

Just then Ralph's eyes met hers. He was returning the compliment, and watching her also, perhaps. She turned quickly away, and looked towards Fred, who was nearing the end of a "capital story, you know."

"Wasn't it first-rate?" he asked, quickly.

"No doubt it must have been," was the brief reply.

"Well, he had his revenge after all."

"Revenge! How very wrong," exclaimed Cora, trying hard to gather up the lost threads of his narration.

"Do you call it wrong? Everybody else said he was fully justified. But I don't think you heard all I was saying."

"How careless of me!"

She glanced across the table once more—encountered a flash of the dark eyes, and blushing vividly bent over her dessert-plate to hide her confusion.

"Have I annoyed you?" asked Fred, with surprise.

"Oh, no, I assure you."

"Then I'll tell you another thing that occurred soon after."

But it happened Cora did not hear any more of Fred's anecdotes just then, for the ladies rose from the table, and she was soon flitting away to the drawing-room, leaning on Nesta's arm.

That evening Jessie McArthur and Ralph sang duets together. He turned over her music, selected the songs he liked, and then their voices rang out together, blending most harmoniously. Scotch, Irish, or English, grave or gay, it did not matter, their store seemed inexhaustible; on they went as though they could have sung duets until midnight.

The rest of the party listened, or talked, or amused themselves, just as they chose, for the songs were not so much for the entertainment of the audience as for that of the performers themselves.

Nesta had challenged Fred to a game of chess, which they seemed to think required a great deal of argument, for there was plenty of sparring over every move.

Cora sat quietly in the shade of the lace curtains at the open window, where she could by turns have a peep at the calm stars as they spangled the cloudless sky, and at the various groups of people in the large, well-lighted rooms.

She decided there was no doubt in the world but that Miss McArthur and Ralph Burges were engaged to be married, just as Olive and Captain Fraser were.

"But oh, I would never think of comparing Ralph with such a man as the Captain" was her mental decision.

Nesta was checkmated at last, much to Fred's delight, who clapped his hands and made a noisy tumult at his success.

"Never mind, I'll have my revenge another evening," laughed back Nesta, as she made her way over to Cora.

"Now that very persevering pair have deserted the piano, I want you to play something, Mousie."

"Yes, do favour us, Miss Forest; we shall be very pleased to hear you," urged Mrs. Burges.

Cora went at once to the piano, and began Schubert's Seventh Symphony.

"That was one of our 'stock school pieces.' I recollect playing it on my last public evening at Westville House," said Olive, with that superior smile of hers.

"I thought you would remember it, and I played the symphony that it might recall old days," said Cora.

"What do you call public evenings?" asked Captain Fraser.

"Oh, the most melancholy exhibitions you can fancy. Once a month all the young ladies used to put on their best dresses and clean collars and cuffs, and stick bows of ribbon in their hair, and then we were ushered into the drawing-room, and played pieces, and sang songs to one another, and to Mrs. Woodhouse, and to Miss Winifred," explained Olive, laughing.

"No gentlemen admitted, of course?" inquired the Captain, with a smile.

"Not the shadow of one! *That* would have been against the rules."

"I like the public evenings very much, and I don't consider gentlemen are so very necessary to make one enjoy oneself," retorted Nesta, indignant at her sister's description.

"Of course, *you* don't think so, my dear. It would be too advanced an opinion for girls of your age," put in Fred, briskly.

"Play something else, Cora," asked Nesta, disdainful to take any notice of Fred's insinuation.

Cora had a taste, almost a genius, for music. Whatever she attempted she played well, and with intense feeling, throwing her whole heart into the music her fingers evoked.

"After having had nine years to learn, and all my holidays to practise, the least that can be expected is that I ought to play decently," she once explained to Nesta.

As Captain Fraser seconded Nesta's request for something else, Cora struck off with vigour a brilliant overture by Cherubini, then a magical mazurka by Chopin that made the Captain unconsciously beat time with his foot, as though he fully appreciated the perfect rhythm.

"Don't get up—please, don't leave the piano yet," pleaded Ralph, who had joined the group near the music stool; and then the girl paused a moment, and began a dreamy nocturne, delicate and refined in its expression, and plaintive as a wail in some of its passages. Then, by almost imperceptible gradations, she glided into the air of "St. Gabriel," and they knew she was playing an evening hymn—

"Our life is but a fading dawn,
Its glorious noon, how quickly past;
Lead us, O Christ, when all is gone,
Safe home at last,"

sang Ralph, taking up the air, and then they all joined in until the end of the hymn.

"That is a very fit introduction for our evening prayers," said Mrs. Burges, in a quiet earnest tone, the influence of which was felt by all, as she rang the bell for the servants.

(To be continued.)

HOW GIRLS ARE PRESENTED AT COURT.



HER MAJESTY generally holds four Drawing-rooms in the course of the year; two before Easter, two after, and seldom later than the month of May. As a rule, young ladies are presented by their mothers. Even if they are only presented themselves for the first time the same day as their daughters, it is still *en règle* that they should make the presentation.

But it is necessary—absolutely necessary—that the lady who undertakes the duty shall be present at the same Drawing-room, though she may not even see the young girl, and, except in the case of relatives, they rarely go together, and do not for a moment think of passing the Royal presence together. In asking any lady to make a presentation to Her Majesty it must be recognised as a great kindness and favour, for she is personally responsible. Unmarried ladies do not exercise the privilege of making presentations. As soon as it is determined at which Drawing-room the young lady is to make her *début*, the mode of proceeding is as follows. A card is sent in to the Chamberlain's office, Stable Yard, St. James's, on which is written the name of the person to be presented and the person presenting, thus: "Miss Smith, by her mother, Mrs. Smith," accompanied by a letter from Mrs. Smith, giving necessary particulars as to address, &c., and saying that it is her intention to be present at the Drawing-room of the date fixed. This must be done two clear days at least before the Drawing-room. The names having been submitted for Her Majesty's approval, on application at the same office, two pink presentation cards will be given, on which must be most legibly written, as before, "Miss Smith, by her mother, Mrs. Smith," and these must be taken to the palace. One will be given to the page-in-waiting on first arriving at the top of the stairs, and the other handed to the Lord Chamberlain, who stands beside Her Majesty, when the Royal presence is reached, and from this he will read, in a loud, clear voice, the names to the Queen.

The proper Court dress is the next important consideration. A young girl, on her presentation, wears white, and every lady attending the Court must have a train, lappets, Court plumes, and a really low dress. So strict are the laws with regard to this, that people are appointed to prevent ladies passing who fall short in any of these requirements. I was myself accompanied to a Drawing-room two or three years ago by a friend who had had her dress from Paris. It proved too high on the shoulders for regulation; moreover, she had only one small piece of tulle in lieu of lappets, and before entering the presence of Her Majesty she was compelled to tear some tulle trimmings from her dress and pin this on as another lappet, and to have the bodice cut down on the shoulders and turned in. These lappets may be either really lace or blonde, with the ends hanging at the back, or two pieces of tulle, which young ladies find more becoming. The width is mostly split in half, one end gathered on a thread, and so pinned on. White plumes are essential—three for married, two for unmarried women—placed in such a manner that they can be distinctly seen in front. The train must be at least three yards long, and is generally four. It is sometimes cut in one with the bodice, sometimes attached

by braces to the shoulders, sometimes plaited on the shoulders, but young ladies generally have it sewn on at the waist. Just now white satin and brocade is most used, with tulle skirts and a profusion of white flowers. Pearls are considered the most appropriate ornaments for a *débutante*. The dress must be well made and all the details well carried out. Many-buttoned gloves are worn, but when presented, before appearing in the Queen's presence, the right hand one must be removed, and this is generally simplified by not being put on at all. Having a handkerchief, a fan, the one glove, and the card to hold, it is far better not to carry a bouquet, especially as the end of the train, neatly folded, has to be borne on the left arm.

The mode of proceeding at a Drawing-room is as follows:—The palace doors generally open at two, the Queen entering the Throne-room at three. Of late years Her Majesty's health has not permitted her to remain throughout the reception. Therefore, in order to pass before her, it is well to go early, especially when presented, as it is only in a case of presentation that the Queen's hand is kissed, and this ceremony is not gone through if the Princess of Wales or any of the Royal Princesses have taken her place. Then you merely pass courtesying low, as you would if you were only attending a Drawing-room, though the presentation thus made is in every respect equivalent to actual presentations to the Sovereign. But being an event that will hardly happen more than twice in a woman's life, it is advisable to do it thoroughly. Once presented, you can annually attend one Drawing-room for the future, and will only require to be re-presented when you marry, or you attain some title. People anxious to arrive early leave home mostly at half-past twelve to one, being content to wait patiently in the line of carriages down the Mall or Buckingham Palace-road, and endure the eager inspection of a dense crowd, who, wet or fine, line the roadway, peer into the carriages, and often laugh and make audible remarks about the inmates. There is, however, no lack of amusement. The beefeaters, in their quaint scarlet Tudor dresses, bedizened with gold, their ruffs, and low-crowned hats, encircled with red, white, and blue ribbon, march, halberds in hand, to Buckingham Palace to take up their stations along the corridors and staircases. The Gentlemen-at-Arms troop in by twos and twos, in scarlet uniform, gold helmets, and white, waving plumes. They are also on duty within the palace. You see them in each room guarding the barriers, and preventing the entrance of more people than will comfortably fill them.

In the room adjoining the Throne-room, they stand in a line ready to act as a veritable body-guard to the Royal Family if required, and another line divides off the lower end of the picture gallery, forming a sort of corridor to the Throne-room. There is no better place for seeing the dresses. I always make a rule of getting close behind these Gentlemen-at-Arms, as soon as I have passed the Royal presence, and so, peering between their shoulders, see the rest of the company pass in single file, their trains flowing behind them. One or more of the Household Troops, are on duty in the Court-yard, and act as escort to the Royal personages who attend the Drawing-room, and it is a very pretty sight to see the bandmen in their gold coats march through St. James's Park, to take up their position and play throughout the reception. I have never myself heard them in the palace, but in some of the rooms you can, and when "God Save the Queen" is played, you know that Her Majesty has entered the Presence Chamber. The equipages of ambassadors, ministers, and other distinguished people also flit to and fro, but they do not

fall into the line, having the privilege of the *entrée* which entitles them to enter the palace by a special entrance, to occupy the first Drawing-room, next to the Throne-room, and to pass before the Queen first.

At last, after a long waiting, the line of carriages begins to move slowly, and in time you pass through the fine gateway into the inner quadrangle, and alight at the steps of the grand entrance. Here you will see some few scarlet-coated servants and officials, and much crimson carpeting. You cross the really magnificent hall, paved with variegated marble, the ceiling supported by white marble columns, with Corinthian capitals of mosaic and gold, and up a few steps reach a dining-room, where cloaks and wraps are left. Leaving this, you ascend the staircase, enter the picture gallery, leave one of the two cards with which you are provided with the page-in-waiting, who stands by a raised crimson-covered desk, and then hurry on through the concert-room into the furthest of the suite of drawing-rooms not yet filled. There is the Blue Drawing-room, hung with blue silk panelled in gold, with Winterhalter's portraits of the Queen and the Prince Consort; the Dark Blue Drawing-room and the Red and Yellow Drawing-rooms; they all command a view of the beautiful gardens of Buckingham Palace, where the fountains are generally set playing. They are filled with rows of chairs, and as soon as these are occupied the Gentlemen-at-Arms cross their halberds, and no more are admitted, and so on till all the rooms are filled. People sit chatting to their friends, and thus while the time away. There are only a few gentlemen present, and they must be in attendance on ladies, and do not generally pass the Royal presence, but are nevertheless occasionally presented with their wives.

After a time there is a rustle and a rush. The "Entrée" has passed the Queen, and the rest of the world are about to do so in turn; the stream moves through the suite of rooms in single file, until they reach the end of the picture gallery, lined with the Gentlemen-at-Arms. Here the Queen's pages remove the train from the right arm, spread it on the ground, and thus you walk across the gallery to the Throne-room. The door on the left-hand side is glass, and scarcely any one passes it without looking how her trains set. When you enter the Presence Chamber you find a narrow half-circular alley left, down which you are to proceed. Quite in the background is the Throne and its canopy. In front of it are the ladies and gentlemen in attendance on the Queen and other Royal personages, and in front of them the Royal Family. Near the doorway next the Queen is the Lord Chamberlain, then Her Majesty, the Princess of Wales, and the other Princesses, and then the Princes. The general circle fills the rest of the room. Just in front of you will be the end of the train of the lady passing next before you. In case of mother and daughter the mother would go first. You have no longer to think about your own train; your glove, fan, and handkerchief hold in your left hand, your card in your right. As you pass through the doorway give this to the Lord Chamberlain. You will find his

hand ready to receive it. As soon as he mentions the word "presentation" the Queen will put out her right hand, then courtesy very low, place your own right hand beneath it, and bend and kiss it. When you rise courtesy low to each member of the Royal Family, and walk along this semi-circular alley sideways, being careful on no account to turn your back; but by the time you have well passed the Royalties, you will find your train being placed on your arm, and, the crowd intervening, you leave the room by the centre doorway without any necessity for further backing. You make your way at once to the picture gallery, which is now thronged. You can look at the pictures which are worth seeing, including gems of Greuze, Wilkie, Maas, and others. But the beautiful people and beautiful dresses will distract your attention. By-and-bye you will proceed to the great entrance hall, and, having obtained your cloaks, wait there until your carriage is called, a tedious process, for if it happens to come up before you are ready, it goes to the very end of the rank.

I should advise all young girls about to be presented to rehearse the actual ceremony well beforehand, for I notice at many drawing-rooms how very badly it is done. It is necessary to remember that courtesies made to Royalty must be very low. Avoid, above all things, "fluster," and do not be alarmed at the idea of having to walk backwards with your train on the ground. You really hardly have to do this at all, it is a crab-like sideway movement you have to execute. The important points to bear in mind are—to have your hand ungloved, to place it beneath the Queen's, and to make separate and distinct courtesies to every Royal person in the circle.

ARDERN HOLT.

FLOWERS IN THE HOUSE.

PERHAPS there is scarcely anything that gives a sweeter touch of finish to home than the



PALM IN JAPANESE POT.