

December 2, 1919

# VISCOUNTESS ASTOR TAKES HER SEAT IN HOUSE OF COMMONS

## First Woman Member of British Parliament Conducts Herself With Great Composure While Taking the Oath of Office

Special cable to The Christian Science  
Monitor from its European News Office

WESTMINSTER, England (Monday)  
—The only person who could do justice to the admission of Lady Astor, the first of the British women M. P.'s to take her seat in the House of Commons, would be one like Samuel Pepys, or Lady Astor herself. The records of a Pepys, however, only see the light of day in later centuries, and Her Ladyship was sufficiently busy manufacturing history, without writing about it. For the information of those who wish to know all about current events at the moment of their occurrence, it should be said that the event was as impressive, and it may be added as pleasant in every detail, as its significance certainly deserved.

Anyone acquainted with the appearance and atmosphere of the House could detect at once that something unusual was on foot. The press gallery was so crowded that distinguished pressmen could not get in at all. The members gallery was also packed, women being in the great majority. Every seat in the House was occupied, and members and ministers gathered behind the Speaker's chair and under the gallery. Prominent in the distinguished strangers' gallery were the American Ambassador and Viscount Astor for whom also this was a unique occasion.

### Her Ladyship Well Sponsored

For a time the questions before the House appeared to hold the members' attention; indeed, there was an unusual businesslike intentness about the ministers' answers and the inevitable supplementaries, until the sudden turning of all heads toward the entrance to the House showed that Lady Astor was waiting the eventful moment. The members' faces relaxed in somewhat hesitating smiles, and there was a tenseness and sense of the unusual in the mental atmosphere, very much what one might expect to find in a congeries of hawks invaded by an intrepid and determined dove. Then the Speaker having called upon the new members to take their seats, Her Ladyship, amid unusual cheers, walked, bowing, to the table with the Prime Minister, Mr. Lloyd George, on her left and the former Premier, Arthur J. Balfour, on her right.

The oath being taken, Lady Astor signed the roll. Throughout the whole ordeal, a somewhat trying one, she maintained great composure. As she passed along the crowded ministerial bench toward the Speaker, Austen Chamberlain shot some humorous sally at her, whereupon she paused to crush him with her ever ready repartee. Obviously she was in a gathering where every one, almost, was a personal friend.

### New Member Takes Her Seat

Reaching the Speaker's chair, Lady Astor was not content till, after shaking hands, she had mounted the step of the chair, the better to exchange a word with Mr. Lowther. Then she passed behind the Speaker's chair where the first to congratulate her was Lord Robert Cecil and she then disappeared through the swing door.

The ceremony was over, Lady Astor was formally an M. P., and the galleries quickly emptied, but those who waited, saw Her Ladyship enter the House again by the side entrance and take her seat on the Opposition side of the House in a corner seat, across the gangway from the Speaker and in the second row from the front. As she did so, Lady Astor looked up at the gallery to smile with a certain confident shyness to her husband, "the poor old Viscount," for whom she expressed such sympathy at Plymouth, and then she settled back in her seat to listen to Horatio Bottomley expound the great possibilities and entire righteousness of premium bonds.

It remains only to say that Her Ladyship, who thus invaded the House with, metaphorically speaking, the smoke of generations of warfare for woman's freedom about her feet, had carried out her promise to set a precedent in dress, so that poorer women, in the future, would be able to follow. Though dressed, however, in simple black with a white blouse and collar-ette, and a simple black hat, she was dressed none the less charmingly and effectively. Lady Astor's thoughtfulness for others in this matter is a significant expression of a very kindly and charming personality and is a sample of those precedents which, as the first woman M. P., she will now have to set for future followers in her footsteps.