her birthday cake. I'm trying to guess whether she is twenty-two or twenty-three or twenty-four, and she won't tell me when I'm right."

Stephen was led in. They gave him pieces of birthday cake which had hard sugar on the top and sweets with almonds in them stuck in the sugar. They told him his fortune for him, promising a beautiful bride, a narrow escape, a serious illness, and at last the fulfilment of his heart's desire.

CHAPTER XIII

THE historian who undertakes the task of writing the history of Ireland during the nineteenth century will have need of a natural fondness for oratory to help him through his task. He will, of course, like all historians, have to read State papers, the letters of eminent men, and quite a number of biographies. But more than any other historian, he will be obliged to read through speeches. We have, all of us, a taste for making speeches, and being a people with a sense of fair play, we all listen to each other's speeches; knowing that the men who speak to-day will be listening to us to-morrow. As our cheers encourage them, so in due time will their cheers hearten us up to fine flights and great words. There have, of course, been a few people prominent in Irish history who have not made speeches at all; and there have been others who meant a good deal of what they said. It has been the misfortune of the first class to have had their reputations drenched into a condition of soddenness by the oratory of their admirers since they departed from the scene of action. The second class have generally said so much more than they meant that their plans, intentions, policy—whatever they meant to start with—have been lost to sight amid the whirling flights of

words. For the most part the Englishmen who govern our country have allowed us to talk as much and as loud as we liked. Occasionally they have interfered with the delivery of some particular speech. They have even been known to shut a speaker up in gaol for a week or two. They have done this in pure kindness of heart. Realising that we are not happy without explosive rhetoric, they have, by unreasonably imprisoning a stray orator, given the rest of the community a fine new substance of a most inflammatory kind, out of which to fashion more orations. We ought to be grateful to them. Yet among the resolutions, which in this era of local self-government are passed every hour, there has not been one in which any Chief Secretary has been thanked for imprisoning a Member of Parliament.

Only once during the century have our speeches gone near accomplishing anything, and that was when the speakers were exploited in a curious way by a man who disliked speaking. The new Parliamentary leader to whom Stephen Butler attached himself, hit upon the brilliant idea of driving Englishmen mad by making speeches continuously for days and nights at a time. The idea was not wholly original. It was an adaptation to modern times of the policy of Moses. When that great lawgiver set to work to deliver the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, he devised the plan of inflicting plagues of locusts, frogs, and flies upon the people of Egypt. No one objects to a few flies or a reasonable number of frogs. But when the frogs, for instance, become so numerous that you can't get out of bed without stepping on one, or bake a loaf of bread without finding a reptile in your dough, the thing becomes serious. Just in the same way no Englishman objects in the least to a considerable number of Irishmen making speeches in his Parliament. When there is no very urgent business on hand, an Irish member's speech is rather agree-

able than otherwise, just as a fly on a window-pane adds by its buzzing a pleasant sense of drowsiness to a summer afternoon. But a plague of flies—flies in such numbers as to harass men in their sport and work—is quite a different matter. It became a serious question with the Egyptians, whether it would not be better to let the Israelites go off to Sinai and get such laws as they could for themselves, rather than tolerate at Memphis or Thebes a leader who could afflict the whole country with swarms of flies and locusts. The policy was not wholly successful. Moses was obliged at last to resort to sterner measures, to the actual slaughter of several Egyptians before his people escaped. But there is no doubt that the early plagues opened the eyes of Pharaoh to the existence of what must have been called the Hebrew question, in a way that no moderate number of flies, locusts, or frogs, however lively and plump, could ever have done.

The Irish leader had no command of flies, and he lived in days when bacilli were not recognised as a manageable force. He did what he could. He told his followers to make speeches in the House of Commons on every subject which came up. Just at first nobody quite understood what was happening. Statesmen are accustomed to a good deal of speaking, because the art of governing a country nowadays consists in getting things done quickly in between the speeches. But the Irish leader was determined to leave no spaces between the speeches of his followers; not the smallest chink should be available through which it should be possible to pass even a simple little bill for flogging soldiers. Englishmen, who are after all a more or less practical race, began to find an increasing difficulty in getting any business transacted on account of the extraordinary number of speeches which poured upon them. Then they woke up to the fact that an insolent little knot of Irishmen actually intended to pre-

vent business being done. The thing was absurd, impossible, ridiculous; just as the flies were for the first half-hour or so to the Egyptians. The English press printed weighty words about dignity and proper feeling and traditional respect for the greatest legislative assembly on earth. The Irishmen smiled delightedly. Then anger, real anger, with the strongest language on its lips, took the place of remonstrances. Statesmen raged furiously as they watched the locust swarm of speeches devouring the tender crops of legislation with which they hoped at the end of the session to stay the hungry stomachs of constituents.

Stephen Butler worked as hard as any of his fellow-members. He had sat through several sessions, during which Irish grievances were presented in a reasonable way. He had himself been listened to with courtesy and respect. He had enjoyed himself. But he had also realised that Englishmen had no more idea of allowing Ireland to govern herself constitutionally than Pharaoh had of allowing the Hebrews to keep their babies alive and stop making bricks. He felt that some measures must be adopted to force the English to consider the demands of Ireland. The plague of speeches plan seemed to him a hopeful one. He flung himself into the working of it with the greatest ardour. There was no subject on which he was not prepared to talk at length, and he would have proposed several amendments to every clause of the Apostle's Creed if the Government had wanted for any reason to embody that document in an Act of Parliament.

By degrees not only statesmen, Members of Parliament and politicians generally, but the public itself, the great British public, began to get excited and angry over the conduct of the Irish members. It is, as a rule, difficult to excite the British public. People often try to stir it up without succeeding very brilliantly. But when it

is aroused it becomes exceedingly fierce. The Irish members, continuing their deluge of speeches, sometimes for twenty-four hours continuously, began to feel the effects of the anger they had aroused. Those of them who were privileged to go much into English society, who belonged to good clubs or dined at fashionable houses, were the first to feel uncomfortable.

Stephen Butler was lunching one day at his club. He had been up all the night before in the House of Commons, and at about eight o'clock in the morning had succeeded in outraging the decencies of public life so violently that he had been suspended. The surviving members of the party in power, with nerves stretched like fiddle-strings for want of sleep, felt they could stand him no more. The jaded Speaker made a spasmodic effort, named and suspended him. He returned, well pleased, to his rooms, turned into bed and slept for four hours the sleep of a just man who has done a good day's work at the cost of some personal inconvenience. Then he rose, splashed about in a cold bath, shaved, dressed carefully and repaired to his club hungry for the meal which was to take the place of both breakfast and luncheon.

Lord Daintree, who had carried out his plan of retiring to London till his tenants settled down again, came over to Stephen's table and sat down.

"They tell me," he said, "that you were the hero of an outrageous, or perhaps I ought to say a glorious, row in the House last night."

Stephen laughed. "I believe," he said, "it was our best performance so far."

"How long do you mean to go on? I ask merely out of curiosity. I'm not interested except as a spectator."

"Until by our continual talking we weary them. You remember the parable of the unjust judge? If these English people won't listen to reason, they must be made to act rightly by force."

"Let me see. It's an independent Irish Parliament you want, isn't it? The 1782 constitution revised and brought up to date?"

Stephen nodded. His mouth was full of food, and he felt no need of adding anything to Lord Daintree's lucid statement.

"Well, you won't get it. At least, I shall be very much surprised if you do. If you go on long enough, you'll goad the English people into disfranchising Ireland altogether and governing it like a crown colony."

Stephen swallowed hastily, and then drank half a glass of beer.

"I wish they would," he said. "We'd have the country up in arms then."

Lord Daintree smiled. He had not a high opinion of the fighting capacity of unorganised masses of people. In his day he had seen a good many riots in various cities.

"In the meanwhile," he said, "you are making yourselves extremely unpopular."

Stephen was at a pause in his meal. The waiter was bringing him apple tart and cream. He was free to make quite a long reply.

"The more unpopular we are in England the better we are pleased. What we want is to have Irish opinion behind us, not the opinion of the respectable classes. In Ireland the respectable middle class is quite impotent and helpless. They are all cowards. Middle classes always are, you know, everywhere. I've heard you say that yourself. What we want is the goodwill of the extreme men—the hillsiders. They'll terrify the others into supporting us. And the only way to get them is to make ourselves very unpopular here in England."

"Quite so," said Lord Daintree. "I see that. I quite understand that unpopularity with the enemy is a useful asset to a general. But that wasn't exactly what I meant. You are getting beyond the stage of being unpopular in a general

sort of newspaper way. You are beginning to get yourself personally disliked."

"Oh, I know that," said Stephen. "There are lots of men over at home who will hardly speak to me."

"I don't mean at home. The Irish gentry—well, the Irish gentry are the Irish gentry. Their outlook upon life is not highly philosophical. They take themselves and what they believe to be their principles so very seriously. I've met several of them who actually believed in what they called loyalty, just as if they lived in the seventeenth century. I shouldn't a bit wonder at their sacrificing themselves and their estates for the sake of some high-falutin' notion about preserving the integrity of the empire, just as if the empire was interested in looking after them. No, I didn't mean them. I don't suppose you mind them much."

"Well, I did mind about them; for that matter I do still, and just for the reason that you regard them as contemptible——"

"Not contemptible," said Lord Daintree. "Don't put violent words into my mouth. I'm not a politician, and strong language has no attraction for me. Don't let's call them contemptible. Let's say comic. Yes, comic is the word, as a lady would be nowadays who appeared at a garden-party in a crinoline. They are absurdly behind the times."

"Well, comic, then. I value their good opinion just because they are so comic and old-fashioned as to have principles. I have principles myself."

"Of course you have. And so have they. And so has every one in the world except me. But don't be angry with me about it. I'm a very feeble old man, and if righteous anger blazes at me I shrivel up. You'd be sorry to shrivel me, wouldn't you? Fancy, if I became a little heap of ashes at your feet and you had to call the waiter

and say: 'Please sweep up Lord Daintree. I've shrivelled him.'"

Stephen laughed aloud. The joke was not a particularly good one, but he was easily moved to laughter, having eaten the apple tart and sent for cheese and a glass of port.

"The men in the club are getting angry with you," said Lord Daintree. "They don't like your way of flying in the face of the House of Commons. I shouldn't wonder if you got a hint to resign your membership."

"What the devil have my opinions got to do with my membership? This isn't supposed to be a political club."

"Oh, it's not your politics. They've known your politics for years and don't mind them. What they say is that you are bringing disgrace on the club."

"How?"

"Oh, getting named by the Speaker and kicking up rows."

"But——"

"Now don't argue with me. I'm not your equal. Besides, I really don't know what is considered to disgrace a club. I've been all my life trying to find out what the standard of morality is to which a gentleman tries to conform. For instance, I know a man who gets hopelessly drunk on public occasions, goes to sleep on sofas at balls and snores heavily. Nobody ever said he disgraced a club. I knew another man in a club I belonged to once who ran away with the wife of a fellow-member. There was a good deal of talk about the business, but nobody wanted to expel him except the fellow whose wife was taken from him. But about six months afterwards he got tired of the lady and sent her back to her husband. Then they held a general meeting and expelled him. Queer, wasn't it? As well as I recollect a lot of them wanted to expel the husband too for taking her back. You can't argue

out these things. The moment you begin to try you get yourself bogged hopelessly. It's just the same with lying. Men fight shy of you if you tell a certain sort of lie persistently, and if you cheat at cards. But I've been all my life lying. It was my profession to lie. I was a diplomatist, you know. Nobody thinks a bit the worse of me. In fact I've got a jewel-case full of ribbons and stars and things given me as tokens of respect for my skill as a liar. And as for cheating —well, you're a politician yourself, so I needn't tell you anything about that."

"I don't cheat," said Stephen. He was much less inclined to laugh than he had been a few minutes before. The suggestion of possible expulsion from his club vexed him. There came on him a return of the depression from which he had suffered at Dhulough, when the Dean lectured him, and he realised for the first time that men of his own class were turning their backs on him.

"Of course you don't cheat," said Lord Daintree. "Haven't I said that Irish gentlemen, all of them, except me, have principles."

"Then I'm a comic anachronism, a lady in a crinoline. It's a poor chance you give to a man who tries to preserve a little self-respect."

"Well, you know a man must put up with these little things. Lots of young fellows think I wear stays. It isn't true; but I never dream of getting angry. I'm sure a crinoline is no worse than stays. Besides, you know you really are a little out of date. It was all very well for your grandfather, but nationalism at this time of day —I don't mean merely Irish nationalism, but nationalism of every sort—it's—it's a sort of reversion to primitive conditions, like a man insisting on shaving with an oyster-shell instead of a razor."

Stephen sat silent. He felt that he was within a little of disliking Lord Daintree very much. And yet he did not dislike him. He would have been

exceedingly sorry if anything had happened to deprive him of the privilege of hearing from time to time the old gentleman's comments upon life. These conversations amused him, stimulated him, but they left him with a feeling of potent irritation. But Lord Daintree had not finished with him.

"Don't worry about the men in the club," he went on. "Very likely it will all end in talk. And, anyway, it's all for the sake of old Ireland, you know. That ought to cheer you up. What does the opinion of the mere Sassenach matter, even if he won't let you eat your lunch in the same room with him? But there's another matter. What about the Land League?"

"Well," said Stephen sharply. He was on the defensive now in earnest. He did not like the subject of the Land League. Plaguing Englishmen is excellent sport. In the excitement of it a man may forget all about a host of unpleasant things. It was not kind of Lord Daintree to drag skeletons out of cupboards in this way.

"Oh, nothing much," said Lord Daintree. "I shouldn't wonder if they shot Manders any time now."

"What would they shoot Manders for? He's very popular."

"Personally, yes. Officially, no. They'd shoot him to intimidate me, I suppose. Not that it would intimidate me in the least. I like Manders very well. But I shouldn't repent of being a landlord because my agent died suddenly. Why should I?"

"Why do you say things like this to me?"

"Well, it may be foolish, but I thought perhaps you'd put in a good word for poor Manders. After all, he's your friend, you know, as well as mine. Couldn't you arrange for them to demonstrate against Manders, have a sort of reconnaissance in force, miss him, you know, two or three times, often enough to show they really meant to hit him?"

"My God," said Stephen, "you are talking to me as if I were in league with murderers!"

"Don't talk about murder," said Lord Daintree. "There's not the slightest necessity to call that kind of shooting murder. I've seen the police shooting people in the streets of several cities, and nobody called it murder. You're so hasty, Butler. A minute ago you wanted to make out that I called the Irish gentry contemptible. Now you think I'm accusing your friends of murder."

"My friends!" said Stephen. "Can't you understand——"

"Aren't they your friends?" said Lord Daintree, mildly surprised. "I apologise, of course. I'm sorry I mentioned poor Manders at all. I'm sure you'd do anything for him you could. But, of course, if you can't, you can't."

CHAPTER XIV

LORD DAINTREE'S talk stirred again in Stephen the doubt and fear he felt about the Land League. Once before, when Dean Ponsonby lectured him, he had been obliged to face the question. But he had succeeded in putting it by again. Now it came on him more insistently and fiercely. The daily papers were beginning to report agrarian outrages in Ireland. One or two murders had startled society. But Stephen, absorbed in the excitement of Parliamentary life, had not allowed his mind to dwell on them. He did not wish to consider them. But now he found himself forced to, and to do so with Mr. Hegarty's simple teaching about right and wrong clear in his recollection.

He consulted, as he was bound to do, members of his own party about his difficulties. He got little help or guidance from them.