MR. RUSKIN'S MAY-DAY FESTIVAL
AT WHITELANDS COLLEGE.

By J. A. OWEN.

It was with the anticipation of much pleasure that I accepted an invitation to go "a Maying" this year; nor into fields and meadows, 'tis true, but into the College of Whiteland, which proved to be a charming and flowery oasis in the dusty prosaic stretch of the King's road, Chelsea. Through the kindness of Mrs. Newton I have been enabled to give our readers the following account of a very happy morning.

As May-day this year fell on a Sunday, Mr. Ruskin, who takes a lively interest in this College, selected Monday, the 2nd, for the inauguration of this festival of festivities. All preparations for the important events of the morning had been kept secret by the Principal, the Rev. J. P. Faunthorpe, so that the students might be really and truly surprised; and beyond the coming election of a May Queen they knew nothing.

Early in the morning Miss Stanley, the head governess, and numbers were at work and busy decorating the chapel, the large lecture-room, and the lower part of the house with garlands of moss and flowers which arrived in profusion from the country. Others wove wreaths and collected knots for personal adornment, and at 9 a.m. all crowded into the chapel for the quiet but joyous service of the morning. The light costumes and graceful disposal of spring blossoms, with the soft light of the early sun falling through the east windows, made the scene there very beautiful; and the service of grateful song which rose from young hearts gladdened by the sight of masses of blue-bells, primroses, and other sweet flowers, was surely acceptable in the ears of Him who to clothes the hills of the field.

At ten o'clock a few friends, amongst whom were Mrs. Faunthorpe, Sir Harry Cole, the Rector of Cheltenham and Mrs. Blunt, Miss Archer, the girl director of the Victoria College at Berlin, &c., met the students in the lecture-room, where the festivities began by the reading of Miller's "May-day." Then the Principal, remarking that he had been forbidden to publish the morning's programme beforehand, read Tennant's "Queen of the May," and on concluding said, "Now it is for you of so many to choose your May Queen. Mr. Ruskin's orders are that she must be chosen from the Juniors; she may be the cleverest and the prettiest, but she must be the noblest and the loveliest; these are his own words." A voting paper was then passed to each of the 120 students, who secretly wrote the name of the candidate she favoured, and then doubled the slip. These were collected quickly; Miss Martin and Miss Skinner withdrew to scrutinise the numbers, and in the interval Webster's "Hail, all hail!" and "The Angel's Breathe On Flowers," by J. Taylor, in parts were sung. After a short pause, Ellen Osborn was announced "May Queen" amidst general delight; and she at once appeared with Fanny Vance, Seniors, her first and second handmaids, and Annie Brook her maid of honour; they then carried her off to be robed and crowned.

In the Interval Miss Kemm, who has been recently elected a member of the Royal Historical Society, gave a short but interesting lecture on "May-day Sports and Pastimes;" "Old May Day," a carol by Benedict, was sung; and the whole company, with their bouquets, filled the corridor, which they lined on either side to welcome the May Queen. She duly appeared, garlanded with moss and sweet flowers, and draped in white, covered with wreaths of moss and flowers. She wore a crown of moss and straw, and carried a sceptre tipped with flowers. Behind followed her two handmaids and six younger companions, each bearing four elegantly bound volumes of Mr. Ruskin's works, the first maiden carrying three upon a cushion. The procession closed in "two and two;" the Queen took her place on a chair of state, and a May-day carol was sung. She was then presented by the Principal, who said he was commanded by Mr. Ruskin to be for that day his obedient servant, and a very beautiful gold cross and chain, the gift of the author of the festival. On the cross were the words: "May day!" and the inscription: "The only bound in "Ruskin blue" call, or, rather, fine kid, which he had so generously sent her for that purpose. His desire was that in all cases the reason of the gift should be "that they found grace in the eyes of the Queen and her handmaids," and the "why and wherefore" should in each case be stated.

In reference to the cross Mr. Ruskin said in his letter that if the Queen was worthy to be deemed the likeliest and the loveliest of all the students it was surely fitting that she should receive a small trinket in token of their love. Her maid of honour gave "The Little Lamps of Architecture;" and "The Queen of the Air;" to her maid, Annie Brook, "The Earth and the Next." Perhaps it may be interesting to tell some of the reasons why the Queen presented books to certain girls; sometimes it was only that truly royal one, "because the Queen liked her." S. Thomas received the "Forty Charters," for the reason why—she is a noble and good girl. L. Campbell, "Ethics of the Dust," because she is such a pleasant girl. A. Roeby, "Fondness for Agates," for her stones. M. Crane, "Bibliotheca Pastorum,"—she works hard. J. Hassett, "Arna Trigell,"—she stands up for what is right. B. Taylor, "Ariadne Florentina,"—she is excellent. L. Malton, "The Two Paths,"—she obeys the Principal. And so on.

The dance, and loyal homage having been paid by each fortunate nominee, the Principal gave a short sketch of Mr. Ruskin's Ideal of a May Queen, and congratulated the whole body of the college on the happy surprises through the medium of the Queen, about which they had never heard a word. He said that once a young girl, rich and well born, by living a life of luxury, thought to discern the ideal; but he scorned to fulfil this ideal, and, supported by the advice and even contributions of Mr. Ruskin, gave anyone whatever she liked on May-day except the books, and therefore congratulated those girls miscalled "charity." But the scheme fell through on account of the strong opposition of her parents, and a "certain young gentleman." Although only an experiment, the arrangements had been perfectly carried out, even beyond expectation. He then told them Mr. Ruskin was to impress upon them the special importance of their work. As future national school mistresses they would have to entrust to them the teaching of children who could not learn, like their richer sisters, where they pleased and when they pleased, but often only at school. That education meant cultivating in them what was right and good; crushing and killing what was bad. He, as their Principal, enjoined the twenty-seven gift holders to value Mr. Ruskin's words and his costly volumes as being worth more to the college than all the books, and to read them with the aid of a good dictionary. In each one Mr. Ruskin said he had written "carefully, and with pains, and with love, and in the hope that it would be a letter of thanks from the students to Mr. Ruskin, conveying not only their thanks, but their desire to see his face.

The Rev. G. Blunt proposed a vote of thanks to the author of the delightful festival; the National Anthem followed, and the royal proclamation of a holiday till 7 p.m. sent the happy "Mayers" away.

The Editor of The Girl's Own Paper presented a handsomely bound copy of The Girl's Own Annual, which was given to Alice Cole, as being the most diligent student in the eyes of her teachers.

Our readers will perhaps wish to know what the other girls were fortunate in receiving gifts:—E. Metton has "The Laws of Pesole;" C. Croucher, "Prosperine;" L. Haynes, "Arrows of the Chace;" M. Goode, "Young England;" J. H. Osborn, "Stones of Venice;" A. Cocksedge, "Val d'Arno;" A. Wing, "The Great Wild Olive;" A. Thompson, "Miscellaneous Pamphlets;" R. Styles, "Time and Tide;" A. Llewellyn, "A Joy for Ever;" V. Goodall, "Minera Palivers;" W. Rock, "Homeyman;" J. de S. Pier, "St. Mark's at Low;" J. D. Mackay, "Morning in Florence;" M. Hayes, "Unto This Last." All these are works by Mr. Ruskin.