

# THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

THE MOST INTERESTING PLACE IN THE WORLD AT THE PRESENT TIME—ITS MARVELLOUS HISTORY AND MATERIAL BEAUTY—THE FINEST HALL IN THE WORLD—A MEMBER'S ACTIVITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES—THE "GOOD THING" OF PARLIAMENT.

By THE EDITOR OF "WORLD'S WORK."

Illustrated Chiefly from Photographs by F. Frith and Co.

ALTHOUGH the names of the House of Commons and the House of Lords are household words all over the English-speaking world, and in fact beyond it, the inner workings of these remarkable institutions, which are so typical of the British race, are as a sealed book to the multitude. The shriekful attempts of the Suffragettes to literally storm the fort, and wrest *vi et armis* the votes which the members refuse to disgorge through persuasion, and the struggle that is going on between the democratic forces in the Lower House and the aristocratic forces in the Upper lend particular interest to these historic establishments.

It is not generally known that the House of Commons is part of a Royal palace—the Palace of Westminster. A Royal palace has stood on this site for ten centuries. William the Conqueror added to it, and William Rufus celebrated Christmas in Westminster Hall in 1099. Henry III. fed six thousand poor there in 1235, and the golden-haired Richard II., reformer and reactionary, idolised and dethroned, while Chaucer revealed or created the exquisite language that is our greatest heritage, rebuilt the Great Hall at Westminster after its injury by fire in 1299, and added the roof which stands to-day "unparalleled in the world for originality of conception, scientific construction, and beauty of effect." Westminster Hall is to me a never-fading delight, by far the most beautiful hall I have ever seen, and it is a pity that an unreasonable regulation should forbid the public to pass through it on their way to the Strangers' Lobby of the House.

## FIRE HAS BEEN THE RECURRENT ENEMY OF THE PALACE OF WESTMINSTER,

and new members should specially notice the cloisters in which they will hang their coats, for these, among the most exquisite examples of Gothic architecture in the world, with Westminster Hall and St. Stephen's Chapel in the crypt, were the only parts of the building that survived the terribly destructive fire of 1512. To skip several centuries, another fire in 1834 necessitated the construction of a new building, and the present Palace took its origin in the thirty-four resolutions of a Select Committee in 1835, and the construction of the magnificent edifice we know was commenced by the construction of the dam in 1837. The plans of Sir Charles Barry were selected, the cornerstone, which is at the angle of the Speaker's house, where it touches the terrace, was laid on April 27, 1840, and the new House of Commons was first used in the Session of 1852.

The historian of the Palace of Westminster has to employ many superlatives in his description of this truly wonderful building. It contains no fewer than five hundred rooms, with eighteen separate residences for different officers of Lords and Commons. The Victoria Tower, the entrance of which is

## RESERVED FOR THE USE OF THE SOVEREIGN

on State occasions, and the chambers of which are devoted to the safe-keeping of innumerable official documents, is "the largest and highest square tower in the world." The clock in the north-west

tower is "by far the largest, most powerful, and most accurate public clock in the world." Its minute hand is 14ft long and weighs 2½ cwt; "Big Ben," the great bell, weighs 13½ tons. Its hammer, which weighs 4 cwt and cracked it at one of the first strokes, strikes it at the exact moment of the completion of each hour. It takes two men five hours three times a week to wind the clock. The Central Tower contains, above the Stranger's Lobby, "the largest Gothic octagon vault known where a centre pillar is not used."

The interior of the House of Lords is "without doubt the finest specimen of Gothic civil architecture in Europe." The House of Commons is not inferior in design, but, as befits the more democratic nature of its business, less splendid in decoration than what Lord Beaconsfield, in a phrase which has become classic, called "the gilded chamber."

I have thus hastily touched upon a few prominent points in the story of the Palace of Westminster, and quoted a few facts about its physical characteristics, in order to bring home to the reader its wonderful and indeed unapproached historic splendour, and its remarkable material interest. No man with ever so little knowledge of it, if he has any historic sense at all, can visit the House of Commons, still less can he live and work in it, without a deep feeling of reverence for the vast traditions which sanctify the place. But while such traditions work wholly for good, there are plenty of traditions of Westminster which are merely very old bad habits. To many of these is due the fact that business moves so slowly in Parliament, and that energetic men chafe and fret over the waste of their days as members. These traditions, however, are perhaps controversial, rather than descriptive, and, therefore, I treat of them in another part of this magazine.

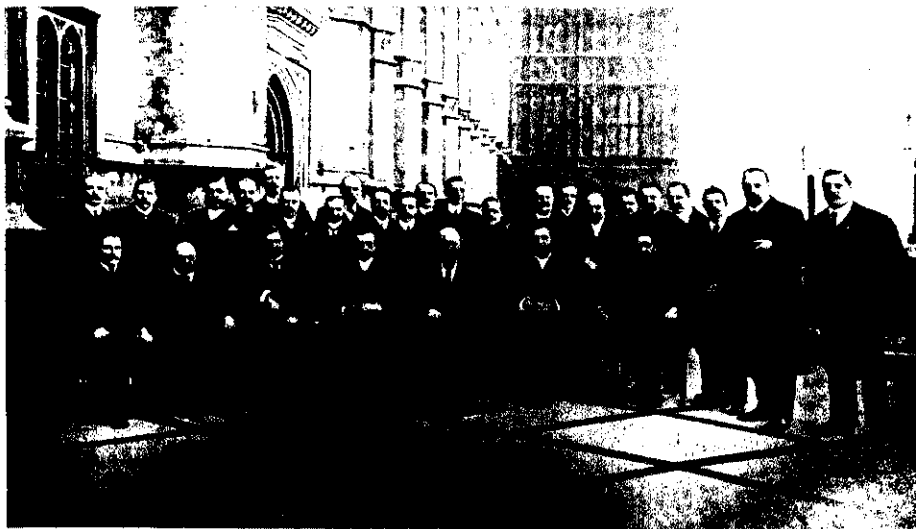
## A MEMBER'S LIFE IN PARLIAMENT

falls naturally into two parts: his political work in the House, and his social and personal life at Westminster. As regards the former, the first discovery a new M.P. makes, to his great surprise, is that the Chamber to which he has been sent is not big enough to hold him. At least, not without compelling him to take vigorous and sometimes undignified steps to secure a seat. The material House seats 306 persons, and the political House contains 670 members. There are, therefore, at all times 364 members for whom there is no room on the floor. On either side there is a long member's gallery, the two seating 122 persons. But, of course, no member can take any part in the proceedings of the House from this elevated position, and indeed each gallery only commands a proper view of the side of the House



THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JAMES WILLIAM LOWTHER, M.P.

Speaker of the House of Commons.



THE MOST INTERESTING GROUP OF THE NEW HOUSE: THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY.

A photograph taken on the Terrace on the opening day of Parliament.

Seated (left to right): W. T. Wilson (West Houghton), Alex. Wilkie (Dumfries), J. Ramsay MacDonald (Leicester), A. Henderson (Barnard Castle), J. Keir Hardie (Merthyr Tydvil), D. J. Shackleton (Clitheroe), Will Crooks (Woolwich), Back Row (left to right): J. H. Jenkins (Chatham), C. W. Bowerman (Deptford), J. Hodge (Gorton), J. Parker (Hull-fax), G. D. Kelley (S.W. Manchester), W. Hudson (Newcastle), G. J. Wardle (Stockport), G. N. Barnes (Glasgow, Blackfriars), F. W. Jowett (West Bradford), G. H. Roberts (Norwich), C. Duncan (Barrow-in-Furness), T. P. Richards (West Wolverhampton), S. Walsh (Ince), A. H. Gill (Bolton), P. Snowden (Blackburn), T. Sumnerbell (Sunderland), J. T. Macpherson (Preston), T. Glover (St. Helens), J. A. Seddon (Newton).