MAIDEN SPEECHES IN PARLIAMENT.

BY FREDERICK DOLMAN.

Illustrated by HARRY FURNISS, T. WALTER WILSON, R.I., *and* RAYMOND POTTER.

WHAT a singular interest attaches to the first utterances in Parliament of those who have come to be famous statesmen and orators! "I believe there is no more solemn moment in the life of an Englishman," said Lord Rosebery in concluding his own maiden speech in the House of Lords, "than that at which he is first privileged to take part in the deliberations of the national senate." But unfortunately for the biographer, the solemnity of the moment never extends to the audience, which as a rule has failed to give much heed to the first efforts in the Parliamentary arena of the men who were to become its most prominent figures. It was a masterly piece of penetration which led Lord Beaconsfield to finish his maiden speech by the audacious declaration, "The time will come when you will hear me," but how many are acquainted with the occasion of the maiden speech of his great rival?

According to Mr. Barnett Smith's "Life," Mr. G. W. E. Russell's monograph in "The Queen's Prime Ministers" series, and similar books, the "old Parliamentary hand's" first speech was made in defence of his father as a slave owner, the date being May 17, 1833, according to one authority, and the third of the following month according to another. But as Mr. Alfred F. Robbins has shown in his lately published "Early Public Life of Mr. Gladstone," the Conservative member for Newark had taken part in debate about three months before the earlier of these two dates. On February 21 a petition was presented relative to electoral corruption at Liverpool, and, prompted doubtless by a sensitive concern for the honour of his birthplace, the new member ventured to interpose in the discussion, which, in accordance with the then existing rule of the House, was allowed to take place on the petition when its prayer had been read. The new Parliament had not been in session a month, and Mr. Gladstone—who had been returned for Newark at the General Election in the preceding December—was, it must be supposed, still overawed by his surroundings. At any rate the young man of twenty-three was described in the newspapers of the following morning as having been "inaudible in the gallery," a circumstance which may have been, however, as much due to the wretched accommodation of the reporters at that time as to the failure of the voice that has since thrilled tens of thousands. Nor does this circumstance fully explain the long oblivion to which this maiden speech was consigned, for some sort of a report of it is to be found in both "Hansard" and "The Mirror of Parliament," although they are qualified by the prefatory warning that "Mr. Gladstone was understood to say." From these reports it would seem indeed that he had not been well heard even by the members around him, and later on he had to rise on "a point of explanation" at the request of a speaker who complained of the hon. member for Newark's want of clearness.

Altogether it is clear that this maiden speech made no sort of impression upon the House. In a few hours it was forgotten; and when Mr. Gladstone came to make his second effort it was regarded by many members as his first. The doubt as to the date of this occasion arose from the presence in Parliament at that time of Mr. Gladstone's brother Thomas. William Ewart spoke on the question of slavery on May 17, Thomas on the same subject on June 3; but both speeches were reported simply as the deliverances of Mr. Gladstone. There is some good evidence however that the earlier speech, regarded as a maiden speech, obtained a distinctive success. Mr. Buxton, in following Mr. Gladstone, described it as "very able, eloquent and impressive," whilst Mr. Stanley, the Colonial Secretary, referred to its "temper, ability and fairness, as affording a model for many older members." But the most remarkable testimony to the contemporaneous effect of the speech was not published till many years after in the

memoirs of Lord Albemarle, who was then Whig member for East Norfolk. "One evening on taking my place I found on his legs a beardless youth, with whose appearance and manner I was greatly struck; he had an earnest, intelligent countenance, and large expressive black eyes. Young as he was he had evidently what is called 'the ear of the house,' and yet the cause he advocated was not one likely to interest a popular assembly—that of the planter versus the slave. I had placed myself behind the Treasury Bench. 'Who is it?' I asked one of the Ministers. I was answered, 'He is the member for

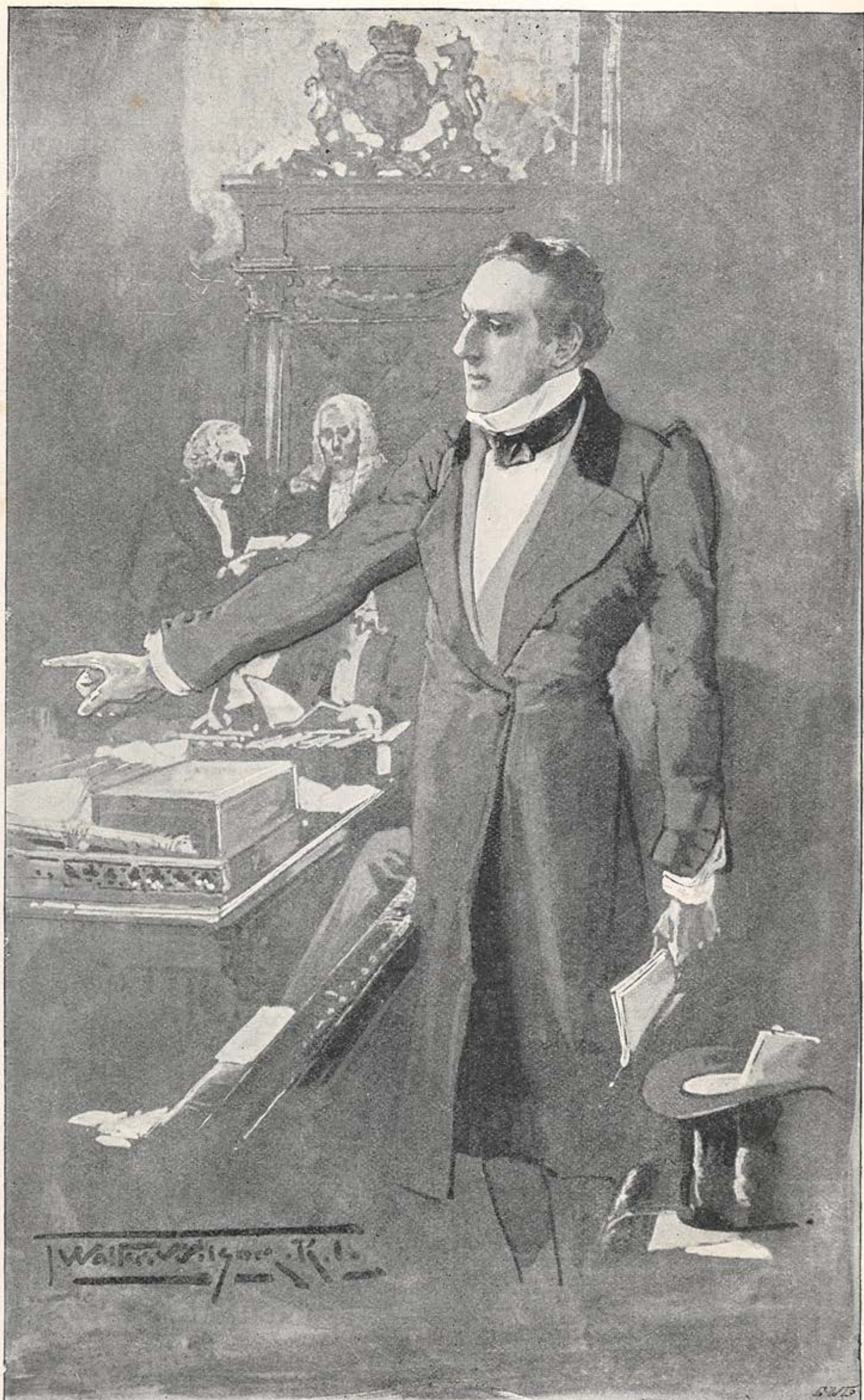
From a photo by] [*Draycott, Birmingham.*
MR. JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN IN 1876.

Newark—a young fellow who will some day make a great figure in Parliament,' said Stanley."

In the then condition of the Press—the *Morning Post* was the only London daily which had any reference to a speech that was thus spoken of—it was only natural that parliamentary proceedings generally should receive very inadequate attention. But it is surely passing strange that the maiden speech of Mr. Chamberlain—who did not enter Parliament till 1876—should have been the subject of an error similar to that in Mr. Gladstone's case. Even "Toby, M.P." is found nodding. In his "Diary of Two Parliaments," Mr. Lucy describes the right hon. gentleman's first essay in the House of Commons, with much gusto and some humour, as having been delivered on February 17, 1877, his subject being the Prison's Bill. Mr. Chamberlain himself tells me that his maiden speech was called forth on August 4, 1876, by debate in Committee on Lord Sandon's Education Bill. Elected for Birmingham in July he had not intended taking part that session in the debates of the House, but this resolve was broken by the attacks levelled against the Birmingham School Board, of which he was then chairman, by the supporters of Lord Sandon's Bill. But in beginning his speech Mr. Chamberlain thought it necessary to tender an apology to his audience in the following terms:—

"He had so recently come into the House that he felt reluctant to trespass on its time, being of opinion that he should best show his respect for the assembly he was proud to enter by refraining from addressing it while inexperienced in its forms and practices."

The event proved the apology to be superfluous. The speech indeed was, according to all accounts, so strikingly successful as to make it a matter of some surprise that it should have been overlooked by Mr. Lucy. The four columns in "Hansard" and the half column in the *Times*—greater space than was given to any speech in the debate, with the exception of Lord Sandon's—were doubtless the reporters' tribute to the reputation which Mr. Chamberlain took with him into the House of Commons. A new member rising to make his maiden speech always excites some amount of expectant interest—in a new Parliament like the present, indeed, maiden speeches are a recognised means of diversion. Mr. Chamberlain's first appearance in debate was made at the fag end of a session, in a Parliament which was more than two years old, but his Birmingham career invested it with an exceptionally eager curiosity. The House was impatient for a division, but the moment it was seen that Mr. Chamberlain was on his feet the cries of "'Vide, 'vide" ceased. Members hurried in from the lobbies, and even Mr. Disraeli, who was in his private room when Mr. Chamberlain rose, was induced to return to the Treasury Bench by the voice of the new member for Birmingham. The House listened with close and unbroken attention, and Mr. Chamberlain, we are told by the chronicler of the *Birmingham Daily Post*, "resumed his seat amid loud and general cheering."



MR. GLADSTONE DELIVERING HIS MAIDEN SPEECH IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, FEBRUARY 21, 1833.

(There was a window at that time behind the Speaker's chair, from which the light fell on the young orator's face. Mr. Gladstone spoke from behind the Opposition Bench.)

On the following morning the *Times* made the speech a text for its leading article on the Education Bill, although content to

LORD ROBERT CECIL (NOW MARQUIS OF SALISBURY) DELIVERING HIS MAIDEN SPEECH IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, APRIL 7, 1854.

describe it as "interesting." Of the complete success of this first effort there can be no doubt, and it was a success all the more difficult of achievement because the House of Commons expected much—although it hardly knew what—from the man who, by his work in Birmingham, had obtained something like a national fame.

In contrast with the *éclat* attached to Mr. Chamberlain's maiden speech, we find that those of Lord Salisbury, the Duke of Devonshire, and Mr. Balfour, passed unnoticed unhonoured, and unsung. The present Prime Minister first appeared in "Hansard" (by the name of Lord Robert Cecil) under the date April 7, 1854. It was a brief speech delivered in opposition to the second reading of the Universities Bill, which Lord John Russell had moved. Its keynote was rebuke of Lord Robert Cecil's party leaders for lacking the courage to divide against a measure which he described as "fraught with injustice and hostility to the Universities." Lord Salisbury was then twenty-four years old, and had sat for Stamford for two months. "Hansard" gave him only eighteen lines. Another maiden speech of that evening, delivered by Mr. Byng, was seemingly received with far greater favour. But there was one conspicuous exception to the indifference with which the parliamentary *début* of the future leader of the Peers was regarded. In closing the debate Mr. Gladstone—who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer—spoke with characteristic generosity of the speech of Lord Robert Cecil as "rich with future

From a photo by] [*Russell.*

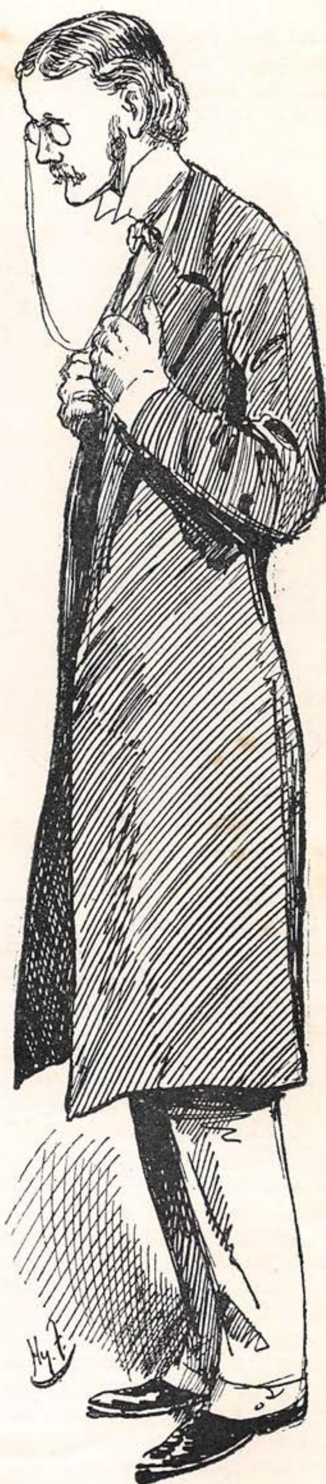
THE MARQUIS OF HARTINGTON (NOW DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE) IN 1858.

promise," and as indicating that "there still issue forth from the maternal bosom of the University men who, in the first days of

their career, give earnest of what they may afterwards accomplish for their country." It would be interesting to know how much of this eulogium was dictated by love for an *alma mater* and how much by admiration for a new member's first speech. Mr. Gladstone's prescience at any rate began to be justified even sooner than he could have anticipated, for twelve months later Lord Robert Cecil was selected by his party to second a vote of censure on the Government.

Both the Duke of Devonshire and Mr. Balfour showed some coyness in wooing the House of Commons. The Duke—then Marquis of Hartington—entered St. Stephen's as member for North Lancashire in March 1857, and his first speech was not made till May 1858. Mr. Balfour sat for two years and a half as member for Hertford before, in August 1876, he successfully endeavoured to catch the Speaker's eye. Both gentlemen had in fact ceased to be new members, and we find them refraining therefore from the customary claim upon the indulgence of the House. It was a matter largely of local interest which led the Marquis of Hartington to interpose for the first time in debate—a motion by Mr. Ricardo in favour of a committee of inquiry into the mining operations carried on by the Duchy of Lancaster. The member for North Lancashire opposed the motion in a speech to which "Hansard" gives only about a dozen lines; but, among a number of speeches by members of similar standing, no particular attention was paid to what he said. Certainly in this maiden speech there is not a glimmer of the qualities which were to secure for its author his powerful position in our Parliamentary system.

Mr. Balfour, on the other hand, tardily chose the occasion of his first effort when the nature of the debate appealed to a phase of thought which he has since done much to bring into prominence, if it did not favour an effective or dramatic *début*. It was the Indian Budget of 1876, brought forward by Lord George Hamilton, then Under Secretary for India. On the motion to go into Committee Mr. Fawcett moved an amendment for the purpose of raising a debate on the depreciation in the value of silver and its consequent effect on the Indian taxpayers. In this amendment Mr. Balfour—then a young man of twenty-six—saw an opportunity of putting forth those views on the currency which have since developed into so decided an advocacy of Bimetallism. After giving to the comparatively small House



MR. A. J. BALFOUR DELIVERING HIS MAIDEN SPEECH ON AUGUST 10, 1876.
(*Drawn by Harry Furniss.*)

many figures and much economic learning, Mr. Balfour quietly thanked it for a patient hearing and sat down, having clearly said, indeed, what he intended to say, but without

LORD ROSEBERY IN 1871.

raising a suspicion in any of his hearers that in him there was a coming leader. This speech was delivered on August 10, six days later than that which gave Mr. Chamberlain so good a start in his parliamentary career.

At the beginning of this session Lord Rosebery playfully rebuked the Government for not having chosen as the mover of the Address in the House of Lords an orator who had what he called "the halo of political virginity." The usual practice on such occasions had impressed itself the more on the mind of the leader of the Opposition inasmuch as it gave him the opportunity twenty-five years ago of making a highly successful maiden speech. Lord Rosebery was indeed only the seconder of the Address in the House of Lords on February 9, 1871, but his oration, which occupies over six columns in "Hansard," quite eclipsed that of the mover, the Marquis (now Duke) of Westminster. Additional prestige was given to the occasion by the presence of the Queen, who that year opened Parliament in person. Lord Rosebery, who was then twenty-four, was attired in the uniform of the Scottish Archers and, according to the *Times*, "spoke with a graceful emotion which became his years."

Beginning with the plea that the favour and indulgence which their lordships were accustomed to show to all who for the first time addressed the House might be extended to him in even a larger measure on account of his "extreme youth and inexperience," Lord Rosebery finished with words of similar humility. But the speech as a whole was bold and original. It gave more than one taste of the bright fancy which Lord Rosebery has since cultivated so well. In reference to the conflict between France and Germany, for instance, Lord Rosebery said: "Among the numerous engines of war which have recently been discovered or re-adopted, we must all have noticed the diplomatic circular. Every event of the war has been preceded or followed by a cloud of these missives. I believe that if Jupiter were to return to the earth and re-commence his courtship of Danæ he would woo her in a shower of diplomatic circulars." The speaker was chivalry itself, by the way, in his references to the nation that was then in the throes of defeat, and more particularly the capital which, "having for eighteen years given herself up to luxury and deified pleasure," showed so gallant a spirit in the national hour of need, "feeding

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MR. (NOW SIR) WILLIAM VERNON HARCOURT, M.P., AT THE TIME OF HIS FIRST SPEECH IN PARLIAMENT IN 1869.

her population of epicures on husks and rats." The admiration with which the peers heard this speech from one of their latest

recruits was expressed by the Duke of Richmond, who spoke of its "conspicuous ability," this compliment being endorsed by Earl Granville. Lord Rosebery is, by the way, the only leading parliamentary orator whose experience has been gained entirely in the Upper House.

Sir William Harcourt's maiden speech was even more successful than that of his colleague in the leadership of the Liberal party. Sir William did not enter the House of Commons till he was forty-one, however, and his triumph was the triumph of well-matured power, not that of the daring of enthusiastic youth. Mr. Vernon Harcourt—as he was then known—was returned for Oxford to the Parliament which met for the first time on February 16, 1869. It was perhaps his feeling that no time was to be lost in striving for that parliamentary position which ambition had marked out for him; at any rate just a week later the new member threw himself into the fray. The battle was not one which, in the ordinary course of things, could give the new speaker much glory. It arose out of a motion by Viscount Bury for leave to bring in the Vacating of Seats Bill—a measure relieving Ministers of the Crown from the necessity of re-election on their appointment—and a large part of the discussion was taken up with the propriety of opposition at this primary stage. The member for Oxford saw an opportunity however of turning to good account the constitutional knowledge which, as a writer, had made "Historicus" famous. In sonorous, well-rounded sentences, to the extent of six columns of "Hansard," Mr. Vernon Harcourt denounced the proposal as an insidious attack upon one of the safeguards of our popular freedom. In what for a maiden speech was a remarkable peroration, the hon. member for Oxford described the statute which it was proposed to repeal as "the sword of our fathers, and it was our duty to keep it bright and burnished as we had received it from our ancestors. While sailing on a calm and unruffled sea we ought not to confine our thoughts solely to the present because it seemed prosperous, but we should make provision also for the future when a political tempest might arise, and following the advice of Mr. Hallam, jealously preserve those safeguards which our forefathers had provided—those safeguards which had proved hitherto, and might prove hereafter, alike a security for the stability of the throne and for the liberties of the people." Strangely enough, from beginning to end the speech had not a suggestion of the jesting spirit which now relieves the natural heaviness of Sir William Harcourt's style.

MR. GOSCHEN IN 1864.

When the new member sat down he was warmly complimented by friend and foe. Mr. Henley, on the Opposition front bench, spoke of the "constitutional principles so admirably set forth" by Mr. Harcourt, and congratulated the House "on their having so sound a constitutional authority among them." Mr. Gladstone was profuse in felicitating his supporter, and admitted "great expectations in regard to his future contributions to our debates." Lord Bury's motion was negatived without a division, and according to the *Daily News* its fate was sealed by "the comprehensive and effective oration" of the member for Oxford. "There could be no difference of opinion," said the same newspaper, "as to the effect which this maiden speech produced upon the House; but it was perhaps unnecessarily elaborate, and the manner of its delivery was not altogether unexceptionable." This opinion was supported by the London correspondent of the *Oxford Chronicle*, who wrote to his paper that "the critics of the Gallery were unanimous in their approval of the matter of the speech, but considered it a little slow in manner, although the speaker never stumbled."

Mr. Goschen, like his son, obtained his first parliamentary opportunity through being chosen to second the Address in reply

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MR. JOHN MORLEY, M.P., IN 1883.

to the Queen's Speech. It cannot be said, however, that the right hon. gentleman made Lord Rosebery's brilliant use of the opportunity. Although at the time it was delivered—the date was February 4, 1864—nearly the whole of Europe was distraught with international difficulties, Mr. Goschen's speech was chiefly noteworthy for its exposition of banking principles. He had been elected, at the age of thirty-two, for the City of London during the previous session, and accepted the honour paid him by Lord Palmerston's Government as a compliment to his constituency. But although "Hansard" reported it in the first person, and to the length of seven columns, the speech was received in very listless fashion, and assuredly gave no omen of the oratorical power which Mr. Goschen was to develop in spite of great natural disadvantages. The best adjective Mr. Disraeli could employ—when paying the customary compliment to the mover and seconder of the Address as Leader of the Opposition—in reference to it was "interesting."

In more recent years there have been two maiden speeches of exceptional interest—those of Mr. Morley and Mr. Asquith. When Mr. Morley entered the House of Commons in 1883 he had already won a reputation—like Mr. Chamberlain in 1876—but it was the reputation of the thinker and the author, and there was not much expectation of his achieving a similar distinction in the arena of debate. The member for Newcastle-on-Tyne rose to address the House for the first time on March 13, 1883, about three weeks after he had taken his seat. Mr. Gorst, Q.C.—now Sir John Gorst—moved, "That in view of the complicity of the Transvaal Government in the cruel and treacherous attacks made upon the chiefs, Montsioa and Mankroane, this House is of opinion that energetic steps should be immediately taken to secure the strict observance by the Transvaal Government of the Convention of 1881, so that these chiefs may be preserved from the destruction with which they are threatened." The late Sir R. N. Fowler seconded the resolution, and he was followed by Mr. Morley, who spoke in opposition to it for about twenty minutes. According to the newspapers of the following day, "he was greeted with encouraging cheers from his friends on rising, and the clear, able and intelligent manner in which he addressed himself to the subject made a favourable impression on those who heard him." Mr. Morley spoke from the third bench below the gangway, among Irish

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MR. H. H. ASQUITH, M.P., IN 1887.

Nationalists and English Radicals, many of whom warmly congratulated him on the success of a speech which they had awaited with something like fear and trembling.

Nevertheless Mr. Guy Dawnay, the succeeding speaker, ventured to accuse Mr. Morley of "laying down several premises without making deductions from them, and drawing a variety of conclusions without premises." Nor would it seem that in Mr. Morley's own eyes the speech had, not indeed the logic, but the effect which produces self-confidence. In praising the fluency and self-possession of this speech more than one parliamentary chronicler suggested that the old members who heard it would never have supposed that it came from a new member, whose life had been spent in the study. Yet both Mr. T. P. O'Connor, M.P., and Mr. H. W. Lucy, in writing generally of the early parliamentary speeches of the late Irish Secretary, lay stress on the nervousness by which they were distorted. The latter authority speaks of Mr. Morley "struggling piteously, with parched tongue, nervously facing an audience in which there are not ten men his intellectual equals."

It seems only the other day that Mr. Asquith startled the House of Commons into the admission that success at the Bar might not necessarily disqualify for the highest parliamentary eminence. Mr. Asquith emulated Mr. Morley in obtaining his first hearing during a full-dress debate. It was on March 24, 1887, the subject "urgency" for the Irish Coercion Bill. The late Home Secretary, who had been biding his time since entering the House at the General Election of the previous year, was sandwiched between Col. Saunderson and Mr. Chamberlain. Mr. Asquith, who introduced himself as "an Englishman who represents a Scottish constituency," did not attempt, however, to reply to the redoubtable Colonel, but delivered a speech which was obviously as carefully prepared as it was closely reasoned. The House, which had filled up for Col. Saunderson's fiery humour, was held together by the first sentences of the maiden speech and listened to the end, in the words of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, "as to a leader." By all the papers the speech, which fills seven columns in "Hansard," was described as the most striking of the evening, apart from Mr. Gladstone's, but some considered that it did not equal Sir Robert Finlay's brilliant maiden speech about the same time. Mr. Chamberlain, with whom Mr. Asquith has since fought on equal terms, did not pay the compliment of a reply to the young barrister's speech, but spoke of it as "a favourable augury of the position which he is likely to fill in our parliamentary contests." The Opposition, from Mr. Gladstone downwards, had already given their opinion of this new acquisition to their debating strength by continued applause.