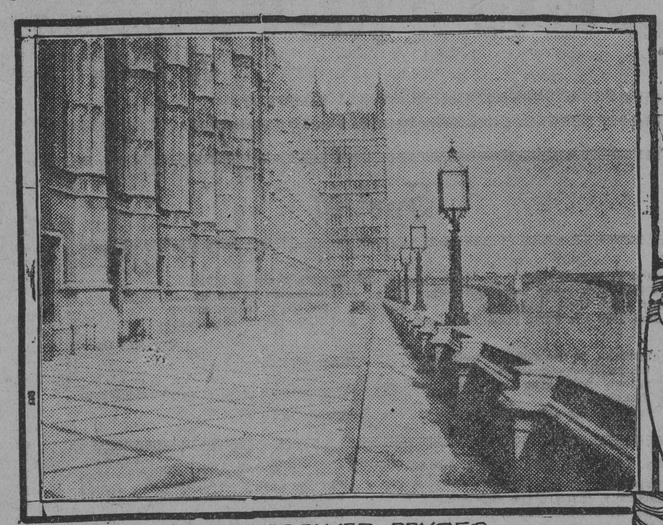
No one dare decline his Invitation to dinner

LONDON, March 15.

THERE is only one man in England who has the right, should his own carriage or auto happen to break down, to turn any other person out of his carriage or other conveyance and take the latter's place, and that is the Speaker of the House of Commons. There are only two men in this country whose invitations to dinner constitute a command—to disobey which is to risk all sorts of pains and penalties—one of these being the King and the other the puissant Speaker of the House of Commons again, who also has the proud title of First Commoner in the Realm, and exercises a despotic power unequaled, so it is said, by any other chairman in the world.

The present holder of this office, the Right Hon. J. W. Lowther, is perhaps more in the public eye at the moment than any other man in England, his recent decision regarding the Liberal government's long-promised Franchise Bill having provided the sensation of the parliamentary year. As a result of it, this bill, which was designed to grant, for the first time, almost universal male suffrage in this country, has been shelved indefinitely, and, incidentally, a settlement of the women's suffrage question in England has been postponed for months and, perhaps, years. Probably at no time during his 20 years in the House of Commons has the many-sided man and all-around athlete who, clad in solemn robes and a wig, presides over the deliberations of that body found himself so squarely in the limelight, and never, incidentally, has he stood so good a chance of being assaulted as he does at present at the hands of the infuriated women whose long-matured plans he has upset at the eleventh hour. If he is not strongly guarded, nowadays, when he leaves his official residence in the Palace of Westminister, on horseback, to take his regular morning canter in the Row, then Scotland Yard is neglecting its duty. Meanwhile Lowther has just been attacked bitterly by George Bernard Shaw, who accuses him of "gross partiality."



WHERE THE SPEAKER FENCES.

His Salary $25,000.

Being Speaker of the House of Commons is no snap, however you look at it, but the rewards are many and various, likewise a bit funny. To begin with, there is the excessive dignity, for as First Commoner in the Realm Mr. Speaker takes precedence of the entire nobility in state processions, coming, in fact, directly after the archbishops, who, in their turn, are preceded only by royalty. At the end of his term of office, moreover, he invariably is elevated to the peerage, usually with the title of viscount, and draws a fat pension for the remainder of his days. His official salary is $25,000 a year, which is not bad considering that he lives rent free in the Palace of Westminster during his term of office, to say nothing of being provided with a gorgeous state coach. The possession of this ornate vehicle, however, is a mixed blessing, the "Speaker's Coach" being an antiquated, lumbering contraption which, as like as not, would break down did Mr. Lowther entrust himself to it (a thing which he has not done since it came into his possession), thereby enabling him to utilize his legendary privilege of ousting whosoever he likes from his carriage and ensconcing himself therein. They say that when Lowther's predecessor in office (Speaker Gully) used the state coach at the time of the Diamond Jubilee a couple of big dray horses found it all they could do to drag the creaking and swaying vehicle, and everybody was intensely relieved when its occupants, who included, besides the Speaker, his chaplain and private secretary and the sergeant-at-arms of the House of Commons, got back with whole skins from their brief excursion from New Palace Yard to Buckingham Palace.

The "perquisites" mentioned above are only a few, however, of those enjoyed by the Speaker. On being appointed to the chair, a generous nation awards him $5,000 as "equipment money," and he receives an allowance of "1,000 ounces of plate" and $500 to keep him in "stationery," which must be ample unless he writes more letters than even Mayor Gaynor. Another queer perquisite he enjoys is an annual gift of two hogsheads of claret wine and a buck and a doe killed in the royal preserves at Windsor also are sent to him every year. Again, at Christmas time, the Speaker's heart is gladdened by the Clothmaker's Company (one of the ancient guilds of the city of London), which solemnly presents him with a generous length of the best broadcloth made in England.

Must Memorize 600 Rules.

Perhaps all these emoluments compensate the Speaker for being intensely bored and, occasionally, being made to look and feel a fool, and perhaps they don't. As presiding officer of the House of Commons he is the kingpin of the elaborate system of tomfoolery which tends to make what is usually described as the most dignified legislative assembly in the world actually one of the most ridiculous. He has between 500 and 600 castiron rules to remember and enforce, and a large percentage of them are the sheerest absurdity, admirably fitted for a comic opera but ludicrously out of place in the legislative machinery of the greatest empire in history. Any nation but England would have "scrapped" the bulk of them a century or more ago, but, as everybody knows, tradition dies harder here than perhaps anywhere else on earth.

It is the Speaker who has to call an "honorable member" to order should he commit the heinous offense of proposing an amendment to a bill while standing, bareheaded (as common sense would suggest), instead of seated with either his own or somebody else's hat on, as is solemnly laid down in the rules of procedure. There are about a hundred more rules about headgear in the House of Commons (whose members, of course, sit with their hats on), and each of them must be enforced rigorously by the Speaker, also there will be frantic yells of "Ordah! ordah!" from all the old parliamentary fossils on each side of the chamber to whom "usage" is as the breath of life.

Likewise the Speaker must rebuke the member of the House, who, in the excitement of speakers, ventures to remove both feet from a certain rug which is laid over the cocoanut matting on each side of the chamber. One foot may be taken off this rug, but not both, or there will be more bawling of "Ordah!" until this terrible solecism has been put right. The rule about this is supposed to date from the days when the knights of the shires came down to the House with their swords by their sides, and at that time it would no doubt have been risky to let the opposing parties get too close to each other, but the insistence on the thing to this day is a fair example of the way in which the time of Parliament is frittered away.

Since the present Speaker was elected, in 1905, after having been chairman of committees and deputy speaker, there have been many evidences that he possesses a keen sense of humor, and if he does not laugh in hih sleeve occasionally at the queer figure which he cuts, it must be because his job is too exacting to give him time to think about it. The word "Gilbertian" positively begs to be used in writing about the solemn farces that so often are enacted in Parliament, and no description is more fitting for a historic scene in which Lowther sustained, not only the chief, but all the roles. At this time he was chairman of committees, and disorder having broken out which he was unable to quell, he had to report the matter to the Speaker. It happened, however, that Speaker Gully was not present, and, therefore, it was Lowther's duty to take his place as deputy speaker. So he had to stand at the head of the table as chairman of committees, report to himself what had been going on, and then step up into the Speaker's place and consider the merits of the case which he had submitted to himself and decide upon it. Lowther emerged from this ordeal more gracefully than a man of less tact and dignity would have done, but if he didn't feel "rather an ass," as they say in England, all the time he must take himself a lot more seriously than do most of us.

The Speaker's Wig.

Gladstone once declared that no man in England (unless it were Henry Labouchere), would have the courage to suggest doing away with the Speaker's wig, but that was a good while ago, and there are a lot of folks today who would not lament the disappearance, not only of the aforesaid wig, but the whole of "Mr. Speaker's" state procession, which includes, besides the "mace-bearer" and other flunkies, a menial whose business it is to hold up the Speaker's long train! As for the performance that is gone through with when the Speaker is elected, it is funny enough to make a cat laugh. He is chosen by a vote of the whole House, by the way, and it is not best evidence of the unusual capabilities of the present Speaker that, although an avowed Conservative, and originally elected by a Conservative majority in the chamber, he has continued in office despite the fact that a Liberal administration has been in power for seven years.

The first thing that has to be done after the House has chosen its Speaker is to have its choice approved by the King. Nominally, that is, for as a matter of fact the King has just as much to say in the matter as you or I and no more. This "gratious approbation" on the part of His Majesty is supposed to come through the House of Lords, and prior to obtaining it, the Speaker-elect, wearing ordinary court dress (i. e., a swallow-tail coat and knee breeches), and sporting a small "bob" wig, seats himself at the table in the House of Commons. To him there comes "Black Rod," the official messenger of the Lords, who escorts him to the sacred precincts of the Upper House, while the sergeant-at-arms, the Speaker's chaplain and other functionaries, bring up the rear, and the guarding policemen cry, "Make way for Mr. Speaker-elect."

So the quaint little procession arrives at the bar of the House of Lords where the Lords Commissioners, as representatives of the sovereign, are sitting, robed in scarlet, on a bench in front of the throne. Chief of them is the Lord Chancellor, to whom the speaker-elect makes a profound obeisance, and proceeds to inform him of his election, winding up by saying, "I, therefore, present myself at your lordship's bar, and submit myself, with all humility, to His Majesty's gracious approbation." Whereupon the Lord Chancellor, after explaining that it is not convenient for the king to be present in person and that, therefore, he has turned the approbation job over to his Lords Commissioners, proceeds to express His Majesty's "entire confidence in the talents, diligence and efficiency of the speaker-elect," and much more to the same effect, after which the speaker-elect makes another solemn reverence to the Lords Commissioners and the Lords Commissioners make a series of "reverences" to him. The procession then reforms and files back to the House of Commons, where the now duly elected speaker changes his "bob" or "fatigue" wig for a full-buttomed one and dons his long robe of office, after which he takes his seat in the great, canopied speaker's chair, the mace is laid on the table and "Mr. Speaker" proceeds to announce to the "faithful Commons" that the King has graciously approved their choice of a presiding officer. Then prayers are said, for, minus the presence of the speaker, the House cannot even pray, let alone transact business.

There is not space here to describe the many duties of "Mr. Speaker," nor would such a description make entertaining reading. More than any other member of the House, except, perhaps, the Chief Government Whip, the present presiding officer has reason to be thankful for the new "11 o'clock rule," which practically put an end to all night sittings, the bane of life in the House of Commons. The record sitting in the experience of Mr. Lowther was one during a debate on the Agricultural Land Rating Bill, which began at 3:15 on one afternoon and ended at 5:30 on the following day, but, before the adoption of the new rule it was nothing unusual for a session to last from 2:45 in the afternoon until 4 or 5 in the following morning.

Is a Dapper Dresser.

Despite his long hours and heavy responsibilities, however, the Right Hon. J. W. Lowther—who is 58, wears a neatly trimmed beard, and is noted as a careful dresser—always looks in the pink of condition, and no doubt this is due to the many forms of exercise in which he indulges. His favorite sport is deer-stalking, and he would far rather be crawling on all fours in the rain over a sodden Scotch moor than presiding over the deliberations of the House or acting as host at one of the "full-dress dinners" to which his invitation constitutes a command. When last nominated as M. P. for his district, he rode to the ceremony in his hunting pink, and he rarely misses his morning canter in Rotten Row, but it is as a swordsman that he is most famed.

Lowther is said to be one of the most expert masters of the foil in England, and three times a week he has a lively bout with a renowned maitre d'armes. The scene of these encounters is the famous Terrace of the House of Commons, which is overlooked by Westminster Bridge, and it is said that more than once worthy citizens, having seen, to their horror, what looked like a life and death struggle going on in the sacred precincts of the House of Commons itself, have hurried off to inform the police at nearby Scotland Yard, and got the merry "hah-ha" for their pains. While at Cambridge, too, the Speaker showed himself to be no slouch of an amateur actor (appearing under the pseudonym of Lowther R. Cade, the name of a historic little alley off the Strand, which now has disappeared), and was associated in these university productions with Charles H. E. Brookfield, the playwright, and author of Dear Old Charley, who is now to the disgust of the whole world of "high-brows," official examiner of plays.

Lowther was married, in 1886, to a society woman who is said to make a model hostess. He was first elected to Parliament in 1885, as a representative of Penrith, for which Scottish constituency he still sits. To assist him in his decisions he has four little volumes which contain the rulings of all speakers of the House for the past 50 years, and, so far as one remembers, this is the first time that his impartiality ever has been called in question, even by the turbulent Irish members.

Has Plenty of Pluck.

No one can accuse the Speaker of a lack of pluck, anyway, for more than once in important crises he has decided against the powers to whom he owes his continuance in office. In 1905, for example, just after the Speaker's election by his Conservative friends, A. J. Balfour, as prime minister, decided upon a scheme to redistribute constituencies, a reform which both parties considered to be overdue. He introduced resolutions laying down the lines on which the scheme would be based and proposed that these resolutions should be taken, not separately, but in one debate as a whole. The Liberals objected and appealed to the Speaker, who ruled without flinching against his political friends, declaring that each resolution must be debated by itself. This ruling killed the scheme and hastened Balfour's resignation.

It would be the basest flattery to describe the Speaker as a wit, yet he possesses a brand of humor which vastly pleases the House, and often brings all parties out gracefully from a complicated situation. During the first suffragist disturbances, for instance, it was decided that the ladies' gallery should be closed to all save relations of members, and one day a rather imprudent Radical asked the Speaker how he would define the word relative.

Lowther rose slowly to his feet, wearing upon his countenance an aspect of immense gravity: "I cannot," said he, "undertake the responsibility of saying in what relation members stand to the ladies whom they introduce into the gallery. That is a subject which I can only leave to the consciences of honorable members themselves."

Just what would happen to anybody who had the temerity to refuse one of "Mr. Speaker's" dinner invitations is not known, but it is believed that he would be arrested instanter and imprisoned in the Clock Tower, as was Charles Bradlaugh, the great Free Thinker. As for the Speaker's right to turn whomsoever he pleases out of his carriage, it must be confessed that this rests on precedent and not upon any recorded judicial or other enactment. The precedent in question was established over 200 years ago by a notoriously aggressive speaker in the person of Sir Edward Seymour. Sir Edward was driving to the House one day and his carriage broke down near Charing Cross. There were no 'buses nor taxis then, and so Sir Edward directed his attendants to bundle some private party out of his carriage and the Speaker stepped into it. The private party protested, but Mr. Speaker's ruling was: "Sir, it is more proper for you to walk in the streets than the Speaker of the House of Commons." If Sir Edward Seymour had the right to do that in 1672, one supposes that J. W. Lowther has the right to do it today, but the undersigned, for one, would like to be present when he tried to exercise his right.

HAYDEN CHURCH.

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The Wearing of Amulets

PROF. FLINDERS PETRIE, lecturing at University College, London, declared that the wearing of amulets denoted the lowest stage of human intellect. All the same, he remarked, the idea that inanimate things exercise an influence on the course of events is too strong in the human mind to be conquered by the rise of knowledge.

It extends from the aborigines of Australia to the modern Englishman, and a woman doctor has recently stated that one-third of the children brought to her care from the elementary schools wear charms of some kind. In ancient times there was confusion between natural and magical causes, and so it came about that the distinction between amulets and medicines had been very indistinct, and many of the latter had been as useless as the former.

Absurd as the idea was, it had in the beginning contained some rhyme and reason, and had followed a general plan. Given belief in the power of amulets, their wearers would gain power to steer through difficulties, and by concentration of attention on the one object diseases might be obviated. A common practice had been to wear a token in the likeness of some organ of the body, such as the heart, in the hope that the evil spirit would attack the amulet by mistake.

This was the doctrine of "doubles," and it also worked in an opposite way. To wear the sign of a broken heart was to obviate evil, since it signified that the damage had been already done and that it would be useless to make a second attack.

It was also easy to see why a large white shell had been worn on the head; it was put there to attract the attention of the evil eye, as it did of the human eye, from the wearer himself. A piece of vicarious magic was shown in the custom of catching a frog, spitting on it, and then releasing it in the hope it would carry away the cough of the expectorator.

Among the amulets of various nations Prof. Flinders-Petrie alluded to those used by the Eskimos, who would give the skin of a hawk and the head of a fox to a hunter in order that he should acquire cunning. In Italy they had thunder stones and serpentine stones as guards against lightning and snakes, and a transfixed frog was to insure fidelity or the inability to get away.

Vigilance might be secured by the eyes of a crab placed in the skin of a nightingale wrapped in a piece of deerskin. In Egypt the original custom of burying slaves and food with the dead was superseded by the use of amulets made as images, and in the same way models of all parts of the body were put in the grave, so that the dead should in after life lack none of their organs.

Symbolism was also shown in several cases. Amulets in the shape of a frog were common in the tombs, and as the frog was the emblem of multiplication, it insured numerous progeny in the future world. Certain "powers" were also indicated by these tokens, notably by the square and plummet, which signified rectitude and a well-balanced mind.

Among the Egyptians the fear that the dead would be lost by forgetting their names was very great, and in consequence men and women were put in the tombs wearing a large bead with an inscription not unlike that of a modern luggage label. Models of writing tablets and toilet requisites were among the other trifles in a well-furnished grave.

Deplorable as it may seen, there is less of coherence in the modern idea of amulets. The lecturer pointed out that when some persons miss a train or pick up a purse in the street they are apt to think the bad or good luck the result of something they may on that occasion be carrying with them, and so hundreds of individual superstitions arise.

Individuals with such beliefs are usually those whose living depends on chance, and the professor mentioned actors, aviators and motorists. Incidentally, he spoke of a prime minister "wearing a swastika for luck and talking heartily about it to uneducated boys." The wildest chances of good luck were seized, though the face of all reason was against it. Men were like white ants digging blindly in search of food.

Explained.

"Why do you suppose he has such a vacant expression?"

"Well, he thinks of himself a good deal."—Judge.

Mr. Jack Didn't Have Much to Say

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By James Swinnerton

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