whole system of prizes and competition. It corrupts the fine feeling which should urge a boy to work his hardest —not because he gains anything thereby, but because that is the course of virtue. There is not the slightest fear that these amiable views will prevail. But holders of them are quite reasonable, if vanity be in truth one of the deadly sins.

There is no escaping it; the thing is conspicuous at every form of human life. 'All is vanity,' said the Preacher, and he was right. What profits it to be beautiful or clever or distinguished? Théophile Gautier declared in the immortal Preface, that he should begin to think the race was improving when anatomy showed the rudiments of the sixth sense. The pursuit of wealth excluded, the loveliest of women, the most powerful and brilliant and successful of men, takes no advantage from his or her conditions beyond the indulgence of vanity. Once it was not so. The results of triumphing might be 'empty'—that is, vain—in the eyes of an elderly monarch who had tried them all; but they looked solid enough to those who longed for them. Solid, in fact, they *were*, and solid they would be still—if you could get them. But these joys are no more. Here, and to-day, success brings no return but desperately hard work, constant anxieties, unending struggle, and the gratification of vanity. This it is which makes a statesman scorn delights and live laborious days. It has been argued (delightfully enough) that a little girl in a new frock is as happy as a great general after his greatest victory. But Solomon resolved the question long ago—resolved it in that famous phrase. If all be vanity, a new frock and a famous victory are equal and no more. It follows that nothing in the world is worth a fight; and the old moralists did not shrink from the conclusion, but conscientiously worked it out. To speak not of ecclesiastics (with a professional point of view), it is the teaching of the *Danse Macabre*, the *Ship of Fools*, the *Praise of Folly*, and many works of high renown. They take your every human passion and desire and prove its vanity. Sunday after Sunday plenty of zealots are doing the same thing now. The world laughed with Brandt and Erasmus but it went on its wonted way: we listen to our sermons with respect—but that is all. That were a morose community, in truth, wherefrom the buxom influences of vanity should be excluded. For that were a community with no prizes but a world of blanks (like the school which some desiderate) in which no man cared to excel his fellow, nor any woman would do her best to outshine hers. The logical outcome of Socialistic Democracy is something of the sort, and it may be that it is an experience reserved for mankind yet. Meantime, let it be ours to recognise that vanity is one of the most blessed influences in human life.

THE MEMBER'S WIFE

BY MRS. OLIPHANT

I

SAID she, alarmed: 'George! you are not going to give up your seat?'

'How can I help it?' said he, hanging his head.

'Help it! Your seat!—the only thing that gives us—the only thing that—Oh, don't tell me—your seat! Part with anything else, and I shan't say a word; but Parliament——'

'My dear,' he said earnestly, 'what difference can it make to you? I'm very ailing—I'm very poorly. You know that as well as I do.'

'I should think I did, indeed,' said she with a fervour in which there was something like indignation. Mrs. Vickars was persuaded that it was she who suffered most. He had the illness and the importance of it, but she had the nursing and the watching and the withdrawal from every pleasure—miseries not at all counterbalanced by the few pains and aches which he had to undergo. 'I should think I did,' she repeated after a moment's pause; 'but what does that matter? There are plenty of people in Parliament more ailing than you are. Health is always accepted as an excuse.'

'But that would not be doing my duty to my constituents.'

'Your constituents!' She gave him a look of contempt more telling than words; 'half of them your own workmen,' she added with high disdain. 'You could pair with somebody else for the session, if you're so very high-minded. There is always somebody that wants to get off attendance on the Tory side.'

'I should not think that was doing my duty,' he said with an attempt at dignity. And then after a moment he added in a tone of pathos: 'You know I have always been a consistent Liberal, Maria.'

'Well?' she said, with her eyes very wide open.

'Always a consistent Liberal! I've stood by Mr. Gladstone through thick and thin'——

'And he has never done anything for you that I know of—a poor dinner now and again——'

'I hope I am above corruption,' he said, loftily. Then his tone and his head drooped. 'But Maria!' he said; 'I cannot swallow this Home Rule.'

'This—what?—Oh the Irish business—Good heavens, George, what does any Irish business matter to you?'

'I think it does,' he said, with much appearance of firmness.

'You think it does! What does it do to you?—You've got no connections with Ireland. I have no connections with Ireland. Home Rule indeed! It would be much better for you to look a great deal nearer home than Ireland and take other people's feelings more into consideration when you talk of Home Rule'.

'My dear Maria,' he said, with the earnestness of moral remonstrance which usually accompanies that term of endearment. 'Parliament or no Parliament what can it matter to you?'

But here words failed Mrs. Vickars. She gave him a look in which a whole volume was expressed. 'What is it to me?' she said, when she had paused to take breath and became capable of utterance: she added solemnly after another pause, 'Is there any one creature in the world to whom it is of so much importance as it is to me?'

He looked at her with a gasp—there had been times before in his life in which he had failed to grasp Maria's meaning: but none so entirely as now.

'What is it to me! He has the folly and the audacity to ask me that! George Vickars! Will you cast back your mind if you can—if it's equal to the exertion—to the time before we were elected for the borough. Do you remember what it was like then? We used to go up to town in the season, and we always spent a good deal of money. Whom did we see there? Other Clayshire people up for a holiday—people we could see any day at home, and never wanted to see. That's not my idea of the season. I never want to meet a person in town that I can meet at home. One goes to town to see the world! It used to make me sick to find myself among all the Newtons and the Martins and the Browns and the Robinsons—people whose houses I can see from my own front door!'

'I allow they are tiresome, Maria,' said Mr. Vickars meekly.

'Tiresome! Well, I don't say a Ministerial dinner's much—when you're left among the nobodies perhaps, with only a small bit of a private secretary to look after you——'

'I assure you, Maria,' said Mr. Vickars, raising himself among his cushions, 'that is what never has happened to me.'

His wife again gave him a look—much more eloquent than words—but to this piece of self-assertion she made no reply. 'But when,' said she impressively, 'should we ever have seen the inside of a Foreign Office Reception had we not been in Parliament? Who would have asked us to ——, and to ——, and to ——?' We refrain from giving in full the names of these terrestrial paradises. Mrs. Vickars's elocution increased in power as she pronounced the words—her voice gained in volume, her breathing quickened: eloquence and that which is the soul of eloquence—feeling—was in her utterance. 'Do you think,' she said, 'that I care to compare patterns or match my diamonds with Mary Morton or Jemima Brown? I know Maud Robinson's rivière is finer than mine, but where does she ever show it off? Mrs. Lamplough has a dress from Worth's, which is a thing that never happened to me: but she has worn it only once in London, and that was at the opera. Fancy getting a dress from Worth, and having no place to wear it but at the opera! And what makes me to differ from the rest?' she cried with a vague Scriptural reminiscence. 'Why, only that we're in Parliament—only that there's the seat! And you tell me you're going to give it up!'

'Maria——' said the hapless man.

'Oh, don't Maria me! I know how little you care for my feelings. You think perhaps they'll go on asking you to Ministerial dinners and that sort of thing? Not a bit of them! The moment you give up your seat, George Vickars, you're nobody, and I'm nobody, and the children that might have had such a good set-out in the world and made friends that would have lasted them for life—they're nobody. I wonder that you can sit there as if you were a Roman Emperor and look me in the face!'

'Maria,' said once more the husband feebly, 'it isn't any will of mine. You know I always try to do everything I can to please you: but I have my duty to others, too—to my constituency, and to my conscience—I won't have you turning up your nose and tossing your head as if you thought my conscience didn't matter—and my country too.'

'What do you call your country? I never heard that Ireland was your country,' she said.

Upon this Mr. Vickars gave an exposition of his principles, which we need not quote here. It was a very unnecessary exposition: for, indeed, these two people were thinking of two entirely different things. The man—who had been a stout-hearted politician enough, making over his conscience to the keeping of his chief, and doing as he was told, with that devotion to Mr. Gladstone, which has had something touching and pathetic in it, a survival of the allegiance of old to a Lord and Master, which the French admire as a relic of feudalism—and at the same time a worship of the ideal which proves how much simplicity and sincerity linger in the respectable mind of the English bourgeois—had been, after many strainings of his understanding at last brought to a sudden pause by the last movement of his great leader. Mr. Vickars, perhaps, though shocked and startled, might still have swallowed Home Rule had he been in his usual vigour, able to reason himself into it, and to accept the metaphysics of the party in explanation of the new departure. But he was not strong enough to do this. The fascination of Parliament, of Ministerial dinners, and the importance of a position which kept him up late every evening, and made that fireside of warm slippers and easy coat which he had been accustomed to regard as the fit reward of a virtuous life, impossible—had ceased to move him. He had already begun to long to get rid of it all, to stay at home and be comfortable: and he had the steady instinct of property, the sense that to part with your land, especially without any equivalent, was the act of a madman, and could in no way be justified. To throw one part of the estate of a nation to the dogs, to let every hungry hound have a tear at it: to establish a centre of sedition close to your own door: oh no, oh no, that was what he never would consent to. As well hand over one of his mills to the idlest and most insubordinate of his hands to make what they would of it, and have endless rows and mischief going on within sight to discourage the honest workman. If America, that sage and virtuous Republic, fought tooth and nail to prevent a secession what should Great Britain do, with not a tenth of the space to work it out in? He expounded all this to Mrs. Vickars, whose mind, as has been said, was occupied with very different things. Her country was to her a very abstract matter indeed. When she was abroad, as happened sometimes, she declared loudly that nothing was so good, nothing so comfortable as in England, and I am not sure that she had any faith in the possibility of foreigners getting finally to heaven. But when that was said, all was said. Ireland, bless us all, what was Ireland to make a fuss about! Since ever Mrs. Vickars could recollect there had been war going on in and about Ireland. Had she not herself put in the newspapers, and impressed on the people at the registry offices, when she wanted servants, that 'No Irish need apply'? and that Ireland should rob her of the great distinctions of her life—the parties at the Foreign Office, the notice of great people, the M.P. to her name (of course it was to George's name, but what was the difference?)—was a thing not to be borne. She was absorbed in these thoughts while he went on maundering about his principles, and the rights of the case. Principles! rights! Where was there such a principle as that of holding fast by your advantages, and letting nobody take them from you? where such a right as that of doing the best for yourself? Mrs. Vickars ran through, in her mind, the difference between being a member's wife in the London season, and being only Mrs. George Vickars—Heaven and earth, what a difference! No! She stood up against the mantelpiece looking at him as from a height of contempt and resistance while he ran on. It was not worth her while to pay any attention to what he said, for had he spoken with all the tongues of men and angels it would not have affected her mind. No! She would not consent, not if the Empire depended on it. Nothing should persuade her to give up her seat——

I dare not attempt to follow this interview to its terrible close, in which Mr. Vickars with the strength of despair, at last brought forth the conclusion to which he had been working up, hoping, deluded man, to prepare her mind. The intimation came at length while she was quite unprepared and still unable to conceive that anything could have been done, or that these were other than vague threats and grumblings on the part of a man whose actions and motives had hitherto been inspired and directed if not by herself at least by the pair in council united. That other influences could come in, that her husband should do something in which she had absolutely no share, did not so much as occur to Mrs. Vickars: and when her astonished ears were suddenly struck by the news, like the bursting of a bombshell, that it was all over, that the thing was done, that George Vickars was no

longer member but that young Stanley Trotter was standing in his stead, the shock of this strange news was such that she gasped and said no word: and for the space of five minutes a silence fell upon the room terrible as the silence of doom, a silence in which the poor man who was the culprit could take no comfort, so dreadful was the augury in it of a tempest to follow. Nor will I try to describe that tempest. It burst forth, it blazed, it rolled like thunder round the horizon, then fell, mercifully as all such hurricanes do, into tropical torrents of tears. And it was not till some time after, that, slightly assuaged by that downfall, the voice of Mrs. Vickars began to assume something of its usual tone, and wholesome anger, no longer frenzied rage, regained possession of her spirit and of the scene. It was the name of the new candidate, the future member—for with all the Vickars' interest flung upon his side what doubt was there of his success?—which produced this re-descent into more common and practical ways. Mrs. Vickars drew herself together, her tears dried up, her eyes flashed, a blaze of fierce laughter illumined her face. 'Oh,' she said, 'that's what they've been thinking of—that's why she was too sensible to go to town last year. O-oh!'—strong indignation yet a sort of triumph in seeing through the wiles of her neighbour was in Mrs. Vickars' voice—'they'll go up for the season this year, you take my word for it! Trust Selina Trotter to be on the spot when there's anything to be gained! That old tiara of hers, as she calls it—she'll think it'll make a fine show at my Lady Salisbury's. Much she knows! As if any one there would care to look at it twice! Oh! to be sure it'll be my lord and my lady now. George, you fool! putting out the Grand Old Man to let the titles come in. Nobody ever can say of me that I truckled to the aristocracy,' Mrs. Vickars cried. 'I never was one to swear by a title; but that will just suit Selina Trotter! and as she can't go in on her husband's arm as I did she'll hold fast by her boy—— Oh!' Mrs. Vickars paused. A new idea seemed to gleam upon her mind. She drew a long breath. Then she nodded her head as if in answer to some sudden suggestion within herself. 'Yes—yes,' she said, 'yes, yes. And so shall I, and so shall I!'

'Her boy!' Vickars permitted himself to say in the relief of the moment; 'he's a grown man: and lucky for him he's got no wife to domineer over him. As for a mother——'

'Yes?' said Mrs. Vickars, raising her momentarily downcast head, as a dog pricks up his ears. 'As for a mother—you were saying?'

Vickars with a feeble remnant of vigour snapped his fingers. '*That* for a mother,' he said.

His wife looked at him with her usual sense of superiority intensified into a scorn that was almost sublime. 'We shall see about that,' she said.

A CRY WITHOUT THE GATES

MOTHER—Mother of Parliaments—who through the centuries long
Hast stood for Freedom ever, and no parley hast held with wrong;
August in thy large justice to the small and to the great,
Speaking thy proud words proudly to thy foes within the gate;
Whose winged words have travelled, bringing ease to the oppressed,
To the North and to the South, to the East and to the West;
So that all men grant thy strength, and the wisest grant thy lore,
And thy fame is based on laws that shall rule for evermore!

Knowest thou not, O Mother, the lesson thyself hast taught,
To be true unto Thyself, and to count all else as naught?
To set thy foot on treason, and in tactic and debate
To stand for that antient honour that has made our England great?
Thy enemies are watching as the wild dogs watch the deer!
They smile, but they hate and curse thee! they would pull thee down with a cheer!
Thou guardest what their envy would filch and ravish away:
Shall the labour of long ages go down in a single day?

Mother, O Mother, be Thyself! for thy hour has come at last,
Stand now for England's greatness, or for ever thine own hath passed.

PAUL CUSHING.

CORRESPONDENCE

'MADMAN OR SYMBOLIST'

[To the Editor of *The National Observer*]

London, 1st *March*, 1892.

SIR,—The following 'Impressionist' sketch of *The Master Builder* was given me by a friend fresh from the representation, from whom I asked for some account. I am told that it reproduces the general effect more faithfully than any lucid exposition. It appears to be modelled on a composition of Foote's:—

'Once upon a time he waved a flag at the top of a steeple; but the younger generation came knocking at the door, which was just what he feared, his house having been burnt to the ground. So the little twins they died; but, Mrs. Solness being inconsolable for the loss of her nine dolls, the young lady at the desk was not allowed to marry her young man, for the master had palmed off the plans as his own. And, while the crack in the chimney still weighed heavily on his mind, Hilda was put to sleep in the nursery, whereupon the lady clerk, though remaining in a hypnotic condition, got warning on the spot. It was all on Hilda's account that Mrs. Solness went shopping; and the doctor would have it that her husband was mad. However he explained that he had quite left off building churches, and remembered now that he *had* kissed Hilda when she was at school. Then the young man's father appeared to be dying; and Solness, chained though he was to a dead woman, went on building castles in the air: but the plans were returned after all. Yet the young man was certain the master would never get to the top of the tower: his conscience, Hilda said, was terribly out of sorts. So she spoke: "Only go and get killed and I am yours." Which finished him. And the play.'—I am, etc.,

A PUZZLED ADMIRER.

'FOUR THREE-QUARTERS'

[To the Editor of *The National Observer*]

Cupar, Fife, 28th *February*, 1893.

SIR,—The note appended to my second letter is in part interesting on grounds to which I shall presently refer: but it is primarily so because in it silence gives assent to my contention that 'the superior defensiveness of the four' is not yet proved. That is the one point in the new tactics with which I have been concerning myself in your columns: and it appears you have nothing to say in reply to the very striking lesson from Cardiff. Nor do the three correspondents who write to express their agreement with your views on 'the four-system,' as a whole, succeed in bringing forward anything substantially confirming the soundness of your opinion in this particular. 'Foot-baller' quotes one sentence from 'Wot they called the Great Gawd Budd' (or another), which only offers a tentative opinion. 'A Would-be International' appeals to actual experience. I cordially agree with him that by experience, not by argument, must the point ultimately be determined; and I would only appeal to him to carry his researches further. What does *he* say to the Cardiff result? If he is no more successful in explaining it away than in

agree with certain of the conclusions to which his method of handling prose brings him. What they will welcome is the fact that here is an artist in words, one to whom prose has a price, has almost perfection, is a medium that men of parts choose to work in as they choose to work in colour or marble or bronze.

Mr. Marriott Watson has decided to place the majority of his stories in an eighteenth century of his own devising, and to make them move in an atmosphere of speech which is the speech of the eighteenth century only so far as Mr. Marriott Watson pleases. Certainly it is not a speech that can be definitely said to belong to any period of the last century; it is not the speech of Swift or of Wilkes, or of Burke or of Cobbett. But it is true artistically; it has an aptness, a precision, a beauty of its own, which change its affectation and its quaintness into richness and strangeness. The wooers and luters of Watteau's fans are phantasms like the phantasms of Verlaine's 'Clair de Lune'; but they have vitality in their artificiality, and Mr. Watson's creatures are throbbing with vitality, if their environment be artificial. No doubt that at no period from 1700 to 1800 did people habitually speak as epigrammatically, as choicely, as Mr. Marriott Watson's people speak; that is beside the mark in the matter. What touches the gold is that the speech has life, has a magic like the magic of music, has pertinence and strength, directness and the curious felicity. At a time when a sluttishness of style is too common, when too many a would-be muse walks slipshod, the qualities of Mr. Marriott Watson's prose strengthen while they attract. To be at pains, to choose, to aim at excellence in the union of thought and utterance, to refuse to be content with the ready-made form, or with any form except the best form attainable after toil upon toil, to do this is to serve letters loyally. And this is what Mr. Marriott Watson has done in his book. He has wrought at his material as earnestly, as lovingly as Mr. Pater's Flavian, and in his case 'fine phrases' do not mean what the Philistine calls fine writing.

It is to be regretted for the sake of the harmony of his volume that Mr. Marriott Watson did not limit its contents to those stories, sketches, fancies, which are moulded in this eighteenth century manner which he has made his own. The purpose of the book would gain in distinctness if its author had set aside a number of its pages which do not breathe the same air, and had filled their places with others of kin with those that make the charm and newness of the book. He seems a churl who quarrels with an author for including in his book two such stories as 'The Stroke of One' and 'Don Quixote,' stories that are dramas, the one so terrible, the other so tender, both so admirable. And yet their presence jars; they are conceived in another spirit from the bulk of the book; they are of our to-day, while their companions belong to a yesterday of dreams, and it would have been well if they had been reserved for another volume. A like objection might be made to 'The Sword of the Kadi'; its orientalism seems out of place in a volume which is not meant, or should not be meant, to figure as a collection of stories chosen at random, but a book with a purpose, a whole book. Among the stories that belong to the book, that rightly make the book it would be hard to choose a favourite. Phyllis is woman to love and so is the Naiad; and the talk of the Men in the Maze, the talk of Diogenes and of Achates, has the sharpness of a rapier, the swiftness of rapier-play; and the tragedy of 'The House of Dishonour' throbs with terror, and there is much philosophy in 'The Facility of Life.' These would be the flowers of one reader's garland.

Justin Huntly M'Carthy.

THE MEMBER'S WIFE

BY MRS. OLIPHANT

II

A WOMAN has many things to put up with which the world knows nothing of, and probably would scoff at if it knew, but which notwithstanding, are very hard to bear. For instance, a woman who is a respectable and really good woman and a good wife, concerned to keep up the character of her family, and not to diminish the reputation out of doors of her husband, will not put herself into opposition to him publicly, however she may disapprove of, or even feel herself insulted by, his proceedings. Mrs. Vickars endured like a heroine the terrible period which followed the revelations of that evening. She put on a countenance of iron, and gave no sign of emotion during the election. She said 'How do you do?' to Stanley Trotter himself, and to the young men who came with him, flushed with canvassing and success, to report progress to the former member. 'Oh, I have no opinion,' she said. 'I am not one of the women that meddle in politics. If George thinks he has had enough of it, I am quite satisfied. To leave my own house every year, and more or less neglect the children while Parliament was sitting, was always a great trouble to me. How fortunate for you that it's your son, who has his own lodgings and his own set, and won't give you any trouble, and not your husband, who would have wanted you in town with him ——' This was said to Mrs. Trotter who did not quite relish the consolation. 'Oh, I daresay we shall stay in town a little longer than usual, now,' that lady replied. 'Ethel is just of an age to go out, and it will be nice for her having her brother.' Mrs. Vickars' bosom swelled, but she made no sign. 'It's very nice at first, but it palls when you get so used to it as we did,' she said. In renunciation there is a great superiority. She turned away with a sweep of her last year's gown, *quite* good enough for wear in the country, and a consciousness of having the upper hand of Mrs. Trotter, who indeed felt the same for the moment, and was humbled in the midst of her exultation. But Mrs. Vickars' foot beat the ground and her bosom panted fiercely. She clung to the arm of her boy who was her companion, a slight slip of a schoolboy in his first evening coat, whom she had brought with her to Mrs. Robinson's party. 'Harold,' she said (for I need not remark that nothing would have induced Mrs. Vickars to call her son George after his father or William like his grandfather, or any of those common names), 'Harold! how your father could give up his principles and let that conceited prig Stanley Trotter take his place! —but I mustn't, no, I mustn't say a word.'

'An Uppingham cad,' said Harold, who was at Rugby; 'but mother, in a year or two ——'

'Oh yes, in a year or two!' she cried, 'five years at the least: and who can tell how many elections there may be before then.'

'My birthday's in March,' said the boy, 'it's only four and a half.'

Mrs. Vickars give her son's arm such a clutch as made him almost cry out. 'Oh!' she cried, with a perfect monsoon of hot breath forced forth from her labouring breast, and filling the cold night air with blue spirals and rings of vital force, 'that I may live to see that day! but we mustn't, we mustn't say a word!'

And they did not. Harold Vickars was his mother's own son. He felt the descent in social importance as much as she did—he missed the days in town, the carriage at Lord's, the glories of a long leave which is so

much better worth having when the family are in town, than in the much modified importance of home—home which was not even a country place, but a mere house halt in the country, in the close neighbourhood of the smoky provincial town.

There was a good deal of virtue involved, it must be allowed, in the behaviour of this mother and son. Mrs. Vickars 'lay low' during the long course of these five years. She scarcely went to town at all. With a wise self-restraint which was much increased by her sense of the impossibility of anything else, she refrained from all attempt to keep up the ties with society which she had formed in the days when she was a member's wife. And the boy was admirable: he kept his own counsel: he never betrayed, even to his friends at Oxford when he went there, his own and his mother's intentions. 'I think my father was wrong to give up the seat,' he said. 'He was frightened a little, poor old governor, by the name of Home Rule. It did frighten the men of his generation, don't you know. They had never learned to see how they must march with the age. We are all going in for democracy now, and the old fellows have to stand out of the way. I don't know what may happen at next election. Trotter the sitting man's a prig of a Dissentient, a Cambridge fellow. Stand myself? before I've taken my degree? Oh, thank you, not such an ass as that——.' But all the while young Harold had his course clearly set out before him. He and his mother had private talks in stolen moments, when nobody was near. 'We must not say a word,' she said. 'Oh, not a word,' Harold replied. He liked the fun of the conspiracy, and the thought of how small Stanley Trotter would look when it was burst upon him. The Trotter faction had not a notion of what was coming. Mrs. Trotter, indeed, had begun to give herself little airs, as Mrs. Vickars once had done—to complain that it was a great bore to have to be in town so long—but that Stanley with all he had to do, the cares of government upon his head, and of keeping the country straight, had more need than ever that his parents should make 'an 'ome' for him. She was careful about her h's in a general way, as she was of her diamonds, and did not permit herself to be overawed by that troublesome letter any more than by the indifference of London Society to what Mrs. Vickars called that old tiara—but 'ome is a word which is to be found in the mouths of the smartest of people. Thus the stream of affairs flowed on in the stillest fashion, nobody suspecting anything. Harold Vickars gave vent, indeed, to revolutionary sentiments freely at the Union, where he was sometimes permitted to speak, and declared himself out and out with Mr. Gladstone: whatever that Grand Old Man might choose to do—abolish the House of Lords if he liked or the throne if he liked (but the Union sternly objected to this sentiment)—Vickars, of St. Jim's, was his man. Young Oxford laughed, not thinking very highly of Vickars, of St. Jim's, and his paternal town laughed too, at the boy's bravado. Mrs. Trotter was grieved that such sentiments should be uttered by his father's son, but nobody else took the youth seriously. Mr. Vickars himself paid no attention—probably did not know anything about it, for his society was not composed of University men: but he patted Stanley Trotter on the back, and assured him that so long as he voted straight for the Union, he need never fear any opposition from him.

Mrs. Vickars was present on several occasions when this was said, and though Mr. Stanley Trotter was not a very observant young man there was something in the glance of her eye which startled him. 'Your mother goes out a good deal in London?' she said to him suavely. 'The Foreign Office, and that sort of thing? I can understand that she does not care much for our poor little society here.'

'Oh yes, they do go out—now and then,' said the young man, 'with me, you know—when I can spare the time.'

'To be sure, with you—how else?' Mrs. Vickars said. 'But it's hollow,' she added, shaking her head, 'oh, it's hollow! I could tell her a thing or two. When you cease to be of use to them, they forget you exist. It's the seat they think of, nothing else. If you should lose your election next time——'

'No fear of him,' Mr. Vickars said. 'Don't you pay any attention to her, Stanley. I believe Maria's always been a Home Ruler in her heart.'

Mrs. Vickars repeated the words with scorn in her voice. 'Home Rule!' she said. 'It is much I care about Home Rule. If Ireland were sunk to the bottom of the sea, what should I mind? It isn't my country, and I've got nothing to do with it; but there are other things——' She said the last words very slowly, and Stanley Trotter, M.P., felt a disagreeable chill run over him—which was the merest nonsense, he felt, for what could she do, so long as old Vickars was all right?

It must be added that old Vickars, as he was disrespectfully called, was the largest employer of labour in the district. He was a man who was very popular with the constituency. He had been their member for a long time, and could throw out any man to whom he should happen to be opposed—*that* was certain, even if perhaps he could not return his own man. Stanley Trotter, at all events, could never have secured the seat as he did, but that all Mr. Vickars' influence was thrown into the scale. When he returned home and told his family of that look in Mrs. Vickars' eye, the statement was received, it must be admitted, with more laughter than sympathy. 'Did she imagine that the Gladstonian bigwigs would keep her up?—for what? *pour ses beaux yeux?*' asked Miss Ethel Trotter, with the laugh of a young woman of the period, cynical and enlightened. 'Hush, hush, my dear!' said the mother. 'No doubt it was a great humiliation to poor Maria—not even sharing her husband's opinions: for that she doesn't, I am sure, and never did.'

'A woman like that has no opinions: no woman of her age has any opinions,' said the young people; which was not very civil to that excellent person, their own mother—but she was well trained, and said no word.

Thus things went on until the very eve of the election. Young Harold Vickars was much about among the men, attending the Free Library, visiting the clubs, making himself agreeable—but who thought anything of Harold Vickars? He was only a few months over twenty-one, and he was still more boyish looking than his age justified—a lad at Oxford not yet within sight of his degree. His motive was thought to be (if anybody thought of it at all) a part of the amiable conviction very much current in that community, that the society of an Oxford man is really the most improving influence that can be brought to bear upon the working classes. The air of the borough began, however, after a while to tingle with young Harold's name. He made one speech—at the anniversary of a benefit club among the men, or some such occasion—which was reported in the Radical paper with some significance. The boy was not a bad speaker, and he had much sympathy among his audience. When he said 'You don't know me yet,' there were cries of 'We've known you from your cradle, Mr. Harold,' which drew forth the following reply.

'Thank you very much, my friends, for reminding me of that. Yes, you've known me from my cradle: and I've known you ever since I could walk, and many is the kind

thing I remember of you—when I was only Mr. Vickars' little boy——' Here his voice was drowned in cheers so that nobody knew what was the end of the sentence. 'Ah,' said the young man when he was audible again, 'that's my father you are cheering—and you know what a father he is, and what a master he is. But still,' he went on slyly with a laugh, 'I don't go in exactly for all his opinions, don't you know. Young fellows don't take the same view as old ones, do they? I'm all for packing the Irish back to their own country, and making them comfortable there, that they mayn't come interfering with you. And I'm all for trusting the Grand Old Man, who knows better than any of us. I've no fear of following him wherever he goes, and I don't believe you men have either: but papa, don't you know——' said the young orator, with that touch of mingled respect and ridicule, that laugh of quite innocent malice which is irresistible. They all respected Mr. Vickars to the bottom of their hearts, and they all laughed loud and long at the idea that he was perhaps an old fogey, and that his son and they knew better. There was nothing in it that papa himself could have objected to, not even that clever use of the old-fashioned domestic name.

Some of Stanley Trotter's supporters however, were made a little nervous by the report of this tremendous popular success on young Harold's part, and the laughter and the cheers. Stanley M.P. himself took an opportunity just before the tug of the conflict began, of calling upon Mr. Vickars to make quite sure of his sentiments, though the sitting member himself thought it really unnecessary. 'You may be quite sure *I* shall do nothing against you,' Mr. Vickars said. 'I'm sick of political life, for my part. Quiet is the thing for me. And I approve of you very much from my own point of view. You're just the man for our borough.' He said a good deal more in this tone, lulling any doubt that might have arisen in Stanley Trotter's bosom. But as he rose to see his guest to the door, Mr. Vickars added in a hesitating tone. 'There's one thing, Stanley, I ought to say—I can't be responsible for that hot headed boy of mine. He's got opinions of his own, don't you see? I do what I can, but when a boy is old enough to think he knows——'

'Harold! why he's scarcely grown up, Mr. Vickars. You don't mean to say——'

'I don't mean to say anything,' said the cautious father. 'Oh, he's grown up fast enough. I can't answer for him, that's all I mean. A boy like that, with his mother humouring him in everything——'

And then Stanley Trotter remembered the look in Mrs. Vickars' eyes—and the tone in which she had spoken of his mother and Ethel and society—and for a moment his heart sank down into his boots. But he asked himself, of whom could those conspirators be thinking? What other candidate could be in their mind? And he answered himself that there was nobody, nobody! The constituency would not stand a stranger, foisted in at the last moment: and there was not a man in the whole district with any sort of influence who would thus betray him at the last moment: with which reflection he went home comforted. Alas, poor Stanley M.P.! There was not a man perhaps; but there was a woman and a boy.

Next day every wall in the town was placarded with Harold Vickars' address. It was in the tone of his speech which had pleased the men so much at their club. They did not know him politically as yet, though they had all known him from his cradle. They knew what his father was, who erred in nothing but in that defection from the great leader, which so many Liberals had unfortunately fallen into for a moment, but were coming back from day by day. *He* knew better in the clearer intelligence of his youth. He would never abandon the Liberal traditions in which he had been trained, nor the wonderful man who was the embodiment of them all, the Friend of the Poor, the Father of his country—who had secured the Big Loaf and the Free School and Short Hours and High Wages, and who could tell in the future how many blessings to come. Harold was not so ignorant as would appear from this, but if the men were, or could be got to believe so, what matter? Everything is fair in the heat of warfare.

I am sorry to say that Stanley Trotter had not a chance against this sudden appearance of Novelty, Youth, big words and bigger promises. The shock paralysed his party for the moment, then they were roused and showed fight. But they had been, perhaps, a little careless in their certainty that all was safe: and the Vickars' influence had always been all but supreme—without it doubt and hesitation came in, against it danger on all sides. And the borough, what with the suddenness of the onslaught and the triumphant temerity of the youthful candidate, was carried as by storm. The humour of the populace was even tickled by the idea of having for their member one who could be spoken of as a Baby-boy—and was freely called so on the other side. His opponents bid him go back to his lessons, they jeered at those reminiscences of his cradle which had charmed the men at the club. But all these things mattered not: Stanley Trotter retired gloomy and defeated: and Harold Vickars, M.P., reigned in his stead.

All this is a true tale, but I will not attempt to add a moral. If I did it would not be a political one. It would be a question in morals, perhaps more profound than any controversy about Home Rule. It would be the question whether—after her labours of six years, her steadfast following of her purpose, her training of her son to carry it out, her courage, her reticence, her success—it would happen after all that Harold Vickars should mean as George did Maria Vickars, M.P.—— whether the Foreign Office would open again to her its golden doors; whether invitations to heavenly places would fall once more in showers, and she should recover the *entrées* and show her diamonds in houses where there was no question of such vanities. It is perhaps too early as yet to decide, but if I were to state my own opinion I should say—not. Harold Vickars is a young man of great spirit. The last thing he will think of doing will be to take his mother with him into society. *That* for his mother! he will say as his respected father said. She will be left to her legitimate duty of nursing her husband, more valetudinarian than invalid, who sits by the fireside congratulating himself that he had no hand in it, though not without a little pride in the consciousness that the Trotters are out of it, and all the honours concentrated upon the head of his boy. Mrs. Vickars will eat her heart at home during the next season, I feel satisfied. But who can tell? It may still be that things will turn out according to that brave woman's desire and determination, notwithstanding that precedent and experience are in favour of the other way.

THE OAK SAID TO THE EAGLE

(From the Irish)

THE Oak said to the Eagle:
How old art thou?
Clouds and the sunlight regal
Are on thy brow.

But the Eagle: Thine age, brother,
Tell it again.
We are old, both one and the other,
Past dreams of men.