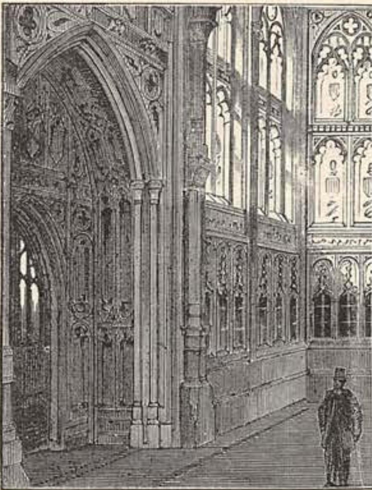
ladies. In this ceiling, which we were talking of just now, I require several hundred feet of flat moulding, which will be wholly turned out by my boy and myself. I am too old to begin new ways, and yet I don't care to give up so long as I can do enough to keep me from rusting. But I know that ladies are often employed in this manner. They cannot, of course, do the heavy joinery in making up the furniture, nor can they plane and prepare the work. But they carve better than men; indeed, at first they carve too well, finishing their work with a delicacy and refinement quite out of keeping with *old* work. Now if my chisel happens to slip a little I know that it does not matter, and do not fret over it. All the tools required are a small iron clamp, to hold the work steady, and a few fine chisels and gouges. Half-a-sovereign would buy them all, and practice would do the rest. In the neighbouring county town, an architect, who has devoted much time to the study of old oak, has a class of ladies to whom he is teaching carving, and I have no doubt that it will, where necessary, be a lucrative occupation—far different from the stamp swindles one so often hears of as advertised in the newspapers. And even where necessity is not the actuating motive, wood-carving is an occupation not over-taxing strength or energy, yet demanding high artistic feeling and great discrimination. The branch I follow is not, I know, the highest phase of the art, but then while it is in the truest sense a pleasure, it is quite as truly a bread-and-butter duty. Where ladies do take it up they should first make themselves acquainted with genuine old oak. Sophistication, as people now-a-days style adulteration, has already made way to meet a coming demand, and I have been offered wood which I know to be made up for the purpose, by being steeped in bullock's blood and then covered with pin-pricks. With this difficulty overcome there need be nothing in the way of a lady making her own furniture, provided she can procure her wood. Only let her guard against the temptation to use green wood or, as in my juvenile efforts, she will only find that her carefully-devised carvings soon fall to pieces. Soft wood may be worked up and stand very well if one does not happen to let it fall; but the risk run is very great, as one slip, especially when the wood is weakened by being cut away, and the work near completion, may spoil all the labour bestowed upon it.

A STROLL THROUGH THE PARLIAMENTARY LOBBY.



COMPARATIVELY few persons know how interesting an insight into Parliamentary life may be got in what is well known at Westminster as "the Lobby." This name, simple and unpretentious, does not include the public corridors or the outer precincts, where strangers may loiter at will. It applies exclusively to the more reserved inner circle, at the main entrance to the House of Commons, which only Members of Parliament and other privileged persons may frequent. In this advantageous arena for observation, a visitor can not only, as the familiar phrase goes, rub shoulders with any of our leading politicians, but may also watch the varied incidents which enliven leisure intervals, when senators retreat from the occasional tedium of the legislative chamber.

The approaches to the Lobby are guarded by police whose duty, discharged with firmness and courtesy, is to prevent the entrance of persons not entitled to admission. Each of these officers has a list of those who, not being members of the House, are yet authorised by the Sergeant-at-Arms, on behalf of the Speaker, to enter here without let or hindrance. They include a number of public officials, private secretaries to right hon. gentlemen, the accredited agents of leading political organisations, the City Remembrancer, and a representative of each of the press agencies, as well as of the principal newspapers. Other persons may be introduced for a short time by members, upon whom there are many calls daily for the exercise of this prerogative. Frequenters of the Lobby soon learn its habits, by which may be understood the times when this select area is seen to most advantage. Between eight and ten o'clock each evening the place looks empty and deserted, most of the members having then gone to dinner; but at certain other hours, both before and after that quiet interval, it is thronged by those whom public business or private friendship brings together at this favourite rendezvous. Opposite the entrance passage are the portals of the House of Commons, jealously guarded on either side by trusty servants of the State. No rash intruder dare cross this threshold, save only the favoured few whom members, by virtue of an order from the Speaker, may conduct to the select seats under the galleries devoted to peers and distinguished strangers. The more absolute line of reserve is drawn at the Bar, within which none may enter but the duly elected and sworn representatives of constituencies. On the left-hand side of the Lobby is the members' private

IN THE PARLIAMENTARY LOBBY.

(*See p.* 530.)

entrance, and the Conference-room—where deputations frequently interview representatives of the Government. Near this apartment are the offices of the political "whips," who look closely after the due attendance of the members of their respective parties in critical divisions, or, more reluctantly, arrange the "pairing off" of such as partially atone for absence from an important vote by getting coupled with other absentees from the opposite side. The Liberal and Conservative parties have each two responsible whips and a couple of assistants, who are seldom absent from the Lobby when the House is in session. A staff of messengers is in constant attendance upon these gentlemen, ready to be sent upon such hurried errands as the exigencies of Parliamentary business may require. From the right-hand side of the Lobby there branches off the carpeted corridor which leads to the reading-room, dining-room, library, tea-room, smoke-room, &c., which all contribute towards placing the House of Commons foremost in some respects among the many clubs of London. On mild summer evenings the favourite retreat for members is the private terrace by the river-side where—overlooking the Thames, in full view of St. Thomas's Hospital and the electrically-lighted Embankment—wearied legislators escape for a time the prolixity of dull debates. In describing the other accessories of the Lobby, a post office and refreshment bar, occupying opposite corners, should be mentioned as two convenient institutions which both command a due share of patronage.

One of the earliest incidents of a visit to the Lobby is the state entrance of the Speaker. At four o' clock that exalted functionary, wearing official robe and wig, is escorted to the chair with the dignity due to his office. His approach is heralded by the voice of Police Superintendent Denning calling upon strangers to take off their hats. No sooner has this order been given and obeyed, than the small but imposing procession advances. It is headed by the Sergeant-at-Arms, a personage of no small consequence, who shoulders the massive gold mace and also carries at his side, as part of his official costume, a sword which never needs to be unsheathed. Then comes the Speaker himself, followed by his train-bearer, secretary, chaplain, and several of the leading officers of the House. Up to this time there may have been a considerable throng of members in waiting, but now they troop into the House, in order, by their presence at prayers, to secure the right to certain seats for the evening. Prayers over, the Lobby again fills up with members who do not happen to be interested in those brief formalities of private bill legislation which intervene before "question time." Most of them return to their places whilst members of the Government are answering the questions—usually a long list—of which notice has been given. This part of the evening's business concludes about half-past five—the hour of what may, in commercial phrase, be called "high change" in the Lobby. It is at this time that the largest proportion of the members come out for friendly chat with *habitués* of the place, or with others whose admission they may have authorised. The varied appearance and demeanour of these casual visitors suggests a wide field for speculation as to their business. Some are country cousins in London for the first time, to enjoy the sights of the Great City, and timidly beg the condescending aid of their local members to secure them the privilege of admission to the gallery. Others—to whom the scene is more familiar—approach with the easy confidence of influential townsmen or active politicians whose representatives cannot receive them otherwise than graciously. The man with a grievance, the busybody anxious to air his own ideas, and the journalist gathering the latest items of political news are also among those who move about in conversation with members. Occasionally the throng includes former members revisiting the scenes of bygone distinction, candidates for future senatorial honours, or Parliamentary agents and railway directors concerned as to the fate of bills in which they are more or less directly interested. Peers of the realm, and sometimes one or other of the Royal Princes, may likewise be seen in this central arena of political gossip, as well as distinguished strangers from many a far land. Some of these notable foreigners are conspicuous and picturesque in native costume; it may be a Hindoo visitor in gay colours, or a high dignitary of the Greek Church in more sombre but equally characteristic attire.

Another visitor whose arrival causes some commotion is the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod, better known simply as "Black Rod." The duty of this venerable functionary is to summon Her Majesty's faithful Commons to attend in the House of Lords for the purpose of hearing the Queen's Assent given by commission to such measures as have passed all the preliminary stages. "Hats off" is the order in the Lobby as, duly attended, he slowly marches into the House of Commons. There, ceremoniously bowing three times, he advances to the table and announces his formal message. Retiring with like obeisance, he is followed in stately fashion by the Speaker, attended by those members who care to visit the gilded chamber of the Peers. It depends, of course, upon the interest and importance of the "orders of the day"—*i.e.*, the Parliamentary programme—whether there be many or few members present in the House of Commons during the business which follows questions. When prosy or unwelcome speeches are being delivered by unimportant members, there is usually a considerable exodus into the Lobby. At a late hour the re-appearance of many of the members in evening dress, sometimes accompanied by ladies in corresponding gaiety of attire, suggests that dinner parties and other festivities happily afford some diversion to legislators tired of protracted debate.

J. D. SHAW.