

# Where Have all the Good Causes Gone?

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"I COULD never vote for a man with buck teeth" . . . "His fancy accent puts me off" . . . "He's a bachelor—what can *he* know?" . . . "He's got such a kind smile" . . .

Thus the vast British electorate supposedly governs itself, choosing its parliamentary representatives according to their superficialities of appearance or mannerism. Otherwise they simply vote for a new candidate in reaction against the old. Moved or unmoved by noisy campaigning, the final marking of the cross is as personal as it is private, and prejudice is often the deciding factor.

As for the elected, the makers of policies and laws many find in those longed-for corridors of power people with hearts of stone. Many an M.P. finds early disillusion. He soon discovers that success begets smiles; but that failure, or even hesitation, draws disdainful shrugs, rapier wit, and abandonment on the home front.

The new member may have thought—as those who voted for him may still think—that it would

the Party machine. They begin to demand rewards in the shape of headlines in the local papers, and at least some small paragraphs in the nationals to show that he is giving them some repayment for their pains. Supporters require some evidence of his efforts, preferably successful. But in order to make the efforts and headlines expected of him, the wretched M.P. must have a *cause*—that is, of course, a "cause" beyond that of holding his seat and income.

A light-hearted novel\* by Edward Taylor, himself the Tory M.P. for

the marginal Cathcart division of Glasgow, suggests that a popular and worthy cause is the pivot on which parliamentary success or failure may depend. Alas, grand causes are few, and often forgotten until too late! When the Member has lain fallow, being nice to housewives and the Chief Whip for long enough to arouse criticism in his constituency, the search for such a cause becomes urgent and desperate.

Gibley Horn, M.P., "Teddy" Taylor's anti-hero, has enjoyed nine years of pleasant inactivity. The Conservative Party Agent in his Scottish constituency is distinctly restive. Dissatisfied with routine bazaar-openings and plaque-unveilings, he and his executive want visible and tangible results. At this juncture in his career Horn's name is drawn in the Private Members' Ballot. His chance has come at long last to present to the people of Britain a history-making, dogooding, Gibley-Horn-skin-saving Private Member's Bill on any subject of his choice. He is at once bombarded with suggestions from

every crank in the country, anti-"pop" musicians, anti-lorry motorists, and every other "anti." "Something nice about children or dogs," advises his Agent. Unfortunately such happy, uncontroversial topics have been over-used in Previous Private Bills.

In his eagerness to make an original speech, and thus news, Gibley Horn falls victim to the peculiar enthusiasms of the Insect Friendship League, and, somewhat half-heartedly, adopts the cause of banishing chemical insecticides. This story, concerning the passage of the Bill, is certainly good for a giggle. One hopes that the farcical situation and its central, rather pathetic, figure of fun are both heartily exaggerated. Unfortunately, one suspects more than an element of sombre truth in all this—the selfish motivation, misuse of opportunity and power, lack of ideas and disregard for basic needs.

If there really is such a dearth of good causes, readers of *LAND & LIBERTY* could doubtless supply a few.

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be money for jam: an average of three days a week in the House for £65, the time made up by snoozing through debates, or, better still, imbibing coffee whilst waiting to vote as advised.

Some members do indeed manage to lie low and keep quiet, giving no offence for years. But sooner or later even the most agreeable Member is likely to find himself under pressure from the big-wigs at home who backed him smoothly through