

THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

BY A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT.

Illustrated by A. C. GOULD; and from Photographs.



A MEMBER of the Lower Chamber has three great privileges: the policeman will stop the traffic opposite Palace Yard for the legislator to cross in safety; the evening mail is collected an hour later for him than for the ordinary mortal; and the House of Peers offers him a seat in a crowded gallery during its debates, or, if some great speaker is up, he will find standing room only at the Bar. And this third is a very real privilege, for whether he be of the order of sturdy democrats and determined iconoclasts, or of those who, in the expansive atmosphere of the Commons' smoking-room, declare that the Peers are the only independent assembly in the world, he will find much to charm his eyes, to stimulate his humour, to kindle his imagination as he watches the doings of this aristocratic institution, which still lifts its towers and spires above the democratic flood

that has submerged so many political relics of the past.

There are few who will deny that from a decorative point of view the House of Lords deserves its place in the constitution. The very building is more richly coloured and ornamented than the House of the elected, and a wise tradition maintains that the seats must always be coloured red. When the last Government were in office they spent of their wealth in re-covering the seats, and cynics say that, notwithstanding their crusade against the Lords, they chose morocco leather because it lasts longer than any other! The modern peer, it is true, is somewhat careless as to the elegance and grandeur of the trappings of life. He may be seen riding in a "growler," his dress is never so brilliant as that say of the Stock Exchange clerk (except in the item of silk hats, for there is a deep and abiding glossiness about the hats of peers which encourages the belief that their hats like their marriages are made in heaven), and the *chef* at a famous club has recently let the world into the secret that dukes, when they dine there, generally content themselves with a cut from the joint. This surprising carelessness, so contrary to the ideas of many novelists of high life, may account for the fact that the highly-decorated lobby of the House of Lords is crowded with shabby hat-stands, where, to secure the ownership of pegs similar to those provided for Board school children, you may see written names that have been made famous again and again in English history!

The House of Lords includes a library about equal to that of the Commons; the sovereign's robing-room, which is only used when the Queen opens Parliament in person; a very fine room used as a kind of lobby, and adorned on either side by famous frescoes representing the death of Nelson and the meeting of Blucher and Wellington after Waterloo, and a small lobby behind the throne, which is decorated by scenes from the history of the peerage. There, as Mr. Disraeli was fond of saying in his novels, a

young man may draw inspiration by gazing at the portraits of his ancestors, though, as far as can be observed, very few of them adopt that method. A kitchen and dining-room are provided, but in these days the business of the nation is usually concluded before the dinner hour, and when the Home Rule debate necessitated a late sitting for four days several peers are said to have sent their own cooks and their own plate in order that life might still be worth living. Along each side of the House itself there runs a

small gallery, where the peeresses sit raining influence upon the debaters below, and there Lady Salisbury may be often seen, almost as regular an attendant at important debates as Mrs. Gladstone was in the old days at the Commons. These galleries and the corner to the right of the throne, where the bishops sit arrayed in lawn sleeves, add picturesqueness and colour to the scene,

though in one detail it is less imposing than that offered to the spectator in the Commons, as the Lord Chancellor has no throne but a small unraised bench.

The Lords are an older assembly than the Commons, as they are direct descendants of the Witangemote, which, according to the more probable historical theory, consisted of the great men and councillors of the king and people. The oldest title, so far as England is concerned, is that of earl, which dates from Saxon times, and next to the earl in point of antiquity comes the baron. The first duke was the Black Prince, son of Edward III; the first marquis was created

in the reign of Richard II, and the first viscount by Henry VI. The station and precedence of peers are regulated by an Act passed in the reign of Henry VIII, which ordains that "all dukes, marquesses, earls, viscounts and barons, not having any of the offices of the commonwealth, shall sit and be placed after their ancience, as it hath been accustomed."

The premier duke and earl of the United Kingdom is the present Postmaster-General, the Duke of Norfolk,

who combines with that office the duties of the Hereditary Earl Marshal and Chief Butler of England, a Justice of the Peace and County Councillor in two counties, the Mayor of Sheffield, the colonel of one volunteer regiment and the major of another. He is said to have accepted the office of Postmaster in order that he might insure himself a regular occupation! It would occupy more than an



From a photo by]
Ministerial benches.

The Throne.
Woolsack.

[Frith].
Opposition benches.

THE INTERIOR OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

entire number of the WINDSOR MAGAZINE to write even a brief history of the illustrious family of Howard, the head of which has played a distinguished part in England since Sir John Howard was created Earl Marshal of England and first Duke of Norfolk in 1483. Perhaps the greatest of the Howards lived under the Tudors, when their days were glorious if they ended untimely. The third duke, who was Lord High Admiral, spent seven years in prison; during those years his eldest son, the Earl of Surrey, a noble orator and poet, was executed on a charge of high treason, while some few years later the fourth duke,

son of the poet, was beheaded on the charge of treacherously communicating with Mary, Queen of Scots. No fewer than five out of fifteen Dukes of Norfolk have been attained—an ancestry of which even an Irish member might be unashamed! The present duke is mainly distinguished by his passionate devotion to the Roman Catholic Church, of which the Howards have ever been loyal adherents.

The greatest interest of the House of Lords is undoubtedly its wealth of historic association, and the fact that so many of its members (though, it is true, only a comparatively small number of them) bear names distinguished in the history of our past. The record of the House itself is certainly not so interesting, or so full of historic and dramatic incident, as that of the Commons, mainly perhaps because the popular chamber had to struggle for its privileges, while those of the Lords were always conceded. The meeting of the barons with John, in the meadows of Runnymede, can hardly be claimed as an incident in the history of the

House of Lords; and perhaps the most dramatic scene that can properly be claimed is that of the great Chatham's final speech. Macaulay has written the classical account of that scene. "The slightest particulars of that day were remembered, and have been carefully recorded. Chatham bowed, it was remarked, with great courtliness to those peers who rose to make way for him and his supporters. His crutch was in his hand. He wore, as was his fashion, a rich velvet coat. His legs were swathed in flannel.

His wig was so large and his face so emaciated that none of his features could be discerned, except the high curve of his nose, and his eyes, which still retained a gleam of the old fire. When the Duke of Richmond had spoken, Chatham rose. For some time his voice was inaudible. At length his tones became distinct and his action animated. Here and there his hearers caught a thought or an expression which reminded them of William Pitt. But it was clear that he was not himself. . . . The House listened in

solemn silence and with the aspect of profound respect and compassion. The stillness was so deep that the dropping of a handkerchief would have been heard. The Duke of Richmond replied with great tenderness and courtesy, but while he spoke the old man was observed to be restless and irritable. The duke sat down. Chatham stood up again, pressed his hand on his breast, and sank down in an apoplectic fit. Three or four lords who sat near him caught him in his fall. The House broke up in confusion and the dying man was carried



From a photo by]

[Russell.

THE LORD CHANCELLOR, LORD HALSBURY.

to the residence of one of the officers of Parliament."

It is interesting to compare with that historic quitting of the scene the entrance upon it of another famous statesman, Lord Beaconsfield, as described by an eye-witness, Mr. H. W. Lucy. "At twenty minutes to five the Premier appeared on the threshold, clad in peer's robes, the other lords, except the new peer's sponsors, being in the ordinary morning dress in which they are accustomed to attend to the affairs of the nation. Lord

Beaconsfield entered, preceded by the Deputy Black Rod, the Garter King-at-Arms and the Earl Marshal, who led him within the railings. Here the Earl of Derby appeared, and, in company with the Earl of Bradford, presented Lord Beaconsfield to the Lord Chancellor. Then the new peer approached the table and handed the clerk his writ of summons as Earl of Beaconsfield and Viscount Hughenden. This done, accompanied by Earl Bradford and Lord Derby, he walked round to the viscounts' bench, on which the three seated themselves, and gravely saluted the Chancellor by thrice

field was congratulated on his elevation by a brother peer, he said in his most sepulchral tones, "I feel like one dead and buried," then recollecting himself, he added, "and in the regions of the blest!" When Lord John became Earl Russell, *Punch* had a caricature representing old Lord Brougham receiving him at the door of the Peers' Chamber with the words, "O Johnny, ye'll find it mighty dull here!" As a matter of fact Lord John's biographer tells us that he was met by his great opponent, Lord Derby, who said, "O Johnny, what fun we shall have here!" Mr. *Punch*, like other people,



From a photo by]

THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

[Russell.

raising their three-cornered hats, which they put on as they sat down. The Lord Chancellor, also wearing his hat, raised it in acknowledgment of the salute. Next the three lords proceeded to the earls' bench, on which they again seated themselves and bowed to the Lord Chancellor, this time with their three-cornered hats in their hands." Such is the time-honoured ceremony which attends the entry of the new peer. How tranquil and undisturbed must seem this new atmosphere to one who comes from the combative and unruly Lower Chamber! This indeed is the rest after toil, port after stormy seas. When Lord Beacons-

field thought that Lord John would take the title Earl Ludlow, which suggested the lines—

John Russell, Earl Ludlow, John,
When we were first acquaint
You would have scorned the haven
On which you now are bent!
The House of Lords, I fear, John,
You'll find uncommon slow,
And for the Commons, gipsy-like,
You'll sigh when Earl Ludlow!

There are of course many peculiarities about the way in which the Lords do their business, the prevailing characteristic of their method being the quickness of dispatch. The Committee stage of a Bill, which would take three weeks in the Commons, will liter-

ally be run through in as many minutes in the Lords. An amiable gentleman, Lord Morley, the Chairman of Committees, stands at the table and reads through the clauses in a low hurried tone, and the thing is done. There is too an easy absence of formalities. I have seen a peer rise in his place and address the House after a division has been called, a breach of rule that would have brought a storm in the Commons, while the Lords seemed not to mind at all, and the Lord Chancellor merely shook his head and smilingly motioned the peer to sit down again. When a division takes place each of the tellers is given a white wand, like a conductor's bâton, and with this he is supposed to touch each peer as he passes into the House. During last session there were several very close divisions on the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill (the discussion of which is the favourite relaxation of the more light-hearted of our nobility) and on the Irish Land Bill. In the former the Prince of Wales took part—when in the House he sits on the cross benches and holds an informal levée during the less interesting speeches.

The level of oratory is not very high, except in set debates on the greater topics of statesmanship. The Irish Land Bill debates were profoundly dull; while they were in progress I stood at the Bar by the side of the wittiest and most impatient of the Irish Nationalist members. "Ah!" said he, with pleasant recollections, while a peer was laboriously proceeding through a prosy utterance, "we used to shout this fellow down when he was in the Commons." In the Lords they rarely cheer and never interrupt. "Motto for the House of Lords," went on the Irish member, "Liveliness is next to Godliness!" But when there is a great occasion there is little doubt that the Lords make a statelier display of oratory than the Commons of the present day, though of course there

is not the excitement which attaches to the results of divisions in the Commons. The greatest orator of the day is the Duke of Argyll; the unequalled master of terse and nervous English is the Marquis of Salisbury; the most polished, urbane and witty of speakers is the Earl of Rosebery, while among the bishops the new archbishop has the persuasive force of strength and sincerity, and the Bishop of Ripon a melodious sweetness sweeter than the honeycomb, which is perhaps more effective in the pulpit than elsewhere.

Critics of the Lords are fond of speaking of "King Salisbury," as though the Conservative Premier had entire command of the assembly; but it would probably be a mistake to think that any statesman could secure the same kind of influence there which Sir Robert Peel and other great leaders have wielded over the Commons, "ruling the House as Alexander ruled Bucephalus." A man carries the weight of his own authority, and the authority of his party if he be a Minister, but the Lords meet too rarely and for too short periods to give that constant personal contact by which the Commons test their great men. It is therefore a very cool and critical assembly which Lord Salisbury leads

at present, and one which detects his mistakes very swiftly. When he rises to speak his first few sentences are generally almost inaudible, but his voice once found he turns away from the House and speaks straight to the reporters, very deliberately, weighing his words well, giving full time for the sarcasm to bite and the argument to pierce. It is true of him that "his vitriolic sarcasm is a purely literary product, the main purpose of which is to amuse himself," and that it is not the result of any malice or uncharitableness towards opponents. When Mr. Gladstone retired, the noblest testimony to his greatness was that made by his leading opponent, who



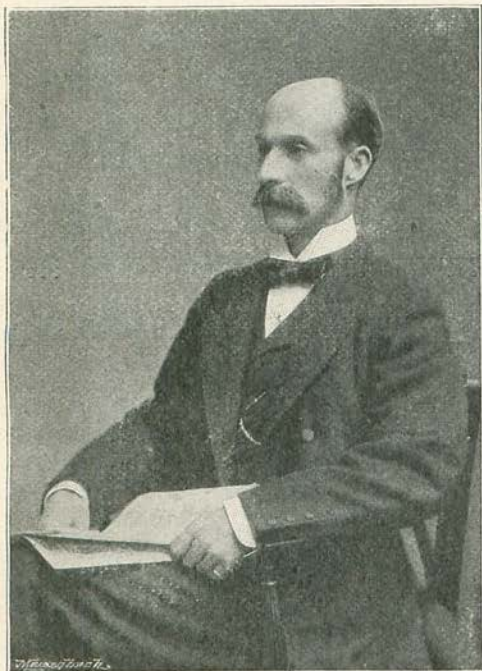
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[Bassano.

THE DUKE OF ARGYLL, K.G.

gave unstinted praise to "the greatest intellect devoted to the service of the State since Parliamentary Government began."

The manner of Lord Salisbury's chief



From a photo by]

[Russell.

THE MARQUIS OF LANSDOWNE, K.G.

opponent is in great contrast. All Lord Rosebery's greatest successes have been made in those speeches which have attacked political problems from a detached, personal, original standpoint, and not from the party point of view. His mind is essentially independent, not following in the lines of tradition, whether Liberal or Tory, and his immediate inclination is to go to the root of a question, not to regard it (as the party man instinctively does) in its momentary aspect. His manner and voice have charm, and every sentence is polished, with a lurking irony in apparently chance phrases and the quality of sincerity in his tones. He made his reputation first by his attempts to reform the constitution of the House, and those speeches were characteristic of his whole career, as the reforms they advocated were excellent in themselves and yet such as would commend themselves to neither party. There is a frankness about Lord Rosebery which endears him as a man and makes him very piquant as a politician; and no one can chaff an opponent so gracefully, so urbanely

and, if need be, so finally. An Irish landlord, not very highly esteemed in Ireland, had told the House how much he knew of that country. "The question," said Lord Rosebery, "is not so much what the noble lord knows of Ireland as what Ireland knows of the noble lord."

Lord Rosebery's chief assistants as leader were Lord Herschell, who is one of the greatest lawyers of the day; Lord Spencer, the "Red Earl," as Rudyard Kipling named him; Lord Ripon, who is descended from Lord Goderich, the short-lived Premier, the first to be called a "transient and embarrassed phantom"; and Lord Kimberley, who himself has been leader of the House. Not one of the four can be described as a first-class speaker, and the result is that the Unionists generally get their case better put than the Liberals, whether it happens in itself to be a better case or not, for there is a great array of speakers on whom Lord Salisbury may usually rely. The heads of the two great Whig houses, the Duke of Devonshire and the Marquis of Lansdowne, are two very strong lieutenants, especially the latter, whose powers are not realised by the country at large, though he is one of the most lucid and logical speakers in either House and retains



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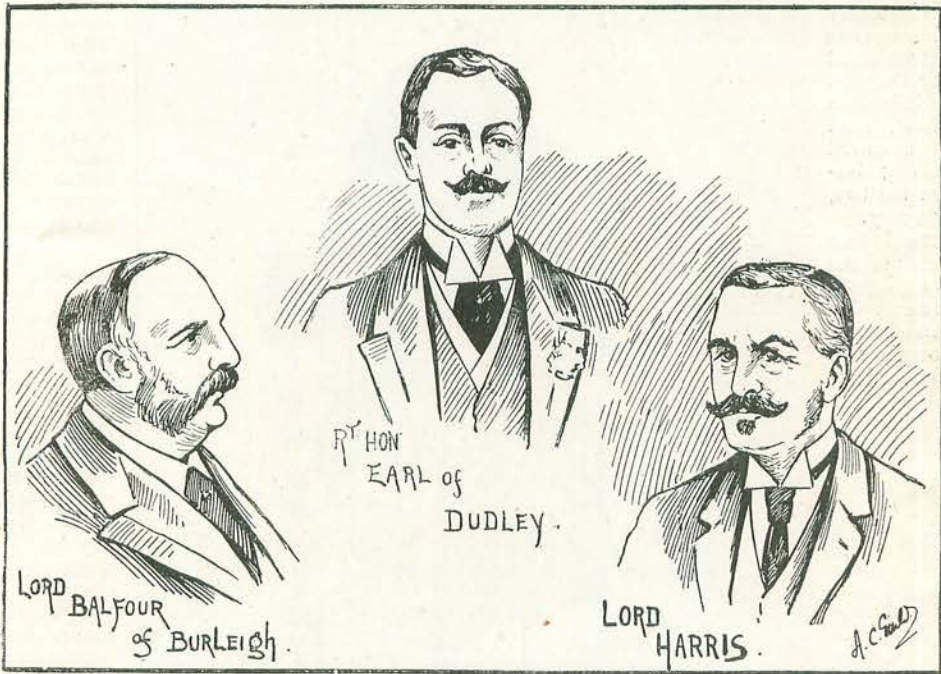
[Elliott & Fry.

THE EARL OF KIMBERLEY, K.G.

that charm of manner which is the characteristic of his family. The Duke of Devonshire has never taken the prominent part in debate which was forced upon him as Marquis of Hartington in the Commons, but though there is no pretension to grace or art in his oratory, there is a ruggedness and common-sense about his words which are much more attractive to the average Englishman. The Duke of Argyll is a very different speaker. It has been well said, though by a hostile critic, that he is like Lord Brougham, of whom Macaulay said that he was "a kind of semi-Solomon, half knowing everything from the cedar to the hyssop." But, adds

the House is courteously attentive, but for those who exceed all bounds they have a delightful method of their own. One moves "that the noble lord be not heard," another seconds, and the motion is promptly carried.

The House of Lords is in a sense an assembly of experts. As has been remarked, however recondite and out of the way the subject of discussion may be, there is usually some quiet peer on a back bench who will rise and say that he happens to have made a special study of it. For theology, archbishops; for law, judges; for the army, the two greatest generals; for the Colonies,



THREE RISING PEERS.

the critic, the Duke is "a born orator, with musical voice of great compass and penetration; he has an easy flow of language, which he regulates with consummate art."

There are other members of the present Government who are good speakers, notably Lord Balfour of Burleigh, one of the ablest business men of the day; Lord Harris, the famous cricketer, and Lord Dudley, who is reckoned by many wise observers to be a coming man. Perhaps the most influential of non-official peers is the Marquis of Londonderry, who has shown very remarkable capacity in various difficult posts. To even bad speakers, if they have anything to say,

viceroy and governors; for finance, the greatest bankers; and there are many specialists too, including of course several who have expert knowledge of the brewing traffic. There is one deficiency, which Lord Charles Beresford might point out: there are hardly sufficient admirals to represent the navy. Apart from all political considerations, whether their House is an anomaly and an anachronism, or a providential bulwark, it is impossible to deny that the Lords make a very interesting and stately assembly, and that there are many among them of whom we may well feel proud.