

**THE PAGEANT OF
PARLIAMENT.
VOLUME II**

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The pageant of Parliament. Volume II by Michael MacDonagh

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THE PAGEANT OF PARLIAMENT

BY

MICHAEL MacDONAGH

AUTHOR OF "THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE"
AND "THE REPORTERS' GALLERY"

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THE PAGEANT OF PARLIAMENT

CHAPTER I

THE BIG DEBATE AND THE DIVISION

1

THE varying aspects of a debate in the House of Commons are surprising. During one speech the benches are crowded. During the next there is but a Member here and there amid the desert of green morocco. All the time Members are restlessly moving in and out of the Chamber. Indeed, the general inattention to ordinary speakers is very marked. The doors of the main entrance under the clock swing open and a Member, hat in hand, enters and stands at the Bar. One sentence of the speech that is being delivered suffices. Out he rushes again. Here and there on the benches a Member sits apart in a half-dreamy state, his arms folded, his hat over his eyes, engrossed in his own thoughts. A good deal of babble is heard in the course of the debate. But it is not the babble of argument and contention. It is the babble of Members chatting and joking with each other, heedless of the honourable gentleman who is wrestling with his arguments, and to whom only Mr. Speaker is attentive. A loud laugh is heard. Nothing could be more serious than the speech which is being addressed to the House. What then is the cause of this misplaced gaiety? A good story is being told in that group of Members yonder making merry among themselves. Still, a few Members listen, but half abstractedly and with expressionless faces. There are some, however, whose attention is eagerly concentrated on the man who is continuing the debate. Yet they, too,

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seem to hear, but not to heed. Not a gleam of sympathy is to be seen in their looks. Who are they? They are those Members who are all on an edge to join in the debate. Some of them divide their feverish attention between the talker, the clock, and their notes. Others are mumbling to themselves the favourite passages of their own intended speeches. But will the opportunity of delivering these speeches come to them? Time is flying for these Members, impatiently on the pounce.

The hon. gentleman on his legs has long ago said all he really had to say. "Why the blank does he not sit down?" the others ask themselves, and they look at him ferociously. He is in that curious predicament of the unpractised and self-conscious speaker that he does not know how to stop. So he continues his harangue, not that he has anything more to say, but that it seems easier to go on talking to Mr. Speaker than to finish and sit down. Mr. Speaker, certainly, is listening amiably, politely, but scarcely sympathetically. The arguments seem to bring no conviction to Mr. Speaker. Across the face of Mr. Speaker no smile flickers at the jokes. Mr. Speaker follows the remarks of the hon. Member solely to see that he does not offend against the rules. It must be a trying ordeal addressing the House of Commons, that most fastidious or inattentive of audiences, and not the least of its terrors are the sleepless eyes and the vigilant ears of the ever watchful Mr. Speaker. Still, the fate of those to whom was given the chance of taking part in the debate might have been worse. At any rate, they have had the relief and the satisfaction of self-expression. The debate might have closed, and left them, like the unsuccessful competitors for the Speaker's eye, with carefully prepared unspoken speeches lying oppressively on their minds.

Old as the House of Commons is, there is always a great deal of the unmitigated Boy—with a big B—in its composition. A good joke never fails of a hearty laugh. Humour, especially with an element of a practical joke in it, is highly appreciated. Frivolity often follows fast on an exhibition of emotion. A terrific cry is suddenly raised. "Order, order, order!" Both sides unite in giving vociferous voice