

the visitor usually asserts that he has come to look for some member, whose name he gives, and he is allowed to enter. No dynamite scare has arisen for a number of years; and even when the whole country is fancying that some kind of outrage is about to occur, the private-secretaries of members of parliament could hardly be excluded upon the ground that they might be in league with the Irish "physical force brotherhood." Excluded from the sacred members' lobby, however, they are, unless their chiefs are ministers of the crown, and the usually accepted reason is that the line must be drawn, somewhere. If the public were admitted indiscriminately, the unfortunate member would especially if he represented a London constituency—be worried almost to death by his supporters who would come to him upon every conceivable mission. There would not even be standing room in the small members' lobby, and a cabinet ministers' life would be a greater burden to him than any man can bear. These facts explain why the whole house supports the sergeant-at-arms in the strict manner in which he keeps the lobby clear of "strangers."

Object of the the Lobby.

What, it may be asked by those who are ignorant of English party politics—and who cannot make out how "things get into the newspapers"—what is the use and object of this lobby which it is such a privilege for anybody, except a chosen few, to enter? Well, the lobby has its various uses and usages. It can still boast of a neat little bar—a bar where good alcoholic liquors can be obtained at a very moderate price, together with various edibles, such as hard-boiled eggs and sandwiches. At this bar, it is but fair to say, there has never been much treating, nor much prolonged drinking. Occasionally a wearied legislator would in the intervals of debate, or after making a speech, rush out, eat a few mouthfuls of food, and drink—perhaps a small brandy and soda—a favorite English beverage. Mr. Balfour, now first lord of the treasury, was, a few years ago, almost a daily visitor at the bar. When secretary for Ireland, he would glide out of the chamber after the storm and stress of question-time, and would restore the inner man with a glass of wine and a biscuit—what we call a "cracker"—or with a cup of the black tea, so popular in the British Isles. In these few moments he always had a kind word for any member who might wish for a brief chat with him. Few British legislators are total-abstainers and, curiously enough, the bar seemed to be in special requisition during debates upon the ill-fated compensation clauses in Mr. Goschen's bill of ten years ago. This measure proposed to compensate

saloon-keepers whose licenses were taken away by a reduction of the number of drinking-places in a city. The weather was sultry at the time and the debate was often fiery. A great deal is changed now. The lobby bar, with its dry sherry, its rice puddings—cold, of course,—and its biscuits is being swept away. The house determined, after full consideration, to relegate it to a more secluded spot within the walls of the Palace of Westminster.

House of Commons' Lobby.

The house of commons lobby is a kind of recreation ground where members of parliament may take a little moderate exercise. The air there is perhaps purer and fresher in hot summer weather than it is in the chamber itself, and there is room to walk up and down. On days when an important division is expected the government whips spend most of their time in this lobby; and some members, notably Mr. Broadhurst and Mr. Burt, clearly affect its tessellated pavement for ambulatory purposes. Although the terrace overlooking the river Thames is better adapted for hygienic pursuits, it has lately become unpopular owing to the supposed prevalence of the much dreaded "grip" microbe upon the bank's of London's river. Moreover, the lobby seems to possess a sort of pacifying and softening influence. Partisans, who in the chamber itself seem to be on the most strained terms, and who often hurl defiance at one another across the narrow space which separates the two hostile armies, meet in the lobby and enter into amicable conversation. It is here that the "dyed-in-the-wool" tory ascends the "little Englander" and most likely greets him with a friendly smile. Men seem glad to lay aside the ground of partisanship in the lobby, as well as in the eating and smoking rooms of the house. One may see such political opponents as Mr. Labouchere and Sir John Gorst in affable conversation; while that violent Irishman, when in the chamber, Mr. Tim Healy, talks pleasantly to a conservative, Mr. Walter Long. It is almost certain, however, that the Hibernian representative will in his next platform speech describe the action of Her Majesty's government as detestable, and the editor of "Truth" (Mr. Labouchere) is not unlikely to compare Mr. Chamberlain to Judas Iscariot with an apology to the latter for the comparison!

Land of Gossip.

The lobby, needless to relate, is the land of much parliamentary gossip. What course the government or the leaders of the opposition are going to take with regard to various proposed statutes is here discussed by the private members with great zeal. The lines of the next financial measure—the chan-

cellor of the exchequer's "budget" is the term—are foreshadowed by the political prophets; and the latest rumors concerning a "cave" or revolt finds currency here, if anywhere. A certain amount of this gossip is well-founded, although the ministers invariably describe it either as "totally unfounded" or "quite inaccurate." But everybody knows that this repudiation of what is often the truth is due to the dislike, shared by all cabinets, of having their programmes and policy forestalled. Few ministers or members of the government, with the exception of the "whips," who are, of course, there to prevent members escaping from divisions, are habitue's of the lobby. They sometimes pass through it, looking—or trying to look—oppressed with national responsibilities, always walking fast, and usually having an armful of books and papers. They are occasionally called out of the house to consult with some member of the so-called upper chamber, the House of Lords; but more frequently they may be seen hurrying to and from the chief whip's private room. There is, however, very little opportunity to stop a cabinet minister in the lobby and ask him for an explanation of the ministerial policy. Nor do the ex-ministers affect the lobby to any extent. The late Mr. Gladstone, for example, was not visible there once in a year, while Sir William Harcourt, Mr. John Morley, Mr. Bryce and Sir George Trevelyan were hardly more frequent visitors. Of the most unfamiliar figures in the territory of the house of commons, the Premier, Lord Salisbury, takes the first place. Perhaps he got tired of its precincts when, as Lord Robert Cecil, he was a member of the elected assembly. From 1890 to a year or two ago the most constant attendants in the lobby were Sir Richard Temple, whose remarkable figure *Punch* so dearly loved to caricature; and Mr. Whitebread, Sir Charles Milner and Mr. Lowther, the last three being conspicuous by their height.

Opportunity for Character Study.

A few hours in lobby-land when some important party question is expected to "come on" in the course of the evening (the house does not meet 'till four in the afternoon), will give an excellent idea of the personal side of the lower branch of Great Britain's legislature. It has inspired the pen of many newspaper-men; for the lobby is sometimes far more interesting, and far fuller of life and animation—as well as of members—than the house itself, with its fast-emptying benches, its bored occupants, and its hesitating speakers who are merely killing time, chiefly because they believe that their constituents like to see portions of their diatribes in the daily papers.

The lobby may be seen to advantage in the earlier hours of the parliamentary day, especially at about five o'clock, immediately after the ministers have passed through the ordeal of question-time. The last question on the list having been disposed of, members leave the chamber for a short breathing space, and the buzz of many voices sounds in the ear. But the members' lobby is seen at its very best at the conclusion of some great party contest; or when a pre-eminent debater, having resumed his seat after a great speech, one of the regular brigade of "bores" vainly strives to obtain a hearing from a satiated and fast-emptying house.

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