

At the Sign of the Wooden Leg

By "Silas Wegg."

On Hats.

If you will cast your eye across the street you will observe that Mr. Murphy-Gamble is standing on the sidewalk with his megaphone in action. He has the habit of planting himself in front of the Sign of the Wooden Leg. He has other habits also,—some he offers at \$18.75, and some at more ruinous figures still. I am not paid by Mr. Murphy-Gamble to tell these things. On the contrary I am making a protest and feel like taking out an injunction against him, for when I hear the lyric strains of his megaphone as he descants on "the sentimental and romantic and legendary atmospheres" which surround his millinery, "reminding one of William Tell, Robin Hood, the picturesque Venetian Gondoliers and other personages more or less familiar through song and story," I know that it is all over with my trade as far as one half, the better half at that, of my clientele is concerned.

"Orpheus with his lute made trees
And the mountain tops that freeze
Bow themselves when he did sing."

The Orphean notes wooed Ulysses from the Sirens, but the Murphean notes capture the Sirens themselves, and I see them trooping, in ever-increasing throngs, along the Great White Way past the Sign of the Wooden Leg.

Ay, there's the rub. I must do something desperate to save my patronage, and so I intend writing on Hats. This meeting is for women only.

Much may be said on ladies' hats. More is said under them. This point

is elementary and we will not dwell long on it. Let me state, however, that the most that is said under hats these days is on hats. The first remark that a woman makes when she meets another woman is, "Where did you get it?" and the second is, "I am positively ashamed of mine now that I have seen yours." It may be said, in passing, that freely translated the second remark reads thus, "Well, I am glad I did not go to your milliner."

The main thing about a woman's hat is not what it is, but what it does. Articles of clothing may be divided into two groups, the active and the passive. Shoes and stockings, for instance, are almost entirely passive. We use them, really wear them, and as a rule they remain with us until they are worn out. Neckties, on the other hand, are moderately active, while ladies' hats are activity itself. Men's hats are quite passive, the Panama being an exception. We wear a felt hat, we sport a Panama. Now it is a misuse of words to say that a woman *wears* a hat. If there is any wearing at all it is accidental. When a woman dons a hat she submits her personality to it. The hat may adorn her, even as the King's crown adorns the King, but George is no longer George but King with all the uneasiness of head pertaining thereto, and a woman with her hat on is a hat-bearer above everything. The hat becomes the woman we say, and this is a fact in more senses than one.

If these things are true generally, much truer are they this Spring.