

PUBLIC MEN AT WORK:

II.—A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A BRITISH STATESMAN.

BY AN EX-MEMBER OF THE GOVERNMENT.

Illustrated by A. C. GOULD and RAYMOND POTTER.



HIS "day" chiefly differs from other days in that it has no definite time of beginning or ending.

The truly virtuous minister, we may presume, struggles down to the dining-room to read prayers and to breakfast in the bosom of his family between 9 and 10 a.m. But the self-indulgent bachelor declines to be called and sleeps his sleep out. Mr. Arthur Balfour invariably breakfasts at 12; and more politicians than would admit it consume their tea and toast in bed. Mercifully, the dreadful habit of giving breakfast-parties, though sanctioned by the memories of Holland and Macaulay, and Rogers and Houghton, virtually died out with the disappearance of Mr. Gladstone.

"Men who breakfast out are generally Liberals," says Lady St. Julians in "Sybil." "Have not you observed that?"

"I wonder why?"

"It shows a restless, revolutionary mind," said Lady Firebrace, "that can settle to nothing, but must be running after gossip the moment they are awake."

"Yes," said Lady St. Julians, "I think those men who breakfast out, or who give breakfasts, are generally dangerous characters; at least I would not trust them."

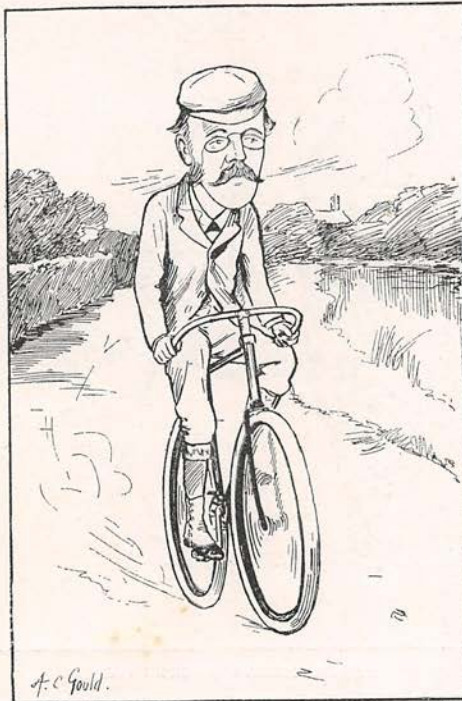
And Lady St. Julians' doctrine, though half a century old, applies with perfect exactness to those enemies of the human race who endeavour to keep alive or to resuscitate this desperate tradition. Juvenal described

the untimely fate of the man who went into his bath with an undigested peacock inside him. Scarcely pleasanter are the sensations of the minister or the M.P. who goes from a breakfast-party, full of buttered muffins and broiled salmon, to the sedentary desk-work of his office or the fusty wrangles of a Grand Committee.

Breakfast over, the minister's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of exercise. If he is a man of active habits and strenuous tastes, he may take a gentle breather up Highgate Hill, like Mr. Gladstone, or play tennis, like Sir Edward Grey. Lord Spencer when in office might be seen any morning cantering up St. James's Street on a hack, or pounding round Hyde Park in high naval debate with the blameless Sir Ughtred Shuttleworth. Lord Rosebery drives himself in a cab; Mr. Asquith is driven; both occasionally survey the riding world over the railings of Rotten Row; and even Lord Salisbury may be found prowling about the Green Park, to which his house in Arlington Street has a

private access. Mr. Balfour, as we all know, is a devotee of the wheel, and his example is catching; but Mr. Chamberlain holds fast to the soothing belief that when a man has walked upstairs to bed he has made as much demand on his physical energies as is good for him, and that exercise was invented by the doctors in order to bring grist to their mill.

Whichever of these examples our minister prefers to follow his exercise or his lounge



MR. BALFOUR'S RECREATION.

must be over by 12 o'clock. The Grand Committees meet at that hour; on Wednesday the House meets then; and, if he is not required by departmental business to attend either the Committee or the House, he will probably be at his office by midday.

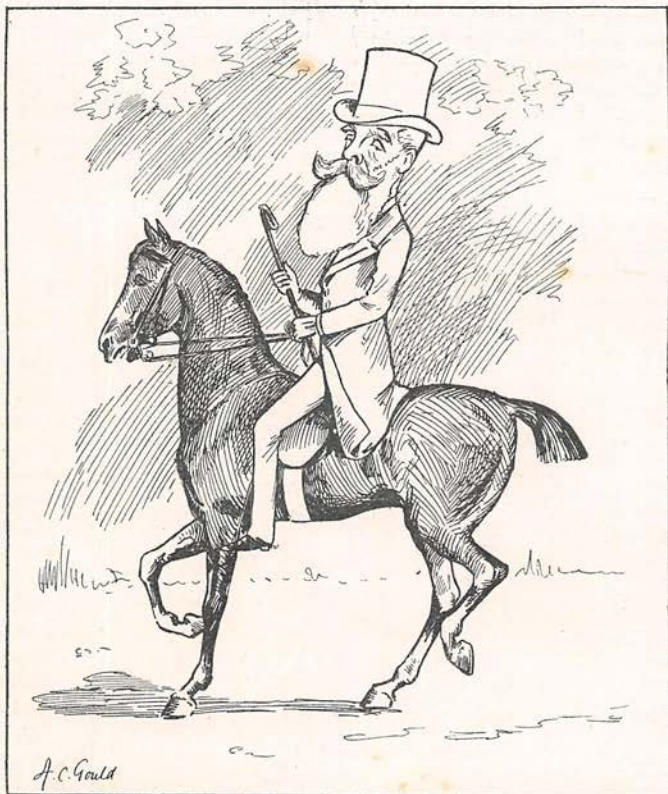
The exterior aspect of the Government Offices in Whitehall is sufficiently well known, and any peculiarities which it may present are referable to the fact that the execution of an Italian design was entrusted by the wisdom of Parliament to a Gothic architect. Inside, their leading characteristics are the abundance and steepness of the stairs, the total absence of light, and an atmosphere densely charged with Irish stew. Why the employes of the British Government should live exclusively on this delicacy, and why its odours should prevail with equal pungency "from morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve," are matters of speculation too recondite for a popular sketch like this.

The minister's own room is probably on the first floor; perhaps looking into Whitehall, perhaps into the Foreign Office Square, perhaps on to the Horse Guards' Parade. It is a large room with immense windows, and a fireplace ingeniously contrived to send all its heat up the chimney. If the office is one of the older ones, the room probably contains some good pieces of furniture derived from a less penurious age than ours—a bureau or bookcase of mahogany dark with years, showing in its staid ornamentation

traces of Chippendale or Sheraton; a big clock in a handsome case; and an interesting portrait of some historic statesman who presided over the department two centuries ago. But in the more modern offices all is barren. Since the late Mr. Ayrton was First Commissioner of Works, a squalid cheapness has reigned supreme. Deal and paint are everywhere; doors that won't shut, bells that won't ring, and curtains that won't meet. In two articles alone there is prodigality—books and stationery. Hansard's Debates, the Statutes at large, treatises illustrating the

work of the office, and books of reference innumerable are there; and the stationery shows a delightful variety of shape, size and texture, adapted to every conceivable exigency of official correspondence.

It is indeed in the item of stationery, and in that alone, that the grand old constitutional system of perquisites survives. Morbidly conscientious ministers sometimes keep a supply of their



EARL SPENCER'S MORNING CANTER.

private letter-paper on their office-table and use it for their private correspondence. But the more frankly human sort write all their letters on official paper. On whatever paper written, ministers' letters go free from the office or the House of Commons; and certain artful correspondents outside, knowing that a letter to a public office need not be stamped, write to the minister at his official address and save their penny. But these are pettifogging economies. In old days things were done on a nobler

scale. The late Sir William Gregory used to tell how, as a boy, he was taken by his father to see Lord Melbourne in his official room. "Now, my boy," asked the good-natured old Whig, "is there anything here that you would like?" Young Gregory chose a large stick of sealing-wax. "That's right," said Melbourne, giving the sealing-wax and adding a bundle of pens, "begin life early. All these things belong to the public, and your business must always be to get out of the public as much as you can." There spoke the true spirit of the great governing families.

In days gone by each Secretary of State received on his appointment a silver inkstand, which he could hand down as a keepsake to his children. Mr. Gladstone, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, abolished this little perquisite, and the only token of office which an outgoing minister can now take with him is his despatch-box. The wife of a minister who had long occupied an official residence said with a pensive sigh, on being evicted from office, "I hope I am not avaricious, but I must say, when one was hanging up pictures, it was very pleasant to have the Board of Works' carpenter and a bag of the largest nails for nothing."

And now our minister, seated at his official table, touches his pneumatic bell; his Private Secretary appears with a pile of papers, and the day's work begins. That work of course differs enormously in amount, nature, importance and interest with different offices. To the outside world probably one office is

much the same as another, but the difference in the esoteric view is wide indeed. When the Revised Version of the New Testament came out, an accomplished gentleman, who had once been Mr. Gladstone's Private Secretary, and had been appointed by him to an important post in the permanent Civil Service, said—

"Mr. Gladstone, I have been looking at



From a photo by]

THE GOVERNMENT OFFICES, WHITEHALL.

[W. H. Bunnett.

the Revised Version, and I think it distinctly inferior to the old one."

"Indeed," said Mr. Gladstone, with all his theological ardour roused at once; "I am very much interested to hear you say so. Pray give me an instance."

"Well," replied the permanent official, "look at the first verse of the second chapter of St. Luke. That verse used to run,

'There went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.' Well, I always thought that a splendid idea—a tax levied on the whole world by a single act—a grand stroke, worthy of a great empire and an imperial treasury. But in the Revised Version I find, 'There went out a decree that all the world should be enrolled'—a mere counting! a census! the sort of thing the Local Government Board might do! Will anyone tell me that the new version is as good as the old one in this passage?"

This story aptly illustrates the sentiments with which a member of one of the more powerful and more ancient departments regards those later births of time—the Board of Trade, the Local Government Board, the Board of Agriculture, and even the Scotch Office—though this last is redeemed from utter contempt by the irritable patriotism of our Scottish fellow-citizens, and by the beautiful house in which it is lodged. For a minister who loves an arbitrary and single-handed authority, the India Office is the most attractive of all. The Secretary of State for India is (except in financial matters, where he is controlled by his council) a pure despot. He has the Viceroy at the end of a telegraph-wire, and the Queen's three hundred millions of Indian subjects under his thumb. His salary is not voted by the House of Commons; very few M.P.'s care about India; and he is practically free from parliamentary control.

The Foreign Office, of course, is full of interest, and its social traditions have always been of the most dignified sort—from the days when Mr. Ranville-Ranville used to frequent Mrs. Perkins's Balls, to the existing reign of Sir Thomas Sanderson and Mr. Eric Barrington. The Treasury has its finger in every departmental pie, except the Indian one, for no minister and no department can carry out reforms or even discharge its ordinary routine without public money, and of public money the Treasury is the vigilant and inflexible guardian. "I am directed to acquaint you that My Lords do not see their way to comply with your suggestion, inasmuch as to do so would be to *open a serious door.*" This delightful formula, with its dread suggestion of a flippant door and all the mischief to which it might lead, is daily employed to check the ardour of ministers who are seeking to advance the benefit of the race (including their own popularity among their constituents) by a judicious expenditure of public money.

But whatever be the scope and function of the office, and whatever the nature of the work done there, the mode of doing it is pretty much the same. Whether the matter in question originates inside the office, by some direction or inquiry of the chief, or comes by letter from outside, it is referred to the particular department of the office which is concerned with it. A clerk makes a careful minute, giving the facts of the case and the practice of the office as bearing on it. The paper is then sent to any other department or person in the office that can possibly have any concern with it. It is minuted by each, and it gradually passes up by more or fewer official gradations to the Under-Secretary of State, who reads, or is supposed to read, all that has been written on the paper in its earlier stages, balances the perhaps conflicting views of different annotators, and, if the matter is too important for his own decision, sums up in a minute of recommendation to the chief.

The ultimate decision however is probably less affected by the Under-Secretary's minute than by the oral advice of a much more important personage, the Permanent Head of the office.

It would be beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the composition and powers of the permanent Civil Service, whose chiefs have been, at least since the days of Bagheot, recognised as the real rulers of this country. But as one who has had much experience of them, and not a little conflict with them, the writer feels bound to record his opinion that, in absolute knowledge of their business, in self-denying devotion to duty, in ability, patience, courtesy and readiness to help the fleeting Political Official, the permanent chiefs of the Civil Service are worthy of the highest honour. That they are conservative to the core goes without saying. On being appointed to high permanent office the extremest theorists, like the bees in the famous epigram, "cease to hum" their revolutionary airs, and settle down into the profound conviction that things are well as they are. All the more remarkable is the entire equanimity with which the Permanent Official accepts the unpalatable decision of a chief who is strong enough to override him, and the absolute loyalty with which he will carry out a policy which he cordially disapproves.

Much of a minister's comfort and success depends upon his Private Secretary. Some ministers import for this function a young gentleman of fashion whom they know at home—a picturesque butterfly who flits gaily

through the dusty air of the office, making, by the splendour of his raiment, sunshine in its shady places, and daintily passing on the work to unrecognised and unrewarded clerks. But the better practice is to appoint as Private Secretary one of the permanent staff of the office—if possible of your own politics—and then, as every minister would agree, you have the most efficient and the most obliging aide-de-camp. He supplies his chief with official information, hunts up necessary references, writes his letters, and interviews his bores.

When the late Lord Amphill was a junior clerk in the Foreign Office, Lord Palmerston, then Foreign Secretary, introduced an

innovation whereby, instead of being solemnly summoned by a verbal message, the clerks were expected to answer his bell. Some haughty spirits rebelled against being treated like footmen and tried to organise resistance; but Odo Russell, as he then was, refused to join the rebellious movement,



A TYPICAL PRIVATE SECRETARY.

saying that whatever method apprised him most quickly of Lord Palmerston's wishes was the method which he preferred. The aggrieved clerks regarded him as a traitor to his order—but he died an ambassador.

Trollope described the wounded feelings of a young clerk whose chief sent him to fetch his slippers; and in our own day a Private Secretary, who had patiently taken tickets for the play for his chief's daughters, drew the line when he was told to take the chief's razors to be ground. But such assertions of independence are extremely

rare, and as a rule the Private Secretary is the most cheerful and the most alert of ministering spirits.

A word should be said about the messengers of the public offices—a highly intelligent, respectable and responsible body of men. In recent days a mistaken practice has sprung up of appointing old soldiers and undersized footboys to these posts, but twenty years ago they were filled by men of a different stamp—men like Truncheon in the "Little Dinner at Timmins's," who "had been cab-boy to Lord Tantallan, valet to the Earl of Bareacres, and groom of the chambers to the Dowager Duchess of Fitzbattleaxe. Oh, it was delightful to hear Mr. Truncheon!"

A young man, a sprig of one of the great Whig families, was appointed to an under-secretaryship, and the first day he visited his office he was received by a venerable gentleman of ducal presence who said, with tears in his voice, "I rejoice to see you here, sir, and when I think that I helped to put your noble grandfather into his coffin, it makes me feel quite at home with you." Surely never was an official career more impressively auspicious.

But it is time to return from this personal digression to the routine of the day's work. Among the most important of the morning's duties is the preparation of answers to be given in the House of Commons, and it is often necessary to have answers ready by three o'clock to questions which have only appeared that morning on the notice-paper. The range of questions is infinite, and all the resources of the office are taxed in order to prepare answers at once accurate in fact and wise in policy, to pass them under the minister's review, and to get them fairly copied out before the House meets. As a rule the minister, if he sits in the House of Commons, knowing something of the temper of Parliament, wishes to give a full, explicit and intelligible answer, or even to go a little beyond the strict terms of the question if he sees what his interrogator is driving at. But this policy is abhorrent to the Permanent Official. The traditions of the Circumlocution Office are by no means dead, and the crime of "wanting to know, you know," is one of the most heinous that the M.P. can commit. The answers therefore, as prepared for the minister, are generally jejune, often barely civil, sometimes actually misleading. But the minister, if he be a wise man, edits them into a more informing shape, and after long and careful deliberation as to the probable effect of his words and the reception

which they will have from his questioner, he sends the bundle of written answers away to be fair-copied, and turns to his correspondence.

And here the practice of ministers varies exceedingly. Lord Salisbury writes almost everything with his own hand. Mr. Balfour dictates to a shorthand clerk. Most ministers write a great deal by their Private Secretaries. Letters of any importance are usually transcribed into a copying-book. A chief under whom I once served used to burn the fragment of blotting-paper with which he had blotted his letter, and used to lay it down

as an axiom that if a constituent wrote and asked one to vote for a particular measure one should on no account give a more precise reply than, "I shall have great pleasure in voting in the sense you desire." For, as my mentor observed with great truth, "unless the constituent has kept a copy of his letter—and the chances are twenty to one against that—there will be nothing to

prove what the sense he desired was, and you will be perfectly safe in voting as you like."

The letters received by a minister are many, various and surprising. Of course a great proportion of them relate to public business, and a considerable number to the affairs of his constituency. But in addition to all this, lunatics, cranks and impostors mark a minister for their own, and their applications for loans, gifts and offices of profit would exhaust the total patronage of the Crown and break the Bank of England.

In some of the offices a log-book has been kept by ingenious clerks in which the gems

of the official correspondence are embedded. Let a passage from a letter addressed to the Prime Minister by a young clergyman stand as a sample of its order:—

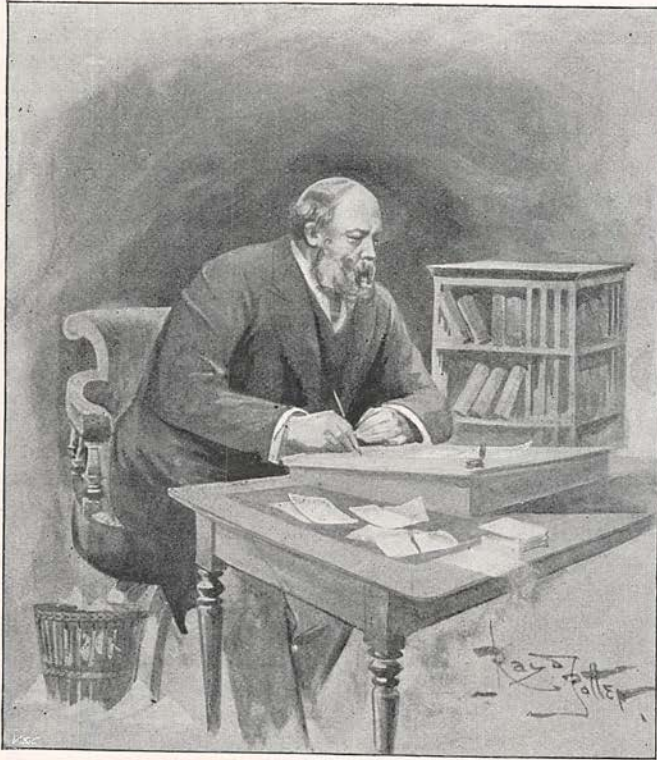
"Dear Sir,—I have no doubt that your time is fully occupied, I will therefore compress as much as possible what I wish to say, and frame my request in few words. Some time ago my mother wrote to her brother, Lord —, asking him to try and do something for me in the way of a living. The reply was that my uncle could do nothing.

I naturally thought that a Premier, possessed of such a plenitude of power as yourself, would find it a matter of less difficulty to transform a curate into a rector or vicar than to create a peer. My name is on the chancellor's list—as far as results, somewhat suggestive, I am afraid, of the Greek Kalendar. My future father-in-law, Mr. —, is a member of the City Liberal Club, in which a large

bust of yourself was unveiled last year. I am thirty-one years of age, a High Churchman, musical, and a graduate of Durham. If I had a living I could marry. Being a southerner, fond of music and of books, I naturally would like to be somewhere near town. I hope you will be able to help me in this respect, and thus afford much happiness to more than one."

Here is a gem from the North of Ireland:—

"Before the Irish Church was robbed I was nominated to the deanery of Tuam, but,



LORD SALISBURY AT HIS DESK.

Mr. Disraeli resigning, I was defrauded of my just right by Mr. Gladstone, and my wife, the only surviving child of an earl, was sadly disappointed. But there is a just Judge above."

Anonymous letters, chiefly abusive or threatening, are constantly received by ministers whose work brings them prominently into public view. The original of the following epistle to Mr. Gladstone lies before me as I write :—

"March 15, 1893.—Far away from my native land, my bitter indignation as a *Welshwoman* prompts me to reproach you—you *bad, wicked, false, treacherous* old man!—for your iniquitous scheme to *rob* and overthrow the dearly beloved old church of my country. You have no conscience, but I pray that God may even yet give you one that will sorely *smart* and trouble you before you die. You pretend to be religious, you old hypocrite, that you may more successfully pander to the evil passions of the lowest and most ignorant of the Welsh people! But you neither care for nor respect the principles of religion, or you would not distress the minds of all true Christian people by instigating a mob to commit the awful sin of sacrilege. You think you will shine in history; but it will be a notoriety similar to that of *Nero*. I see someone pays you the unintentional compliment of comparing you to Pontius Pilate, and I am sorry, for Pilate, though a political time-server, was, with all his faults, a very respectable man in comparison with you; and he did not, like you, profess the Christian religion. You are certainly *clever*—so also is your lord and master the devil. And I cannot regard it as sinful to hate and despise you, any more than it is sinful to abhor him. So, with full measure of contempt and detestation, accept these compliments from

A DAUGHTER OF OLD WALES."

It is a triumph of female patience and painstaking that the whole of the foregoing was compressed within the limits of a foreign postcard.

When the day's official papers have been dealt with, answers to questions settled, correspondence read and the replies written or dictated, it is very likely time to go to a conference on some Bill with which the office is concerned. This conference will consist of the minister in charge of the Bill, two or three of his colleagues who have

special knowledge of the subject, the permanent officials, the parliamentary draughtsman, and perhaps one of the law officers. At this conference the amendments on the paper are carefully discussed, together with the objects for which they were presumably put down, their probable effect, their merits or demerits, and the best mode of meeting them.

An hour soon passes in this kind of anticipatory debate, and the minister is called away to receive a deputation. The scene is exactly like that which Matthew Arnold described at the Social Science Congress—the large bare room, dusty air and jaded light, serried ranks of men with bald heads and women in spectacles, the local M.P., like Mr. Gregsbury in "*Nicholas Nickleby*," full of affability and importance, introducing the selected spokesmen—"our worthy mayor—our leading employer of labour—Miss Twoshoes, a philanthropic worker in all good causes"—the minister, profoundly ignorant of the whole subject, smiling blandly or gazing earnestly from his padded chair; the Permanent Official at his elbow murmuring what the "practice of the department" has been, what his predecessor said on a similar occasion ten years ago, and why the object of the deputation is equally mischievous and impossible; and the minister finally expressing sympathy and promising earnest consideration.

Mr. Bright, though the laziest of mankind at official work, was the ideal hand at receiving deputations. Some ministers scold or snub or harangue, but he let them talk their full, listened patiently, smiled pleasantly, said very little, treated the subject with gravity or banter as its nature required, paid the introducing member a compliment on his assiduity and public spirit, and sent them all away on excellent terms with themselves, and highly gratified by their intelligent and courteous reception.

So far, we have described our minister's purely departmental duties. At the Cabinet he must, to use Mr. Gladstone's phrase, "throw his mind into the common stock" with his fellow ministers, and take part in the discussions and decisions which govern the empire.

Saturday is the usual day for Cabinets, though they may be convened at any moment as special occasion arises. Describing the potato famine which settled the repeal of the Corn Laws, Lord Beaconsfield wrote: "This mysterious but universal sickness of a single root changed the history of the world. 'There is no gambling like politics,' said Lord Roehampton as he glanced at the

Times; 'four Cabinets in one week! The Government must be more sick than the potatoes!'

Twelve is the usual hour for the meeting of the Cabinet, and the business is generally over by two. At the Cabinets held during November the legislative programme for next session is settled, and the preparation of each measure is assigned to a sub-committee of ministers specially conversant with the subject-matter.

Lord Salisbury holds his Cabinets at the Foreign Office; but the old place of meeting was the official residence of the First Lord of the Treasury at 10 Downing Street, in a pillared room looking over the Horse Guards' Parade, and hung with portraits of departed First Lords. In theory of course the proceedings of the Cabinet are absolutely secret. The Privy Councillor's oath prohibits all disclosures. No record is kept of the business done. The door is guarded by vigilant messengers against possible eavesdroppers. The despatch-boxes which constantly circulate between Cabinet ministers carrying confidential matters are locked with special keys, said to date from the administration of Mr. Pitt; and the possession of these keys constitutes admission into what Lord Beaconsfield called "the circles of high initiation."

Yet in reality more leaks out than is supposed. In the Cabinet of 1880-1885 the leakage to the Press was systematic and continuous. Even Mr. Gladstone, that greatest of all sticklers for official reticence, held that a cabinet minister might impart his secrets to his wife and his Private Secretary. The wives of official men are not always as trustworthy as Mrs. Bucket, in "Bleak House," and some of the Private Secretaries in the Government of 1880 were little more than boys. Two members of that Cabinet were notorious for their free communications to the Press, and it was often remarked that the *Birmingham Daily Post* was peculiarly well informed.

A noble lord who belonged to the Government of 1880, and who, though the most pompous, is not the wisest of mankind, was habitually the victim of a certain journalist of known enterprise, who used to waylay him outside Downing Street and accost him with jaunty confidence: "Well, Lord —, so you have settled on so-and-so after all." The noble lord, astonished that the Cabinet's decision was already public property, would reply: "As you know so much there can be no harm in telling the

rest," and the journalist, grinning like a dog, ran off to print the precious morsel in a special edition of the *Millbank Gazette*. Mr. Justin McCarthy could, I believe, tell a curious story of a highly-important piece of foreign intelligence communicated by a minister to the *Daily News*, of a resulting question in the House of Commons, and of the same minister's emphatic declaration that no effort should be wanting to trace this violator of official confidence and bring him to condign punishment.

While it is true that outsiders sometimes become possessed, by these nefarious dodges, of official secrets, it is not less true that cabinet ministers are often curiously in the dark about great and even startling events.

A political lady, who lived in Seamore Place, once said to the present writer: "Do you in your party think much of my neighbour, Mr. —?" As in duty bound, I replied, "Oh, yes, a great deal." She rejoined: "I shouldn't have thought it, for when the boys are shouting any startling news in the special editions I see him run out into Seamore Place without his hat to buy an evening paper. *That doesn't look well for a cabinet minister.*"

On the evening of May 6, 1882, I dined in company with Mr. Bright. He stayed late, but never heard a word of the Phoenix Park murders, went off quietly to bed, and read them as news in the next morning's *Observer*.

But to return to our minister. The labours of the morning are now beginning to tell upon him, and exhausted nature rings her luncheon-bell. Here again men's habits widely differ. If our minister has breakfasted late, he will go on till four or five, and then have tea and toast, and perhaps a poached egg, but if he is an early man, he craves for nutriment more substantial. He must not go out to luncheon at a friend's house, for he will be tempted to eat and drink too much, and absence from official territory in the middle of the day has a bad look of idleness and self-indulgence. The *dura ilia* of the present Duke of Devonshire could always cope with a slice of the office joint, a hunch of the office bread, a glass of the office sherry. But Lord Spencer, when Lord President, used to have an elaborate luncheon brought from Spencer House, and Mr. Mundella, his Vice-President, was admitted to share it. As a rule, if a man cannot manage to get back to the family meal in South Kensington or Cavendish Square, he turns into a club, has a cutlet and a glass of claret, and goes back to his

office for another hour's work before going to the House.

At 3.30 questions begin, and every minister is in his place, unless indeed there is a Levée or a Drawing-room, when a certain number of ministers, besides the great officers of state, are expected to be present. The minister lets himself into the House by a private door—which ministers alone have the key—at the back of the Chair. For an hour and a half, or perhaps longer, the storm of questions rages, and then the minister, if he is in charge of the Bill under discussion, settles himself on the Treasury Bench to spend the remainder of the day in a hand-to-hand encounter with the banded forces of the Opposition, which will tax to their utmost his brain, nerve, and physical endurance. If however he is not concerned with the business, he goes out perhaps for a breath of air and a cup of tea on the Terrace, and then buries himself in his private room—generally a miserable little dog-hole in the basement—where he finds a pile of office-boxes, containing papers which must be read, minuted, and returned to the office with all convenient despatch. From these labours he is suddenly summoned, by the shrill tinging of the division-bell and the raucous bellow of the policeman, to take part in a division. He rushes upstairs two steps at a time and squeezes himself into the House through the almost closed doors. "What are we?" he shouts to the whip. "Ayes" or "Noes" is the hurried answer; and he stalks through the lobby to discharge this intelligent function, dives down to his room again, only, if the House is in committee, to be dragged up again ten minutes afterwards for another repetition of the same farce, and so on indefinitely.

It may be asked why a minister should undergo all this worry of running up and down, and in and out, laying down his work and taking it up again, dropping threads, and losing touch, and wasting time, all to give a purely party vote, settled for him by his colleague in charge of the Bill, on a sub-

ject with which he is personally unfamiliar. If the Government is in peril, of course every vote is wanted; but with a normal majority, ministers' votes might surely be "taken as read," and assumed to be given to the side to which they belong. But the traditions of Government require ministers to vote. It is a point of honour for each man to be in as many divisions as possible. A record is kept of all the divisions of the session and of the week, and a list is sent round every Monday morning showing in how many each minister has voted. The whips, who must live and move and have

their being in the House, naturally head the list, and their colleagues follow in a rather uncertain order. A minister's place in this list is mainly governed by the question whether he dines at the House or not. If he dines away and "pairs," of course he does not in the least jeopardise his party or embarrass his colleagues, but "pairs" are not indicated in the list of divisions, and as divisions have an awkward knack of happening between nine and ten, the habitual diner-out naturally sinks in the list. If he is a married man, the claims of the *placens uxor* are to a certain extent recognised by his whips, but woe to the bachelor who, with no domestic excuse, steals away for two hours' relaxation.

The good minister therefore stays at the House and dines there. Perhaps he is

entertaining ladies in the crypt-like dining-rooms which look on the Terrace, and in that case the charms of society may neutralise the discomforts of the room and the unattractive character of the food. But if he dine upstairs at the ministerial table, few indeed are the alleviations of his lot. In the first place he must dine with the colleagues with whom his whole waking life is passed—excellent fellows and capital company—but nature demands an occasional enlargement of the mental horizon. Then if by chance he has one special bugbear—a bore or an egotist, a man with dirty hands or a churlish temper—that man will inevitably come and sit down beside him and insist on being



OUT FOR THE EVENING.

affectionate and fraternal. The room is very hot; dinners have been going on in it for the last two hours; the κνίσση—the odour of roast meat, which the gods loved but which most men dislike—pervades the atmosphere; your next-door neighbour is eating a rather high grouse while you are at your apple-tart, or the perfumes of a deliquescent Camembert mingle with your coffee.

To wash down these delicacies you may, if you choose, follow the example of Lord Cross, who, when he was Sir Richard, drank beer in its native pewter, or of Mr. Radcliffe Cook, who tries to popularise cider; or you may venture on that thickest, blackest, and most potent of vintages, which a few years back still went by the name of "Mr. Disraeli's port." But as a rule these heroic beverages are eschewed by the modern minister. Perhaps if he is in good spirits after making a successful speech or fighting his estimates through committee, he will indulge himself with an imperial pint of champagne; but more often a whisky and soda, or a half bottle of Zeltinger quenches his modest thirst.

On Wednesday and Saturday our minister, if he is not out of London, probably dines at a large dinner-party. Once a session he must dine in full dress with the Speaker; once he must dine at, or give, a full-dress dinner "to celebrate her Majesty's birthday." On the eve of the meeting of Parliament he must dine again in full dress with the Leader of the House, to hear the rehearsal of the "gracious speech from the throne." But as a rule his experience on Wednesday and Saturday is a ceremonious banquet at a colleague's house, and a party strictly political—perhaps the Prime Minister as the main attraction, reinforced by Lord and Lady Tite-Barnacle, Mr. and Mrs. Stiltstalking, Sir John Taper, and young Mr. Tadpole.

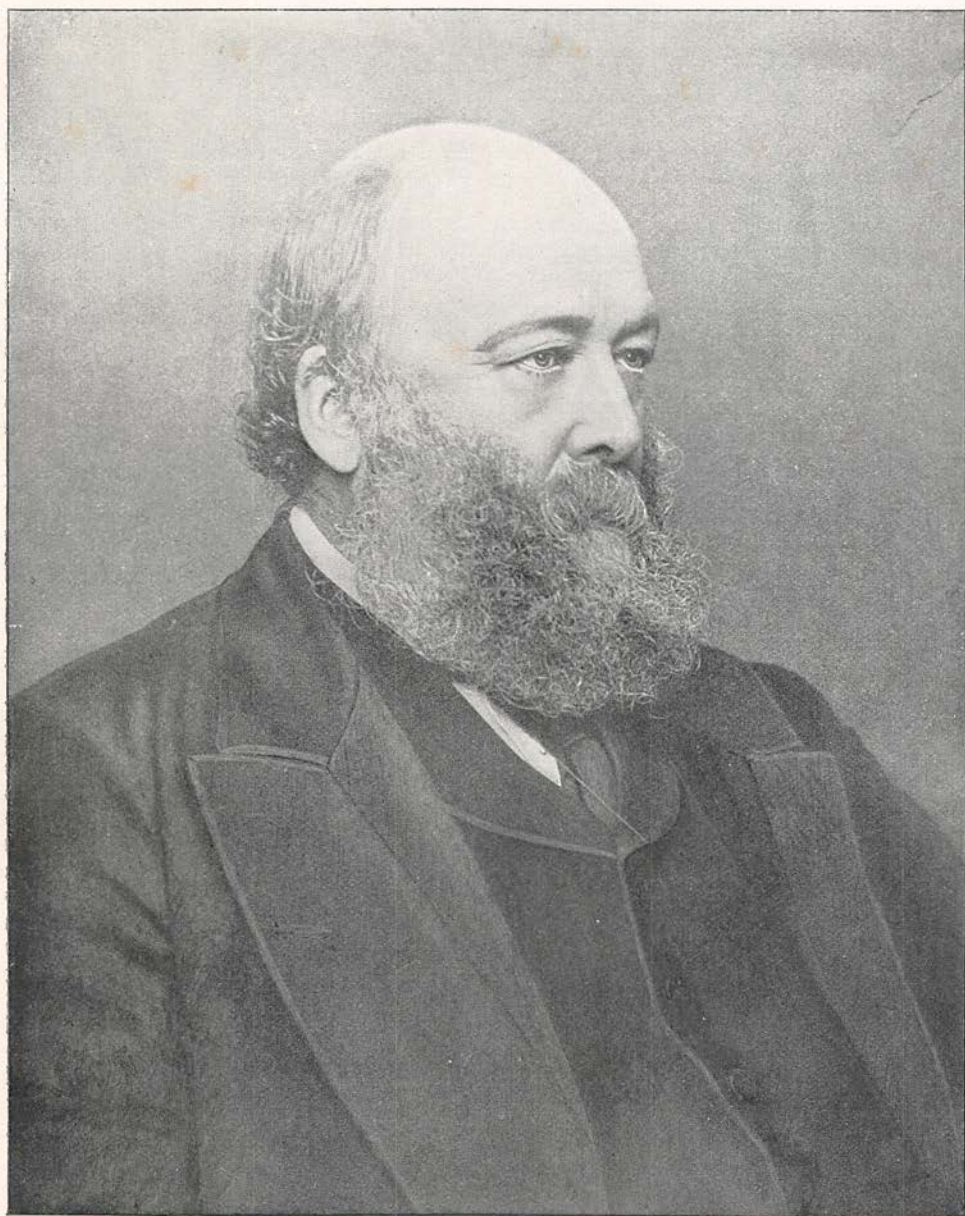
A political dinner of thirty colleagues, male and female, in the dog-days is only a shade less intolerable than the greasy rations and mephitic vapours of the House of Commons' dining-room. At the political dinner "shop" is the order of the day; conversation turns on Brown's successful speech, Jones's palpable falling-off, Robinson's chance of office, the explanation of a recent by-election, the prospects of an impending division, and what Lord Beaconsfield justly called "that heinous

subject, on which enormous fibs are ever told, the Registration." And, to fill up the cup of boredom, the political dinner is usually followed by a political evening party.

On Saturday the minister probably does two hours' work at his office, and has some boxes sent to his house, but the afternoon he spends in cycling, or golfing, or riding, or boating, or he leaves London till Monday morning. On Wednesday he is at the House till six, and then escapes for a breath of air before dinner. But on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, as a rule, he is at the House from its meeting at three till it adjourns at any hour after midnight. After dinner he smokes and reads, and tries to work in his room, and goes to sleep and wakes again, and towards midnight is unnaturally lively. Outsiders believe in the "twelve o'clock rule," but insiders know, as a matter of fact, that it is suspended as often as an Irish member in the '80 Parliament. Whoever else slopes homewards, ministers must stay. The present writer has been fetched out of his bed, to which he had surreptitiously retired, by a messenger in a hansom, and taken back to the House to defend his estimates at three in the morning.

There we sit with ranks unbroken, cheering on the fierce debate,
Till the sunrise lights us homeward as we tramp
through Storey's Gate,
Racked with headache, pale and haggard, worn by
nights of endless talk,
While the early sparrows twitter all along the
Birdcage Walk.

Yet some ardent spirits there are who, if report speaks true, are not content with even this amount of exertion and excitement. A noble duke, when he held office in the House of Commons, used to finish his night or begin his day with a rubber at the Turf, and an eminent judge, formerly a law-officer, was believed to banish care and induce rest by games considerably more hazardous. But we are describing not choice spirits or chartered *viveurs*, but the blameless minister whose whole life, during the parliamentary session, is the undeviating and conscientious discharge of unexciting duty; and he, when he lays his head upon his respectable pillow any time after 1 A.M., may surely go to sleep in the comfortable consciousness that he has done a fair day's work for a not exorbitant remuneration.



From a photo by]

[Russell.

THE BUSIEST OF BRITISH STATESMEN :
THE MOST NOBLE THE MARQUIS OF SALISBURY, K.G.,
PRIME MINISTER OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.