

THE INKY CLOAK



ILLUSTRATED BY
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Legislators and Their Garments.



MR. JOSEPH COWEN.

THE House of Commons, up to about twenty years ago, was like most things British in a tendency towards the drab in colour and the monotony of type. It was regarded as the inflexible rule that every member should wear a black frock-coat and a tall black silk hat. If you looked along the benches on which nearly six hundred men sometimes sat, there was nothing to distinguish the dress of one member from the other—of the Liberal from the Tory, the English from the Irish, the young from the old. But these were days when everybody was supposed to seek conventional

monotony and sombreness of colour. The late Lord Cairns was regarded as a daring innovator when he refused to be bound by the inky garments of the typical judge, and critics used to speak of him scornfully as like "a well-dressed stockbroker."

It is hard to say who it was that first broke through the stern and inflexible rule of the House of Commons; but, like most insensate rules, the moment anybody was found audacious enough to make the first infraction, the rule suddenly and at once lost all its old omnipotence. An Irish member is generally

given the credit of having been the first to break down the law as to head-gear. Mr. John Martin, one of those gentle, obstinate, immovable men who so often make revolutions, appeared in the 'seventies in a low-crowned, somewhat shabby and discoloured, white hat. The Speaker, who was at that time a very stern man—Mr. Denison was his name—was so shocked that he sent for Mr. Martin and privately remonstrated with him. But Mr. Martin had the same soft invincibility as Carlyle's wife, and stuck to his hat; and then the *débâcle* in hats began. Mr. Joseph Cowen, a man of many millions, a great orator and a great newspaper proprietor, used to figure in the ready-made and badly-cut black garments and the soft black and broad-brimmed hat, which up to that time had been confined to the Dissenting minister. And then came the Irish members who followed Parnell in the 'eighties, and with them synchronised the Labour member, and the Labour member



MR. WILLIAM ALLAN.

rarely, if ever, appears in a tall silk hat. And thus by degrees the tradition of the tall silk hat broke down, and all kinds of head-gear came to be regarded as at first permissible, though shocking, and then as permissible and natural.

And thus Mr. William Allan, of Gateshead, became possible. Imagine a man with the torso of a Hercules, the head of a Roman emperor, the long shaggy locks of an Ossianic bard, and the tangled and bristling beard of



MR. GLADSTONE IN LIGHT ATTIRE.

the Last Minstrel, and you have some idea of what William Allan is like. To put on top of all this the ordinary conventional and sleek tall hat would have been grotesque: you might as well put such an abominable and ridiculous pinnacle on the brow of a statue in bronze or marble. And William Allan accordingly, with that eye for the picturesque which is part of his mental and dramatic equipment, wears a broad-brimmed, soft black hat—a head-gear which might be that either of a very leading Dissenting minister or of a Buffalo Bill.

The tall white hat used to be a favourite type of head-dress in the 'eighties. Mr.

Gladstone was supposed to be one of the most careless of men in the small details of life; but in reality he was nothing of the kind; and he was always dressed with great care. Indeed, when he was above eighty, he sometimes used to look like a young buck going a-courting. He would wear a creamy coloured hat, that looked a great deal nicer

than the ordinary drab-coloured white hat; and this would be the climax of a suit of light-coloured clothes that would not have been altogether out of place even at Newmarket. Sir Wilfrid Lawson was always one of the first of the members to start a white hat; it was one of the heralds of the coming summer. Mr. John Ellis, a quiet, teetotal Quaker, with huge collieries and a large banking account, used also to startle those familiar to him by issuing forth with a tall white hat on the smallest provocation.

Last Session saw an unusually hot summer, and this brought a series of startling phenomena. It sounds scarcely credible, but it is a fact, that so carefully groomed a young man as Mr. Austen Chamberlain was found by his amused father sitting with other young legislators on the Terrace of the House of Commons in his shirt sleeves. Perhaps he had been emboldened to this by the example of Mr. John Dillon and Mr. Swift McNeill, who, on a previous day of tropical heat, had sat at the door of the lower smoking room in their shirt sleeves, drinking coffee and the breezes from the Thames at the same time. It was this period which also produced, for the



MR. KEIR HARDIE AND HIS CAP.



MR. BROADHURST'S TWO HATS.

first time in the House of Commons, the straw hat as a very general head-gear. There had been individual members who had done this before; but last Session saw Mr. Herbert Gladstone passing across the Lobby in a straw hat, and Mr. Herbert Gladstone is a Whip; and this was a high official sanction to the usage which it had never got before. Mr. Ian Malcolm, who is a handsome and well-dressed young man, was a very beautiful



LORD RANDOLPH CHURCHILL.

picture in those tropical days. Tall, handsome, with a mass of thick, curled, fair hair, he looked a typical guardsman, though he is only a peaceful private secretary. He wore no waistcoat; instead of this necessary garment he appeared in a cummerbund; his trousers were white duck and his hat was of Panama straw. Here, indeed, was a vision of coolness which delighted all observers of this modern day; but would have sent shivers through such an old-time Speaker as Mr. Denison.

One or two members descended even a profounder depth. Mr. Sydney Gedge, a hitherto blameless lawyer with a certain tendency to Pietism, astounded people by appearing in one of those white cloth hats such as the agricultural labourer wears in the hot July fields. He had, however, as he was careful to inform his friends, the decency to abstain from entering within the precincts of the House itself in such a head-gear, but he haunted the lobbies.

Mr. John Burns has stuck persistently to a low-crowned, hard black hat for years. Mr. Broadhurst, like a wise man, has two hats—a tall silk hat for wear on state occasions, a low-crowned black hat when he appears in the streets. But Mr. Keir Hardie went one better. He entered the House of Commons on his first day, escorted by a group of friends and admirers, in a waggonette; and the police constables might well be affrighted by a vision of a coming red revolution when Mr. Keir Hardie presented himself to their eyes after he left his friends and entered the

Lobby. He had a red muffler around his neck; his waistcoat was some form of knitted flannel thread; and on his head—horror of horrors!—there was a small cap. He is the one and only man who has ever ventured on a head-gear so shocking.

The breakdown of the conventional head-dress was followed by an equally revolutionary breakdown of the other things. Legend has been at work for the discovery of the first member who desecrated the House of Commons by wearing brown boots. But undoubtedly this act of courage was first performed by the late Lord Randolph Churchill. He one day walked up the floor with these audacious brown boots. Lord Peel, who was



MR. BALFOUR'S SHORT COAT.

a very dignified man, was then in the Speaker's chair; and it was said that he turned away his eyes when this scandalous exhibition presented itself before him.

One of the little things which indicate the man is the wearing of spats. There are some members of the House who wear the spat winter as well as summer; though, of course, it is of different colour and material according to the season. Mr. Arthur Balfour is one of those devotees of the spat. So is his first

cousin, Lord Cranborne. Mr. Molloy, an Irish member who is always conspicuously well dressed, always wears spats, and when summer comes the driven snow is less white than the colour of these spats on his carefully polished boots. The late Sir John Mowbray—who was upwards of eighty when he died—was also a wearer of the spat. In all his dress



MR. T. G. BOWLES.

there was a certain old-world air and cut and colour, as though he were a ghost of the eighteenth century. He wore trousers with big side pockets; an old seal hung from his waistcoat; his boots always had either black or drab-coloured spats upon them. The catholicity of taste which has come in recent years, shows itself in nothing more conspicuously than in the trousers which are now worn. Here, again, nothing was changed until there appeared a bold innovator. It was Sir John Dalrymple Hay—an old and respected, but long since vanished, member of the House—who ventured to introduce into the House some of the garments which had been found useful in far-off alien tropical shores. While other members around him were sweltering in the conventional black frock-coat and check coloured trousers of tweed, Sir John entered—it had almost been said floated—into the House in gauzy, silken garments that made him look like a drab-coloured butterfly.

It was the example of Sir John Hay undoubtedly which emboldened members to wear the white ducks which are now so conspicuous a feature of Westminster in the months of June and July. Mr. Tommy Bowles, as he is universally called, was, however, the first member who really made the white duck a part of himself. Among other of his qualifications Mr. Bowles is a master mariner, having passed with flying colours the examination which the Board of Trade imposes for that qualification. And

when therefore Mr. Bowles walked up the floor of the House of Commons in a black frock-coat and a pair of white ducks everybody felt inclined to stand up and bow, as though the Lord High Admiral were passing by. Mr. Macartney, a young Irish member, who is Secretary of the Admiralty, also wears ducks; and last Session there were just a few more members—Mr. Austen Chamberlain among them—who also ventured on this strange and, as Mr. Speaker Denison would have considered it, abominable innovation.

Mr. Balfour usually conforms to the old conventions of the House, and appears in a long-tailed black frock-coat; but when summer comes he also is caught by the fever of novelty and unrest, and he astounds the House by garments in strange contradiction with the usual sombreness and decorum of his attire. He is not satisfied with wearing a light and transparent alpaca, but, in addition, he has that alpaca made up into what may be called a bob-tailed coat—something not only as short as a sack coat, but a good deal shorter; in fact, something like a small office coat. His brother Gerald has been captured by the example of his elder; and, in the closing hours of last Session, he conducted one or two Irish Bills with an almost disgracefully abrupt coat.

Mr. Chamberlain is always very carefully dressed, but he does not leave the conventional lines to any great extent. He sticks to the frock coat in summer as well as in winter; the one change he makes is that it is a light slate colour in the summer, and the sombre black in winter. Mr. John Morley has a certain individuality of taste in dress; perhaps it is reminiscent of the French Revolutionary studies which occupied so much of his earlier years, but he always sticks to blues and browns. There are also curious eccentricities of dress in unlikely quarters: Mr. Courtney, for instance, is devoted to canary-coloured waistcoats; and Sir Charles Dilke always wears riding trousers with a band under the sole of his boot. T. P.



MR. COURTNEY'S WAISTCOAT.