

**RANDOM RECOLLECTIONS OF THE  
HOUSE OF COMMONS, FROM THE YEAR  
1830 TO THE CLOSE OF 1835: INCLUDING  
PERSONAL SKETCHES OF THE LEADING  
MEMBERS OF ALL PARTIES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649358205

Random recollections of the House of Commons, from the year 1830 to the close of 1835:  
including personal sketches of the leading members of all parties by Anonymous

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Cover @ 2017

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GRANT, James

BY ONE OF NO PARTY.

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PHILADELPHIA:  
E. L. CAREY & A. HART.

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1836.

## P R E F A C E.

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THE author, during a very regular attendance in the House of Commons for several years past, has been in the habit of taking notes of what was most interesting in the proceedings, as well as of the personal and oratorical peculiarities of the leading members.

The notes, thus taken from time to time, have accumulated to a size sufficient to form the volume now presented to the public, to a large majority of whom much of its contents, it is presumed, will be novel and interesting.

In his descriptions of the members it has been his earnest desire to be guided by the strictest impartiality; and he trusts that he has so far succeeded in his object as to betray no political bias in any of his sketches.

As has elsewhere, in the volume, been remarked, the author has selected for his subjects those members whose names are most frequently before the public. Hence it necessarily follows, that no mention is made of many members, of great weight and value as Legislators, and of even higher talents than several who are noticed, but who do not take a prominent part in the proceedings of the House.

## RANDOM RECOLLECTIONS, &c. &c.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE HOUSE.

I SHALL not soon forget the disappointment which I experienced on the first sight of the interior of the House of Commons.\* I had indeed been told that it but ill accorded with the dignity of what has been termed the first assembly of gentlemen in the world, or with the importance of the subjects on which they were convened to legislate, but I was not at all prepared for such a place as I then beheld. It was dark, gloomy and badly ventilated, and so small that not more than four hundred out of the six hundred and fifty-eight members could be accommodated in it with any measure of comfort. When an important debate occurred, but especially when that debate was preceded by a call of the House, the members were really to be pitied; they were literally crammed together, and the heat of the house rendered it in some degree a second edition of the Black Hole of Calcutta. On either side there was a gallery, every corner of which was occupied by legislators; and many, not being able to get even standing room, were obliged to lounge in the refreshment apartments adjoining St. Stephen's until the division,—when they rushed to the voting room in as much haste as if the place they had quitted had been on fire.

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\* This was of course the old House of Commons. The new House is much larger, better lighted, and in every respect much more comfortable than the old one; but what is said regarding the arrangement of seats, the places of members, and other matters of form, applies equally to the old and new houses.

The ceiling, the sides, and ends of the house were lined with wainscot. The floor was covered over with a mat, and the seats of the members consisted of plain benches well cushioned, and covered with leather. From the floor backwards to the walls, each seat was from twelve to fourteen inches higher than the one fronting it. The front row of benches on either side was within three feet of the table. The row on the right of the Speaker was invariably occupied by the members of the Government and their most influential supporters, and that on the left by the leading individuals in the Opposition. The table of the house was within five or six feet from the chair: in length it measured six feet, and in breadth, four. At the end next the chair sat the clerks of the House; and when the members were in committee, on which occasion the Speaker vacated the chair, the Chairman of Committees invariably sat at the corner on the right hand of the clerks. The Speaker's chair was raised twelve or fourteen inches above the floor of the house, and measured nine feet in height. In form it somewhat resembled our modern easy chairs, but had solid sides, and was covered over at the top. It stood a few feet from the farthest end of the house, which was only seven or eight yards from the Thames. The Speaker always entered by a door exclusively appropriated to himself at the end of the house next the river, while all the members entered by a door at the other end, in a straight line with the chair. Immediately above the place where the members entered was the strangers' gallery, and underneath it were several rows of seats for friends of the members. To these seats there was no mode of admission except that of being taken in by one of the members. To the strangers' gallery, a note or order from a member, or the payment of half a crown to the door-keeper, would at once procure admission. At the farthest end of the passage, after you had entered the house, were several rows of benches which extended on either side from the walls to the passage. The other seats extended along the house, and hence these were called the cross benches. They were always occupied by members who professed to belong to no party—to be neither the friends nor opponents of Government, but who stood on perfectly neutral ground, judging of measures only by their abstract merits or defects. It was from one of these benches that Lord Stanley (then Mr. Stanley) made his celebrated "thimblery" speech, after he, Sir James Graham, the Duke of Richmond, and Lord Rippon had seceded from the Administration of Earl Grey.



I have already mentioned, that the members of Government, and their leading friends, occupy the first row of benches on the right hand side of the Speaker's chair, and that the most influential of the Opposition occupy the first row on the left; the other supporters of each party range themselves on the benches behind their respective leaders; consequently when there is a change of Government, the quondam ministry and their supporters move over in a body from the right to the left side of the house, to make way for the new Administration and their friends. There are, however, a few members belonging to the extreme Radical party who never change their seats, whatever ministry may be in power, because no men sufficiently liberal for them have ever yet been in office. Among these are Hume, Cobbett,\* Roebuck, and several others.† Their seats are therefore always on the Opposition benches, and when the Whigs have been in power, the circumstance has often led to strange associations. When Sir Charles Wetherell and the late Henry Hunt, men whose politics were wide as the poles asunder, were both in Parliament, it was no uncommon thing to see them sitting in close juxtaposition with each other, often, too, engaged in most earnest conversation together, as if the utmost cordiality and the most perfect unanimity of political feeling existed between them. In the Reformed Parliament might be seen Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Cobbett sitting cheek-by-jowl, while close by them were to be found Sir Robert Inglis, the great advocate of the Church of England and ecclesiastical establishments in general, and Mr. Gillon, the sworn foe of both, apparently as friendly together as if of one heart and one soul in such matters.

There are some members who not only never change from one side of the house to the other whatever alteration may take place in the Ministry, but who never change their identical seats; they invariably occupy the same twelve or fourteen inches of space. Mr. Hume is one of the most noted members in this respect; his seat in the old house was close to one of the posts which supported the side gallery on the left of the Speaker's chair; there he was constantly to be found. There is not, nor has there been since he was first returned to parliament, a single member whose attendance on his legislative duties has been so regular and close as that of Mr. Hume; the

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\* Since this was written, Mr. Cobbett has died.

† Towards the end of last session several of the Radical members went over to the other side of the house.

moment the doors were opened there was he, and never until the adjournment was his seat to be seen vacant. There were many other members who made a point of "looking in to see what's doing" almost every evening; but they soon left the house again. Not so Mr. Hume. He was there at all times and during every debate, however dry and uninteresting. He was looked on by "honourable gentlemen" as a sort of animated fixture. His contiguity to the post and the regularity of his attendance made a Tory baronet, who was in the house during the close borough régime, waggishly remark, "There is Joseph always at his *post*." Whether Sir Charles Wetherell, or Sir William Cumming, a Scotch baronet, is entitled to the credit of the witty observation, I have not been able to ascertain, as both graced the last Unreformed Parliament by their presence, and both were equally lavish of their waggeries. It has often been a matter of surprise how Mr. Hume's constitution could stand such close attendance in the house, especially when the unhealthy atmosphere\* he had to breathe, and the quantity of speaking he went through, were taken into account; and yet, excepting on one or two occasions, he was never heard to complain of illness. Can it be that there are any peculiarly salubrious qualities in pears! for, by his own admission he always filled his pockets with this species of fruit when it was to be had, and ate the pears in the house, making them answer as a substitute for dinner. Colonel Leith Hay, before he was a member of Government, as well as since; Mr. Warburton, Mr. Humphrey, Mr. Roebuck, Mr. Ruthven, Mr. Pease the Quaker member, and many others, including men of all parties, whose names it is unnecessary to give, were also very regular in their attendance,† though I am not aware that they patronized the consumption of pears in the house.

Members who wish to sit in any particular part of the house on a given evening, must go down at the time of prayers, and label the particular place with their name. If they neglect to do this, they cannot claim any particular seat as a right,—though it may be conceded to them by the courtesy of other members, if it be the place they usually filled. The seats occupied by members of the Government are, however, un-

\* The last House of Commons was an extremely unhealthy place.

† I speak here in the past tense, because my observations chiefly refer to the last House of Commons, both in respect to the place and the members. The same observations, as to those who are in the present Parliament, still apply with equal truth.

derstood to be exceptions to this rule. Ministers, and those holding important Government offices, are not put to the trouble of placarding their names on the backs of their seats, as no other member, however crowded the house, would think of occupying their places. When an important debate is expected, almost all the seats, with the exception of those occupied by the members of the Government, are thus labelled the moment that prayers are over. At the time of the second reading of the Reform Bill, every member was naturally anxious to secure a seat in a good part of the house, and in order to make assurance doubly sure that none of his "honourable friends" should pre-engage the one which he had, in his own mind, fixed on, Mr. R. Fergusson went down one day during the adjourned debate at seven in the morning, that being the hour at which the servants cleaned the house. To his great surprise he found the discussion still proceeding which he had left the previous night at a little before twelve, under the impression the debate would be again adjourned. The feeling of the House had become general in favour of a division, and several of the Tories being determined, as the Reformers said, to embrace that as the last opportunity of singing the requiem of the Constitution, had protracted the discussion so long that Mr. Fergusson was just in time to vote, and thus got credit from his constituents and the country for having been in the house all night, in the plenitude of his devotion to the cause of Reform.

Of the strangers' gallery I have as yet said nothing. It was immediately above the door at which the members entered the house. It consisted of five seats, and could accommodate comfortably one hundred and twenty persons; but during important debates I have seen one hundred and fifty wedged into it. On such occasions, it was no uncommon thing to see Peers submitting to be jostled and jammed, and treated with as little ceremony by the "strangers," as the veriest plebeian in the gallery. They could have procured a comfortable seat in the house itself; not of course among the members, but on some of the benches under the gallery which are set apart for the friends of honourable gentlemen; but they rather preferred to encounter all the inconveniences of a seat in the gallery, where they could witness the proceedings *incognito*.

Strangers, as already mentioned, are admitted to the gallery either by an order from a member, or on paying half a crown to the door-keeper. No member is allowed to write more than one order for one day, and the day of the week and that of the