went away to the West Indies to seek his fortune, and during the twenty-five years of his absence she had even denied herself some of the necessaries of life to keep up the supply of "Semper Augustus," and "Admiral Leifken's" bulbs.

Most people would have called the time-worn house lonely, but Maria never thought it so, in fact she had very little time to think about herself at all. What with keeping the place tidy, according to Dutch notions of tidiness, washing the walls, the paint-work, the window-shutters, the floor, the bricks—what with polishing the brass knocker, the door-handles, and every piece of metal within and without the *house at least* twice a week—what with doing most of the garden work with her own hands, she was fully occupied from day to day.

The house was full of sweet associations to her, and, as she rambled about its now silent rooms, she thought of scenes that lay far away behind in her past, when life had some roseate hues even for her, and held none of the dull chill greys it now wore. There, she had spent a happy childhood, one of a united family, but now they were all gone, and of her brother Jan she had not heard for ten years. Perhaps he would come back soon; she was always expecting him, and one chamber in the house was always kept bright, and aired ready for his reception.

On the evening our story opens, Maria had been *to Dordrecht, the* nearest town, for a supply of provisions to last the week. Shopping was always an important business to her, for her income was limited, every coin held its full place in the quarter's expenses, and she needed to get its utmost value in commodities. What with bargaining, cheapening, hurrying from shop to shop, from stall to stall to get the most for her money, it grew late ere she set out on her return journey, and by the time she reached the fields near her own house, the sun had gone down.

Maria came wearily across the flat meadow-land, with two large bucket-like baskets on her arms. She wore a faded black cloak with a hood, a black poke bonnet, in whose depths her patient, waiting face looked pale and worn, and her large grey eyes seemed, as usual, watching for someone who never came.

She started with surprise when she came in front of her house, for a man was leaning against the garden gate, his eyes fixed on the closed-up windows. Her heart gave a wild throb. Could it be Jan come back at last? But no, even in the dim twilight she soon discovered that the stranger was younger, taller, and slighter than her brother could possibly be.

She drew near, with the key of the gate in her hand, and the stranger came towards her at once, and said in good Dutch—

"Perhaps you can give me some information. I am searching for Maria de Velde, and, from description, I should say this is her house."

"I am Maria de Velde. What is your business with me?"

"You!" He looked at her scrutinisingly in the dull twilight as he said slowly, "Your brother was Jan de Velde, I presume?"

"Yes! Oh yes! Jan is my only brother. Have you come to tell me about him? is he come home?" Her voice trembled, and she was in such a state of trepidation she could hardly speak the words.

"Be calm, I beg of you. My story will be long, and perhaps we had better go indoors before I relate it."

Maria opened the gate, and walked into the house. The stranger followed, and waited in the passage until she had deposited her burdens and lit the lamp. Then he stood by the parlour table, silently watching her.

"What news have you brought me of Jan?" she gasped.

"Not such as you will like, I fear. I had better explain that I am Jules Peterson, a lawyer, that I live at Dordrecht, that I have had communications about your brother's business from his solicitor in the West Indies; he has, in fact, put the affair into my hands."

"Jan's affairs! Why cannot he manage them himself?" asked Maria, in an eager manner, as though she expected some terrible trouble was coming, but that she yet dreaded to hear.

"He is dead, madam," was the low reply.

"Dead!" she echoed.

"Alas! such is the sad truth; but by his will your brother has left you sole legatee to his property."

The lawyer had often found such information as he had just imparted a wonderful panacea in cases of bereavement, but Maria hardly heeded it; she was numb and dazed in her deep woe, and she sat down in a low chair, rocking herself to and fro in mute agony.

Jules Peterson was a feeling man, and a polite man. He waited until her paroxysm of grief had subsided, then he asked Maria for instructions, and laid a packet of papers before her.

She had no instructions to give, and with tear-stained cheeks could only control herself to say—

"Did Jan send me any message?"

"Not a word. The will was enclosed in the lawyer's letter, and was dated years before the death took place."

This, then, was the end of all her watching and waiting! Jan had bequeathed her the hard-earned money he had given his life to win, but had left her no history of that life—of its struggles, disappointments, and achievements.

For a long time after this event, Maria felt too dulled with grief at her brother's death to appreciate the change of fortune that had come to her—it was only by degrees she realised her days of poverty and pinching were over. The property was not what some people could call large—about as much as would bring her three hundred pounds a year of our money; but it was boundless wealth to Maria compared with the pittance on which she had lately managed to subsist.

By-and-by, the old buff-coloured house began to show a brighter face to the world. The worn, faded furniture was replaced by new, and when spring came round again, the garden had such a show of tulips as had not been seen there since Jan had left off planting them himself.

Maria hired a stout servant maid to take the roughest part of the house-work off her hands, and then, having less to do, she began to think more, and ere long came to the conclusion that it was very dreary to ramble about the empty rooms alone. She began to speculate who amongst her relatives she should invite to come to stay with her, with the view of leaving them, by-and-by, the fortune Jan had accumulated.

Mistress de Velde had not any very near of kin, but she had some cousins whom she had not seen for years past. The poor and sad are not much troubled by visitors and invitations, and Maria, like many others in her case, had been quietly dropped out of sight and memory.

As soon as it became known she had inherited a fortune, and wished to renew intercourse with her relatives, there was great excitement amongst them; she might have had her pick and choice out of a dozen cousins. The Von Huysens, on her mother's side, consisted of a father, three daughters, and one son. The De Veldes, on her father's side, were represented by two girls. Of the latter, Lois, the eldest, was married to a poor thriftless man, who, with ill-health and no regular employment, was struggling on with a large family at Rotterdam, and the second girl, Anna, was music teacher at a preparatory school.

From these families, Mistress de Velde selected Anna, and Oscar Von Huysen, and sent them invitations, the former to live with her as companion, the latter to come on a visit. Anna was a pleasing looking girl about nineteen, with clear, brown, thoughtful eyes, tolerable features, and a pale olive complexion. She was not pretty, and her face in repose might have been considered a little too mild, too placid; but those who saw her eyes beaming with animation, her cheeks glowing with brightness, her lips parted in one of her sweet rare smiles, would confess her attraction was more potent than even beauty, for the light from a loving heart was reflected in her face. Her voice was low and musical, her figure small and neat, a little quaint and prim perhaps, for constant restraint and repression at the preparatory school had somewhat tended to cramp the natural gracefulness of her figure. The same cause had doubtless contributed to make her shy and timid, conscious of her own defects, forgetful of herself, and ever ready to take a secondary part, contented to be in the shade that others might enjoy the sunshine.

Oscar Von Huysen was a contrast to Anna in every way. He was strikingly handsome, and quite conscious of it. Tall, dark, with a splendid figure, symmetrical features, and a bewitching manner, he soon won the hearts of the two women in the buff-coloured house.

Anna looked at him with shy admiration, and thought him superior to herself as a being from another sphere might be; and Maria, from her standpoint of observation, considered him a noble fellow, quite worthy of being her heir by-and-by. Indeed, ere he had been long in the house it was well understood that he, and none other, would inherit her property.

It was impossible to be dull in Oscar's company when he chose to make himself entertaining. There were lurking fun and mockery in his brown eyes, a ringing laughter in his voice, a vein of humour in his conversation that was irresistible.

The old house now resounded with the sound of youthful voices, with mirth and music. Maria ordered a fine piano from Dordrecht that Anna might keep up her practising; and so, in the quiet evenings, the low rooms would be filled with harmony. Sometimes Anna and Oscar sang duets together, or Anna's sympathetic voice would ring out softly and clearly in some pathetic chanson, and Mistress de Velde, leaning back in her crimson-cushioned chair, would listen with her eyes closed, her mind dreamily recalling scenes from the past again, when she also was bright and hopeful as were her young cousins at present.

(*To be continued.*)

## CURIOSITIES OF COURT RECEPTIONS.

By the Hon. Mrs. Armytage.

It is difficult to trace out or fix the exact date when Court receptions assumed the rules which at present regulate these ceremonies.

From very early ages the sovereigns of every country have been in the habit of keeping some regular court of state at which their subjects were received. In olden days, no detailed rules prescribed who should and who should not appear in the sovereign's presence.

Vassals of all degrees have come before the king either to offer fealty, or to represent some grievance. A curious custom carried down to the end of the last century was the admission of the public to see the king and

queen at their dinner, which they ate under the gaze of crowds of their subjects.

From very early times it is evident that English queens received during the morning toilet, so that the origin of the word levée is easily traced. When at Conway Castle with King Edward, we read that "Queen Eleanor received ladies qualified to be presented to her while her hair was being dressed," but there is no record at that date as to the qualifications necessary to secure the privilege.

During the succeeding reigns we find no specially interesting records of Court receptions that would amuse our readers, so we will pass on to more modern times. Queen Elizabeth was a monarch who delighted in all the ceremonies and grandeurs befitting a great sovereign, and her state progresses form a history in themselves. When she was residing at Greenwich Palace, crowds were always admitted to the long corridors through which the queen would pass on Sundays as she went to the chapel, and everyone knelt before her. We are sorry to say that Sunday was for many succeeding generations the day on which Court receptions were held; the king and queen first attending divine service and then admitting the numbers of people who thronged the Court, and in this manner the rule became established for those attending Court receptions to be in their places before the Royal Family entered the rooms, and their Majesties passing along spoke to whoever they deemed worthy of their notice by degrees. Some favoured visitors were ushered into a separate apartment, from whence no doubt originated that privilege which is now spoken of as "having the entrée at Court."

During the reign of George II., drawing-rooms, as they were then called, continued to be held in the evening, but George IV. altered this to their being held as now, in the daytime.

My readers may, perhaps, have noticed, if they ever read the *Gazettes* respecting Court ceremonials in the present day, that it is often announced that such a day is "Collar Day," and may have wondered at its meaning. By the official register we find that these days almost exactly coincide with the festival days of the Church of England. Easter Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, Ascension Day, Whitsuntide, and Trinity, with all the recognised Saints' days of the Church are Collar Days, in addition to which are added St. George's Day, the sovereign's birthday, Accession, and Coronation, and the late Prince Consort's birthday; and upon these days, if there be a levée or drawing-room or any Court ceremony, the knights appear wearing their collars, as well as the ribbons and badges of their respective orders. The history of these various orders of knighthood can be but briefly alluded to in these papers; they are of very ancient origin, and each one claims a separate and special notice. The Garter, the Thistle, St. Patrick, the Bath, and the Star of India are the British orders conferred by the sovereign, according to her will and pleasure. The Most Noble Order of the Garter ranks first. Constituted by Edward III., limited to the number of twenty-five knights, and the arms and banners of the first roll of the Garter Knights, is perpetuated at Windsor Castle, where, in St. George's Hall, we see the banners arranged along this magnificent apartment. An account of the ceremonies which have attended various instalments of the Knights of the Garter would fill a volume. St. George is the patron saint of the order. The chapel at Windsor was dedicated to their use, and the installation of any knight still takes place at Windsor Castle, though of late years the Queen has not held any formal chapter. It is customary to include foreign monarchs in their number, and upon such occasions noblemen, with a considerable suite, with Garter King-at-Arms, are despatched by the sovereign to decorate whoever it has been her pleasure to receive into the order. The dark blue ribbon now worn by the Knights of the Garter was changed to its present shade from one much lighter in tone in the year 1622. The pictures of Charles I., by Vandyke, always show the lighter shade.

The Order of the Thistle has claimed a very ancient date for its foundation—even as far back as A.D. 809; but it was either restored or instituted by James V., 1540, when he with twelve knights completed the roll. It now consists of the sovereign and sixteen members; St. Andrew its patron saint, and the colour of the distinctive ribbon is dark green. The knights of this order are invariably Scotchmen.

The Irish order of St. Patrick next follows —instituted by George III., 1783. Twenty-two knights besides the sovereign and the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland complete its numbers. Sky-blue is the colour of the mantle and ribbon.

The Order of the Bath was instituted in the thirteenth century, and seems at times to have fallen into disuse; but there are many records of quaint ceremonies attached to its reception at the time of the restoration of Charles II. The knights elect slept in the Painted Chamber of the House of Lords on pallets; at the foot of each couch stood a bathing tub, and the installation took place in the adjoining abbey of Westminster.

There are various degrees of honour in the Order of the Bath; it is equally bestowed upon officers of Army, Navy, Diplomatic, and Civil Service, a difference in the badge distinguishing them, all using a red ribbon.

It remained for Queen Victoria to create another Order, to which ladies should be admitted as companions, having long ceased to be admitted to the honours of the Garter, though there are records of many women having been thus privileged.

The most exalted Order of the Star of India was instituted in 1861, and consists of the sovereign, the Viceroy of India, thirty knights grand commanders, seventy-two knights commanders, and one hundred and forty-four companions, with extra and honorary members. The badge contains Queen Victoria's likeness cut in a cameo, and the ribbon of the order is pale blue with a white edge.

In diverging from the subject of Court receptions to the orders and insignia worn on collar days, I have said more than I intended, and must return to the records of the actual Court ceremonies.

When, in 1761, Queen Charlotte held her first drawing-room after her marriage, we read that the queen stood under the throne, and the women were presented to her by the Duchess of Hamilton, and the men by the Duke of Manchester—which is very different from the existing rule.

A most amusing account was written by Mr. Rush, Minister from the United States, in 1817, describing a levée of the Prince Regent's and a drawing-room of Queen Charlotte's—the former held at Carlton House, and the latter at Buckingham Palace, then known as the Queen's House. He describes a private presentation of himself to the queen as taking place before he attended the drawing-room; of the latter he says:—"Going through Hyde-park, I found the whole way from Tyburn to Piccadilly filled with private carriages, standing still, with persons in them, who adopted this mode of seeing those who went to Court. Trumpets were sounding, Park and Tower guns were firing, being the queen's birthday; ranks of cavalry in scarlet, with bright helmets and jet-black horses—the very same, we are told, both men and horses, that had been at Waterloo. Hundreds arriving, hundreds endeavouring to come away. The staircase branched off at first landing, with two arms wide enough to admit a partition. So the company ascending took one channel, those descending the other; but all stood motionless. The hoop dresses of the ladies sparkling with lama, plumes, lappets in confusion. In three-quarters of an hour gained the top of the staircase. Four rooms were allotted to the ceremony. In the second was the queen, then aged seventy-six. She sat on a velvet chair and cushion a little raised, and near her the princess and ladies-in-waiting. The general company bowed and passed by. When my wife was presented Her Majesty addressed some conversation to her. The Regent was present. A numerous portion of the nobility were there, with wives and daughters; others distinguished in life, though bearing neither title nor station. If the scene in the hall was picturesque, the one upstairs far transcended it. You saw a thousand ladies richly dressed. It was the first occasion of laying by mourning for Princess Charlotte. No lady was without her plume. The whole was a waving field of feathers. Some were blue, some tinged with red. Here you saw violet and yellow; there shades of green; but most were like tufts of snow. The diamonds encircling them caught the sun, and threw dazzling beams around. Then the hoops! I cannot describe these; they should be seen. To see *one* is nothing; but to see a thousand, and their wearers! I afterwards sat in the Ambassadors' Box at the Coronation; but that sight faded before this. Each lady seemed to rise out of a gilded little barricade, or one of silvery texture. This, topped by her plumes, and the face divine interposing, gave to the whole an effect so unique, so fraught with feminine grace and grandeur, it seemed as if a curtain had risen to show a pageant in another sphere. It was brilliant and joyous. Those even to whom it was not new stood to gaze, as I did; Canning for one. You saw admiration in the gravest statesmen."

So much for the American opinion of a drawing-room in those days, when hoops were still the fashion; and they continued to be worn during the first half of the long reign of George III.

At the first drawing-room held by King William IV. and Queen Adelaide, all peers and peeresses were commanded to attend in their coronation robes and coronets. The ladies' coronets were no doubt fastened on their hair, as we see in old prints, and the peers would have carried theirs in their hands; which reminds me that two peers claim to have the privilege of appearing in the presence of their sovereign with their hats on. Lord Forrester and Lord Kingsale claim the right, but we never remember hearing of the former venturing to assume the privilege. Lord Kingsale, however, did so, and, notwithstanding the remonstrances of the officials, he persisted in appearing in the Presence Chamber at St. James's Palace, where the Queen was holding a levée, still wearing his cocked-hat. Much surprise was felt, and a remonstrance made; but it is believed that the right to do so was conferred on the Barons of Kingsale by King John, 1203-4. The privilege was asserted in King William III.'s reign; also in that of George I.; but it was questionable discretion to claim it before the sovereign who was a woman. Lord Forrester received a grant from Henry VIII. conferring the same privilege.