wanted business for their ships and their shops and therefore wanted to trade with the rest of the world as easily as possible. But the landowners and factory-owners were afraid that if cheap goods came into this country from abroad, they would not be able to sell the goods which they made and the food which they grew.

Between these two parties, therefore, was a great difference of opinion. One wanted goods from abroad to come in freely ("Free Trade") and the other wanted taxes placed on goods brought in from abroad ("Tariff Reform").

So that when there was a General Election in those days, people voted for candidates chiefly because they supported one of these two policies.

* * *

This example, however, is only part of the picture, for the two chief parties had different ideas and different policies on many other matters too. For instance, the "Free Traders" were mostly people who went to Non-conformist chapels, whereas the "Tariff Reformers" were mostly people who went to Church. But there would be chapel-men who voted for Tariff Reform and Churchmen who voted for Free Trade. And many people would not accept *all* the ideas of the party which they voted for, but would accept more of those of one party than of the other.

* * *

At the present time there are two great parties—the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. Thirty years ago there was another great party—the Liberal Party. At that time the Labour Party was a small one, and as it has grown, the Liberal Party has got smaller. There is a fourth party, which is very small in Britain, called the Communist Party. Although very small in Britain, the Communist Party is very powerful in some other parts of the world, especially since wherever it gets into power it destroys all other parties.

* * *

One of the most important duties and responsibilities

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of the citizen is to learn all that he can about the political parties, so that when he does give his vote to one of them he does so with a knowledge of what he is voting for.

At election times the candidates set out their party's programme and explain it at public meetings. But also, day by day, the newspapers put the point of view of the various parties, and one of the important things to remember when reading a newspaper is that most newspapers write about the nation's affairs from a party point of view.

* * *

Now let us get back to our M.P., and see how the party system affects his work.

The party with the biggest number of members in the Commons is asked by the King to form the *Government* and its chief man becomes the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister chooses a number of Ministers to look after various sides of the nation's affairs—Health, Education, Agriculture, Defence, and so on. From his Ministers he chooses the most important to form a Cabinet—a smaller group with great power. The Cabinet decides on the main problems that Parliament is going to tackle, and how it is going to set about them.

Meantime the second largest party forms the *Opposition*, and its chief man becomes the Leader of "His Majesty's Opposition".

The Government's work is to look after the country and to propose ways of improving the condition of the people. The work of the Opposition is to criticize what the Government does, to show what it would do in its place, and, by doing so, to convince the people that when the next General Election comes, the Oppo-

sition ought to get more votes and so take the place of the Government.

This is an excellent system which has gradually grown up during the history of Parliament. It ensures that everything that a Government does has to stand up to the test of fierce criticism.

Almost every M.P. is on the side either of the Government or of the Opposition, and supports his own side. If the Opposition not only wish to find fault with the details of what the Government is doing, but also wish to say very strongly, "We protest against what the Government is doing," then they demand a vote in Parliament.

Usually the result of this vote is certain, for the Government M.P.s will all vote one way, and the Opposition M.P.s the other, and, as the Government Party is the larger one, it wins.

But sometimes in the years which follow an Election, things begin to change. The Government side may get smaller if it loses seats in by-elections. Or some of its own side may not like the particular bill that the Government is proposing.

Then there are sometimes small groups of M.P.s who do not belong to either of the two main parties, and their votes may change from time to time.

For any of these reasons, the Government may be defeated in the House of Commons. In that case, if the question is a serious one, the Prime Minister resigns, and there is another General Election. If, however, the question is one of detail, the Government decides that it is not important enough to have a General Election about it.

* * *

Members of Parliament, as we have seen, are busy

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men. Some of them, in addition to their work in Parliament, have other business outside Parliament to attend to, and do not wish to stay in Parliament every hour of every day waiting for the duty of voting for or against the Government.

But M.P.s must be present when an important vote has to be taken. Both the Government and the Opposition want all their members present in full strength on such occasions. For this purpose, each party appoints a number of its members as *Whips*. The Whips may be regarded as prefects, or team-captains. Their duty is to see that other members attend regularly, and that every member is there for important votes.

Each week the Chief Whip sends out to all members of his party a letter telling them what important business is to take place in the next week, and instructing them to be present without fail on certain days and at certain times, when important votes are expected.

This letter is itself also called a "whip". When the Chief Whip wants to emphasize certain dates or times in his "whip", he underlines them. But, centuries ago, members got used to this, and he had to *double underline* the most important days. This practice grew until there was a time when something very important was underlined *five* times.

Nowadays the most important notice from a Whip has *three* lines under it, and if a member receives a "three-line whip", it means that no excuse but illness will be accepted for his absence. Actually a member is free to stay away as much as he likes. In the very ancient days M.P.s were fined for absence, but today there is no punishment like that. But if an M.P. absents himself needlessly, he will be reprimanded by his Chief Whip. The leaders of his party will write

him down as an unreliable man, and so will his fellow-M.P.s.

Moreover, in these keen days of modern democracy, a member's constituents will watch how he attends and how he votes. The man who neglects his duties may not be asked to stand again as candidate, and even if he is, the voters may not be inclined to vote for him. Years ago, when there was far less interest in Parliament, members might stay away from Parliament for months and months, but today the lazy M.P. would soon find himself without any supporters.

* * *

When an important vote takes place in Parliament, the member of Parliament votes for his party. Normally this does not worry him, for he is part of his party, and voting with his party means voting just as he would wish to do.

But there may be occasions when a member does not agree with the way in which his party is voting on some question. He is then in a very difficult position. If he votes against his party, his vote may help to cause the defeat of his party, may even destroy the Government which he supports on everything but this one question. His leaders, his friends in the House, and those who elected him will all want to know why he has "rebelled" in this way.

Sometimes he solves the problem by not voting at all. If it is, however, some serious matter on which he feels strongly, he will boldly, but sadly, record his vote against his friends and for his opponents in Parliament.

If a member feels that his party is wrong not just on one matter but on a number of matters, he may take the very grave step of "crossing the floor" of the

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House, i.e. of leaving his own party and joining the other one. Mr. Churchill early in his career left the Conservative Party to join the Liberal Party. Years later he left the Liberal Party to rejoin the Conservative Party.

In all this, the voters who sent a member to Parliament are watching what he does. Every vote that he gives is shown in the printed record, and he will have to explain at the next election—or even at his next meeting—why he has done what he has done. If his conscience is clear he may feel sad about changing his party, and losing his old friends, but he is supported by the knowledge that he has done what he believes to be right.

* * *

Most of the working time of Parliament is shared between the Government and the Opposition. The Government introduces various measures, but the Opposition has no right to do so. On the other hand, the Opposition has a number of days, called “supply days”, on which it chooses the matter to be discussed.

Little time is left for ordinary members of Parliament to raise all that we spoke of as *private* member’s business—local matters, and other things in which they are keenly interested.

At the beginning of most Parliaments there is great argument about “private members’ time”, that is, how much time there will be for private members to raise what they like and have it discussed. There are over 500 M.P.s who are not ministers of the Government or leading members of the Opposition and each of these has the same right as any other to raise a matter on the very few days to be shared among private members.

Parliament gets over this difficulty by balloting for the right to speak on a private members' day. If a certain Friday is to be for private members (and many Fridays are), then everybody is told some fortnight ahead, and is invited to write his name in a book. Each name is given a number. Three numbers are drawn out of a box by the Clerk of the House, and the lucky members' names are read from the book by the Speaker.

Number One has the right to open a debate on that Friday. If there is time, the other two will have the right to start other debates that day.

Every night, just as the day's work is ending, and the Government spokesman says "I move that the House do now adjourn", a private member rises in his seat and is called upon to speak. He then opens what is called the "Adjournment Debate". This is a short debate lasting exactly half an hour. The lucky member has won this privilege by ballot, some days before.

On certain Tuesdays a private member can introduce a short bill under what is called the "ten minute rule". He makes a ten-minute speech. Then one other member is allowed to make a ten-minute speech against the bill, after which the House immediately votes on the First Reading of the Bill.

The other opportunity which a private member enjoys is that of asking questions of the Ministers at "question-time", which is the first hour of each day in Parliament. We shall return to this later.

* * *

The leaders of both parties sit on the front benches of each side of the House, and the ordinary members sit behind, the newest being in the back benches.

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From this fact the ordinary rank and file M.P. is usually called a "back-bencher", and the chief men "front-benchers".

Front-benchers make long speeches, and can be sure of speaking whenever they wish to. Back-benchers are supposed to make much shorter speeches, and they compete against each other for the chance of making a speech at all. So that whilst the House is divided into parties, back-benchers of both parties are inclined to be friendly to each other and to grumble against front-benchers who by making long speeches cut down the amount of time left for the 500 back-benchers.

* * *

The member of Parliament receives a salary of £1,000 a year.

In the Middle Ages, M.P.s were paid a daily allowance for their expenses by the people whom they represented. Some towns objected to spending this money, and often begged to be excused from sending a member to Parliament. Some men begged to be excused from being M.P.s as the money which they got did not compensate them for all the expense, danger and difficulty of journeying to Westminster. M.P.s had to be fined for non-attendance.

By the seventeenth century the practice of paying M.P.s had passed away.¹ But men were now becoming very eager to go to Parliament—sometimes because they wished to do good for their country, sometimes because they wanted power, or the opportunity to sell their votes in Parliament (see p. 22). Parliament for several hundred years consisted of members who could afford to be there.

¹ The last payment (before modern times) to an M.P. was in 1681.

In the nineteenth century there grew up a demand that M.P.s be paid a salary, as it was felt that it was wrong that a man should be prevented from standing for Parliament merely because he was too poor to go there.

In the twentieth century M.P.s began again to receive payment. First the salary was £400. Then it was raised to £600, and since the Second War it has been raised to £1,000. Out of this M.P.s have to meet all their expenses, except that they are allowed free travel between Westminster and their constituency.¹

¹ For some of these expenses—secretarial assistance, postage, travelling expenses, lodgings in London during the sitting of Parliament—they can claim income-tax relief.

CHAPTER VI

HOW LAWS ARE MADE

NEARLY two thousand years ago, a Roman writer, Tacitus, wrote that the Germans, in the kind of "Parliament" that they held in those savage days, used to discuss any proposal for a new law *twice*—once drunk, and once sober. In this quaint way they made sure that a matter was well discussed and that everybody's innermost thoughts about the new law were revealed.

The British Parliament takes similar but not identical steps to ensure that no hasty or ill-considered Bill passes into law.

A proposed measure is presented to the House in the form of a *Bill*, which is there *read for the first time*.

Four hundred years ago an old Parliamentarian wrote, "At the first reading of the Bill, it is not the use for any man to speake of it, but rather to consider thereof, and to take time till the second reading."

In those days the Bill was actually read. Old records tell us,

"The Clerk, with a loud and distinct voice, first readeth the title of the Bill, then, after a little pause, the Bill itself, which done (kissing his hand) he delivereth the same to the Speaker who, standing uncovered, whereas otherwise he sitteth with his hat on, and holding the Bill in his hand, saith, *This Bill is thus entitled.*"

The Speaker then used to give the House a short summary of what was in the Bill.

Modern procedure at the first reading is purely

formal. A “dummy” bill is presented, its title is read, there is no discussion, a day is appointed for its second reading, and the Journal for that day records that *the Bill has had its First Reading*.

It is then printed, so that every member can read and study it at his leisure.

The *Second Reading* of a Bill is perhaps the most important stage of its long and dangerous journey through Parliament.

On this occasion the principles of the Bill, rather than its details, are discussed. The House debates a resolution, “That the Bill be *now* read a second time.” Those who are against the Bill usually move one of two amendments. The first one asks that the Bill be read some months later, the time chosen being some time when Parliament is not sitting. The second states that the Bill is a bad one for certain reasons or that, although it is good, it has certain serious defects, and for this reason should not now be read a second time.

At the end of the Second Reading Debate, which may last several days, the House will either carry a resolution “that the word *now* stand part of the Bill” —in which case it has secured its Second Reading—or one of the amendments, in which case the Bill is dead.

Having passed its Second Reading, the Bill is sent to Committee. This is called the *Committee Stage*. Here the Bill is examined word by word, line by line, clause by clause. This long and detailed task is carried out sometimes by the whole House sitting as a Committee, sometimes by a group of members chosen from each side.

In the Committee stage all kinds of alterations may

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be made, and enemies of the Bill will attempt to make such serious additions, alterations or deletions as may indeed destroy the whole purpose of the Bill.

On the other hand, in Committee both sides do their best to get rid of defects and to improve the details of the Bill. The strict rules of Parliamentary debate are relaxed in Committee so that members may speak as many times as they wish to, whereas they may speak only once in a debate in the House.

The Bill now reaches its *Report Stage*. It is reported to the House in the form in which it has left the Committee.¹

At the Report Stage attempts are again made to alter the Bill. New clauses and new amendments are moved. Often the principal changes which have been defeated in Committee are brought to the floor of the House for another battle.

(On very rare occasions, after the Bill has passed its Report Stage, it is re-committed to the Committee for some special bit of detailed re-examination. But this is so infrequent that we need not consider this extra stage here.)

The Bill now comes for its *Third Reading*. The debate at this stage is confined within limits fixed by the Bill itself. Nobody can propose any amendment but an improvement of the wording, and nobody can discuss any topic that is not in the Bill. A member

¹ In former times the Chairman of the Committee used to stand by the Clerk when the Bill was being reported, for the alterations were actually written on to the Bill, and omissions scratched out, so that the Chairman would often have to explain an untidy mass of scratchings and additions.

Nowadays, of course, the Bill is neatly printed in the altered form in which it leaves the Committee.

cannot, for example, talk about a certain clause that he had previously tried to get inserted in the Bill. He can denounce what *is* in the Bill, but can neither attack nor praise what *might* have been in it. Bills which have got so far usually survive the Third Reading, the Opposition amendment and vote being just a last gesture of protest.

The House of Commons has now done its main work and the Bill is sent to the House of Lords. Written on it is "*Soit baillié aux seigneurs*"—"Let it be sent to the Lords."

In the House of Lords it goes through the same chain of procedure from First to Third Reading, after which it is sent back to the Commons.

Sometimes the Lords send back the Bill with a number of alterations.

In days when there were bitter struggles between the two Houses the Lords often "threw out" a Bill, or altered it beyond recognition, and this was enough to destroy a Bill entirely.

But the long struggle between Lords and Commons has gradually weakened the power of the Lords.

The Commons nowadays gravely examine all the alterations which the Lords have made in the Bill. Often they accept the alterations because they improve the Bill. If the two Houses disagree about an alteration, then they confer until agreement or compromise is reached.

But if there is a head-on collision between Commons and Lords over a Bill, the Commons has its own way in the end.¹

The last stage of the eventful history of a Bill is for it to receive the Royal Assent.

¹ See Chapter III, pp. 15-16.

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This is a picturesque ceremony and it takes place in the House of Lords.

Seated in authority are the King's Commissioners—lords who represent His Majesty. (In earlier times it was the King himself who presided.) The title of the Bill is read by a Clerk.

The Clerk then bows to the Lord Chancellor, who raises his hat.

Another Clerk now bows to the Chancellor, then turns to the Speaker and the Commons, who stand at the bar of the House of Lords. He says to them, still using the old Norman-French words, *Le roi le veult*—"The King wills it." If it is a money bill, the King's message is, *Le roi remercie ses bons sujets, accepte leur benevolence, et ainsi le veult*—"The King thanks his good subjects, accepts their generous gift, and so wills it."

The *Bill* is now an *Act*, and part of the law of the land. It is given the date of the Session, a Chapter number, the year of the King's reign, and it is reprinted by the House of Lords.

King, Lords, and Commons thus combine in making a law.

* * *

Bills can also originate in the House of Lords, in which case the procedure is similar to that detailed above, with the Lords and Commons in reverse.

* * *

In addition, Parliament also passes from time to time private Bills. These are usually introduced on behalf of some corporate body—a town, or a county, for example, asking for certain powers to develop in the years ahead. For example, recently London County Council promoted a private Bill which gave it certain

powers—among them one to set up municipal laundries. Parliament passed the Bill, but struck out the power to set up laundries.

* * *

Private members—as distinct from the Government—may introduce Bills which they hope will be made laws.

But, it can be seen from the above description how complicated is the passage of a Bill through its various stages, and how little chance a private member has of getting his Bill through, unless the Government is willing to give the Bill Parliamentary time.

Yet twenty private members each year win by ballot the right of introducing a Bill on a Friday, and sometimes several of these go through all their stages and become Acts of Parliament.

CHAPTER VII

THE SPEAKER

THE CHAIRMAN of the House of Commons is called the *Speaker*, or *Mr. Speaker*. But he is much more than a mere chairman.

In the days when the Commons were beginning to fight against the tyranny of the King and his Ministers, it was dangerous for them to speak out what they thought. They therefore chose one of their number to act as their spokesman, or "speaker".

In their meetings, which were held in private, members said what they wanted to. When they had come to a decision, the Speaker conveyed it to the King. In doing so he would not mention which members had proposed a Bill which the King did not like, or who was in favour of and who was against what the Commons had decided. All he did was to report the final decision of the Commons, a decision made by the Commons as a whole.

If anybody was to get into trouble, it was to be the whole House of Commons. They argued that there was safety in numbers, safety in secrecy and safety in unity.

During the long struggle of the people for freedom, this very simple idea did not always work. Sometimes the King refused to accept as Speaker the man whom the Commons had chosen. Sometimes the Speaker acted almost as a spy for the King. If he was a "King's man" he would try to persuade the Commons not to oppose the King's wishes. Indeed, sometimes after the Commons had had a long debate, the Speaker would use his power as Chairman to sum up what they

had been saying in a way quite differently from what had actually been said.

One can feel real pity for a Speaker who had to convey to a powerful King messages from Parliament which he knew would anger the King. It is no wonder that he tried to tone them down.

For example, King Henry VIII once told a Speaker that if the Commons did not quickly pass a Bill that the King wanted passing, he would lose his head !

So difficult and dangerous was the office of Speaker that when a member was proposed for it, he very often begged not to be elected. For centuries, at the election of a new Speaker, the member chosen made a speech pointing out what a bad Speaker he would make. He would say that his hearing was not good, or that he could not see members well enough, to carry out the office. When the new Speaker-elect went to the King to tell him that he had been chosen by the Commons, he again would point out his unfitness for the post and ask the King to choose somebody else.

This fear of taking office survives, even to the present time, in a quaint Parliamentary custom.

When a Speaker is elected at the beginning of a new Parliament, the two members who have proposed his election take him by the shoulders and drag him to the Chair. There is no danger in the office now, but it was a useful alibi in former times for the Speaker to tell the King that the Commons had compelled him to take the Chair.

The Speaker, then, is a very important man and the Commons made him as powerful as they could in order to protect themselves and Parliament. He lives in a magnificent Speaker's House in Westminster Palace, and there he entertains from time to time important people who come to Britain from other lands.

The Speaker

Day by day, when Parliament is sitting, he makes his stately way through the corridors of Westminster Palace to the House of Commons. The procession is headed by an attendant, followed by the Serjeant-at-Arms carrying the Mace. Then comes Mr. Speaker, in his robes, followed by a train-bearer, his Secretary and his Chaplain. Policemen call along the corridors "Mr. Speaker!", and all people must stand, hats off, until he passes. Members bow to the procession.

In the House the members stand as he comes in. With the Speaker and the Chaplain kneeling, the Commons begin the day's work with prayers. During prayers the members turn and face the walls. This custom is said to go back to the days of Charles II, when the irreverent "bloods" of the time used to misbehave during prayers, and this turning away was devised to prevent such misconduct.

* * *

After Prayers comes "Question Time", lasting one hour exactly. Here members ask various Ministers questions about their departments. Questions have been sent in some days before, and each member has a printed list of them. Each question is numbered, and to save time, a member asks his question by calling out the number. The Minister then answers the question on the printed paper.

Some members will not be satisfied with the answer and will wish to put another question. Such a question is called a "supplementary question".

So that when the Minister sits down a number of members will stand in their places, and the Speaker will call one by name. The named member has the right to put a further question.

When the Speaker thinks that there have been

enough supplementary questions and answers, he passes to the next printed question by naming the member who has put it down.

It is during this very exciting hour that the Speaker's power and his skill are illustrated.

As nobody must speak unless the Speaker has called him by name, he must know the name and face of each of the 625 members. And these he must know almost as soon as a new Parliament begins. Moreover, he must judge when a question has been pursued long enough. Each day there are as many as a hundred questions on the Order Paper. If the Speaker allowed members to put as many supplementary questions as they liked, the first question might occupy the whole hour. If that happened, other members would be angry because their questions had not been reached. On the other hand, members are eager to put supplementary questions, as the Minister does not know what is coming, and they like to catch him by surprise.

Somebody, therefore, must have the power to decide when to "move on", and that somebody is the Speaker. His word is law, and although thirty or forty members may be on their feet wishing to put awkward supplementary questions, he will turn a blind eye to them and call the next question on the order paper.

After questions there begins the important debate of the day. This is opened by one of the chief men from each side, after which the "back-benchers" will stand up in great numbers to carry on the debate. To be allowed to speak, a member must "catch the Speaker's eye". That is, the Speaker must see him and call him by name. As there may be any number up to seventy or eighty standing in their places, trying to catch his eye, the Speaker has a formidable task in choosing one.

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Again, in this the Speaker's word is law. He may choose anyone he likes, and nobody may question his decision. But there are certain principles governing his choice.

First of all, he must see that the various parties in the House have a fair chance during the debate of putting their points of view. Thus, in the last Parliament, where there were about equal numbers of Conservatives and Socialists, the Speaker would choose first a Conservative and then a Socialist, so as to be fair to both sides.

But there may be small parties with different opinions from those of the major parties. The Speaker must also see that the tiniest party—even a party of one member—is heard in a debate.

Then he must remember which members are specially qualified to join in a particular debate. If, for example, the subject is the fishing industry, he must be sure that members who represent fishing towns catch his eye. Moreover, the Whips of various parties may let the Speaker know that they would like certain of their members to be called upon to speak—just as a cricket captain will put in his best batsmen at important places in the match.

The Speaker must also remember that Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England are very different parts of Britain, and that to miss out any one of these in a debate would mean trouble. He has to remember too which members make long boring speeches, and who can be relied upon to speak briefly and to the point. He cannot pass over long-winded members altogether, but he can conveniently miss "seeing" them more than is absolutely necessary.

Above all, the Speaker must share out his favours fairly. If a member tries to speak month after month

and is never called, whereas someone else gets called again and again, the slighted member feels a sense of injustice.

All these factors must be weighed by the Speaker as he looks round the House and then names the member who has "caught his eye". But the decision to call a member is his alone, and nobody may question it.

One charming custom has been a feature of "catching the Speaker's eye" for many centuries. This is that a "maiden speaker"—one who is making his first speech in the House—always manages to catch the Speaker's eye as he stands up among the veterans of debate.

Moreover, as the new member sits down in confusion after the ordeal of his maiden speech, the next member called upon to speak always pays him a compliment.

* . * *

The Speaker has also to decide whether a member is "in order", that is, whether he is talking about the subject under discussion. This does not mean that members are foolish enough not to know what is being talked about. But often a clever member will try to talk about some topic which is not under discussion, but which he is very anxious to speak about. He will then try to link it up with the matter before the House, or he will even just boldly talk about it in the hope that the Speaker will not notice him.

Parliamentary rules about what may be discussed in a debate are very definite, and often a member will suddenly hear the Speaker say, "Order, Order!" He at once sits down, and the Speaker coldly tells him that he must get back to the subject under discussion. Sometimes the member will be unwise enough to argue

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with the Speaker that his remarks are “in order”, but the Speaker usually wins, for one of his qualifications for the Chair is his knowledge of Parliamentary rules of debate.

The Speaker may also call a member to order for “tedious repetition”. This is necessary not because members usually say the same thing over and over again, but again because clever members who wished to “talk out” a debate, i.e. make it last so long that no vote could be taken, used to, and still occasionally do, make long speeches with that purpose. If they do so cleverly and entertainingly, the Speaker may for a time shut his eye to their tricks. But if the attempt is a clumsy and dull one, or if he thinks it has gone on long enough, he will rise in his seat and sternly call the member to order.

CHAPTER VIII

PARLIAMENTARY CUSTOMS

WHEN a member enters or leaves the Chamber, he bows gravely to the Speaker's Chair. This custom dates from the days when Parliament met in St. Stephen's Chapel, and the Speaker's Chair was in front of the Altar. The reverence was originally shown to the Altar, and not to the Speaker's Chair.

In the Middle Ages members used to bow only when they entered the Chamber, but on January 21st, 1580, it was decided that members "should depart and go forth, in comely and civil sort, for the Reverence of the House ; in turning about with a Low Courtesy like as they do make at their coming into the House ; and not so unseemly and rudely to thrust and throng out, as of late Time hath been disorderly used".

When the Speaker enters the House at the beginning of the day, he bows as he reaches the Bar, bows again on his way to the Chair, and again as he stands by the Chair. These three traditional bows are also given by messengers from the King and the Lords, and by a new member taking his place in the House for the first time after a by-election.

Members of Parliament when speaking of each other during a debate always address the Chairman and do not mention members' names. A member is referred to by the constituency which he represents . . . e.g. "the member for Camford South". But there are further elaborate courtesies in such references. Every member is an *honourable* member, for the British Parliament is an "honourable House".

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If he is in the Government or has been in a Government or is a Privy Counsellor, he is a *Right Honourable* member. If he is of the same party as that of the member who is speaking, he is a *Friend*. If he is an opponent, he is a *Gentleman*. If he is an ex-serviceman who has been a commissioned officer, he is *Gallant*. If he is a lawyer, he is *Learned*. If he has a title, he is *Noble*.

So that a member will be referred to as "The Rt. Hon. and gallant gentleman, the Member for Oxbridge" or "My Hon. Friend, the member for Stockford" or "the Noble Lady the Member for Wentworth"—and so on.

In itself, this ceremonious method of address probably helps to keep the British Parliament the dignified assembly that it is. Debates in foreign Parliaments often become heated and even violent. Tempers are more restrained in our House of Commons, and the practice of not naming the man whom one is attacking must help not a little.

But, again, this custom has serious historical roots. In the days when M.P.s were afraid of getting into trouble for speaking their mind, everything that could help to keep individuals' names secret was a help. In those days they referred to each other in any way which occurred to them . . . "The member who spoke last" . . . "The member who spoke from the gallery" . . . "The member sitting near the Speaker's chair" . . . but never by name.

* * *

The House of Commons votes by "dividing" and a vote is called a "division".

Every matter discussed in the House of Commons is debated in such a way that you can say "Yes" or "No" to the question proposed.

If, for instance, the Opposition do not like the way the Government is dealing with some parts of its foreign policy, they may put down a resolution to reduce the salary of the Foreign Minister. After a long debate in which both sides point out what they think is wrong and what is right in the handling of foreign affairs, the House votes on whether to reduce the Minister's salary. If it votes "yes", then it has shown that it is not happy about some parts of the Government's foreign policy.

Thus, every evening at ten o'clock or later there is the possibility of one of these "Yes" or "No" votes. Such a vote will not always be taken, however. If the Government is defeated, it may resign and there will be a General Election. The Opposition and any others who wish to vote against the Government have to think carefully before they take such a risk.

Moreover, such a "yes" or "no" resolution may be put down just in order that some subject may be discussed for a day, at the end of which the resolution may be withdrawn.

But on highly serious matters which divide the main parties, resolutions are put down for the House to vote on, whatever the consequences.

The method of voting used is at least four hundred years old—apart from one slight change made about one hundred and fifty years ago.

The Speaker puts the question to the House. Those in favour shout "Ay!" Then those against shout "No!" The Speaker listens, decides which is the bigger shout, and that one wins the vote! This is called "collecting the voices".

Such a clumsy method might be enough if on one side there were 300 "voices" and on the other about fifty. But, obviously, it could not work as a general

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rule, for 200 *big* voices might sound more than 300 *little* voices, and the loudest members might win even if they were not in the majority.

Therefore, having "collected the voices", the Speaker announces, "I *think* the Ayes have it," or "I *think* the Noes have it." If the House does not wish the voting to proceed further, it sits silent. But if one side wishes the votes on each side to be counted, its members shout, very loudly, "No!" when the Speaker announces which side he thinks has won.

If this is done, the Speaker says, "Clear the Lobbies!" and the House proceeds to divide.

On each side of the Chamber is a Lobby—one for the "Ayes" (to the right of the Speaker) and one for the "Noes" (to his left). These are long corridors stretching the whole length of the Chamber, and with doors at each end. The doors at one end of each lobby are at once locked. Members now make their way into the lobby in which they wish to vote. But not every member is in the Chamber at the moment when the House has decided to "divide". Some may be attending Committee meetings in one of the five hundred rooms in the Palace, others may be working in the Library, interviewing visitors or writing letters.

All through the Palace there are electric bells. The moment a division begins, these bells start ringing. Policemen rush up and down every corridor, into every room, crying out "Division!" Telegraphic indicators in the most important rooms which show what is going on in the Chamber, now show a printed message, "Division".

Every member, no matter how important the business he is engaged on, at once makes his way to the Division Lobbies. He has about five minutes to

get there, and this means that if he is at the far end of the building he has to hurry.

After a certain interval, the Speaker calls out "Lock the doors!" At this moment the doors at the other end of each lobby are locked, so that all members who are voting are now in one lobby or the other.

The first doors are now opened, and members make their way out singly through a gap wide enough to let through the fattest member. As they do, they bow to two "tellers", who are counting them. In the lobby, clerks mark down their names on a list of all the members.

When all are through the lobbies, the "tellers" (two from each side) make their way to the Clerks' Table, and hand one of the clerks the number of voters in each lobby. He writes this on a paper which he hands to one of the tellers of the winning side.

The four face the Speaker, who rises in his place and calls out "Order! Order!" Excited members, especially if the vote is a close one or a very important one, stop their chattering and listen eagerly for the result.

The four tellers bow gravely to the Speaker, step forward, bow again, then one announces,

"The Ayes to the right 297, the Noes to the Left 314."

At this there are cheers and counter-cheers from the two sides. The Speaker then announces the result and the division is over.

Formerly, although the House divided, and had "tellers" as now, there were no Division Lobbies. One side went out of the House and one side stayed in. The custom was that those who wanted to change a law went out—to bring the new law in—and those whose vote was in favour of keeping things as they

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were stayed in. It is said that during the eighteenth century, when gentlemen went to Parliament in the evening after heavy drinking, someone who went to sleep in the House would wake to find that he had voted against his wishes, and that it was for this reason that two lobbies were provided.

One old custom holds during a division. Whilst the House is dividing, there can be no debate about anything. But if a member wishes to raise some important point of order during a division he can do so only if he *sits*, and *has a hat on*. But members nowadays very rarely wear hats in Parliament, and curious incidents have happened in carrying out this custom. On one occasion an M.P. wished to raise a point of order, had no hat, and grabbed the nearest one that he could reach. This was so big that it went down over his ears.

Members made themselves paper-hats, men borrowed ladies' hats, to raise points of order during a division, until in the 1950 Parliament an opera-hat was procured. The writer has seen the great Winston Churchill sitting in the House with members moving about in all directions. He was raising a point of order. On his head was uncomfortably perched the opera-hat which he had just grabbed from another member whose head it equally failed to fit.

* * *

The seating of the House of Commons is something like that of a church choir—two halves facing each other. Indeed, this seating actually goes back to the meetings of old Parliaments in St. Stephen's Chapel.

Between the two is a broad space called the "floor" of the House. On the carpet before each of the front

benches is a red line. No member when speaking must stand outside of this red line, or in the gangways. If he does so, there are immediate shouts on all sides of "Order! Order!" and the offending member jumps sharply back.

This is no idle foolish custom. We are told that it dates back to the days when members wore swords, and the distance between the red lines was enough to prevent angry members from reaching each other with their swords.¹ This explanation is delightful, but has been disputed—especially as, centuries ago, M.P.s were forbidden to take their swords into the House. On the other hand, making a member stand in his place must have prevented in moments of anger the scenes of violence that sometimes occur in, for example, the French Parliament.

Members when speaking must refer to each other politely. If they use abusive language about each other, they are not only being discourteous to each other, but they are also offending the dignity and privilege of the honourable House.

The Speaker will reprimand a member if he uses an "unparliamentary" expression—such as "fool" or "liar" or "scoundrel". Through the ages a whole list of terms which are unparliamentary has been compiled. The latest addition is "stooge", which a member was made to withdraw in November 1951.

If a member says what he should not say, the Speaker immediately calls him to order. If the offence is serious, the Speaker asks him to withdraw the words that he has used. If the member refuses to do so, the Speaker may *name* him. This is a serious punishment—for a "named" member must leave the

¹ In the members' cloakroom are still ribbons for members to hang their swords in.

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House, and the rest of the members will at once discuss what is to be done with him. If he refuses to leave, the Serjeant-at-Arms and his men will remove him, by force if necessary.

Punishments today are not bodily severe. A member may be suspended. He may be brought to the Bar of the House and be reprimanded by the Speaker. But in the past, and especially in the days when Parliament was struggling to build up its power against the King and the Lords members could be severely punished for what they said in the House. The Commons fought the King for the right to say what they liked without fear of punishment by the King, but long years after they had won that right, they insisted on punishing their own members for abusing that right. Often in the seventeenth century a member would be arrested by the Serjeant and be sent to the Tower for several months.

* * *

The House of Commons debates matters either as a "House" or as a "Committee".

Discussion of details is impossible at a large meeting, which is too unwieldy to debate anything but broad principles. For this reason all democratic governments elect smaller groups to discuss matters in detail, and these bring the result of their discussion back to the larger body for decision.

For this reason, very early in the history of Parliament, the Commons set up certain Committees,¹ varying in size, to consider details of new proposals.

¹ The "committee" was at first a *man*, and the word meant a man to whom a question was committed. A group of these men were called "Committees". Later the singular word was used for the group.

In Elizabeth's time there was, adjacent to St. Stephen's Chapel, a Committee-room for such smaller meetings.

In a committee of twenty or thirty, talking can be easy and informal. A member may speak several times during such a discussion without causing any confusion, whereas, when the whole House is assembled, there must be very severe rules about the right to speak, or debate would simply become confused noise.

But Committees in Parliament have again a significance in history. In the days when the Commons were afraid that their speeches might be reported to the King or his Ministers, and when they feared that even their Speaker might be a King's spy, they found that it was much safer to appoint a Committee of trustworthy members, who would meet and talk with confidence because they knew that nothing which they said would reach their enemies. They then reported back the result of their meeting to the full House.

So useful was the Committee from this point of view, that the Commons used it to get rid of their Speaker from a debate by the curious custom of making the whole House "go into Committee".

When this happened, the Speaker left the Chair and the House, and one of the ordinary members became Chairman. The House in Committee then spoke freely and safely, and came to some decision. When the Speaker returned the Chairman reported from the "Committee" to the "House" (i.e. the same persons except for the Speaker) that decision.

Although the need for such secrecy has long since gone, the practice still remains, and another old custom surviving from the days of fear still marks the House's going into Committee.

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The Mace is the symbol of Royal Authority, and seems to mean that the King is present in Parliament. When the House is sitting, the Mace rests in a place of honour on the Table before the Speaker. But when the House goes into Committee, the Mace is placed "under the Table". *The King is no longer there,*¹ and members are free to say what they like ! The Speaker leaves the Chair, and another member of the House, called the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, presides. He sits at the Table, in the place of the Chief Clerk. When the business of the Committee is over, the Speaker returns to the Chamber, the Mace is solemnly restored to its place of honour, and the Chairman reports to the Speaker what has been done in "Committee".

Visitors to the House sometimes witness with surprise the old custom enacted when the House goes into Committee and out of it several times in quick succession. It is always performed, however, with solemnity and dignity.

The Serjeant-at-Arms sits, throughout the meetings of the Commons, at the opposite end of the Chamber from the Speaker. He is dressed in black, wears knee-breeches, carries a three-cornered hat (as does the Speaker) and wears a sword. He is responsible for the protection of members of the House.

In ancient times he had more arduous duties than he has today. We have noted how sometimes he had to arrest members for unruly conduct. At other times he would be sent, with the Mace, to bring to the Chamber members who were wandering up and

¹ When the King came to Westminster Hall to his Parliament (Lords and Commons) on October 26th, 1950, the Maces of the Lords and the Commons were covered in his presence, and uncovered as soon as he left the Hall.

down Westminster Hall when they should have been doing their duty. Or he would be sent to arrest some citizen who had, by speech or by action, hurt the House of Commons or its members.

* * *

The House is lit at night by electricity. But formerly its light at night-time was, as everywhere else, candle-light. When the room was getting dark, the day's debate usually ended. Parliament met at eight in the morning and liked to finish by the early afternoon. But if the matter was an important one, and members wished to continue the debate, a member would propose that "candles be brought in", and they would vote on this question.

Still in our modern Parliament, when a member wants the lights to be put on, he rises in his seat and gravely asks for "Candles".

Going home at night was dangerous in olden days. There was no street-lighting. There was no proper police force until just over a hundred years ago. Citizens put up their shutters at nightfall, and the only people left in the streets were either unfortunate folk who had been compelled to be out late—or footpads, thieves and cutthroats. No M.P. therefore liked Parliament to continue its debates after nightfall. If it did so, he preferred to make his way to his lodgings in the company of other M.P.s, and with their armed servants as a bodyguard.

When Parliament ended for the day, the attendants would call up and down the corridors "Who goes home?" Members would hear them, and gather into bands for mutual protection on their perilous journeys.

And still, at the end of each day's sitting, as the

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Speaker leaves the Chair, policemen call up and down the corridors, "Who goes home?"

* * *

No member of Parliament may resign from being a member. This rule dates back to the time when people were not very anxious to become M.P.s or to remain M.P.s—because it was dangerous, because travelling was difficult and because, although members received a sum for their expenses, they often lost money by neglecting their business back in their native town.

At the same time no member of Parliament may accept a paid post from the King. This rule dates back to the time when Parliament had to find some method of keeping "King's men" out of the Commons.

The two old customs are now blended to enable a member who wishes to give up his seat to do so without actually resigning.

There are two little posts which were once real jobs but now have no work attached to them and carry a tiny salary of some few pence a year. These posts may be filled by the King. So that if an M.P. wishes to give up his seat, he applies to the King for one of these posts—the "Chiltern Hundreds" or the "Stewardship of Northstead".¹

* * *

If an M.P. wishes to vote, he must be present. This sounds very obvious—but in the French Parliament a member need not be present to vote, for the chief of his party may vote for him.

¹ Holders of these posts used to have to keep down brigands in certain Buckinghamshire forests. But brigands—and forests even—have long vanished.

If a member wishes to stay away from Parliament and yet not lose the effect of his vote, he has a way of doing this. Provided that he can find an M.P. of the opposite side who also wishes, or is willing, to stay away, the two may "pair". This means that both promise not to vote, and that as both parties have thus lost one vote each, no harm has been done.

If a member has promised to "pair", and then finds himself able to attend and vote, he must not vote. To vote when he had promised not to would be unfair, and if he did vote in such circumstances, the Speaker has the power to order his vote to be cancelled.

The Speaker has a casting vote. This means that usually he has no vote, but that if the votes are equal, he must give the deciding vote. Everything in the House must be "Ay" or "No", and no question could be left "Ay-No", or undecided. However, the Speaker usually endeavours to give such a casting vote in a way which will allow the matter under discussion to be considered again at some later date.

In the early nineteenth century, however, there was an intensely dramatic occasion when a Minister, Dundas, afterwards Lord Melville, was being charged with corrupt practices and the voting to condemn him was equal with that for his innocence.

On the Speaker's casting vote depended whether a famous leader, a friend of the Prime Minister, was to be utterly ruined and disgraced for life.

It is said that the House was tense and silent as the Speaker sat, pale and anguished, for over ten minutes. Nobody could advise him. Nobody could help him. Finally he cast his vote against Lord Melville. As he did so, the Prime Minister, Mr. Pitt, crushed his hat over his brows to hide his tears at the ruin of his friend.

Parliamentary Customs

The House of Commons is not a very large chamber, and it has seats for only about two-thirds of its members. The reason for this is that the House has to serve many purposes. It is not meant for great mass-meetings and the kind of exciting speeches that Hitler used to make to vast crowds. It is rather a place for intimate and reasoned debates.

Moreover, the debates vary in importance and in nature. When, for example, the House is "in Committee", there may be only twenty or thirty members—those keenly interested in the details of a Bill—taking part in the discussion. So that the Chamber must be large enough for every member to get in, but small enough for a handful of members to debate in it.

For an important debate every seat is taken, and the remaining members sit in the gangways on the floor, or stand round the Speaker's Chair and at the Bar of the House. For a small debate most of the benches are empty, but to members there is no sense of emptiness, as there might be in a hall large enough to seat six or seven hundred.

* * *

Upstairs at one end are seats for "strangers", who may listen to the debate but who are not allowed to speak or to applaud.

At the other end are special seats for the Press reporters, and others for the Official Reporters of the day's speeches. For every word said in Parliament is taken down, and next morning appears in a printed book, usually called, after the name of its first printer, *Hansard*.

Nobody but a member of Parliament is allowed to enter the Chamber whilst the Commons are meeting,

and at the entrance are two door-keepers who prevent any "stranger" from going in. Not even the King or Queen may cross the threshold. The last king to do so was Charles I, who soon afterwards lost his throne.

"Strangers" are allowed in the Gallery only if the Commons permit them to be there. At any moment Parliament may decide to go into "secret session", as it did during the darkest days of the war to discuss military matters. Formerly, it was enough for one member to cry out "I spy strangers!" for the Serjeant-at-Arms to instruct his men to send every stranger out. But towards the end of the last century some Irish M.P.s, who were deliberately trying to hamper Parliamentary business as a protest against the unwillingness of Parliament to grant freedom to Ireland, used every device they could. On one occasion one of them cried "I spy strangers!" on a day when amongst the distinguished strangers was the then Prince of Wales. He had to go out with the rest.

After that incident Parliament decided that if any member "spies strangers", the question must immediately be voted upon, and a majority decision taken on whether the galleries are to be cleared or not.

In the summer of 1950, when the Opposition wanted a debate on military matters to take place in secret, Mr. Winston Churchill, then Leader of the Opposition, rose to his feet, slowly looked round the galleries, and then, as if he had just noticed them, said, "Mr. Speaker, I spy strangers!" There was at once a division and, by a majority of *one*, Parliament decided that there were no strangers there—and that they could therefore remain to hear the debate.

All this may sound rather amusing. But again its

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origin goes back to the days when Parliament had to lock its doors to keep strangers out, and sent to the Tower anyone who got into their debates even by accident, because members were afraid of what the King might do to them if he found out what they had been saying.

CHAPTER IX

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

THE STORY OF PETER WENTWORTH

IN Queen Elizabeth I's reign was fought the noblest battle for free speech in the history of Parliament, and the hero—and martyr—in that struggle was Peter Wentworth, M.P.

The Tudor kings ruled with absolute power, and Queen Elizabeth, last of the Tudors, was no exception. But even the Tudors were compelled to call Parliaments when other ways of raising money failed them or made them too unpopular. And when Parliaments met to vote money to the King, they wished at the same time to voice the nation's grievances. Members of Parliament in Elizabeth's time were deeply anxious about two matters—religion, and who was to succeed Elizabeth on the throne. The two problems were intertwined. England was then Protestant, but in the previous reign the Catholics had been in power and Protestants had suffered bitter persecution. Parliament feared a return, under the successor to Elizabeth, of the persecution of the reign of "Bloody" Mary.

But the religious question went even deeper than that. Most of the merchants who went to Parliament, many of the country gentlemen, and above all, the great City of London, were bitterly opposed to what they regarded as Catholic tendencies in the Church of England. The nation was moving into what we call Puritanism—with a dislike of bishops and church ceremonies, of anything that savoured of "papisty".

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For these reasons, whenever Queen Elizabeth called a Parliament, its members wanted to discuss religion and the question of her successor.

In her first Parliament, the matter of her marriage was raised. Inwardly angry, the young queen gave a gentle answer, to the effect that they could safely leave this question to her.

In 1566 the question was again raised in Parliament. Elizabeth had not married, but there were varying rumours from time to time of the possibility of her marrying some foreign prince. Most foreign princes were Roman Catholics. If she died unmarried, the next heir to the throne was Mary Queen of Scots, a Roman Catholic. Parliament wanted to be sure that Elizabeth married a Protestant or that, if she died unmarried, any possible Catholic successor had been excluded from taking her place.

It is difficult to realize in these days just how much courage members displayed in daring to deal with this subject, for Tudor kings had a grim way of dealing with those who crossed their will. But deep religious faith, and even deeper fears, made them bold. The Queen's Ministers told Parliament that the Queen "minded to marry", and warned them to leave the matter alone. In spite of this, the Commons decided to set up a Joint Committee with the Lords about this grave question.

Elizabeth angrily sent another message to the Commons telling them to choose thirty of their number to attend her Palace. There she told them, "by word of a Prince, that she, by God's grace, would marry, and would have it therefore be believed". She said that she would not name her successor for fear harm might come of it. And she told Parliament to stop discussing what was her own business.

The Lords accepted the Queen's commands, but the Commons, led by a brave member, Mr. Lambert, went back to the House and debated the matter again, on November 8th, 1566. On November 9th the Queen's Minister brought a command from the Queen that they must cease this debate. Two days later Paul Wentworth, M.P., raised the question as to whether the Queen had the right to send such a message, for it challenged the privilege of the Commons to speak freely. A tremendous debate arose, which had not ended by dark and which was therefore "adjourned" to the next day.¹

On the next day, when the Commons assembled at 8 a.m., the Speaker was missing. At about 9 a.m. he sent word that he was with the Queen, and asked the House to "have patience". Obviously some member had given the Queen information about what had been said on the previous day, and she was venting her wrath on the Speaker.

He came in at about ten o'clock. He told the Commons that the Queen absolutely forbade any more "talk of that matter". If any M.P. was not satisfied, or had further points to put to her, he was welcome to come to her Privy Council and put them there. This meant the end of discussion, for the only strength of the Commons lay in their acting as a body, and not as individuals. No *single* member dared appear before the Queen and her Privy Council and say what he thought. He might never have been seen again.

And so Parliament accepted the rebuff, and dropped the subject.

Queen Elizabeth was a very astute ruler, and knew

¹ This is probably the first "adjourned" debate in the history of Parliament. Nowadays debates are frequently adjourned, and some of them last six or seven days.

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when to be angry and when to relent. On November 25th she sent a message to Parliament revoking her two "commandments". Parliament received the message with joy and "most hearty prayers and thanks". Now that they had agreed not to talk about her marriage, she acknowledged their right to talk about what they liked! This was, in a curious way, a victory for Parliament. For, although Elizabeth had had her own way, she had recognized the right of the Commons to free speech, even if she did not propose to let them use it whilst she was alive.

But Elizabeth never forgot. And when Parliament ended in January 1567, she declared in her final speech, "that she seemed not pleased with the Doings of the Commons for busying themselves, this Session, with matters that did not appertain at this time".

* * *

Peter Wentworth, brother of the Paul Wentworth who had challenged the Queen, had been a member of this Parliament. He was a very earnest Puritan. He had observed with sorrow how the place which he had always imagined was the home of free speech had been silenced by the Queen, how few members had supported his brother, and how a threat, or a hint of a threat from a minister could strike terror into the hearts of the Commons.

He pondered over these matters in between Parliaments and, three years before he was again elected to Parliament, he prepared a speech which he resolved to make in the House if ever he got the chance. Accordingly, on February 8th, 1575, on the first day of a new Parliament, Peter Wentworth, as M.P. for Tregonye, in the county of Cornwall, rose in the Commons to make one of the greatest speeches ever made there.

He began : “ Mr. Speaker, I find written in a little volume these words in effect, *Sweet is the name of liberty, but the thing itself a value beyond all inestimable Treasure.*”

He then declared his passionate faith in a free Parliament, which had the sublime task of making good Laws and destroying bad Laws. Parliament, he said, could not carry out its noble work unless there was real freedom of speech in it. Without free speech it was “ a mockery to call it a Parliament House ”—it rather ought to be called “ a fit place to serve the Devil and his angels in ”.

In the last Parliament he had noted with sorrow two great enemies of free speech—*Rumours* and *Messages*. If a man expressed a different opinion from that of the Queen’s Ministers, some would whisper, “ Take heed. The Queen does not like it.” There were veiled threats, stories about what happened to men who spoke out of turn, and so on. Then there were *messages* sent by the Queen through her Ministers. Here he was referring to Elizabeth’s messages forbidding the last Parliament to discuss her marriage and the succession.

“ I would to God, Mr. Speaker,” he cried, “ that these two were buried in Hell—I mean *Rumours* and *Messages*.”

The Queen’s Ministers had forbidden Parliament to talk about religion. This was like banishing God out of Parliament, he declared.

Wentworth then set out what he believed to be the basic principles of a free Parliament.

He said that the Queen was not always rightly advised by her Ministers. Out of sheer love and respect for her, he asked her to allow Parliament to criticize her. The Queen was Head of the State, but she must govern by Law. “ *No one is without fault,*” he fearlessly declared, “ *no, not our Queen.* No estate can

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stand where the Prince will not be governed by advice.”

As he spoke the House must have listened in silence. It was a long speech. In it he was uttering not only his own thoughts, but those of many thoughtful members, and those which were in the years ahead to become part of the law of Parliamentary democracy. But even those who believed with him must have trembled at the boldness of some of his expressions.

Most frightened of all was the Speaker. He had already incurred the wrath of the Queen for letting members talk too freely. Finally he rose in his place, and called Peter Wentworth to order—but not before Wentworth had said that even the Queen could have faults—which was almost high treason.

Wentworth was arrested at the order of the House by the Serjeant-at-Arms. The Commons then decided that he should appear before a Committee consisting of M.P.s who were also Privy Counsellors of the Queen. He was brought to the Bar of the House. The Speaker told him what had been decided, and he was led away, a prisoner.

On the same afternoon he appeared before the Committee. Here he maintained the bold stand he had taken in Parliament. First, he refused to answer any questions put to him by them as “Counsellors of her Majesty”. He would answer them in their capacity as fellow-members of the House of Commons, but not as Ministers. The Committee was obliged to yield to him on this point.

Members of the Committee then objected to the tone of his speech in Parliament. He replied that he had to speak plainly and forcibly so that the Queen and her Ministers should not be in doubt as to what he was driving at.

They asked him for the names of the members who had complained to him about being intimidated or prevented from speaking their minds. Wentworth nobly refused to mention any names, for fear that others would suffer with him. But when he was pressed to give an example, he cleverly gave as his example, the Speaker himself!

For he reminded them of a day when the Commons had passed a resolution which had displeased Elizabeth. She had at once sent for the Speaker. When the interview with the Queen had ended, the Speaker had returned to the House with an "amazed countenance". His terror-stricken behaviour had so daunted the Commons that they had not dared to discuss anything serious for about a fortnight afterwards.

The greatest passage in Wentworth's speech before the Committee was one in which he vividly recalled how, in the act of making his Commons speech, he realized that he had gone so far that no other member would dare to support him, and that he must bear the responsibility, take the historic step, alone.

He said: "When I uttered these words in the House that *there was none without fault—no not our noble Queen*—I paused and beheld all your countenances . . . your countenances did assure me that not one of you would stay¹ me in my journey. . . . But if it were to do again, I would with the same mind speak it again!"

On February 9th the Committee reported to the House that Wentworth "acknowledged and confessed his violent and wicked words". He was committed to the Tower of London. Imprisonment there was a wretched existence in itself, and there was the fear of even graver punishment overhanging him.

A month later, Queen Elizabeth sent a Captain of

¹ support.

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her Guard to the Commons. He told them (March 12th) that Her Majesty was now “graciously pleased to remit her just occasioned displeasure” for Wentworth’s offence, and to refer the question of whether he should be set free to the House. This act of mercy was eagerly and thankfully accepted, and Wentworth was released. He was brought to the Bar by the Serjeant-at-Arms, and as he knelt there the Speaker gave him a severe lecture on his wickedness and on the Queen’s “great and bountiful mercy”, and told him he was free. Wentworth humbly admitted his faults and was “restored to his place *to the great contentment of all that were present*”.

* * *

Such an experience ought to have been enough for the Wentworth family. But in 1581 they were in trouble once more—this time the offender being brother Paul.

On January 21st, 1581, Paul Wentworth moved that the House hold a Public Fast, with “prayer and preaching”. Paul’s resolution was carried by 115 votes to 100.

On January 23rd the Speaker again arrived very late. This was ominous. He told them that he had been at Court and that Parliament had better put off meeting until the next day.

On January 24th Mr. Speaker opened the day’s debate. He said that Elizabeth was angry with them for deciding to have a Public Fast. It was an interference with religion, and religion was the Queen’s business. The Speaker plaintively reminded them that he had warned them not to pass the resolution. He advised them to apologize to the Queen, and in future to deal only with their own business.

One of the Queen's Ministers then spoke, and said that the Queen blamed the whole House and the Speaker. In a way, said the Minister, this misbehaviour of theirs was due to the fact that the Queen had been so kind in the past, "especially towards a *brother*¹ of that man who now made this motion", whom she had imprisoned and then, generously, released.

It was proposed that the Commons should send an humble message to Her Majesty asking for her gracious pardon for their error. Before it was put to the vote, another brave M.P., Mr. Carlton, tried to speak "for the liberty of the House". But he had hardly uttered his first sentence when the Speaker stopped him, "out of a tender care as it seemed to give no further distaste to Her Majesty".

And so Parliament accepted a bitter defeat in silence.

* * *

But, although his brother Paul from this time onwards gave up the struggle, Peter Wentworth was not to be silenced.

On March 1st, 1586, when Parliament opened, he handed in to the Speaker a series of questions which he demanded that the House should discuss.

Wentworth even tried to form a political party. There was an attempt just before the new Parliament met to set up a secret committee of "grave, wise and ancient Parliament men" to discuss how best to defend the rights of Parliament. But very few met at the appointed place, and the attempt failed. Wentworth may indeed be regarded as the founder of the Party

¹ Obviously one of the "Queen's men" in the House—possibly the Speaker himself—had told the Queen that it was Paul Wentworth who had moved the resolution.

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System of Government—or at least as its would-be organizer.

His questions were of immense importance. Just as he had done in his speech of 1575, he boldly claimed the rights of men to meet and to speak freely.

He asked, “Whether this Council be not a fit place for any member of the same here assembled, freely and without any controlment of persons or danger of laws, by Bill or speech to utter any of the griefs of this Commonwealth?”

He asked whether those who betrayed the secrecy of debates in the Commons should not be punished. Whether the Speaker had a right to interrupt M.P.s when he was afraid that what they said might displease the Queen. Whether the Speaker had any right to overrule the decisions of the Commons.

The Speaker ought to have brought these questions to the Commons for debate. Instead he “pocketed them up”, showed them to the Queen’s Ministers, and Wentworth was again sent to the Tower.

The Queen’s Ministers were most angry about the attempt to form a “party”, to plan resistance, to form what we would call an “Opposition”. Other members and their friends who were connected with the attempt were arrested and examined. Some were imprisoned for a time. Wentworth was imprisoned for nearly five years, and then released.

But behind Wentworth there was a growing movement—indeed, a movement that in the next century was to produce Civil War. Many who dared not speak so boldly shared the opinions which he held. And the electors sent him again and again to Parliament.

In 1593 he moved a Bill in the Commons. This sought to “entail the succession of the Crown”, that

is, it sought to name the heirs to Queen Elizabeth, and so to prevent any Roman Catholic from succeeding to the throne.

This was the last straw. On the next day Peter Wentworth was sent to the Tower again—this time for life.

After a time, members got up a petition to Her Majesty asking for the release of Wentworth and other M.P.s who had been associated with him in the Bill. The Queen's Ministers in the House advised them to drop the petition, as "it would hinder those whose good we seek". But although Parliament accepted the advice, although the other rebel M.P.s were one by one released, Elizabeth never forgave the man who had challenged the very roots of absolute monarchy, who had blazed the trail for a free Parliament.

Even so Wentworth might have been set free if he had been willing to promise never to offend again. But his deep religious convictions, the fierce love of freedom which burned within him, made such a course unthinkable, and he died in the Tower. He was a truly great man, and deserves a high place in the history of British Parliamentary freedom.

CHAPTER X GRIEVANCES BEFORE SUPPLY

THE STORY OF SIR JOHN ELIOT

QUEEN ELIZABETH managed her Parliaments with skill, making concessions when the struggle grew dangerous for her, and asserting her power ruthlessly at other times.

She was succeeded by the Stuarts—James I and Charles I—both of whom made stubborn and obstinate attempts to break the growing power of Parliament, because they believed in the “divine right of kings” to do what they liked. James I died in the midst of the struggle, but Charles I lost his throne and his life in an attempt to rule without Parliament.

The conflict between Parliament and the Stuarts centred on the right of the Commons to discuss grievances and to make laws whenever the King summoned them to vote him money. This battle had to be won before Parliament could become a really important part of the Government, and the great figure in this battle was that of Sir John Eliot, M.P.

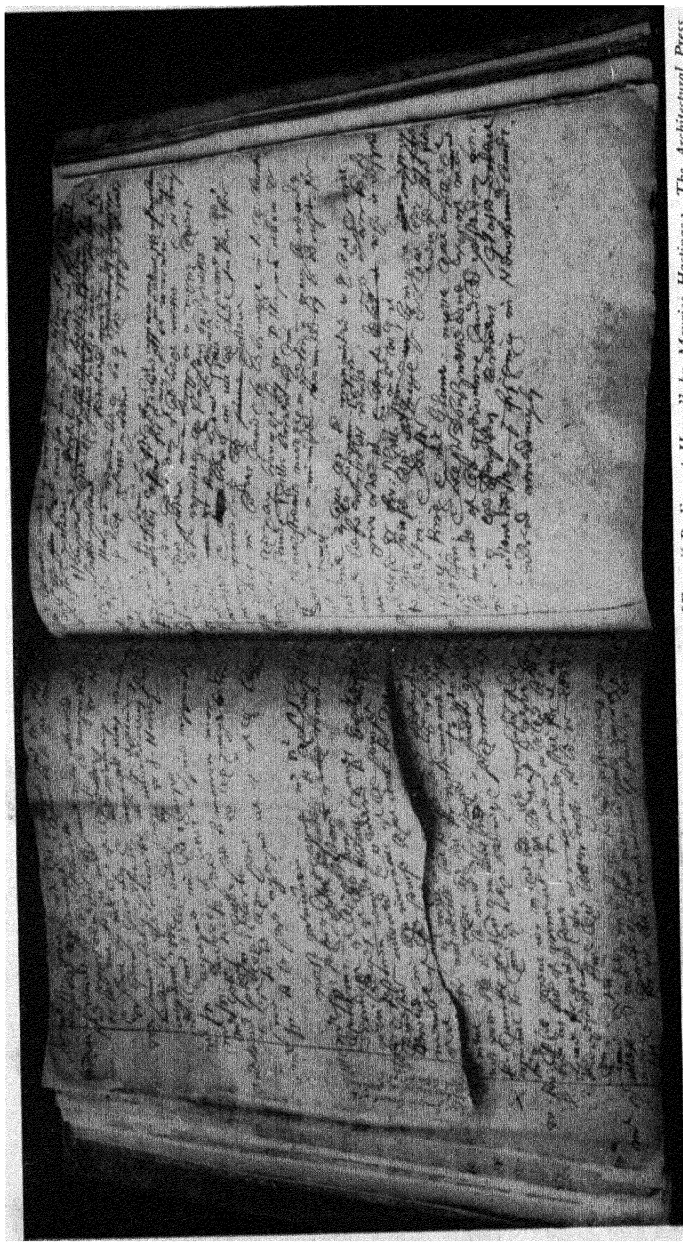
* * *

Sir John Eliot was elected to the Parliament of 1614 at the age of 24. There had been no Parliament for ten years, and when this one met there were clear signs of two “parties” in it—the King’s men and the Parliament men. There were also clear signs that Parliament was going to be troublesome—so after a few weeks James I dissolved it. Because it did nothing, it is known in history as “The Addled Parliament”.



[From "Parliament House" by Maurice Hastings: *The Architectural Press*.
 (By permission of the Society of Antiquaries)]

Plate V. Queen Elizabeth I at a Meeting of Parliament. H is Speaker. K is Serjeant-at-Arms. I is Black Rod. A is Lord Chancellor. BCDE, Lords. L, Commons,



[From "Parliament House" by Maurice Hastings: The Architectural Press,
(By permission of the Lord Great Chamberlain)]

Plate VI. The Commons Journal mutilated by James I. (See page 84.)

But it gave one young member a vivid picture of the issues on which he was to fight all his life.

James went on ruling without a Parliament, raising money by various methods, but he eventually had to call another Parliament, in 1621.

This Parliament immediately attacked the misgovernment of the country during the long years in which there had been no Parliament. But Parliament did not attack the King personally. It had first to win the right to attack, remove and even kill, the King's ministers.

To understand fully the curious way in which the Commons fought the Stuarts, we must remember how deeply loyal Parliament was to the person of the King. The Commons wanted to keep the King, but they wanted him to rule by law. They really believed that the King could do no wrong, and therefore accused his ministers and courtiers of advising him wrongly. This strange attitude reached a fantastic climax when, in the Civil War, they fought against the King and his Royalist armies on behalf of the King and Parliament, and even executed the King on behalf of the King and Parliament.

The 1621 Parliament decided at once that they must discuss *Supply* (money for the King) and *Grievances* (their complaints against the King's ministers), whereas the King wanted them only to vote him the money he asked for. They attacked the King's religious policy, his foreign policy, his Ministers, and said that they would vote him only *conditional supplies*. In other words, they would grant him money only if he agreed to put wrongs right.

James I indignantly warned the Commons against "further meddling with his mysteries of government" and told them that the privileges which the Speaker

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demanded for them at the opening of Parliament were *not theirs by right, but were given only if and when the King thought he would give them.*

At once all other questions faded before this vital one of the Commons' right to free speech. In December 1621 they voted a Protest, which declared that "the liberties franchises privileges and jurisdictions of Parliament are the ancient and undoubted birthright and inheritance of the subjects of England".

James was furious. He called a meeting of his Privy Council and sent to the Commons for the Journal in which the Clerk of the House had written down the Protest.¹ He took the book, tore out the offending resolution, and dissolved Parliament. On the next day he sent to the Tower the Members of Parliament who had led the Commons into making the protest. Sir John Eliot was not a member of this Parliament, but one of those arrested was the almost equally famous John Pym. Nine months later they were released.

In 1624 Sir John Eliot was elected to a new Parliament. The King and his chief minister, Buckingham, were so badly in need of money that they had to treat this Parliament a little more gently.

One of the first members to speak in the Commons was Sir John Eliot. He was moderate in tone, and affirmed the Commons' loyalty to the King. But he told the House how in his first Parliament much harm had been done by the King's spies, who reported to the King what members had said, and often mischievously altered their speeches.² He also said that

¹ The Journal, with its torn page, may still be seen in Westminster Palace. As James rode back that night to his palace, he "fell off his horse into New River, where the ice brake, so that nothing but his boots were seen".

² Cf. Wentworth's speech.

Parliament would not compromise on their right to their ancient privileges.

This Parliament attacked one of the King's Ministers, the Earl of Middlesex. Buckingham was quite prepared to sacrifice his fellow-Minister, and allowed Parliament to impeach him. He was fined £50,000, imprisoned, and excluded for ever from Parliament and Court.

Parliament also passed a bill against "monopolies"—one of the ways in which James had raised money in the past. But as at the same time the Commons voted him nearly a million pounds, James I accepted their decisions. He was wise enough to foresee future dangers in allowing Parliament to dismiss and punish a Minister, and he said to Buckingham when he permitted Parliament to impeach Middlesex, "By God, Steenie, you are a fool ; you are making a rod for your own breeches."

In 1625 James died, leaving his son facing a Parliament which was determined to win back its privileges. Unfortunately the new king, Charles I, took as his chief Minister Buckingham, the enemy of the Commons.

The 1625 Parliament began well enough, for Charles granted without question the ancient privileges of Parliament when the Speaker asked for them in the name of the Commons. But at once the Commons set about discussing all the wrongs that they had suffered under James I, and set up committees to draw up their complaints. In vain did the King's wily ministers suggest that these be considered by the House and not by committees.¹ This Parliament, of which the leader was Sir John Eliot, meant business.

¹ In the House were "King's men", but the Committees could be made up of Parliament men, who could speak safely in committee. See Chapter VIII, pp. 90-1.

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The King's chief source of income had been "tonnage and poundage"¹—a tax on imports and exports. For 200 years Parliament had voted any new King this tax for life, any extra money he needed being voted from time to time. But Eliot and his friends realized that one of the reasons why James had managed to get on without Parliament was that he had this regular source of income. If they were to clip Charles's claws, then they must see that he could not raise any taxes at all without their consent. So they voted him Tonnage and Poundage for *one year only*, promising to vote it for him annually as long as his Ministers governed properly and put right the grievances of Parliament.

The King tried to weaken Parliament by moving it to Oxford—in the hope that many members would fail to make the journey. Sir John Eliot told Parliament that there would be a "roll-call" at Oxford, and that any M.P.s who did not attend there would be punished by Parliament. In this way he secured a full attendance.

The Commons eagerly discussed all the wrongs of the past. Sir John Phillips, M.P.—one of those imprisoned by James—told the story of how when the 1614 Parliament had sent a Protest from Lords and Commons, the King's Ministers had burnt the Protest, with James looking on through a hole in a curtain. No doubt they were told of Wentworth, who had died in the Tower as a martyr for Parliament. Sir John Eliot drew examples from history of the freedoms Parliament had won through the ages. He suggested that they draw up a *Remonstrance*—a protest setting out their demands.

¹ *Tonnage* was a tax on every *tun*, or barrel of wine. *Poundage* was a tax of so much in the £ on imports and exports of merchandise.

When the King heard of this he decided to get rid of Parliament. Eliot foresaw this and said that if the King was going to dissolve Parliament, they must act quickly, and simply pass a short Protest.

Even as they were discussing this, Black Rod came with a message from the King. He knocked at the door and the Speaker wanted him to come in. But the Commons shouted "No! No!" and passed their Protest before Black Rod was allowed to tell them to come to the King to be dismissed. They made the Speaker hand in the Protest as the King was dissolving them.¹

* * *

In 1626 Charles I had his Coronation, and a few days later his second Parliament met. The Royalists tried to prevent men like Eliot from being elected, but in vain.

At once Eliot took the lead. He said that Parliament must refuse to vote *supply* until the King promised to put right their *grievances*. He was still moderate and respectful in tone, except when he denounced Buckingham as being responsible for the country's misfortunes.

Charles I sent a sharp message to the Commons. He said, "I will not allow my servants to be questioned among you. I see you especially aim at the Duke of Buckingham." He then uttered dark threats—"I would you would hasten my supply or else it will be worse for yourselves, for if any evil happen, I think I shall be the last to feel it."

¹ An interesting detail of this Parliament of 1625 is that among the rules of procedure which it established was that of "catching the Speaker's eye". Up to then, when two or three members stood up, the House itself had decided which of them was to speak. But a rule was passed that "if two rise up at once, the Speaker does determine. He *that his eye saw* first, has the precedence given."

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Eliot ignored the threats. He held up in the House "old rolls of Parliament", showing that in times past—in Henry III's reign and that of Richard II—Parliament had insisted on getting rid of wicked Ministers before voting the King his taxes. He hinted at the shameful attempts of the King and Buckingham to get money by pawning the Crown Jewels, and suggested that they vote the King's supplies in three separate parts, at different times, each vote depending on how far the King had put their grievances right.

Charles angrily sent for Parliament again. He said that it was in his hands whether Parliament met at all, and that "if they were evil, he would end them!"

The Commons went back, to meet behind locked doors, with the key in the hands of the Speaker. They passed a vote of confidence in Sir John Eliot. Then they decided to impeach Buckingham.¹

At the trial of Buckingham in Westminster Hall, Eliot was the chief accuser. Buckingham sat through the trial jeering and laughing. He despised Parliament and openly showed how little he and the King feared either Lords or Commons.

Eliot spoke on Wednesday, May 10th. On the Thursday the Commons sent to the Lords for the Duke's commitment to prison. The King and Buckingham went to the Lords and attacked the action of the Commons. They then sent troops to Eliot's house and took him off to prison.

The Commons were indignant at this outrage, and resolved that they would do no further business until Eliot had been set free. For some days the King refused to budge. But he badly needed the money which the Commons had not yet voted him, and after

¹ When a man is *impeached*, he is prosecuted by the Commons, and tried by the Lords.

a fortnight he released Eliot, who returned to receive a triumphant welcome from the Commons.

Eliot at once renewed the debate, and the Commons again drew up a *Remonstrance*.¹ Again the King dissolved Parliament—but not before the Speaker, on behalf of the Commons, had asked for the arrest of Buckingham and had presented their Remonstrance.

Two days later Eliot and the other ring-leaders were arrested and closely examined by the King's Ministers. As in the case of Wentworth, they were asked for the names of all their supporters. The King was anxious to make a clean sweep of all his enemies. But the rebel members nobly refused to implicate any of their friends, and, like Wentworth, boldly denied the right of anybody to question them outside Parliament for what they had done as members of Parliament.

Buckingham now showed some cunning. He had Eliot put in gaol, not for his speeches in Parliament, but on trumped-up charges of his having kept for himself some of the goods he had seized from pirates when he was officer in charge of the south-west coast of Britain.

He was released just before Charles called his third Parliament, which met in March 1628. Eliot was again elected. Before Parliament met, its leaders met in secret conferences, to plan their tactics in the House. Truly the lessons of Peter Wentworth were being learnt by these disciples of his.

In the King's Speech Charles again warned Parliament that if they did not vote him money he would use other means of getting it. This, he said, was not to be taken as a threat, for he proudly declared, "I scorn to threaten any but my equals."

Eliot again opened the debates in the Commons. With sublime nobility, he made no reference to his own

¹ Protest.

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imprisonment but renewed the claim that *grievances* must be taken before *supplies* were granted, and said that in this struggle what was at stake was Law itself.

Charles was desperately in need of money. He wanted to have his taxes voted, and then to get rid of Parliament for ever. Day by day his ministers brought to the House messages, suggestions and threats. He told them not to adjourn for Easter, but to hurry on voting him his supplies. On the receipt of this message Parliament reaffirmed its right to adjourn itself. He suggested that they take grievances and supplies together—say, grievances in the morning and supplies in the afternoon. He suggested that they name a date by which they would vote supplies. Eliot opposed all this and the Speaker was instructed to tell the King—“Grievances before Supplies!”

Then the King sent for the Commons. He told them that he gave them “his royal word” that he would uphold *Magna Carta* and all the laws of the land and all the privileges of Parliament. They must now go back and vote him his money.

Back in their House, the Commons debated this deliberately vague offer. Eliot said that they must set down in writing just what their rights were, and the Commons appointed a Committee to draw up a **PETITION OF RIGHT**.

A few days later the impatient King sent a message to them, asking whether they had discussed his speech, and whether they “took his royal word”. But instead of humbly replying that they did not doubt the word of a king, the rebellious Parliament held a two days’ debate on the King’s message. In this debate Eliot said, “We have lost within a few years more liberties than in three hundred years before.” Another message

followed from the King. Parliament must hurry up. It was May 2nd and he intended to dissolve Parliament on May 12th.

On May 5th the King's Ministers proposed that Parliament should debate their answer as a House and not as a Committee. The Commons decided to go into Committee.

On May 6th the Ministers said, "But surely you do not doubt the King's word?"

In reply the audacious Pym proposed that they vote on a resolution, "Shall we trust the King's word or no?" Eliot seconded. This was indeed a bold challenge—so bold that the King's Ministers dared not face it, for what would be the state of the Government if the Commons decided by a majority that the King's word could not be trusted! The question was dropped.

The Commons resolved that *they could take the King's word only in the accepted way of Parliament*. In other words, they would present to the King their Petition of Right, and he must give his Royal Assent to the Petition in the long-established way.

On May 28th the Petition of Right was presented by the Speaker to the King, who received it in silence. Later he sent a message to the Commons that he would "answer it with speed". In the meantime he was secretly taking the advice of the Chief Judges on the Petition. He wanted still to be able to arrest people without stating on the warrant what offences they had committed. He had done so in the past, and the Petition of Right mentioned these "warrants without cause shown" as one of the evils that had to go. The judges, afraid of the King but also afraid of Parliament, gave him vague replies.

But other crafty counsellors suggested to him a curious way out of his dilemma. We have seen how a bill

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becomes law when the King says "*Le roi le veult.*" Similarly, when the King agreed to a petition, he had to say, "*Soit fait comme il est désiré*" ("May it be done as is desired"). There is no changing of these words. They are still spoken in the old Norman French language even.

When the Petition was again presented to the King, his Minister, instead of saying "*Soit fait comme il est désiré*", made a little speech in which he said that the King "wills that right be done according to the laws and customs of the realm", and that he would always uphold the laws of the land.

The Commons went away to think over this surprising breach of ancient custom. They realized that by not accepting their Petition in the legal way, what the King was really saying was, "Of course I will always rule by the laws of the land. I have always promised that, and always done that. I have not really broken any law. Part of the law of the land is my power as King. I accept the Petition only in so far as it recognizes my power to do what I think is right."

On June 3rd the Commons met to debate the King's action. To ensure secrecy they instructed the Serjeant-at-Arms to stand outside the door, and ordered that no member leave the House, the penalty for disobedience being imprisonment in the Tower.

Sir John Eliot now made the greatest speech of his career. He critically surveyed the whole of national policy, almost as the Leader of the Opposition would do in modern times. He bitterly contrasted the glories of Elizabeth's reign with the sorry state of affairs to which Buckingham had brought the country.

As soon as Eliot mentioned Buckingham, the Chancellor jumped up and said that he would leave the House if Eliot dared to go on discussing the King's

chief Minister. To his amazement, members flung open the door, and shouted to him, "Begone!"

The Chancellor tremblingly sank into his seat.

Eliot asked Parliament to call upon the King to get rid of his evil Ministers.

On the next day came another message from the King. He had nothing to add about the Petition, but said that they must hurry up and vote him his money, as he intended to close down Parliament on the 11th.

On June 5th, as the Commons met, they learnt that the Lords had already adjourned in obedience to the King's command.

The Speaker arrived late. He had been with the King, to receive orders to shut down the Commons.

When he took the Chair, he told them that he brought a message from the King, that they were to proceed with no "new business", but vote the King his supplies and then adjourn.

Eliot at once began a speech attacking the King's Ministers. The Speaker interrupted him. Trembling with fear—for the Speaker was torn between his loyalty to the King and his loyalty to Parliament—he told Eliot that he had orders to prevent him from making any attack on the King's Ministers.

Eliot indignantly sat down. If he could not speak freely, he would not speak at all.

The Commons sat silent for a long time. Men wept. A letter of the time tells us, "I have been told by a parliament man that there were above a hundred weeping eyes . . . yes, the Speaker in his speech could not refrain from weeping."

This was one of the most moving moments in the history of Parliament. These men all their lives had been loyal, deeply loyal in their own way, to the monarchy, which they regarded almost as sacred.

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But, like Wentworth, they were also loyal to their religion and to their laws. Before them was the sad choice of either disobeying their King or betraying their conscience.

One said, amidst tears, "We had better go, or sit silent, if we are not free to say what is wrong with the nation." Each man who rose to speak broke down before he had uttered a few sentences.

Finally someone moved that the House go into Committee. This was agreed, and the Speaker left the Chair and the House. The doors were locked after him. Members were again forbidden to leave, on pain of being sent to the Tower.

And now, in secret meeting, the Commons turned from sorrow to anger. The moment Buckingham's name was mentioned, there was a roar of indignant rage. The Remonstrance was agreed to, and the name of Buckingham, as the chief cause of all the wrongs the country had suffered, was set down in it.

The Speaker was away for three hours. During that time he was with the King and Buckingham. These men were in a dilemma. They wanted to get rid of this rebellious Parliament—but they still hoped, against hope, that they could get the Commons to vote the money before they were sent packing.

When the Speaker returned he suggested that the House adjourn till next day, and this was agreed to.

That night a member wrote to a friend :

What we shall expect this morning, God of Heaven knows ! We shall meet betimes [early], partly because of the business's sake, and partly because two days ago we made an order that whosoever comes in after prayers pays 12d to the poor.

Next morning the Speaker told them that they must not mention any of the King's Ministers by name in

their speeches. He spoke timidly, and his very denials reveal what had taken place at his meetings with the King. He said that "he had been with the King yesterday but he hoped the House would think he had thereby done nothing nor made any representation, but what was for their honour and service—for, might his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth before he would speak to the disadvantage of any member thereof".

The Commons decided that they would ask the King to give the proper legal answer to their Petition of Right.

Charles yielded on this point, and, before a meeting of both Houses, said that his first answer should be struck out of the records, and that he now said, "*Soit fait comme il est désiré.*"

In the House of Lords Library may still be seen the Petition of Right, with the King's writing at the top of it—" *Soit fait*, etc." These old French words seemed to mark a great Parliamentary victory.

But there still remained the Remonstrance. Charles apparently thought that now he had accepted the Petition, Parliament would settle down and vote him the money that he so anxiously wanted.

But the *Petition* simply set forth the *principles* which Parliament demanded, whereas the *Remonstrance* applied those principles to the *misdeeds* of the King's Ministers. Charles did not mind accepting the *words* of the Petition, but the Remonstrance called for *deeds*, and Charles was determined that the Commons should not interfere either with him or with his Ministers.

When the House reassembled on March 2nd, Eliot at once resumed the attack. At the same moment the Speaker rose in his seat and said that he had the King's command that the House should adjourn for

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a week. Eliot insisted on speaking and the Commons cried out that he should continue.

Again the Speaker rose. He said that he had express orders from the King to leave at once, and he made a movement to leave the Chair.

At once two members, Hollis and Valentine, seized him by the arms and forced him back into the Chair. Eliot went on with his speech. He produced a paper which the Committee had drawn up, setting forth the misdeeds of the King's Ministers, and after his speech he came to the Table and handed the document to the Speaker. The Speaker refused to take it. Eliot asked the Clerk to read it. The Clerk also refused.

The House shouted that the Speaker should put Eliot's resolution to the vote. Twice, with tears, he refused, and said that the King had commanded him to adjourn the Commons. Those who held him said angrily, "Do you now refuse to be our Speaker?", and held him, struggling, in the Chair. King's men in the House moved towards the Speaker to release him, but a group of Eliot's supporters formed a guard round the Chair and drove them back.

The Speaker still refused to put the question to the vote. One member cried out that they should elect at once a new Speaker, but the matter was solved more easily by a member who shouted that all who wished Eliot's declaration to be read should stand up. A great majority stood up.

Some members were fighting.

At this moment the Serjeant-at-Arms received a whispered message brought from the King, who was eagerly awaiting the return of the Speaker with the news that the Commons had been adjourned. He at once went to the Table and began to carry the Mace away. But it was seized from him by angry members,

who put it back in its place, took the keys from him, and locked the doors.

Eliot now fearlessly declared in a loud voice the main parts of the resolution which his Committee had drawn up. These, in brief, were, that no taxes could be raised without the authority of the Commons, that any Ministers who dared to raise such taxes without this authority were enemies of the State and liable to capital punishment, and that anyone who paid such illegal taxes would also be punished.

Whilst the various items were being passed, with enthusiastic shouts of "Ay!", Black Rod was knocking at the door. He knocked in vain, and went back with the news to his Royal Master, who sat, impatiently waiting, in the House of Lords.

As soon as the resolutions had been agreed to, the doors were flung open, and the excited members rushed out, passing on the way a group of the King's Guards who had been sent to force open the doors.

This was the last day of Parliament for eleven years, for the King at once dissolved it.

On the next day Eliot, Hollis and seven more M.P.s were summoned to the Privy Council.

Sir John Eliot was sent to the Tower, where he remained, a close prisoner, for the rest of his life. Petition after petition was sent to the King, begging for his freedom. But Charles was merciless. Of all men he hated most Eliot, and the bitterness of this hatred pursued Eliot even after his death.

He died in the Tower in November 1632. Prisoners who died in the Tower were buried in the Tower Cemetery. Eliot's son sent a humble petition to Charles I, asking that his father's body might be taken to his home in Cornwall, there to be buried with his ancestors.

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Charles's cruel answer was, "Let Sir John Eliot's body be buried in the Church of that parish where he died." And so he was buried in the Tower.

In 1640, when the King was at last compelled to call another Parliament, one of the first tasks of this famous Long Parliament was to find out how Sir John Eliot had come to his death, and how he had been treated in the Tower. They found no evidence to support the widely held view that he had been murdered, but they did find that his treatment there had been harsh and cruel.

Throughout the work of the Long Parliament the memory of this martyr for Parliamentary freedom was an inspiration to those who risked the same fate in their struggle against the King, and when the Commons set down on paper all the wrongs which the people of England had suffered in the years when Charles had governed as a tyrant, one paragraph referred to Eliot, as follows :

One died by the cruelty and harshness of his imprisonment, which would admit of no relaxation, notwithstanding the imminent danger of his life did sufficiently appear by the declaration of his physician. And his release, or at least his refreshment (i.e. some easement of his condition) was sought by many humble petitions. *And his blood still cries for vengeance.*

It was indeed terribly avenged in the Civil War which followed.

CHAPTER XI

FREEDOM FROM ARREST

KING CHARLES AND THE FIVE MEMBERS

BY the end of 1641 the quarrel between Charles I and his Parliament was moving rapidly towards the grim event of the Civil War. Charles had had to call another Parliament in 1640.

King's men in the House of Commons had fought a losing battle against the determination of the Parliament men to limit the power of the King and his Ministers, and to maintain, and even to extend, the rights and privileges of Parliament. The King's chief Minister, Strafford, had been killed by Parliament.

Leaders of the Parliamentary struggle were Hampden and Pym, and among their bravest supporters were Hollis, Strode and Haselrigg. History knows these as the "Five Members".

Charles's friends in the House constantly informed him of the speeches that Pym's group made there, and of the key-part that they were playing in the struggle to weaken the King's power. He had himself watched Pym as spokesman of the House of Commons play the leading part in the Trial and execution of the King's chief Minister, the Earl of Strafford. Charles had been too weak, or too selfish, to save Strafford. But he determined to have revenge on the leaders of Parliament and, most rashly, decided to destroy them.¹

¹ Quotations in the following description are taken from the *Commons Journal*, or *Rushworth's Historical Collections*, or *D'Ewes' Diary*—all of them eye-witness accounts.

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In this, we are told, he was egged on by his French wife, Henrietta Maria, who is supposed to have said to him, "Go, you coward, and pull me these rogues out by the ears, or never see my face more."

* * *

In the Commons on December 30th, 1641, Mr. Pym moved that "the door of the House might be shut and that no one might go out". On the rare occasions when this drastic step was taken, the lobby near the House was cleared of strangers, the door was locked, and the key was placed on the Table.

The Commons, in their curiously obstinate way, first debated the motion, then carried an amendment that members might go if they liked into the Committee Room which was adjacent. But the Speaker declared that "nobody who went into the said Committee Chamber should speak to anybody out of the window or throw out any writing to them."

When secrecy had thus been assured, Pym told the House that they were in danger of arrest by the King's Guards, that there was a plot to destroy the Commons, and that they ought to send to London for "train-bands" to protect them. Some members suggested that the Commons should at once leave Westminster and meet at the Guildhall in the City of London, where the Londoners¹ would protect them.

The Commons decided to do none of these things, but to arm their own servants with pistols, and to instruct the magistrates of Westminster to set a "strong watch of halberdiers" on the House.

During that day the air was full of rumours of plots

¹ The citizens of London were on the side of Parliament in the struggle against Charles. The "train-bands" were a kind of London Home Guard.

and counter-plots. A member brought to the House two men who told the Commons "what they heard in Westminster Hall, of some speaking *that they should be ready presently,* with other words". But whilst this sounded ominous, it was too vague to be acted upon.

On December 31st, another member reported that a Roman Catholic, one Mr. Robert Carson, had said, "he hoped ere long to see half a dozen Parliament men hanged". But there was nothing new in this, for all through the two years that Parliament had been meeting, it had had to punish enemies for saying even worse things than that. The Commons decided to treat Mr. Carson with contempt, and take no action.

On January 1st a knight was brought into the House to tell them that Mr. Spite (appropriate name!) had told him that the Papist Mr. Buckle had told *him* that "The Earl of Strafford's blood must be avenged . . . and that the House of Commons were a company of giddy-brained fellows." The House took no action.

But on January 3rd Mr. Pym came to the House in indignation, and told them that on the King's orders soldiers had come to his rooms and those of Mr. Hollis and had "sealed up his trunks, his study and his chamber". A Royalist member retorted that this was not surprising, as on that very day the King's Ministers in the House of Lords had accused Mr. Pym and four other members of high treason, and therefore it was right that their rooms and papers should be sealed.

Here was a direct challenge to the Commons. King Charles in his earlier Parliaments had struck a fearful blow at the freedom of the Commons by dismissing Parliament and by arresting its bravest members. Sir John Eliot's blood still cried for vengeance—and now it seemed that other M.P.s were to share his martyrdom.

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It was now or never. The Commons passed a resolution declaring that if “ *any person whatsoever* ” tried to seal the “ Trunks, doors, papers ” of any member, or to imprison them, it was a breach of the Privileges of Parliament. They sent the Serjeant-at-Arms at once to the lodgings of Pym and Hollis to break the seals. They also sent a message to the Lords demanding a meeting to discuss this breach of privilege.

Even as the messengers were going, Serjeant Francis of the House of Lords appeared at the door, carrying his Mace, and asked for admission. He was made to leave the Lords’ Mace outside, and he came to the Bar of the House. There he said :

“ I am commanded by the King’s Majesty, my Master, upon my allegiance, that I should come and repair to the House of Commons where Mr. Speaker is, and *there to require of Mr. Speaker five Gentlemen, Members of the House of Commons and, those Gentlemen being delivered, I am commanded to arrest them in His Majesty’s name of High Treason.*” Thereupon he named the Five.

He was commanded to wait outside. The indignant Commons then decided to send four of their members to tell the King that this message concerned the privileges of Parliament . . . “ and therein the privilege of all the Commons of England ”. They would take it into serious consideration, and would, in all humility, send back a message as soon as they could.

Mr. Speaker was ordered by the House to instruct the Five Members, naming each one solemnly, to attend the House day by day, and it was decided that on the next day the House would go into Committee to discuss the grave message sent by the King. In the meantime Serjeant Francis had been waiting outside. Suddenly they remembered him, and he was told that

the House would send its reply by its own members, and he went back, empty-handed, to those who had sent him.

The House then learnt the names of those who had sealed up Mr. Pym's rooms, and resolved that they should be arrested by the Serjeant-at-Arms.

That night the deputation of M.P.s visited the King with the humble, but determined, protest of the Commons. Charles told them that he would send an answer to their protest next morning, as soon as they assembled. Even as they left he must have turned to plan the vigorous "answer" that he was resolved to give them next day.

Overnight there were anxious discussions, feverish comings and goings, both in the King's camp and among the Parliament men.

For the M.P.s who had opposed the King and his Ministers, who had indeed been responsible for the trial and execution of the King's chief Minister, Strafford, it was now a matter of life or death. If the five members could be taken off and gaoled, then Charles could once more get rid of Parliament, as he had done years before, even if it meant killing a few score of the most rebellious.

On the other hand, it was life or death for Charles also. He must have by now realized that when he signed the death-warrant of Strafford, and had acknowledged the power of Parliament to kill a King's Minister, he had already taken a fatal step along the road of putting the King in the power of Parliament. But, having set out to arrest five M.P.s and regain his authority, there was no drawing back. He simply must succeed, or perish himself.

On the fateful January 4th the Commons began the day by sending for Sir William Killigrew, one of the

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King's officers, to face a charge of having told a group of gentlemen to be ready, "at an hour's warning, to defend the King's person". This message they (rightly) thought, meant not so much defending the King's person as seizing the King's enemies. They also accused him of being the man who had taken to the Lords the King's accusations against the Five Members. They knew that if the Five Members had been handed over on the day before, Sir William Killigrew and his friends had been ready to seize them, and that they might never have reached the House of Lords alive.

When the Five Members entered the House, their names were recorded by the Clerk in the Journal. They were thus in the solemn protection of Parliament. Whoever attempted to hurt them was hurting not five men, but the whole House of Commons.

It was reported to the House that gentlemen of the Inns of Court had also been asked to get ready to "defend the King". Immediately a number of M.P.s who were themselves of the Inns of Court were sent off to urge the lawyers there to stand loyally by Parliament.

Pym produced the accusations made against him in the House of Lords, and the indignant Commons sent to demand a conference with the Lords, and to ask for the names of those who had dared thus to accuse members of Parliament.

Members now brought news that there were groups of armed men assembling at Whitehall, the King's Palace, less than a quarter of a mile away. Pym moved that the Lord Mayor and the City Council be informed of the danger threatening the Commons.

At twelve, with anxious hearts after an exciting morning, the Commons adjourned for lunch.

* * *

At about two, the Speaker resumed his Chair. The first business was a report from those who had been to the Inns of Court. There they had been told that the lawyers "wished to defend the King, but also wished to defend Parliament". This answer, uncertain as it was, at least satisfied the Commons that these men were not in the plot to attack them.

One M.P. then told the House that he had just been down to Whitehall. There he had asked an officer by whose authority the soldiers were assembled. The officer had replied "that they were commanded to obey one Sir William Flamen *in all things that he should enjoin them*"—an ominous reply.

At about three the Commons heard that the King was coming down the road from Whitehall to Westminster "with a great company of armed men". Almost immediately afterwards came a second report—that it was only a group of ex-officers and some "four hundred loose persons". But four hundred ex-soldiers were quite enough to deal with the House of Commons—fewer than half of its four hundred members being present.

Pym and the other four members had been secretly warned that the King was coming to arrest them, and the Commons debated what they should do. Finally it was left to the Five Members to make up their own minds. Much to the relief of the rest of the House, they decided to escape by the river to London—to avoid, the Journal tells us, "combustion". But the youngest of them, Strode, wished to stay and face martyrdom for freedom's sake, and had to be forced to go off with the others.

By this time Charles was striding up Westminster Hall at the head of a group of armed men, loosening their swords in their sheaths. Other soldiers "made

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a lane on both sides of the Hall, through which his Majesty passed ”.

In those days the walls of Westminster Hall were lined with shops, and we are told that “ all those that kept shops in the said Hall or at the gate thereof ” were “ struck with fear ”, and “ instantly shut up their shops, looking for nothing but blood and desolation ”.

One of the King’s officers told a member next day that he and the other soldiers had come with the King “ because they heard that the House of Commons would not obey the King and they therefore came to force them to it ”.

From the Hall Charles proceeded through the lobby or little room that connected Westminster Hall with the Commons Chamber (St. Stephen’s Chapel). The soldiers left their cloaks in the Hall, for these would be in the way when they were doing what they had come to do. They were armed with pistols and swords, and they held the door of the House of Commons open by force.

“ Captain Hyde stood next the door, holding his sword upright in the scabbard. Another held up his pistol cocked, and one of them said, ‘ *Plague take the House of Commons ! Let them be hanged if they will !* ’ One of these ruffians, that stood within the lobby, holding up his pistol said, ‘ *I will warrant you I am a good marksman. I will hit sure !* ’ ”

In Westminster Hall people hid themselves, or waited anxiously, whispering the kind of talk that had been going about throughout the past weeks. One “ heard a Frenchman who he knew, being a Papist, say to another in Cheapside on Monday last that he understood there were hurliburlies at Westminster and that if there should fall out any hurliburlies here, there

should soon come 15,000 Frenchmen out of France on our backs”.

Outside, in the Palace Yard, excited and terror-stricken people passed wild rumours to each other.

Inside the House of Commons, English history was happening.

Charles I entered the Chamber. All the members stood up and took off their hats. The Speaker stood up before his Chair.

Charles came up the Chamber, bowing to either side as he did so, and the members gravely bowed to him.

He went to the Speaker's Chair and said, “ Mr. Speaker, I must for a time make bold with your Chair.”¹ As he went to it he looked towards the seat which Mr. Pym usually occupied, but it was empty.² He stood in front of the Chair, and slowly looked round the House at the members who stood there, but saw none of those whom he had come to arrest. He then declared to the House that he was sorry that he had had to come. Yesterday he had sent a Serjeant to arrest some members accused of high treason, and he had expected from the House “ obedience, and not a message ”.

He said that no King of England had respected the privileges of Parliament more than he did, but that there could be no privilege for men guilty of treason.³

¹ Or, according to another version, “ By your leave, Mr. Speaker, I must borrow your Chair a little.”

² Royalist members must have told the King beforehand the seats in which the various men he wanted usually sat.

³ Not the least sublime of the many incidents of this historic day was the fact that Rushworth, the Assistant Clerk, sitting at the Table, went on with his job of writing down the proceedings of Parliament. The Clerk himself had stopped writing through sheer fright. For some minutes every word that Rushworth wrote was pure history. Charles sent for him that night to check his report of what had been said.

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He then asked for the men, and said, "I must have them, wheresoever I find them."

Charles waited for someone to speak. But all were silent. He looked round again, and then said, "Is Mr. Pym here?"

Nobody answered.

"Is Mr. Hollis here?"

Nobody spoke.

Angrily Charles turned to the Speaker. "Are any of these persons in the House? Do you see any of them? Where are they?"

The Speaker knelt humbly before his King. For a time he made no answer. Then he said,

"May it please your Majesty, *I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak in this place, but as the House is pleased to direct me*, whose servant I am here, and humbly beg your Majesty's pardon that I cannot give any other answer than this to what your Majesty is pleased to demand of me."

To this the King impatiently replied, "Well, well, it is no matter. I think my eyes are as good as another's." And then, as one of the members present afterwards wrote, "He looked round the House a pretty while to see if he could espy any of them."

Still a grim silence from the outraged Commons of England—their heads humbly bowed, their hearts beating high.

"Well," said Charles at last, "since I see all the birds have flown, I do expect from you that you will send them to me as soon as they return hither."

And he went out of the House—"in a more discontented and angry passion than he came in".

As he went down the Lobby there were mutterings, growing to shouts loud enough for the King to hear, of "Privilege! Privilege!" He stalked down West-

minster Hall in silence, followed by his soldiers, who must have wondered what it all meant, and why they had not been called into the House to use their weapons on the King's enemies.

* * *

Back in the Commons, there was happening one of those fantastic bits of procedure which makes the British Parliament so extraordinary a place.

Whenever the King sends a message to Parliament, it is "reported" by the Speaker. The King's Speech given in the House of Lords at the beginning of a new Parliament, for example, is read again by the Speaker when the Commons return to their Chamber.

The Speaker, following the old custom, on resuming his seat, asked the Commons whether he should make report of the King's Speech! A member dryly pointed out that it was hardly necessary, as the whole House had heard it.

There were loud shouts of "Adjourn! Adjourn!" and the Commons adjourned until one o'clock next day. It was about half-past three.

* * *

Outside in Westminster Hall there must have been widely differing emotions as the silent King, and the "officers of the late Army and desperate Ruffians", made their way out. Members no doubt lingered in the Chamber, venturing out into the Hall only when they were really sure that the enemy had departed. Prudent ones may even have followed the Five Members by boat down the river to London.

One can surely say that the cry of "Who goes home?" never meant so much as it did that day as

Freedom from Arrest

groups of members, surrounded by their armed servants, made their way to their various lodgings.

The events which followed this dramatic day are outside the scope of the present work. It is sufficient to mention one or two facts briefly.

On the next day the Commons decided to obtain a guard for themselves, and to meet at the Guildhall in the City of London.

Charles came to the City to demand the Five Members from the City Council. He was given a courteous welcome—but no answer. As he left the City, he passed through hostile crowds, the boldest among them crying, “Privilege!”

On January 10th Charles left his Palace of Whitehall and went to Hampton Court. This was his farewell to London.

On January 11th Parliament met again at Westminster. The Five Members returned in triumph by river, their boat being attended by “thirty or forty long boats with Guns, Flags, etc., and a great number of citizens and seamen in other boats and barges, and so they were conveyed to Westminster, some of the trained-bands marching at the same time by land, to be a Guard about the two Houses.”

Events were now rapidly moving towards the Civil War.

Never again would a King attempt to arrest members of Parliament or even enter the House of Commons. For, at the end of the Civil War, the Commons tried King Charles in Westminster Hall, and sentenced him to death.

CHAPTER XII

WILKES AND LIBERTY

IT seems strange that the British people, having won freedom for members of Parliament, should have then had to fight a battle for freedom of the people *against* Parliament or against the majority in Parliament. Yet such was the fact, and the story of John Wilkes, M.P., is the story of that battle.

* * *

A new session of Parliament always opens with the King's Speech—a speech which His Majesty reads to the assembled Lords and Commons in the House of Lords.

In the days of powerful kings, the King's Speech was indeed a speech from the King telling Parliament what it had to do. But by the eighteenth century, although the King was still more powerful than he is today, his speech was one prepared by his Ministers, and stating Government policy.

John Wilkes was M.P. for Aylesbury. In 1763 he was in Opposition to the Government, and sometimes wrote articles attacking them in a newspaper called the *North Briton*.

In No. 45 of that newspaper, Wilkes bitterly attacked the King's Speech which had just been made. Among the words he used was a statement that the King's ministers were "tools of despotism and corruption" and he said that the only way to keep peace in the land was "by the extinction of their power".

Now these words could mean that the King was a

Wilkes and Liberty

tyrant, that his ministers did evil things for them because he paid them, and that Wilkes was urging the country to get rid of them by civil war. Everybody knew, however, as Wilkes himself knew, that the King's Speech was really the Government's Speech, the Government's declaration of policy, as it is today, and Wilkes was merely making a bitter political attack on the Government.

But the Government, which had long been angry with Wilkes, decided to get rid of him. The King, George III,¹ regarded Wilkes's attack as a personal insult, and in this view he was encouraged by his Government.

They decided to prosecute not only Wilkes who wrote the article but also anybody else who had anything to do with the publication of the *North Briton*. They accordingly issued a warrant for the arrest of *anyone suspected of printing, or writing, or distributing copies of the paper*. Instead of the warrant having the names of the persons charged written on it, it was what was called a *general warrant*. That is, it gave power to arrest anybody. This was a most unusual, and a most dangerous procedure.

Wilkes, with others, was arrested and sent to the Tower of London.

But members of Parliament, as we have seen, had won the right of freedom from arrest for carrying out their duties as M.P.s, and Wilkes at once demanded to be taken before the Court of King's Bench, which met in those days at Westminster Hall. There he claimed his "privileges" as an M.P. and the judges

¹ George III tried to regain some of the lost power of kings over Parliament. In his reign the Commons debated a motion "That the power of the King has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished".

set him free. Moreover, he strongly protested against the *general warrant* on which he had been arrested, and the judges declared that such general warrants were illegal.

Wilkes left the Court a hero, followed by cheering crowds. It seemed that a great victory had been won.

But the Government's attack had only begun, and the battle went on for nearly twenty years.

* * *

Whilst Parliament claims for all its members certain privileges, it also claims the right to punish its own members for bad conduct. When it was reported to the Commons that Wilkes had been freed by the judges, the House of Commons itself decided, by a majority, that No. 45 *North Briton* was a "scandalous libel", and that Wilkes's privileges as an M.P. did not give him the right to publish such wicked articles. The House ordered that the paper should be publicly burned by the common hangman, and Wilkes was commanded to appear before the House so that it might deal with him.

In the meantime, Wilkes was in further trouble. In his private life he was not a good man, and he had written a blasphemous poem. For this the House of Lords decided to arrest him. Moreover, a gentleman challenged him to a duel for having written the *North Briton*. The duel was fought and Wilkes was wounded. Duels were illegal.

Wilkes thereupon escaped to Paris. He wrote to the House of Commons that he was too ill to attend Parliament, but he refused to be examined by a doctor whom the House proposed to send to Paris in order to find out whether he really was unfit to travel.

The Commons now found him guilty of "contempt",

Wilkes and Liberty

the case of the *North Briton* was examined by them again, he was declared guilty of libel, and the House of Commons *expelled* him.

* * *

One of the duties of Parliament is to see that elections are properly carried out. For centuries it appointed a committee to consider any questions about elections. If it thought that there had been something unfair about an election, or that an elected person was not entitled to be an M.P., it had the right to decide that another election be held in the place which had sent him to Parliament.

The Speaker therefore ordered a new writ for the election of an M.P. for Aylesbury, Wilkes's constituency. The election was held, a new M.P. was elected, and there was no further trouble for the time being, for Wilkes very carefully remained in Paris.

The judges (now that he was no longer an M.P.) found him guilty of libel, and as he refused to face trial, he was declared an *outlaw*.

But in 1768 Parliament was dissolved and there was a General Election. Wilkes came back from France, petitioned the King for a pardon, and stood as a candidate. He was elected M.P. for Middlesex.

He surrendered to his outlawries, and went to the King's Bench Court, where the judges promptly sent him to prison. A mob surrounded the prison and demanded that their M.P. be released in order that he might take his seat in Parliament.

But Wilkes insisted on remaining in prison! No doubt he thought that the sentence would soon be quashed because of his privileges as an M.P. In any case, he was comfortable in gaol, for friends from all

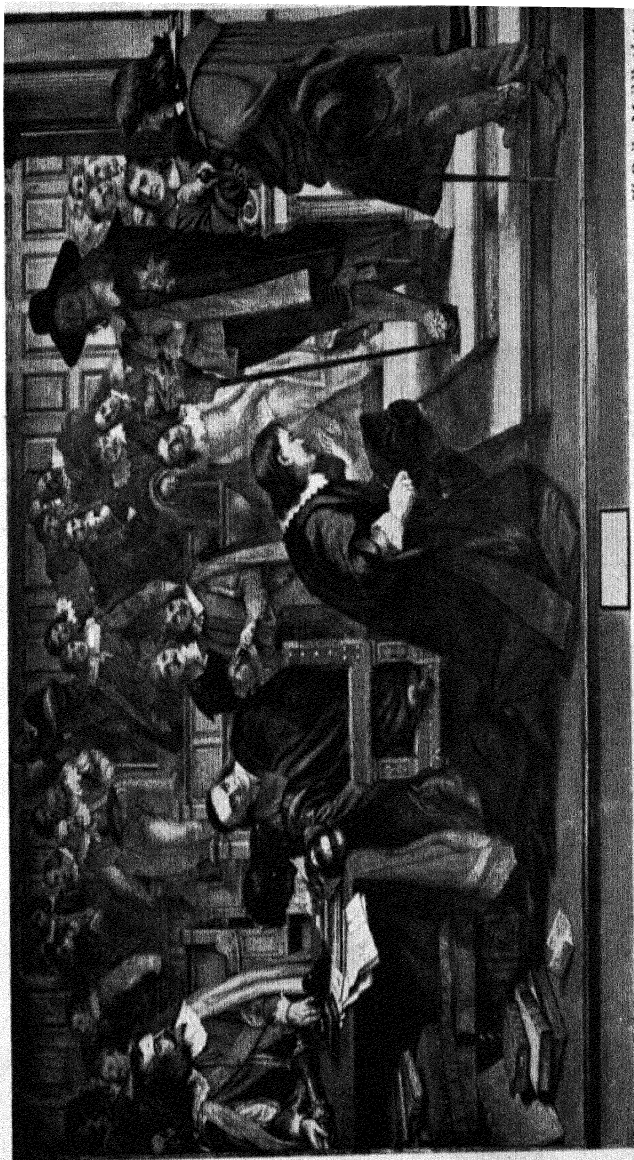
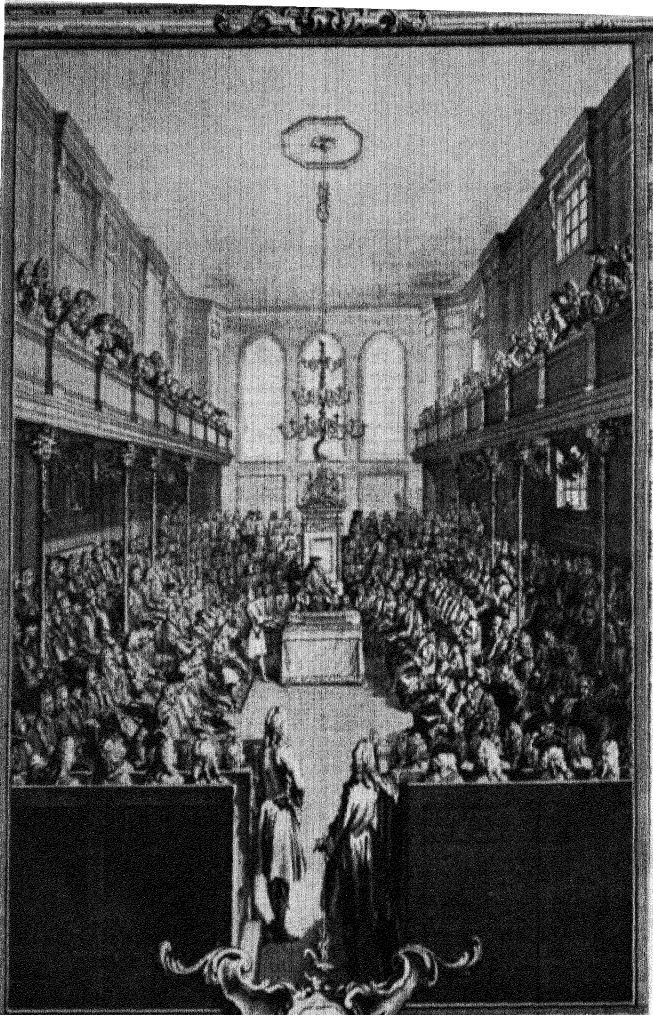


Plate VII. Charles I demanding the surrender of the Five Members. (See page 108.)
Front a painting in St. Stephen's by John Copley.

[¹ Daily Mail photo.]



VIEW of the

HOUSE of COMM

Arthur Onslow Esq

Speaker of the House of C

This Plate is said to have been designed by Sir James Oglethorpe

[From "Parliament House" by Maurice Hastings: The Architectural Press.
(By permission of The Society of Antiquaries)]

Plate VIII. The House of Commons in Session, 1742.

over the country sent him enormous quantities of food and drink.

The new House of Commons decided that Wilkes was incapable of being elected to Parliament because of his previous conduct, and the Speaker issued a new writ for an election in Middlesex. Wilkes again stood as candidate.

But, during the two years' quarrel about Wilkes, the common people had always taken his side. They regarded the Commons as wicked plotters persecuting the people's hero at the behest of a tyrant king. Wilkes had an exciting election campaign, conducting it from prison. Amid scenes of wild enthusiasm he was again returned as M.P. for Middlesex.

Again Parliament declared him unfit to be an M.P. and again a new writ was issued for a new election.

This happened four times, and at each election the Middlesex voters elected Wilkes as their M.P. He won the fourth contest by 1,143 votes against 296 cast for his opponent, Mr. Luttrell.

Parliament now tried a new way of dealing with this awkward problem. They decided that Wilkes's election was "null and void", and, on the grounds that Mr. Luttrell "ought to have been returned", declared, on April 14th, 1769, that Mr. Luttrell was the M.P. for Middlesex.

Matters had reached a serious pitch. The people of Middlesex had decided, four times running, that they wanted Wilkes to represent them in Parliament. Parliament now not only refused them the right to choose whom they wanted, but had chosen for them someone whom they, by a large majority, had said that they did not want.

Some members of Parliament, too, were beginning

Wilkes and Liberty

to realize just how serious was the action of the Government. If it was allowed to go unchallenged, then the King and a few people in Parliament could for ever choose which people were to be M.P.s, and British freedom of elections would disappear.

Supporters of Wilkes began to travel up and down the country telling the people of what Parliament had done, and urging them to make their M.P.s take up the cause of *Wilkes and Liberty*. From places as wide apart as Somerset and Newcastle, from Pembroke, Truro, York, came petitions to the Commons protesting against the action of Parliament.

The Government's supporters in turn went about getting counter-petitions, but their efforts only advertised Wilkes's campaign all the more.

At first the Government tried to pretend that only very poor people supported Wilkes, and one of them, in the debate that unseated Wilkes, said that those who had voted for Wilkes were only "the scum of the earth". But poor and rich alike, if they believed in the right of free elections, rallied to support Wilkes. Above all, the ordinary folk and the merchants of London were on his side.

London had always played an important part in the old struggles for freedom against the King and the nobles. And now the rich merchants of London fought their last fight for freedom against a Government and a House of Commons which were slavishly obeying King George III.

When Wilkes was released from prison in April 1770 he decided to build up power for himself in London. At once he was made an alderman and a magistrate. He persuaded the City Council to send petition after petition to the King on behalf of his right to sit in Parliament. Members of the city corporation appeared

before the King, led by the Sheriff. The King received their protest with anger, and said that it was "disrespectful to me, injurious to Parliament, and irreconcilable to the principles of the Constitution".

Parliament joked about the Londoners, and one of the Lords said of the interview, "However swaggering and impudent the behaviour of low citizens might be on their own dunghill, when they came into the Royal Presence their heads hung down like bulrushes, and they blinked with their eyes like owls at the rays of the sun." The noble Lord did not understand either the Londoners or the power of Wilkes in the City. Another deputation was sent, led by the Lord Mayor. Again the King replied curtly and angrily to their petition. Then, to the horror of the King and his courtiers, the Lord Mayor stepped forward and answered the King. Such disrespect was shocking, for nobody had ever "answered back" to the King of England.

But the delighted Londoners put up a statue in the Guildhall to Lord Mayor Beckford for his courage.

The next move was with the King. It was illegal in those days to publish reports of what went on in Parliament, but many reports were nevertheless circulated. Printed reports appearing in London often attacked the Government. The King decided to seize the printers. The Commons acceded to the King's request, and offered £50 reward for the arrest of any of these men who had printed reports of Parliament.

The arrested printers were brought before a London magistrate. This magistrate was . . . John Wilkes! He found the arrests illegal, and discharged the prisoners.

The angry Commons sent a messenger to seize the

Wilkes and Liberty

printers. As soon as the messenger seized the first one he appealed to a constable standing by, and charged the messenger with assault. All three proceeded to the Mansion House, where the Lord Mayor, Wilkes and another magistrate awaited them. The magistrates gravely listened to the case, and committed the messenger to gaol.

Parliament was furious at the insult offered to them through the arrest of their messenger. They at once sent for Wilkes and the other magistrates. Wilkes wrote to say that he was M.P. for Middlesex, and was not prepared to come to Parliament until he was allowed to take his rightful place in the House of which he was a member.

The other two magistrates were also M.P.s, and they went to Parliament. The House of Commons sent them to the Tower of London. The City Council thereupon passed a resolution providing excellent food for the prisoners at the City's expense. Visitors came from all over England to the Tower of London to congratulate the prisoners on their fight for freedom.

Parliament tried to save its face by adjourning, and, with no Parliament sitting, the two M.P.s were automatically released.

Lord Chatham, a great statesman, praised the Londoners in the House of Lords, and told the Government and Parliament that by their foolish actions they were only making Wilkes a successful martyr and a public hero. He said, "*You* have made him an Alderman of the City of London, and representative of the County of Middlesex. *You* will make him Sheriff, and, in due course, Lord Mayor of London." These words were prophetic. In 1771 Wilkes stood for Sheriff of London, and after a hard fight was elected. This gave him charge of prisons and executions.

An enemy challenged him to a duel. Wilkes wrote in reply :

“ SIR,

“ I do not think it my business to cut the throat of every desperado that may be tired of his life ; but as I am at present High Sheriff of the City of London, it may shortly happen that I may have an opportunity of attending you in my civil capacity, in which case I will answer for it that you shall have *no ground* to complain of my endeavour to serve you.”

In 1773 Wilkes presented himself at Westminster and tried to take his seat. Parliament refused to let him and again refused when he tried early in 1774.

In 1773 Wilkes became Lord Mayor, and the Lord Mayor's Show that year was one of the most magnificent ever held, and drew record crowds.

In 1774 came a General Election, and Wilkes was again elected to Parliament. This time Parliament wisely decided to abandon the struggle, and he was allowed to take his seat. His “ maiden speech ” in the House was a demand that January 30th, the anniversary of the execution of Charles I, should be celebrated not as a day of mourning, but as a “ festival ”.

Twice—in 1774 and in 1777—Wilkes moved that the resolution expelling him from Parliament be struck out of the records of the House. Each time he was defeated.

But at long last, in 1782, he moved, “ That the resolution on the 17th day of February 1769 be expunged from the Records of this House, *as being subversive of the rights of the whole body of Electors of this Kingdom* ”, and on May 3rd, 1782, he had the joy of seeing this historic resolution carried.

Wilkes and Liberty

It had taken Wilkes nearly twenty years to win through. But the battle which he had fought established the right of electors to choose whom they wish to serve them in Parliament, no matter what the rest of the country, or the rest of Parliament, may think of their choice.

Wilkes had also helped to secure the publication of reports of what went on in Parliament, and by the end of the century there had ended the secrecy which in the Middle Ages Parliament had established to protect itself but which was now a hindrance to free government.

* * *

But the fight for freedom was not truly complete until it included complete *religious* freedom for members of Parliament, and this was not finally achieved until 1886.

Members of Parliament, when they come to the House for the first time, swear an oath of loyalty.

Charles Bradlaugh was an atheist, and when he was elected to Parliament in 1880 he appeared at the Bar of the House and asked for permission to "affirm" his loyalty and not to swear a religious oath.

Parliament was angry about this, and did not feel happier when Bradlaugh contemptuously offered to solve the problem by taking the oath that he did not believe in. This was even more shocking, for how could an atheist be allowed to make a mockery of the oath by which members swore by Almighty God to be loyal!

After long debates the Commons decided that Bradlaugh was not to be allowed either to "affirm" or to take the oath. He was expelled from Parliament.

It was the Wilkes story over again. Four times in

succession Bradlaugh was re-elected for Northampton, just as Wilkes had been for Middlesex. Finally, after four years of struggle, he was allowed to take his seat. But he sat in the House as an unsworn member, and therefore unable to vote.

It was not until a new Parliament was elected in 1886 that Bradlaugh secured for himself and his town the full rights of membership of Parliament, without taking a religious oath.

Ever since then members may express their loyalty in whatever form they like—by oath of any religious kind, or by non-religious affirmation.

Throughout this second struggle, what had happened over Wilkes served as a guide, a warning and an inspiration.

CHAPTER XIII

PARLIAMENT AND FREEDOM

THE stories of Wentworth, Eliot, the Five Members and Wilkes illustrate the fact that the various freedoms which we take pride in, the *British way of life*, *Parliamentary democracy*, did not just happen, but had to be won by hard struggle and bitter sacrifice.

We have given them because they are perhaps the most important episodes in the growth of Parliament. But they are almost equalled by the lives of many other pioneers and martyrs for freedom, some of them known, and others—particularly in the early days of the Commons—lost in unrecorded history.

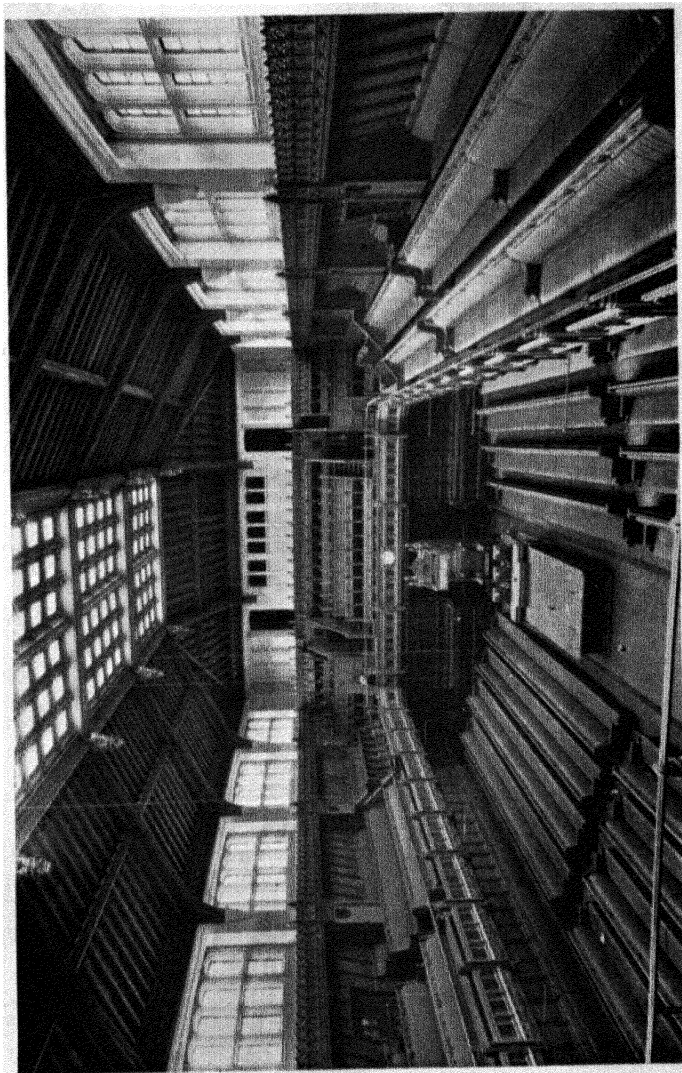
We are proud of our free way of governing ourselves, and in two great world wars our young men sacrificed a great deal to preserve that freedom.

But no form of government is perfect. And even in our own times there are conflicts of opinion, struggles in Parliament itself and in the country, over just how free one may be in Britain, without freedom becoming anarchy or lawlessness. For if everybody did just what he liked, without caring what happened to others, his freedom could seriously interfere with other people's happiness and well-being, and with other people's freedom.

Let us consider two modern problems of freedom that Parliament has to deal with.

* * *

In the American Senate any member may speak as long as he likes, on whatever subject he likes, during



[Copyright : "Country Life".

Plate IX. The new House of Commons.

any debate. The Americans, when they formed their Senate, wanted it to be an assembly of absolutely free men.¹

If, then, one senator does not agree with something which the majority of Senators propose to do, he tries to prevent them from carrying it out by making long speeches—very long speeches, which last as long as he has physical strength to stand up and keep his tongue moving. He can read chapters of books, newspapers, nursery-rhymes—anything he likes, for he alone can decide what he is to talk about, and the Chairman cannot interfere with his right to go on speaking.

If he has one or two friends in the Senate to help him, he can prevent a Bill from being passed by wasting days and days in talk until it is too late for the Bill to become law. This time-wasting is called a *filibuster*.²

But here the freedom of one member to say what he likes is seriously hurting the freedom of the rest of the members to make what they think are good laws.

This cannot happen in the British Parliament, for in times past we have evolved ways of dealing with this problem.

In our Parliament it is the Speaker, and not the individual members, who decides whether what a member says is "in order". Every member, therefore, must keep to the subject under discussion.

But clever members can make long speeches, like the "filibusterer", merely to hold up the work of Parlia-

¹ The Senate is the Upper House of the U.S.A., and consists of representatives of the various States that make up the United States. In many ways, each of these States is a separate country, with its own Government, and the Senate is almost like an assembly of "kings" or "rulers".

² A *filibuster* was a lawless pirate. Even the U.S.A. Senate has now devised ways of checking "filibustering"—but it is still an American problem.

Parliament and Freedom

ment, and yet keep just inside the rules of order. Or they may put down dozens and dozens of amendments to a Bill, and talk at great length on each one of them, merely to waste time.

These tactics presented a serious problem to Parliament in the late nineteenth century, when Irish M.P.s used every device that they could think of to "obstruct" Parliament, because Britain would not give Ireland a Government of its own, and this was their way of protesting. As long as their remarks were "in order", the Speaker could not do anything about it. On one occasion in 1881 they kept a debate going for forty-one hours, beginning on Monday at 4.30 p.m. and continuing until 9.30 a.m. on the Wednesday without a break.

It was therefore decided to alter the rules of debate so that time-wasting and "obstruction" could be checked. If the Speaker thinks that speeches are being made for this purpose only, he may now close a debate. After a debate has been going on for some time, a member may move "that the question be put". This is voted on, and if the majority is in favour, the debate is closed and the matter under discussion is voted upon. This device is called the *Closure*. Moreover, the Government may fix a time-table for a Bill, and decide that, no matter how many amendments there may be, a certain part of a Bill must be passed by a certain day and hour. This device is known as the *Guillotine*.

The Chairman has also the right to decide which amendments may be debated. His practice of missing out some amendments used to be called the *Kangaroo*, since he "leapt over" some amendments either because they were not in order, or had been talked about before, or were merely time-wasting.

But a Government might use these devices to stop debate altogether, if it simply used its majority to carry the "putting of the question" whenever it thought it would.

For this reason Parliament also safeguards the right of the individual M.P. If the Government Whip moves "that the question be now put", the Speaker has power to refuse the motion. It is left for him to decide whether the debate has gone on long enough to be really fair to everybody. It is still possible for the individual, or for a small party in the Commons, to delay the business of the Government, but in the last resort the majority must have the right to *win*, and get on with the nation's business. The Speaker's task is to see that the Government uses this power fairly, and that the rights of minorities are protected.

A second problem of freedom arises from what we call *delegated legislation*.

Parliament makes laws. We have seen how slow and complicated is the method by which a Bill becomes an Act. This is in order that every detail of the Bill may be carefully examined by the people's representatives.

But some Acts of Parliament set down only general principles, and instruct the Minister to make plans to carry them out in detail. He does this by devising what are called *Regulations*. Parliament has invented this method so as to save the time of Parliament, for if every detailed regulation had to go through the complicated process of a Bill, Parliament could never finish its work.

On the other hand, it might be possible for a Minister to do things by regulation which M.P.s thought were wrong. To avoid giving too much power to a Minister, Parliament has decided that when a Minister makes a Regulation, it is printed, and is

Parliament and Freedom

laid before the House of Commons for forty days. During that time any M.P. may object to it, and raise his objection in the House by what is called a "prayer" against it. This is debated, and he then attempts to convince Parliament that the Regulation ought not to be passed.

This seems, at first sight, to be sufficient safeguard against Ministers doing things by Regulations without the consent of Parliament.

But there are hundreds of such regulations, and few members have time to read them all carefully. It is therefore possible for a harmful regulation not to be noticed by M.P.s during the forty days.¹

To avoid this, Parliament decides that important Regulations must be made *affirmative*. This means that instead of merely printing them and letting Parliament know that they have been printed, the Minister has to come to the House during the forty days and move the proposed Regulation and explain it.

But even this is not enough for many who are troubled about this way of carrying out the details of an Act. For when a Regulation is debated in the House, members may only vote for it or against it. They cannot amend it. They cannot say, "We like parts of the regulation but we object to other parts." So that often they have to accept the part that they object to in order that the rest of the Regulation may be passed.

Here again is a problem of how to reconcile freedom of full debate with Parliament's desire to avoid wasting time, and this problem of delegated legislation has not yet been really solved.

* * *

But this is the kind of problem that free men

¹ Parliament now elects each year a Committee to examine all Regulations.

and women in Britain freely argue about both in Parliament and outside it. They are details against a background of real freedom which we have won after centuries of struggle.

We believe deeply in this freedom of ours. Century by century, Parliament by Parliament, we have built up a system of democratic government. In Parliament after Parliament we have used that system to secure for ourselves other freedoms—freedom from poverty, freedom from ignorance, freedom from injustice, freedom from foreign invaders.

Not every Government in the world is built on the principles which we have slowly established in Britain. But the nations in the British Commonwealth have governments very similar to our own. Many of them have so closely imitated our own Parliament that we speak of ours as the *Mother of Parliaments*.

Not all countries, however, have a government like our own. Communist countries, for example, do not share our views on freedom and Parliament. They believe that the best form of government is one in which a group of workers in the country seize power, and use that power to carry out what they believe to be good for the country, without any opposition. They use their power as a Government to prevent the expression of any opinion except that of the Government, and punish, imprison, or even put to death those who speak, write or work against the Government. They do this because they believe that they are right and that anyone who opposes them is a traitor to the country.

But most of us, from our long history, believe that the best form of government is one which has to face a critical Opposition, which rules over free men and

Parliament and Freedom

women, which can be turned out of office whenever the people wish to, in a nation where all have the same right to vote, where men may say what they like, worship as they like, and vote for whom they like, without fear of punishment, imprisonment, or death.

Six hundred years ago, when the story of Parliament had scarcely begun, a poet called William Langland dreamed of the days ahead when Britain would have a democratic and free government, and use it to build a just social order. He wrote :

Common Love and Conscience shall yet come together,
And make of law a labourer, such love shall rise,
And peace among the people, and perfect truth.
Neither king nor knight, constable nor mayor
Shall overbear the Commons, nor summon them to court.
King's court and Commons' court
Shall be but one court, and one lord shall be judge,
And that shall be True-Tongue,
And there will be the same justice for all people.

Throughout six centuries we have steadily moved towards that goal.

APPENDIX

The following are brief notes on Parliamentary terms not adequately dealt with in the text.

ACT. A Law made by Parliament. It begins as a *Bill* and becomes an *Act* when it has passed all its stages. (See Chapter VI.)

ADJOURNMENT. At the end of each day's work, and whenever it takes a holiday, Parliament *adjourns*.

As the House may adjourn whenever it decides to, and the decision to adjourn is always debated, the proposal to adjourn is always the opportunity to discuss some matter not provided for in the ordinary day's business. Every night a back-bencher makes use of this custom (see p. 39).

Similarly, if there is an urgent question to be debated, the House will rush through the day's business, and then the Adjournment will be moved so that the urgent new business may be debated.

The Opposition can show its strong disapproval of something the Government is doing by moving the Adjournment of a debate when the Government does not want the House to adjourn, or *vice versa*.

THE BAR. This is at the opposite end of the House to the Speaker's Chair. It consists of two metal rods which can be drawn across the end of the benches and form an actual bar to the Floor of the House. Outside the Bar is "outside of the House", and members may stand about in the space between the Bar and the Door. But once they cross the Bar they must take their seats, except to speak.

Serious offenders against Parliament are brought to the Bar to be reprimanded by the Speaker. Until the nineteenth century, they had to kneel.

Appendix

Newly elected members wait at the Bar to be called by the Speaker to take their oath.

BLACK ROD. An officer of the House of Lords who is usually a distinguished retired officer of H.M. Forces. He occupies a seat at the corner of the Lords' Chamber, is responsible for the protection of the Lords, and for admission of strangers to hear their debates. He is also the messenger of the King and the Lords to the Commons. He carries a black rod as a sign of his office.

BUDGET. Each year the Commons have to provide the money for carrying on the King's Government. The Chancellor of the Exchequer presents to Parliament each spring an estimate of the amount of money which the Government needs for the year ahead (*Supply*) and the ways in which the Government proposes to raise the money (*Ways and Means*). This statement of the Chancellor is called his Budget.¹

Budget secrets are jealously guarded as it is important that nobody should know in advance what alterations in taxes are going to be made. It is only a few hours before the Budget Speech that the Cabinet are informed what the final proposals are going to be. The proposals are secretly printed, and M.P.s themselves do not see them until they are suddenly handed round during the Chancellor's speech. The main items are at once voted upon so that the new taxes may be imposed at once.

The thing people like least of all is paying taxes. For this reason there is always a long debate on the Finance Bill which seeks to make the proposals into law, and M.P.s sit up all night fiercely arguing about the taxes and trying to get them changed. But although the Chancellor may make some slight concessions during the debate on the Finance Bill, the main lines remain unchanged. For the Government is determined to resign if it is beaten on its

¹ *Budget* means a little leather bag, and the Chancellor still brings to the House on Budget Day a leather case containing details of the proposals which he is going to make.

Budget proposals, and the only way to change a Budget is to get rid of the Government. Much as the Opposition would like to do this, it is rarely strong enough to defeat the Government. But there have been occasions in history when a Government has been beaten on its Budget proposals and a General Election has followed.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE. The Clerk has many important duties. He is a lawyer, expert in the procedure of Parliament, and he must see that the business of the House is carried out in the proper way. He signs all Orders of the House. He reads whatever is required to be read in the House. He has the custody of all records of Parliament, and is responsible for the daily recording in the *Journal* of all that the House does. He is also ready at any moment to give advice to the Speaker on any tricky point of procedure that suddenly arises during a debate. The Clerk sits at the Table with his two chief Clerk Assistants. All three wear wigs and gowns.

DISSOLUTION. When the King ends a Parliament, he is said to *dissolve* it. In former times Kings dissolved Parliaments when they quarrelled with them. Then Parliament won the right to have *regular* Parliaments. For a time they sat for *three* years, then for *seven* years, and now for *five* years.

Nowadays Parliament would be dissolved by the King at the end of five years. But few Parliaments last as long as five, or even four years. If a Government is beaten by a vote in the House on an important matter, or if the Prime Minister feels that the time has come for his Government to "go to the country" to test the feeling of the electors, he resigns, and Parliament is dissolved.

HANSARD. The "Parliamentary Debates", or "Hansard", are the daily printed records of everything that is *said* in Parliament.

For centuries it was illegal to report Parliamentary proceedings. Then, in the days just before the Civil War, members themselves began to give to printers speeches

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which they and others had made. Sir Simonds Dewes in the seventeenth century complained in the House, and said :

“ Much wrong was offered of late to several members by publishing speeches in their names which they never spake. I had yesternight a speech brought me by a stationer to whom one John Bennett, a poet lodging in Shoe Lane, sold it for half a crown to be printed. He gives it as my speech at a conference, when there was no conference ! ”

The Assistant Clerk to the Long Parliament, John Rushworth, kept shorthand notes of what went on in the Commons, and later published his *Historical Collections*—several volumes containing notes, resolutions, and many of the speeches made in that Parliament. Rushworth has been called the “ Father of Parliamentary Reporting ”.

In the eighteenth century the growing demand for news of what went on in Parliament was satisfied by reporters who gave accounts of the debates under fictitious headings. The greatest “ reporter ” of that century was Dr. Samuel Johnson, who wrote regular accounts of the Debates in the Parliament of . . . Lilliput. The members’ names were openly concealed by anagrams—Pitt was *Ttip*, Walpole *Polelaw*, and so on. But Johnson’s reports were not the actual speeches made in Parliament. He dressed them up in his own learned style. He was a violent Tory, and boasting that he was not impartial, said, “ I took good care that the *Whig dogs* should not have the best of it.”

Towards the end of the century newspapers were openly reporting debates, but in 1771, during the Wilkes struggle, several printers were imprisoned for so doing.

The new House of Commons of 1847 provided a Reporters’ Gallery and since then the Press has regularly published detailed reports of what goes on in Parliament. Charles Dickens began his career as a Parliamentary reporter.

Luke Hansard was a printer to Parliament at the beginning of the nineteenth century. His son, *Thomas*, became official printer of Reports of the Debates. At first these

were summaries, like newspaper reports, but later they became a word-for-word record of what was said in Parliament. Later the printing was taken over by H.M. Stationery Office, but Hansard's name is for ever associated with the daily report. Hansard deserves well of his country, for he also published a complete History of Parliamentary Proceedings. It was not the first, but was the fullest published up to that time.

JOURNAL. The daily record of what is *done* by Parliament. This is the only official record of Parliament. "Hansard" is merely an accurate account of what is *said*.

The Journals date back to the reign of Edward VI, and before that there are other records in the *Court Rolls*.

MACE. The Mace was originally a heavy club with spikes in it—a fearful weapon. Then ornamental maces became the symbol of authority.

The present Mace is comparatively modern—a mere three hundred years old. The older Mace disappeared in the times when Cromwell ruled without Parliament. When he and his soldiers angrily expelled the Rump Parliament, he contemptuously pointed to the Mace on the Table and said, "Take away this bauble!" Legend tells us that it was thrown into the river.

MINISTERS (CABINET, "SHADOW CABINET"). Every important branch of the nation's work is directed by a Department of State, at the head of which is a *Minister*, who is responsible to Parliament for the work of the Department. Every Minister has a *Junior Minister*. If the Minister is a Lord, the Junior Minister must be an M.P. This is to make sure that the Commons always have the opportunity of questioning the work of any department.

Several Ministers have no department to look after. Chief of these is the **PRIME MINISTER**, whose work is to lead the Government, and to be interested in all departments rather than in one.

The Chief Ministers form a group of leaders known as

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the CABINET. This group varies in size. Sometimes, in the critical days of a war, it has been cut down to five or six, so that important decisions could be made quickly.

Cabinet meetings are presided over by the Prime Minister. Ministers make it a point of honour never to reveal what disagreements have taken place in a Cabinet meeting. If a Cabinet Minister feels that he cannot accept the views of the majority of his fellow Cabinet Ministers, he resigns his office. Apart from this, the Cabinet is always "unanimous" in its decisions.

The Opposition must always be prepared to form a Government, and must therefore have men ready to fill most of the important Ministries. For this reason, the Opposition forms a "SHADOW CABINET" of its chief men, and this meets in a way similar to that in which the real Cabinet meets, but to plan attacks on the Government.

When a Minister speaks in a debate, he is usually opposed by one of the Opposition's chief men, who has either held that Ministry or some day hopes to hold it.

All this means that when a new Government is formed, there is less dislocation in the various departments than there would be without this preparation on the part of the Opposition.

LORD CHANCELLOR. Although the Lord Chancellor might be called the Speaker of the House of Lords, his duties in the Chamber differ very greatly from those of the Speaker of the Commons.

The Speaker acts as an impartial Chairman, but the Lord Chancellor is a Government man, and may join in the debates. When he does so, he steps away from the Chair (the Woolsack). The Lord Chancellor is chosen for his legal knowledge and presides over the highest Court of Appeal in the land, which consists of himself and four Law Lords.

PARLIAMENTARY PRIVATE SECRETARY. Every Minister chooses an M.P. to act as his secretary for the

Parliamentary side of his work—arranging appointments and interviews with other Ministers and M.P.s. The “P.P.S.”, as he is called, sits behind the Minister during a debate, and may be sent at any time for papers or information required suddenly during a debate. He is not paid for this job, but it is regarded as the first stepping-stone towards higher office.

PRIME MINISTER. Even in the days when kings had almost absolute power, they would choose from their counsellors the wisest or most faithful to act as chief adviser. Henry VIII, for example, at one time had Wolsey, Queen Elizabeth had Lord Burghley, and Charles I had Buckingham and later Strafford. But such men were selected by the King himself and owed all their power to him.

As the kings lost their power, so the power of the chief man in Parliament grew. The early Georges could not speak English, and it was during their reign that the chief man in Parliament became Prime Minister. Later kings and queens tried to get back their lost power, but in vain.

The Prime Minister is chosen by the majority party in the Commons. He chooses all his other Ministers.

Throughout the life of his Government the Prime Minister keeps in close touch with His Majesty the King, and talks over with him all important state affairs. But final decisions rest with the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, subject to the approval of the Commons.

The Leader of the Opposition might be called a “shadow prime minister”, as he is most likely to be the new Prime Minister if the Government is defeated. On very grave matters of State, the Prime Minister will keep well informed the man who some day may take his place.

PRIVATE BILL. The object of a *Public Bill* is to change the law of the land for everybody, whereas the object of a *Private Bill* is to give some group of citizens special powers or privileges in excess of the general laws of the land. For example, a town may wish to run trams through certain

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streets, or raise money to build a new Town Hall, or it may, as the town of Luton recently did, seek to become a county borough, i.e. a town with far greater powers than Luton at present possesses.

Private Bills are very rarely debated in Parliament, which appoints a Committee to deal with them. But they have to be finally approved by Parliament.

PRIVILEGE. A privilege is some special right enjoyed by an individual or group of people, in excess of those enjoyed by the rest of the nation.

Throughout the ages Parliament has fought for and established certain privileges which protect M.P.s in their important task of making the nation's laws.

The most important of these are reaffirmed by the King to the Speaker every time that a new Parliament opens. They are, freedom of speech, freedom from arrest, and free access to the King. We have seen how they had to be fought for.

No M.P. can be punished for anything that he says in the House—except by Parliament itself.

Obviously "freedom from arrest" does not mean that an M.P. can get away with crime. He can be punished for crime just like any other citizen. In former times M.P.s used their "privilege" to escape rightful punishment for debts, but such abuses have been done away with. But no M.P. can be punished for doing what he thinks it is his duty as an M.P. to do or say. And even today M.P.s are safe from actual arrest whilst they are within the Palace of Westminster.

It is a breach of privilege to insult Parliament or its members. This does not mean, however, in this land of free speech, that people may not say rude things about either, and today only a very serious breach of this privilege would be punished. But in the past breach of privilege was punished heavily by the Commons. In the seventeenth century a man was pilloried, whipped, and sentenced to gaol for life because he had "cursed Parliament and all

its works". Parliament had its own prison, called "Little-Ease"—a dungeon so small that a man could not lie down in it. M.P.s who offended against the privileges of Parliament could be sent to the Tower for an indefinite period, except that their punishment usually ended with the ending of Parliament.

For a long time M.P.s had the "privilege" of "franking" letters, i.e. writing their names on envelopes which could then be sent post free. But this privilege was abused, and eighteenth-century M.P.s would "frank" letters for their friends. For this reason the privilege was dropped, and the modern M.P. spends quite a lot of his salary in postage-stamps.

PROROGATION. At the end of a session of Parliament, the King dismisses his Parliament, and tells it to reassemble on a certain date to begin a new session's work. This dismissal is called *proroguing* Parliament.

The ceremony of prorogation is a dull one. At it the Lord Chancellor reads a list of the Acts passed during the Session. The King himself does not attend. The ceremony of the King's Speech at the opening of Parliament, on the other hand, is a grand and colourful ceremony.

QUORUM. A quorum is the minimum number of members of a society who are allowed to transact its business. The quorum of the House of Commons is forty members.

There are always many more than forty members present at Westminster during the day's business. But M.P.s have many duties to attend to, and on occasion there will be found to be fewer than forty sitting in the House itself, especially if the debate is on some narrow aspect of a special topic—or if the member who is speaking is a dull speaker!

Now if there are fewer than forty members present, the business may go on, unless some member calls attention to the fact. The Speaker himself may not do so. If a member rises and says, "Mr. Speaker, I desire to call to

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your notice the fact that there are fewer than forty members present," the debate is at once interrupted and the Speaker proceeds to "count the House". If he cannot count forty, the House is at once adjourned.

But if "counting the House out" were a frequent practice, the business of Parliament would seriously suffer. And so Parliament, with its wisdom of centuries, provides safeguards against this.

First, there are the Whips on both sides. One of their duties is to see that there is always a "good House". But as this is not always possible, the procedure of the "count" itself is an elaborate affair. Instead of the Speaker's "counting the House" immediately, he rises in his place and says, "I shall now proceed to count the House." At once bells ring all over Westminster Palace, just as they do for a division. Whips rush out into the Lobbies, the various committee-rooms, the Library, calling up members who are not in the Chamber. There is a rush to the House of those who do not want the House to be counted out (usually the Government side), and a few minutes later, when the Speaker is about to begin the actual count, there are far more than forty present—and the debate continues.

Sometimes dozens of M.P.s who want the House to be counted out will be standing just outside the Chamber, watching with amusement the frantic efforts of their opponents to "whip up" their own side to save the situation.

All this, however, is very rare in the modern Parliament, which takes itself much more seriously than Parliaments did in the past, and regards such tricks as rather bad form.

SERJEANT-AT-ARMS. The Serjeant-at-Arms was one of the King's military officers appointed to keep order in the Commons and to protect its members. In the past he used to be sent by the Commons to arrest offenders against Parliament.

His main duties today are—first, the ceremonial duty of

attending the Speaker, carrying the Mace, as the Speaker enters the House, or goes to the Lords or to the King. Then he has to arrest "strangers" who have got into the Chamber, who have misbehaved in the Strangers' Gallery. He is responsible for the protection of the Commons, and under his command are the attendants and the police who constantly guard Parliament. He is also responsible for admitting strangers to hear debates, and for clearing the Galleries if the House decides to go into secret session.

STRANGERS. In former times Parliament was anxious that its debates be kept secret. Men who got into the Chamber during a debate were arrested, and examined carefully by the Serjeant-at-Arms to find out whether curiosity, or ignorance, or some more sinister motive had led them into the House.

Over the centuries the custom grew up of allowing strangers to come into the lobbies near the Chamber. But the Serjeant-at-Arms had power to drive them away if they crowded the lobbies and got into the way of members. They were even allowed to come into that part of the Chamber which was "outside the House"—i.e. below the Bar.

Ladies were not allowed anywhere near the Chamber in the ancient Parliament House. But up in the roof-space of old St. Stephen's there was a ventilator, and eighteenth-century ladies would go up there to listen to, and peep down upon, the debates that were conducted below.

When the new House was built a hundred years ago, a gallery was provided for Strangers to sit in and listen to the debates. At the back of it was a tiny part shut off by an iron grille, behind which ladies were permitted to sit.

Nowadays almost all debates are held in public. There are two ways of obtaining a seat in the Strangers' Gallery. One is to write to your M.P. well ahead of the day on which you wish to visit the House. He is given two tickets every fortnight and may be able to supply you with one. The

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other way is to join the queue of people who each day wait for hours to get into the Strangers' Gallery. A certain number of seats are filled in this way daily, and the long queues are evidence of the very keen interest which citizens take in the British Parliament.

SUPPLY (COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY). The main duty of Parliament is to raise taxes, and watch carefully how they are spent.

As soon as it meets, it appoints various Committees. One of the two chief Committees is the Committee of Supply, which examines the way in which the country's money is spent. As this is so important, every member of Parliament is a member of this Committee.

During the year, the Opposition is given twenty-six "Supply Days"—days on which they debate the way in which the money is spent by any of the Departments. The Opposition chooses which department they will debate about on any particular Supply Day. And so they arrange during each year to have important debates on—the Fighting Services, Education, Transport, Fuel and Power, and so on.

At the end of all these Supply Debates, the Estimates of Expenditure for the next year are voted. Parliament has thus decided that these sums are to be spent. All that it has to do now is to find the money!

WAYS AND MEANS (COMMITTEE OF WAYS AND MEANS). To find the money, the House has set up a Committee of Ways and Means. Again, as this is so important, every member is a member of the Ways and Means Committee.

The main work of this Committee is to consider the Finance Bill, which is the real name of what we usually call the Budget. This Bill, like any other Bill, has its First, Second and Third Readings, its Committee stage and its Report stage (see Chapter VI), and takes weeks to get through all its stages.

Finally it is passed, and Parliament has thus provided the money to meet the expenditure which it has approved

in Committee of Supply. Its main work for the year is over.

Throughout the long history of Parliament, the most bitter struggles have been about taxation—about Supply and Ways and Means—especially in the days of the Stuarts.

It was for this reason that to discuss Supply and Ways and Means the whole House went into Committee, for this meant getting rid of the Speaker during the discussion, and there was less likelihood of the King's getting to know what was said.

An important officer of the House is the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. He is elected by his fellow-members to the Chair, and presides over the two great Committees. He also acts as Deputy-Speaker.

The fact that all this important business is taken by the House in Committee means that the Speaker gets a rest from his duties in the Chamber on the many days when the House is in Committee of Supply or of Ways and Means.

TELLERS. The old word "tell" meant "to count". Whenever the House votes, it appoints four tellers—two members from each side—to count the votes.

USUAL CHANNELS. A small group of members, usually the leaders of the two Parties in the House and their Chief Whips, meet every Wednesday to talk over arrangements for the business of the following week, and get together if ever there are other urgent changes to make in the week's business. This group is known by Parliament as "the usual channels".

WOOLSACK. The official seat of the Lord Chancellor in the House of Lords is called the Woolsack—because it actually is a sack of wool.

In the Middle Ages England's most important trade was in wool, and it was as a symbol of this fact that the seat of the Chancellor and of the judges were made of wool.

The Woolsack is treated with reverence by the Lords.

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No lord, wittingly, passes between the Woolsack and another lord who is speaking.

Behind the Woolsack are the Royal Thrones, which are covered except on the day when Her Majesty attends for the Opening of Parliament and the reading of the Queen's Speech.

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