

"I beg the honorable gentleman's pardon; I am not learned."

It is a breach of order for a member to read a newspaper in the house, although he may quote an extract from one in the course of a speech; but if he should attempt to peruse a daily or weekly paper, while sitting in his place, his ears would soon be assailed by a stern and reproofing cry of "order, order!" from the chair. Some members are said to resort to the deception practiced by the young lady, who had "Trilby" bound like the New Testament, and was observed reading it in a fashionable Episcopal church in New York. The "Orders of the Day" is a parliamentary paper containing the program of business, which is delivered at each member's London address each morning. Inside this program, some representatives often place a part of a newspaper, and read it while everybody imagines they are studying some bill or its amendments.

In little matters, the house of lords is less strict than the house of commons. The upper house allows attendants to pass up and down the chamber delivering messages, and a reporter of the proceedings sits on the floor of the house—with the clerks at the table. In the elective chamber, however, nobody except a member is allowed to pass up and down the floor. An attendant, even when he has telegraph messages to deliver, dare not pass beyond the place known as "the bar," just inside the chief entrance to the chamber. He gives the papers to some member sitting near the bar, and they are passed from one member to another, until they reach their owner.

A curious custom is the performance known as "counting the house." No business can be transacted unless a quorum of forty members is present. But when business has once started, it proceeds, if only a single member is in his place. He, of course, must be addressing the speaker, who never takes any notice of the paucity of the attendance, unless a member rises in his place and says: "Mr. speaker, sir, I beg to call your attention to the fact that there are not forty members present." After that has been said, the speaker must proceed to "count the house." He does not, however, simply count the members who are present in the chamber at that moment. He sets going the electric bells, which ring in every room of the great building, a summons to members to return to the legislative hall. The representatives of the nation then come rushing in from all quarters, and after the lapse of three minutes, the doors are closed—and locked. Then, and not till then, the speaker, using his "cocked" hat (which he never wears over his huge wig), as a pointer, proceeds to count the number of men in the house. When he gets to the fortieth member, he says "Forty," in a loud voice, resumes his

seat, and business again proceeds from the point at which it was interrupted. But when there are not forty members present, he simply leaves the chair without a word, and the sitting is over.

A favorite resort for a member who wishes to secure an audience for a colleague, is to move "a count." The object, however, is not always attained, for members leave the house again as soon as the speaker has reached the number forty, and the benches are left as deserted as before.

Some six years ago, a member who was to have resumed the debate after the speaker returned from dinner at 8:30, found, when the time arrived, that the house contained nobody but himself, the speaker and the clerks. Not liking the idea of being obliged to talk to empty benches, he called the attention of the speaker to the obvious fact that there was no quorum, as required by the rules. The bells rang out their summons as usual, but only thirty-six members responded, with the result that the man who wanted to obtain an audience, had the sitting suspended and lost his opportunity to make a speech. A member is occasionally counted out by an opponent, who, after a survey of the precincts of the house, discovers that there are not forty members in attendance; but this is the only instance on record of a member having "counted out" the house to his own detriment.

The forms of the house of commons throw difficulties in the way of a member, who is desirous of relinquishing his legislative functions. He cannot resign his seat in the way a person resigns a membership of a society or club. If he becomes bankrupt or insane, he *ipso facto*, ceases to be a member of parliament; he may be expelled for infamous conduct. But if he, for some personal reason, wishes to close his parliamentary career, he can only do so by accepting some office of profit or honor under the crown—such as the nominal stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds—before he can terminate his connection with his constituents. And if he has, in any way, disgraced himself, his application for the office of honor or profit, will be refused, and the house will proceed to expel him.

The forms of the house afford "private members," as the unofficial representatives of the voters are termed, few opportunities of exercising their legislative abilities on their own account. Every session some three hundred bills are introduced by "private members," but less than three per cent. pass through all the stages necessary for their insertion on the statute book. The majority of them are killed by the process known as "blocking." The government appropriates so much of the time of the house to its own business, that the bills of private members can only come up for consideration at twelve o'clock at

night, or at half-past five on Wednesday afternoons. As no opposed business can be taken up after these hours, unless a bill meets with universal favor, it can make no progress. The opposition of a single member is sufficient to prevent even the discussion of a proposed statute; and if that opposition is exercised, the measure is said to be "blocked." Twelve o'clock at night arrives. Government business, which occupied the attention of the house till that hour, is postponed; and the clerk reads the remaining "Orders of the Day," in which fully fifty of the bills of private members are sure to appear. The title of the first of the bills is read—"The Crossing-Sweepers Registration Act". The member who has introduced it, says "now," meaning that he wishes that the bill be proceeded with, then and there. Immediately another member shouts out, "I object," and the doomed bill goes into the waste-paper basket. It has been "blocked." And so on, through the entire list. By this method a considerable slaughter of "the innocents of legislation" takes place almost every night of the session soon after twelve o'clock.

"Blocking" has degenerated into a system of reprisals. The bills of liberal members are blocked by conservatives; and those proposed by conservatives are blocked by liberals. Frequently pathetic appeals are made at this time of the sitting. "Oh, spare my lamb," the author of the bill cries out, when he has heard the dreaded words, "I object," from the benches on the opposite side of the house. "No, I intend to have my revenge; your friends killed my bill," is the reply.

Of course, many of the proposed statutes represent pernicious fads and hobbies, or quixotic attempts to make straight the crooked things of the world—bills it would be unwise to pass into law. Some members get so passionately attached to a hobby that, night after night, session after session, year after year—if their constituents do not refuse to re-elect them—they continue to strive, in face of the most exasperating disappointments, to get it inserted on the statute book. An old and exceptionally eccentric member, who died three years ago, vainly tried during nearly half a century of parliamentary life, to get passed into law a bill for preventing persons from standing or sitting outside windows, while cleaning them. During his last session, this member complained to a friend that his object in introducing the bill, had been quite misunderstood by the house for fifty years. "I have always wished to make a law upon this subject," he explained, "not for the sake of the window-cleaners, but in the interest of the people on the street, upon whom they might fall. The idea of the bill was suggested to my