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HOW I WAS PRESENTED AT COURT.

By LA PETITE.

I do not think that I really quite took it in when this important ceremony was first talked about.

Of course I had always known it would happen some day, and used to watch my mother go, and wonder how I should look in that sort of costume, but somehow I could never picture myself in a long train with plumes on my head.

I remember once when I was quite small that one Drawing-Room day after mamma had departed in all her splendour I got a duster, pinned it on to the bottom of my frock and flirited up and down our long drawing room like a very tiny, but very vain peacock trying to imitate my mother's stately progress and beautiful curtsies, much to the amusement of a lady visitor who had to play the part of Queen, and that was the nearest I ever got to it.

Well! the days of the duster were over apparently, and I began to think it was serious when I was borne off to the Court Dress-maker to choose the dresses.

As Presentation dresses are always white it was merely a question of style and material as regarded mine, in which I let my elders have it all their own way, but when it came to the flowers to be worn, I put in a word for my favourite lilies-of-the-valley, and I was allowed to choose those for the occasion.

My costume was to be a wonderful mixture of satin, *crêpe-de-chine*, tulle and lilies-of-the-valley, and my mother's was heliotrope velvet and silk, yellow satin, orchids and big yellow marguerites, all of which was not arrived at without long and mature deliberation.

After this mamma, deciding (as all mothers do) that nothing was too good for her child, settled not to present me herself but to ask a titled lady of high rank (herself a contributor to our dear "G.O.P.") to perform this office, and, the request being made and granted, the next step was taken.

As a matter of fact the lady presenting a *débutante* has nothing to do and need not even be present at the same Drawing-Room, but in this case, our friend, who had known me all my life, took a great interest in me and was going herself.

Our names had been submitted to the Lord Chamberlain in due form, and copies of the regulations were sent us, together with two pink cards on which my name and that of the lady presenting me must be written. Mamma simply had plain white cards.

Now a lull set in, during which I went quietly on with my studies as if nothing were going to happen, and was only reminded of the

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H.R.H. THE PRINCESS OF WALES AS I SAW HER.

impending event by having to go to a preliminary fitting on of the dresses, which seemed the least interesting part of the proceedings.

In this interval also the Court curtsy had to be practised with the peculiar glide sideways which accompanies it, but I found it easier to master than might have been expected, and it soon ceased to worry me.

At length it came to a week before the important day, and we went for the final trying on of the costumes. This was literally the most trying of all, for every detail was attended to, plumes, veil, flowers and train, and I got thoroughly tired out.

In fact presently I collapsed altogether in a little heap of white satin, and the dressers had to run for water and smelling salts while I was propped up on the floor and brought round!

I was very much ashamed of myself, but it often happens with delicate girls who cannot stand the hours of posing before a long mirror while flowers are tied first on one side and then on the other, and trimmings are arranged and rearranged to obtain the best effect possible.

At length all was ready, and the only disappointment in connection with it was that the Queen was not going to hold the Drawing-Room in person.

We did not know it for certain till the night before, but it made an important difference to me, as *débutantes* kiss hands if the Queen be present, but simply curtsy to any of the Princesses.

I felt rather injured, I fear, and did think the Queen might have made an effort when she knew I was coming, but I was consoled on hearing the Princess of Wales was to hold it, and decided to make the best of it.

The night before we went to bed early to prepare for the morrow, I feeling not a bit nervous but expecting to be so when the actual moment arrived; however, I slept well and woke feeling none the worse, ate a good breakfast, and was ready for the hair-dresser at a quarter to ten.

At that time my hair was short and curled all over my head, so he had rather a business to fix securely the erection of veil, feathers and flowers, but it was done at last, and I was ready for the next step.

A dear old friend who had known me since I was five years old, insisted on coming up from her seaside home on purpose to dress me (which she did under the superintendence of the Court dressmaker), so loving hands were busy about me preventing my feeling strange or frightened, and, except that it seemed odd to be dressed like that in the day-time, I took it all as a matter of course and soon quite forgot myself and my dress.

By half-past eleven we were ready, mamma looking magnificent in her handsome dress, while mine was deliciously pure and simple, but instead of my gaining in dignity I looked strangely childish, and people laughingly said I should be turned back at the Palace as being too young.

When we came downstairs we found our drawing-room full of friends who had come to criticise us and have a private view, and by twelve o'clock the carriage had drawn up with the coachman and footman adorned with huge bouquets of yellow Marguerites, and a crowd had begun to collect outside.

We took a hurried lunch and then put on our wraps, which were large soft shawls of fine white India muslin edged all round with lace, as anything heavier would have crushed our finery.

A crimson carpet was put down over the pavement and we walked out through what I fondly hoped was an admiring crowd and entered the carriage, our trains being arranged on our laps after we were seated and filling up all the available space.

I was still waiting for what I supposed was the inevitable fit of nervousness, but I may as well say here that it never came, and I thoroughly enjoyed myself from beginning to end.

We had not long to wait in St. James's Park where, it being a wet day, there were fewer people than usual, but this I was glad of, for the few there were came close up and glued their faces to the windows, making audible comments on our appearance exactly as if we were wax figures.

I remember they all seemed much struck with my apparently extreme youth, and made some very diverting remarks thereupon. "I say! don't she look young with them there feathers on her 'ead!" and other remarks of a like nature. Some ladies had brought books to read, and others were taking a picnic-lunch or talking to friends, but I enjoyed watching the beef-eaters file past in their quaint, picturesque costumes, and the Horse-Guards on their beautiful chargers escorting the various Royalties, till presently we drove through the gates and beneath two arches to the entrance, where we dismounted and entered a lofty hall with pillars springing up to the roof and a grand staircase at the right-hand side. We walked straight across this to a side-room where a number of the Queen's dressers were waiting to arrange our veils and take our wraps, and I was sorry to notice how white and ill some of the *débutantes* looked instead of enjoying it as I was doing.

Evidently some of them wished themselves at home again, and even at the last minute would have gladly escaped if they could.

When we were pronounced ready our trains were deftly folded lengthwise into three and laid over our left arms, so that we could carry them without injury or trouble, and we sailed up the grand staircase. Half-way up was stationed one of the Queen's pages, to whom we each gave one of our cards, while he ran his eye sharply over our dresses to see whether they were within the regulations, for at this point one is liable to be turned back if a dress is too high or too low, a train not of the prescribed length or a plume out of place.

I breathed a sigh of relief when he let us pass without comment (though I knew we were all right) and on we swept through many rooms all brocade, mirrors, and exotics, looking out on the gardens, till we came to one filled with rows of chairs, where we sat down and waited.

A barrier divided it from the next room, guarded by an officer, a certain number being admitted at a time, and here we remained for half-an-hour so I had leisure to look about me. My Court sponsor, in black and vieux-rose, presented another girl besides myself, who was charmingly pretty, also in white of course, but with white acacia and orchids for flowers, and, as she was as free from self-consciousness and nervousness as I, we sat together and compared notes.

Huge fires were blazing in all the rooms, being early in May and chilly, but many were trembling so that their teeth chattered and they could hardly stand.

One poor bride (presented on her marriage) was leaning up against the mantelpiece shivering in spite of the fire that was almost scorching her dress, and muttering at intervals to her husband, "How much longer will it be? Will it never be over? If ever I get home safely I'll never come here again!" while he vainly tried to console and encourage her.

A girl, nearly crying with fright, was almost incapacitated altogether by her mother who, to hide her own nervousness, kept whispering sharply, "You are stooping dreadfully. Do hold yourself up properly. Don't tread on my train whatever you do. Mind you remember what I said about your curtsy!"

and so on till we sympathised heartily with the unlucky daughter whose misery was pitiful to behold.

At last the officers raised the barriers and we crushed through (receiving not a few ugly scratches from sharp bracelets and tugs at our veils) into another room all blue brocade, where we waited again gazing at each other and admiring the lovely colours, beautiful jewels and shimmer and sparkle, for one could see better here.

Yet again we were admitted into another smaller room whence we could see into a picture-gallery where those who had the *entrée*, as it is called, and those who had already passed were strolling up and down, and then thirty of us were admitted into the last room of all! At length I found myself waiting at the barrier. We took our turn, my Court sponsor first, white acacia next, I third and mamma last.

When I stood forward two pages took my train off my arm and laid it out full length, and, as it was longer than I was tall, the spotless, shining folds were heavy to draw after me, but it was not far that I had to go. I had no time to think, for I found myself walking past a row of officers with drawn swords uplifted, reminding me irresistibly of the old nursery game of Oranges and Lemons, especially the last line but one, "Here comes a chopper to chop off your head!"

They stood on my right, and on my left was a huge mirror running from floor to ceiling; but I had been warned of that glass and told not to look into it, for many a girl had done so to her own discomfort, seeing something fatally wrong perhaps about her hair or dress and knowing there was no chance of remedying it.

So I kept my head resolutely the other way and walked on, past the stalwart scarlet and gold giants, with their glittering swords, a small curly-headed person in white, with childish face and shining eyes, who looked as if she had strayed into that distinguished presence by mistake! I stepped on solemnly and gave my second pink card (which I had been holding all this time) to the Lord in Waiting, who called out in stentorian tones, "To be presented. Miss — by Lady —," and it seemed to me as if all London would hear him.

The next few minutes passed like a whirlwind. I found myself sinking mechanically to the floor while the sweet face of "our own Princess" flashed a smile back at me, and then I had a confused recollection of making five more curtsies, and of some prince, next the last princess, smiling as I went by, and then my train was caught up by two pages at the end, bundled after me and I backed out. This struck me as the least dignified part of the proceedings, for the pages, in their hurry to dispose of you and be ready for the next comer, roll up your precious train and fling it at you anyhow without looking, while you may or may not catch it in your excitement, or it may (as sometimes happens) catch in the ornaments on your head, to the detriment of both. However I was prepared for it, so promptly caught it, and, while waiting for mamma, had leisure to notice the reason of the hum of conversation that had filled my ears ever since entering this Throne room. The Royalties were all standing side by side across the room and, facing them, stood a row of soldiers behind whose shoulders stood and peeped all those who had passed through before.

Of course not a word is supposed to be spoken, but, as a matter of fact, it is impossible to enforce this rule though the Queen, when present, frequently sends messengers to stop the laughing and talking that goes on.

Naturally the very nervous people make awkward mistakes sometimes, and the others,



who have passed through safely, forget their own blunders and criticise very unkindly; but this is the way of the world.

When mamma joined me she comforted me by saying I had done very well, though I had made only six curtsies and ought to have made eleven, as there were five princesses and six princes present, but still very few people manage to curtsy to every individual royalty, so I did not mind.

As we made our way down she asked me how I had felt, and I said, "Not one little bit nervous, but only inclined to laugh at the vision of the ladies in front of me bobbing along!"

We were some time getting our wraps there was such a crowd, and then we had to wait for our carriage, and I was amused at the frantic efforts of the beef-eaters and their officer to keep the ladies quiet lest the Princess should hear the noise they were making! It was no good; they stopped for a minute perhaps and, when his back was turned, were as bad as ever, till his face of despair was comical to behold.

At last we got to the door, where a crowd of footmen were collected laughing heartily at the stentorian announcement of "The Bishop of Giber-raltar's carriage!" which certainly sounded rather funny, and then ours drew up and off we drove home. Friends were waiting for us, so we could not go off to any Drawing-room teas, but I was not sorry to be quiet to think it all over.

The soldiers with their drawn swords and splendid band, the beef-eaters in their quaint costume, the variegated and beautiful colours of the ladies' dresses, the gorgeous uniforms of the gentlemen, the jewels, the flowers and the lofty rooms all made it seem like an Arabian Night's Dream, and indeed when it was over I could hardly believe it was true. I was so happy and enjoyed it all so much, only I could have wished it had lasted longer, it was so very soon over! Of one thing I am certain, namely, that however often I go I shall never forget How I was Presented at Court.

VARIETIES.

HEAVY BURDENS.—Money and time are the heaviest burdens of life, and the unhappiest of all mortals are those who have more of either than they know how to use.

DUTY.—"There is nothing so sweet as duty, and all the best pleasures of life come in the wake of duty done."—*Jean Ingelow.*

SMILES AND FROWNS.—God will not smile on us while we are frowning on a brother.

SPIDER'S WEB.—Enough spider's web to go round the world would weigh one half-pound.



PREPARING TO ENTER THE THRONE ROOM. (Drawn by Arthur Hopkins, A.R.W.S.)



AFTER THE PRESENTATION.
(From a Sketch made at Buckingham Palace.)