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HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II
With her—the new Elizabethan Age.

Mr. Speaker, Sir

by

GRAHAM CAWTHORNE

*Honorary Secretary (1946-1949) Parliamentary Press Gallery,
Chairman (1949-1950), Deputy Chairman (1950-1952)*



LONDON

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FOREWORD

by

VISCOUNT RUFFSIDE OF HEXHAM

Speaker of the House of Commons, 1943-1951

THIS is a very readable book; it is full of humour and yet in all its pages there is something to be learnt about Parliamentary proceedings. Mr. Cawthorne has given pen pictures of prominent figures; he chuckles with joy when someone threatens to make a scene. This may be all very well when viewed from the Press Gallery but not quite the same thing for the occupant of the Chair.

I particularly commend his remarks on written speeches, which have become far too common. I have always felt that if a speech was read out—not only was it frightfully dull but it was also evidence that the speaker did not really know his subject.

The book also preserves the memory of Oliver Stanley. Of Parliamentary debaters of modern times, I put him easily first—even if there was a sting in some of his witticisms, it was put so nicely that even his victim seemed to enjoy it.

Many books have been written about the House of Commons; this is one that I have thoroughly enjoyed.

D. CLIFTON BROWN

PREFACE

THIS is a book about Parliament, its people, its work and its humours. The Parliamentary journalist sits above the battle of politics, and he sees the politicians as men and women, and regards each and every one of them with the affection of a member of a unique family circle.

It is a book that grew from five years of *Sidelights on Parliament*, a weekly feature contributed to the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*. I am, therefore, especially grateful to Mr. F. K. Gardiner, the Editor, for his permission to reproduce some of that material.

I should also like to express my thanks to M. André Maurois for his permission to quote a charming incident from his *Disraeli*; to Guy Eden for permission to quote from his *Portrait of Churchill*; and to my colleagues Geoffrey Wakeford and Harold Turner for their advice and help. For permission to make several quotations from Mr. Churchill's wartime memoranda and speeches, I am indebted to Messrs. Cassell & Co., Ltd., publishers and holders of the copyright. For the list of Gifts to the new Chamber from the Commonwealth and Colonies, I am indebted to *Hansard* and H.M. Stationery Office.

And I also wish to pay tribute to those authors whose works on Parliament provide such a fascinating field of research, among them

PREFACE

Sir Alan Herbert, for his *Independent Member* and *The Point of Parliament*; Mr. Strathearn Gordon, for *Your Parliament*; Mr. Alfred Bossom, M.P., for *Our House*; Sir Geoffrey Shakespeare, for *Let Candles be Brought In*; to those of my colleagues, William Barkley, Guy Eden, Tom O'Donoghue, Geoffrey Morley and George Turnbull, who collectively wrote *The Press Gallery at Westminster*, in 1950, as a book about the Press Gallery for the Press Gallery; and going back down the years, to that great benefactor of the Press Gallery, Sir Henry Lucy, for his *Parliamentary Diaries*.

GRAHAM CAWTHORNE,
*Parliamentary Press Gallery,
The House of Commons,
London.*

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CHAPTER 1

The Fabulous Parliamentarian

BACK to Downing Street in October, 1951, went Winston Churchill, in office again after years of frustration. Within a couple of weeks Downing Street provided a round-the-clock service of secretaries, for Winston brimmed with more energy than many a man of half his age.

Yet he was 77 years old when he again became Prime Minister. He was a mere 74 when, receiving an honour from a society he said to them—"You have given me the nickname of 'Old Faithful'..." He paused. Then, with a grin and a chuckle, he added, "Well—not so much of the 'OLD'!"

No other man attacks life with the gusto of Winston Churchill. His zest for living is tremendous. Life to him is a cigar, to be smoked fully, and enjoyed to the end; unlike the cigars he constantly half-smokes.

When the war in Europe was won he had found himself the Leader of His Majesty's Opposition. Behind him were five years of glorious leadership with their ceaseless, wearing strain of big decisions and the agonised uncertainties of war.

If ever a man had been entitled to retire there and then in an atmosphere of civic honour—he had 80 invitations, for every city in the country was anxious to make him a Freeman—it was Churchill. But the cigar was not yet ended. There were still things to do. He was the Leader of a great political party, and now it was his duty to oppose. That is no loose phrase, although it is loosely used by all Governments in sardonic references to the Opposition. Mr. Churchill was the Alternative Prime Minister, a part

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of the British Constitution. As such he was entitled to a salary from the State of £2,000 a year, though he never drew it.

There was not a moment's hesitation in his mind. From the summit of power he went into Opposition, and took up a new life leading a party which was as shattered and bewildered by the 1945 Election as it was after the Liberal landslide in 1906, which Churchill himself had described in masterly language in one of those 29 books he has written. He took that beaten party and rallied it by the force of his own example until, from a bewildered band it became a formidable and fighting Opposition deadlocking the Government in the General Election of 1950; beating them in the autumn of 1951. In those early post-war days Mr. Herbert Morrison, Leader of the House, was wont to exclaim "What an Opposition!" Mr. Churchill changed all that. So much so that Mr. Morrison didn't smile for forty-eight hours after Parliament met following the 1951 Election.

After the war Winston was out for blood from the word "go". The first fully-powered Labour Parliament was hardly launched before he flung his first vote of censure defiantly across the House. It was the first of many. His duels on a Thursday afternoon with Herbert Morrison became famous. Morrison would announce a week's business—Churchill would begin to comment with "questions" that ranged over the entire legislative field, and a row would start, greatly enjoyed by both participants, almost before anyone realised what was happening. Many an angry vote of censure was born on those afternoons at half-past three.

And yet all this was only a part of the canvas of his life at the beginning of its seventh decade. There was the world scene to be surveyed with massive Churchillian vision that brought him jumping into Western leadership with the Fulton and the Zurich speeches. There was European unity to be fostered; a single-handed Churchill creation, this. There was history to be written, famous history of the

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war. "Let history speak for itself—particularly as I intend to write that history myself", he chuckled, and the Government of his opponents passed a special Bill to enable him to use official documents in it. He took up racing—and won at it. He carried on with his painting—and was elected to the Royal Academy.

Today at 78, though he has the deliberate step of a man of that age, he is as vigorous and as sparkling as ever. Gladstone formed his last Administration at 84. Winston had seven years' start over the G.O.M. with the formation of his third Government.

What is the secret of Winston Churchill? More than anything else it lies in his refusal to waste a minute of his time; in his single-minded concentration on the matter in hand, and then his immediate concentration on something else. When a diplomat at the 1919 Peace Conference found his mind a'weary, Balfour sent him away to a quiet country hotel with an armful of Edgar Wallace thrillers. Winston paints to relax his mind, but he never lets inertia descend. His rest—real sleep, undressed and between the sheets—after lunch has, for forty years, given him the energy to go on working until the small hours. At the Admiralty in the first war, Fisher, First Sea Lord, an old man, worked all day. Winston, starting later, worked half the night. They left each other notes and it was a perfect partnership. The routine persists today, though he does not work so much in the late hours. But midnight often, as Leader of the Opposition, found him on the 'phone to one of the big newspaper offices chatting over the news of the evening for half an hour or more. Sometimes he was on the 'phone again at two in the morning. As P.M. again, he is often working and dictating at anything up to 3 a.m.

His motto still is—If you do something, do it with all your might. If there is a problem to be solved, solve it. "Don't tell me the difficulties—they will argue for themselves", he said in a wartime note. He is still that Churchill. When somebody laughed in the House at his condemnation

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of the "famine" in men for the Forces, he snapped, "It isn't a thing to laugh at, it's a thing to hustle at and try to find a way to do it." He refuses to be put off by high-sounding clichés. "It is altogether wrong that these debates should proceed on a basis of guarded platitudes", he growled when they tried it.

Mr. Attlee himself paid tribute, when he became Prime Minister, to the driving Churchillian thrust. "Mr. Churchill", he said, "radiated a stream of energy throughout the whole machinery of Government, indeed, throughout the life of the nation. He set the pace." It was a great compliment for Mr. Attlee to pay in his moment of overwhelming electoral victory. And time and again in the next six years we saw instances of this restless Churchillian outpouring of energy. The man is interested in everything, even in the Barbary Apes of Gibraltar. Questions in the House about the "Ape population" there found Winston listening with attention. Then he rose. "Isn't it a fact that they are mostly male!" he said innocently.

Never was his abundant energy and his abounding interest in the Parliamentary scene better shown than in the all-night sittings on the Committee stage of the 1951 Finance Bill. The motto of Mr. Herbert Morrison in the post-war Parliament had always been—"certainly, have a debate—but not too long", or words to that effect. The Report stage of the Budget Resolutions had been formalised to save Parliamentary time, cutting off many opportunities to move amendments.

Winston determined that when the Gaitskell Budget came to the House in the form of the Finance Bill, Parliamentary rights of discussion should be fully restored; and so they were, but only after a series of all-night sittings which brought furious protests from some quarters.

His interventions in these debates showed him for the Happy Parliamentarian that he is. At half-past three in the morning few men are at their brightest, and it is certainly not the hour which you would expect normally

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to appeal to an old gentleman of 76 and a half, as he was then. But in Winston's case the number of years is a purely nominal number. He is not 76 or 77 years OLD, but 76 or 77 years YOUNG. He napped for an hour or two on a bed in his room at the House, was awakened, and strode into the Chamber in the best possible form. The Government was in a fix. It was pressed for time—the Finance Bill had to be in the House of Lords by early in July, for although the Lords cannot amend it, they have to be given a month for its examination. Already it was almost mid-June. Only twice before in history had Finance Bill debates been “guillotined,” and with income tax at 9s. 6d. in the £ and an Election just around the corner, the Government dared not set that precedent. Not that there had been the slightest obstruction in these debates. Far from it. There had been only a careful, very careful examination of the Bill.*

So now, at half-past three in the morning, Winston came in to support the motion for the adjournment of the discussion. Nothing, of course, could have given the Government less pleasure. If they did adjourn, they would have to give up yet another day to the Bill, throwing the tight time-table even further out. Not only that, but they would have faced bitter recriminations from half their own back-benchers, who would have found themselves stranded in London with no public transport to their homes and lodgings.

All this did not deter Winston for a moment. He entered in the middle of a minor row, dismissed an angry speech from the Government back-benches as that of a “sleep-talker”, and went on from there. Four hours later he was back again, and at half-past seven in the morning, as fresh as paint, again demanding the adjournment in one of those quite unprepared and utterly delightful little speeches of which he is such a master. Even the abolished University seats came into it, and before breakfast hour he had the

* Now being repeated in reverse in 1952.

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Prime Minister, no less, jumping up in furious interruption. Said Winston of the Government's majority that night, it was—"10, 11, or 12—and which they would not have had if the present Foreign Secretary (Mr. Morrison) had not thought of the bright idea of breaking all his pledges, and the inter-party agreement (on electoral reform) to which the Prime Minister was a party. . . ."

Mr. Attlee, pink with fury, was on his feet in an instant, declaring hotly, "The Right Honourable Gentleman knows there was no agreement to retain his pocket boroughs."

"It is a wicked world!" sighed Winston.

He was there again four hours later, at 11 o'clock in the morning, commenting to the Government that it was their own supporters who were suffering from the strain of being in every division, for all of them had to be there all the time. Into it even came memories of the Admiralty before 1914. "We had 16 battleships which had to be always ready to meet ten of the potential enemy, the Germans. One would have no idea of how difficult it is to maintain an average of 16 to meet the selected moment of only ten. All sorts of things happen. They have to undergo refits; sometimes they collide with one another and injuries are done. Generally speaking, it is a very great strain which cannot possibly be measured."

Appreciating fully the point of all this was the Chief Government Whip, for as Winston pointed out, "Nothing happens to us if we turn up 100 short in any division. We should only be taking a needed rest, whereas much would happen to the Government if they turned up only ten short."

"They might," he said with a resounding chuckle, "get an even longer rest."

And so it went on. Some of us worried about his health. Was it good for a man of that age to be up and down all through the night like this? Winston never worried for a moment. He was on top of his form, revelling in the embattled atmosphere, drawing strength from the House itself.

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When the power cuts began a year or two after the war, there were questions in Parliament about hospital operations that were endangered by the sudden blackouts in operating theatres, about factories whose power was, and still is, cut off without warning. For some minutes the questions went on—could not some method be found to give a warning? Winston had been sitting quietly on the Front Bench taking it all in. Suddenly he rose. Could not some flicker of the lights be given—he illustrated it with a flicker of his fingers—to show that a power cut would be along in a minute? One of my fellows in the Reporters' Gallery whispered, "That's how the war was won." Of course, all the technicians hastily explained that it couldn't possibly be done, that it would burn out something or other, but it showed the spirit of the man. "The difficulties will argue for themselves." Well, there were experts who said the Mulberry Harbours could not possibly be built. But Winston said "it must be done", and done it was. Even Nature could not stop him. When the idea of dispersing fog by burning petrol came along, Winston wrote to Geoffrey Lloyd, the Minister for Petroleum, "I will push this with all my might". And did. It was not very long, at any rate, after this incident of the power cuts that warnings and prearranged rotas of cuts became an accomplished fact.

Winston Churchill simply will not admit defeat, even when the obstacle in his way is a Parliamentary majority of a hundred and fifty. The bigger the storms he created in that post-war Parliament, the happier was the warrior.

And never was a man so at home in the House of Commons. When someone suggested in 1945 that he should retire, he is said to have replied—"What! Leave the House—but I'm a child of the House." Certainly he is as much at his ease there as in the drawing-room at Chartwell. When everyone shivered because the stokers had gone on strike, Winston swept into the Chamber in a greatcoat, and, still wearing it, irascibly enquired of the Minister of Labour—

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when could Parliament expect its normal services to be restored? Finding himself chilly one afternoon in the New Chamber, he strode to the cloakroom, checking his chilliness by the thermometer on the door. A moment later he returned, to show his general disapproval of the air-conditioning by huddling in a greatcoat on the Front Bench and looking as forlorn as any waif. (No waif ever looked as neglected and woebegone as Winston when he chooses.) When, in 1950, he dropped his only throat pastille down his waistcoat at the end of a tremendously sustained attack on the Government, he dived after it, first with one hand, then with the other, down from the top of the waistcoat, and then up from the bottom of it, in a contorting search that ended with four hundred Members of Parliament laughing at the sight. The laughter halted the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Gaitskell, in his own speech, and the debate stopped dead until Winston looked up to find every eye upon him in amusement. Yet he merely explained with the broadest of grins, "I was only looking for a jujube!" "So sorry", said the Chancellor, he had left his own outside—and the debate went on. The next day *The Scotsman* printed a leading article entitled—*The Fall of the Pastille*.

But then, Winston Churchill is a Parliamentary born. Remember what he said to the American Congress, "If my father had been an American instead of my mother, I think I might have got here on my own." Does anybody doubt it? To him the atmosphere of the House of Commons is as natural as the scent of burned powder to the soldier, or printer's ink to the journalist.

He is the Master of Parliament, admired by all as the second Grand Old Man. His 75th birthday was a Parliamentary occasion, with the Prime Minister making a charming little speech, and everyone applauding the blushing, smiling old gentleman, old in years, but young in heart and vigour. That such tributes and such applause should come from those whom he had lambasted with

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every freedom for years was in itself a tribute to the man. But politics becomes a hard business if grudges are held, and between Winston and his leading opponents were many memories of wartime strain. "I have never considered myself a good hater", he said in a moment of reflection one day, though he added characteristically, "though I must realise that it has from time to time added stimulus to pugnacity." He has many times expressed his appreciation of the work of top Labour Ministers during the war. Mr. Herbert Morrison, one of the hardest hitters in the Government against the Tories, recalled in the middle of a controversial debate some of the complimentary things that Winston had said about him in his war memoirs. Winston leaned forward in his seat. "I stand by every word of it", he said.

He has had his quarrels with Mr. Attlee, but never for long. He belaboured Mr. Attlee unmercifully over steel nationalisation and other issues, and Mr. Attlee hit back, even to the extent on one occasion of saying on the air, "Mr. Churchill seems to think that Parliament is a place where he makes speeches." But Winston is too big a man to hold a grudge. There was an example in the great debate on India. Winston contended that the Government were acting with too much haste in setting a date by which British troops should leave the country. He said so in a long and angry speech. There was a division immediately after the Prime Minister had closed the debate, and he and Mr. Churchill strolled down the floor of the House together. At the start, Winston was still in the full flight of argument, reinforcing his words with angry gestures, but obviously making no impression on the Prime Minister. Halfway down the floor he stopped, shrugged, laughed, and threw an arm round Mr. Attlee's shoulders. They walked like that to the Bar of the House and then separated; to vote against each other.

Mr. Churchill's description of Mr. Attlee in 1946 was, "The Right Honourable Gentleman, the Prime Minister,

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whose official position alone prevents me from describing him as my Right Honourable Friend."

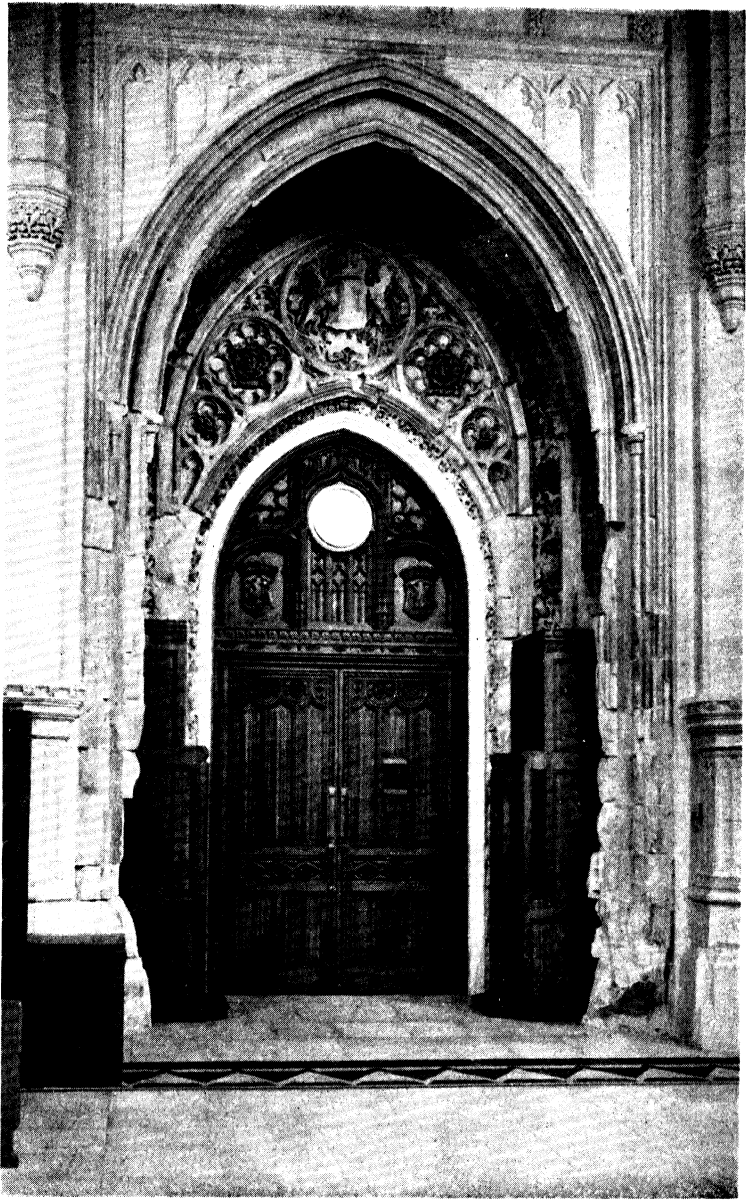
And when we came into the New Chamber five years later, Mr. Attlee made a striking, and deliberate reference to the "Churchill Arch", the bomb-chipped, smoke-blackened archway to the new Members' Lobby, named as a memorial to Mr. Churchill's tremendous wartime leadership of Parliament.

But all this didn't stop a Churchill joke one afternoon soon after the war. He had been asking so many questions about Government policy that Mr. Morrison sought to silence him with the remark, "Really, Mr. Churchill must recognise that another Right Honourable Gentleman now presides over the Cabinet."

Winston rose. With a flirt of the hand towards Mr. Attlee he said, "I am quite willing to recognise the fact—such as it is!" Mr. Attlee actually stopped doodling to join in the laugh.

Between Mr. Churchill and Mr. Bevin was a great bond, though that didn't stop Winston rending the Foreign Secretary when he felt that punishment was necessary. After one rather sulky Bevin speech Winston referred to him as "Retiring behind a screen of inky fluid, like a cuttlefish, to some obscure hiding place." But the bond endured. Before Mr. Bevin's long illness Winston wagged a sympathetic head at him and said, "Some of us only bore the burden of office for five years—he has borne it for ten." In hospital, Bevin received flowers from him.

Winston sent flowers, too, to Herbert Morrison, when Herbert was laid up with thrombosis. And soon afterwards, Winston himself fell ill. They came back to the House on the same day, and there was a Front Bench comedy during questions. Winston came in first, received his cheer, and became modestly immersed in the Order Paper. Mr. Morrison came in a few minutes later, sat down on the Treasury Bench, and began to try to catch Mr. Churchill's eye. Winston, too, began to steal glances over



To the Fighter of the Age, the Commons' own memorial;
blackened, bomb-chipped
THE CHURCHILL ARCH

[By courtesy of Daily Graphic]

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the top of his Order Paper. They were rather like two schoolboys who wish to say "hello" without appearing to make the first move. Yet, try as they would, they could not make those stolen glances meet.

Mr. Morrison scowled, rumbled his quiff impatiently. Finally, he could stand it no longer and, in the middle of Questions, he dashed across the House, swept Winston's Order Paper aside, grasped his hand and said, "Glad to see you back." Winston was for once taken completely off his guard. He could only blush with pleasure and mutter thanks.

A little later, Mr. Morrison gave Winston an official welcome. Winston reciprocated the sentiments, and hoped with a smile that Mr. Morrison's labours would not be too much for him. "I speak, of course, in a purely physical and not a *POLITICAL* sense!"

Delightedly, Herbert replied that Winston had made a remarkable recovery. "All the signs are that we shall have trouble from him very soon." He did.

As Quentin Reynolds used to say of Britain, Mr. Churchill can "dish it out" in debate. But he can take it too, because he loves the battle. When Mr. Bevan, in the devaluation debate, launched that tremendous and sustained attack on him, finally demanding that he should withdraw from public life, Winston lay back on the Front Bench, his features composed and quite expressionless, his eyes shut. Only when the speech reached its highest peak did Winston open his eyes, survey Mr. Bevan impassively, and close them again.

Winston admires a fighter. This and his interest in the Parliamentary scene made him listen with some keenness to the first speech that Mr. Bevan made as Minister of Labour in the 1950 defence debate, before he quit office sensationally over the Gaitskell Budget. Only the day before, Winston had fiercely attacked the assembled Ministers; had, as part of his "no quarter" war, moved a vote of censure on them, declaring their incapacity to re-arm

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the country. Mr. Bevan was winding up. After his speech would come the division. On the surface, it seemed a "natural" for one of "Nye's" defence-through-attack speeches. And yet, Mr. B. had been studiously quiet since going to the Ministry of Labour. Sure enough, in his speech he was carefully quiet and unprovocative. He smiled at Winston, said, "If I wished, I have only to recall some of the things which you yourself said about the Conservative Party before the war". But having said that, he dropped the subject. He went on, still unusually at pains to avoid giving provocation, with Winston lying back on the Bench listening intently. For one moment Mr. Bevan wandered on to thin ice. Winston leaned forward, wagged a finger, "Now, don't spoil a good speech", he smiled. Bevan returned the smile, and sheered off the dangerous subject. To find Winston praising Bevan was something quite new. It was a recognition of the way Bevan had apparently dropped his private "hates" with his new office. For not very long after the war, Winston had skewered Bevan with a look as he thundered "... unless he improves, the most mischievous mouth in time of war will become the outstanding Ministerial failure in time of peace." It was an attack so unexpected, and so bitter, that Bevan was caught right off guard. He crimsoned uncontrollably to the scalp before he caught hold of himself, cried "Oh, very good!" and slapped his thigh. "We seasoned politicians are not disturbed by the things said about us by persons for whom we have no respect", snorted Winston when Bevan attacked him. Yet there has been in his attitude to Bevan over the years the same unwillingness to hold a grudge. Commenting on Bevan's housing policy in the debate on the vote of censure on the Government after the 1950 ("300,000 houses a year") Tory conference, Winston looked across at him and said—"I don't believe he is as bad as he makes himself out to be." He went on, "But I give him this advice—hate is a bad guide."

In a big speech Winston runs all the gamut of the

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emotions, unlike, say, Mr. Attlee, whose range on these occasions runs, as the New York critic said of the actress, "From A to B". His emotions are never very far from his sleeve. He is essentially a Romantic, as acute observers saw one day when Princess Elizabeth came specially to the House to hear him on foreign affairs. Winston began his speech, proceeded for a few sentences and then, unaccountably, his voice became so husky that he could hardly speak. His face crimsoned. He struggled on for a few moments, then recovered himself and proceeded without fault, and without the slightest sign of a cold or any other incapacity that could possibly have caused him difficulty in those few moments. To the observer the only possible explanation seemed to be that the thought had suddenly crossed his mind that there, in the Gallery above him, sat the future Queen of England—His future Queen.

He tackles a speech with the same full-blooded enthusiasm with which he undertakes everything. He has always regarded the House as an august body which should be complimented by careful preparation of his words. Immense care goes into the speech long before it is made (in his early days he re-wrote one speech six times by hand). If a Churchill speech flags at all, it is a sign that he is making too many of them. He knows it. Just after he had addressed the American Congress and both Houses of Parliament in Canada during the war, he got a wire from Mr. Attlee in London saying there had been a suggestion that Winston should make a speech in the Commons on his return. He wired back, "Could not possibly lay another egg so soon."

Unlike the bulk of Parliamentary speeches, his are dictated in advance, not written. So he preserves the spontaneity of his phrases by talking, either to a secretary, or into his dictaphone at Chartwell, or into a lapel microphone as he strolls around. He has a tremendous natural rhythm in words, but is not easily content. He will spend time in recasting a phrase until it takes on its most melo-

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dious form. His command of the language is incomparable—he has put that down to his enforced stay for several years in the same form at school! In those post-war days, Ministers tended to bring down to the House a couple of pounds of manuscript containing every word, every comma, every full stop of their speeches (though with Mr. Bevin the full stops were apt to be in short supply). They ploughed painfully through these vast agglomerations of typewritten sheets, breaking the rule that Members must not “read” their speeches (originally made long ago in case the notes fell into the wrong hands and were prematurely published!). Winston, by contrast, uses notes sparingly. He has them typewritten on ⁸/₁₆ eight-by-six inch sheets, in little “verses” of four lines each, arranged like a poem, which the eye can grasp at a single sweep. They contain his telling phrases, give him the cue for filling in. His 1940 speech on things to come—“steady continuous bombing—learn to get used to it—eels get used to skinning”, lasted 60 minutes. He used only nine pages of notes. So he is safe from the trap that lies in wait for the man with a fully written speech, the trap into which Mr. Bevin fell one night when he turned over two pages at once, found, naturally enough, that they did not “read on”, and had to stop and asked to be excused “while I sort this out”.

Planning his speech, Winston thinks of everything. He even, one suspects, looks ahead to see where he is likely to be interrupted. Then, if the interruptions come, he is, more often than not, ready for them with a telling reply. He certainly did this in his Budget speeches as Chancellor. Those speeches were so framed that his announcements of tax changes came in reply to interruptions. He would “talk round” the point until some Opposition M.P. shouted impatiently, “What about it?” and then—back would come the announcement with a bang. The Labour Party found the Churchillian Budget speeches going with such a swing that they analysed one, discovered the trick, and vowed that

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the following year, no matter what the provocation, they would keep absolutely mum. They did, and the speech fell as flat as a pancake. But Winston the Parliamentarian enjoyed the joke when they told him later.

Even today, Labour M.P.'s are warned not to interrupt him because they are sure to get the worst of it. In the early post-war days he was subjected to constant interruption from men who seem to think that an opponent could be shouted down in the House of Commons as he can be put down on a street corner or at a public meeting. Winston quietened that by standing unconcernedly at the Despatch Box until the breeze spent itself and then saying—"The crackling of thorns beneath the pot does not disturb me!" When they thought that one out, the interrupters found that Winston had discovered a perfectly Parliamentary method of calling them fools through the agency of a Biblical quotation.¹ Laughter has punctured many a Parliamentary speech—but Winston creates the laughter, using it to emphasize his point as, for instance, in a magnificent passage on the family in that housing debate.

"The family", said he, "requires a home—and the home requires a house—or, if you like, an accommodation unit. Something at any rate where a man has his own front door. Outside is the great bewildering tumultuous world; inside, the family can plan what is best for themselves, what it is best to aim for, what it is wisest to give up.

"And in so deciding, they create at once the foundation and the motive power without which all the super-planners are only chasing shadows."

This was striking home with a vengeance. Never before in the post-war Parliament had anyone so brought out the futility of the "Gentlemen in Whitehall", over-planning everything that the people should have, should want, should need.

"Where does the family start?" asked Winston rhetorically.

¹ "For as the crackling of the thorns under a pot so is the laughter of fools."—Ecclesiastes vii, 6.

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He answered his own question—"It starts with a young man falling in love with a girl!"

Eagerly his opponents seized the chance to laugh.

But he was in no whit disconcerted. It seemed that this was precisely what he had decided in advance that they would do, for he beamed at them and chortled—"Well—no suitable alternative has yet been found!" The passage was remembered for that joke.

He can be merciless to an interrupter if the mood takes him. He was interrupted one day by a Labour Member who is fond of interjecting without going through the formality of rising to his feet and asking the speaker to "give way". Winston swept him with a thunderous look and snorted, "The Honourable Gentleman is always interrupting—and this time he didn't even bother to HOP OFF HIS PERCH."

Or he can be gentle. When someone furiously shouted "No" to an argument he was advancing, Winston beamed at him and murmured—"The Honourable Gentleman who seeks to differentiate himself from me excites in my heart a great pleasure!" Gentle it was, but with a sting in the tail.

To an incoherent interrupter he chuckled—"The full force of that interruption has not dawned upon me—I trust I may be pardoned for not digressing to answer it."

There is nothing hurried about a Churchill speech. He takes it at his own pace. They say that during the first air-raid alarm of the war when the Commons, for the only time, adjourned to their air-raid shelter, Winston was discovered lecturing Anthony Eden on how to consult notes when making a speech. "If you want to look at them—stop and look. Take your time. Don't try to steal a glance while you go on talking", said Winston. Time and again you see him follow his own advice so typically given in such odd surroundings and on such an odd occasion.

He is utterly irrepressible. If his opponents shout at him while he is making a big political speech he shouts back at them in their own terms. Let them shout "Yah!"

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—and they get “Yah!” back. He makes faces at them. Once he even put out his tongue at them. If they ironically cheer one point in his speech he will follow with another, devastating to them and, with a glare, will say—“Cheer that!” Or he will stop dead after making points favourable to them and will say, with a cheerleader’s wave of the hand—“Cheer, please!”

He is the master of the unexpected. One day Mr. Morrison was being impatiently questioned by his own side as to the dates of the Summer Recess. Winston rose. “We are all very anxious for Labour Members to get away in time for the grouse shooting,” he said in a simple reversion of the pre-war Labour gibe that sent the House into a roar.

When the Minister of Fuel announced in 1950 that we were going to import coal for the second time since the war, there were many furious questions and things—unlike the hearths of the country that winter—were getting hot. There was an angry mutter among Labour M.P.’s when Winston rose. They expected some highly political point. But they were surprised. The previous weekend had happened to be the first on which miners had been asked to do a Saturday shift. Winston glanced across at the Minister of Fuel—“Will you please tell the miners how grateful we were for their work last Saturday morning?”—and sat down.

Yet he has probably made more men angry in the House than anyone since Lloyd George and the “People’s Budget”. He has always aroused full emotions among his opponents, and still does. After all, the Labour Party treated him to a storm of booing that was without precedent in its length and its fury when he brought steel nationalisation into a foreign affairs debate. He is certainly the only man at whom anybody ever threw a book in the House of Commons. It was a long time ago, and it was a small, though heavy and sharp-cornered book. It was, incidentally, a Tory who threw it, for Winston was a Liberal then. It was lobbed

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across the House, underhand, and hit Winston in the small of the back. He has the power to arouse his opponents, almost at will, into a hysteria of anger.

He is the supreme Parliamentary artist. In Opposition his eye would range along the Treasury Bench searching out the latest Ministerial offender for castigation ("and less governessing!" he once almost hissed at Sir Stafford Cripps, then urging and harassing industry from the Board of Trade).

Yet he will stop dead in a big speech and crack a joke for the love of the thing and, with the effect heightened by the joke, proceed. His speech on the crisis at the opening of the November 1951 Parliament, immediately after his return to office, was in its way as grim as anything in 1940. Yet he found time for a solitary quip to lighten the tension for a moment. He was commenting on the much-discussed fact that the Home Secretary, a Scot (Sir David Maxwell Fyfe), had been given charge of Welsh affairs. But, said Winston, he had now appointed Mr. David Llewellyn, a Welshman, as an Under-Secretary to the Home Office to be specially charged with Welsh affairs. "His name is, I believe, quite well known throughout the Principality".

"Pronounce it!" challenged a Welsh M.P.

Winston turned to him with the broadest of smiles, and pronounced the famous Welsh name with as good a pronunciation as can ever be expected of an Englishman.

But he did not stop there. For good measure, he added, amid cheers, in good Welsh, "Môr o gân yw Cymru i gyd" ("All Wales is a land of song").

He had heard the phrase thirty years before at an Eisteddfod with David Lloyd George. Years after he had asked what it meant, but he had never had occasion to use it—until now.

From his vast experience he can lecture political "new boys". Once he looked across at the eager Parliamentary revolutionaries of the post-war Parliament and remarked, "I am glad to look back to the days when I used to address

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the fathers and grandfathers of Honourable Gentlemen opposite." Then, blisteringly, and with an astoundingly vivid turn of phrase, he added that those he was now addressing had "fallen away from the Liberal and Radical theme—and LOLLOPED INTO THE SLATTERNLY TROUGH OF COLLECTIVISM."

He joins in a joke against him with a grin and a phrase. He was bewailing Government extravagance, urging the need for economy when a Labour man shouted "Sell your horse!" Winston chuckled. "I could sell him today for considerably more than I gave for him", he said with memories of the wins of Colonist II. He added with becoming gravity, "But I am trying to rise above the profit motive!"

Parliament has for many years now tacitly concluded that a Chancellor needs some kind of refreshment in the Budget Speech. Gladstone drank eggnog, mixed by Mrs. Gladstone. Dizzy took white port in big speeches. But none of them took his refreshment with the brazen Churchillian enjoyment. Halfway through the speech he would stop, pick up a glass of what was always described as "amber-coloured fluid", raise it almost with the air of a toastmaster, and declare, "I shall now FORTIFY THE REVENUE"—and quaff the lot, to the invariable accompaniment of a round of cheers.

In contrast there is the story of the Chancellor of the Exchequer who many years ago was faced with a long and wearying Budget speech. Just before the debate was due to begin, his Parliamentary Private Secretary thought that the Chancellor would probably get rather jaded and would welcome a "stiffener" during his speech. So he procured a glass of port—and hid it among the books on the Clerk's Table, where the Chancellor could see it, but where it would be hidden from the rest of the House.

Unfortunately, in the flurry of Budget Day, he forgot to tell the Chancellor.

The Chancellor began his speech and, halfway through,

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as the P.P.S. had foreseen, he began to think that a little stimulant would be very welcome.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the glass of port hidden among the big volumes. That was where he made his mistake. Instead of stopping dead to pick up the glass, and drink, as Winston would have done, he went on talking while he groped with his hand. What happened next was quite inevitable; he upset the glass. And not only did he have to go on unrefreshed, but the rest of the Budget Speech was made with the Financial Secretary to the Treasury madly mopping up port all round him.

Winston can be an imp. My old friend Guy Eden, in his *Portrait of Churchill*¹ tells the story of one day during the war when he got tired of being heckled at question-time by a tiny band of critics. He entered the House just in time for his questions and wore a furious scowl. He sat down on the Treasury Bench, folded his arms—and continued to scowl. His questions he answered with a grim “Yes, sir”, or “No, Sir”. So flabbergasted were the critics, so fearful were they that something had gone terribly wrong, that they did not ask a single supplementary question. Winston maintained his scowl for a minute or two longer, then left the Chamber. Outside, his face relaxed. He thrust his hands into his pockets. Then he roared with laughter and said, “That shook ’em!”

And one day after we got into the New Chamber Mr. Dalton, busy attacking the Tories, banged his fist hard on one corner of the new Despatch Box. Now this Box is heavily brass-bound at the corners, and Mr. Dalton flinched and began to hang his hand. Winston howled with laughter, proffered his handkerchief for binding up the injured fin, and spent some minutes patting the Box pointedly to show how reinforced the corners were, and how it was safer to hit it in the middle where there was more “bounce”. All this time, Mr. Dalton was going on with his speech, and watching these antics at the same time,

¹ *Portrait of Churchill*, by Guy Eden.

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nodding his head and every now and then interjecting "Yes, yes", in his deep voice.

But all that fun didn't stop Churchill, five minutes later, forcing even the combative Dalton to give way by sheer overwhelming personality, to a furious interruption.

Winston looks like Mr. Pickwick as he lies back on the Front Bench with his feet on the edge of the Clerk's Table, and his spectacles pushed down to the tip of his nose benignly regarding the particular young man who "has" the House at the moment.

Then Winston will take off his spectacles; and look just like a baby. When someone remarked to Winston that his new grandchild "looks just like you!" he replied swiftly, "That wouldn't be difficult—*all* babies look like me!"

And so they do, for nearly all babies seem to have tip-tilted noses, two innocent blue eyes, and a thin layer of sandy hair which, in Winston, is sometimes as pleasantly unkempt as that of a baby whose mother has not yet brought herself to shear those darling locks for the first time.

He likes to wear a black jacket and "spongebag" trousers in the House, alternating with a morning coat or a frock coat for State occasions, concerning which he is always very correct. One afternoon before the war he appeared in a spanking new light grey suit, and a pair of new shoes with zip-fasteners instead of laces. He was quite disconcerted at the round of cheers which greeted his spring-like appearance. But in the evening, when he made a big speech, he was back in his rather rumpled black jacket and a pair of old shoes in which he was able to "paw the ground" comfortably in an unconscious mannerism.

On the Front Bench he will be either lying back in comfort, or sitting upright with head bowed in thought, eyes fixed on his fingers, as he holds them, tips together, between his knees. He tends to punctuate somebody else's speech with comments in a rumbling undertone which, though he does not know it, is fully audible and is often highly disconcerting. Sir Stafford Cripps, when ailing, grew

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so annoyed that he suddenly snapped at Mr. Churchill either please to stop talking, or, if he wanted to talk, to leave the Chamber. Winston, shaken by the sudden attack, sat back in silence. Ernest Bevin, who had a tremendous regard for him, adopted another technique one day when Winston had read through the copy of Mr. Bevin's speech which had been supplied to him as a courtesy, had run his eye over his own notes and then—still finding Mr. Bevin in full flight—began to talk to Eden who was beside him. Very soon, Mr. Bevin began to cast pained glances across the table at the talkative Winston. Suddenly, Ernest found a passage of considerable emphasis in his speech—it was about some international meeting. He brought it out at the top of his voice—"I said NO to that!" and glared at Winston; who was brought upright by the sudden bellow, took the point, and sank back again, conversation with Eden at an end. Bevin went on with his speech with an air of great satisfaction as though to say, "I've shouted him down at last."

Winston's deafness has grown a little with the years. He would occasionally punctuate a Ministerial speech in the Labour Parliaments with a growl of "What d'he say?" and a hand cupped to his ear. But Parliamentarians suspect that, like the Old Lady of Dingley Dell on the subject of whist, Winston hears very well when he wants to hear. Certainly his deafness was most apparent in one of those relatively dull Ministerial speeches which were unfortunately unrationed in Parliament after the war.

Mr. Attlee gave him some trouble through his bad habit of swallowing and slurring his words. More than once, Mr. Attlee stopped dead in a speech to repeat a sentence slowly for Winston's benefit. Winston was always punctilious with his "Thank you very much" as he sank back again on the bench.

As well as being a master of the prepared phrase, he is a master of the art of framing an extempore sentence, which he found, in Opposition, a very useful accomplishment at

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that moment in the day at the end of questions when Ministers make statements. This is the time when Winston himself announced the German surrender; when the Fuel Minister announced the import of coal for the first time. The rule is that subsequent discussion must be by way of question and answer. Speeches are ruled out. Mr. Churchill is the only living person who can frame a sentence of two hundred words! He would rise and begin, "May I ask the Minister . . ." and then would follow a brilliantly phrased, though quite unpremeditated, "question" which somehow embodied Winston's personal views on the step which had been announced, his party's views, his views on the Minister announcing it, on the wretched nature of the Government itself—and anything else which he saw fit to include.

His opponents invariably grew restive as the question grew longer and longer—but Winston would beam at them and say, "I couch all this, of course, in the INTERROGATORY vein!" and go merrily on his way.

Once without thinking, he began a comment on a Government statement with the words—"I am very pleased. . . ."

Then he remembered the rules. With a chuckle, he stopped and began again amid a gale of laughter, "Am I not very pleased . . . ?"

He could be a stern test for the enthusiastic young Ministers of the Labour Parliaments. After all, the two Front Benches are only about ten feet apart, and to come under the lash of the Churchillian tongue at that radius must be quite an ordeal. Particularly for the Minister whose enthusiasm had just run away with him, like Mr. Gaitskell, when he was Minister of Fuel. In those days, sitting on the receiving end of a stream of delectably wrapped parcels of unburnable stone and slate, he was once sufficiently indiscreet as to suggest that people took too many baths. "I never had a great many baths myself", he said, and added, it didn't show, anyway.

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Winston let this ride for a day or two, but in opening a big debate on economic affairs, he suddenly transfixed the uneasy Fuel Minister with a twinkling eye.

"If His Majesty's Ministers say this sort of thing", he said, "they cannot wonder if they get into **BAD ODOUR!**" He paused for a moment while the House roared and the Minister probably wished the earth would open and precipitate him safely into the basement.

"I almost thought of asking you, Mr. Speaker", went on Winston, "whether on this occasion you would admit the word 'lousy' as a Parliamentary expression. Not as a term of opprobrium, of course, but as a matter of **FACTUAL NARRATION.**"

It was two years before Mr. Gaitskell heard the end of that speech—"my solitary brick!" as he describes it today. Mr. Churchill had used the politician's most deadly weapon, ridicule, but Mr. G. took it in good part.

Lady Astor found Winston cold towards her when she became the first woman M.P. Years afterwards he explained that when she entered he felt that she had intruded on his privacy "as if you had caught me in my bath, without even the protection of a sponge."

But it isn't long since he made Dr. Edith Summerskill blush with the remark that "Her authoritarian demeanour would inspire awe, if her agreeable personality did not somewhat discount it." (That was in the days when Dr. Edith was laying down the dietetic law of the nation as deputy Minister of Food.)

Probably because some Minister made a habit of putting his despatch case on the table in front of him in a speech, Parliamentary tradition dictates that there should now be a Despatch Box on each side of the table; one for the Government and one for the Opposition. Like all Front Benchers, Winston finds the Box a tremendous advantage. In the first volume of his war memoirs he mentioned the help it gives to a Front Bencher, and remarked that when he was out of office between the wars, a minor difficulty in

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making those tremendous "Wake up, England" speeches was finding something to do with his notes. "As a Front Bencher", he says, "you can put your notes on the Box, and pretend with more or less success to be making it up as you go along!"

You can almost feel the tension when Winston rises, drops his notes on the Box, looks round the House, and begins—"Sir . . . UM!" He talks with a wonderfully sustained rhythm, the result of the "stanza" form of his notes. As he talks, he likes to tidy his little bundle of typescript with his beautifully kept hands. He caresses the Box. Occasionally he smacks it, though with nothing like the vicious emphasis that imprinted the marks of Gladstone's signet ring on the Box which was destroyed in the 1941 bombing. Sometimes he will dash his hand along the Box in a sweeping gesture that was easier to make on the one that had been polished by the fingers of a century of Front Benchers. Quite typical of his ability to make a joke without detracting from the effect of a speech, and of his complete mastery of the House, was his experience when he essayed his first sweeping gesture along the Box in the new Chamber. He found his hand was impeded by those same ornamental encrustations that injured Mr. Dalton, glanced down in surprise, then looked round the House with a grin and said, "This one doesn't SWEEP as well as the old one!" And then proceeded with his attack on the Government. Only he could do that.

Aiming a verbal broadside, he will step back with hunched shoulders, like a boxer measuring an opponent for a knockout—such as his growling remark in 1946, with a glowering look at the Treasury Bench—"If the British people get what they like, they must learn to like what they get."

After the General Strike, he gave the House the greatest demonstration of all time of turning an ugly situation with a laugh. It was in the debate that followed the Strike, during which Winston had been the Editor of the Official

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Government newspaper, the *British Gazette*, which not even his genius could prevent being the dullerest thing ever to afflict the nation. In the debate, Winston became the special target of the Labour Party. Tempers were running high, and Winston wound up the debate in a crescendo of fury.

Finally, he matched his opponents glare for glare. He growled "...and if you ever inflict on us..." and the Labour men growled back—"another General Strike, I swear that we will inflict on you..." (he paused and scowled, while the mutterings from the packed benches facing him sounded like a thunderstorm in the hills). He leaned forward over the Box, gripping it with both hands, and with every appearance of ferocity he threw across the House the words—

"I swear that we will inflict on you—ANOTHER *BRITISH GAZETTE*."

There was a moment of utterly incredulous silence. A feather would have made a clatter drifting to the floor. Then the scowl cleared from Winston's face to be followed by that irrepressible schoolboy grin of his, and the whole House, Government, Opposition, clerks, reporters, public and all, collapsed into helpless laughter.

He loves a joke. He was speaking of those grand old days before 1914 when he glanced round the House and remarked, "In those days, public men largely took the place of footballers—they had their attendant troops of fans and backers, who knew their form to a turn." In another speech he drew the difference between this country and some others. "We have", he said, "an educated democracy in this country, though", with a wave of his hand towards the chuckling Labour Government benches, "you wouldn't think it to look at some of their TEMPORARY ABERRATIONS."

The Churchillian art entered even into the routine duty of the Leader of the Opposition asking the Leader of the House to state Parliament's business for the following week.

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He would put the question with a tremendous air of diffidence, as though he almost feared to trespass on the good nature of the Minister concerned. Or he would DEMAND the statement, as though the Minister had been holding out on the House long enough and it was time he "came clean". He would ask for it in tones that suggested that he would be tremendously surprised if he got any kind of an answer at all. And if, as was not unusual in the 1949-50 Parliament, Mr. Morrison had been having trouble with some of his back-benchers, Winston would adopt the air of an ultra-nervous man intervening in a dog-fight.

It was the same when a Minister quietly passed the word that if he were asked such-and-such a question, he would have an interesting statement to make. Mr. Shinwell did this after a European conference, and the routine preamble, "Has the Minister of Defence any statement to make about", was handed to Winston by his whips. He scorned the routine. Instead, he rose and said with a broad smile that he understood the Minister of Defence wished to make a statement, "and therefore I ask him, will he make one?" Mr. Shinwell's reply contained just about every cliché known to international officials which, in these days, is, as they say, "going some." Winston detests this kind of verbiage and when the flow of "under consideration" and other Civil Service rigmarole had ceased, he said, "We are not much wiser—we will study what he has said and endeavour to see what meaning—if any—there is." Mr. Shinwell was not amused.

Mr. Shinwell subsequently made some remarks on the Atom Bomb. Winston described them as "a model of non-informative eloquence".

When Sir Stafford Cripps took Whitechallese to his heart and began talking about "quantify", and "multilateralisation", "dis-saving" and other monstrosities, Winston parodied him with "non-un-disinflation."

He hates this Civil Service jargon, which is so unhappily common now to every Government in every country. When

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the Ministry of Health began to talk about "accommodation units" instead of houses, because it was a convenient term to cover everything, including huts seized by squatters, Winston got up at a mass meeting at Cardiff and sang:

"Accommodation unit, sweet accommodation unit.

There's no place like accommodation unit."

Sir Stafford Cripps taxed "commercial vehicles". Winston, from his seat, growled, "lorries!"

He has very definite views on language. "Broadly speaking," he says, "the short words are best—and the old words, when short, are best of all." It is the old words that lend such vividness to his speeches.

But all the same, he introduced to the House the phrase "TERMINOLOGICAL INEXACTITUDE" for the word "untruth."

Winston could, if he had wished, have been one of the greatest actors ever to walk the stage. When he tried to get from the Labour Government what in peacetime we call a "private" debate, but which in war would be a Secret Session, he had to "spy strangers". This is the ancient form for clearing the House of all but Members. It is followed by a motion that "strangers do withdraw"—the Commons have never legally recognised the right of entry of either the Press or the public into the Chamber.

Winston rose without a word. He gave a long, searching look up at the crowded Gallery of Distinguished Strangers facing him—and nodded to himself. A twinkle came into his eye. Then he turned and looked at us, the reporters ("the gods in the Gallery", he subsequently called us) and the twinkle became a grin. He turned and scrutinised the crowded Peers' Gallery behind him, and then he nodded. He was satisfied. There WERE strangers present.

With the air of a man who has known for years that something was going on, and has tracked it down at last, he turned to the Speaker and said, "Mr. Speaker, I SPY STRANGERS."

Lesser men, doing the same thing, have been content

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to utter the formula in the tones of a man buying a bus ticket. But not Winston.

He has always described himself as a child of the House of Commons. His greatest speeches are made down there on the floor of the House, in the cockpit of politics, doing the thing and breathing the air he loves.

He is, indeed, the Fabulous Parliamentarian.

CHAPTER 2

Mr. Clement Attlee and Some Others

AS you sit in the Strangers' Gallery of the New Chamber (all who are not Members are, to Parliament, "Strangers"), you may have the illusion of a theatre. The gallery is steeply ramped to make it hold 300, and if it held twice that number there would still be perpetual queues outside. You may feel the theatrical illusion so strongly that you instinctively begin to clap when Mr. Churchill enters, or when he scores decisively in a speech. This is highly indecorous, of course, but it has been quite a feature of our new Chamber. The attendants, scandalized, are always quick to "hush" it. Sometimes it goes further than this. Mr. Morrison was speaking during a furious row one night in the first post-war Parliament, and there suddenly came a shout from the Public Gallery; an interruption which Mr. Morrison answered under the impression it had come from the Opposition. And in a debate on Malaya Mr. Eden was saying "We must keep up the morale of the home front in Malaya", when a reporter in the gallery above snapped quickly at his neighbour "Home front where?" His voice reached the floor of the House, and Mr. Eden glanced up. "In Malaya", he replied, and went on with his speech. But you would not have been tempted into applause in the Strangers' Gallery in the Lords. That was set far back and vision was limited. (The Lords spent six months in renovation of their Chamber as soon as the Commons left. It wasn't a reflection on the Commons! The old place hadn't been "cleaned"—in the technical, and not the housewife's sense—for 40 years.)

In that Chamber you could see little. In the new Chamber, the political world is spread at your feet. There



CLEMENT ATTLEE
“Never a wasted word”



WINSTON CHURCHILL
“Still the Churchillian motto,
‘find a way’”

[By courtesy of Yorkshire Observer]



HERBERT MORRISON
“I was a Londoner”

[By courtesy of Daily Graphic]

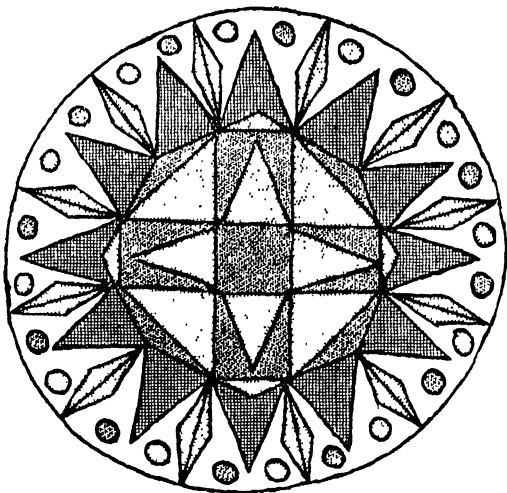


ANTHONY EDEN
“26 years of foreign affairs”

CLEMENT ATTLEE

is the Speaker, in his wonderfully carved Chair of Australian Black Bean, which was the gift of Australia. Now look at the front benches on each side of him, and the names in your newspapers will spring to life. Opposite one of the Despatch Boxes what do you see? A pair of small feet on the edge of the beautiful table? And the top of a bald head halfway down the back of the bench? Yes—that's Mr. Attlee. If he is doodling on an Order Paper, not idly, but with apparent concentration, it is without doubt Mr. Attlee. He likes to snuggle down on the bench. He gets his shoulders down on to the seat, and virtually disappears. Mr. Churchill, wishing to make a personal reference to him, after the war, had to lean halfway across the table to find him—beside Mr. Morrison, and almost beneath Mr. Bevin's very substantial figure.

Mr. Attlee is Parliament's champion doodler. He can keep it up for hours if necessary. His designs are executed



"Mr. Attlee is Parliament's champion doodler"—here is one of his designs which he constructed, in three colours, during a Cabinet meeting.

[By courtesy of Mr. Attlee]

with the greatest of care. He is a slight figure, but vigorous when the occasion demands. He has the gift of conserving his energies. As Prime Minister he appointed Ministers,

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then left them to do their jobs—until things went wrong. Then he took the crisis into his office and dealt with it; as he did with the Fuel Crisis in 1947; as he did three years later when he called the miners' leaders to Downing Street to tell them about the situation created by the falling coal output.

In a speech Mr. Attlee looks like a benevolent headmaster. Always in the background is the rasping tartness of the headmaster's "See me in my study!" And there are some politicians who remember that rasping note, too.

While Mr. Churchill's use of humour is to give light relief or to make a point, Mr. Attlee's use of it is infinitesimal. When someone asked him whether the "Middle" East ought not really to be called the "Near" East, he cast a mild glance over the top of his spectacles at the Member concerned and replied "It all depends where you start from." When Tory-Liberal coalitions in the constituencies produced some Labour defeats and queer political labels at the 1950 Election, he grouped them all under the sardonic heading of "The Liquorice Allsorts". In his first speech as Leader of the Opposition again in 1951, he commented that the legislation announced by Mr. Churchill in the King's Speech did not hold much for the Scottish nationalists. "They asked for bread—they didn't even get the Stone", he said.

In speech, Mr. Attlee has the dry enunciation of the family lawyer; he was trained for the law. With the years he has shown increasing appreciation of the virtues of brevity, and has set an admirable example. He has never wasted words. A big speech on a great dock strike took only twenty minutes. So did the speech in which he announced, when Prime Minister, that he was flying to see President Truman. It was the same in his office. He sacked a Minister with a phrase; was always quick to curb any who speechified at Cabinet meetings.

Where Mr. Churchill dictates his speeches, Mr. Attlee types his own, on an aged portable typewriter in his study.

Anthony Eden

Second in stature only to Mr. Churchill himself on the Conservative benches is Mr. Eden—"my trusted Deputy", Winston has called him. In those far-off days when he was Minister for League of Nations Affairs under Mr. Baldwin they called him "The Knight in shining armour". His speeches sparkled with his devotion to the League, his sincerity shone in every phrase. Although today he is older, greyer as to hair and moustache, the sincerity still shines through. He is without contender as the next Conservative Prime Minister after Mr. Churchill. The more troubled the times, the more is Mr. Eden in demand for his advice, and not only by Conservatives. Labour back-benchers have consulted him; respect his opinion. Until 1945 he had been thought of as Foreign Secretary. In Opposition he found broader fields. He did not speak for a year after the Tories lost office. In that time he studied all the questions likely to beset a troubled Britain in a troubled world. Then the House and the country heard well-informed speeches from him on nearly every aspect of the country's affairs. Deliberately, in these years, he has set himself out to tackle one subject after another, even down to finance.

He became Foreign Secretary, and Deputy Prime Minister, when Mr. Churchill formed his Government in 1951. Eden is probably the most practised diplomatic mind in the world today. He looks so perpetually youthful that it is difficult to believe that his experience in this field goes back twenty-six years, twenty of them until 1945, in almost continuous contact. For the whole of that time he has been intimately connected with the life and thought of the Foreign Office. He knew the League of Nations inside out, helped to form the United Nations, and headed the British Delegation to San Francisco when it was formed. The years may have made him look older, but Mr. Eden has

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a perennially youthful look about him. The knight in the shining armour is always peeping through the visor. He is an accomplished speaker, popular with all parties. But he can hit hard when the occasion warrants it. Perhaps the greatest compliment to him came from a Labour Member who said privately, "He is the greatest menace the Labour Party has. The country would rally behind him tomorrow."

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Lord Salisbury

In the Lords since the war there has been one supreme figure, that of Lord Salisbury. Like Mr. Eden, he combines perpetual youth with the wisdom of middle years. When he rose in the 1945-51 Parliaments as Leader of the Opposition Peers to speak on a controversial subject, the Government spokesmen knew that there must be an end to hawking. He would say very quietly, "We must know where we stand", and, in a trice, the atmosphere grew tense.

The Commons knew him as Lord Cranborne, young, enthusiastic colleague of Mr. Eden's at the Foreign Office. Older Commons men still remember the impact of that twin Eden-Cranborne resignation after Munich; remember the contempt in Cranborne's voice in his resignation speech, "Here is peace, but where is honour?" He has still the same pleasant delivery, the same occasionally racy turn of speech. Government and Opposition conducted talks on Lords Reform during the passage of the Parliament Bill. Inevitably the talks broke down (it was subsequently hinted by Labour back-benchers that there would have been trouble if they hadn't broken down), and the Lords *v.* Commons crisis was on again. In the Lords, the Government wished to cram the debate on the Parliament Bill's vital stage into one day, which would have meant sitting very late. Tory Peers were going to throw the Bill out, and Lord Salisbury protested against the timing of the division at,

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possibly, 11 o'clock at night. "A division in your Lordships' House at that time of night would be a most unseemly affair!" smiled Salisbury, and had his way. The debate was continued for another day. (If the Lords sit after dinner (7 p.m.) every subsequent speaker begins by saying he will not keep the House long "at this time of night".)

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Ernest Bevin

When Ernest Bevin rose to make an impromptu speech on foreign affairs he resembled nothing so much as Stephen Leacock's horseman who "galloped off in all directions." Syntax mattered not. Sentences began and never ended. One parenthesis followed atop the heels of another. Bevin never knew the debt he owed to Parliamentary reporters. They, in turn, owed to him many a grey hair. Over the years of his Foreign Secretaryship they learned to straighten out those vast meandering periods; to distinguish the main point from the tangent which so quickly succeeded it. One Bevin sentence in an extempore speech on the future of the Tyrol began on the shores of the Baltic, meandered down the Danube, paused parenthetically to take in hydro-electric developments in the Alps, and finally emerged, as breathless and exhausted as were all his hearers, on the shores of the Mediterranean. (But the subsequent settlement was made on just the lines which Bevin advocated in that 200-word sentence.) He was not as incoherent as he sounded; one always knew where he was going. Whether the public would have known from a verbatim report of his speeches was quite another thing.

He became Foreign Secretary by accident. For a few minutes, in 1945, he was the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Reporters who heard those extempore foreign affairs speeches still break into a cold sweat when they imagine Bevinesque sentences still further complicating the modern

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financial and economic jargon! But Mr. Attlee changed his mind, switched Bevin to the Foreign Office. Bevin himself was a mildly disappointed man. He had some very definite ideas about finance. He had always had something of the Churchill about him, an inquiring and restless mind, a capacity for absorbing facts. And his trade union experience had brought him into touch with all the problems of money.

As Foreign Secretary he had no tricks in the House. He was never a Parliamentarian in the true sense of the word. He just stood four-square to the Despatch Box, and talked in his thin, harsh voice. His policy was his love of the ordinary people. He talked about them always. Sometimes he would end a speech with real tears in his voice when, at moments of the greatest strain with the Russians, he would declare that the people of the world—and of Russia too—only wanted Peace. For he knew those people. He had spent all his life among them. In his trade union days he would talk of “my people”, as he did during the war when troops called him “Ernie”. “My people always call me that”, he would say.

He was a stubborn Foreign Secretary in some things. He was not immune from the temporary insanity that at some time or another overtakes all politicians. He staked his political reputation, in those very words, on finding a solution to the Palestine problem. He ended up with the ill-will of both sides. (Why politicians say these things is a mystery that will never be solved.)

Yet if it had not been for Bevin, Marshall Aid might never have become an accomplished fact. It was Bevin who seized with both hands the hint that General Marshall threw out in a speech. It was Bevin who harried the European capitals into listing speedily their needs for submission to Marshall.

For years he was caricatured with a back full of daggers, born of his furious “stab in the back” remark over a Labour back-bench revolt while he was negotiating in America. His anger showed him still to have the outlook of a trade

ERNEST BEVIN

union leader who, having been entrusted by the men with negotiations, expected no disturbing action from them while the talks were going on. A politician would have taken the revolt in his stride.

Back-bench critics would often ask Bevin to "keep an open mind" on whatever subject they happened currently to be pressing. He would snap back, "A friend of mine once told me that an open mind is like an open sewer." The same "friend" once remarked of Gentlemen's Agreements, "Show me the Gentleman!"

He could, when he chose, be a rather bulky Puck, particularly where Mr. Churchill was concerned. For Winston he had a tremendous affection, especially after the past anger over 'tween-wars politics had died. His affection would often betray him into the shockingly un-Parliamentary expression of ". . . you . . . my old friend." But the two of them fought many a hard battle over the Council of Europe, and Bevin knew he could always tease Winston into vocal protest on that subject. He would do so and then, when Winston began to wriggle with impatience, Ernie would look across at him, shake all over with silent laughter and say, "Yes, I know you're angry. . . ."

In a lifetime of negotiations, Bevin had never been renowned for his patience. But when the post-war Golden Age was turned by Stalin and Molotov into the Age of Frustration, Bevin showed magnificent tolerance. He sat for six solid, weary weeks in Moscow while the Russians railed at him with their propaganda speeches. Reporting to the House on the conference, he apologised for boring his hearers, added, with a world of weariness in his voice, "I know what it's like—I had six weeks of it." About this time he met an old friend who said, "You must have been re-born. The old Bevin would never have shown such forbearance."

Once he described his feelings under years of Russian invective "like the schoolboy who was asked by his master what he would do if he was hit. The boy replied, Turn the

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other cheek. Then he was asked what if this cheek, too, were hit? The boy said, "Heaven help 'em!"

"How often have I felt like that boy," said Bevin.

He had occasionally a mordant sense of humour when foreign affairs were not too pressing. Goering committed suicide in a Parliamentary recess, and it was three weeks before M.P.'s could ask the inevitable questions as to how and why it happened. Bevin shrugged them off, "It's rather a COLD subject now."

He was a medical puzzle for years. At the Moscow conference it was said that one day he could hardly mount the stairs to the conference hall; three days later he was running up them. Towards the end of his time as Foreign Secretary he would sometimes sit on the Treasury Bench open-mouthed, gasping for air in a fight with asthma, while his colleagues around him pretended that nothing untoward was happening. Then the attack would pass, he would close his eyes for a minute as his strength flowed back, and would be his own man again.

Then he had pneumonia, recovered, and returned to the House. But he had a strange look of serenity about him. A day or two later the reason was known. The old war horse had gone to grass. He had left the Foreign Office for the quieter waters of the Lord Privy Seal. Not long after, he died, and was mourned by everyone.

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" Rab " Butler

When the Tories were returned in October, 1951, tall, balding Richard Austen Butler stood up at the Despatch Box and gave the country the horrible news. We were out of balance everywhere; every currency was "hard" now. Well, the news might be bad, but there was a first-class brain at the Treasury. Of that, the Treasury was aware in the first hours of "Rab" (as the whole of Parliament calls him)

“RAB” BUTLER

taking office. They presented him with appalling problems, but found him quick in comprehension and fully equal to the occasion. He worked in the tradition of modern Chancellors, two days' work in one, at it all hours of the day and some of the night, too. He is a naturally tremendous worker, and this was just as well, for the Treasury is the hub of Britain today.

“Rab” reads voraciously, early and late, even in his bath. At Cambridge—where he took a double first in modern languages when President of the Union in 1924, they used to say his brainpower was “unfair to others.”

He is one of the fathers of modern Toryism; the Industrial and Agricultural Charters of the Party were born out of his thought, research and initiative. He is not a glamorous Parliamentarian. Rather has he something of the preciseness of a Bonar Law. His speeches because of an innate kindliness, often lack the “touch of the devil” which Sandy Herd besought his woman pupil to put into her golf swing, and which, equally, “makes” a big speech. “Rab” prefers common sense to rhetoric, but the fire is there, and it comes out when his deep convictions are aroused. Anyway, nobody looks for rhetoric in a Chancellor of the Exchequer, but only for concessions. In his Budget speech he found the ease that comes with power.

For a man of only 49, Mr. Butler's record is impressive. He was in Government continually, 1932–1945. First at the India Office, where at one time he piloted the great India Bill on his own through the Commons when his chief, Sir Samuel Hoare, was ill; at the Ministry of Labour; at the Foreign Office where, as Under-Secretary, he carried the responsibility of the Department in the Commons, for Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, was in the Upper House. As Minister of Education “Rab” put through the Butler Act, which reorganised the entire educational system of the country.

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Herbert Morrison

Now look next to Mr. Attlee. Do you see a grey quiff with a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles beneath it? Yes—that is Mr. Herbert Morrison. Some people, in the five years when he was Leader of the House, used to think that quiff was an index to the State of the Party. Certainly in the post-war Parliament it showed how things were going inside the Labour ranks. When the steam-rolling majority was trundling smoothly over all opposition, then the quiff was glossily smooth. It curled with a contented air. But when the back-benchers began to get difficult, when they played ducks and drakes with the death penalty, reduced the conscription period, and insisted on introducing Private Members' Bills in the last few months of that Parliament which would have lost the Party every vote in the agricultural districts, then that quiff lay flattened and disconsolate.

Normally the quiff is as perky as its owner. And its owner is the most typical Cockney sparrow that ever was born within sound of Bow Bells. Talk of London, and in Herbert Morrison you strike a chord like the strings of a harp. He was the father of the proud post-blitz phrase "I was a Londoner." Even when he was abolishing the City of London's M.P.'s, he could say with tremendous feeling, "I love this City of London". And he does. To him stand two monuments in London—the Waterloo Bridge, one of the loveliest in Europe, and the South Bank, where he combined some much-needed cleaning up with the Festival of Britain.

Whenever anybody asked him, as Leader of the House, about something that has happened in the House of Lords, his favourite reply used to be, "That House is nothing to do with me; I have my hands full with this one." At times, he could not have been more right. In those early post-war years he was faced with a jam-packed programme which

HERBERT MORRISON

had to be fitted into Parliamentary time. He did it. He persuaded the House to do an enormous amount of work; set up Standing Committees to deal with the committee stages of Bills; and in the early days, would stroll round them in the mornings to see that everything was working smoothly, listening meekly in the "public" seats. Like Sir Stafford Cripps, he did it at the expense of his health, and had a long and anxious spell in hospital with thrombosis. Then he took a short holiday, and came back to the House in such robust health that he put his overworked colleagues to shame.

He is a lover of Parliament, and is willing to join wholeheartedly in any row that happens to be going. He has all the energy of the Cockney, but is inclined to bring flippancy too much into debates on serious subjects. His pet adjectives are "tidy" and "naughty".

For the first two days of Parliament's meeting after the deadlock election of February, 1950, Mr. Morrison was a glum fellow. His normally sunny Parliamentary nature seemed clouded. He was peeved, stony-faced; refused to unbend. He had been wont to cry in the old days "What an Opposition! Why don't they oppose?" Now, it seemed, he had an Opposition in numbers as well as in spirit, and he didn't like it. But he isn't the man to stay glum for very long. At the end of the second day he melted, under the influence of his own oratory! He had held forth for 40 minutes, engaged in his favourite occupation of "knocking about", though he treated the Liberals as though they were Dresden china, treatment which subsequently bore fruit in the inevitable Liberal split. Suddenly, it seemed, he realised that he was having fun. He began to smile. Then he cracked a good joke, and laughed. Herbert was himself again. But 1951 found him glum again, for another forty-eight hours before he began to enjoy the rest from office.

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Aneurin Bevan

The air in the new Chamber is warmed or cooled beforehand, depending on the weather. Another condition to which the technicians may one day find they have to give attention is whether Mr. Aneurin Bevan is making a speech. He is a verbal fire-raiser, can send the temperature rocketing in a few seconds and sentences. A debater *par excellence*, he has a vocabulary matched only by that of Mr. Churchill. And his phrases are only enhanced by a slight stutter (he is a left-hander who forced himself to write with his right hand). Those phrases are rolled lusciously around his mouth for all the world as though he hated the thought of letting them go. He professes to many detestations, coins expressions that lose votes, such as "Tories are lower than vermin", which was reckoned to have cost his Party untold votes at the 1950 Election.

He was always the darling of the Labour Party because he said all the things the old-fashioned Socialist wanted to hear, and said them with a fascinating Welsh eloquence which, in delivery at any rate, was reminiscent of the Young Lloyd George.

But he split sensationally with the Government over the Gaitskell Budget of 1951 with its charges on artificial teeth and spectacles. A week of political crisis was followed by his resignation and by a "resignation speech" in which he launched the policy which became known as "Bevanism". With him he took Harold Wilson, at the time President of the Board of Trade, and John Freeman, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Supply, one of the brightest of the Junior Ministers.

The Government survived; but Mr. Bevan's arrows flew in every direction, hitting his own party more than anyone else. With three of his followers he topped the poll for the constituency section of the Labour Party Executive. This was normal for "Nye". He has been at the

SIR DAVID MAXWELL FYFE

top for years. But now he and his followers occupied the first four places. His movement grew until, in the Spring of 1951, a division forced by the "Bevanites" showed them with a strength of 57. After bitter wrangling, the Labour Party brought back "toe-the-line" discipline for the first time since the war. Mr. Bevan had struck a blow at the Right wing of the party, and the Right wing is still quivering.

Only time can tell what time will do for Mr. Bevan. He is young—54 years old and he is vibrant with energy and fire. Opposition could bring him leaping into the leadership of his party for opposition demands different qualities in leaders. It demands many of the things that Mr. Bevan has got, and those who are in his way, Mr. Attlee and Mr. Morrison, are respectively 68 and 63 years old. Downing Street, for Mr. Bevan, could hang on a swing of the pendulum. Or did those arrows fly too wide?

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Sir David Maxwell Fyfe

Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, the Home Secretary in the Government of 1951, has many characteristics of one of his favourite characters in history—Napoleon. He has an astonishing memory, needs little sleep, has terrific energy which is always well controlled, and an ice-cold brain. Like Winston, he concentrates exclusively on the job in hand.

It was David Maxwell Fyfe who broke the Prisoners of Nuremberg with his cross-examinations. Even Goering could not stand up to him. When, in the House, you hear that slow, incisive voice, you know that not a word is wasted. Sir David is a brilliant lawyer come to Parliament, and every word carries its point.

He is a poor boy who has made good, and wants every other boy and girl to have the same chance. This very famous man has not an ounce of vanity about him.

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It was energy that helped him to make good. He shared the Churchillian motto, If you do something, do it with all your might. Lawyers still recall the day he appeared in a London law court in the morning, took a plane to Liverpool, appeared in another court there in the afternoon and then flew back to London to make a big speech in the House of Commons in the evening.

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Oliver Lyttelton

When Oliver Lyttelton became Colonial Secretary in Winston's Government in 1951 the first thing he said was "I must go to Malaya and see for myself". And off he went for a thorough look at that jungle war against murderous Communist bandits. The visit produced for him some narrow escapes from ambushes, but this was a familiar atmosphere to him, for he was in the Guards in the first war, and his D.S.O. and M.C. were immediate awards in the field.

That speedy Malaya visit showed the mind of Oliver Lyttelton—he sees for himself.

The Colonial Office was a new role for Lyttelton. Industry and commerce had been his spheres until then. When, in the Parliament of 1950, Chancellor Gaitskell had been expounding the economist's theories about industry, you would generally find a burly Tory front-bencher rising to put him right on the practical application of those theories. It was the classic conflict between the economist and the down-to-earth businessman who had to make the ideas work. The burly fellow was Oliver Lyttelton. He is the embodiment of the meaning of the word "enterprise". He is also one of those men with the "power of decision", men who are called upon to weigh up circumstances on which there are big stakes, make their decisions—and then go on to the next problem.

HUGH GAITSKELL

He had a commercial career of brilliance—managing director of the British Metal Corporation before the war, also Chairman of the London Tin Corporation and of other metal companies. After the war, until taking office, he was Chairman of Associated Electrical Industries.

Mr. Churchill made him President of the Board of Trade in October, 1940. It was a tremendous compliment, for Mr. Lyttelton was not at that time even in Parliament—he was elected for Aldershot the next month. Later he filled the vital post of Minister of Production. He was Minister of State in Cairo and member of the War Cabinet in 1941, representing the Cabinet in the Middle East in a job which demanded the closest co-operation with the Services there in the supply of equipment and the concerting of all non-military measures.

Is 58 (but you wouldn't think it). He likes shooting, is a scratch golfer, and is full of confidence and humour. He likes precise thought and expression, and considers that the most important thing in industry is for directors, management and workers to build up mutual confidence.

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Hugh Gaitskell

Mr. Gaitskell has always been a man to whom figures were a delight, and politics were not. As Fuel Minister he appeared rather unhappy and out of place. It was not a pleasant post, and it needed someone of tougher political calibre. When, in 1950, he became Labour Minister for Economic Affairs, the change was immediate. His eye brightened, some lines, and some wrinkles, disappeared. Dollar troubles to him were never as unpleasant as defending nationalisation in the House when things were going wrong. As illness gradually overpowered Sir Stafford Cripps, Gaitskell took more and more of the burden. He negotiated the tricky European Payments Agreement,

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one of the most complicated international measures of all time, and when Sir Stafford retired with his health badly broken, Mr. Gaitskell's succession to the Treasury was as logical as it was useful to Mr. Attlee in saving him a reshuffle and the counterbalancing of political jealousies that it would have involved.

From his preoccupation with figures, many had thought Mr. Gaitskell to be an "ivory tower" man divorced from the ordinary problems of life. They had forgotten that at Hampstead he has a small family, grows flowers, and is never happier than when strolling around at the week-end presenting them to his friends.

In opposition again in the autumn of 1951, Mr. Gaitskell went on growing. He was noticeably at his ease in a part he had never played before, that of ex-Chancellor. His speeches showed a further growth in power, and from the first moment of that new Parliament it was obvious that here was a political figure to be reckoned with in the future. Mr. Gaitskell may yet upset some calculations on his side of the House.

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Sir Stafford Cripps

No man can give more than his health for his country. Yet that was just what Sir Stafford Cripps did. His war was as strenuous as anyone else's, and when he entered the post-war Labour Government he flung himself into his duties with a vigour that was bound eventually to sap a not over-strong frame. He spared himself nothing. As President of the Board of Trade he launched the great export programme, worked night and day on it. Then came a brief spell as Minister for Economic Affairs, and the unprecedented succession to the Exchequer after Mr. Dalton had given away his budget in advance of the speech in a talk with a newspaperman when actually on his way to the Chamber on Budget Day. In this new task, Cripps

HAROLD MACMILLAN

worked even harder. He seemed to disregard fatigue entirely. When the Commons was sitting all night on one of his Finance Bills, he told them he could stay at the House until 6 o'clock in the morning, but that he must leave then as he had to fly to an OEEC meeting in Paris. At six o'clock the next morning he duly left London. But the OEEC meeting proved protracted, and he told this meeting that he could stay with it until 6 o'clock the following morning but that then he must leave to fly back to London for another Commons sitting on his Finance Bill; and at 6 o'clock the next morning he duly left the meeting and flew back to London, and to spend the afternoon and evening in the House.

He rose every day at dawn, to clear his desk of overnight decisions. Then he breakfasted, lightly because of his permanently disordered digestion; strolled with Lady Cripps for half an hour in St. James's Park; and was at his desk at nine o'clock to face a day of interviews, Cabinet Meetings or Cabinet Committees, for the Chancellor of the Exchequer is the key man in Government today. These would continue until ten o'clock at night and, unless he had a dinner engagement, or a big debate in the House, Sir Stafford would go to bed at this hour. Meanwhile, all the matters requiring his decision which had collected in the Treasury during the day were sent over to No. 11 Downing Street and placed on his desk. At five the next morning he would sit down with a cup of tea, and deal with them.

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Harold Macmillan

Harold Macmillan, whom Mr. Churchill put in charge of one of the most vital domestic tasks facing his Government in 1951—housing—is a Scot with a Guardee moustache and an inquiring mind, and a belief in the Churchillian motto

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“There MUST be a way.” When he went to the Ministry of Supply in the war as Parliamentary Secretary in 1940, he found that statistics showed that the Ministry simply could not fulfil the production tasks set for it when, after Dunkirk, only Churchillian defiance stood between this naked nation and the Nazis. So, with his chief, Macmillan improvised and sought unconventional methods, and the programme was fulfilled in spite of statistics. He brought the same original and thrusting mind to bear on his work in 1951.

His great-grandfather was a crofter, who came south and founded the great publishing firm. Harold follows the precepts of so many famous Scots who come to London and make good by hard work and enterprise which, he says, are the only keys to success for the individual, the family, or the nation. He combines business with politics by getting up early in the morning.

Like all successful men he has the gift of detachment. Wounded in the first war, he had to wait all day for the stretcher-bearers to collect him. He passed the time reading Homer in the original.

He, like “Rab” Butler, helped to father the Industrial Charter. He is an advanced thinker, as was shown by his book *The Middle Way* in the late ’thirties.

He is a man of wide political experience—Under-Secretary, Supply Ministry; Under-Secretary for the Colonies in 1942; then Resident Minister in North Africa after the “Torch” landings. Later he became Resident Minister in the Central Mediterranean. Those were tasks calling for breadth, vision and firmness on occasion and he rose to them, winning great respect. The job of Air Minister in the caretaker Government still further broadened his experience. He was the first Tory ex-Minister to return after the debacle of 1945. Is a first-class Parliamentarian and a ready wit.

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Hugh Dalton

Look further along the front Labour bench, do you see a mobile face beneath a pink bald head that is surrounded by a tonsure of white hair? That is Mr. Hugh Dalton, the man with the most talkative hands in Parliament. As Chancellor of the Exchequer after the war he was a master Parliamentarian. His voice boomed through the Chamber ("When he whispers in the Lobby the seagulls take off at Battersea!" said a wit). His hands seemed to convey any message he cared to give them as he leaned on the Despatch Box, flicking a minatory fin now and then at his opponents. Parliamentarians still recall the way he opened the first Labour Budget in 1946. He uttered no sound at all, but merely held up "Let us face the Future" between finger and thumb and turned it this way and that around the House, surmounted by his beaming face. Then, after a long pause, he put it down, and began to break the bad news. A Tory once looked across at Mr. Dalton's shining pate and smiled, "What a zealot was lost in him". He was tireless, too; took all night sittings in his stride until he was overwhelmed by the dollar crisis which some thought was in its terrible strain a contributory factor to his indiscretion. He and Cripps were exact opposites in public. Cripps was cold; Dalton filled with *bonhomie*, with a mobile face ever ready to crease into a laugh.

It was Dalton who, in the 1947 dollar crisis, whipped cigarettes up to 3s. 6d. for twenty, with corresponding increases on pipe tobacco. A few weeks later he appeared with a poisoned finger in bandages. Someone asked him what the trouble was. Replied Dalton, "A smoker bit me!"

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Mr. Shinwell

One of the most extraordinary political conversions ever seen was that of Mr. Emmanuël Shinwell. It was Mr. Shinwell who nationalised the coal mines in 1946, and lost his temper every third day in doing so. It was Mr. Shinwell who said at the time, "I am always cross with Tories." His hobby was making week-end political speeches, which became a hilarious record of what his opponents deemed inconsistencies, an accusation he would hotly deny. He declared, "The organised workers are our friends; as for the rest, they don't matter a tinker's cuss." Three weeks later, after reported rebukes from higher quarters, he defiantly repeated that he "didn't give two hoots" (for the rest), which led a Tory M.P. to suggest that motorists passing the Shinwell residence should "give two hoots." As War Minister his conversion began. The War Office liked him. He liked the Army. Then he became Minister of Defence, and a statesman respected throughout the world. Instead of making political speeches at the week-end, he moved to Hampstead and grew roses. The hot single-syllable phrases of mining area politics gave way to the non-committal clichés of international statesmanship. It was Mr. Shinwell who reported on a Brussels defence meeting that it had laid the "infra-structure of European defence"; a form of words which made even that master of language, Winston Churchill, raise an eyebrow.

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Harry Crookshank

Post-war Ministers learned to look warily on Harry Comfort Crookshank, suave, immaculate bachelor. He is a polished Parliamentarian, and these are always the most dangerous. His post after 1951, of Minister of Health and Tory Leader of the House of Commons, was the most

ANTONY HEAD

natural thing in the world, but it brought him on to the opposite side of the fence. He found himself faced, in the House, with an Opposition poised on tiptoe ready to take advantage of any and every opening. Within a month he was in his first all-night sitting, but he took it in his stride, remaining unruffled, and keenly interested in everything that was going on, for hours at a time in the corner of the Treasury Bench. All the signs were that he would be doing that for many other hours in the future. Not that he would be troubled by it, for he is a lover of Parliament.

Occasionally he suffers a twinge of gout—and one day that twinge was transmitted right along the Labour Government Front Bench. It happened that he was opening a debate on meat, and he made one of the finest attacking speeches heard since the war. To please interrupters he even turned the speech upside down as he went on, and argued just as effectively from quite a different angle.

Harry Comfort Crookshank is a man of immense value to his side.

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Antony Head

“These last years might be known as the Years which the Dentists have Eaten”. The speaker was Antony Head, a tall, slim young-ish (45 but looks 30) Brigadier on the Tory benches in 1950. It was Antony Head who, after only six years in Parliament, became War Minister in the Churchill Government of 1951.

He is one of the liveliest younger men on the Tory benches, and even before going to the War Office he had an immense knowledge of the Army, its troubles, and its needs. The party were quick to recognise his merits, and chose him to open or close big debates. He found his feet with surprising speed when he came to Parliament in 1945, and went ahead fast, with knowledgeable speeches delivered in a light,

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pleasantly conversational style. As a Minister he set his face against prepared typescripts—a pleasant change.

To the Army he brought a practical mind. When the House was discussing post-war pay increases, he asked where was the sense in scraping on the pay of a young officer who might be commanding a squadron of tanks which in themselves represented half a million pounds' worth of equipment.

He is a little nostalgic about the lost horses of the cavalry—he himself rode Ace II in the Grand National once, and was the tallest rider on the course. Humorously bewailing the replacement of the horse by the tank he remarked that “Many officers used to enjoy travelling upon—or falling off—horses.”

CHAPTER 3

Front Benchers Talking

IT is a liberal education in public speaking to watch some of the Big Men on the floor of the House. You gain one sovereign impression that the Front Bencher has a tremendous advantage because he speaks from the Despatch Box. Mr. Churchill has made clear how useful it is. Mr. Baldwin, like Mr. Churchill, was exactly the right height for the Box, liked to lean on it with folded arms, and muse. At the end of a bitter foreign affairs debate in the early 30's when he rose to reply in a packed and excited House, he leaned both elbows on the Box, glanced around the place and began "I should like to say a few words about democracy". Then followed half an hour of that exquisite, poetic prose of his that entranced his hearers. It was nothing whatever to do with the debate, of course, but it was a delight to listen to, and it had the advantage that it completely side-stepped all the criticism that had gone before.

Mr. Dalton, on the other hand, is too tall to use the Box comfortably. He has to bend down, put an elbow on it and twist himself half round if he wishes to avoid looking down at his notes all the time. But he manages to keep his hands free even in this awkward position to carry on their own conversation. His old pupil, Mr. Gaitskell, is also of the Dalton school of gesticulation, but there was at first no natural art in his gestures. They were wide and ungainly. When he made his debut as Chancellor of the Exchequer he began to wave his arms as well. It looked as though his Budget Speech would look like a Boy Scout's semaphore competition. Fortunately, his gestures calmed with experience.

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To those who like plenty of exercise in debate, of course, the Despatch Box—and there is one each side of the Clerk's Table—is very useful. You can bang it, and even wrestle with it. Mr. Bevan, when a Minister, liked to do this sort of thing. At his favourite occupation of turning defence into attack, a process which delighted the hearts of his back-benchers, his forefinger prodded the air viciously in the direction of the Opposition. As Welsh frenzy mounted, he would be almost wrestling with the Box, gripping it by alternate corners as though he wanted to hurl that, too, at his opponents—by this time it was generally about the only thing he hadn't flung in their direction.

All in all, the Box can get some pretty rough treatment—but it is a help in emphasis.

Mr. Bevin pounded the Box in moments of excitement or of great emphasis. Yet this is not a necessary accompaniment to great effect. I have rarely seen Mr. Churchill give it more than a light smack, and Sir Andrew Duncan, when he made a great speech on the second reading of the Bill to nationalise iron and steel, only touched it twice, with gentle pats that contained more emphasis than all the slap-happy bangings of others. One of them came when something he said was contradicted by Sir Stafford Cripps. Replied Sir Andrew, "I assert that what I say is true!" and he brought his hand down on the Box in a featherweight gesture. Somehow, that gesture carried more conviction than any bellow-accompanying bangs and thumping.

Anyway, as Mr. Dalton found, it isn't particularly safe to bang the Box today.

But the Despatch Box as a raised surface for bringing notes closer to the eye, can be a trap. Reading of speeches has always been forbidden by the House, but in the last five years the rule has been almost completely disregarded by many on the Treasury Bench. It took years, for instance, to stop one Minister dropping a couple of pounds of typescript on the Box, tucking his head down like a sprinter and racing through it at top speed. He was pulled up one day by

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a Member who said he was gabbling so much that the sense of what he was saying had long since disappeared. After that, the Minister looked up—occasionally. Another great offender was a Secretary of State. Like so many others, he would bring into the House a thick sheaf of typescript, which contained the whole of his speech, would duck down, and stay there. He, too, became completely incoherent at times, so much so that one day the Opposition punctuated his speech for him with chants of “comma . . .” “full stop . . .” injunctions obediently followed by the Minister. He, too, was reminded that too much speed made for very little understanding. After that he became like any other post-war Minister, and only buried his head in his manuscript for a minute or two at a time. Then he would raise it impressively, apparently when he had managed to memorise in advance the final two or three words of a sentence.

But in the old days, the House bred Ministers who MADE their speeches, instead of reading them. The only notes that Bonar Law ever took into the House were on a tiny scrap of paper tucked into his waistcoat pocket. It held any figures to which he wished to refer, and more often than not the paper stayed where it was and was never consulted. Lloyd George used very few notes for his greatest speeches, and he won some of the most dramatic victories in Parliamentary history. For his great speech on King Edward's Abdication, Mr. Baldwin had a sheaf of notes, unpinned and ready for use. He put them on the edge of the Clerk's Table, but Sir Samuel Hoare, hurrying in at the last moment, knocked them to the floor in hopeless confusion. A second later the Speaker called on Mr. Baldwin for his speech. There was no time to attempt to do anything with the notes; but Baldwin made the entire speech from memory, despite the immense detail of personal talks with the King which it contained (“Sire, this is grievous news”). If Gladstone had followed the modern example of having every word of a speech typewritten before he came to the House, he would have brought with him the equivalent of a three-volume novel.

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Even Mr. Dalton, that Parliamentary *par excellence* when he was the first post-war Chancellor, fell into the trap of verbosity as the dollar-cum-inflation strain became steadily greater. He took three hours over a Budget speech at that time, falling unconsciously back into his old lecturing habits. He came out of the House stricken with remorse, saying, "I said everything three times!" And he had. Yet his successor, an ailing man, was to stretch the Budget speech to almost that length, and on orange juice. That was when Sir Stafford Cripps decided to re-state the Government's financial policy. Never was so little listened to for so long, and the Galleries had a feeling almost of despair as they watched him take from his scarlet Despatch Box one neat little sheaf of notes after another. That Despatch Box was a veritable cornucopia of Whitehallsese. The little sheaves seemed endless. Despairingly one thought in desperate frivolity as the time wore on that if he had only mixed them up it would have brought a little gaiety to the occasion. After all, successive Chancellors over forty years had cut the Budget Speech from four or five hours (Lloyd George had to stop for tea in the middle of one of his controversial Budgets because his voice had given out), down to Neville Chamberlain's businesslike record of one hour flat before the war. And that was quite enough, for the main part of the Speech is highly technical and packed with figures. Indeed, Philip Snowden, when Chancellor, was unwell at the time of one Budget Speech, and circulated to Members in advance the whole of the first part of the speech, comprising that vast review of the financial year which occupies the House until the Stock Exchange is closed. It was an excellent precedent. But there are two certainties about a modern Budget Speech. The first is that it will go on and on and on; and the second is that there will be something you don't like at the end of it. The Snowden precedent affords fine opportunities for doing good all round.

It could have been used to good effect on some other

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speeches, too; on one by a Colonial Secretary which took over an hour, even though made at breakneck speed, and was so dull that someone described it later as a "pretty pedestrian gallop round the Empire." Or on some of those midsummer reviews of Foreign Affairs which Mr. Bevin had to make but which, one suspected, bored him immensely. Certainly he nearly put himself to sleep in one of them. It was a hot day, and Mr. Bevin's always thin voice became more and more disinterested as he ploughed through an immense brief. At last he reached the Mediterranean, and so far away was his voice that one could swear he was almost asleep on his feet, that only his eyes and his vocal cords were reacting instinctively to the written word in front of him. There is no need to say what the state of his hearers was by then.

One of the most shocking examples of speech-reading after the war came from a minor Minister. Replying to a debate on the third reading of a Bill he produced a wad of quarto typewritten pages, clipped together in one corner. He didn't even unclip them, but read through the lot almost without raising his head, and used the clip as a hinge when he turned over the pages. What a fall from the days of Lloyd George, who would much rather fight a Bill through a storm of his own raising than see it go tamely and quietly to the Statute Book (though it must be admitted that most Ministers of any period would rather get their Bills through with as little fuss, and as little alteration, as possible).

Speech-reading has its dangers. There was once a Minister who used notes and, as he finished one page, slipped it to the back of the batch. In due course he came to his peroration, slipped the page to the back and in his absorption, began all over again. It was quite a few minutes before he realised that he was merrily repeating himself, and sat down. Whether any of his hearers noticed it is not recorded.

A Duke of Devonshire fifty years ago stopped in the middle of a speech he was making to the House of Lords,

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yawned widely, and muttered behind his hand to his neighbour, "This is a damned dull speech!" That was the foundation of the story that the Duke dreamed he was addressing the Lords, and woke up to find he was!

In these days official language is the enemy of every man in every civilised country. One Minister spoke of "export pairage" of shoes. Service Ministers have talked about "loaning personnel", despite the plaintive inquiry of Mr. Harry Strauss, who loves the English language and will not stand by and see it mutilated—"How can you loan a personnel?" "Multilateralisation" (of trade) is now almost standard usage—and as for the economic debates, they stun the mind, or did when the economists and their mystic language first took over the Parliamentary stage. When Sir Ernest Gowers issued his admirable pamphlet *Plain Words*, in which he enjoined the Civil Service to make its letters comprehensible to the ordinary fellow, Sir Stafford pushed out 169,000 copies of it. One hoped that his Ministerial colleagues came high on the list. Some Ministers, like Mr. Morrison, have a robust vocabulary of their own. But others take their Whitehall notes as they come, official phrases and all. Indeed, one Minister, privately reproached one day for making a dull speech, replied, "But they give us such dull briefs!"

The beginning of a big speech is often a tricky moment. The Minister in charge of a dull Bill on a hot day must steel himself to seeing his embryo hearers disappearing in search of cups of tea. Mr. Barnes, the Minister of Transport after the war, had this experience when trying to move the second reading of a Bill about roads; which, anyway, is a subject which never seems to have any turning. And these were not roads which anybody was using, or was likely to use for a long time. They were super-splendiferous motor roads that might come some day when the size of the capital investment programme had ceased to matter (how far those roads have receded now!). Poor Mr. Barnes stood there for a full two minutes bellowing with all his

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might and main in that "light-brown" voice of his. But all around him were Members who had simultaneously decided that "tea in the tum was worth any amount of pie in the sky". The House evaporated before his very eyes. The trick in these circumstances is to stand unconcernedly at the Despatch Box until the patter of Parliamentary feet has subsided. Your Parliamentarian is always very happy when he has got over the first sentence or two. It was Lloyd George, I think, who said you should always feel nervous at the start of a speech, and if you didn't, it would be a bad speech. By the end of the first sentence or two, the Parliamentarian also knows whether he has got an attentive House; and whether he remembers his speech!

The lesser man may have to contend with people going out, preferring the Terrace to his oratory. But the big man has to make allowances for people coming in to hear him. Between the wars, when Mr. Churchill would rise just before dinner and make those tremendous "Wake up, England" speeches, he would begin by cracking a joke or two while Members trooped in from the corridors and smoking-rooms as his name went up on the "tickers" all over the building.

Sometimes those first few words can be a great test of a level head. As on the day when Mr. Chuter Ede, then Home Secretary, rose to move the third reading of the Bill that laid down how elections should be conducted, a vast and portentous measure. On the table before him for some minutes had lain a shiny scarlet box containing his brief; for a subject as complicated as this, nobody would for a moment have begrudged him the documents, Blue Books, and Hansards, necessary to aid his memory. Questions ended, the Clerk of the House rose to read out the heading of the business now to be discussed. Casually, Mr. Ede pulled the scarlet box towards him and felt in his pocket for the key. It wasn't there. Very quietly he felt in another waistcoat pocket. Then another. Not a muscle of his face moved while this was going on, and there were only

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one or two people in the Chamber who noticed. Everyone else was watching the Clerk as he read out "Representation of the People Bill, third reading"; Mr. Ede's Bill—and still there was no sign of the key. Very unobtrusively he tried his trouser pockets, then his jacket pockets, all this with an eye cocked for the Speaker's summons. Just as the Speaker called "Mr. Secretary Ede", Mr. Secretary Ede gave it up. He rose, put the red case on the table and pushed it away as though he had decided, after all, to make his speech without any notes this time. Then he plunged straight into a disquisition on the business vote. It was, perhaps, rather an abrupt beginning, but he carried it off so well that it wasn't until his Parliamentary Private Secretary passed over to him an enormous brief six inches thick, overflowing with typescript and Blue Books that the House realised that anything had gone wrong. It was a remarkable demonstration of keeping your head. To have a nice speech all ready, and to have lost the key that will unlock it must cause feelings of frustration only equalled by those of Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* when they wanted tinned peaches, and found they had no can-opener! I don't think anyone really would have blamed the Home Secretary if he had put the despatch case on the floor and jumped on it, as the *Three Men* treated their tin. And yet these despatch cases are so strong that all his efforts would probably have been as null as theirs—after beating the tin wildly with oars they only produced on it an inane grin—and still no peaches.

The way a man begins his speech can often give a revealing glimpse into the immediate future. Mr. Bevin, for instance, in those long reviews of his of foreign affairs—which have to be made so that the rest of the world can know what Britain thinks of them—was inclined to dump a wad of typescript on the Box, survey the House, take a deep, almost sighing, breath as though to say "my word, this is going to be some job", and dive in.

There was a Minister between the wars who began a

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speech with the words, "Well, Mr. Speaker, I will try to compress what I have to say into an hour."

"In that case, Mr. Speaker", said a back-bench voice, "can we have the windows open?" A bad beginning.

Front benchers keep an eye on the clock, put especially for their benefit above the Speaker's head. Time can slip by at an alarming rate in a speech, though whether the hearer feels that depends very largely on the contents of the speech. At one period there were only two small clocks at the far end of the Chamber, in the old House of Commons, and one day they showed different time. One Member urged that they should be synchronised, presumably on the principle of Lord Melbourne that "It doesn't matter what we say as long as we all say the same thing". But he was opposed, by a doughty individualist!

Then someone presented this big clock to the House, for the guidance of the Front Bench. Naturally enough, it was a back-bencher who made the presentation! Back-benchers have a vested interest in keeping a Minister as short as possible, for between them the two Front Benches use up three hours of the day in every big debate, leaving only three and a half hours for back-benchers. The clock has only gone wrong once, one night when young Mr Geoffrey de Freitas, Under-Secretary for Air at the time, was making a speech. He gave his routine glance up at the clock, followed it with another, and then, incredulously, consulted his own watch. A laughing voice said, "Yes, it's stopped." And it had. For the rest of his speech Mr. de Freitas relied on time of his own keeping.

But this was an electric clock. And we have several hundred such in the Palace. Why did it stop? Wits suggested that the Minister of Fuel was employing load-shedding as a weapon against his Ministerial rivals! Mr. Oliver Stanley, speaking in advance of the Home Secretary one day, apologised for keeping him waiting, and when asked "Why apologise?" grinned and replied, "Well it's always a good thing to keep on the right side of the Home

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Secretary.” Did this new incident mean that future speechmaking Ministers would have to keep on the right side of the Minister of Fuel? After all, the clock is the only way a man can tell how long he’s been speaking (apart from whether the eyes of his hearers are open or closed). And it must be admitted that even the passage of time doesn’t always check him. The clock is useful to the listener, too. It can prove to him that the speech hasn’t really been going on half as long as he thought it had on one of those days when seven minutes begin to feel like seventy. Late at night the clock is important to the weary, for it tells one what time to go home. Years ago the House used to adjourn at eleven, and one night the Commons were still sitting when Big Ben struck that hour. Members protested, but the Speaker replied firmly, “I am guided by the clock in this House”, and sure enough, they sat until the Chamber’s own clock showed 11.

Mark you, Parliament treats Time badly on occasion. Sometimes it seems to “waste” Time. Governments “give” Time with an air of patronage which must infuriate the Old Father and make him fall over his beard with irritation. On dull days Time is even “killed”, and waiting for the big speeches (and sometimes actually in them) the galleries “do” Time.

If Time occasionally goes on strike, can we wonder?

To perorate, or not? I once heard a Minister read a passionate peroration with the air of a man who was seeing it for the first time. As it glanced off their outer consciousness, some Parliamentarians must have pondered that eternal problem: to perorate, or not to perorate. And anyway, how to perorate. Or indeed, whether to take the trouble to perorate. Sir Andrew Duncan never perorated, he just sat down. Our well-remembered, Oliver Stanley ended a financial speech with a glance at the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Stafford Cripps, and the remark, “Heaven save us from a man who always knows he is right.” That can be contrasted with flowery, meaning-

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less phrases put in for the sake of winding up the speech on a high note. To take the trouble is worthless if the note is going to be flat.

Perorations can be punctured, too. One of the greatest stories of the Peroration that Came Unstuck is told by M. André Maurois¹ in his charming book on Disraeli. It was at the end of a big debate. Gladstone was winding up for the Opposition in one of his tremendous speeches. His hand crashed repeatedly on the Box as he assailed Dizzy, who lay back on the Treasury Bench, feet on the table, apparently asleep, topper tilted forward over his eyes. At every crash of the Gladstonian fist, Dizzy's head sank a little lower and a little lower. Finally, Gladstone thundered out his peroration, and brought his fist down so hard on the Box that all the pens and pencils on the table jumped from their holders and rolled around the surface. Gladstone sat down in a tenseness that could be felt. For a moment Dizzy made no move. Then he took off his hat, and clambered painfully to his feet. He looked round the House, and began, "Mr. Speaker, the Right Honourable Gentleman has spoken at great length and with much violence. But the damage can be repaired." And very slowly he picked up every pen and every pencil from the table and the floor and put them all back in their holders, while the tension in the House dissolved in a ripple of amusement. Then he put both hands on the Box, and in his finest voice, replied.

Applause, naturally, is dear to the Front Bencher's heart. Those "cheers" you read about in the newspapers, "The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that income tax would be reduced to half a crown in the £" (cheers), are not cheers at all. The Parliamentary cheer is a muted murmur of "Hear, hear", which can swell at times, such times as Mr. Churchill's "Fight on the hills, the landing grounds and the beaches" speech, into a roar that echoes round the Chamber.

¹ *Disraeli*, by André Maurois.

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There is also that indecorous and quickly "shushed" applause of the Public Gallery. But one of the oddest moments of applause came just after the war when the Labour Party was still filled with the flush of landslide victory. Around the Palace one afternoon was a little man, who had obviously arrived as the guest of somebody or other and was very happy about the victory. One met him everywhere as the afternoon and the evening wore on, and he ended up in the Public Gallery. For an hour or so he beamed down on his Government and his back-benchers. Finally he could contain himself no longer. He rose in his seat, teetered happily down to the front row of the Gallery and shouted, "LONG LIVE THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT."

Of course he was ejected! It was the supreme irony.

Another night Mr. Gaitskell, as Fuel Minister, found himself subjected to most unusual Parliamentary applause. He was doing nicely with a defence of the trilogy of nationalised industries under his wing. Suddenly, from behind him on the Treasury Bench, came a strangled, yawning "hear, hear", sounding more like "heaaaar, heaaaaar!" It was Mr. Dalton, the victim of momentary schizophrenia. One half of him wanted to applaud his young friend; the other half wanted to yawn, and both desires were fulfilled at the same moment. Tories, with a good view of Mr. Dalton with a hand to his mouth, and of Mr. Gaitskell's consternation, chuckled. But Mr. Gaitskell was equal to the occasion. "My Right Honourable Friend," he said, "made a very fine speech yesterday, he's rather tired to-day!" Mr. Dalton blushed.

There are several ways in which the House can show disapproval of a Ministerial, or any other, speech. There is the shout of "No", or of "Divide, 'vide", a sign that the House is weary of further debate and wishes to vote. There is the continuous raising of "Points of order", or even booing, a modern innovation of which the Speaker thoroughly disapproves. A century ago, disapprobation took the form of literal cat-calls, cries of "MIAOW!" It has, in

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extreme cases, taken the form of violence, particularly in the riotous days when the Irish Members were sometimes passed from hand to hand overhead on their way to ejection. And then there was that book which somebody threw at Mr. Churchill.

Yet somehow, I felt that a sleepy "hear, hear" outdid all these!

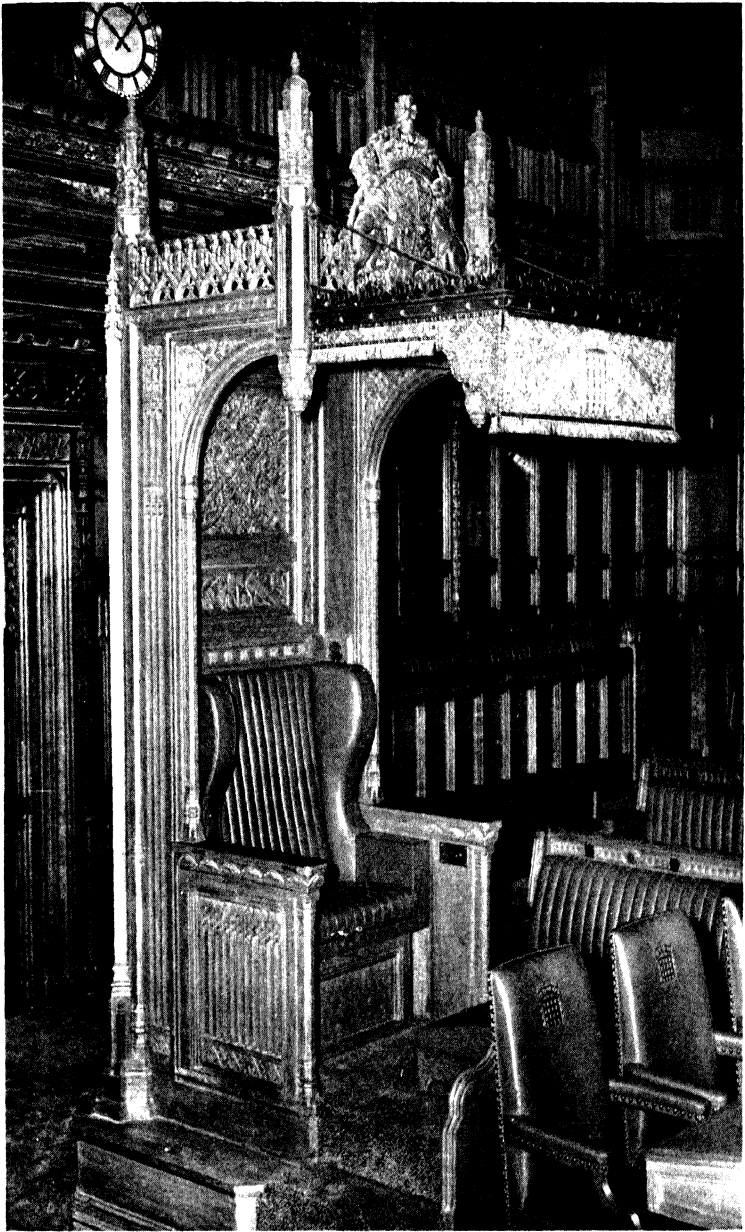
The man who above all others is sometimes entitled to yawn, or to follow the Daltonian example in applause, the man who listens to it all is, The Speaker.

CHAPTER 4

The Loneliest Parliamentarian

THE Speaker is the only man who is indispensable to the House of Commons. He is the only Member of Parliament who never makes a speech. At the beginning of every Parliament he claims from the King the ancient privileges of the Commons, among them freedom from arrest, liberty of speech and access to the King. There is a throwback to Tudor days in these requests, and also in his plea that a "favourable construction" shall be placed on the proceedings of the Commons. For in those early days the office of Speaker of the House of Commons was neither a sinecure nor a position of particular safety. The Speaker then had to take responsibility to a powerful Monarch for the things that his turbulent fellow-Members might say. (Several Speakers were beheaded in those risky times.) Hence the seeming reluctance with which, to this day, a Speaker-elect receives the invitation to take this high office. At one time, this apparent unwillingness went further. He would loudly protest his unsuitability for the job. Today he merely attempts to shrug off his sponsors, so that the tradition of distaste for a position of such high responsibility is still carried on. In Parliament, history never dies.

High office carries its penalty. The Speaker is lonely because he sits above the party battle; must at all costs preserve his impartiality. This means that he must shun the company of his fellow-Members. Once elected, he gives up the pleasant informalities and companionships of the Smoking Room, which make Parliament still the best Club in the world. The nearest he can get to it is a series of small parties to three or four Members at a time in his



THE SPEAKER'S CHAIR

From this great Chair, Australia's gift, the Speaker of the House controls the Commons.

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lovely house, converted at the moment into a flat, overlooking the River. In times of full peace, he holds levees at which Court dress must be worn. He is the only subject with this privilege. An invitation to the Speaker's Levee is the equivalent of a Royal Command.

Yet, though he must keep himself aloof, the Speaker is always accessible to Members who want his advice. He is usually himself a Parliamentarian of skill; he must, by the nature of his office, be an expert on procedure of the House. And he is also, quite naturally, an expert on the form of speeches.

The Speaker's job, said Gladstone, was to give the House protection against itself. In the early days of Parliament it was the Speaker who framed the question. The House decided that, "After debate, the Speaker shall reduce the same to a question, to be approved by the House as containing the substance of the debate." A tremendous responsibility lay on those early Speakers. Any man who has presided over even a committee of a dozen people knows how difficult it can be to crystallize their views. How much more difficult with several hundred vigorous, at times unruly, men. Without wise guidance their discussions might have ended in mere talk, with no decision. That was the fate that overtook many other European Parliaments founded at the same time. The British success lay in the resolute way in which this matter of "the question", the decision, was tackled.

That responsibility today does not lie on the Speaker. The question is drafted by the Whips of either Government or Opposition, according to which of them is raising the motion before the House. But he has many others, his casting vote for instance. If there is a tie on a division, the Speaker gives his own vote. Invariably, he casts it in such a way that the matter can be discussed again. On the night of May day, 1950, Major Milner, presiding over the House as Chairman of Committees, found himself faced with this problem in a debate on road haulage (278-278).

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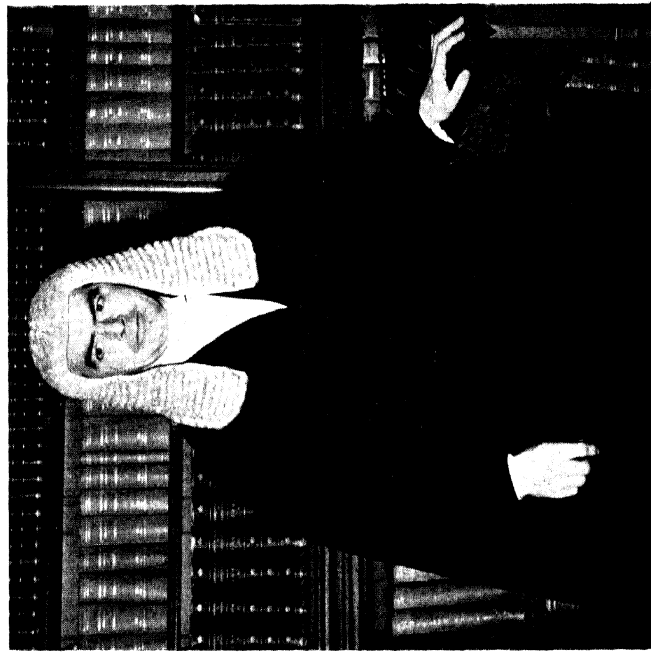
Unhesitatingly, he gave his vote for the Government. Had he given it for the Opposition, the subject would have been closed. As it was, the way was open for the Opposition to raise the subject again, which they did in a few weeks' time. The same problem confronted Sir Charles MacAndrew, the Deputy Chairman of Committees, at two o'clock in the morning when the vote was 82 82 on an amendment to the Bill recalling the "Z" class men for 15 days' training. He followed the same precept.

Listening to speeches is by no means the only duty which the Speaker fulfils. He has much other work to do in his beautiful Library, a room the size of two suburban houses. Here he scrutinises doubtful Parliamentary questions, certifies Bills as "money" Bills, which means that they cannot be amended by the House of Lords under the Parliament Act. He looks up the precedents for difficult points of order or suggested breaches of Parliamentary privilege that are put to him. He is responsible for the official reporting of Parliament, both in "Votes and Proceedings", which is the "bare-bones" record, and in Hansard. He presides over all-party conferences on such knotty problems as electoral reform. It was due to the skilful negotiations of Speaker Lowther that women got their votes.

But it is in the Chair that the Speaker undertakes his greatest task. In him alone resides authority over the House, an authority that is very real. A Member using un-Parliamentary language will find the Speaker ordering him to withdraw the expression instantly, and if he fails to do so he will be ordered to leave the Chamber. It is all part of the ceaseless efforts to take the "personalities" out of politics, and the harsh words that are used in the middle of the night—were used bitterly by both sides when the Conservatives began, in March of '51, to try to wear the Government down with nightly successions of "prayers" until the small hours—show the need for the Speaker's tact. If tempers get out of hand to such an



VISCOUNT RUFFSIDE OF HEXHAM
(Rt. Hon. Douglas Clifton-Brown, P.C., M.P.,
Speaker of the House, 1943-1951)
[By courtesy of *Daily Graphic*]



MR. SPEAKER, THE RT. HON.
W. S. MORRISON, M.C., K.C., M.P.

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extent that nothing can be heard but shouts of anger from both sides, the mere rising of the Speaker to protest, perhaps, "But I want to hear what is going on", will calm things down. He will, perhaps, crack a little joke, and a ripple of laughter instantly replaces the fury. But if other methods fail, the Speaker can "name" a Member and, on the motion of the House, order his suspension "from the service of this House." If the turmoil is beyond all calming, the Speaker can suspend the sitting until things have cooled. Usually, however, his mere displeasure is enough.

It is an odd thing, but the House is always best-behaved when the Speaker is away. If he is invited, say, to make a visit abroad, as when Col. Clifton Brown conveyed a gift of books to the University of Caen after the war, he has to ask the permission of the House. It is always given with a cheer, but the mere fact that it is given, in effect puts the House "on its honour", as they say at school, to be "good" until he returns. Those disciplinary powers on which the House depends in the last resort for protection against itself cannot be passed to anyone else while the Speaker is away. He takes them with him. Yet, no matter how great the storms that may break out in his absence, the House always seems to take extra care to avoid extremes.

On occasion the Speaker can take on a timeless, terrifying authority. As, for instance, when one Member was dismissed from that post-war Parliament, and another was admonished. The House had taken its decisions; the Speaker was to implement them. For those few moments the House ceased to be a collection of lounge-suited moderns. It took on an awful majesty. It was—the House of Commons, above the law; the House that once confined a Lord Mayor of London in the Clock Tower. The Speaker was in his tricorne hat, which he only dons in great moments. As for the House, it might have been composed of men in any costume in its long history. The very language used by the Speaker was imposing in its dignity, "... a gross affront to Members... a contempt of this House", he

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said to the Member who was expelled for publishing "words which contained unfounded imputations against the conduct of Members of this House." To the Member who was reprimanded, the Speaker said, "The House has adjudged you guilty of corruptly accepting payment for information which you obtained from your fellow-Members under obligation of secrecy. If other Members acted as you did, it would be impossible to maintain that mutual confidence without which the system under which you work would break down. Your conduct, which has been publicly exposed, lowers not only yourself, but the House in public esteem.

"In the name of the House, I accordingly reprimand you for your offence against its honour", he said to the white-faced man who was standing in his usual place amid the rows of quiet Members. It was unforgettable.

Yet the Speaker is always essentially human. He above all knows when a touch of humour can make both sides almost kin. No one knows better how to prick the bubble of anger with a nicely worded comment. No one appeals more earnestly for the cut and thrust of debate than the Speaker who has to listen to all speeches and who never, or hardly ever, makes a speech himself beyond saying "The question is . . ." (he said that more than two thousand times in the post-war Parliament). Occasionally he has an announcement to make, and then he will rise and say, with great satisfaction, "Now *I* am going to make a speech", and the House will give him a hearty cheer. Or, if he is trying to make himself heard in an argument, he will say, "Perhaps I should be allowed to speak if I want to. . . ."

When the House is sleepy from late sittings, the Speaker is the sleepest of all. Even if the House is in Committee, say in those regular all-nighters on the Finance Bill, the Speaker must always be ready to return instantly to the Chamber in case of trouble which the Chairman of Committees, lacking the Speaker's disciplinary powers, is unable to quiet. In the post-war Parliament there were more all-night sittings than at any time since the Irishmen began

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to turn Parliament upside down at the turn of the century. It was the same when the nightly "prayers" began in 1951. An ordinary Member of Parliament has at least a chance of sleeping late the next morning. The Speaker has none, for he has duties in the morning before he sweeps through the Central Lobby in his stately little procession at 2.25 for Questions. The longest sitting which Col. Clifton Brown had to face in that Parliament was on the Bill to nationalise Iron and Steel. The House sat for 21 hours and 48 minutes. But this was by no means a House of Commons endurance record. There have been many longer sittings in Parliament's history. In those early days of active combat with the Throne, the Commons kept the Speaker in the Chair, refused to let him leave, for three days and nights. And when one Speaker died under the strain they elected another to carry on.

Mr. Baldwin once called the Speaker's eye, "The most elusive organ that Nature has ever yet created." In his calling of Members in debate, the Speaker is guided by nothing but the desire to attain the "cut and thrust", that sharpening discussion that shapes legislation by argument. He selects Members from each party alternately, appeals constantly to them to keep their speeches short. At the beginning of a debate he will pointedly tell the House that an enormous number of Members has told him they would like to take part, and will use that as an excuse for yet another appeal for that crisp debate which he loves best to hear.

With one Speaker the House found his eye much easier to catch. The trouble was that Members never knew when they had caught it, for that particular Speaker had so pronounced a squint that his "eye" would seem to light simultaneously on several Members.

The Speaker is Parliament's greatest connoisseur of speeches. Speaker Lowther once calculated that he had sat through 35,000 of them. Today Mr. Speaker Morrison listens to about a million words a month!

And this is what he hears.

CHAPTER 5

The People's Problems

THE Commons spend the first hour of their day in “gingering up” the Executive.

The Speaker has passed in that small, but so very impressive procession of his, down the smoking-room corridor from his huge library through the Central Lobby (“Do we curtsey?” whispers an agonised woman visitor in the two lines of M.P.’s and strangers who have been marshalled by the tactful and gentle policemen of Westminster, now standing bareheaded, bowing with the Members as the Speaker passes), and into the Chamber. There his Chaplain has advanced to the Clerk’s Table, has looked at the Members and prayed for the country. Members have turned to face the wall, a relic of the days when they turned to kneel on their seats in St. Stephen’s Chapel because their swords prevented their kneeling on the floor between the rows of seats. (The Speaker and the Serjeant-at-Arms still kneel on theirs.)

Until now the galleries have been closed. First-comers see the Chaplain backing towards the Bar of the House as the Speaker calls the name of the Member who has the first Question down to the Government. The Minister concerned rises and gives the reply. The day’s work has begun.

You can follow the Questions on the pale green Order Paper of the House and it is a thoroughly interesting pastime, for here are all the problems of the country; your problems, and you, through your letters, are asking these questions. It is, indeed, a moot point whether this is not the most valuable part of the day. Certainly it is democracy working, and even a landslide majority doesn’t affect Question Hour.

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Here, Ministers are "put on the spot", are forced to account for the misdeeds of their Departments, to reply in detail as to why they did this, or why they adopted that policy. The Norwegian Ministers who saw the system at work during the war thought it was an excellent idea. They went home to Norway in 1945 and adopted it straightaway. Wisely, Commonwealth Parliaments also included Questions when they adopted the methods of the Mother Parliament.

The Parliamentary Question is a mere stripling compared with our long Parliamentary history. The first Question was asked in the Commons in 1835 but there was no fixed Questions Hour until 1869.

Whoever put down that first Question laid up a lot of perspiration for a great many Ministers. He also put into the hands of every man and woman in the country a tremendous weapon against bureaucracy. Even by 1920 it had become necessary to limit the number of Questions to three per Member per day, so great was the pressure. Yet the powers of the State in those days were comparatively small—Questions must relate to something for which a Minister is responsible. Think of the field today! The State has its finger in nearly everything you can think of; and never were there so many problems to be solved, so many grievances to be ventilated. That is why Questions cover every conceivable subject. And it is also the reason why Ministers go on a "rota", answering once or twice a week. Otherwise some of them would never be "brought to book" at all.

As for variety, well, here are some subjects for a typical day after the war: Danish butter talks, canned bristling stocks, apples, Russian crab meat, price of sausages, sugar from France, sugar de-rationing on the lines of the 1950 petrol agreement, butchers' profits, "old ewe mutton", fish prices, can butchers refuse to take inferior quality meat, poultry supplies, eggs, bananas, sweets, pork, housewives to advise on food problems, pedestrian crossings, road accidents,

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speed limits, prams on footpaths, London traffic congestion, television, old age pensioners and the Festival of Britain, steel for building, metal supplies, machine tools, tanks for overseas, electricity generator research, hotel prices in the Festival of Britain, newsprint, land valuation claims.

Price and other controls bring everything used in the home within the realm of the Parliamentary question. "Why are women's large-sized shoes scarce in Wobbleton?" fiercely asks the Member for that Division. His wrathful attack may get a soft answer, but has at least stirred up an inquiry directing the official mind to Wobbleton. Prices of everything figure in the list. And as for food, when this Minister opens the Question hour anybody else is lucky to get a look in. Why was uneatable meat issued at Wibbleton last week? "'Twasn't," replies the Minister in effect, and the argument may end, as one such recently ended, in the aggrieved Member brandishing a chunk of that same meat. Or perhaps the Speaker will intervene in an argument to say pacifically: "It is a hot day; this is only making it hotter!" Why did the "butter" issued somewhere else turn out to be margarine? What about oranges for marmalade and why does the Minister buy these but refuse to issue the sugar with which to make the marmalade? Even—What's in a sausage? In short, the Commons finds food just as fascinating a subject at Question Time as the rest of the country does wherever two or three people meet.

The President of the Board of Trade may find someone waving at him a shirt imported from Hong Kong and sold here for half a crown or so, and everyone gets very indignant at this unfair competition with Lancashire (while the galleries may be wishing they had the address!). The Minister of Supply will answer questions about raw materials, the Government hold themselves responsible today for procuring many of these. He will, for instance, be asked about tin-plate production; and here the housewife's interests come in again, for the answer to this will determine whether she can buy tinned vegetables and fruit in the

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winter. Or there will be queries about aircraft for the R.A.F. or vehicles for the Army.

The Foreign Secretary's field is wider, and the questions are more remote from the British fireside. They will deal with both detail and policy the world over. With a Labour Government you may see covert sniping at the Minister from his own back-benches. Foreign affairs are productive of this, for every Party seems to bristle with would-be Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs.

Then there is the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He is a man to watch. His questions affect your pocket; why is there purchase tax on this, or on that? What is the £ worth? How much purchase tax did he get out of: and then will follow a list of things like cosmetics, toothpaste, razor blades and half a dozen other articles that you have to use if you are to conform to modern ideas of cleanliness and appearance. Tactfully, the Chancellor "doesn't know" but the question has made a point and has drawn your, that is the voter's, attention to the fact that these necessities ARE taxed, which is exactly what the questioner set out to do. Does the Chancellor really have to keep purchase tax on fishermen's boots and knives, queries a Member from a seaside constituency? And, asks a Sheffield Member, does he realise that the tax on silverware is not only driving craftsmen out of the industry but is preventing the entry of those young men who will carry it on. He will consider these, says the Chancellor tactfully, in the "next review" of the tax (he doesn't say "when"). From the fogs of November until the March lion has gone out as a lamb, the Chancellor is in self-made purdah; his stock reply to questions that affect any aspect of Treasury policy is, "I cannot anticipate my Budget statement." But even here the questions are not wasted. They are making an impression, perhaps even the tiniest dent in the official mind. And sooner or later the Chancellor will call for the documents on, say, purchase tax, and the Members' representations and reasons, probably backed by local Chambers of Com-

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merce or trade associations for an industry, will receive consideration. When it comes, that consideration will be thorough. The only doubt is "when".

The Parliamentary Question extends even to the Prime Minister. An American journalist, newly arrived in London, chose to quiz a Parliamentary reporter of many years' experience on the "inferiority" of the British Press. Why, exclaimed the American, they freely questioned the President in Washington, had a conference with him every week. Why couldn't that be done with the British Prime Minister? The Englishman laughed. "You see your President once a week; over here, the Prime Minister is cross-examined on the floor of the House of Commons as often as any back-bench M.P. wants to do so", he replied. And that was the end of that. The media were different, but in each, cross-examination was the aim. Look in the middle of the list of questions, and you will find at "No. 45" there is a small list beginning, "To ask the Prime Minister." This means that the Prime Minister need not put in an appearance in the House until about three o'clock, a privilege intended to give him time to get back from official functions. But he is there at that time every day unless the circumstances are exceptional. And Members can and do cross-examine him. Naturally enough, his questions come into rather a different category from those of his colleagues and subordinates. Let a Minister make an indiscreet speech, and the Prime Minister will find a question down acidly asking, "Does this represent Government policy?" The technique follows a recognised pattern. The Prime Minister will remark blandly that he saw no harm in it, that it seemed to be a pretty innocuous way of putting things, but what happens to the offender in the privacy of the Prime Minister's own office at No. 10 is never divulged, though it can be imagined. Many former Ministers in many previous Administrations could throw light on this point, in the unlikely event of their being so minded. Then the Prime Minister answers questions on the broad aspects

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of Government policy, and this is the feature which puts the final seal on the Question Hour as being a corner-stone of democracy. In how many other countries in the world can the Prime Minister be asked such questions?

And yet, but for one of those happy accidents that have made so much of British history, we might not have had Questions at all. Back in those early days the Commons disliked having Ministers present. Remember, the Commons were fighting the King, and Ministers were the King's men. Fortunately, the system of Cabinet responsibility developed about the same time. Ministers found it good to band together. The fact that all would go if one was sacked strengthened them against the King. And their unity strengthened them against the Commons. For their part, the Commons found it convenient to have them there to be attacked as a body. It was a narrow escape from the American system of Ministers deliberately excluded from Parliament, and with every kind of carefully calculated counter-balance between Parliament and the Executive.

The power of the Parliamentary question is very great even in these Whitehall-ridden days. Members hand them in to the Clerk of the House, who sits perpetually at the table in the Commons, and scrutinizes each question with the greatest care, making sure that there is a Minister responsible (even in these days there are some things which are outside this category) and that the questioner is genuinely seeking information and not giving it. Mr. Herbert Morrison tells a story of his early days in the House. He handed in a question to Sir Gilbert (now Lord) Campion, then Clerk of the House, quoting housing figures. Asked Sir Gilbert—was Mr. Morrison quite sure that the figures he had given in his question were accurate? Mr. Morrison took them away, checked them and came back. Yes, he was quite, quite sure. "Then", said Sir Gilbert, "there's not much point in asking the question, is there?" Mr. Morrison went away again.

But having got past the Clerk the question enters White-

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hall—Ministers must have three days' notice. In Whitehall it receives a special folder, impressively marked—"Parliamentary question". As such it warrants, and receives, attention in the highest quarters and right down to the department-within-the-department-of-the-department on whom it has an impact, which in some cases, and particularly those cases where there is, perhaps, a slightly guilty conscience, must be seen to be believed. For, remember, each of these questions holds the seed of disaster for the Minister.

If a civil servant has blundered, and the Minister has a bad time in the House, that civil servant is likely to hear about it. Come what may, in three or four days after getting the question, the Minister must get up in the House and give his answer in the full glare of publicity. He cannot rely on party feeling to back him up, unless the subject is very "political". The party line tends to fade at Question Time. So the wise Minister takes care that he knows as much as possible about the background to his questions. Indeed, it was said of one post-war Minister that he locked himself up for an hour every morning in his room and wrote his own replies. If a Minister is on the defensive in his reply, he must be very calm. A Minister on the run is quickly over-run. He may find himself under fire from the Opposition in front of him, and from his own "supporters" behind as well.

There was the famous case of Sir Ben Smith, when he was Food Minister, and the dried eggs. In an unwise moment he expressed the opinion that they weren't much good anyway, and so he was going to save dollars by ending further imports. But in the House Sir Ben found himself under a cross-fire from women M.P.'s of every party who, being housewives themselves, were fairly shaking with rage. Those who saw it will always remember Mrs. Jean Mann, with forty years of housekeeping in Scotland behind her, rising almost immediately behind the luckless Minister and telling him, in tones that fairly dripped with vitriol, just what

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dried eggs meant in the English—sorry Mrs. Mann—British home at that shell-eggless time. Into his burning ear she poured one recipe after another. When she sat down, temporarily exhausted, another took up the tale, while the Minister got hotter and hotter. The thing ended twenty minutes later with the Minister scarlet and spluttering desperately through his papers. His final word as he sat down turkey-red after what must have been one of the worst times of his life was, "I'm no chicken, I don't lay eggs", which his tormentors agreed was an admirable statement of fact but did not help the situation he had created. Yes, once on the run, quickly over-run.

Departments do their best to help the Minister. His battle is very much their battle. They would very much prefer, of course, to say nothing. No Government Departments anywhere in the world like anything so much as privacy, and it is when they attain that privacy that disaster sits round the corner. Their favourite phrase is, "It is not in the public interest" to declare anything about the particular matter under discussion. But the House has time and again wisely shown its impatience when this phrase is frivolously used. So the civil servants prepare replies, generally giving the minimum of information, and at the same time they try to foresee the trend of the supplementary question which, coming without notice, is often the most dangerous of all. In fact it does sometimes look as though the M.P. concerned had thought of a good "supplementary" first; and then framed a question to fit. Having decided the "line" which the questioner will take, the Departments add some further information for the Minister to give if he is pressed, and they put it on the bottom of the foolscap sheet containing the main reply.

There was once a nervous Minister who, answering his first question, read out everything on the paper; the main answer, the supplementary information, and even included the final admonition by the civil servant, "THE MEMBER CONCERNED IS WELL KNOWN FOR HIS TENACITY ON

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THIS SUBJECT AND THE UTMOST CAUTION SHOULD BE OBSERVED."

That ties up with the young Minister in the Lords who also read out everything on the paper including the rueful remark of civil servant, "A pretty weak argument I'm afraid, but it should be good enough for the Lords."

Wit can be an asset to a hard-pressed Minister. The House of Commons is a very human assembly, and it can turn in a flash from indignation to a laugh. Before the war, when Mr. Walter Elliot was Minister of Agriculture, he had to admit in the House that some herrings, landed at a remote port, had had to be thrown back into the sea because they could not be got to market before going bad. Up jumped a Labour Member in great anger to ask—why had these not been sent to the unemployed?—with his "side" cheering him on. Elliot, one of the readiest wits on the Tory Benches, was not disconcerted. He beamed at the indignant Member and replied simply, "Nobody thanks you for a bad herring!" The fury subsided in a general laugh.

There are lighter moments, too. The deputy War Minister one day announced that Army Officers could, if they wished, wear swords on ceremonial occasions. Immediately there were complaints that swords were expensive, and that this would bear hardly on some officers. A sardonic Labour Member inquired, "Will those who do not wish to carry a sword be allowed to carry a bow and arrow?" But in came an elderly Colonel, saying with a glint of amusement, "Is the Minister aware that a well-made bow and arrow costs considerably more than a sword?" The young Deputy Minister chuckled and replied, "My experience doesn't go back as far as that, but I will accept the Honourable and Gallant Gentleman's assurance!"

In these difficult days the House could fill two hours with questions instead of one. Yet if that were done, it would have to come off the time for debates. It is all part of Parliament's perpetual problem of how to get a quart of business into a pint pot of time. It is rare for the number of questions on the Order Paper "for oral

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answer" to be less than a hundred. The hour provides time for 70 or 80 at the outside. And if the opening batsman is a controversial or talkative fellow or has a controversial subject like, say, food, then there is likely to be so much interest that progress is bound to be slow. And when Scottish questions lead off, the Scots M.P.'s show an enormous and very detailed interest in their national problems.

There have been one or two attempts since the war to get the hour extended by another 15 minutes, but they have come to nought, for it was tried once in 1916, but it only led to even more questions being put down. In the post-war Parliament someone suggested that there should be an hour for questions on Friday mornings. Mr. Herbert Morrison, who realized that his overworked House was just about at the end of its tether by that time, grinned and replied, "This is certainly a new and lively House, but its least lively time is first thing on a Friday morning." Indeed it was the thin attendance one Friday after a gruelling week that prompted Mr. Kenneth Pickthorn to remark, "It ill becomes those few of us who are boring the rest of us to complain about those who have stayed away."

Members ask something like 10,000 questions a year, at two guineas a time, which is the calculated cost of digging out the reply. It is money well spent. To keep an Executive, any Executive, on its toes would be cheap at almost any price. Whitehall offices, dingy, often fly-blown, and always in need of a coat of distemper, nevertheless bear a strong resemblance to ivory towers in their distance from reality. "A sharp and healthy sign that Parliament is master", is what Mr. Morrison once very truly said about questions.

So the problem of the pint pot will continue. It is a daily problem, and there is no answer except self-discipline. The Speaker has his own way of dealing with it. One day he will let the House "run on", thoroughly enjoying itself with the first twenty or thirty questions, until it realises suddenly that there are only a few minutes to go and there

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are some most interesting questions later on. Then the next day the Speaker will remind everyone that "We did very badly yesterday"—Members will "keep it snappy"—and the hour ends with really good progress and everyone is happy.

But they always slip back. Oddly enough the new Chamber has had its own effect on this problem. It is smaller than the House of Lords, where the Commons sat for five years after the war and it is very intimate indeed. The result is that the question hour becomes much more of a "fireside chat" between Members and Ministers. For the first week or two this feeling of intimacy was so great that the House only got through thirty or forty questions a day. The Chancellor of the Exchequer who, like the Prime Minister generally starts late on the list, had something like ten days without being tackled once. There were angry protests, suggestions that the Departmental questions rota should be revised to let people examine the Chancellor. But the whole thing came back to that one point, self-control.

If the question is not reached, the Member gets a written reply which is published in Hansard. But there is another kind of Parliamentary question which is deliberately put down "for written reply". When the post-war difficulties and scarcities reflected themselves in a flood of questions, Mr. Morrison, as Leader of the House, asked Members to put queries about personal cases from their constituencies into the "written" category, so that the valuable hour could be devoted to matters of more general interest. So at the end of the Order Paper you will find a second list; when is Mr. Smith, of such-and-such a road in such-and-such a town going to get a licence to open that shop? When will Mr. Jones of ——— get the hearing aid for which he applied to the local hospital board months ago? What about that telephone, which Mr. Robinson, who is an export manufacturer, requested for his home?

But don't think, please, that just because a Minister answers a question that that is the end of it. Let the reply

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be evasive, or unsatisfactory, and you will hear the Member concerned say that he will raise this on the Adjournment, which is *YOUR OWN HALF-HOUR*.

Every motion before the House is debatable, and the House cannot do anything without a motion before it. There is a tale that years ago, through failure on somebody's part to put the proper motion, the Speaker was left in the Chair. Not having been instructed by the House to leave it, he couldn't do so until they had gone round knocking Members up and brought them back to the House to pass the necessary motion. The House cannot even stop work without resolving to do so. The final motion of the day is, therefore, "That this House do now adjourn." And so you come to what has now become one of the most precious half-hours of the entire day. In those headlong years after the war, the first fully powered Labour Government took, and needed, every minute of Parliamentary time. Mr. Morrison offered as a compromise a thirty-minute debate every night for back-benchers before the House adjourned. They ballot for it every week, and the lucky ones have the right to raise any question they like during that time, and with it goes the right to have a Ministerial reply. Theoretically they are opposing an adjournment of the House until given satisfaction.

Here, then, is another powerful weapon for your protection against the Executive. A Minister can be forced into the open once again, and this time without the restraints of time that operate during the question-hour. He has now to make a speech in full publicity, defending his Department. Any attempt to evade the issue now will become patently obvious. Like questions, adjournment debates fall into two classes, the particular and the general. First are the constituency grievances. A member may receive a letter from a constituent. He then writes to the Minister concerned, receives an unsatisfactory reply. ("Is the Minister aware that a reference to an unsatisfactory reply which referred to another unsatisfactory reply is—

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unsatisfactory?" inquired Mr. W. J. Brown one day). He may write again to the Department, unwilling to take Parliamentary action unless absolutely forced. Again the reply may fail to satisfy, so down goes a question. If the Member now finds that the Minister gives an evasive answer, or fails to show that he is going to take steps to see that it doesn't happen again—then the Member raises it on the adjournment of the House, when he wins the ballot. The operative word is "when". It doesn't always happen. A case in point was the telephone situation in Sheffield. One of the Conservative Members found himself acquiring an immense file of applications for 'phones, but the only response he got from the Post Office was a shrug of the shoulders and murmurs of immense capital investment needed to increase the size of the telephone exchanges. He put questions in the House, was fobbed off with inconclusive replies. So he began balloting for the Adjournment so that he could raise a debate. That was where his luck ran out. A year later he was still trying to win a place.

The second class of Adjournment Debates on general matters has produced, even in the statutory thirty minutes, some big and important discussions. Atomic energy flared into the news one night at a quarter-past ten. There was furious debate on Centurion tanks for Egypt—on the adjournment. In this case it was a longer debate because the House got through all its other business by dinner-time (the adjournment debate lasts until the normal time of rising, 10.30 or, if the House sits later, for half an hour) and then found that after a question-time row, Mr. Reggie Paget had slipped round to the Speaker's office and had been lucky enough to discover the adjournment unbooked for that particular evening. So at half-past seven in the evening the Labour Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs found himself sitting unhappily on the Treasury Bench while half a dozen of his own back-benchers attacked the "Tanks for Egypt" policy. And in the end he was forced to make a concession.

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The adjournment debate operates at any time of the day, or the night. No matter whether Parliament sits all night on the Finance Bill, there you will find the Member who has the adjournment sitting grimly in his place. I have known a Member get up at eight o'clock in the morning to raise his half-hour debate after an all-nighter. To do this, he has been there every minute of the night, for if the man with the adjournment turns his back for a moment, he may lose his opportunity. There is nothing automatic about the privilege. When the Government Whip jumps to his feet and utters the only speech ever to cross his lips, "I move that this House do now adjourn", the Speaker repeats the question, and then glances round the House to spot the Member who is waiting to speak. If the Member isn't there, the Speaker simply says, "This House now stands adjourned", and goes to bed. So the lucky ballot-winning Member must be in his place at that particular moment or he won't be lucky any longer. The price of the adjournment, in fact, is eternal vigilance. I have seen three men miss it. One was taken by surprise when business suddenly finished early in the evening and caught him outside the Chamber. He scurried down the corridors, but got to the doors of the Chamber just in time to hear the shout of "Who Goes Home?" which comes straight out of the days when linkboys with flaring torches escorted bands of M.P.'s from Westminster as a protection against the footpads waiting to do what the Treasury do today with perfect legality—clear their (and our) pockets.

Another Member met with even greater mortification. He was going to talk about high railway fares on the Adjournment. It was due about 10.30 that particular night. He spent the evening digging out figures in the Library and just about that time he took a couple of friends up into the Public Gallery and settled them there nicely to hear his speech. But while he was settling them down, the House came to the end of its business. Desperately he raced down the double flight of stone stairs to the Lobby

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but he was only half way down when the Speaker looked round the Chamber for him. Naturally he couldn't see him, not having eyes "like a pair of patent double magnifying gas microscopes of h'extra power" to see through two stone walls, as Sam Weller might have said, and so he adjourned the House. The breathless Member arrived at the doors of the Chamber just in time to hear those casual phrases with which the Commons' day ends, "Usual time tomorrow?" and the answer, "Usual time tomorrow."

Saddest of all was the case of a Member who was going to raise the price of wool on the adjournment. It was of immense value to his constituency, and he took what seemed to be reasonable precautions. He was actually in the Chamber, a couple of feet outside the "Bar" of the House which is merely a line across the carpet at the far end of the Chamber beside the Serjeant-at-Arms' chair. In the last minute or two of the main debate, he began to chat to the Serjeant. Now this member was a loquacious fellow; one of those men whose sentences tend to roam across fields of commas and semi colons, but rarely reach a full stop. He was in the middle of one of these sentences, with his head bent over the Serjeant's chair, when the debate, which was a very quiet dull affair, suddenly ended. The Whip moved the Adjournment, and the Speaker repeated, "The question is that this House do now adjourn." The Member, it appeared, was still in the middle of a sentence. At any rate he did not hear. So the Speaker remarked that the House now stood adjourned, and walked out. The too-talkative one lifted his head to find the House dissolving beneath his very eyes!

Since Mr. Morrison first conceded this nightly half-hour, Private Members have retrieved many of their privileges of introducing Private Bills and resolutions, of which more later, but still the adjournment debate remains a cherished attribute. It was done in the old days before the war, but only on very particular occasions when a Member was really extremely disgruntled. Now it

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looks as though it is here to stay. The House will not easily part with such a useful part of the day.

Mark you, there is a right way and a wrong way to use the adjournment debate. The essence of the debate is to force a reply from the Government, and the wise M.P. will ensure that he only takes, say, ten minutes of the thirty. That allows time for other members to intervene if they are interested, and still leaves the Minister plenty of opportunity to make his reply. There is nothing a Minister likes better, when faced with a difficult adjournment debate, than for the opener to take twenty minutes, and other people to take five, leaving himself only five for his reply. Then he looks at the clock and says, of course he can't possibly be expected to deal in so short a time with so important a subject as this, and goes home chuckling.

On the other hand, I remember an adjournment debate raised by a back-bencher who had been on a flight round the Caribbean. He had evidently enjoyed it, for he booked the adjournment, and then occupied the entire thirty minutes himself, talking about it. He was still in full flight when the Speaker adjourned the House and went to bed; and the Minister who had been kept there unnecessarily for an extra half-hour after a hard day's work, yawned and went home. The inconsistency of human nature was shown within five or six weeks when the same back-bencher raised another adjournment debate demanding a time-limit on Parliamentary speeches!

There is yet another kind of debate on the "Adjournment". This is a very rare, and very formal affair, designed to enable Parliament to give instant discussion on something big which comes upon it without warning. A Standing Order of the House provides that another Member may move the adjournment of the House, if he has the support of 40 other Members, to discuss "a definite matter of urgent public importance". It is a privilege that is deliberately granted by Speakers of the House only on the most vital occasions, for if it became a regular business it would lose all its value.

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Many attempts are made but few are granted. The application is always made at the end of questions, and often arises out of some Government statement made a minute or two before. If the adjournment is granted, the debate begins at 7.30 that evening and may continue until 10.30. As the subjects are invariably "big" by nature, these debates are first-class in their interest. And quaintly enough, speeches are shorter and in consequence more to the point than usual. Perhaps the reason is that only four hours are available for preparation, and that there is not the opportunity to look up great masses of detail which often clogs a speech. An emergency debate on Egypt, obtained through this privilege, provided 14 back-bench speeches as well as the Front-benchers in its three and a half hours, with every effort brisk in its brevity and hard-hitting. Cynics said that night that in future, Parliamentary business ought only to be announced three hours before it was due to be taken.

There is another kind of adjournment. Sometimes a big debate is, by agreement, taken on the motion for the adjournment. This is to ensure the widest possible range for the discussion, so that the others will not be confined in what they say to the terms of a motion. One such debate had a comically unexpected result shortly after the 1950 Election, when for a debate on fuel the Government moved the adjournment, voted against it, and were defeated.



PARLIAMENT HOUSE

After 50 years, "Queen-Lords-and-Commons" once again.

CHAPTER 6

Making the Law

BETWEEN Questions and the Adjournment debate, the Commons turns to its legislative work. But just before this, there is a moment when Anything Can Happen; and in these troubled days, it probably will.

It is the instant, at half-past three, when Ministers make statements on developments in policy of which they wish to keep the House informed, but on which there has been no opportunity to question them. This was the moment when Neville Chamberlain made frequently inaudible statements on foreign affairs; it was also, as I said earlier, the moment when Mr. Churchill announced the German surrender. That was tremendous news, but it had to wait until Questions were over.

It is the moment when the Food Minister announces ration changes; when Mr. Harold Wilson, as the President of the Board of Trade, having flown all night from Russia, announced his big wheat agreement, and looked daisy-fresh when he did so. Or the Prime Minister announces a meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers. Often the announcement leads to what amount to little debates though everything is conducted by way of Question and Answer. It is here that Mr. Churchill's two hundred word "Questions" came in so useful when he was in Opposition. What happens depends on the contents of the original announcement. When the Labour Minister of Supply told the House, at this time, that he intended to nationalise iron and steel, he caused a storm that went on for a solid hour. Perhaps a demand may be voiced for a quick debate on the subject of the announcement. The Minister

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tactfully remarks that debates have nothing to do with him—and the Leader of the House is brought into it, temporising genially, suggesting “talks” through the “usual channels”, which is Parliamentese for the Party Whips, who arrange business.

It can carry greater news. Sir Stafford Northcote rose casually one day at the end of Questions and said, “Perhaps the House will allow me a few minutes before it proceeds to business”. Then he announced the impending dissolution of Parliament.

After this is all over, the visitor in the Gallery will hear the Speaker say, “The Clerk will now proceed to read the Orders of the Day”, a peculiarly rhythmic phrase which has led frivolous observers to suggest that it should be put to the tune of *John Brown's Body*. After all, when they brought Dan Leno into the Gallery forty years ago, he looked and listened intently for an hour. Outside, they asked what he thought of it. He thought for a moment, then replied, “It would go better with a piano!” Danny Kaye, in the same Gallery forty years later, moved not a muscle and did not take his eyes off the House for a moment, except when he nearly fell out under the rail to see a back-bencher beneath him. Kaye admirers are still awaiting his “Sketch of an M.P.”

Now you will see the bewigged Clerk at the Table rise and read from the Order Paper the main business, saying, “Cattle Grids Bill, second reading.”

And at that moment it seems as though everyone in the House hurries out! The Public Gallery is perpetually puzzled by this general exodus the moment Parliament comes to its big job of the day. The answer is that a Member of Parliament today has to do so many things in so short a space of time. He has your letters to attend to; he probably has meetings with other Members to discuss this or that; he may well have an appointment with a Minister in his office—on your business. The Bill under discussion may not be of a direct constituency interest to

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him, so he goes away to attend to those duties which more nearly concern you. He will be around the building all evening if there is a sudden development; you will probably find him in the Chamber for the final speeches. The Members who stay behind for the debate are those directly concerned—lawyers if it is a debate on, say, leaseholds; farmers if it is an agricultural discussion. Or Scotsmen if the subject is the Scottish Estimates; woe betide the Englishman or the Welshman who interferes here!

But if it is a big debate on, say a vote of censure, things are quite different. The House takes on an atmosphere of its own. Throughout the question-hour you can feel things growing more and more tense as the House gradually fills. The Prime Minister always gets a big cheer from his party, born of taut nerves; the Opposition greet their leader mightily from the same cause when he enters. The very air seems a-quiver with expectation. From time to time the tension is broken by an explosive joke that acts as a safety valve. Any remark with a pretence to humour provokes howls of laughter. Finally the last question is answered and the Members settle back in their seats to hear the opening speech. Nobody leaves the House after Questions on a "big" day. The attendance thins in the dinner hour, but at nine o'clock, when the winding-up speeches begin, the benches fill up again until all the seats are gone; the Chamber holds only 400 odd, and there are more than 600 M.P.'s. So the rest pile up at the Bar. The front rank fills, then another behind it, and so on until there are five or six ranks there, and a crowd behind the Speaker's Chair. This is the scene which Mr. Churchill and Mr. Morrison had in mind when they insisted that the New Chamber should be the same size and shape as the old. Mr. Churchill wanted none of the Continental political practices where a semi-circular Chamber made it possible to shift along the bench a little, and be neither of this party nor the other. In a rectangular Chamber there is none of that. To change his party, a Member must

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“cross the floor”, and political alignments are kept quite clear. Mr. Morrison wanted the big night at the House to remain as crowded and exciting as it is in a too-small Chamber. And, after all, if that Chamber were big enough to give every Member a seat, it would look perpetually half-empty between the relatively few occasions on which it is packed. “The Old Gangs of both the Parties are combined on this, and they’re a pretty tough lot!” chuckled Winston. By combining thus, they kept a precious atmosphere intact.

Well, the Clerk has now read out the title of the Bill, and now the Minister in charge rises to move the second reading. Bills, like Questions, are the descendants of petitions; the similarity is obvious. The first reading is formal, has been for many years. It gives permission for the Bill to be printed.

On Second Reading, the House debates the broad principles of a Bill. If a Member tries to go into too much detail he will be asked by the Minister concerned to raise it again in the Committee Stage. The Minister is concerned to explain the effect of the Bill in general, and Opposition to say why they object to it. There are precious few agreed measures presented to the House, for the criticism of the Opposition is the file by which a Bill is smoothed and rounded. Some small provision may bear hardly on a section of the community. The Second Reading debate brings out this point, and it will probably be put right in the Committee Stage which comes next, and which is the stage of detailed examination. Even the position of a comma, the most important punctuation point in the language, has been questioned. Between them, Government and Opposition can take a Bill to pieces and rebuild it. As soon as it is published, every M.P. has a copy, and examines it, on both general principles and for its effect on his constituents. Now on this stage, he can put down amendments and get them discussed. He can get a reply from the Minister on the specific point he raised; may even get the Bill altered.

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On the top of that the Opposition is looking at the Bill from the standpoint of its political principles, and is trying to amend it accordingly. The Second Reading debate, having resulted in the carriage of the Bill's broad principles, the Opposition accept that for the moment and put down amendments which they declare will make the Bill work better.

On the Iron and Steel Bill, for instance, they tabled many amendments about the qualifications which Members of the Nationalised Corporation must hold; amendments which produced from Mr. Stanley Evans, later famous for his 45-day career as Under-Minister of Food, the remark that he did not want to see as Members of the Corporation "elderly Trades Unionists who tend to bask in the miracle of their own careers".

Perhaps the greatest example of the efficacy of a Committee Stage was in the pre-Hitler war National Service Bill. When the Labour Party finally withdrew their furious objection to conscription as a principle, both sides of the House worked together to improve the Bill. Law Officers of the Government, and ex-Law Officers on the Labour Front Bench held quiet legal arguments and discussions during that Committee Stage; would it not be better put this way? and so on. As a result, there was never a legal quibble about the Bill after it had passed, and it worked perfectly.

For the foundation of the Committee Stage of Bills we must go back to Tudor days. Then, with the Commons fighting the Monarch to get Bills passed, it was vital that the entire House should agree on a measure before it went to the Throne for approval. Sometimes it happened that half the House could agree on some parts of a measure, but that the other half would not agree. So they formed the habit of choosing a number of Members, and telling them to take the Bill away and amend it until all could agree on it. Today the Bill goes to the King when it has been approved, not by all, but by the majority of the House;

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but the Tudor practice undoubtedly paved the way for the stage of detailed examination.

In those headlong days after the war, so much legislation was impending that it was obvious that desperate measures would have to be taken if Parliament was to get through the work. It was even suggested that the House should split after Questions into a number of special committees to consider Bills. The device of "Standing Committees" was a half way house. They were formed with a hard core of permanent Members, chosen by a "Selection Committee" of the House itself. Extra Members were added for each Bill—men with a special knowledge of the subject, or with a constituency interest in it—the steel towns with the Iron and Steel Bill is an obvious example. These men brought the numbers of the committees up to 50 or 60. They met in the mornings in the big, high-ceilinged, 100 years old Committee Rooms overlooking the Thames, draughty in winter, stuffy in the summer because of the Barry windows which, though very picturesque (they were made from the metal of French guns captured after Napoleon's fall) depended mainly for ventilation on small diamond panes high up. Sash windows, if opened, produced only a breeze calculated to scatter papers all over the room. There is an air extraction plant behind the iron grills around the cornices, but you would never think so. The rooms are arranged with three or four rows of benches facing each other, in a miniature Parliament, with the Chairman at a raised bench on a dais running across the end of the Members' benches. He is flanked by House officials and Parliamentary draughtsmen. At a small table between the two Front Benches is the Hansard reporter, relieved at 15 minute intervals. He has no hearing troubles here, though these can beset other Parliamentary reporters who, in some Committee Rooms, are accommodated rather far away from the Members. This was the case in the Iron and Steel Committee, when it proved impossible to hear until, on my instigation as Honorary Secretary of the Reporters'

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Gallery, Members were asked to "speak up"; whereupon Oliver Lyttelton, leading the Conservatives, smiled and said that in that case he wished to make it plain that "if I raise my voice I am not starting a row, but am merely considering the reporters".

The Standing Committees met at half-past ten in the morning, an unpleasantly early hour for a Parliamentary man who had probably not left the Palace until midnight on the previous day. And it was intense, detailed work liable to leave even the fittest man with a slight headache with which to face the rest of the Parliamentary day. Yet it went on month after month, while the time of the House itself was freed for the introduction of yet more Bills, which then took their places in the queue for the morning Standing Committees.

When the Committee Stage is finished, the Bill is "Reported to the House as amended in Committee". Here you can see another obvious survival of that Elizabethan examination, for after the Members of those days had managed to amend a Bill, it obviously had to be brought back to the House to see whether, in fact, everyone could yet agree on it. More amendments can be tabled "on report"; sometimes they are efforts to achieve an amendment which was refused by the Government earlier. Its movers may wish to affect public opinion by the repetition, or the amendment may be in fulfilment of a Government pledge given in Committee to gain time for the consideration of the best wording for the alteration.

Then comes the Third Reading. Here the House sees the Bill as a finished product, trimmed, and with its rough edges smooth and rounded. There may be quite striking differences between it at this stage and when it was first introduced in the House. Or, as in some regrettable instances, there may still be an inordinate amount of work to be done on it, as in the case of the Town and Country Planning Bill and the Transport Bill, which both left the Commons with large sections quite unconsidered, because

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of the operation of the "guillotine" in the Committee Stage. That is one of the devices forced on the House originally by the Irish M.P.'s who, by prolonging debate, sought to upset all the legislative plans of the Government of the day and so coerce them into giving way to Ireland's demands.

Under the guillotine, a time-table for the entire Bill is worked out, so many days for so many clauses, and at the end of that time, those clauses get no more consideration. Whatever side is the victim of this procedure is invariably furious, but the other side can always point to days when its own opposition was truncated by this method. In the case of the Standing Committees the criticism had the new point that in any case here were big Bills being considered by only a tenth of the House of Commons, and that even there, debate was limited by the guillotine. When it came to the nationalisation of gas, Mr. Herbert Morrison forgot to give Mr. Gaitskell power to impose a time-table on the Standing Committee which examined it. Never was a Bill so carefully looked at! There were nearly a thousand Opposition amendments put down to it!

But when Bills do leave the Commons in a semi-finished state, well, there are always the Lords. The House of Lords is a first-class revising Chamber and even the Labour Party have always said so (they would like it to remain only such). To one "guillotined" nationalisation Bill the Government alone tabled 200 amendments in the Lords!

In Committee the Speaker leaves the Chair, and his place is taken by the Chairman of Committees, or one of his panel of Members chosen for these duties which involve very considerable tact in dealing with turbulent situations, because, as we have seen, only the Speaker has disciplinary powers. The Speaker quits the debate because of history again. In those early days when the Commons were fighting the King or the Queen, there was always a suspicion, well founded in some cases, that the Speaker was the King's man. Secrecy was imperative, for the Commons at that time were under the constant fear that their words might

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reach the King, with unpleasant results for individuals. After all, most of their debates were concerned with the Royal expenditure; they were in process of establishing the principle which won freedom for Parliament of "grievances before supply". So they moved the Speaker out of the Chair, elected one of their own members to preside over the debate, and felt they could talk more freely. Even today the House votes finance in "Committee of Ways and Means", without the Speaker present; cherishes the tradition that grievances must be ventilated before supplies are granted. When the various Estimates are taken, they are preceded by debates in which Members ballot for the privilege of raising various questions connected with them. Not until these debates have been answered is the money voted.

That, in outline, is the M.P.'s legislative work. But this is what Membership of Parliament entails.

CHAPTER 7

Your M.P.—His Mail

EVEN fifty years ago a young man standing for Parliament would be warned that his life would cease to be his own once he was elected. Many a post-war M.P. has thought with a certain wistfulness of the "old days", before his election, when he merely worked five and a half days a week for a living, when he had free time every week-end instead of one week-end in a dozen. Saturdays and Sundays are booked up with meetings or constituency functions weeks in advance. (But having had that wistful thought, he has fought madly for re-election!) His life is a study in packing. Like the House he has to pack more work into a day than the day will properly hold. Since the war, with rules and regulations and statutory orders multiplying like rabbits, dying, perhaps, for a short spell, and then deplorably coming back to life, the Member of Parliament has become the ordinary man's channel of influence. It is, reasons the constituent, the job of his M.P. to "know the score" about everything; to get results out of Government officials; to be able to get the son of a sick father out of the Army when the one-man business is in danger of going hang. Once elected, the Member does not differentiate between Tories, Liberals and Socialists in his constituency. He represents them all, whether they voted for him or not. On the average he represents 60,000 people, say 15,000 families, hundreds of businessmen and manufacturers, all potential problem-fodder. He is theirs. He holds regular "surgeries" in his constituency where his people can bring their troubles. If he lives in the constituency, his front door bell is liable to ring any hour of the day or night as the harbinger of more troubles. He is

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their (free) lawyer; their advocate with the local authority; their spokesman with nationalised industries—M.P.'s today are in constant touch with the gas, electricity, coal and transport boards about the troubles of their constituents, for it has been ruled that Parliamentary questions cannot apply to the "day to day running" of the nationalised industries. He gets angry letters when the landlord won't do repairs.

Constituents drop in on him at the House when they come to London for a holiday—the Central Lobby is perpetually filled with constituents who hope that through their Member they will be able to jump the queue for the public gallery. And nothing, of course, gives a constituent greater pleasure than to be entertained to lunch by his Member at the House. That's expensive for the Member, and it holds a snag for the unwary. Let the Member give lunch to one constituent, and a cup of tea to another, and when, sooner or later, the twain meet, they compare notes! The Member may have made a friend of the man who had lunch, but he is likely to have made an enemy of the one who only had tea!

At one time you would see Members queuing up in the Chamber for tickets to the public gallery. They waited inside, on the long scarlet bench beyond the Bar of the House, until the Serjeant-at-Arms saw empty seats in the Gallery. Their constituents waited outside in the Lobby. The spacious public gallery in the New Chamber has helped in this, for it holds 300 people, twice as many as the Gallery in the Lords' Chamber.

Public interest in Parliament remains tremendous, and a good thing it is, too, in these days of constant assault by totalitarian opponents. Every day the queues for the public gallery run right round St. Stephens Hall and out on the pavement of Old Palace Yard where, incidentally, they pass under the warted nose of Oliver Cromwell, who once unmistakably signalled his contempt of the Commons.

Five thousand letters a day come to the Commons. Five thousand letters have come there every day for the last

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five years. Even divided between 600-odd Members, that works out at a depressingly heavy figure.

Some of these five thousand, fortunately, have only one obvious destination—the wastepaper basket. They are the “crank mail”, for which the luckless M.P. is a natural target. Then there are the postcards, which all say the same thing, but bear different signatures. They come in floods whenever something really controversial is on the programme. There were so many of them when the House was debating whether the Festival of Britain Fun Fair in Battersea Park should be open on a Sunday that Mr. “Rab” Butler remarked that “legislation by reflection” was preferable to “legislation by postcard”. There are other kinds of cranks, such as the voter who wrote to one of the mildest Labour M.P.’s ever to hit the House of Commons. The letter ended, after a farrago of wild nonsense, with the remark that the writer had voted Tory “because the Tories are gentlemen!” Then there are invitations from the constituency; will the Member open this baby show, or that bazaar? Or the Army overseas write to him to ask, “Why is food better on a day when a Brass Hat is coming?” And then come the problems. They make up the bulk of the postbag. That is why you can identify a post-war M.P. by his bulging briefcase. Here are the country’s troubles in the raw. These letters are the cause of half the questions asked in the House. They provide much of the material for speeches in debate. They can embarrass Ministers, who end up endeavouring to “talk themselves out of this”. They could even bring down Governments. For these letters contain not only the tribulations of businessmen and manufacturers, on whom the country still depends for its trade, but also the troubles of the ordinary, humble individuals who make up the nation. An old man finds that his pension book has been lost by the Ministry of National Insurance, so he writes to his Member about it. Mr. Brown cannot get a house. After haunting the Housing Officer, who for all his goodwill can’t give what he hasn’t

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got, he writes to his M.P. These housing letters are often born of frightening desperation. The details which they give would often revolt you in their revelations of conditions which most people thought had passed. The Rural District Council may be having trouble with its building allocation, or over the drainage of an area which has been flooded every year for twenty years. The baker wants to make cakes, his customers want him to make them, but the Ministry of Food won't let him. The couple who married in the war are still living with mother-in-law, but now there are children. A manufacturer can get allocations of raw material to fill export orders, but no export licence has been granted. Another can get the licence all right, but no raw materials. An industry finds German and Japanese competition growing, and the firms write to their M.P. about it. Mrs. Jones extracts from her fire a lump of stone, loses patience, and writes to her Member. If she is a really strong-willed character, she packs it up, labels it "Quite safe, guaranteed non-combustible", and sends it to the Minister of Fuel. Successive holders of that office have received streams of parcels like this. Mr. Shinwell, as Fuel Minister, once remarked in a moment of humour that every day he got parcels, sometimes delectably wrapped and tied with ribbon. Every day, he thought to himself that at last the country was beginning to appreciate his talents; but when he opened them they were, alas, all full of the same thing, lumps of stone and slate!

And so it goes on. There is something inevitable about these letters. There was a big batch yesterday, another batch today, and as sure as the sun will rise, though in Britain it will probably remain invisible, there will be another batch tomorrow. To put off till the next day the letters that ought to have been done today is to ask to be buried like a half-brick in a snowball as it rushes downhill.

Every letter which you write to your M.P. means that he must write two more. One goes back to the constituent, to say what the Member is doing about it, the other to the

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Department concerned. And it isn't the kind of letter to be dashed off in the tying of a cravat. It must be very clear, must set out in unmistakable language the point at issue, for it is not unknown for Whitehall to write back a charming letter dealing with the wrong point. Nor, when the letter is written, is that the end of it. Not by a long way. The correspondence may go on for weeks, so the letters must not only be filed carefully away, but filed where they can be found quickly. A plumber got a telephone installed in his home, on a party line, five years after the war, only after he had written to his M.P., and after eight more letters had passed between the Member, the regional Telephone Manager, and the Postmaster-General. A Member got letters from constituents living in an industrial area about the noise and damage to their houses from heavy hammers in a factory. He wrote to Whitehall, found himself passed round four Departments in succession, and was still writing letters a year and a half later. A disability case taken up by a Member with Whitehall took five months to settle.

All of this makes a secretary quite indispensable, which is another heavy financial burden. Some M.P.'s try to cope by themselves, taking portable typewriters up to a smaller room on the top floor of the Palace of Westminster. Some secretaries used to work in Labouchere's Regency House in Old Palace Yard, just beside the Abbey. Now they work by Westminster Hall. Some Members have offices there. When the Commons were sitting in the House of Lords' Chamber after the war, there was precious little space for Members to dictate their letters. You would see them sitting on couches in the corridors, on the cushioned stone benches in the Central Lobby, even on stone steps, dictating to secretaries. It was hideously inconvenient, and very distracting. When he designed the new Chamber, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott helped a lot by providing comfortable writing and dictating rooms over the division lobbies, just behind the Members' Galleries of the House. They are

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beautiful places, splendidly furnished with big tables of carved oak, handsome chairs and couches. But still the accommodation is not enough. Indeed, there can never be a proper solution in the Palace to the problem of providing writing rooms that would hold all the Members and their secretaries at the same time, or even half of them or a quarter of them simultaneously. So, they will go on writing their letters in the Library of the House, and on the benches in the Central Lobby.

There are Members whose wives are so devoted that they will willingly spend the week-end sorting the mail and typing the replies. These, I suspect, are the wives of relatively new Members. There is, of course, also the other method. It is said of Lloyd George when Prime Minister that he asked his Parliamentary Private Secretary to fetch a particular paper from his locker, one of those rectangular, double-banked oak cupboards which line the corridors, and in which Members are expected to keep all their private papers and belongings. The Secretary opened the locker door, and was submerged in a flood of letters, all unopened. Well, that was a Prime Minister. The back-bencher has no such excuse so he will go on dictating letters all morning, and signing them, perhaps in the Cafeteria on the Terrace, 50 at a time last thing at night. Or perhaps he will get home after a 12-hour day in the Palace, and then begin to open the mail which he hasn't yet had time to examine.

Ministers are not immune from letters. They get their share, and they have the added misfortune to be natural targets for all the back-benchers with constituency troubles. A word from the Minister, thinks the Member, will surely smooth the way, ensure red-carpet treatment for those letters the back-bencher has just written to the Department. And there is the Minister, as large as life, coming along the corridor! But the best-natured Minister simply can't remember every local problem put to him verbally every time he appears outside the Chamber. In any case, the

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Minister has plenty on his mind. All this may account for the "Ministerial Eye", which afflicts Ministers when they are walking around. It is like the eye of the soldier on parade; it looks straight ahead and sees nothing. You can't altogether blame the Minister, or the back-bencher.

The Minister of Fuel is not alone in getting parcels. When President of the Board of Trade, Harold Wilson one day received a parcel containing a vest, accompanied by a furious letter from the woman who had bought it. Look at this! she said, what trashy quality—what a price! "Madam," wrote back Wilson, sidestepping fast, "the Board of Trade doesn't make vests".

The deputy Food Minister, arguing that ration eggs were NOT musty or stale, found himself submerged in parcels of eggs, the demonstrative gift of Mr. Gerald Nabarro, M.P., who flooded the Minister until, as he said later, "He begged me to desist!"

If you have written to your M.P. about a problem, and he has written Whitehall, do not be dismayed or impatient if the rest appears to be silence. Above all, do not write twice to the Department. One Member, whose "out-size" daughter lost her clothing coupons in the days of clothing rationing, provided the illustration of the wisdom of patience. By some quirk of the official mind, replacements of "out-sizes" had to come from the Board of Trade in London, and not from the regional office, whence they came if the lost coupons were merely normal ones. The Member wrote to the Board of Trade and forgot about it. Weeks later the replacements hadn't come, so he wrote again. Nothing happened. So, one dull afternoon, he strolled from the House of Commons to Millbank, went into the Board of Trade, explained his business, and was shown into a handsome waiting room. On the table was a great pile of booklets. They were all the same, all entitled, "How to take care of your corsets!" He spent some time boning up on this important subject, and just as he had finished, in came a charming young woman. He explained what had

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happened—the original letter, the long silence, then the second letter. . . .

“Oh, you wrote again. That was a mistake!” she said.

Flabbergasted, he asked—why? She told him. When the first letter came, it went into its file and began its journey round the Board of Trade. Sooner or later in that journey it would pick up the clothing coupons and when it emerged from the “conveyer-belt” at the other end, the coupons would be despatched. But when the second letter arrived, the file had to be tracked down to whatever department of the Board of Trade it had happened to reach, and then had to be taken all the way back to the beginning to have the new letter attached. After that it began the journey all over again.

In due course, the coupons arrived all right, and a day or two later the Member received a letter from an impatient woman constituent, complaining that she had written to the Board of Trade about something or other, and had had no reply although weeks had passed. “I was just on the point of writing to them again—but I thought I would ask if you could do anything,” she said.

“Madam,” replied the Member, “for goodness’ sake—don’t write again!”

CHAPTER 8

Your M.P.—His Day

A MEMBER of Parliament has a day filled to overflowing. In the headlong times after the war, as we have seen, his day frequently began at 10.30 in the morning with a Standing Committee on some big Government Bill. With the 1950 electoral deadlock there was little legislation, and so the Standing Committees were unnecessary. But even then, the M.P.'s life today is very much the same. He is frequently at the House in the morning for a meeting of some kind. The Parliamentary Labour Party, for example, always has its fortnightly meeting before the House meets. In any case, he has the spectre of those letters overhanging him from the moment he steps out of bed. At lunch time he may well have a constituent to meet, or a delegation from a local authority in the constituency, or local businessmen who want his advice, or wish to ask for his help. Then come Questions, then the debate. During the evening he is sure to have at least one meeting of a "group" of Members who are all interested in the same subject. It may be the Industrial Group, the Agricultural Group, the Land Reform Group, the Fuel and Power Group of his Party, or the Foreign Affairs Group (a lively one, this!). Or it may be an all-Party group. Sometimes there are thirty such meetings in a day. He may want to speak in the debate that is going on. That means sitting in the House to "bob" every time the previous speaker sits down. He bobs and bobs, hoping always to catch the Speaker's eye. In his pocket are his notes, with the telling sentence, perhaps underlined in blue for flinging challengingly across the House; the statistics, product, perhaps, of much research

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in the Library, perhaps even of research in the Victoria Tower, where State documents are stored until wanted, and where there are the accumulations of the centuries marshalled carefully. The speech may have been well rehearsed (to take the trouble is a compliment to the House, and there is the Churchillian precedent). And in the end, it may not be made at all. Home will go the Member, notes still in his pocket. And he will tell you the next day that it was to have been the finest he had ever made. They always are!

But he may be lucky. Bobbing for, perhaps, the umpteenth time, he may feel the Speaker's eye rest on him, and then he will hear his name. Even this can present its own troubles if the name is a common one. When F. E. Smith, afterwards Lord Birkenhead, was waiting to make his maiden speech he was bobbing with half a dozen other Members. The Speaker, selecting "F. E.", called, "Mr. Smith", so THREE of the six bobbers sat down. There were still three standing up. The Speaker elaborated; "Mr. Frederick Smith", he said, and ONE of the three sat down. The Speaker went the whole hog—"Mr. F. E. Smith," he said, and at last the other Smith sat down, and F. E. was able to begin the most brilliant maiden speech that the House had heard for years. Incidentally, did you ever stop to wonder how the Speaker knows every M.P. so well that he can, at a second's notice, put a name to a face half-hidden, perhaps, in some obscure corner of the House? In 1945, when two-thirds of the membership of the House disappeared in the Labour landslide and was replaced by entirely new faces, the Speaker had a tremendous job. He had an album of photographs of all the new Members, and, in off-duty moments, sat with it in the window of his flat overlooking the Terrace, and picked out Members with binoculars as they strolled beside the river. To put the right name to the right face over a matter of weeks is not difficult. To do it all in a day or two is a very different matter.

Well, our Member is now making his contribution to the

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debate. If the subject is an attractive one, say foreign affairs, or one of those big economic "inquests" to which we have become accustomed over the last five years, he is under great temptation. If he is wise, and considerate of the House, he will be brief. It depends on the amount of work he has put in the speech beforehand. It was Gladstone who said, when invited to speak at a function, "If you wish me to speak for an hour, I must prepare for a week; if you wish me to speak for a week, why, I'll start now". A fair average of back-bench speeches is about 15 minutes. It is safe to say that that time could be cut to ten minutes, with full and adequate preparation, and merciless cutting of over-elaboration. It can be done. The Scots used to do it when Scottish affairs were debated, before the Scottish Grand Committee was set up to take much of this business away from the full House. Their time limit for back-benchers was five minutes, and woe betide the man who overstepped the mark. He was apt to find the next speaker acidly presenting him with a minute or two so that the House could get back to its timetable.

In a three-day economic debate in 1947, 150 M.P.'s wanted to speak. Only about thirty were able to "get in". In another debate, 80 wished to talk; three-quarters of them were disappointed. Yet the only remedy is the self-imposed (and self-observed) time limit. At conferences, even in some legislatures where the man who is speaking mounts a rostrum and harangues his hearers, you can have gongs and coloured lights. But any attempt to do this would destroy the informality of the Commons atmosphere, which is its greatest charm. Here members speak from their places, and not from a central point. It would be quite impossible to make any system of signals work, and the House would never tolerate the idea for a single moment. So we come back to self-discipline, perhaps aided by a hint from the Chair. The Deputy Speaker notified Members one day that in his choice of Members to speak he would, among other

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things, take into consideration whether they were going to keep their speeches short.

Our Member will be wise to keep his eye on the Speaker. The Commons have no red lights to tell a man when he has gone on too long. But the Speaker can be just as good. If the fingers of that right hand of his begin to tap out a tattoo on the arm of his Chair, then it's time to bring out the peroration and sit down. In any case, to acquire a reputation for long-windedness is always a bad thing in the House. Like the man who begins by saying, "I shall not detain the House", and invariably does. Or the expert who has spent half the night polishing the periods, detailing the arguments, and marshalling masses of statistics so that they trip off his tongue so effortlessly that his hearers, with equal lack of effort, relapse into a coma.

Nerves may affect our Member—the House is the cause of a species of nervousness which Members will tell you they have never felt anywhere else. There was one who declared that he saw blue flames shooting out of the Speaker's wig. Lord Guildford, son of Lord North, made, through nerves, the shortest speech on record. He rose, and was instantly paralysed by nervousness. He gasped out the three words, "Mr. Speaker . . . Sir!" but could get no further. He sat down, and never spoke again. All this, of course, is only a temptation to go the other way, to try to achieve the reputation of being a "strong and silent" M.P. But this may not work either. They still tell the story of a Member who kept silent for twenty years. Then one day, in the enthusiasm of a big debate, he exclaimed, "Hear, hear!" The *Hansard* reporter chuckled, and printed his name beside the applause. The reputation of twenty years vanished in that moment.

When he does get called, our Member must be careful what he says. Parliament has its own rules for language. Like the rule that Members must not bring "weapons" into the Chamber (which today includes things like attaché cases) and the other rule that they must not overstep the

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strips of red carpet down each side of the House, which are supposed to be just outside two swords' lengths of each other, the rules about language are designed to keep passions in check. If our Member wants to quarrel with Mr. Jones, he cannot use Mr. Jones's name. He must first think of the name of Mr. Jones's constituency and then refer to him as "The Honourable Member for —", and if Mr. Jones is a soldier, sailor or airman, he must be called "The Honourable and Gallant Member", and if he is a barrister, he must be "The Honourable and Learned Member". That gives him an opportunity to cool down. It is difficult to stay really angry with all those points to keep in mind. He must not use language which is too sharp, or blunt. On no account must he use such expressions as, "insulting dog", "behaving like a jackass", "cad", "caddishness", "scurrilous", "vicious", "vulgar", "swine", "corrupt", "dishonest", "blether", "criminal", "Pecksniffian cant", or "not a damned one of you opposite", "stool pigeons", "cheat", "bastard". These have been expressly barred by the Chair. Banned, too, is the word "lie". Mr. Aneurin Bevan began his speech on the devaluation of the £ by the resounding phrase that he "welcomed the opportunity to prick the bloated bladder of lies with the poniard of truth". Mr. Churchill, with a chuckle, protested that surely the word "lie" was out of order. To which Mr. Speaker replied blandly, "Oh, I thought it was a quotation!" And certainly it sounded too Shakespearean for a modern Minister.

But Parliament broadens in its language. Sir Alan Herbert, fighting a memorable battle over Newfoundland, managed to say that Newfoundland had a "damned sight better" dollar balance than we had. And later he quoted a story ending in the famous words, "That's a hell of a way to run a railway". That's a far cry from the days when Mr. Gladstone exclaimed that he "didn't give a damn" and had hastily to explain to a shocked House and country that a "dam" was a small Indian coin! But there is a story of a country squire who was waiting to make his maiden speech

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and was unfortunate enough, at the last moment, to be incensed by something said. He was called, rose and began in great indignation, "Mr. Speaker . . . dammit, Mr. Speaker. . . ." He was sternly called to order, sat down, and never spoke again.

Our Member has an atmosphere of peculiar charm in which to speak. The House of Commons has its own attraction—its informality. Here is no stiffly formal gathering of delegates, sitting rigidly in their chairs waiting to be addressed. There is always a little hum of talk on the benches; some Member will be standing by the table while the Clerk checks over the question he wishes to put down. A Minister will be leaning against the Speaker's Chair watching the scene. A Badge Messenger, one of the attendants in the House, in evening dress, with his silver-gilt insignia hanging over his waistcoat, will be passing a "green card" along one of the benches to summon an unsuspecting Member out into the Lobby to see a constituent. As he speaks, the doors of the Chamber will swing to and fro perpetually as Members stroll in, look around, perhaps in search of someone, perhaps just seeing how things are going. Or they may be friends of his who, seeing his name go up on the indicator in the dining-rooms or the smoke room, have come in to give him encouragement.

At one time, our Member would have had to worry about making himself heard. Indeed, after Sir Charles Barry had rebuilt the Palace after the fire in 1834, Members found that they simply couldn't hear a word that was said. The place had to be closed immediately while a false ceiling was installed which, incidentally, so ruined Barry's conception of the Chamber in his own opinion, that he never entered it again.

When the false roof was in place, Members could hear each other if they spoke up, but whether the Galleries, and particularly the reporters in their gallery—above the Speaker's head—could hear them, was quite another thing. They strained their ears until deafness became an occu-

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pational disease in the Gallery. *The Times* thundered that its reporters were going deaf. A new reporter had to serve for months in the Gallery before his ears became attuned to the murmurings on the floor below. Lloyd George turned away from the Speaker in a big oration; *The Times* reported him the next day with the acid remark, "Speaking with his back to the Press Gallery, the Right Hon. Gentleman was understood to say. . . ." Voice amplification everywhere else but in Parliament became an accomplished fact. Why, asked the reporters, couldn't it be installed in the Commons? The Lords led the way. They put a microphone on the table in between their two Front Benches and installed earphones in the Press Gallery. The reporters might have looked like a lot of crystal-set owners as they sat there, but at least they could hear what was going on. And that was something new in the Lords, for the Lord Chancellor, who is Speaker of the House of Lords, sits at the far end of the Chamber from the Press Gallery, and peers tend to turn away from the reporters, and address him. Back in the Commons, the reporters continued their agitation. But still the Commons would not have it; perhaps Front Benchers feared that their "asides" might be overheard. A new First Commissioner of Works was appointed, and he happened to be known as a first-class Latin scholar. The Press Gallery had a Latin scholar, too. Almost in jest, someone suggested that if the Government wouldn't listen to the King's English, they might listen to the language of the Senate. So, in due course, the First Commissioner, Mr. Herwald Ramsbotham, received a flowing oration in Latin beginning—

*"Quare non venis nos videre aliquando ut ait Maia Occidentalis?"*¹ ("Why don't you come up and see us sometime," as Mac West would say?)

As the Gallerymen had hoped, the First Commissioner's sense of humour was tickled. He replied—in Latin.

¹ *The Press Gallery at Westminster*, published for the Parliamentary Press Gallery, 1950 by Kemsley Newspapers Ltd.

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More, he accepted an invitation to the Reporter's Gallery to hear for himself. He didn't hear a thing. As the author of the original letter, William Barkley, commented "He thought we were wonderful". And, in due course, experiments began. For the engineers they were heart-breaks. The House of Commons presented a unique acoustics problem. The microphones had to pick up voices from any part of the Chamber. But, with their skill challenged, the engineers persevered. Reporters came into Town on Saturdays, went down on to the floor of the House and made speeches from the Despatch Boxes, and from all the odd places that would have to be "covered" by microphones.

All the time, the ordinary work of Parliament was going on. In the grim international situation of 1938 and 1939, Neville Chamberlain made statements periodically on the progress or otherwise of international affairs. His statements covered British policy in reply to the successive Hitler speeches which had taken the place of the morning-coated diplomats of the pre-1914 era. Yet many of those statements were made in conversational tones that were just about audible on the Opposition benches, only a few feet away. One day, in a "key" statement, Mr. Chamberlain used a vital word. In his muted murmur it was well-nigh inaudible. Behind the Press Gallery, a dozen reporters checked their shorthand notes together before putting the Prime Minister's statement over the wires. Eleven agreed on what the "key" word was, the twelfth disagreed. He held to his point so strongly that a message was sent down to Mr. Chamberlain's Parliamentary Private Secretary, asking for verification. The reporters deliberately held up transmission of their report until the reply was received. And when it came, the twelfth man was proved to have been right!

Today, the Commons has full voice amplification, and most Members simply would not be without it, though occasionally there is a Front Bench reaction against it.

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The trouble is that the microphone between the two Despatch Boxes tends to "ring back" at the Front Bench speaker. But at least the amplification relieves Members of having to throw their voices in all directions simultaneously, for two-inch amplifiers built into the backs of the benches in the New Chamber enable them to hear perfectly. You may see Members leaning forward, almost with their heads in their hands, or leaning right back, almost prone across the bench. They are neither in despair nor asleep, but are merely listening to the amplifier either in the bench in front, or in the back of their own benches.

But to return to our back-bencher, who has now been called, is making his speech, and is being heard. If he prepared it well, it is going to be compressed and to gain in effect from the compression. But if he prepared it too rigidly, it may be completely out of tune with the rest of the debate; for it was prepared before he knew what other people were going to say. Mr. Speaker pleads at regular intervals for "the cut and thrust of debate". This is what makes a Parliamentary institution; the clash of opinion; the stress of argument. And it is not achieved by a set speech. Never was this more admirably demonstrated than in the post-war Parliament when a certain Member was waiting in the hope of being called in a foreign affairs debate. He was leaning forward in his seat, lips moving silently. The Member who was speaking referred to him, but he did not move. Another reference was made; again he did not move. The third time he heard, but replied, "I am sorry, but I am afraid I was not listening . . . I was mentally rehearsing the speech which I hope to be able to make." That is not what is meant by the cut and thrust of debate. The same Member, when he came to speak, refused to give way on the grounds that "I am speaking against time"—but went on to take 35 minutes!

By and large, the best advice to the back-bencher is that given in the oilfields, "If you don't strike oil in the first ten minutes, stop boring!" And, of course, there is

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always Disraeli's advice to the young Member who asked whether Dizzy thought he ought to speak often in debates. "Goodness me, no" replied the great man. "It is much better that the House should wonder why you don't speak, than why you do!"

So our back-bencher will be living up to the best traditions of the House if he not only keeps his speech short, but relates it to the speech of the man he has followed. He must be sufficiently alert to pick up a point from the previous speech, and either support it or reply to it. To spend a minute or two on this is much better than merely to rise and say, "I will not follow the last speaker into that interesting train of thought . . ." and then follow with the speech prepared the night before.

The House of Commons is a unique assembly, in that it can always produce an expert on any subject you like to name. If not an absolute expert, at least someone who has had experience of it. This is another source of strength to the House, it is not composed of full-time politicians. Many of its Members still earn their livings outside. These men have important contributions to make to debates. Even after the Chinese invasion of Tibet the House could produce a Member who had lived in that forbidden and veritably unknown country. His speech was one of the most interesting the House had heard. And it was listened to in considerable attention; the House will always give attention to the man who obviously knows what he is talking about. Just as it will subside in obvious boredom when the street-corner claptrap begins to emerge.

Our back-bencher must also remember that his mind must be cool and collected during those few moments when he is on his feet. There is nothing more upsetting to a speaker than an anti-climax. Such as, for instance, the anti-climax that overtook a Liberal when he was defining his party's attitude to a vital vote on steel nationalisation after the 1950 General Election deadlock. With literally everyone, Government, Opposition, party leaders and back-

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benchers, hanging on to his words, he spoke overlong, entangled himself in his own sentences; and having led up to the crucial point, got it wrong and had to start all over again amid the uproarious laughter that had sprung from the pure comedy that had suddenly replaced high drama.

Humour has a very definite place in our Parliamentary life. It is the gleam of sunlight that suddenly illumines the November day and gives a sudden lift to the spirit. In its more extreme form of ridicule, it is the politician's most deadly weapon. It can make the foolish wish they had never been born: it can puncture the most high-sounding peroration. Mr. Shinwell once perorated that there would be "no guinea-pigs ruling this roost"—on coal nationalisation—only to be reminded abruptly that such was not the normal function of a guinea-pig.

Some humour bites, some achieves its effect without leaving a scar. Oliver Stanley never inflicted a hurt, but his humour both lightened the dark hours of all-night sittings on the Finance Bill and pricked the long-winded and any who were in danger of complacency. When the tax on admission as a barrister and on solicitors' clerks was abolished, a back-bencher began to delve into the beginnings of the tax. He started in 1870, but then moved back to 1694, and then up to 1765. "Will somebody tell me when the Honourable Member gets within a hundred years?" sighed Stanley, settling himself comfortably on the bench.

When Cripps gave a concession on soda-water, Stanley offered him "diluted" thanks.

Mr. Gaitskell, after his injunctions to the public to "bath less—it doesn't show anyway" speech, came inevitably in for the Stanley touch. Stanley referred with a chuckle to "that academic throng of economists on the Treasury Bench who, in all their glory, make such an impressive display of *mens sana*; though not, you will regret to hear, Mr. Speaker, always IN CORPORE SANO!"

And after Mr. Shinwell had spoken of laying the "infrastructure" of European defence at a Brussels meeting,

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Stanley gleefully adopted the phrase. It happened that a woman Labour member had declared in considering anything new, Tories always thought "from the top downwards." Stanley said, "I suppose the corollary which the Honourable Lady would apply to Ministers is that their consideration starts from what you might call the infra-structure, and endeavours to work its way upwards!" Gravely he added, "I am very grateful to the Honourable Lady. She has made clear to me many things about the last five years which I had hitherto failed to understand!"

When Mr. Attlee developed an ulcer, Stanley voiced the sympathy of the House but added, with a chuckle, "None of us on our side really appreciates him as Prime Minister until we begin to read the selections of those who may possibly succeed him."

When the Member for Cambridge, in moving the Address to the King at the opening of a Session, made the usual remark that his selection was a compliment to his constituency, Stanley smiled and said, "When one thinks of Cambridge, one thinks of Oxford first."

On a long speech by Mr. Clement Davies, the Liberal Leader ("Clem the Lesser," as a wag called him), Stanley chuckled, "The natural rotundity of phrase, the habitual profundity of tone, the occasional irrelevancy of theme, all united to remind me irresistibly of Sandy Macpherson at the BBC organ!"

Mr. Herbert Morrison one year refused to allow Parliament an emergency September meeting to talk over the economic situation—but the next year summoned the House back specifically to pass the Bill clipping the Lords' veto from two years to one. Stanley commenting on this contrast in willingness to recall, looked back on the speech with which the Leader of the House had refused the Opposition request; "Oratorically, it was Mr. Morrison's finest hour. Never have I seen the heads of his colleagues on the Front Bench nod more frequently and less drowsily. Never have I heard the cheers of the Parliamentary Private

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Secretaries coincide more consistently with the right end of the right sentence!"

The Gaitskell "bath-less" speech drew its quips for two full years. When somebody commented on a poster bearing the picture of a baby saying, "Half a fire keeps me warm," a Tory chuckled and suggested another one entitled, "Half a bath is better than no bath."

And when gas was being added to coal and electricity in the nationalised trilogy, a Tory quipped, "Mr. Gaitskell will now control every form of fuel, and it will now be in his power to reduce everyone to the same sanitary habits as his own."

Someone else remarked that there were many problems for Mr. Gaitskell to ponder in his moments of relaxation, "in his bath, for instance".

It was a lesson learned the hard way, but Mr. Gaitskell took it very well. He put an end to it finally by smiling at his tormentors and saying, "I think that probably sufficient emphasis has already been laid on that particular form of fuel economy."

"Rab" Butler made an economic point with humour when he said, "Unrequited exports are like unrequited love, extremely exhausting and not very rewarding."

Mr. Brendan Bracken, in a debate on the BBC., remarked, "Alas, it is still true that a joke in the BBC.'s mouth is no laughing matter."

Sir Waldron Smithers gave an unusual political definition when he described a Brains Trust in which he took part—" . . . opposite me was a young woman who said she was a Socialist—she had red toe nails anyway."

Some humour is unintentional. "This is going to be permanent . . . for a long time," said a back-bencher, intent on making his meaning quite clear.

It can, as we have seen with Mr. Churchill, be useful in dealing with interrupters. Oliver Stanley, too, illustrated this with, "I wish the Honourable Gentleman's interruptions were as inaudible as they are unintelligible."

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A pun that puzzled Parliamentarians for a moment or two came one day in the slow, deliberate speech of Sir David Maxwell Fyfe. "I am one," he said, "who stands unashamedly glorying in the fact that he is a good party man . . . the only thing I hope is that no cynic will add to my tombstone, 'Here lies a good party man,' the words, 'as usual' or something of the kind."

Lord Hailsham, when he was Quintin Hogg, scintillating Tory back-bencher, began a peroration, "I propose to conclude with one or two finely rounded sentences. . . ."

To illustrate that even the best of us make mistakes, Raymond Blackburn told a tale of his childhood. His father, he said, was a doctor in Bournemouth, and young Master Blackburn was struck by the fact that though, in the polite fashion of the day, his father always took off his hat to other men who lifted theirs in greeting, there was one man whose salutation he never returned. "Father," asked the boy, "why is it that you never take notice of that gentleman when he takes off his hat?" "My boy," replied the doctor, "the reason is that I told him five years ago that he would die within three years—and he ought to be dead!"

In power, Law Officers sound infallibly mighty, but Mr. Victor Raikes obviously had his doubts when he remarked, "I have found in the past that it has cost me quite a lot of money to follow the legal opinion of Honourable and Learned Attorney-Generals when they have ceased to be Honourable and Learned Attorney-Generals."

In the committee stage of the Bill to nationalise coal, a Tory amendment slipped right past Mr. Shinwell, Mr. Gaitskell (at that time his Under-Secretary) and the Attorney-General. All were deep in meditation, and the amendment had been added to the Bill before any of them realised what had happened.

On the report stage of the Bill, Sir Hartley Shawcross, then Attorney-General, moved another amendment to wash out the one that had eluded the vigilance of the Front Bench. He did so with graceful humour, thus:

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"I rise with a particularly humble and contrite heart to deal with this amendment. A very sad story attaches to the proviso which at present finds itself in the Bill. It found its way there by means of an Opposition amendment. Of course, there is nothing sad in that. We are always ready to accept amendments which improve the Bill. . . . We had not contemplated accepting the particular amendment which was eventually adopted. When the Honourable Member (who moved it) had finished . . . I am afraid I did not at once rise. I do not know whether I was spellbound by his oratory, or whether I was contemplating the advantages of hurrying slowly, or whether I did not understand what it was all about, or had lost my brief, or whether I was asleep. At all events, I did not rise. The Chairman immediately collected the voices (took a verbal vote) and for once, oddly enough, the Government voices were silent." The House laughed, and passed his amendment.

And a breath of the past came from a chuckling remark by Mr. Osbert Peake ancient Mr. Dalton's famous "Song in my Heart" passage. "Chancellors of the Exchequer," said Mr. Peake, "should beware of songs in their hearts. They remind me of the Labour Minister in 1931 who told one of his colleagues that his heart bled for the unemployed. His colleague, Jimmy Thomas, replied that he did not want so much his bleeding heart; he wanted more of his blood-stained brains!"

It was Godfrey Nicholson, back-bench Tory, who opposed one of those frequent proposals in the 1945 Parliament that the House should sit later than usual, with the remark, "Members of Parliament are seldom so harmlessly and profitably employed as when asleep."

And in a debate on the National Health Service, Mr. Pitman, son of the shorthand king, commented that in his family, they didn't go running to the doctor for every ache and pain; "We prescribe for each other." Mr. Nicholson, a minute or two later, recalled this and, with a glance at

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the balding Pitman pate, wondered, "Which member of your family prescribed your hair-restorer?"

Humour can point the stupidity of Red Tape. In the dollar crisis of 1947, the Government announced a reduction in the allocation of petrol for hearses. A quick-witted back-bencher asked, "And has a complementary Regulation been issued forbidding death?"

Mr. Chuter Ede, as Home Secretary, proved one day that you can make a joke in official language. Questioned about the youth of the day he replied, "... the lack of parental control and a corporate family feeling are very often the causes of a lot of difficulty with which we have to contend, particularly the apparent desire to get panes of glass and stones into closer association."

Even spoonerisms have their place; genial George Isaacs, when Minister of Labour, once began the reply to a question, "the stotal taff at this hostel. . . ."

An apt commentary on post-war eating habits came from Mr. Walter Fletcher, burliest man in the House, in a Health Service debate. "I have three pairs of spectacles," he said, "one for distances, one for reading and, since the advent of Mr. Strachey as Food Minister, one for eating."

It was Mr. Fletcher who, in a military debate, described himself as "an industrial oasis entirely surrounded by Brigadiers".

One of Parliament's famous tales concerns Ernest Brown, a pre-war and wartime Minister, who was M.P. for Leith, in Scotland. He had the biggest voice that Parliament could remember. The story goes that one day he was talking in the Lobby to some of his constituents and his voice penetrated the Chamber. On the Treasury Bench, Baldwin turned to his Parliamentary Private Secretary. "What was that noise?" he asked. The P.P.S. went out, returned, and said, "It's only Ernest Brown talking to his constituents."

"Well", said Baldwin, "why can't he use the telephone?"

If he is unlucky, our back-bencher may suffer an unusual

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interruption. He may suddenly hear three loud knocks on the door of the Chamber (which he hadn't noticed was being quietly shut by one of the attendants). A moment later the attendant will shout, in tones of alarm, "Black Rod!" and the House steels itself to receive the King's representative. One particular attendant achieves a magnificent quaver when he gives the cry. The note of alarm is quite in keeping, for the ceremony dates from the days after Charles the First had walked into the Commons to demand the Five Members—who were, at that moment, sculling down-river. There and then the House made a rule that the King could never enter again and that when his emissary approached, the doors must be slammed in his face so that he could only be admitted by the will of the Commons. Black Rod comes to the House to bow to each side of it and announce that Royal Assent is about to be given to some Bills by a Royal Commission of three Peers in the Lords, and will the Commons come to watch. "The Lords", he says, "are authorised by virtue of the King's Commission, to summon this Honourable House (two bows, grandly returned by the Members) to the House of Peers to hear a Commission read." Our back-bencher has resumed his seat, perhaps in the middle of a sentence. Now he sees the Speaker and the Serjeant-at-Arms with the Mace, and Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition walk out side by side, leading the procession of Members out through the Lobby, across the Central Lobby and into the Lords. Five or ten minutes later they return, the Speaker announces to which Bills the King's consent has been given, and our back-bencher is free to resume his speech. It is a considerable test of his resilience. But he has the comfort of knowing that it has happened to better men than he. Lloyd George was once in the middle of a tremendous speech on a religious question that was currently tearing the country apart. He had worked the House up to violin-string tension when Black Rod knocked at the door. L.G. went with the others to the Lords, but when the

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House reassembled he was not there. Members were just beginning to wonder whether he had given up the unequal struggle when in he walked, brisk and fresh. He resumed his speech, and in two minutes had recreated the electric atmosphere!

It happened fifty years ago, too. A most important speech in the Commons was interrupted by Black Rod's unexpected appearance. When the Commons had returned to their chamber, a back-bench M.P. protested vigorously against the timing. Couldn't something be done? he asked. The Speaker replied that he didn't see that there was much he could do, but he would try. Just fifty years later, in the 1945-50 Parliament, it happened again. A big front-bench speech was interrupted, and the Commons processed to the Lords and back again. A back-bencher protested with vigour. Couldn't the Speaker, he asked, see what could be done to ensure better timing. The Speaker replied—he didn't see that there was much that he could do—but he would try!

Well, our back-bencher has made his speech. His mouth is dry, and he wonders whether he actually made the points he had in mind. Again, if he prepared his speech properly, he knows that he did make them. If he didn't prepare, the betting is six to one that he made them three times over, just to make sure. Now, he is at liberty to go and get some dinner. You can be sure he badly needs it. But first he must sit in his seat for twenty minutes or half an hour. To make a speech and then scurry out looks bad, and is not polite to the House. Besides, the succeeding speaker may flatter him by taking up his points.

He may feel that his speech is so good that he wishes that ALL his constituents could hear it. On the radio, may be. It's a vexed question, and the success that has attended this innovation in New Zealand has only bedevilled it.

The proposal has been made time and again, and the post-war enthusiasm for the spoken word, both in Parlia-

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ment and on the Air, brought it up once more in that headlong Parliament. The New Zealand experiment naturally played its part in the argument for broadcasting, and it was suggested that the same system should apply here, that the BBC should have a special Parliamentary wavelength on which Parliament's proceedings would be continuously broadcast from beginning to end.

It is superficially an attractive idea, but it is founded on the belief that the man-in-the-street is so politically minded that he would be content to spend the evening smoking his pipe and listening to what might possibly be very dull speeches. For Parliament's fare is not a series of exciting foreign affairs debates, or even those on economics and fuel, which can, particularly just now, produce tremendous interest. There's a great deal of necessarily unexciting material as well—which is just another of your M.P.'s burdens. How many people in the country would have extracted much amusement from, say, the Town and Country Planning Bill (which, at the most, half a dozen in the House really understood)? Or the Hill Farming Bill? Or the Leasehold Bill, which the Attorney-General brought in with the remark that it was a good thing that Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, his opposite number, was for that day on the Front Bench so that he could put his feet on the table “in view of the appallingly long and tedious speech I am about to make.” A selection of any of these would make the most enthusiastic listener cry “enough”.

Not only that, but listeners simply would not understand what was going on. When Mr. and Mrs. Brown come into the Public Gallery for the first time, they don't know, either, because Parliament has its own way of doing things.

It has been found, too, in New Zealand they say, that Members tend to try to make their speeches at the peak listening hour, and are inclined to be listless if they have to speak at any other time. Also, they talk more about their constituencies, or, as cynics say, “to” their constituents. Topics in New Zealand's Parliament, of course, are much

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more domestic than those of the British Parliament, so there is that much more reason for interest in the broadcast word.

If anybody did start it in the British Parliament, some constituencies might get a shock. They might discover that they had elected some dull fellows. Of course, the argument can be reversed into a much more tempting light—that the witty speeches would be shown up by the dullards. And, of course, no man ever thinks his own speeches dull.

But the House is almost wholly conservative as far as broadcasting was concerned. And when this proposal was last made, Mr. Herbert Morrison showed himself as good a conservative as the next man.

The knowledge that every word spoken was going out over the air would undoubtedly make Members "mike conscious", and it would be bound to ruin the intimate atmosphere which is the charm of Parliament.

But one thing that could be done, but which has been refused by Parliament so far, is to have particular speeches broadcast. The highspot of this suggestion came during the war when it was put forward that if Mr. Churchill was enabled to record for broadcasting some of those tremendous fighting speeches that he made to the House, it would save him the bodily fatigue of making them all over again for the microphone. But no. Whether it was that the House rightly insisted that it had a prior claim to hear the Prime Minister, or whether it feared the thin end of the wedge, it refused.

Yet it would be a dramatically worth-while innovation, for when the House is exciting, it is very, very exciting, and a good commentator would communicate this feeling over the air.

Our Member may now wish to check his speech with *Hansard*, the Official Report of Parliament—started by William Cobbett in 1803, sold by him to Luke Hansard, his printer, and finally expanded into an official organisation by the Commons in 1909 (by the Lords a year earlier).

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There had been spasmodic Parliamentary reports before that, but Mr. T. D. O'Donoghue, former Editor of *Hansard*, says in *The Press Gallery at Westminster* that the practice of compiling reports of "particular men's" speeches from notes taken by the Clerks was disapproved by the House.

But today it does not matter whether the King knows what a particular Member said in the House, and so the Report is public, and is the most informative book in the world. Our Member will find, however, that he can only correct errors in grammar, or obvious mistakes, or perhaps a mishearing. He must not change the sense. If he has said something foolish, it must stay on record for ever. A Prime Minister once altered *Hansard* to correct the sense of what he had said. There was big trouble, for *Hansard* goes into fat, bound blue volumes as a permanent record of Parliament's proceedings. But it is not the "official" record. That is contained in *Votes and Proceedings of the House*, compiled by the Clerk. It is singularly uninformative; merely says what the House did, not how it did it. There is another kind of Parliamentary report, compiled, indeed, specially for the King. Disraeli used to write these himself for Queen Victoria; he was able to give his considerable descriptive power full reign! Today the task is discharged by one of the Government Whips.

Our Member's first feelings when he sees the sheaf of foolscap sheets covered with typescript of his own words will be one of amazement that he actually said all that. His next feeling will be one of admiration for the reporter who managed to get it all down. But that was simple to the expert shorthand-writers of the Gallery. *Hansard*, and many other reporters, can rise to the heights, even of reporting a Parliamentary "row" which generally involves noting the shouts and remarks of half a dozen men all shouting at once.

But if a "sticky" passage does come, perhaps filled with the economic jargon which has become part of our daily life, you will see half a dozen friends outside the Gallery running over their notes together, and it is one of the beauties of

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the system that if a man can't read the outline he scribbled down under great stress, two or three of the others can scrutinise it and help puzzle it out. It doesn't often happen. When it does, it is always important.

There is a Peer in the House of Lords, Lord Burden, whose ambition as a young man was to become a *Hansard* reporter. He made himself into a verbatim shorthand writer—used to relax and learn at the same time by reading the Bible and the Classics in shorthand. Then a twist of life took him into politics, and now *Hansard* reports him.

Looking at his typescript, our Member will probably feel that he must be a naturally brilliant speaker. Just look at it; not a ragged sentence in the lot! He is unlikely to realise the instinctive pruning that went on during the transcription; the trailing sentence neatly lopped here, with careful attention to the meaning of the passage, so that this was not changed at all, to the placing of a comma; perhaps even the complete discard of the third repetition of the point of the speech. No man, they say, is a hero to his valet. That goes for reporters, too. Probably the sole exception today is Mr. Churchill. He leaves never an untidy sentence, never a ragged ending.

And so, after all this, our Member enjoys his dinner.

But he can't go home now. Dear me, no. He will wish to hear the winding-up speeches from Opposition and Government. Perhaps the Minister may pick up his point and reply to it. If so, he must be in his place. He may wish to interrupt to get a little more elucidation. Anyway, it's nice to hear yourself referred to by those godlike beings on the Treasury Bench. And then there may be a vote. Even at the best of times the Whips don't like you to miss divisions. Nor do your constituents. And certainly, if there is a Parliamentary deadlock with almost equally balanced parties, it would be most unwise, perhaps politically suicidal, to be absent.

Besides, in the division, our Member may wish to raise a point of order, and that is where one of Parliament's quainter

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customs comes in. If a Member wishes to raise a point of order during a division, he must do so "seated and covered".

Like all other Parliamentary customs, it is rooted in sound, practical common sense. In the old days Members all wore top-hats. Apart from making them feel well dressed, this form of headgear kept the overhead light from shining into their eyes. And during a division, they were all strolling about on the way to the division lobby, but hatless, for no Member may wear a hat when standing. So it would be impossible for the Speaker to spot a Member who was trying to raise a point of order unless that Member had some distinguishing mark, and the easiest way to mark a man in such circumstances was to have him sitting down and wearing a hat.

Well, times have changed. Very, very few Members wear toppers nowadays; perhaps Sir William Darling, former Lord Provost of Edinburgh, or Captain Harry Crookshank, of the Tory Front Bench. But people still want to raise points of order during divisions, and the struggles for a hat become, at times, laughable. A Labour Member once borrowed the topper of Mr. "Jimmy" de Rothschild, and had to hold it up round his forehead to stop it enveloping him to his chin. Members have for years been improvising nursery soldiers' hats out of Order Papers, which successive Speakers and Chairmen of Committees have refused to acknowledge as being "hats" in the real sense of the word. One Member, in this fix, materialised a tiny grey trilby from somewhere. It perched attractively on the very top of his head. Another Member, having first tried swathing his head turban-like in a handkerchief, to which the Deputy Speaker remained "blind", not considering that it was a "hat", found that behind him was Miss Jenny Lee, wife of Mr. Bevan, in a black velvet beret. She passed it over, and it was a very Gallic M.P. who sat there shouting, "Point of Order, Mr. Speaker". He was "recognised", and made his point. Then someone else borrowed the beret to make another point. When Miss Lee got it

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back eventually it was not quite as shapely as it had been.

This difficulty of the hat has received official recognition, and the suggestion has been made that there should be a "Parliamentary hat", to be kept "in close custody", by the Serjeant-at-Arms until wanted. The proposal lends itself to an intriguing debate. There is, for instance, the colour of the hat to be discussed! And its design. Plus the difficulty of women M.P.'s who are always wearing hats, and so would not be noticed if they tried to raise points of order during divisions. Perhaps the best way out of it would be to have something really noticeable, like a Cavalier's hat with a sweeping feather. But they compromised with a topper.

Well, the vote is taken, and the main business for the day is finished. But still our Member can't go home. There may be a "prayer" after the odd bits and pieces of business that are purely formal—such things as an Order to permit Sunday opening of cinemas in some area which has approved it after a local vote, or perhaps, an Order to admit a bison to the Zoo under the Diseases of Animals Act (one such was solemnly passed in the midst of the 1945-50 revolution). In the "prayer", Members "pray" the sovereign to annul an Order in Council or a regulation made in his name by a Minister. This is the only way of debating such Orders or regulations and they have to be laid before the House for a specific period especially for this purpose. The "prayer" has no time-limits. If the feeling about it is sufficiently strong, and the numbers backing it are sufficiently large and energetic, it can go on all night. It is another method of forcing a Minister into the open to defend his policy. Stupid regulations, like the one under which a manufacturer was ordered to re-label all his jars because a Ministry said "net" in "net weight" should be spelled "nett", come under fire. Not only stupidity, but unpopular policy can be the subject of a "prayer". Such as Mr. Gaitskell's total abolition of the petrol ration in the dollar crisis of 1947. It proved a most unpopular move, for the abolition-

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ists had forgotten that thousands of working men used motor cycles to get to their jobs. When the Opposition "prayed" against the regulations embodying the abolition, Mr. Gaitskell found his own party rebelling, and at 1.30 in the morning he had only a majority of 27. Yet, an hour and a half before, another division had proved that there were 500 M.P.'s in the House. The petrol vote showed a big drop in the numbers voting, and this argued heavy Labour abstentions, which were in themselves a disapproval of the Minister's action. The Government brought back the petrol ration as soon as they could possibly do so.

It may now be well after midnight. The last trains will have gone, but there is still the adjournment debate. Unless our back-bencher has a personal or a constituency interest in this, he is at last free to go. Perhaps in a taxi to an hotel; many members stay in hotels for four nights a week, and go home, or to the constituency, if they don't both mean the same thing, at the week-end. Hotels are just another added expense for, with the day's meals, they total almost a pound a day, and there is still the home to be kept going, and perhaps there are children to educate.

As he goes home, our Member will be browsing through the latest Government Report, for it is just another part of his job to keep abreast of all these documents. He must be able to talk intelligently on them in debate, must know how the country and the Commonwealth and the world are progressing. And, after all, there is nothing more humiliating than to ask a question, and to be told that you will find the answer on page so-and-so of the appropriate Report.

That is his day. But it may not end there.

CHAPTER 9

This Can Be His Night

HE may not get home at all if the Finance Bill has entered its committee stage, the time of detailed examination, when anyone can put down an amendment to alter any one of the provisions that affect all our pockets for the whole of the following year. There has grown up a Parliamentary tradition of at least one all-night sitting on this Bill. It happened sometimes before the war, aided by the fact that Parliament's normal times of rising do not apply to it. But it grew into a habit in the five years after the war when Mr. Morrison, who had to take a Scrooge-like attitude towards Parliamentary time, decreed that three days was enough in which to dispose of the Bill which decided how many pennies Robinson, Smith or Brown had in their pockets for the next twelve months. The first time he said this, the late Oliver Stanley queried incredulously, "Surely you mean that in those three days we shall TAKE A PRELIMINARY GANDER at the Finance Bill." But no. They couldn't discuss the Bill fully in the daytime, so the Tories decided they would use the night-time, too, and so it has gone on.

An all-night sitting of the House is an interesting psychological study. It falls into several well-defined sections. Remember, Members have been on the go since morning, so round about midnight, everyone gets rather somnolent. Then tempers begin to shorten, and between one and three they are ready to quarrel at the drop of a handkerchief. But then Nature takes her toll, the attendance thins, and you see Members dropping off to sleep on the benches, sometimes lying almost full length, others slumped sideways with an elbow on the back of the bench (which, in this New Chamber,

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will only bring one ear closer to the amplifier!) It is about this time that Lord North generally makes a peevish entry into the discussions. Some Member will remark that some other Member is asleep—whereupon the Member concerned rises indignantly and says that, like Lord North on a similar occasion, he was not asleep—"but I wish to God I was!" As the sun comes up, things brighten perceptibly. Breakfast becomes a thing of the immediate future, not something that seems æons away. And by seven o'clock, well, you simply wouldn't know the place. Heavy-eyed they may be, and unshaven, but they are all merry and bright, and you hear on every hand good temper and wit marching side by side. Then they slip out one by one for a shave in the barber's shop—200 shaves one after the other were a common experience for the barber in that first post-war Parliament. They can take a bath in the huge Victorian bathrooms, with enormous baths, and walls tiled to the ceilings. A Cabinet Minister was once caught in his bath before dinner by a division, but he voted, in a towel. He was safe in those days, for Lady Astor was still only dreaming of the day when she would become our first woman M.P. Then he can breakfast in the dining-rooms or the cafeteria, and by nine o'clock he and his fellows are so bright and cheerful that you can hardly tell which is the all-nighter and which the sluggard who slipped home to bed and has just come back.

It is hard work, but it is worth it. Many a concession, small, but important to someone or other, has been won in those small hours. And again, at the worst, the arguments are on record for future study.

Oliver Stanley, whose untimely death at the end of 1950 was a sad blow to the entire House, was always a comfort and a joy in all these post-war all-nighters. He had become his party's principal spokesman on finance, and he had the knack of knowing when a little wit would leaven debate. Hour after hour of serious financial

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discussion is deadening to the mind as, I fear, we shall find now that he is gone. Stanley enlivened it happily.

In a 19-hour all-nighter in the first post-war Parliament he remarked, at half-past two, "The Financial Secretary to the Treasury has just woken up." At half-past seven he suggested that they should call it a day; "It struck me that the Solicitor-General (gentle Sir Frank Soskice), though still lucid, is not quite so long. I have watched the Financial Secretary to the Treasury for two hours, and he has been awake all the time. It is clear, therefore, that we must look for a progressive deterioration of the standard."

But still they went on. And at 11 a.m. Stanley said, "The sacred hour of 11 o'clock is approaching. Coffee and buns are calling. I heard one of the lady Members say that if any of the unmarried girls saw Honourable Members at this time of the morning, it would put them off marriage forever."

Stanley's wit crackled and bubbled like bacon and eggs in a pre-war chafing dish.

When Sir Stafford Cripps repeated time and again the old phrase, "democratic planning", Stanley remarked, "Sometimes in my more depressed moments I even envy the fate of the Gadarene swine. They did at least commit race suicide in a mood of joyous abandon. They did RUSH over the precipice. Better that than to go over it with every inch of the way—democratically planned.

"The last thing we shall hear as we plunge over the brink is a speech from the Chancellor—mercifully abbreviated—explaining the theoretical correctness of his intellectual processes."

In the Budget in which he crashed, Mr. Dalton introduced an advertisement tax. Sir Stafford Cripps withdrew it after consultation with industry. Stanley twitted him on the speedy withdrawal, "If so soon I was to be done for, I wonder what I was begun for."

Cripps, at the peak of his career, was stung into saying, "Under the stress of speeches of that kind, I shall not be

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prepared to make accommodating offers to the House of Commons."

Stanley bided his time. At last Cripps accepted a little Tory amendment to cut purchase tax from dry batteries. Then Stanley fired his broadside, "The Chancellor has given us to understand," he said, "that future concessions are to be determined not so much on the merits of each case, as on the flattery which the Government receives. Not guns, but butter, has got to be the weapon of Members in future.

"So . . . I should like to declare that the Chancellor has shown courage, wisdom and humanity, all the qualities of statesmanship, in accepting this amendment. I should like further to say that the Solicitor-General, when he gave strong reasons for RESISTING this amendment, showed the same courage, the same wisdom, and the same humanity—in fact, all the same qualities of statesmanship. In order that there may be no ill-feeling, I should like to add that we are all certain that had the occasion demanded it, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury would have shown the same courage, the same wisdom, and the same humanity which are the same qualities of statesmanship, either in accepting or rejecting the amendment as the case might be."

All-night sittings have not, in these hectic post-war years, been confined only to the House. When Mr. Gaitskell was nationalising gas, the Government in failing to give Mr. Gaitskell guillotining powers, reckoned without Mr. Brendan Bracken, who was leading the Tories in this Committee. Now Mr. Bracken enjoyed a fight as much as Mr. Churchill; and a fight he gave them. The whole thing ended with the Gas Committee sitting day and night for three days. *Hansard* stopped reporting the night sessions, probably the first time they had not reported Parliament since the days of Luke himself, who must have turned in his grave, but the reporters were at work from 10.30 a.m. until that time at night—and there are limits. The refreshment department set up a special cold buffet in the corridor outside, which was all very well for the Committee but left

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its Chairman right out of the food stakes. When the food trolleys appeared in the corridor at about twelve o'clock that night hungry M.P.'s smacked their lips, and one of the Conservatives asked, "Will the Minister let us know when the delectable repast outside will be available for consumption?" *Hansard* records the rather abrupt reply of sleepy Mr. Gaitskell, "Go and find out." But the Chairman, who cannot leave the chair while the Committee is in session (the Speaker of the House used to be in this predicament until they gave him a deputy), said, "I understand that refreshments are available to every member of the Committee." Then he added reflectively, "With one exception." It was left to Mr. Walter Elliot, another Conservative, to ask, "Would it be in order to move either that you be allowed the traditional interval for the Speaker's chop, which was the solution in the old days" (when the House adjourned for a few minutes while the Speaker hurriedly took a snack in his house). "Or alternatively," said Elliot, with a twinkle, "that it would not be considered disorderly conduct if you were seen eating a sausage even while occupying the Chair? After midnight it could not be considered disorderly—irregular, but not disorderly." Later on, they adjourned the Committee for a few minutes—and the Chairman got his supper.

By the second all-night sitting of the Committee, the public were coming into the Palace and asking the police, "Is the Gas Committee still sitting?" It was the best show in London. The Committee had been in session continuously for a day, a night, and a day, and was starting on the second night. Mr. Gaitskell was sleeping openly on his front bench. His chin was propped on his hand. Every now and then it slipped off and awoke him. Mr. Robens, his Parliamentary Secretary, took over for an hour or so, then went to sleep himself, at the bench. And across the way was the implacable figure of Mr. Bracken, directing the operations of his side like a general in battle. The thing only collapsed on the third day through the failure of the

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human mind and body to take any more punishment. It never happened again—and it is unlikely that it ever will. If Mr. Herbert Morrison is in the same position at any time, in the future, he will not forget to equip his side with all the powers it needs to force a Bill through according to the time-table.

CHAPTER 10

Private Members

IF the day is Friday, and if the times are not in a Parliamentary sense out of joint—the House may be on different business, Private Members' Business.

Originally, all Parliamentary time belonged to Private Members. They could begin to debate their own subjects at any moment by moving the adjournment of the House. A happy state of affairs it was for the back-bencher, but from a legislative point of view it was chaotic, and could not last. Gradually, the back-benchers gave way. First the Executive gained priority on two days a week for its own Bills, then on three. Up to 1939, Private Members had the Wednesdays and the Fridays for their own Resolutions and Bills. In addition, they could introduce Bills at the end of Questions under what was known as the Ten Minute Rule.

In came the war, and out went the Private Members' time. Came peace, but with it the Morrison-driven Parliament and no Private Members' Time. Sir Alan Herbert, who has become part of Parliamentary history as a "private" legislator—he revolutionised the Divorce Law—slung down a batch of his own hoped-for Bills on the floor in disgust. As the years went by, the position began to look serious. Parliament, at this time, held only a minority of men who had known the delights, and the agonising despondencies, of introducing their own Bills. Among the zealous revolutionaries on the Labour benches there was a tendency to scoff at the mere idea. But Parliament is not so easily changed, and here and there were doughty opponents of the notion that only those great and good beings, Ministers, should have this right. The 1945-50 Parliament began to die. "It is not only dead, but decomposing," snorted Winston

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Churchill in the autumn of 1949. Even Mr. Morrison ran out of legislation, and so, in the last few weeks of the Parliament, he brought back Private Members' Bills. It was only a little step, but it was in the right direction; was enough to sharpen the appetites of back-benchers for their rights. So much so that when Mr. Morrison, in the deadlocked and legislation-starved Parliament that followed the February Election in 1950, let the Parliamentary draughtsmen rest from their labours but offered only a little more Private Members' Time, he was promptly defeated by the back-benchers. It was by half a dozen votes only, but if five was enough to pass the Budget that year, six were enough to bring back the Ten Minute Rule.

Publicity is the whole life of Parliament; publicity through questions and debates. And publicity is a large factor in Private Members' Bills. Even the fact that a Bill has been defeated in Parliament helps to begin to form a public opinion on it. Interest stirs, letters are written to the newspapers "for" and "against" the idea.

The concession which Mr. Morrison made in 1950 gave a number of Fridays for Private Members to bring in Bills in the normal way, by balloting for the privilege. The sponsor has up to five hours in which to get the second reading through, though he is conscious all the time of a couple of other anxious members waiting in the background for a chance to introduce Bill No. 2 and Bill No. 3. After that the Bill would go to a Standing Committee, and then back to the House for third reading. And all the time, hanging over the head of its sponsor, is the factor of time, for only so much of it is available for Private Legislation, and if it runs out before the Bill is through, then there is a "massacre of the innocents". Sometimes the Government comes to the rescue. Mr. Baldwin did so when Sir Alan Herbert's Bill on divorce ran out of time. He made more time available and the Bill passed. That he should do so was an indication of the public interest in the Bill.

Mr. Morrison offered Members the right to have a Bill

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printed, a useful, though limited, concession. They were not slow to point out to him that although this was a help, nothing was so certain to attain wide publicity as the fact that it had been argued on the floor of the House, even in a single speech. You can, after all, talk a newspaper column full in six or seven minutes. If the Member has had the foresight to make his speech sparkling or "newsy" the letters will soon begin to pour in. That was why they insisted on bringing back the Ten Minute Rule, under which any Member can seek the permission of the House at the end of Questions to introduce a Bill. He makes one speech, then any opponent of the Bill can make a speech against it, and then the opinion of the House is taken, by a division if necessary.

Some famous reforms have been made through the agency of Private Members' Bills. Samuel Plimsoll put an end to overloading of ships with a Private Bill which resulted in the "Plimsoll Line" appearing on every hull. You enjoy an extra hour of daylight because of the Daylight Saving Bill, another Private measure whose sponsor fought for years to get it through the House. Ellen Wilkinson, by a Private Bill, changed the law of Hire Purchase, so that if you can't pay the whole of the instalments, you keep what you have paid for. Opponents of private legislation point to these examples and challenge you to name others. The answer is that at any rate the Bill, through its publicity, gives the people a chance to decide whether they want that change or not. And if they want it, depend on it, they will get it eventually.

Private Members' Resolutions have the same function. They too, may have a direct influence on affairs. When the House of Commons "resolves" on something, it is not to be treated lightly. They give an opportunity for non-political debates in which the Party line can dim, and Members can bring objective discussion to bear on a problem.

The greatest danger to Private Members' Time is the

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Party Whip, who is always ready and willing to provide a subject for debate. But that is a gift horse that should be looked in the mouth, for the Whip is likely to provide some “political” subject and thereby inject into Private Time something of use either to the Government or to a political party. Let that become general, and Private Time has died. While the House remains what it has always been, a body of resolute individuals, this is unlikely. But the Whip is always trying.

CHAPTER II

The New Chamber

MEMBERS began to gloat over it as soon as they returned to Parliament after the Summer Recess of 1950. Mr. Herbert Morrison had only his usual post-deadlock lean Parliamentary fare to offer in the first day or two. Members succumbed to the temptation to wander into the magnificent place which Sir Giles Gilbert Scott and £1,800,000 had erected for them.

They had plenty to look at. It is a Chamber which has every virtue and not a single vice. True, a "ghost voice" appeared where it shouldn't have; Members found themselves being pursued by Parliamentary speeches when they were outside the Chamber. But it transpired that air-currents were picking up the sound from one of the tiny loud-speakers let into the back of the benches. That loud-speaker was switched off, and the ghost was laid.

The Chamber has beauty, dignity, and simplicity. Pugin's decorations in the old Chamber were magnificent, but there were too many of them for modern eyes. Richness was lost when richness was everywhere. Sir Giles had carving, certainly, the work of the finest craftsmen in the country, but the eye was directed to it by the completely plain oak panels of the walls. Above these ran the single band of carving, right round the Chamber. The ceiling, too, was innocent of the excessive carvings and coats of arms to which Members had become accustomed in the House of Lords. Sir Giles put lighting panels in the ceiling, but made the glass the same colour as the oak. By day the House has a ceiling which exactly matches the walls. At dusk the lighting comes on slowly behind it, as though the sun were rising. And on those rare occasions when the

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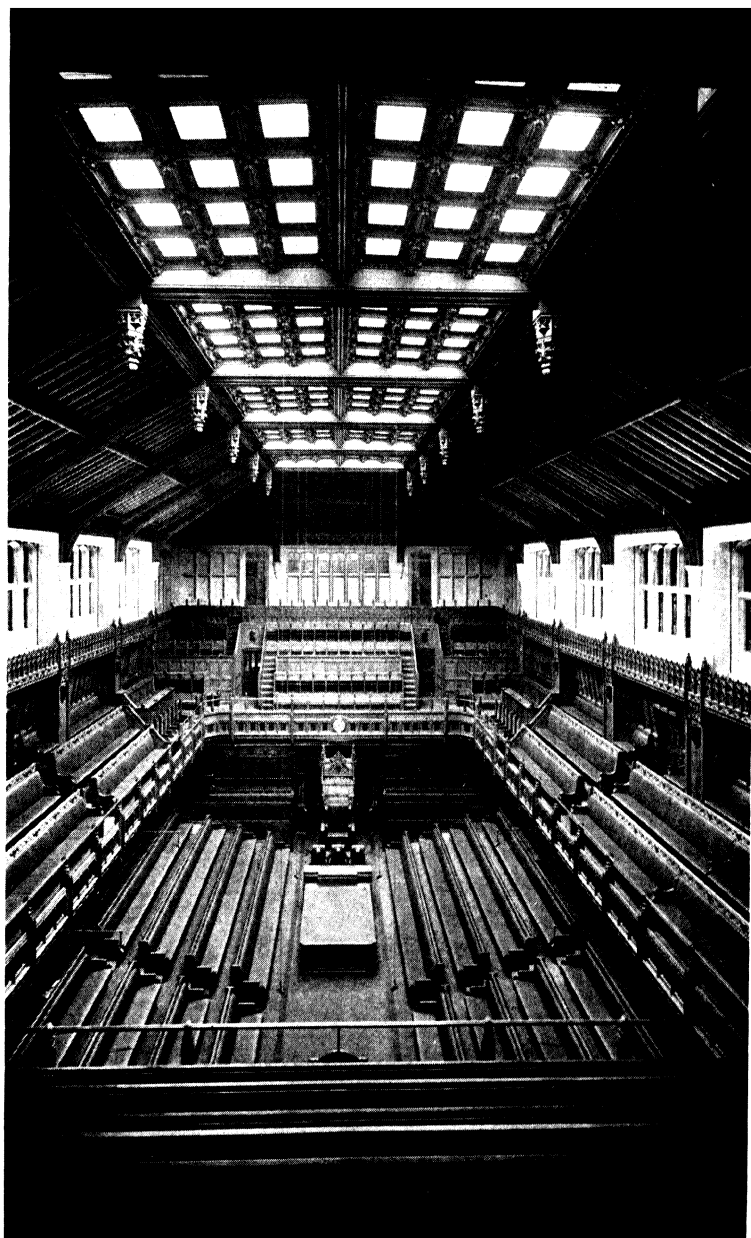
sun shines in this country, automatic blinds rise up inside the windows, set high in the wall with just the hint of an arch. The blinds filter the sun, prevent its rays from dazzling the Opposition, whereas in the old Chamber, they had to be lowered by a man walking on the roof outside.

Plenty of experiment was carried out in the Chamber before it was handed over to M.P.'s. Five hundred soldiers, minus their boots and wearing gym shoes instead, tested the acoustics. Five hundred civil servants got a half-day off to sit in the Chamber in more tests of acoustics and of air-conditioning. Did they feel a draught? If so, where? The test paid dividends, for one woman remarked that it felt to her as though women M.P.'s would have to wear trousers. A balding civil servant felt a draught on the bald spot. They adjusted the air-intake. Now the Commons have only themselves to blame for hot heads, for the New Chamber is cool in hot weather; warm in winter.

If your Member takes you into the Inner Lobby you will find yourself walking through a dream in cream stone. Beside its purity, unsullied as yet by the London atmosphere, the battered, smoke blackened Churchill Arch looks a thousand years old. It is indeed a fitting memorial to the man who took us through Hitler's war but who has never ceased to describe himself as "A child of the House of Commons."

Go beneath the Chamber, and there is a fine conference room for the Prime Minister to hold Cabinet Meetings. There are interviewing rooms where you can see your M.P. privately. On each side of the Chamber, at the level of the galleries, there are the writing-rooms.

Was it any wonder that Members began to gloat over what was to be theirs so soon? And just a week later they prepared to leave the Lords' Chamber which they had occupied pretty well ever since the 1941 bombing. They received the King's message—"Your former place of sitting has now been rebuilt, adorned, and equipped with generous gifts from the other countries of the Commonwealth. It is ready for



From the ashes of the old
THE NEW CHAMBER

[By courtesy of General Electric Co.]

THE NEW CHAMBER

your use as the new House of Commons. It is my pleasure that you occupy the new Chamber on Thursday. GEORGE R."

So had former Kings appointed other places for the Commons to meet, among them the Chapter House of Westminster Abbey, and then St. Stephen's Hall which, with its rectangular form, laid the foundations of the British party system when Members found themselves sitting either alongside Ministers, or opposite to them in token of opposition.

And so they came to the Great Occasion, which, as every Parliamentarian knew it would, turned out to be Parliament's own blend of splendour and informality. One moment the Commons were settling themselves into their New Chamber, with the customary under-hum of talk, the universal chuckle when Lady Megan Lloyd George, squashed among the Liberals, almost sat on her leader's knee; the cheer for Sir Waldron Smithers, who has become the embodiment of die-hard Toryism since the Tories adopted the Industrial Charter.

The next moment, the hush in towering Westminster Hall as the King, a slim figure in a morning coat, mounted those historic stairs to sit on a gold-and-scarlet Throne with the flaming Tudor uniforms of the Yeomen of the Guard splashing colour in front of a fifty-foot blue and gold curtain behind them. The scene glittered in floodlights for cinema and television cameras.

The Mother Parliament was "At Home" to her children. She was in just the same situation as any other mother who was bombed out, had rebuilt her home, and then invited her family for a house warming. The members of the family had all sent gifts for the new home (the Speaker sent 56 illuminated letters of thanks) and she staged a grand reception to show her appreciation.

In the galleries of the New Chamber, when M.P.'s sauntered in early to book their seats for the day, were a score of Speakers and presiding officers of Commonwealth legislatures. In robes of black and gold, black and crimson,

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and crimson and gold they watched as the new Chamber gradually filled. Suddenly M.P.'s were on their feet, bearing an astonishing resemblance to schoolboys at "assembly" as Mr. Speaker, resplendent in his robes of gold and black, and full-bottomed wig, strode in. The "boys" bowed respectfully as he passed. They cheered him greatly as he rose to make a rare speech, expressing a welcome to his fellow-Speakers, to Members of the war time Parliament, to Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (who sat with his brother, Mr. Adrian Scott, in the Gallery watching their Chamber come to life), and not the least to some of the workmen who had built this Chamber with their own hands—they were in the galleries, too.

Prayers were unique that day. For the first time, because of the press of the clock, the House had given up its cherished privilege of praying in private. The galleries—Strangers, Peers, Diplomats and Reporters—followed the example of the House and turned to face the wall.

The Speaker called on the Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee, whose first words proved that there would be no need to fit a false roof to this Chamber in order that speeches may be heard. Mr. Attlee had never been so resonant, so firm and clear. In the Gallery, the architects smiled as they listened.

The Prime Minister made way for Mr. Churchill. Back in what he had described as "my collective cradle", the Old Warrior was at his brilliant best. He recalled that he was the last man to speak in the old Chamber, but looked around him in some puzzlement. There had, surely, been some change in the seating arrangements! "I was sitting—there", he said with a gesture towards the Government Front Bench. "Leading Members of the Government sat with me . . . it seemed a very good arrangement!" Everybody joined him in a reminiscent chuckle. Well, said Winston, everyone had a lot to be thankful for, and he congratulated the Government on a Chamber "Which does the greatest good for the greatest number, and at the same time has regard to the privileges of the deserving few."

THE NEW CHAMBER

And so to Westminster Hall, where the new met the old, for this was the meeting place of that Simon de Montfort Parliament nearly 700 years ago, and his was the first Parliament in which legislation began to assume its present form. Those aged, austere walls put up by William Rufus—Westminster Hall, he boasted, “but a bedroom” compared with the rest of the Palace he was going to build—needed but little ornamentation for such a ceremony as this. Just that single, colossal blue and gold curtain, carpets of the same hue, and the Yeomen of the Guard, and there was all the splendour of the past. There was a wait while nearly two thousand people sorted out their seats. Veteran Arthur Greenwood (“Speak for England”, they cried to him on the night of September 3rd, in 1939, and he did) was brought in in a wheelchair. He had a foot infection, relic of an exciting division when his foot was trampled, but declared that he would not have missed this occasion for anything. Up and down the main aisle went Ministry of Works cleaners, hastily running their carpet-sweepers along in the wake of those who were indiscreet enough to tread on them. A short fanfare from the State trumpeters, and Mr. Speaker strode in, preceded by the Serjeant-at-Arms and the Mace. He took his seat in a green chair at the foot of the great stone staircase topped by the Thrones. Following him, the visiting Speakers spread into the scarlet and gold galleries flanking the Thrones. Another fanfare, and the Lord Chancellor followed. His chair of scarlet faced the Speaker. Before them lay the two Maces. Over the route which these illustrious processions had taken scurried the cleaners, carpet-sweepers buzzing. Then they retired to their point of vantage on the steps at the back of the hall. They would talk about this for years.

At the top of the Hall, another move. The Maces were covered with silken cloth. Symbols of the delegated authority of the King, they serve no purpose when the King himself is present.

And suddenly, a loud, long trumpeting. Shouted words

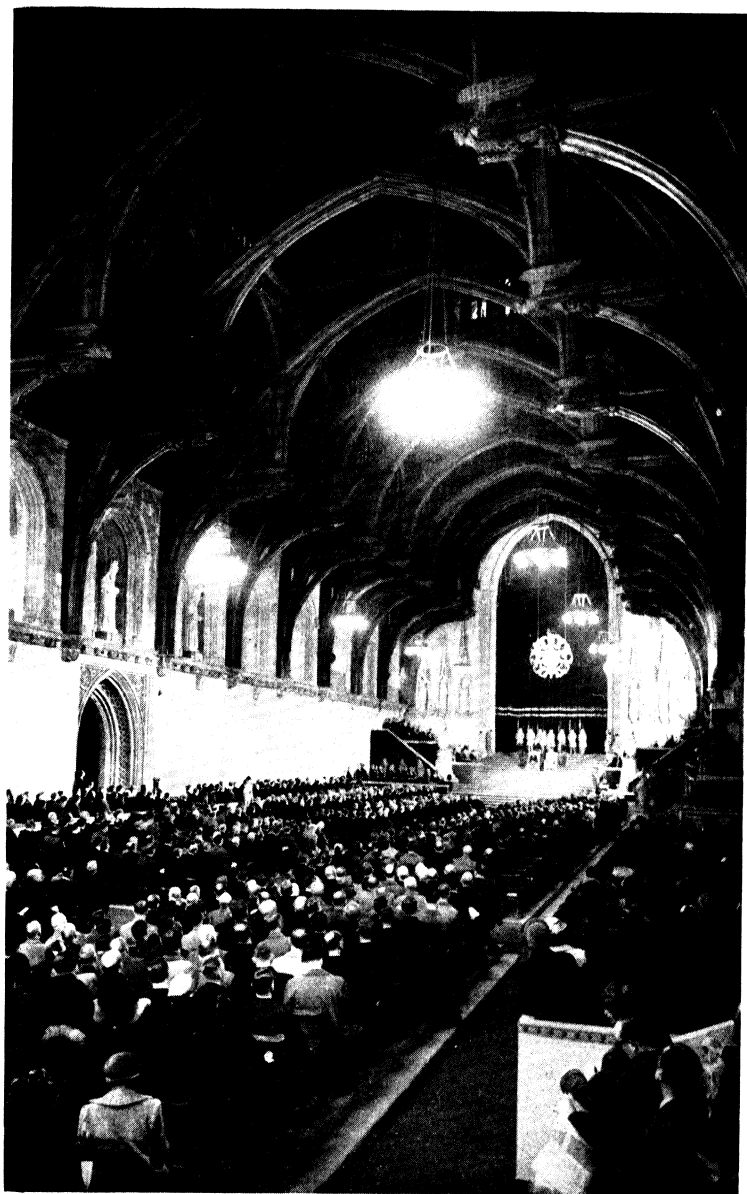
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of command outside. Then the great doors swung open. Two thousand people came to their feet. It was the King. Heading his small procession was the Keeper of the Palace and Minister of Works, Mr. Richard Stokes (he bore a scar on his forehead from a motor smash two days before, was to look pale and worn by the time this ceremony was over). Alongside the Minister, the Lord Great Chamberlain. Behind them, the King; the Queen beside him, smiling as she looked from side to side. Then the Queen-Mother, drawing every eye to her erect figure, her velvet toque, and on each side of her the Princesses, pretty pictures in green and in pink. Then the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, the Princess Royal, Princess Alice and the Earl of Athlone.

Slowly the procession passed up the wide aisle until two tiny figures, dwarfed by the distance, seated themselves. The Royal Family sat in chairs at the foot of the two scarlet galleries.

This was Parliament, as it rarely is today, King, Lords and Commons together. This indeed, more than Parliament, for it was every Parliament of the Commonwealth under that same 12th-century roof for the first time. For Westminster Hall it was another moment of history.

Lord Jowitt, the Lord Chancellor, stepped forward. His beautiful voice rang throughout the hall as he presented to the King the Address from the Lords thanking him for the message about their future accommodation. He mounted the steps, knelt to present the Address, and the King bowed from his Throne. Then Mr. Speaker, Clifton Brown, for the Commons, knelt, handed his message, received the King's bow in return. For both was the delicate task of stepping backwards down the steps, inevitably in danger of tripping over their robes. Then the King stepped forward to the microphone. He spoke of the new Chamber, of its intimacy—"the traditional intimacy characteristic of Parliamentary life in our land. It suggests an almost homely place for discussion and taking counsel.



Beneath the soaring roof of Westminster Hall for the first time—King George VI and all his Commonwealth Parliaments.

[By courtesy of Daily Graphic

THE NEW CHAMBER

It derives some of its virtues from the family circle"—so was the domestic note emphasised again over the ceremony. To the Commonwealth Speakers he said, "Their presence make this a symbolic occasion of untold value. Of all the bonds which unite my people, none is stronger than our common devotion to the ideals of freedom, justice and toleration which in the political sphere find their supreme expression in our Parliamentary system.

"Not for us the silence of the suppression," he said. "May this Chamber long stand to shape the destiny of my people at home."

Then the slow procession down the Hall again, and the Royal Family drove away. The Yeomen of the Guard climbed into plain black horse-drawn vans, packing their halberds carefully in racks on the floor. The ceremony was over.

The Commons had gone Home again.

* * * * *

But that same Westminster Hall was, within only sixteen months, to be the scene of sad pageantry. Where the King had received the Parliaments of his Realms, he now lay in state, surrounded first by his family and his Parliament, and then by his people. They queued for four miles in icy weather for the brief moments when they filed, in two long single lines, past the coffin of the King as it lay, draped in the Royal Standard, upon the catafalque of Royal purple, with the Crown dwarfed by the Queen's wreath. Around it stood Gentlemen-at-Arms, Yeomen of the Guard and officers of the Brigade of Guards. Their heads were bowed; swords and partisans reversed. Lighting the sombre splendour of the scene were the four huge candles at each corner of the bier, casting their flickering light over the glowing uniforms.

First—Parliament. Mr. Speaker Morrison put on his State robes of black and gold, but unlike his predecessor, Mr. Speaker Clifton Brown, his white cuffs spoke of

MR. SPEAKER, SIR

mourning. Only in 1949 Mr. Speaker Clifton Brown had led the Commons in rejoicing mood. Now, after this so-short interval, Mr. Speaker Morrison led them to the same Hall with stricken feelings. The Lord Chancellor led in the Peers, to await this coming of the King, first upon a gun-carriage, then carried with such gentle strength by the giant Guardsmen. After it came the slight, heavily-veiled figure of the Queen, and then the Queen-Mother, who had done so much to help the King to carry the burden of what Mr. Churchill was later to call the hardest reign of modern times, and that tall, erect figure of Queen Mary, whom not the heaviest veil could disguise.

A simple, but unforgettable ceremony—and it was the turn of the people. For the next three days they came to pay their own tributes, not to a “ruler”, but to a friend and well-loved figure whom they had seen after every war time “blitz” and in all the dark moments of the previous fifteen years. Their homes had been bombed—so had his. Their children had joined the Forces—so had his eldest daughter. Now they came to Westminster Hall to pay their own tribute to their friend. Here and there on that vast carpeted floor they left their own tributes—here a bunch of irises, there a little posy of some other blooms. A Member of Parliament, leaving the crowded, silent Hall, gestured to the orderly black-clad line. “This is Britain”, he said.

Bareheaded, shadow-eyed but smiling, the King but a few days before had waved “Good-bye” to Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh on their way to Africa and Australia. While they received tributes from African chieftains in Kenya, the King had shot at Sandringham. On February 5th, he spent a happy day in the open and said to a friend, “We will go out again tomorrow.” That night the Princess and the Duke spent in a hotel in an tree-top, watching big game. The next morning the hotel lodged a Queen. Peacefully, and in his sleep, the King had died. For months the nation had feared this. Now it was upon them.

THE NEW CHAMBER

The Heralds rode through Britain proclaiming Queen Elizabeth the Second. Asserting its ancient rights, the City of London stretched a silken cord across the road, bade the Herald halt to state his business, and then read the Proclamation. To the Commons came a pale, grief-stricken Prime Minister—for the war had brought Mr. Churchill closer to his sovereign probably than any other Prime Minister in history. Political warfare, soaring to savage heights over foreign policy, was silenced on the instant. The Queen flew 4,000 miles back to London in 29 hours.

At the Bar of the House of Commons Mr. Churchill stood, leonine head still bowed in grief, but hand upflung to show the paper it held. "A message from the Queen", he announced, and brought it to the Speaker.

"I know that the House of Commons mourns with me the untimely death of my dear father", wrote the young Queen. "In spite of failing health, he upheld to the end the ideals to which he pledged himself of service to his peoples and the preservation of constitutional government. He has set before me an example of selfless dedication which I am resolved with God's help faithfully to follow. ELIZABETH REGINA."

The country mourned the King, rallied to its young and lovely Queen. The dwindled number of crowned heads and their representatives at the King's Funeral testified once again to the enduring nature of the British Monarchy in a half-century of violent changes. Its strength lay in its closeness to the people—through their Parliament. For fifty years Parliament had been—King, Lords and Commons. Now, once again, it was to be—Queen, Lords and Commons.

And so the Speaker led the Commons, and the Lord Chancellor the Peers, in swearing allegiance with these words:—

"I do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, her heirs and successors according to law. So help me God."

The second Elizabethan Age had begun.

The Family's Presents.

These were the gifts which the Legislatures of the Commonwealth made to their Mother Parliament for her New Chamber:

Australia: The Speaker's Chair (Black Bean).

Basutoland: Two silver gilt ashtrays.

Bechuanaland Protectorate: One silver gilt ashtray.

Canada: Table of the House (Canadian Oak).

Ceylon: Serjeant-at-Arms' Chair (Oak).

States of Guernsey: One table, three chairs for Ministers Room (Oak).

India: One entrance door to Chamber (Oak).

States of Jersey: Minister's writing desk and chair, one silver gilt inkstand.

Isle of Man: One single silver gilt inkstand and two silver ashtrays for Prime Minister's Conference Room.

Newfoundland: Six single chairs for Prime Minister's Conference Room (Birch).

New Zealand: Two Despatch Boxes (Purui).

Northern Ireland: Three Chamber Clocks.

Pakistan: One Entrance Door to Chamber (Oak).

South Africa: Three chairs for Clerks' Table (Stinkwood).

Southern Rhodesia: Two silver gilt inkstands for Chamber.

Swaziland: One silver gilt ashtray.

And from the Colonies came these:

Aden: Members' Writing Room table (Oak).

Bahamas: Ministers' writing desk and chair (Oak).

Barbados: Minister's writing desk and chair (Oak).

Bermuda: Two triple silver gilt inkstands.

British Guiana: Set of four silver gilt inkstands.

THE FAMILY'S PRESENTS

- British Honduras:* Minister's writing desk and chair (Mayflower).
- Cyprus:* Member's Writing Room table (Oak).
- Falkland Islands:* One silver gilt ashtray.
- Fiji:* One silver gilt inkstand.
- Gambia:* Two silver gilt ashtrays.
- Gibraltar:* Two table lamps (Oak).
- Gold Coast:* Minister's writing desk and chair (Mansonia).
- Hong Kong:* One triple silver gilt inkstand.
- Jamaica:* Bar of the House (Bronze).
- Kenya:* Minister's writing desk and chair (Olive).
- Leeward Islands:* Six table lamps (Oak).
- Malaya:* Minister's desk and armchair (Oak).
- Malta:* Three silver gilt ashtrays.
- Mauritius:* Minister's writing desk and chair (Oak).
- Nigeria:* Furniture for one Division Lobby (Iroko).
- North Borneo:* Interview Room furniture (White Seraya).
- Northern Rhodesia:* Two pairs Mace brackets (bronze).
- Nyasaland:* One triple silver gilt inkstand and one silver gilt ashtray.
- St. Helena:* Chairman's Chair for Minister's Conference Room (Iroko).
- Seychelles:* Minister's writing desk and chair (Oak).
- Sierra Leone:* Minister's writing desk and chair (African gold walnut).
- Singapore:* Interview Room furniture (Oak).
- Tanganyika:* Interview Room furniture (Iroko).
- Trinidad:* Minister's writing desk and chair (Oak).
- Uganda:* Furniture for one Division Lobby (Mvule).
- Windward Isles:*
- Dominica:* One silver gilt inkstand.
 - Grenada:* One silver gilt inkstand.
 - St. Lucia:* One silver gilt inkstand.
 - St. Vincent:* One silver gilt ashtray.
 - Zanzibar:* One silver gilt ashtray.

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