

THE LAST ACT IN THE DRAMA.

"HATS OFF, STRANGERS."

We British people have reason to be proud of our "House"—the "People's House"—probably the most beautiful block of Parliament buildings in the world, and certainly one portion of it (Westminster Hall) is richer in historic interest and antiquity than any other. There are two classes of women in the British Isles who are better acquainted with it—inside and out—than most others. They are Suffragists and Trained Nurses. They have haunted it—and the consciences of the male members of it—for years. Knowing something of the Bill of Rights, which declares "that it is the right of the subject to petition the King or his representative" (his Prime Minister and others), they have, during a campaign of many years, characteristically put the rusty machinery of the law into motion and made it work. The main object of the two groups of women has been identical, namely to obtain the elemental right of freedom. The Suffragists have fought for political enfranchisement, and the trained nurses, who are logically Suffragists, have done the same for professional enfranchisement. The result has been victory for both after a hard fight. We are, however, chiefly concerned with the trained nurses' battle. *November 21, 1887.* Don't forget it, my sisters, for it is a red-letter day. It was on this historic day that the great spade-work of the reform began; the great agitation organised by the pioneers, followed by the great opposition which kept back the final achievement of purpose for so many years. Acting upon our prerogative contained in the Bill of Rights, we have petitioned the King—in the persons of his representatives—not once nor twice, but many times, in person and in writing. We have had a cherished Bill for State Registration before the House for fifteen years. Victory has been in sight many times, almost within our grasp. We have had to fall back to bring up fresh reinforcements of money (subscribed by ourselves), energy, courage, hope, and patience, and attack again and again the foe of opposition, as he assumed different beguiling forms. But "who will count the billows past?" It has all been worth while; we have overcome and won a great victory, and perhaps we are the stronger for the struggle. There are a few names in this connection which should be inscribed in letters of gold by the future chronicler of this great reform. These and similar thoughts revolve in our mind as we wait in the spacious central hall

of the "New Palace of Westminster" with our hearts throbbing with joyful expectancy. There is plenty for the observant eye to notice in the interval, in this octagonal-shaped hall, so richly decorated with Venetian mosaics and heraldic emblems, in frequent repetition, of the English crown—the rose, shamrock, thistle, portcullis and harp. To ponder for a moment over the maxim of the House inscribed around the handsome mosaic pavement is also no waste of time: "Except the Lord build the house their labour is but lost that build it." Then we examine the niches at the sides of the portals, bearing statues of English sovereigns. There is the strong man, Edward I., in whose reign the "model Parliament" was set up at Westminster in 1295, and there is his weak father, Henry III., and his wicked grandfather, John. At the sight of him we bridge over the centuries and enact the historic scene at Runnymede in vivid imagination. Those stern, just men stand around the tyrant King, and compel him to sign the great Charter of liberty and justice, and we hear the echo, rebounding down the centuries, of those potent words upon which all our political system is founded, one of the three main sections of the Charter. Listen in reverence to the great truth:—

To none will we sell, to none deny, to none delay right or justice.

We are abruptly roused from our reverie—"Hats off, hats off, Strangers!" The hall is full of men and women. Off go the hats of the men, and all form themselves into an avenue and turn their eyes towards the Peers' corridor, whence comes a small procession, in the following order:—

One Police Inspector;
The Senior Doorkeeper, in evening dress;
Black Rod, the Gentleman Usher, in Court dress.

Crossing the hall they arrive at the door of the House of Commons, and Black Rod humbly knocks, for the door has been shut in his face. The Serjeant-at-Arms announces to the Speaker that there is a message from the House of Lords. The Speaker gives permission to enter. He approaches the Bar and there delivers his message, which is to summon the Commons to the House of Lords to witness the Royal Assent to certain Bills, three of which are of special interest to a group of watchers in the hall—the Bills for the State Registration of Nurses for the Sick. The supreme moment has arrived; the romance of it all appeals to us, and our hearts throb anew as we await the return of the messenger and his escort. Here they come. This time it is the Royal proces-

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