HATS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The small question of the hat (says Mr. T. P. O'Connor, M.P., in the *Chicago Tribune*) plays a less important part than it used to in the inner life of the House of Commons, but still it does play its part.

When I entered the House of Commons for the first time there were few members who did not wear their hats. It was almost considered an indelicate interference with ordinary etiquette of the Chamber not to wear one's hat. It was also considered indelicate not to wear a tall silk hat, as it was unusual not to wear a long black frock coat.

The Speaker of the epoch just previous to mine was a great stickler for these fashions, and when an Irish member, the late John Martin, shocked his eyes by appearing in a low crowned white hat, the Speaker summoned him to his presence and gravely remonstrated with him for his breach of the fashions of the House. Mr. Martin explained that he was precluded from wearing a tall hat by the state of his health, that a tall hat produces headaches, and he was excused.

The Speaker who followed had an even more difficult case to deal with when Joseph Cowen entered the House wearing a soft black felt hat, the kind of hat that is affected by the old-fashioned Nonconformist minister.

Mr. Cowen was a remarkable man in many ways. He was one of the most brilliant orators of his time; he was the proprietor of a great newspaper, the *Newcastle Chronicle*; he also owned large brick works, and with all his simplicity of attire was one of the richest men in the House.

However, he always stuck religiously to the soft felt hat and to a black suit of clothes, so badly made that they looked as if they had been bought in some cheap slop shop. He also had to excuse his departure from the traditional fashion by the same excuse as Mr. Martin—the tall silk hat gave him headaches.

Then came the incursion of the Labor members, and the tall hat was still further dethroned. It was done, however, tentatively. Mr. Broadhurst, one of the first Labor members, was a shrewd politician, who knew all the arts of the trade. He had two hats, the tall hat which he wore in the House, the low crowned hat which he assumed immediately his Parliamentary duties were finished for the day.

By and by the Labor Party became more numerous and more powerful, and its first apostle of plain dressing and high thinking was that revolutionary spirit, Keir Hardie. He entered the House of Commons with a Scotch cap, and there was a groan of despair and even disgust from the well-dressed gentlemen who form the bulk of the Tory Party.

This inroad was almost the final blow to the ancient tradition, and members of every party, with the exception, perhaps, of the bulk of the Tories, now enter the House with all kinds of headgear.

An even more important revolution, however, is the gradual disappearance of the covered head during the sittings of the House. I fancy it must be the disappearance of the tall hat, and the still lingering feeling that it is not quite the correct thing, which accounts for the change, but, whatever the reason, the change has come. Not a fourth of the members of the House now bring their hats into the chamber.

I regret the change, for the hat could now and then play a dramatic part in the proceedings of the House. When, for instance, there was some great mournful occasion, such as a vote of condolence on some illustrious death, the entire House uncovered, and you cannot realise what a change, indeed a transformation, it made in the whole appearance of the assembly: it exalted it to the heights of a tragedy.

No theatrical manager, however great his genius, could have invented a bit of stage play which added such emphasis, solemnity and exultation to the appearance of the House.

Mr. Gladstone though rarely wore his hat. He had his own special room where he used to deposit his hat and stick or umbrella; he always carried either one or the other to accompany him in the long constitutional walk he took every day of his life.

Again in his case I have to recall what a dramatic effect a hat can make. When the great fight was going on, whether Charles Bradlaugh should be allowed to take his seat in the House of Commons without pronouncing the usual oath, Mr. Gladstone, as leader of the House, recommended the admission of Mr. Bradlaugh. Sir Stafford Northcote, the leader of the Opposition, recommended his exclusion. The majority of the House refused the advice of Mr. Gladstone, and followed that of Sir Stafford.

Other steps were necessary to follow up this decision, and I remember seeing with surprise that Mr. Gladstone took his place on the Treasury Bench with his hat on, his stick in his hand, and also his gloves.

I did not grasp at the moment the meaning of this transformation from the bareheaded and alert man he was usually, when he occupied this position, but it was all symbolic and meant to be; it was that he no longer claimed to be the leader of the House so far as the Bradlaugh case was concerned.

Waihi

(From our own correspondent.)

A quiet wedding was solemnised on October 1 at St. Joseph's Church, Waihi, by the Rev. Father O'Malley. The contracting parties were Miss Stella Johns, youngest daughter of Mr. T. Johns, of Waihi, and Mr. W. Porter, second son of Mr. J. Porter, also of Waihi. The bride, who was given away by her father, wore a smart tailor-made costume, and neat black hat with lancer plume. The bridesmaid, Miss V. Johns (niece of the bride) wore smart grey costume trimmed with blue, and hat to match. The bridegroom was supported by his brother Mr. J. Porter. The happy couple left for Te Aroha for the honeymoon.