

poise the perils of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, "a swarm of crows" had swooped down upon Woodstock: "a black-coated and tall-hatted gentry, . . . strange creatures to be at large in a rural constituency." But this time Lord Randolph was no longer the mere son of a Duke: he was Somebody. He laughed his adversaries to scorn, and vanquished them with a high hand.

By good luck, he belonged to the Opposition, and, as we shall soon see, to a double Opposition! Early in the new session he found an opportunity of asserting his position—no longer as that of a parliamentary Free-lance, but as the leader of a Party. The Bradlaugh affair furnished him with a pretext.

It is the moment of swearing in—a lengthy and tedious ceremony, which generally takes place amid noise and confusion. The newly-elected member for Northampton approaches the table in his turn, exhibits the document that proves his election in an authentic manner, and, when the Bible is handed to him, respectfully informs the Speaker that it is impossible for him to base an oath on beliefs which he does not share, and which he looks upon as mere superstitions; but he is prepared to affirm, on his honour as a gentleman and a citizen, that he will serve the Queen faithfully in Parliament, and respect the Constitution. He is informed that affirmation cannot be received in lieu of the oath. Quakers are permitted to affirm. Bradlaugh is not a Quaker, he is an Atheist, he cannot therefore benefit by the exception. The regulations are strict: when he became a candidate for Northampton, he already tacitly accepted the laws and customs of Parliament. "So be it," said Mr. Bradlaugh, content to have maintained his anti-religious opinions in the face of Parliament, "I will take the oath."

Can this oath be accepted? The assembly is stirred by indecision and emotion. The most important occupant of the Treasury bench (the ill-fated Frederick Cavendish, who was destined to fall two years later in Phoenix Park under the assassin's knife) proposes to send the matter before a committee. At this juncture Lord Randolph and his friends intervene. Of what avail is a committee, they ask, on such a matter? A committee compiles documents, confronts witnesses, verifies facts. Here there are no documents, there is but one fact, it is patent.

It is a matter of principle, which ought to be decided by what Lord Beaconsfield once well described as the unerring instinct of the House of Commons. Shall the oath of allegiance be administered to an individual who has thought it his duty to declare beforehand, *coram populo*, that the oath of allegiance can have no binding effect upon his conscience, and who tells the House of Commons that the oath is based upon the lowest of superstitions, upon a mummerly and a mockery, which are degrading and absurd?

Will he be permitted to declare in Parliament, "I call God to witness that I am a loyal subject of the Queen," and to add with a grin, "Only there happens to be no God?" Besides, those who refer to the writings of Mr. Bradlaugh, and especially to his indictment of the House of Brunswick, will not retain more illusions on the subject of his affirmation than they hold with regard to his oath. No! Parliament must take this Atheist, this revolutionary who has betrayed himself at his word, and cast him out from its midst.

It is no vain parliamentary etiquette, no mere detail of form, that Lord Randolph defended in his speech. He leaves these scruples and anxieties to the *Bridgisons* of Westminster. What he sought to establish beyond discussion was the religious character of Parliamentary deliberation.

The whole connection between the proceedings of Parliament and Divine sanction is in danger, and the idea—I may almost say the faith—which has for centuries animated the House of Commons, that its proceedings are under the supervision, and will be guided by the wisdom, of a beneficent Providence, loses all its force. It cannot be doubted, and history could prove, that when persons, and even nations, suffered what are declared to be their most cherished convictions to be trampled upon, insulted and held up to public derision, they cannot be far from abandoning these convictions.

Here his voice became deep, solemn, austere, enthusiastic, well-nigh majestic, albeit free from all pious affectation. It found an echo in many hearts, conquered many votes, and the power of the young orator grew in proportion. From the day when he had, for a moment, wrested the leadership of the Conservative Party from Sir Stafford Northcote public attention had been drawn to him; henceforward it never left him. His henchmen were Mr. Gorst, a lawyer, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, a diplomatist, and sometimes Mr. Balfour. It was a small staff, without soldiers; redoubtable withal from the talent and activity of those who composed it. I find from a speech of Lord Hartington's that by the end of the session Sir Henry Drummond Wolff made sixty-eight speeches and addressed thirty-four questions to the Government; Lord Randolph Churchill, seventy-four speeches and twenty-one questions; and Mr. Gorst, a hundred and five speeches and eighteen questions. They became known as the Fourth Party, and, this appellation, at first employed in jest, passed into current expression. Sir Henry Drummond Wolff and Mr. Gorst are fond of appropriating it. Lord Randolph never uses it. He aims higher. To be the leader of a Parliamentary squad, however distinguished, cannot be the final term of his ambition.

Lord Randolph has abandoned his coign of vantage for a place in the thick of the fight. Seated on the first bench below the gangway, he is visible, when he rises to speak, from every part of the House. His figure, below the middle height, is far from ungraceful, but his countenance is not handsome. A powerful head, a short, *retroussé* nose, and large, prominent eyes lend his face a singularly audacious—some people say brazen—expression. The com-

plexion is pale, and somewhat leaden. A fair, heavy moustache, with pointed, curled ends, dark hair, brushed close to the scalp, and parted by a line which is already widening, complete this physiognomy. If you met him in the street you might take him for a cavalry officer in civilian's attire, perhaps for one of those who study the *Vie Parisienne* more assiduously than the *Théorie*. His attitude is by no means imposing; his gestures are monotonous, mechanical, sometimes ludicrous. When speaking, he buttons or unbuttons his cutaway jacket or frock coat. During an entire speech he thumps his right fist down on the palm of his left hand with the regularity of a steam-worked tilt-hammer. He inserts notes in the interstices of his five outstretched fingers, and when he waves his hand thus laden with papers, he reminds the spectators of a windmill. To others he suggests a conjuror, or a signalman in the act of stopping a train. The voice is strong and powerful; its volume is as unexpected; but it is hollow, harsh, dry and unmodulated. The nervous emotion that struck a Gibbon or a Stuart Mill dumb in the presence of Parliament, and which on vital occasions, on the opening of a weighty speech, lends to the voice of a Gladstone a certain special vibration, is absolutely unknown to Lord Randolph Churchill. His presence of mind is of so free and easy a kind that he does not take the trouble to finish a sentence or to change the tone of his voice when he asks his friend Gorst, who offers him a glass of water, to bring him a glass of brandy and seltzer. It is also without raising his voice, in a perfectly natural and easy tone, sometimes even with a familiar and confidential air, that he flings his accusations in the teeth of the considerable personages seated next or opposite him.

This may appear shocking. Yet it is well that Parliament is not entirely given over to lawyers and professors, to those whose profession it is to speak. It is well for it to listen, occasionally, to one of those *boys* for whom speech is no difficult art, no gigantic labour, but an amusement, a game, a species of sport; who harangue from instinct and genius, without rules, and even in defiance of rules, and who demolish the formalism of parliamentary etiquette, and rejuvenate and modify the language of debate by infusing into it words taken from the language of society, of the clubs, or of the streets. But for the innovators, Parliament would no longer be in touch with outer life; it would become, at times, a school of rhetoric, at others, a limited company; it would be submerged beneath the dryness of figures or the inanity of phrases.

And yet it is interesting to note that not even the most free, fluent and spontaneous of orators can dispense with an oratorical system. Those who have not been formed in the schools, or who do not deign to remember them, build up a rhetoric of their own in accordance with their needs and surroundings.

Thus Lord Randolph; he unconsciously possesses as many forms of exordium as the best pupil of Quintilian. If he addresses his friends, confirmed Tories like himself, he plunges in *medias res*. If his audience is dubious or unknown to him, his exordium is familiar, easy-going, indolent; he is so far from any hurry that he does not seem to be going anywhere. In the House of Commons, no exordium; in truth, there he has neither need to enlighten the ignorant nor to stimulate the indifferent. On the contrary, there he strives to assimilate the ambient temperature, to take up a question where others have left it. Only a Thiers, a Gladstone or a Bismarck may venture to handle a question *ex professo* in Parliament, and Lord Randolph has not come to that yet. Think of the lassitude of a political assembly that has heard hundreds of speeches, and read thousands of articles, without counting the endless conversations at dinner, in a railway carriage, or in the lobby, on the occupation of Egypt, the Irish Question, and Electoral Reform. How is one to triumph over a weariness that is nigh upon irritation? How wrest from such an audience five minutes' attention for these exhausted subjects? Those who have lived in political centres know that a question never long retains the same standpoint. Like a statue on a revolving pedestal, it is ever turning, and in this rotation revealing new aspects in a new angle of light. To be the first to grasp this new aspect is the talent or the gift of Lord Randolph, and that is why he has never been voted a bore.

Very different is his method out of Parliament. He seems to feel his way, to hesitate until he has found a theme, usually a sort of refrain. Sometimes he supplies himself with one—"The policy and principles of the Radical Party are all humbug," he will exclaim on one occasion; he will evolve daring variations on this text, which he re-introduces from time to time. He will wind up by leaving this crude expression in the minds of his audience, where it will remain, for Lord Randolph knows that arguments are forgotten, while formulas are not. Generally he seizes upon an unfortunate word dropped by an adversary, or on an insignificant one that no one has remarked, and that, taken on its own merits, would appear unassailable. He picks it up, turns it round, throws and catches it, like a clown conjuring with an old hat; he squeezes it so hard that he extracts a dozen absurd meanings from it, twenty grotesque corollaries. By way of makeshift, a newspaper paragraph will serve him. He may, like anybody else, have read among the morning's items in a Liberal newspaper the following piece of information:

"Hawarden Castle.—Mr. Gladstone attended divine service this morning. He was guarded, as usual."

"Guarded as usual!" See what this simple phrase will do for Lord Randolph. "Guarded as usual!"

"As usual!" Gracious heavens! What a commentary on Liberal Government in those two words. Do you know that from the days when first what was called a Prime Minister was invented to the pres-

ent, there has been no Prime Minister about whom such a statement could be made? Many Prime Ministers have come and gone, good, bad and indifferent, but the best and the worst have never been guarded by aught save the English people. And has it come to this? Are the times so terrible, are bad passions so rife and unrestrained after four years of Liberal Rule, that the apostle of freedom, the benefactor of his country, the man for whom no flattery is too fulsome, no homage too servile, cannot attend divine service in his parish church without being "guarded as usual?" Surely a world of serious reflection is being opened; surely the art of government must have sunk to a very low ebb when the first servant of the crown has to be watched night and day by alguazils armed to the teeth!

Then, after some more or less fantastic circumlocutions, and a good many attacks *in hominem*, the discourse generally turns upon a general view of Liberal or Conservative politics, often upon a parallel of the two programmes. Then comes a patriotic peroration, combative, captivating, and of a quick, martial rhythm, in which he seems to be charging the enemy. History is not often referred to in the speeches of Lord Randolph. Not that the young bachelor of arts is unaware that there was an England before Sir Robert Peel and Canning. But he is so modern! The idea never strikes him, as it would anyone else, to look back to the past. He is one of those whose gaze is already fixed on the twentieth century. With the exception of living orators, whose speeches he studies so that he may turn their own words against them, and a few writers on political economy, whose statistics he borrows or discusses, he quotes no one besides Shakespeare and Corneille. No Latin verses; they are played out; they are good enough for Lord Granville and the "academicians" of the House of Lords. Epigrams rain, and portraits abound; but the former are produced by butting against his adversaries, and the latter are caricatures. Here and there are amusing anecdotes, but they are slightly vulgar; none of those reminiscences of a statesman with which Thiers seasoned his oratorical *causeries*. Lord Randolph's real power lies in his sarcasm; it also consists in the gift of realizing abstractions, in rendering ideas visible and palpable; in casting light upon objects by comparisons which are rather forced upon him than sought for. A poet's brain would not conceive them with greater abundance, with greater fury. The Whigs are "shooting-stars," the Radicals "dry clouds." When he wishes to portray the advance of Russia towards India, he sees her in turn springing like a tiger or creeping slow and sinuous, like a serpent on its belly. English domination in India is a "thin coat of oil on the surface, which preserves the calm of an ocean of humanity and controls its storms." In describing the depression of trade he employs violent, striking images that stand out in extraordinary relief. This is how Shakespeare would have depicted a commercial crisis:

Your iron industry is dead, *dead as mutton*: your coal industries, which depend greatly on the iron interests, are languishing; your silk industry is dead, assassinated by the foreigner; your woollen industry is in *articulo mortis*, gasping, struggling; the shipbuilding industry, which held out longest of all, is come to a standstill. Turn your eyes where you will, survey any branch of British industry you like, you will find signs of mortal disease. . . . You find foreign iron, foreign wool, foreign silk and cotton pouring into the country, flooding you, drowning you, sinking you, swamping you. . . .

This overwrought imagination sees monstrous visions, and finds no words strong enough to express things so magnified; hence the exaggerated diction with which he is so bitterly reproached, and which suggest a kind of oratorical delirium. The ministers, cowards, traitors, incapable and dishonoured creatures, who are called "Her Majesty's Ministers," what are they? A band of miscreants, a ménagerie of strange and noisome beasts. Lord Ripon has the stupidity of the ostrich; Lord Derby is the political parasite who leaves those Cabinets that are about to fall in the lurch. Mr. Bright—the virtuous John Bright—the purest of the pure, clothes (with his confederates) "their squalid and corrupted forms with the robe of righteousness." And Gladstone, the "evil and moon-struck minister," the "Moloch of Midlothian," he walks in blood, his hands drip with English blood. Strangers are not treated any better. Honduras, Costa Rica and Venezuela are "little, beggarly, plundering republics." The Khedive Tewfik is "a person unfit, from his character and his actions, to be supported by Great Britain." An officer of the Czar, entrusted with the delimitation of the boundaries of Afghanistan, "has lied and cheated as only a Russian can lie and cheat." All this, I say, is not very parliamentary, but it is eminently Shakespearean; that is how matters are discussed in *Coriolanus* and *Richard III.*

No one had contributed as much as Randolph Churchill to lessen the influence of the great Liberal leader. Before his time no one had ventured to ridicule Gladstone; after him everyone tried his hand at it. He was the first to make sport of those long-winded, empty speeches, to point out the ambiguities of expressions that veiled incoherencies of thought, and to break the charm that held the assembly when the magician spoke, enveloping himself in a mist of rhetoric through which his thoughts filtered, like the vague diffuse light of an invisible moon. He showed him in his political laboratory preparing his theatrical get-up with the aid of his son, and out-heroding in charlatanism those manufacturers who make the walls motley and crowd the newspapers with their advertisements. Even the inoffensive and healthful pastime of amateur woodcutting became the symbol of his destructive mania!

Nothing was too sacred for the axe of Gladstone. After the oaks of Hawarden, the House of Lords and the Church of England. Above all, Lord Randolph never wearied of exhibiting him to the English nation, so jealous of its creed and its military honour, as the man who had supported Bradlaugh and abandoned Gordon. In a long speech at Bow, he explained to horrified electors that Mr. Gladstone had had, one after the other, ten policies in Ireland, nine in Central Asia, eighteen in Egypt—in all, thirty-seven different policies. The orator enumerated