

which he takes a great deal of exercise, and the old coachman takes charge of him when he rides. The entire evening Dixon had to himself, and could spend it in his study, if he chose; and the *library* was at his service. By the way, Horace, the rector has a magnificent library—one of the largest private libraries in England, I should say. I have told you, I think, that he is an author? Against these favourable considerations we have to set Mrs. Sylvester. As to what she is, you may judge pretty correctly from this affair of Dixon's—a suspicious, ill-dispositioned woman, who henpecks her husband, and is altogether disagreeable to live with. She might treat you more kindly, Horace."

"Indeed, I assure you, I shouldn't allow the question of her treatment to influence me for a moment, John, if there were any likelihood of obtaining the situation. The advantages seem to me far to outweigh its drawbacks; and even if it were not so, I cannot, as I said before, afford to be over-particular to begin with. Besides, John, you see that young fellow remained for a whole year at the rectory, and I shouldn't imagine him to be the most patient of mortals. Things could not have been so very bad, therefore."

"No, that's true," rejoined John, reflectively; "and there is this in it: you would have your private room; there would always be the refuge of solitude in case of any domestic disturbance. Dixon, I believe, used to spend a considerable part of his time in reading novels. He is of rather a sentimental turn. Did you notice how he blushed and stammered when he mentioned Dora's name? He fancies himself to be in love with the girl: that has been his chief inducement to keep his situation; he confessed as much to me just now. I was very glad, when I heard it, that he had been sent about his business, poor fellow! Dora is leaving school this Christmas, and it would never have done to have had any nonsense between the two. Not that I think Dora would have encouraged him in any way—his appearance is scarcely calculated to charm

a girl's fancy—but there might have been some unpleasantness, and it is as well that he should have gone. The young lady has been at a boarding-school at Hieover for some years, and naturally, being so near, she has often run over to see her parents on a holiday afternoon. And, by-the-by, I had forgotten, May is coming home too!"

"Who is May, John?"

"Oh, Miss Sylvester, I ought to have said. She is the rector's elder daughter. I have never seen her, but I have so often heard her father speak of her as May that I used her name without thinking. She is quite an artist, I believe, and for the last two years she has been studying painting in Rome and Florence. Let me see, will it be to-morrow that she is expected home? No, the day after. It will make the house much more cheerful to have two young girls in it; and perhaps their agreeableness may modify their mother's acerbity—step-mother's I mean. Mrs. Sylvester is the rector's second wife, and Charlie is her child, but not the girls. On the whole, I think this might prove a good opening for you; and if you should not feel happy, you know, you have always a home to come back to. Shall we try, then, for the place? I really think we might do worse."

"I have not the slightest hesitation about that, John. My only fear is that the prospect of getting it is too good to be realised."

"H'm! will you leave it all to me, Horace? Give me those two letters of Carleton's and Davis's and that translation out of the *Novum Organum*, and let me go up to the rectory by myself to-morrow morning, and I think I can answer for the result. But just think, now, what a state of despair you were in a couple of hours ago about getting a situation! And here one has turned up all of a sudden. It is true, isn't it, that we don't know 'what a day or an hour may bring forth?'"

END OF CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND.

THE AMATEUR PARLIAMENT IN LIVERPOOL.

BY A "MEMBER OF THE GOVERNMENT."



WHILE Oxford and Cambridge have their "Unions," and each of our other National Universities and Colleges can boast of its favourite debating society—while the metropolis possesses its numerous debating clubs of more or less historic note, the town of Liverpool reckons among its institutions a debating society which, until within the last few years, could lay claim to being unique of its kind—quite *sui generis*, in fact—and which, judging from the number of members and visitors it continues to attract, still stands unrivalled in popularity. This is the Liverpool Parliamentary Debating Society, and as, one after another, other towns are beginning to copy Liverpool, by establishing amateur Parliaments of their own, some account of

the original institution and its proceedings may not be without interest to our readers.

The Parliamentary Debating Society of Liverpool was formed just twenty years ago, for the purpose of "discussing political and social topics according to the forms of the House of Commons as far as may be practicable." It is, in all its leading features, a perfect House of Commons in miniature—a legislative as well as deliberative assembly, but without executive powers. When a member joins he has to declare his politics, and take up a constituency: that is to say, he elects to represent one of the borough or county Parliamentary constituencies of the United Kingdom, and thenceforward, dropping his patronymic, he is known to the "House" only as "Member" for the place he has chosen. The benches in the House

are arranged after the fashion of those in the House of Commons: the Conservatives sit on one side, and the Liberals on the other. A large table divides the two sides of the House, at the head of which, on a raised dais, is the "Speaker's" chair and desk, and just below him sits, at the table itself, the "Clerk of the House." A "Ministry" is responsible for the conduction of the debates, and is chosen from the party which happens to be in a majority, the subordinate members of the Ministry or "Government" being selected by the leader of the House, who is "Premier" for the time being. The offices, titles, and respective Departments of State to which the members of the Ministry devote themselves, all answer to those of the Imperial Government. The benches to the right of the Speaker are those on which the party in power sit, the first two benches being reserved for the members of the Ministry, while their supporters occupy the benches immediately to the rear, and the more independent members of the party the benches below the gangway on the same side. The Opposition sit in similar order on the benches on the other side of the House. Then, as in the House of Commons, there are cross-benches for "Independent" members, who decline to enter either as Liberals or Conservatives. For some four years past these benches have been occupied by the Home Rulers, who have become, in this mimic Parliament, as in that of St. Stephen's, a recognised party in the House, and by their frequent motions and questions to the Ministry about the Sister Isle have added much to the liveliness of the proceedings of late; indeed, at times they have caused similar "scenes" to those with which the House of Commons has become familiar during the last two or three sessions.

The method of introducing subjects for debate in this amateur Parliament is not by means of simple questions, debated affirmatively and negatively, as in ordinary debating societies; but, as in the Imperial Parliament, by "measures" or "Bills," drawn up with a preamble and clauses in regular legal phraseology and proper legislative form. These measures are generally introduced by the Ministry for the time being, whose Bills always take precedence: but private members may introduce motions or Bills on obtaining the consent of the House, and arranging with the Ministry for certain nights to be set apart for the purpose. On a "Ministerial measure" being defeated, or a "vote of censure" or "want of confidence" in the Ministry being carried, the existing Ministry must resign. The retiring Premier then nominates as his successor the leader of the Opposition, and on such nomination being confirmed by the House, the House adjourns, to enable the new Premier to form his "Cabinet" and prepare his statement of policy. This he generally succeeds in doing by the next weekly meeting of the society, and having announced the *personnel* of his new Ministry, and distributed printed copies of it among the members, he makes a detailed statement of the "Ministerial policy," Home and Foreign, which gives occasion to a general discussion of several nights' duration, previous to the

introduction of any measures. The "Ministerial statement," of course, follows closely the lines of the policy of the party in the State to which the Ministers belong; and these discussions generally turn upon the conduct of affairs by the Imperial Government in office at the time. There has lately been a change of Government in this mimic Parliament. The last was a Conservative Ministry, led by the "member for Tynemouth," which had, for this society, an unusually long term of power, having been in office for three sessions uninterruptedly, and at last resigning without being defeated. Owing to this change of Government, two general debates upon Ministerial policies have taken place this session. The parties having crossed the floor of the House, from the Ministerial benches have been heard, first glorifications, and then denunciations of the recent Imperial policy of Great Britain—the Eastern question, Afghanistan, and the Zulus entering largely into the subject-matter of the discussions. The present Liberal Ministry, led by the "member for Caithness," lately succeeded in passing their first measure, a "Bill to provide for the more Equitable Representation of the People of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, in the Imperial Parliament," which was a decidedly Radical, not to say revolutionary, measure of reform. It is, according to one of its clauses, to be cited henceforth as the "Representation of the People Act, 1880;" but we fancy its provisions will not yet perplex Revision Court Barristers. A "Land Bill" has since been introduced—a somewhat elaborate measure of thirty-one clauses, dealing both vigorously and exhaustively with the whole question of the land laws. If this be carried, either a "Budget," or a Bill for closing public-houses on Sunday, will probably be the next Ministerial measure; but perhaps an opportunity may first be given a private member to introduce an independent Bill or motion.

The debate on the "order of the day" is supposed to stand adjourned on the conclusion of the speech of the member in possession of the House at 9.45 p.m.: but on division nights, or when a "Committee of the whole House" follows the order of the day, the proceedings are sometimes protracted to a late hour. Still, the mimic Parliament has, fortunately, not yet learnt the bad habits of its Imperial prototype in regard to late sittings.

Divisions are not taken as in ordinary debating societies by show of hands, but according to the method followed in the House of Commons. The Speaker first puts the question, "Aye" or "No," and then declares whether the "Ayes" or the "Noes" have it. His decision is generally challenged, and then the House divides. Two tellers are appointed on each side, and the "Ayes" and "Noes" pass between their respective pairs of tellers, each member as he passes through depositing a ticket or voting paper, with which he has been supplied during the evening. Each party has a couple of regularly appointed "whips," and whenever an important division is to come off a "whip" circular is posted by these functionaries to all members of their party. The divisions

are as exciting in their way as are the great party divisions in the House of Commons; and on the numbers being announced by the Speaker, after they have been handed to him on a slip of paper by the tellers, the boisterous jubilation of the victorious party, and the sullen silence and dejected looks of the defeated, afford a good study of life.

Thus this society and its proceedings are conducted very closely upon the model of the House of Commons. There are only two important points in which the practice of the two assemblies differs. One is in regard to the length of time allowed for speaking. A member of Parliament has the privilege of talking as long as his own strength and the patience of his auditors endure. But the time of the members of the Liverpool mimic Parliament is more valuable to them, so their ordinary speeches are restricted to twenty minutes on an order of the day, and ten minutes on a question put to the Government; but an hour is allowed for introducing a measure or motion, or for making a Ministerial statement of policy. The second point on which the procedure of the Houses of Legislature is not followed is in reference to the first, second, and third "readings" of Bills. This Parliamentary form is not observed by the amateur legislators, a Bill in their House being carried or rejected by the one division, though, if an amendment has been moved, a division is taken upon that first. In all other respects Parliamentary forms and usage are observed. The present Speaker of the Liverpool House, the "member for Huddersfield" (a Liverpool merchant), has compiled a very useful and interesting little hand-book of "The Law and Practice of Parliamentary Debate," which has been adopted by the Council of the society as a text-book for the members, and is recommended by it to all who wish to make themselves masters of the forms of either the greater or the lesser Parliament.

As to the character of the membership of the society, it may be best described as mixed. It comprises old and young, the well-to-do and working men, but is chiefly drawn from the middle class. The oratory heard within its walls, while sometimes, perhaps, too personal and vituperative (as is that of the House of Commons itself), will compare favourably with that of any other deliberative body, not excepting the Imperial Parliament, and this has been admitted by members of Parliament and other distinguished visitors who have at times honoured its debates with their presence.

Of course, many sneers may be bestowed upon a society of this kind. Its mimicry of the House of Commons may be described as puerile, and it may be dubbed "playing at Parliament." Yet it has won the approval of many whose opinion is worth the having. The plan of debating measures, or practical proposals for legislation, is obviously superior to that of cut-and-dried questions discussed pro and con. as

in ordinary debating societies; and the Parliamentary method has received the approbation of so high an authority as the late Mr. John Stuart Mill, who wrote to a former Ministry expressing his gratification at a certain Bill they had introduced, and commending that mode of bringing forward subjects for discussion. Even the taking up of constituencies has this advantage, puerile as it may otherwise seem: it prevents the members' names from being bruited about in their speeches, as they are in most debating societies, and merges each member's personality in that of the representation of a certain borough or county, the honour and reputation of which he feels it to be his duty to maintain in his person. But, beyond this, the society is an excellent means of political education, and as such its influence is felt in the town and neighbourhood; while the regular and formal style of its proceedings induces systematic habits of thought and life in those who regularly take part in them, and imparts a practical acquaintance with the mode in which their country's government is carried on and its laws are made. The members of a former Ministry of the society claim that a certain measure they brought forward and passed was subsequently adopted in its main proposals by the Liberal party in Parliament, to an important member of which it was submitted, and actually became the law of the land.

During the last Parliamentary contest in Liverpool, the House, as customary on such occasions, adjourned to enable its members to work for the candidate of their party; while each side, in turn, held a public meeting of its members and their friends in support of the party's candidate, who attended and addressed them.

Many of the members of the Parliamentary Debating Society of Liverpool have distinguished themselves in various walks of life, and acknowledge that they received through their connection with it the lessons which have made them successful. At least one member of the Imperial Parliament owes his position there to the training he received in the amateur House at Liverpool. Several other members of this House have been, and are to be again at the next General Election, Parliamentary candidates. Quite a number are Liverpool Town Councillors, while others have attained to positions of eminence as clergymen, barristers, journalists, and in other professions, and admit that their success has been largely owing to the experience and knowledge they gained as members of the "Parliamentary."

Lastly, as imitation is said to be the sincerest flattery, the founders of the Liverpool society may point with pride to the fact that societies copied from their model have been started in Birkenhead, Birmingham, Manchester, and numerous other towns; though, as yet, none of these imitations has met with the success which has attended the Liverpool Parliamentary Debating Society.

J. QUAIL, F.S.S.